

# Friends Matter: Protective and Harmful Aspects of Male Friendships Associated With Past-Year Sexual Aggression in a Community Sample of Young Men

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Men's sexual violence against women is a worldwide public health issue that negatively affects victims' physical, psychological, and social health.<sup>1-6</sup> Annual sexual assault perpetration prevalence rates of 10% to 15% were reported by male college students in prospective studies conducted in the United States.<sup>7-10</sup> Concerns about women college students' safety prompted a recent White House initiative to address social factors that contribute to these high rates of sexual aggression.<sup>11</sup>

Friends' attitudes and behavior were frequently identified as risk factors for sexual aggression.<sup>9,12,13</sup> In a seminal study with male college students, Kanin<sup>12</sup> found that sexually aggressive men felt more pressure from their friends to be sexually active than did non-sexually aggressive men. This finding was replicated in other studies that asked about perceived pressure to have sex with many women and peer approval of using coercive strategies to obtain sex.<sup>9,14-18</sup> Peer selection and pressure reinforced each other, with individuals gravitating toward friends with similar beliefs and then having those beliefs strengthened through shared experiences.<sup>19</sup>

One way that friends exert pressure on each other is through conversation.<sup>20</sup> Conversations with friends about real and hypothetical dating and sexual partners help men establish, test, and clarify shared norms about expected and appropriate sexual behavior.<sup>20,21</sup> Friends' use of objectifying language about women and relationships creates a climate in which coercive tactics can be normalized (e.g., all is fair in love and war; working a yes out).<sup>22</sup> One common strategy to prove one's masculinity and achieve status is through treating sex as a commodity rather than an act of intimacy.<sup>23</sup> Potential perpetrators may be eager to demonstrate their heterosexual prowess as a sign of their masculinity and power.<sup>12,13,20</sup> For example, Capaldi et al.<sup>24</sup> videotaped 17- and

**Objectives.** We extended past research on sexual violence etiology by examining the impact of perceived pressure to have sex by any means and the types of objectifying and egalitarian language that friends used when discussing women.

**Methods.** We examined a community sample of young single men interested in dating women (n = 423) who completed audio computer-assisted self-interviews at baseline (spring/summer 2008) and 1 year later (spring/summer 2009). We used hierarchical logistic regression analyses that controlled for baseline sexual aggression.

**Results.** Approximately one quarter of participants (n = 108) reported that they made a woman engage in some type of sexual activity during the past year when they knew she was unwilling or unable to consent. Past-year perpetrators perceived more pressure from their friends to have sex by any means, felt less comfortable with their friends making egalitarian statements about women, and used more objectifying statements when describing how their friends talked about women compared with nonperpetrators. Seventy-eight percent of men were correctly classified by these predictors.

**Conclusions.** Men's discussions with each other about women could foster an environment that encourages or discourages sexual violence. We discussed future research and prevention implications. (*Am J Public Health.* 2015;105:1001-1007. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2014.302472)

18-year-old men during a 5-minute discussion with a male friend about what they liked and disliked about girls they knew. Although the authors did not assess sexual aggression, the use of derogatory language toward women was a significant predictor of physical and psychological dating violence perpetration approximately 5 years later.

Our study examined the role of perceived pressure to have sex by any means and the types of language friends used when discussing women in predicting young men's self-reported sexual aggression. Although studies with college samples are important, our study filled a gap in the literature by using a community sample of young men from a large metropolitan area in the United States. Furthermore, many past studies were cross-sectional and only included negative aspects of peer relations. We extended past research by examining the effects of multiple protective and harmful aspects

of relationships with male friends on sexual aggression in the past year, after controlling for baseline levels of sexual aggression. We expected that past-year sexual aggression would be more likely among men who perpetrated in the past, felt less satisfied with their friendships, perceived more pressure from their friends to have sex by any means, felt more comfortable with their friends' use of objectifying language to describe women, felt less comfortable with their friends' use of egalitarian language to describe women, generated more objectifying statements to describe how their friends talked about women, and generated fewer egalitarian statements to describe how their friends talked about women.

## METHODS

Participants were 423 men who completed both the baseline (spring/summer 2008) and

1-year follow-up interviews (spring/summer 2009) for a study of young men's dating experiences (additional details regarding data collection and participants were published elsewhere<sup>25</sup>). At baseline, potential participants were required to be ages 18 to 35 years, single, date women, and reside in the Detroit, Michigan, metropolitan area so that an in-person interview could be conducted. This tri-county region of more than 4 million people spanned the socioeconomic spectrum and included a broad range of suburban and semirural communities, as well as the city of Detroit. Using standard sampling procedures designed to efficiently identify stratified random samples of population subgroups, we purchased a commercial telephone list to create the desired sampling frame.<sup>26</sup> Of the eligible participants who met the age and relationship criteria, 89% agreed to be interviewed. Professionally trained female and male interviewers met participants at a mutually agreeable location selected for quiet and privacy. After reviewing the consent form with participants, the interviewer orally administered the least sensitive questions. Participants then completed the majority of the interview independently (including all measures reported in our study, except demographic characteristics) using audio computer-assisted self-interview technology, wearing headphones so that they could hear each question read aloud by a male voice. Interviewers sat far enough away so that they could not see the computer screen, but were available to answer questions.

