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Gendered Perceptions of Drugs, Aggression, and Violence

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Abstract

Objective—Drug use has been linked empirically with aggression and violence among youth in national and State of Hawai'i samples. In addition, aggression and violence appear to be gendered experiences perceived differently by girls and boys. This paper explores the intersection of drug offers/drug refusals with aggression and violence with specific attention paid to gendered perceptions of drug use situations as a context for aggression and violence.

Methods—A qualitative study, in which fourteen sex-specific focus group discussions were held, focused on rural Native Hawaiian middle school students (N=64). Students were asked to discuss drug refusal strategies in a variety of drug offer contexts. Feminist theories and approaches were used to examine the role of aggression and violence in drug refusal as perceived by Native Hawaiian girls as compared to boys.

Results—Girls and boys differed in their perceptions of aggression and violence in drug offer situations, initially as evidenced by the extent to which the girls groups focused on the intersection of drugs and violence. Further, qualitative analyses reflected gender norms and stereotypes about aggression and violence perpetration, and girls' apparently unique concerns about sexual violence victimization.

Conclusions—Implications are discussed in terms of prevention research and practice, specifically in terms of school-based prevention curricula.

Keywords

rural Native Hawaiian youth; aggression and violence; qualitative analysis; drug offers and drug refusal

Introduction

Compared to youth of other ethnocultural groups in Hawai'i, drug use onset tends to be earlier among Hawaiian youth (Lai & Saka, 2005; Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano, Goebert, & Nishimura, 2004). Drug use rates also tend to be higher among Native Hawaiian youth (Glanz, Maskarinec, & Carlin, 2005; Glanz, Mau, Steffen, Maskarinec, & Arriola, 2007; Mayeda, Hishinuma, Nishimura, Garcia-Santiago, & Mark, 2006; Mokuau, 2002; Wong,

Klinge, & Price, 2004). This trend has been shown to be particularly relevant within rural areas of Hawai'i, where Native Hawaiians tend to reside (Lai & Saka, 2005). Furthermore, the consequences resulting from substance use tend to be more severe among Native Hawaiians (Wong et al., 2004). In terms of interpersonal violence, Native Hawaiian youth have reported that they perceive aggression and violence as a viable and often effective option for drug refusal (Helm, Okamoto, Kaliades, & Giroux, 2014; Okamoto, Helm, Giroux, Kaliades, Kawano, & Kulis, 2010). These trends indicate the need to examine the intersection of drugs with aggression and violence as part of drug prevention in Native Hawaiian communities.

While there have been substantial efforts over the years to develop drug prevention programs focused on indigenous youth populations (Hawkins, Cummins, & Marlatt, 2004; Marlatt, Larimar, Mail, Hawkins, Cummins, Blume, 2003; Schinke, Tepavac, & Cole, 2000), very few have targeted Hawaiian youth. For example, in one review of the literature regarding Native Hawaiian youth substance use, it was shown that the vast majority of articles do not focus specifically on Native Hawaiians (Edwards, Giroux, & Okamoto, 2010). Rather, these articles included Hawaiians in studies of Asian and Pacific Islander ethnocultural groups. In another review, the content of the National Registry of Evidence Based Practices and Programs was scrutinized for its relevance to populations in Hawai'i and in particular Native Hawaiians. NREPP was found to be lacking in this area (Rehuher, Hiramatsu, & Helm, 2008). More recently, two literature reviews of culturally grounded interventions for indigenous and Pacific Islander populations also revealed a gap in addressing substance use with Native Hawaiians (Durand, Cook, Konishi, & Nigg, 2015; Lauricella, Valdez, Okamoto, Helm, & Zaremba, 2016). Therefore, substance use prevention targeting Native Hawaiian youth is warranted in light of the aforementioned indicators of health disparities.

