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Partner Type Matters: Differences in Cross-sectional Predictors of Men's Sexual Aggression in Casual and Steady Relationships

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Abstract

Researchers rarely consider if different theoretical models are needed to understand the etiology of men's sexual aggression against women in steady as compared to casual relationships. A modified confluence model was evaluated with survey data from 556 young, single, men.

Hostile masculinity was the only assessed risk factor that had a direct relationship to sexual aggression against steady and casual partners. Impersonal sex and friends' approval of forced sex were directly related to sexual aggression against casual partners; whereas, heavy alcohol consumption was directly related to sexual aggression against steady partners. Psychopathy-related personality traits were indirectly related to both types of sexual aggression. The model explained a moderate amount of variance in casual date perpetration, but only a small amount of variance in steady date perpetration. Thus, more research and theory is needed to understand violence in this type of relationship.

Keywords

sexual assault; intimate partner violence; relationship to victim; alcohol

Despite the recent media and policy focus on men's sexual violence against women, sexual assault continues to occur at alarming rates. Self-reported rates of perpetration since age 14 range from approximately 20% to 60% in college and community samples, with estimates varying due to the types of tactics and sexual activities included (Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011; Davis, Schraufnagel, George, & Norris, 2008; DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Wheeler, George, & Dahl, 2002). The vast majority of sexual assaults occur between people who know each other, often in the context of a steady sexual relationship. In the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's recent nationally representative random sample survey of the United States population, 45.4% of female rape victims reported that the perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2014). In college and community samples of young men, who are typically unmarried, over half of sexual assault perpetrators report that the victim was someone with whom they were in a committed dating relationship (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, &

Cox, 1988; Wegner, Pierce, & Abbey, 2014). Most media stories and research outside of the marital rape literature focus on casual relationships; however, considering these statistics, it is important to examine risk factors for sexual aggression based on the perpetrator's relationship to the victim.

The Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression

Malamuth and colleagues developed the confluence model to systematically organize risk factors associated with sexual aggression against women (Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991). Direct and indirect pathways are hypothesized and often examined through path analytic models. Hostile masculinity and impersonal sex are hypothesized to be proximal constellations of risk factors that contribute independently and synergistically to men's likelihood of engaging in sexual aggression. Men with high levels of hostile masculinity distrust women and use sex as a way of exerting their dominance over them. Men who score high on impersonal sex, see women as sexual conquests and prefer casual sexual experiences, such as one-night stands. Multiple research teams have found support for the confluence model with samples of male college students and community residents (Abbey et al., 2011; Abbey, Parkhill, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2006; Malamuth et al., 1991; Malamuth et al., 1995; Wheeler et al., 2002).

Malamuth and colleagues (1995) described the confluence model as hierarchical because there are general factors that can be included as predictors of hostile masculinity and impersonal sex. Thus, these distal factors indirectly contribute to sexual assault through their associations with hostile masculinity and impersonal sex. For example, Malamuth et al. (1991) included parental violence, child abuse, and adolescent delinquency as predictors of impersonal sex; whereas, measures of attitudes supporting violence against women were included as predictors of hostile masculinity. Malamuth et al. (1995) added general hostility and masculine role stress as predictors of hostile masculinity. Malamuth (2003) argued that personality traits associated with psychopathy contributed to hostile masculinity. In support of this argument, Abbey et al. (2011) found a direct path from psychopathy-related personality traits to hostile masculinity.

Numerous studies have found that perpetrators of sexual assault are more likely to drink heavily and have alcohol problems as compared to nonperpetrators (see Abbey, Wegner, Woerner, Pegram, & Pierce, 2014 for a review). Most of these studies assess general drinking habits, which are associated with many individual difference characteristics and experiences that might mediate the link between alcohol consumption and perpetration (e.g., childhood exposure to violence, delinquent peer group membership; Tharp et al., 2012). Thus, alcohol has primarily been considered a distal factor in the confluence model. For example, Malamuth et al. (1995) included men's alcohol consumption in adolescence as part of the distal delinquency construct. Other researchers have found that men's current alcohol problems or heavy drinking were positively associated with hostile masculinity (Abbey et al., 2006; Parkhill & Abbey, 2008) and impersonal sex (Abbey et al., 2011; Parkhill & Abbey, 2008).