Ninety percent of the 470 baseline participants completed a full follow-up interview approximately 1 year later.<sup>25</sup> The same procedures were followed. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour, and participants were compensated \$50 at baseline and \$60 at follow-up.

### Participants and Measures

At the initial interview, 72% of participants identified their race/ethnicity as White, 17% as African American, 5% as multiracial, and the remaining 6% reported other races/ethnicities. At follow-up, participants were approximately 24 years old (mean = 24.69; SD = 4.97). Median personal income was approximately \$20 000 per year (mean = \$23 798; SD = \$43 932). Nineteen percent of participants

reported their primary occupation as being a student. Most participants were single (94%), with 5% engaged and 1% married.

With the exception of sexual aggression and some demographic characteristics, we only assessed the measures included in this article at the 1 year follow-up interview. Sexual aggression was assessed with a modified 16-item version<sup>27</sup> of the Sexual Experiences Survey.<sup>4</sup> This measure uses behaviorally specific language to assess a range of sexual activities (e.g., sexual touching; and oral, vaginal, and anal intercourse) that happened against the woman's wishes through the use of verbal pressure, physical force, or when the woman was too impaired to consent. The original and modified versions of this instrument demonstrated good internal, test-retest, and criterion validity.<sup>4,27</sup> At baseline, participants were asked about their experiences since age 14 years. At the 1-year follow-up, they were asked about their experiences since the last interview. Responses were made on 6-point scales, with options ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (5 or more times); the Cronbach  $\alpha$  was 0.84 at baseline and 0.92 at follow-up. At each timepoint, we coded participants as perpetrators with 1 if they indicated any form of sexual aggression at least once in the specified timeframe or as 0 if they were nonperpetrators and indicated no sexual aggression. At baseline and follow-up, this dichotomous scoring correlated significantly with worst assault severity<sup>4</sup> ( $r=0.86$  and  $r=0.85$ , respectively) and the number of sexually aggressive acts ( $r=0.87$  and  $r=0.86$ , respectively; all  $P<.001$ ).

We used the 5-item short form of the Social Support Questionnaire<sup>28</sup> to assess participants' level of satisfaction with their male friends. A sample question was, "How satisfied are you with the extent to which you can really count on your male friends to accept you totally, including both your best and worst points?" Response options ranged from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The mean was computed ( $\alpha=0.92$ ).

We used the 5-item Peer Support for Forced Sex<sup>14,29</sup> measure to assess perceived pressure from friends to have sex by any means. A sample item was, "How much pressure have you felt from your male friends to have sex, even if you have to lie to the woman?" The other items included additional verbal tactics,

getting the woman drunk, and being a little rough with her. Response options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The mean was computed ( $\alpha=0.87$ ).

We used a 4-item modified version of the Comfort with Sexism Scale<sup>22</sup> to assess comfort with objectifying statements that friends make about women. We made minor modifications based on pilot testing to ensure that men in the target audience used the words in conversations with friends. A sample statement was "While having a conversation with you about a woman he is dating, your friend says, 'I had to tell her that I loved her just to get in her pants.'" Participants indicated their level of comfort with each scenario on a 1 (very comfortable) to 7 (very uncomfortable) response scale. Items were reversed-scored so that higher scores indicated greater comfort. The mean was computed ( $\alpha=0.83$ ).

We developed a parallel 5-item measure of comfort with egalitarian statements that friends make about women based on pilot testing. A sample statement was, "Your friends are catching up with each other. One of them mentions his new girlfriend, and says, 'She's so much fun to hang out with.'" Responses were scored as described previously for objectifying statements ( $\alpha=0.85$ ).

After completing the 2 comfort measures, participants were asked to describe in their own words how they and their friends talked about women whom they were dating or would like to date. Participants were asked to type several examples into an open text box in the questionnaire. These questions were included to provide a better understanding of the types of comments made in natural situations and their frequency. Under the direction of A. J. Jacques-Tiura, 3 advanced undergraduates coded responses into 2 categories: (1) objectifying statements friends use to describe women or their interactions with women, and (2) egalitarian statements friends use to describe women or their interactions with women. Several code constructs were developed based on the symbolic interactionist theory of sexual aggression in dating relationships by Christopher<sup>20</sup> and Christopher and Kisler.<sup>21</sup> Table 1 provides examples of each of the coding categories. Seventy percent of the interviews were coded by 2 coders; the intraclass correlation for both categories of statements was 0.92. The

number of phrases matching each category was summed; the number of objectifying statements ranged from 0 to 7, and the number of egalitarian statements ranged from 0 to 8.

Participants' ethnicity was assessed at the baseline interview. Age, personal income, relationship status, and student status were assessed at the follow-up interview.