The focus of this paper builds on other studies with Native Hawaiian youth, which indicated their high exposure to a number of drug-related problem situations and contexts, and their perceived difficulty in dealing with these situations (Okamoto, Helm, Giroux, Edwards, & Kulis, 2010). Drug-related problem situations and contexts refer to situations in which alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs are being used in the presence of the youth. In some situations, the offer may be explicit, while in others the offer may be more implicit (Helm, Okamoto, Medeiros, Chin, Kawano, Po'a-Kekuawela, Nebre, & Sele, 2008). Additionally, a number of studies with Native Hawaiian youth have indicated gender differences in the exposure to drug offers and the use of different types of drug refusal strategies (Okamoto, Helm, McClain, Hill, & Hayashida, 2013; Okamoto, Kulis, Helm, Edwards, & Giroux, 2010; Okamoto, Pel, Helm, & Valdez, 2014). In light of research showing sex differences in drug refusal skills among other ethnocultural groups (e.g. Hecht, Trost, Bator, & MacKinnon, 1997; Kulis, Marsiglia, Ayers, Calderon-Tena, & Nuno-Gutierrez, 2011), exploring the drug offer and drug use context in relation to gendered aggression and violence represents a critical advancement in substance use prevention.

Drugs and Violence

The intersection of drugs and violence is not a new field of study. Large-scale epidemiological research in the United States indicates that as drug use increases, violence

increases (Farell, Sullivan, Esposito, Meyer, & Valis, 2005; Mulvey, Schubert, & Chassin, 2010; Pavkov, Travis, Fox, King, & Cross, 2010; Rainone, Schmeidler, Frank, & Smith, 2006; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006). Research in Hawai'i and among Hawaiian populations shows similar trends (Austin, 2004; Baker, Hishinuma, Chang, & Nixon, 2010; Goebert, Caetano, Nishimura, Ramisetty-Mikler, 2004; Hishinuma, Johnson, Kim, Nishimura, Makini, Andrade, et al., 2005; Zaha, Helm, Baker, Hayes, 2013). For example, among Native Hawaiian youth, substance use has been found to be a robust predictor of a variety of school problems and health risk behaviors, including violence (Hishinuma et al., 2005). In a study of intimate partner violence (IPV) using national Youth Risk Behavior Survey data, Hawai'i teens who reported marijuana and other substance use had significantly increased odds of reporting IPV, especially for youth who reported using drugs at age 12 or younger (Zaha et al., 2013). Although the study did not report results by ethnic group, approximately one quarter of the sample identified as Native Hawaiian. Other studies have shown Hawaiian youth initiate substance use earlier than other youth (Lai & Saka, 2005; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2004).

As noted previously, the majority of school-aged youth reside in rural parts of the State of Hawai'i. Violence in a rural Hawai'i has been explored in several qualitative research studies. In one study, parents, teachers, other school staff, and spiritual leaders from a community experiencing high rates of youth violence were interviewed. While their insights indicated a need to address the problem locally and at the state level, specific rural factors contributing to violence were not identified (Affonso, Shibuya, & Frueh, 2007). In a second study, Affonso et al. (2010) analyzed focus group interviews with adults and youth. They found that ideas about violence had become part of the local culture, which seemed to be attributed partially to cultural disintegration. Neither of the Affonso studies distinguished between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians in these rural communities. A mixed-methods study in which rural Native Hawaiians purposefully were sampled focused on substance use and community violence (Austin, 2004). Interviews with rural Hawaiian adults indicated that alcohol was perceived to be consumed frequently, and violence and drinking went hand in hand. The quantitative component of Austin's study included rural Native Hawaiian youth and adults who self-reported substance use and violence (victimization, perpetration, and exposure). Results indicated that alcohol use was linked to exposure to violence, substance use and violence co-occurred, and ethnic pride was related to less violence (Austin, 2004).

Research among non-Hawaiians has shown that youth might use aggression and violence as a drug refusal strategy across a variety of drug offer contexts (Pristas & Rosenberg, 2010). In a survey of 309 high school students regarding their anticipated behavioral and emotional response to drug offers, results indicated several categories of response. Verbal and physical aggression toward the offerer was one of the five responses, though aggression was endorsed less frequently than other options (also included: inform others, deception, verbal & nonverbal refusal, and deflection; Pristas & Rosenberg, 2010). Similar to the survey participants in the Pristas & Rosenberg study (2010), analyses of a focus group study among Hawaiian youth indicated that drug-related problem situations required aggression and violence for drug refusal, though as a last resort after more socio-culturally competent responses are used, but were found to be ineffective (Helm et al., 2014). In addition, analyses of drug resistance strategies among rural Native Hawaiian middle school students

indicated that violence and aggression were among the more common responses to hypothetical drug offer contexts (Okamoto, Helm, Giroux, Kaliades, et al. 2010).