Male friends' approval of forced sex and pressure to have sex have been linked to sexual aggression beginning with some of the first etiological studies in this area (Jacques-Tiura, Wegner, Pierce, Pegram, & Woerner, 2015; Kanin, 1967; Krahe, 1998; Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2013). A few studies have integrated this construct into the confluence model and found that perceived peer pressure to engage in forced sex was associated with the hostile masculinity path, which in turn was associated with sexual aggression (Abbey et al., 2006; Kaczowski, Brennan, & Swartout, 2017).

Sexual Aggression in Casual and Steady Relationships

Despite the frequency with which sexual assault occurs among steady dating partners, few researchers have tried to determine if the theoretical models and risk factors generally examined in the sexual assault literature are equally effective in explaining sexual aggression against a steady partner and sexual aggression against a casual partner (Wegner et al., 2014). We are aware of only one study that applied the confluence model to long-term relationships, which was conducted by Malamuth et al. (1995). They re-interviewed men who had participated in one of several studies while they were in college (about 10 years earlier), focusing the new study on conflict in long-term relationships with women. They found that both hostile masculinity and impersonal sex assessed in college predicted later conflict in long-term relationships with women, which was operationalized as sexual, emotional, or physical aggression as well as relationship distress. Given that Malamuth et al. did not separate sexual aggression from other forms of aggression and relationship problems in their analyses, these findings are only suggestive as to whether either or both paths would predict sexual aggression with long-term partners.

The only theory that we have identified that attempts to distinguish sexual assault that occurs in casual and serious relationships was developed by Shotland (1992). It was based on the premise that consensual sexual intercourse was uncommon in early stage relationships; therefore, men who expect sex at the beginning of a relationship have high levels of antisocial personality traits and rape-supportive attitudes. However, this supposition did not fit many young adults' relationships at the time it was published (Murstein, 1980; Petersen & Hyde, 2011), and fits even less well now. Recent studies suggest that 53% to 76% of college students have engaged in sexual activity with someone they do not know well (Flack et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Wegner et al. (2014) evaluated an updated version of Shotland's model in a community sample of young, single men. In comparison to men who reported that the victim of their most severe past sexual aggression was a serious, steady dating partner, men who reported that the victim was a casual partner had more extreme scores on indicators of hostile masculinity (sexual dominance), impersonal sexual orientation (positive attitudes about casual sex, one time only sex partners), and heavy episodic alcohol consumption (frequency of consuming 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a two-hour period). Perpetrators who were in a casual relationship with the victim also reported that they and the victim consumed more alcohol during the incident than perpetrators who were in a steady relationship with the victim. There were no differences in psychopathy-related personality traits associated with the type of relationship perpetrators had with the victim.

Present Study

Given the high prevalence rate of sexual assault in committed relationships, the goal of the current study was to evaluate the efficacy of an expanded confluence model in predicting sexual aggression against casual and steady dating partners, using an existing dataset. We focused on young, single men so that our sample would be comparable to those used in other sexual assault studies which focus primarily on college students, as well as young single adults (Abbey et al., 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Koss et al., 1988; Wegner et al., 2014). Figure 1 presents our expanded confluence model, which separates men's reports of sexual aggression against steady and casual dating partners. Consistent with past research and theory which suggests that men with a hostile distrust of women may use sex to exert dominance over women (Abbey et al., 2011; Malamuth et al., 1995; Shotland, 1992), we hypothesized that hostile masculinity would be positively associated with both types of sexual aggression. Moreover, consistent with research and theory which suggests that men who are sexually aggressive against a casual partner are more likely to have an impersonal sexual orientation (Shotland, 1992; Wegner et al., 2014), we hypothesized that impersonal sex would be positively associated with sexual aggression against casual partners and unassociated with sexual aggression against steady partners.