Aggression and Violence as Gendered Phenomenon

As mentioned above, early analyses indicated that girls and boys may be responding to drug-related problem situations with aggression and violence in different ways. The theory that aggression and violence are gendered phenomena (i.e., associated with boys, men, masculinity, and maleness; Frieze & Li, 2010) is supported somewhat in self reports. However, it appears to depend on a variety of factors, including whether the aggression occurs in a public or private space. In public spaces, women may use indirect aggression, while in private spaces women are more likely to use direct aggression, thus minimizing the difference between sexes (Frieze & Li, 2010). In reports of experiences with violence in everyday life, women tend to have reported intimate partner violence (IPV) where as men have reported stranger violence. With respect to criminality, men tend to be the perpetrators, while women tend to be victims (Frieze & Li, 2010). Furthermore, when men report victimization, it tends to be in cases in which the perpetrator was a stranger, whereas women victims are likely to report IPV (Frieze & Li, 2010). With respect to IPV, women are more likely than men to report low levels of physical aggression, however the majority of IPV harm is reported by women victims (Frieze & Li, 2010).

In spite of comprehensive reviews of the literature that outline empirical links between gender, aggression, and violence (e.g. Frieze & Li, 2010), there continues to be the need to deconstruct the idea that men and women perpetrate intimate partner violence at similar rates for similar reasons. This is referred to as “sex-symmetry”; in other words, men and women are not different. By extension, sex symmetry theorists suggest that gender is not an important factor in violence, feminist views are irrelevant, and the status quo (e.g. non-feminist views that perpetuate male dominance) need not be disrupted (Anderson, 2005).

In deconstructing the sex-symmetry debate, three theories of gender and violence require examination at the individual, interactionist, and structural levels (Anderson, 2005). First, individualist models hold that gender is an individual trait, and aggression and violence are aspects of masculinity; thus, violence is a product of gender. Second, the interactionist theory holds that gender is a contextual trait that manifests in social interactions. From an interactionist perspective, violence is viewed as a performance of masculinity; thus, gender is a product of violence. Essentially, individualists propose that masculine gender yields violence, whereas interactionists propose that violence yields masculine gender. Finally, the structural theory explains that gender is used to stratify hierarchically men and women and their access to resources. Thus, violence is a resource structurally more accessible to men, the consequence of which is more serious harm accrued by female victims of violence. As suggested by Anderson, moving beyond individualist models to include interactionist and structuralist views will help clarify the link between gender and violence perpetration and violence victimization.

Moreover, in an effort to address the “feminist struggle to politicize men’s violence”, Brush posed three questions regarding research on women’s aggression and violence (2005, p. 867). First, she addressed the question of why it is important to study gender and violence.

As examples, she pointed to the fallacies in the sex symmetry debate in intimate partner violence. In contrast to sex symmetry, violence involving women needs to be taken seriously, so that issues of diversity, power, and agency may be uncovered. Second, Brush addressed pitfalls in violence research. Most prominently, there is the potential for perpetuating a male/masculine dominance status quo by using existing frameworks and methodologies.

Finally, Brush addressed questions about the direction for future research, specifically a need to focus on research innovation in terms of both theory and method (2005). This paper attempts to align with Brush's three-pronged agenda by taking seriously the early findings that girls and boys seem to be using violence differently (Helm et al., 2014). The goal of this paper is to understand these differences in the context of drug prevention among youth. As gender and aggression scholars have pointed out, unexamined gendered stereotypes impedes progress in understanding the role of aggression and violence in girls' and women's lives. By using a feminist research approach, a gendered context may be explored (McHugh, Livingston, & Ford, 2005). In other words, the purpose of this study was to determine ways in which girls' experiences are different from boys', as opposed to marginalizing these differences by not investigating them. Therefore, this study was informed by feminist theories and approaches to examine the role of aggression and violence in drug refusal as perceived by Native Hawaiian girls as compared to boys, with implications for potential sex-specific prevention activities and programs.

Method

Research Participants

This study was geographically focused on a single island in the State of Hawai'i where a large proportion of students are Native Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian. Each of the eight middle schools in the sampling frame was invited to participate. Seven middle schools participated in this study. Students from these schools were recruited in collaboration with school-based liaisons. These school staff members assisted in distributing and collecting parental permission forms to Native Hawaiian students enrolled on their campus, and assisted the research team with on-site logistics, such as securing meeting space for the focus groups. School staff distributed parent forms to students who met the basic selection criteria: 1) Native Hawaiian ethnocultural identity; and 2) ability to participate in a focus group discussion, with ability defined as being honest and respectful, and able to maintain confidentiality. As noted in the introduction, Native Hawaiian youth were sampled because substance use rates tend to be higher and onset tends to be earlier than their non-Hawaiian peers, and both quantitative and qualitative studies indicated that drug offers are perceived as contexts for aggression and violence.

A total of 64 youth participated (96.7% participation rate), the majority (95%) of whom identified as Native Hawaiian, including part-Hawaiian. Although the recruitment strategy focused on Hawaiian youth, demographic data were collected anonymously so it is not possible to determine which youth in which group were not Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian, thus all data were retained. The majority of these youth also identified with additional ethnocultural groups, including Chinese (53%), Filipino (52%), Portuguese (50%), and

White (41%). Participants were in grades 6 (11%), 7 (42%), and 8 (47%). Half of the participants were girls (50%). The mean age was 12.58 years ($SD = 0.612$). Youth who participated received a gift card worth \$5.00 for a local vendor.

Data Collection Procedures

Procedures for this study were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at the lead authors' respective institutions (removed for blinding), and the State of Hawai'i Department of Education. Youth participated in 14 sex-specific focus groups, seven with girls and seven with boys. The sex of the group's facilitator matched that of the participants. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and consisted of three parts. First, an elicitation activity was facilitated in which youth were asked to generate responses (e.g. brainstorming) to a set of specified drug offer situations. Second, youth ranked the responses based on perceived effectiveness for drug refusal. Youth were asked questions such as, "Which one of these responses is the best response to the (drug offer) situation, in terms of preventing you from using drugs and/or alcohol?". Finally, a group discussion based on the ranking activity was facilitated so that group members were able to explain their rationales for selecting a response as the best or worst.

Data Management and Analysis

For the purpose of this analysis, aggression was defined as the intent to harm, as opposed to accidental aggression or violence. Aggression included verbal and nonverbal hostility, including social withdrawal and the use of profanity; harming or taking property; and relational aggression, which refers to intentionally damaging interpersonal relationships through social withdrawal and other means (Frieze & Li, 2010). Violence was defined as the intentional use of physical force to harm or coerce another.

During group discussions, youth used self-selected pseudonyms to refer to themselves and other group participants. These pseudonyms were subsequently changed to researcher-selected pseudonyms to further protect the participants. Discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Discussion transcripts were subsequently coded and analyzed in stages, based on grounded theory (Patton, 2002; Ponterotto, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the two principal investigators (co-authors) inductively identified patterns in the narratives for open coding. A coding structure was developed from these emergent themes. Second, two or more researchers coded each transcript based on the coding structure. Coders worked independently to identify themes, and then consensus conferences were held among the research team for the purpose of identifying and adjudicating concordant and non-concordant themes. Third, the final agreed upon coding was added to the digital database (NVivo software; QSR International, 2008). Lastly, axial and selective coding were conducted by identifying themes related to drug resistance strategies.

Finally, the NVivo software used to analyze the transcripts provided quantitative outputs for each code. These outputs included the number of times a code is mentioned per group, and the percentage of the transcript included in a specified code. Of the drug resistance strategies identified in prior stages of the research, aggression and violence were described by both girls and boys on average 10 times per interview, with an average of 31% of the content in

each group discussion focused on this theme. These included aggression and violence directed at a person, as well as an object in the person's possession; verbal aggression, such as yelling and swearing; relational aggression, including social withdrawal and other forms of social status control; threats of physical violence and actual physical violence. While quantitative outputs are not definitive, they point to possible areas for further analyses. Thus, the narratives associated with these output data were analyzed for similarities and difference between girls and boys.

Results

Quantitative Indicators

Gender differences in the prominence of the aggression and violence theme became evident when quantitatively comparing girls' interviews with boys' interviews. The girls' narratives included 93 references to aggression and violence, while the boys' narratives included 50 references. Across the 14 focus groups, aggression and violence accounted for an average of 18% of the boys' narratives, with a range of 7-31%; where as it accounted for an average of 44% of the girls' narratives, with a range of 32-70% of the discussion. Comparatively, girls devoted approximately twice as much of their conversation to the theme of aggression and violence as a drug resistance strategy as did boys.