Based on the literature reviewed above, we expected psychopathy-related traits to be positively associated with hostile masculinity. Men with high levels of callous affect and interpersonal manipulation are likely to distrust women and feel comfortable using them to meet their own needs (Abbey et al., 2011; Malamuth, 2003). Past research has produced mixed findings regarding the relationship between psychopathy-related traits and impersonal sex (Abbey et al., 2011; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012); thus, we decided to evaluate the link in this study. Consistent with previous research, heavy drinking was hypothesized to be positively associated with hostile masculinity and impersonal sex (Abbey et al., 2011; Parkhill & Abbey, 2008). Peer pressure and approval of forced sex can normalize and actively encourage hostile attitudes against women and impersonal sex (Abbey et al., 2001; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013); thus, we hypothesized that friends' approval and pressure would be positively associated with hostile masculinity and impersonal sex.

A secondary goal of this study was to examine casual and steady date perpetrators' alcohol consumption during the sexual assault incident. Both sexual assault perpetrators and victims are more likely to report drinking during the incident when they are in a casual relationship as compared to a steady relationship (Abbey, Clinton-Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki, & Buck, 2003; Littleton, Grills-Tauchel, & Axsom, 2009; Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999; Wegner et al., 2014). Thus, we hypothesized that sexual assaults would be more likely to involve alcohol consumption when the victim was a casual partner as compared to a steady partner.

Method

Participants

Male university students and community residents were recruited for a study of dating decisions and behavior. Inclusion criteria required participants to currently be single (defined as not currently engaged, married, cohabitating, or in a serious relationship in which you have agreed not to date others), have dated a woman in past two years, and be between the ages of 18–29. Among the 556 participants, 54% identified as Caucasian, 16% identified as Asian, 10% identified as Middle Eastern, 8% identified as African American, 7% identified as multiracial, 3% identified as Hispanic, and 2% identified as some other ethnicity. The mean age of participants was 22.37 ($SD = 2.90$). Sixty-five percent of participants had at least some college education.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through local online websites, such as Craigslist, flyers posted in local restaurants and businesses, the university's psychology research participant pool, and e-mails sent to the university's registrar's list of students. Interested individuals who met the study criteria were directed to an online survey hosted on Qualtrics, which started with an information sheet that included all the elements of informed consent. Participants were informed that no identifying information would be attached to their data and that all identifying information collected would be destroyed when the study was completed. They were also told that a code number would be used to link their questionnaires if they chose to participate in future studies. The Principal Investigator had obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the Department of Health and Human Services and the information sheet also described its purpose (e.g., identifying information cannot be released even under court order) and limits (e.g., must report child abuse). Survey completion time was approximately 30 min and participants received either extra credit for an eligible psychology course or were entered in a lottery for which they had a 1 in 30 chance of winning a \$100 gift card. Study procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Measures

Psychopathy-related traits.—Williams, Paulhus, and Hare (2007) developed two 10-item subscales to assess psychopathy-related personality traits in nonclinical populations: callous affect and interpersonal manipulation. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the items on a scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Sample items include: "I'm not afraid to step on others to get what I want." and "I find it easy to manipulate people." Cronbach's alpha was .81 in the current study.

Heavy alcohol consumption.—Participants answered two questions developed by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA, 2003) to assess heavy drinking. They reported their frequency of past year heavy episodic drinking, defined as how often they consumed 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a two-hour period, with response options ranging from 0 (*zero days in the past year*) to 10 (*every day*). They also reported the maximum number of alcoholic drinks they consumed within a 24-hour period, with response options ranging from 1 (*1 drink*) to 10 (*36 drinks or more*). *Z*-scores were computed for each

of the two measures, then summed and divided by two to form a composite heavy alcohol consumption variable.