Qualitative Indicators

These results move beyond noting the difference between girls and boys in terms of the quantity of conversation devoted to aggression and violence. Moving deeper, this qualitative analysis highlights possible gendered expressions of violence in the girls' and boys' narratives. Two themes emerged regarding gender differences about the function of violence as a drug resistance strategy (Refer to Table 1). First, the youth narratives reflected gender norms about violence perpetration. Second, violence victimization also was perceived differently.

Violence Perpetration: Gender Norms

Both girls and boys acknowledged that boys are not supposed to use physical violence against girls, yet it may be OK for girls to do so against boys. Specifically, the boys generally did not endorse perpetrating physical violence or threats when the drug offerer was a girl, though physical violence as a drug resistance strategy among boys (boy offering to another boy) was considered acceptable. On the other hand, the boys' narratives suggested that verbal aggression was considered an acceptable means to deter a drug offer from a female, whether it was a girl or woman. The next quote illustrates this point. This group of boys had been discussing the following scenario: "You see some of your friends at the fair, so you go cruise with them for the night. Your friend has weed with her and wants to smoke. She offers you some".

Magneto: Give 'em one slap and then.

Hawk: Nah, come on, would you really do that? It's a girl. [Several boys laugh].

Superman: Oh, it's a girl asking?

Hawk: Yeah, you never see ‘em it says, “your friend has weed with HER. [several boys laugh] SHE offers you some”.

Magneto: Oh, oh, I wouldn’t do the slap one.

On the other hand, girls describe using aggression, threats, and physical violence to deter drug offers from boys either because they know boys are not supposed to hit girls, thus having no fear of retaliatory violence, or in a way described as playful or joking because violence perpetrated by girls is not meant to be taken seriously. For example, in response to a drug offer scenario involving “a big bulky boy”, one of the girls explained that she would “fight” him, because, “He cannot beat me up because I’m a girl”. Another group of girls explained how play punching with a boy might help get the point across that, not only is it unacceptable to offer drugs, but drugs are bad for him. They explained how their response might change if the offerer was a girl rather than a boy, because boys are not supposed to be physically victimized by girls in front of their peers.

Sage: What, oh a boy is a different story. I don’t know. Because then if his friends see a girl beat up a boy then he is going to be teased, so you might as well just talk to him.

Beyonce: Well, girls will get teased, too.

Gem: Can’t you do the same with the girl? [Sage & Maryann suggest no]. Well how come you would treat them differently? How come you can’t just make them both feel bad?...Because like to me that is what like is repeating. Because giving her licks [hit her] in my way is like making her feel bad. So it’s the same path they are going to.

MaryAnn: Girls are easy to emotionally hurt.

Gem: But you could take your time talking to the girl. Not as fast like you are going to talk to the boy.

Violence Victimization: Partner/Sexual Violence

As a drug resistance strategy, violence victimization functions differently from violence perpetration. As a drug resistance strategy of both girls and boys, violence victimization functions indirectly or more distally than violence perpetration. However, the way this occurs was perceived differently by girls and boys. Specifically, girls described the potential for intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and rape; whereas these concerns were not mentioned by any of the boys. Rather, boys expressed a concern for retaliatory violence. As an example of the girls’ apparently unique concerns, one group of girls had been discussing the “bad things” that can happen when you go to parties in which drugs will be available. In addition to discussing the potential for fights and car accidents, they were aware of the possibility for sexual violence.

Mercury: What if somebody got raped?

Baby: OH! My sister, that happened to my sister’s friend. [others make confirmatory remarks]. She was, she went to a party, like her mom [and family] didn’t know. She went to a party and she was drinking and smoking and stuff like

that. And she never have [a] ride home 'cause she wandered off by herself, so her friend[s] just left her. And then she was walking home all, like and she said that she had knocked out. So she fell asleep in the bushes and she woke up, yeah.

Author: She “woke up, yeah”?

Baby: All her underwear was all over there and stuff like that.

In the following discussion, these middle school girls were presented with the same scenario as the boys in a prior excerpt above: “You see some of your friends at the fair so you go cruise with them for the night. Your friend has weed with her and wants to smoke and she offers you some.” After discussing their list of drug resistance strategies, the girls revised the scenario from one in which the drug offerer was a girl, to the same situation with a boy as the drug offerer. This lengthy conversation was edited somewhat for brevity, while retaining its illustration of the variety of concerns girls have about being with boys generally, and the extra trepidation when drugs are involved. Similar to the group quoted above, these girls expressed being “scared” due to the potential for intimate partner violence, including sexual assault and rape, because, “a guy friend is a little different” and “boys are more aggressive” when they are under the influence.

Lydia: It depends too, because there are some guys that like, oh you guys are friends at first. But then you guys know that you are friends with benefits, and when you are older and your mom lets you go out and stuff like that. Like she trusts you to go with them. [Stitch agrees]. Then like how are you going to get home?

Stitch: If he got stoned. Well I would find another friend that was there, and ask them if I could have a ride.

Glitter: I just said, I wouldn't know what to do because I would be scared of what he was going to do.

Author: So what do think he might do? When you say you are scared, what is it that you are thinking?

Glitter: Well usually guys, like well I have been in this situation before where they want to do more than just like friendly stuff [she starts talking very quietly].

Dawn: As she was saying, boys is different to handle with than girls. Boys can be real aggressive and when they try to talk to you they will probably raise their voice and maybe they will slap you or something like that. Because I have cousins like that. They were pregnant or something, and in a drug deal like that, and that is what happened. That is what happened to them.

Glitter: ...[Conversation meanders again, then returns] Well it kind of depends on how you know the guy would react to what you are doing. And sometimes you have no other choice than to walk away, but sometimes you can't because he might hurt you. [Dawn agrees and explains her view-deleted for brevity, similar to Glitter]. And for guys they have a lot of things to threaten you with like they can beat you up more than girls can, and they can like rape you, you know. And there's a lot of things to be afraid of.

Stitch: Very ugly.

The girls quoted in the last two focus groups explained that being afraid of becoming a victim of male perpetrated violence was a reason to avoid potential drug use situations where boys or men would be present. In the example shared by “Baby,” girls may become victims of stranger violence, where as the example shared by “Glitter” and “Dawn” indicated that girls may become victims of boys they know when the boy is under the influence of alcohol and drugs. In this way, perceptions of violence victimization may be viewed as drug resistance.

Discussion

Key Findings

The nexus of drugs with aggression and violence is an important concern in prevention. Similar to prior studies (Helm et al., 2014; Okamoto, Helm, Giroux, Kaliades, et al., 2010), the Native Hawaiian middle school youth who participated in this series of focus group discussions perceived drug offer contexts as situations in which aggression and violence may be necessary strategies for drug refusal. These studies indicated that both girls and boys perceived forms of aggression and violence as forms of drug resistance. Albeit socially inappropriate, these youth felt aggression and violence was preferable to substance use. However, there were important differences between early adolescent girls and boys evident in the present study, which provides novel insights about aggression and violence beyond what is understood among older adolescents and adults. First and foremost, these differences highlighted that the context of drug use may have different meanings for girls as indicated by the quantitative volume of discussion devoted to the topic, and qualitative nuances represented by gendered norms and stereotypes as well as concerns about sexual violence victimization.

A second unique contribution of this study pertains to gender norms and violence perpetration in public and private spaces. Girls and boys expressed what essentially can be considered two sides of the same coin, the coin being violence perpetration. Girls expressed that relational aggression perpetrated against boys was acceptable, as opposed to physical aggression and violence, because public displays of aggression and/or violence by girls was emasculating for boys and likely would not be taken seriously anyway. This sentiment harkens Brush’s (2005) explanation for why women’s violence must be studied, namely that by taking women’s violence seriously, researchers will be able to uncover issues of diversity, power, and agency relevant for non-oppressive interventions. On the other hand, boys acknowledged that verbal aggression against drug offerers who are female may be acceptable in some cases, but public displays of physical aggression against females was unacceptable. This idea of public/private violence has been evident in other studies of women’s violence (Frieze & Li, 2010), and the present study expands the knowledge base to include girls and boys in substance use contexts.

A third innovation emerged regarding violence victimization. Although both girls and boys perceived violence victimization as a drug resistance strategy, they thought of it differently. Girls expressed a fear of sexual assault as a possible outcome of situations in which drugs

are available and used, and therefore a reason to avoid drug offer/drug use situations. Boys did not mention a fear of sexual assault as a possible outcome of drug offer and drug use situations. However, boys explained their concern about becoming a victim of retaliatory violence in situations where a boy may need to express drug refusal via aggression or violence toward a male drug offerer.