Friends' approval and pressure for coerced and forced sex.—The 6-item Friends' Approval and Pressure for Coerced and Forced Sex measure was used (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001). Participants were asked to report the extent to which their male friends approve of getting a woman drunk to have sex with her, lying to a woman to have sex with her, and forcing a woman to have sex. Next, participants were asked how much pressure they felt from their male friends to engage in each of those behaviors. Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Cronbach's alpha was .81 in the current study.

Hostile masculinity.—Two measures were used to assess hostile masculinity. Specifically, sexual dominance motives for having sexual relations were assessed with Nelson's (1979) 8-item Sexual Dominance Scale. Participants reported how important each reason was to them on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 4 (*very important*). Sample items include: "I like the feeling of having another person submit to me," and "It makes me feel masterful." In addition, participants completed a modified version of the 8-item hostility subscale of Buss and Perry's (1992) Aggression Questionnaire. Specifically, the items were modified by adding the clause, "about women," to assess hostility toward women. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a list of statements about women on a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely unlike me*) to 5 (*extremely like me*). Sample items include: "When women are especially nice, I wonder what they want," and "I sometimes feel that women are laughing at me behind my back." Z-scores were computed for each of the two measures (sexual dominance and hostility toward women), then summed and divided by two to form a composite hostile masculinity variable. Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Impersonal sex.—To assess impersonal sex, participants were asked to report their casual sexual attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, participants completed an abbreviated 7-item version of the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006). Participants were asked to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements that reflect casual attitudes about sex on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include: "I would like to have sex with many partners," and "It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time." In addition, participants were asked to report their lifetime number of sexual partners and number of one-night stands. Square root transformations were conducted on participants' reports of number of sex partners and one-night stands because the variable was positively skewed. Z-scores were computed for each of the three measures, then summed and divided by three to form a composite impersonal sex variable. Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Perpetration of sexually aggressive acts.—A modified 16-item version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) was used to assess participants' history of sexually aggressive acts since age 14 (Koss et al., 2007; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). The modified SES

uses behaviorally-specific language to describe acts of sexual aggression and the tactics used to obtain them. These are typically grouped into five levels of sexual assault: no sexual assault, sexual contact (kissing, petting, sexual touching without penetration), verbally coerced penetrative sex (verbal threats or pressure used), attempted rape, and rape (force, threats of force, or the victim's incapacitation used), with participants being assigned to the highest group into which they fit. Participants indicated how many times they have committed each act on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (five or more times). The SES has been used extensively to assess sexual assault victimization and perpetration and has demonstrated good psychometric properties and internal consistency (Abbey et al., 2006, 2011; Koss et al., 1987). Cronbach's alpha in this study was .88.

Participants answered several follow-up questions after each reported act. They were given the list of relationship types used in Wegner et al. (2014) and asked to select the one that best described their relationship with the woman. Responses were dichotomized for the path analyses. Casual relationships included the options: stranger, knew her slightly, friend, coworker, and casual date. Steady relationships included the options: steady date, engaged, living together, married, ex-girlfriend, and ex-wife (Wegner et al., 2014).

Participants were also asked how much alcohol the woman drank and how much alcohol they drank. Responses were made on a 5-point scale with response options ranging from 0 (*none*) to 5 (*7 or more drinks*).

Analytic Plan

The primary hypotheses were evaluated with path analysis using LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006). Latent constructs were formed using total aggregation with reliability correction procedures, a technique that is recommended when the goal is to examine relationships among latent variables rather than relationships among items (Williams & O'Boyle, 2008). The scale score of each item was treated as a single indicator of latent variables, theta-epsilon values were calculated using the formula, $(1 - \text{reliability})\sigma_s^2$, and lambda values were set to 1. Several indexes were used to evaluate model fit, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMSR). CFI and TLI values of .90 or higher suggest adequate model fit, and values of .95 or higher suggest good fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). RMSEA and SRMSR values between .05 and .08 suggest adequate fit, while values less than .05 suggest good fit.

Results

Descriptive and Bivariate Information

Although 718 individuals started the survey, after inspecting the data, 146 records were omitted because these individuals did not complete the full questionnaire (e.g., skipped at least 20% of the questions) and 16 were omitted because of long strings of identical responses within a questionnaire (e.g., a long string of 5's even when items were reversed or the response scale changed), leaving 556 participants in the data file.

At least one sexually aggressive act since age 14 was reported by 35% of participants ($n = 196$). Seventy percent of perpetrators reported committing more than one sexually aggressive act; the median was three. Among perpetrators, 26% ($n = 51$) committed forced sexual contact as their worst assault, 45% ($n = 88$) committed verbal coercion as their worst assault, 10% ($n = 20$) committed attempted rape as their worst assault, and 19% ($n = 37$) committed rape as their worst assault.

Perpetrators indicated their relationship to the victim of each reported act of sexual aggression. In this sample of currently young, single men, 35% of the reported acts of sexual aggression were committed against a steady date, 19% against a friend, 15% against someone they knew slightly, 11% against a casual date, 9% against an ex-girlfriend, 4% against a stranger, 3% against a coworker, 3% against a live-in partner, and less than one percent against a fiancé, or ex-spouse (no one selected spouse). Among perpetrators, 44% ($n = 87$) sexually assaulted (only) steady dating partners, 39% ($n = 77$) sexually assaulted (only) casual dating partners, and 16% ($n = 32$) sexually assaulted both casual and steady dating partners.

Bivariate correlations between study variables are presented in Table 1. There were small, positive significant correlations between the number of sexually aggressive acts against a steady dating partner and heavy alcohol consumption and hostile masculinity. There were moderate, positive significant correlations between the number of sexually aggressive acts against a casual dating partner and psychopathy-related traits, friends' approval and pressure for forced sex, hostile masculinity, and impersonal sex. There was also a small, positive, significant correlation between the number of sexually aggressive acts against a steady date and the number of sexually aggressive acts against a casual date.

Path Analysis

Based on the model fit criteria described above, the hypothesized path model had adequate to poor fit, $\chi^2(9, 556) = 57.16, p < .001$; CFI = .91; TLI = .80; RMSEA = .10; SRMR = .05. Among the exogenous variables, heavy drinking was not significantly correlated with psychopathy-related personality traits or friends' approval and pressure for coerced or forced sex. The hypothesized paths between distal constructs, hostile masculinity and impersonal sex, and perpetration against casual and steady dates were all statistically significant with one exception; the path from heavy drinking to hostile masculinity was not significant. Modification indices suggested the addition of a path directly from heavy drinking to steady date sexually aggressive acts as well as a path from friends' approval and pressure for forced sex directly to casual date sexually aggressive acts. Based on results of the modification indices, the significant bivariate associations between these variables, and past research linking these constructs, we added the two paths to the revised model.

Figure 2 presents the final model, which eliminated the nonsignificant path and added the two paths described above. The revised model fits the data well using all the model fit criteria described above, $\chi^2(8, 556) = 12.28, p = .14$; CFI = .99; TLI = .98; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .00. All hypothesized paths were statistically significant. Table 2 provides information about the direct and indirect effects of each cross-sectional predictor on both types of sexual aggression. Psychopathy-related traits indirectly increased steady date sexual

aggression through its effects on hostile masculinity, and indirectly increased casual date sexual aggression through its effects on hostile masculinity and impersonal sex. Heavy drinking indirectly increased casual date sexual aggression through its effects on impersonal sex, and had direct effects on steady date sexual aggression. Friends' approval and pressure for coerced or forced sex indirectly increased both types of sexually aggressive acts through its effects on hostile masculinity and impersonal sex, and had direct effects on casual date sexual aggression. The model accounted for 21% of the variance in casual date sexually aggressive acts and 2% of the variance in steady date sexually aggressive acts.

Alcohol Consumption in the Incident

Among participants who reported casual date sexual aggression ($n = 119$), 47.9% ($n = 57$) reported never drinking during the incident, 33.60% ($n = 40$) reported drinking in one incident, and 18.49% ($n = 22$) reported drinking in two or more casual date incidents.