Implications for Research and Practice

Although dichotomous gender labels (male/female) have been shown to predict substance use, they appear to oversimplify and obscure the experiences of girls and boys (Kulis, Marsiglia, & Hecht, 2002). As Goodkind explained, dichotomizing gender as male/female “essentialized” gender as if the differences are inherent rather than manifestations of social norms (2005, p. 58). Therefore, our analysis sought to look beyond simple differences to seeking the meaning attached to violence as a drug resistance strategy, some of which may reflect stereotypical gender norms. For example, girls in the focus groups expressed that aggression and violence perpetrated by girls against boys was acceptable, provided it stayed within gender norms for girls (i.e., relational aggression), and did not include physical aggression and violence. Furthermore, these girls also expressed a fear of becoming a victim of male violence. Taken together, these girls’ and boys’ concepts of aggression and violence perpetration and victimization adhere to the “trap” that Brush (2005, p. 870) described as reinforcing men’s power. In terms of school or community-based intervention development, it would be important that a discussion of violence as drug resistance incorporate conversations about gender role expectations and norms that do not reinforce essentialized views of inherent male dominance.

The essentialized view of gender continues to dominate helping professions, including psychology and social work. On the other hand, youth drug prevention researchers increasingly are adding gender identity measures and gendered analyses to their work in order to explore the development of evidence-based sex-specific or girl-focused interventions (Haines, Johnson, Carter, & Arora, 2009; Kulis et al., 2002; Landsverk & Reid, 2013). Results presented here further support a gendered approach to substance use prevention, while taking care to avoid gender oppression that has been evident in girl-specific juvenile justice (Goodkind, 2005).

Sex-specific programming is not without its critiques. Using a critical theory approach for reviewing the literature on girls in juvenile justice, Goodkind (2005) highlighted a number of problems which revealed juvenile justice systems as “sites of oppression” (p. 55). Importantly, she pointed out that increased arrests rates erroneously have been interpreted as increases in girls’ violence. Instead, it may have been interpreted more usefully as a way that society attempts to control girls, in this case as evidenced by increases in arrests made by police. This type of thinking led to targeting girls individually rather than improving systems to support girls. Goodkind critiqued the juvenile justice system for its use of a victimhood discourse in which girls are punished for not behaving like girls per socially constructed gender role expectations. These issues must be considered in sex-specific drug and violence prevention programming so that it does not perpetuate gender oppression. Interventions that

celebrate the diverse expressions of girlhood would serve to improve school and community support systems for drug and violence prevention and positive youth development.

Moving forward, prevention and community research and action may benefit from delving more deeply into gender specificity. Intervention strategies may be improved with feminist theories and approaches such as critical theory and intersectionality (Goodkind, 2005), dyadic methods of inquiry (Brush 2005), and interactionist and structuralist approaches (Anderson, 2005). Following this logic, interventions will need to align with the theme of gendered experiences of drug offers as contexts for aggression and violence. For example, skill-based drug prevention curricula may consider including drug offer situations involving dating interactions. As pointed out by these middle school participants (e.g., “Glitter,” “Lydia,” “Dawn,” and “Stitch”), the potential for sexual and dating violence when combined with substance use by boys and men is a legitimate fear. Importantly, prevention specialists will need to be trained to address gender so that hegemonic views are not inadvertently perpetuated, such as the stereotypical discourse about gender and violence (Haines et al., 2009) pointed out by both boys and girls (e.g., “Magneto,” “Hawk,” and “Superman,” and “Gem,” “Sage,” “Beyonce,” and “Maryann”). Furthermore, drug prevention in school-based settings tends to be didactic with the teacher instructing about why substance use is a health, social, and academic risk, among a myriad of problems. Alternatively, curricula that promote a critical pedagogy may allow students to voice their concerns about substance use. A critical pedagogy may serve as the platform from which students may build refusal skills aligned with their own realities and lived experiences. As a result, students may identify aggression and violence as better options than substance use, at which point a critical pedagogy approach would enable discussions of gender norms and stereotypes. In fact, studies have shown that rural youth may feel disenfranchised by their isolation and insularity of their communities (Kulig, Hall, & Kalischuk, 2006). Thus, critical pedagogy in rural settings, where the majority of Native Hawaiian students reside, may facilitate authentic youth-driven solutions for both violence and substance use reduction (Lynn-Landsman, Graber, Nichols, & Botvin, 2011).

In doing so however, stereotypical gender norms may be voiced in a critical pedagogy classroom, such as those expressed across focus group participants, as well as fear of sexual victimization as expressed by participating girls. The girls and boys who participated in this study reflected well documented expressions of aggression and violence by and on girls and women in either public or private spaces (Frieze & Li, 2010). Other research has shown that violence against girls and women in public spaces is considered unacceptable, unless perhaps provoked in a drug offer situation as depicted in our focus groups presented here and elsewhere (Baker, 2014). On the other hand, violence by and on girls and women in private spaces may be considered acceptable among broader public, and is reflected by the girls’ fear of sexual victimization. These and related issues should be incorporated into teacher/facilitator training prior to implementing a critical pedagogy curricula in which issues of drugs and violence will be raised.

For example, a recent pilot test of a school-based health curriculum designed to reduce substance use using culturally relevant skills in rural Hawai‘i school districts showed promising outcomes (Okamoto, Kulis, Helm, Lauricella, & Valdez, 2016). The curriculum

included examples of drug refusal which depicted non-confrontational assertive strategies, as well as mildly aggressive responses to drug offers (Okamoto, Helm, & Dustman, 2013). The examples depicted both girls and boys and used a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning. Results indicated that students continued to use the drug resistance skills at six month follow up, especially non-confrontational assertive skills. Students from comparison schools reported increases in fighting, whereas students from the intervention schools did not. In addition, reports of aggressive behaviors had decreased among girls from the intervention schools. The updated version of the curriculum includes a lesson which explicitly addresses early adolescent dating from an eight grade girl's perspective (Alboroto & Helm, 2016; Okamoto, Helm, & Dustman, 2016).

Limitations and Future Research

The responses from youth participants in this study represent what participants think they would say or do, and may not represent what they actually would say or do in response to real drug offers. The study was conducted as focus groups in a public school setting. As a result, the interview questions were limited to hypothetical drug use as a way to protect the youth from potentially disclosing possible illegal activity in the presence of their peers. Future research on actual drug offers may be possible in one-to-one interviews. It should be noted that while substance use rates among Native Hawaiian youth tends to be higher and onset earlier (Glanz et al., 2005; Glanz et al., 2007; Lai & Saka, 2005; Mayeda et al., 2006; Mokuau, 2002; Ramisetty-Mikler et al., 2004 ; Wong et al., 2004), the majority of Native Hawaiian middle school aged youth do not report substance use at this age. Thus, interviews with older youth may provide researchers with an understanding of real drug offer and drug refusal situations in which aggression and violence have occurred. For example, Baker and colleagues have successfully investigated the intersection of drugs and dating violence among Hawai'i youth (Baker, 2014; Baker, Helm, Bifulco, & Chung-Do, 2014; Zaha et al., 2013).

Furthermore, implications drawn from these results may have limited applicability to rural Native Hawaiian youth during early adolescence. With respect to the intersection of substance use and violence, the concept of gendered perceptions of violence as a drug resistance strategy may be unique to this set of middle school students. Future studies may consider focus group and individual interviews with urban or suburban youth, as well as non-Hawaiian youth, particular regarding the issue of violence against women in public and private space. Finally, youth were required to obtain active parental consent prior to participating in this study. Youth who may be at higher risk for substance use themselves, or substance use exposure in their families, may have opted out or their parent(s) may have opted them out of participating in the study.

Conclusion

This study adds greater depth to the extant literature regarding the intersecting problems of substance use and aggression and violence. Prior research has demonstrated both quantitative and qualitative empirical links. This study sheds light on how this link is perceived differently for girls and boys during early adolescence. There are important implications for how prevention research is conducted in the future in order to gain clarity

on drug offers as a context for aggression and violence, so that interventions are better informed for both boys and girls. This study specifically points to the importance of gender norms and stereotypes that exist, and may influence the ways in which middle school youth are able to navigate contexts in involving substance use and aggression and violence. These are particularly salient for girls, given concerns about sexual violence.

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Table 1

Qualitative Perceptions of Aggression and Violence as Drug Resistance

Discourse	Girls	Boys
Perpetration: Gender Norms	Relational aggression against boys is OK because public physical violence perpetrated by girls emasculates boys and girls' violence against boys is not taken seriously.	Verbal aggression against girl drug offerer may be acceptable, but public physical violence against girls is unacceptable.
Victimization	Sexual violence by male dating partner or stranger.	Retaliatory violence by male drug offerer.