Among participants who reported steady date sexual aggression ($n = 109$), 70.6% ($n = 77$) reported never drinking during the incident, 14.70% ($n = 16$) reported drinking in one incident, and 14.68% ($n = 7$) reported drinking in two or more steady date incidents.

Paired t -tests were conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that sexual assault perpetrators would be more likely to consume alcohol during the incident when they were in a casual relationship with the victim as compared to a steady relationship. Responses were dichotomized for these analyses as "none" or "any" alcohol consumed in an incident and then summed to create two variables: number of casual partner incidents that involved alcohol consumption and number of steady partner incidents that involved alcohol consumption. Because some perpetrators reported more than one sexually aggressive act, we computed the proportion of acts in which alcohol was consumed separately for each partner type. To assess this hypothesis, we initially conducted analyses that included all perpetrators ($n = 196$), with zero indicating zero drinks with this partner type or zero partners of this type. As expected, men were significantly more likely to consume alcohol during sexual assaults against casual dates ($M = 0.65$, $SD = 1.76$) than against steady dates ($M = 0.29$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(195) = 2.73$, $p = .01$. These analyses were repeated for the victims' alcohol consumption. In a parallel manner, participants reported that the woman was significantly more likely to consume alcohol during sexual assaults when she was a casual date ($M = 0.75$, $SD = 2.08$) as compared to when she was a steady date ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 0.69$), $t(195) = 3.28$, $p = .001$. We then restricted the analyses to the subgroup of perpetrators who reported committing acts of sexual aggression against both casual and steady partners ($n = 32$). Again, as expected, men were significantly more likely to consume alcohol during sexual assaults committed against casual dates ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.46$) than against steady dates ($M = 0.28$, $SD = 0.42$), $t(31) = 2.28$, $p = .03$. No significant difference was found in participants' reports of the woman's alcohol consumption during sexual assaults when she was a casual date ($M = 0.44$, $SD = 0.46$) as compared to when she was a steady date ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.44$), $t(31) = 1.43$, $p = .16$.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to evaluate how well the confluence model predicted young, single men's sexual aggression against casual and steady dating partners. Although participants in this study were currently single, 38% reported acts of sexual aggression in a previous relationship with a steady date or live in partner and 10% reported acts with a previous steady partner. Although recent media attention to sexual assault on college campuses focuses on sexual assaults that occur between people who meet at parties or bars and are often intoxicated, there are many other circumstances in which sexual assault occurs (Breiding et al., 2014). As hypothesized, both hostile masculinity and impersonal sex were associated with sexual aggression against a casual partner and only hostile masculinity was associated with sexual aggression against a steady partner. Additionally, the three distal constructs were all indirectly linked to sexual aggression against a casual partner through impersonal sex and were either indirectly or directly linked to sexual aggression against a steady partner through hostile masculinity. Therefore, the central difference we found was that impersonal sex only contributed to sexual aggression against a casual partner, not against a steady partner.

Although Malamuth et al. (1995) argued that an impersonal sexual orientation would produce conflict and aggression in long-term relationships, including sexual aggression, there was no evidence for this path in the current study. Malamuth et al.'s examples focus primarily on verbal and physical conflict; thus, it is possible that the link between impersonal sexual orientation and violence perpetration against steady partners occurs primarily in the emotional and physical violence domains. Future research should assess multiple types of partner violence to address this question.

Overall, the version of the confluence model examined in this study explained a moderate amount of variance in sexual aggression against a casual partner, within the range found in past studies (Abbey et al., 2006; 2011; Malamuth et al., 1991; Wheeler et al., 2002). In contrast, the small amount of variance explained in sexual aggression against a steady partner highlights the importance of widening the range of risk factors included in etiologic studies. Based on theoretical models of intimate partner violence, future research should include relationship-focused measures including relationship stress, conflict resolution and negotiation styles, power imbalance, trust, and partner responsibility attributions (O'Leary, Smith, Slep, & O'Leary, 2007). Additionally, we had expected the relationship between hostile masculinity and sexual aggression against a steady partner to be stronger than it was, based on the assumption that this construct would be particularly relevant to sexual aggression against steady partners (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). Men who are predisposed to be sexually aggressive are likely to feel entitled to sex with relationship partners and to feel that their masculinity is being challenged if their sexual overtures are refused (Wegner et al., 2014). Future studies should include measures that directly assess feelings of entitlement in relationships and gender role beliefs that equate masculinity with sexual dominance and control in relationships.

The second difference found between the cross-sectional predictors of steady and casual date sexual aggression, and contrary to the hypothesized model, was that heavy alcohol

consumption had a direct association with sexual aggression against a steady partner in the path analytic model; however, it was only indirectly and weakly associated with sexual aggression against a casual partner. In contrast, alcohol consumption during the incident was more common against casual partners than against steady partners, consistent with hypotheses. Alcohol increases the likelihood of sexual aggression through multiple pathways, some of which may be more likely to contribute to sexual aggression against casual partners and some of which may be more likely to contribute to sexual aggression against steady partners. One pathway that contributes to sexual aggression against casual partners involves societal beliefs that link alcohol and consensual sex (Abbey, 2017). Young women and men report that it is easier to talk to people at parties and initiate casual sexual hook ups when under the influence of alcohol (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Casual sexual encounters that begin as consensual often become nonconsensual when the man pushes for types of sex that the woman refuses (Flack et al., 2007). Men who drink heavily are likely to do so in a variety of settings, including potential sexual situations (Abbey et al., 2001, 2011). Usual heavy drinking is also a risk factor for committing more violent sexual assaults and for intimate partner violence perpetration (Abbey, 2011; Eckhart, Parrott, & Sprunger, 2015; Leonard, 2005; Shorey, Brasfield, Zapor, Febres, & Stuart, 2015). Heavy drinking perpetrators often experienced violence as a child, have high levels of anger and hostility, poor conflict resolutions skills, and problems with impulse control. Thus, the relationship between steady partner sexual aggression and usual heavy drinking may be partially due to shared causes and partially due to alcohol exacerbating conflict situations for men predisposed to sexual aggression because of their sense of entitlement and anger (Eckhart et al. 2015). Teasing apart these different paths will require a combination of in depth qualitative interviews and experimental research. Qualitative interviews with perpetrators can identify circumstances that trigger their sexual aggression, which can become the focus of treatment programs (Rothman, Linden, Baughman, Kaczmarzsky, & Thompson, 2013). Experimental research can manipulate both alcohol consumption and situational factors identified in qualitative research to determine if alcohol plays a causal role in some sexual assaults (Abbey et al., 2014; Leonard, 2005).

The third difference found between the cross-sectional predictors of steady and casual date sexual aggression, and contrary to the hypothesized model, was that friends' approval and pressure for coerced or forced sex had a direct association with sexual aggression against a casual partner in the path analytic model; however, it was only indirectly and weakly associated with sexual aggression against a steady partner. In general, past peer influence studies have not assessed perpetrators' relationship to the victim, although some studies provide examples of peers' sexually objectifying comments that fit casual sexual situations (Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Sanday, 1990). Intimate partner violence perpetration has also been linked to peer norms and using objectifying language to discuss women (Capaldi, Dishion, Stoolmiller, & Yoerger, 2001; Casey & Beadnell, 2010), thus it is possible that the measure used in this study was better suited for assessing peer approval of sexual assault against a casual partner than against a steady partner. Some recent studies demonstrate that diverse peer networks and prosocial friendship networks are associated with a reduced likelihood of perpetration (Foshee et al., 2013; Kaczkowski et al., 2017). Qualitative

research is needed to better understand the verbal and nonverbal messages used by men to convey their approval and disapproval of the use of coercive tactics to obtain sex.

Limitations

The findings are based on a cross-sectional survey; thus, causal conclusions cannot be made regarding the relationships between variables. Although self-reported rates of sexual aggression were in the range found in past studies, accuracy of recall is always a concern with self-report surveys. The focus was on young men who were currently single (although they could have been married, engaged, or cohabitating in the past) so that the findings could be easily compared to the existing sexual aggression literature that also focuses on young, single men. Thus, the prevalence rates for sexual aggression overall, as well as with different types of partners, cannot be generalized to the entire adult population. Future research is needed with representative samples of adult men. Because we used an existing dataset, we were not able to assess all of the distal factors that have been incorporated into the confluence model (e.g., parental violence, child abuse, adolescent delinquency). Additionally, although we used well-established measures of each construct, we did not include open ended items that would have provided more information about the circumstances in which casual and steady date sexual aggression occur. Although our sample size was appropriate for the analyses conducted, it was not sufficient for detailed analyses of similarities and differences in patterns of alcohol consumption during incidents committed against casual and serious partners. Future research is needed to examine the relationships between the quantity of alcohol consumed and the context in which it is consumed to better understand alcohol's role in sexual aggression in casual and steady relationships.

Directions for Future Theory and Research

Given the high rates of sexual assault in committed relationships, future theory and research should focus on understanding sexual aggression in romantic relationships. The dating violence and intimate partner violence literatures are useful starting points; however, much of this research focuses on physical and emotional violence, rather than sexual violence. There are likely to be similarities and differences in the etiology of these different types of violence that need to be evaluated (Bergen & Bukovec, 2006; White, McMullin, Swartout, Sechrist, & Gollehon, 2008). Measurement is another challenge associated with comparing findings from the sexual assault and intimate partner violence literatures. The Revised Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss et al., 2007) is the most commonly used measure in the sexual assault literature. It has 35 items, crossing seven sex acts with five tactics, and asks about any occurrences (relationship to perpetrator not specified) since age 14. The Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) is the most commonly used measure in the dating and intimate partner violence literature. It has seven items that assess two types of penetrative sex with four types of tactics (not fully crossed) and asks (only) about occurrences in the past year with one's partner. The differences in the types of tactics and sexual activities assessed, time frame, and relationship to the perpetrator precludes direct comparisons across studies using these different measures. Bagwell-Gray, Messing, and Baldwin-White (2015) identified additional challenges to intimate partner sexual violence measurement associated with inconsistent use of definitions and

terminology. They argued that consensus in terminology is needed to ensure that researchers can communicate clearly with each other, as well as with policy makers and survivors. We extend this suggestion to include the importance of increasing communication between sexual assault and intimate partner violence researchers. Collaboration is needed between these two research areas to better understand the etiology of partner sexual aggression.

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Figure 1.
Hypothesized model predicting casual and steady date sexually aggressive acts ($N = 556$).

Figure 2.

Final model predicting casual and steady date sexually aggressive acts ($N = 556$).

Note. Standardized coefficients are provided. All paths displayed are significant at $p < .05$.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations between Study Variables Used in Path Analyses (N = 556)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Psychopathy-related traits	----						
2. Heavy alcohol consumption	.08	----					
3. Friends' approval & pressure	.32***	.06	----				
4. Hostile masculinity	.37***	.06	.37***	----			
5. Impersonal sex	.21***	.34***	.20***	.23***	----		
6. # SA acts with steady date	.08	.11**	.07	.11**	.05	----	
7. # SA acts with casual date	.22***	.05	.38***	.33***	.21***	.10*	----

Note.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects

Construct	Total effect on number of steady date SA acts		Total effect on number of casual date SA acts	
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Psychopathy-related traits	---	.04	---	.09
Heavy alcohol consumption	.11	---	---	.04
Friends' approval & pressure	---	.04	.33	.08
Hostile masculinity	.13	---	.21	---
Impersonal sex	---	---	.11	---

Note. Standardized coefficients are provided. All effects are significant at $p < .05$.