**Analysis Plan**

We assessed bivariate associations between past-year sexual aggression status and study variables with the  $\chi^2$  test of contingency tables or analysis of variance (ANOVA). We assessed relationships among the peer variables with the Pearson correlation coefficient. We then conducted hierarchical logistic regression analysis, with lifetime sexual aggression entered on the first step, and demographic and peer variables entered on the second step.

**RESULTS**

Overall, 108 (25.5%) men perpetrated some form of sexual aggression in the past year. Seventy-six men (70.3% of 108 past-year perpetrators; 18.0% overall) had also perpetrated at baseline. Among past-year nonperpetrators (n = 315), 107 (34.0%; 25.3% overall) reported perpetrating sexual aggression at baseline. Among past-year perpetrators, 34 (31.5%) men perpetrated forced sexual contact, 45 (41.7%) perpetrated verbal coercion, 6 (5.6%) perpetrated attempted rape, and 23 (21.3%) perpetrated completed rape using established Sexual Experience Survey categories of assault severity.<sup>4</sup> Past-year perpetrators' median number of sexually aggressive acts was 3. Past-year perpetration was not associated with income ( $\chi^2 = 96.91$ , degree of freedom [df= 81];  $P = .11$ ), ethnicity ( $\chi^2 = 0.48$  [df= 3];  $P = .92$ ), or relationship status ( $\chi^2 = 1.82$  [df= 2];  $P = .40$ ). Thus, these demographic factors were not included in further analyses.

Table 2 includes results from ANOVAs comparing past-year perpetrators to past-year nonperpetrators. Past-year perpetrators were significantly more likely to identify their primary occupation as being a student than were past-year nonperpetrators. Past-year perpetrators were also significantly more likely than past-year nonperpetrators to have reported

perpetrating at baseline (since age 14 years). Past-year perpetrators were significantly less satisfied with their male friends, perceived more pressure from their friends to have sex, felt more comfortable with their friends making objectifying statements about women, felt less comfortable with their friends making egalitarian statements about women, and generated more objectifying statements and fewer

egalitarian statements from discussions with friends about women compared with past-year nonperpetrators.

Table 3 shows the exploratory correlations among the friends' measures. The more satisfied participants were with their relationships with their male friends, the less pressure they felt to have sex by any means, the more comfortable they were with friends' use of

**TABLE 1—Examples of Men's Objectifying and Egalitarian Statements Friends Use to Describe Women: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties, MI; 2008–2009**

Category/Construct	Illustrative Quotes
<b>Objectifying</b>	
Degrading	"I would tear that up." "Bro, I hit that last night!"
Sexual focus on appearance	"She's got a nice rack." "How's that ass look?"
Sexually stereotypical behaviors	"She's a gold-digger." "Women are liars."
Stories of sexual experiences	"She gave good head." "Many times the conversations will be about different things we have done sexually to girls."
References to women's alcohol or drug use and sex	"We would talk about girls we wanted to invite to the bar because we knew that there was a chance of something sexual happening after the bar." "She likes to party."
Swearing	"I'd fuck her." "I bet she has some nice pussy."
Other negative attitudes about women	"She's really intelligent (saying this as we make motions referring to her chest)." "Who has she been with?"
<b>Egalitarian</b>	
Woman's job or career	"She has a good job." "She makes way more money than you."
Intelligence	"Where she went to college." "She's really smart."
Personality	"She is fun to be around or a funny person." "She had good conversation."
Emotional connection	"It is actually exclusively about emotional, intellectual, or social attraction." "If we are both still happy."
Nonsexual descriptions of appearance	"She's really pretty." "She is beautiful."
Other egalitarian attitudes about women	"What kind of relationship she has with her family and friends." "Overall, my friends are very respectful to women and would not use derogatory comments."

Note. Coders counted the number of objectifying and egalitarian phrases each participant provided. Constructs and definitions were given in a codebook as guidance for each category.

**TABLE 2—Mean Differences in Study Variables as Function of Past-Year Sexual Aggression: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, MI; 2008–2009**

Variables	Min–Max	Past-Year Nonperpetrators, Mean (SD)	Past-Year Perpetrators, Mean (SD)	F(1, 121)	P	$\eta^2$
Baseline perpetration status <sup>a</sup>	0–1	0.34 (0.47)	0.70 (0.46)	48.16	.001	0.103
Age, y	19–37	24.95 (5.03)	23.94 (4.72)	3.37	.067	0.008
Student <sup>b</sup>	0–1	0.17 (0.38)	0.26 (0.44)	3.99	.046	0.009
Satisfaction with male friends	1–5	3.80 (0.92)	3.58 (1.08)	4.12	.043	0.010
Pressure for sex using any tactic	1–5	1.18 (0.46)	1.56 (0.88)	32.84	.001	0.072
Comfort with objectifying statements	1–7	3.64 (1.63)	4.16 (1.61)	8.14	.005	0.019
Comfort with egalitarian statements	1–7	6.16 (1.18)	5.42 (1.62)	25.93	.001	0.058
Number of objectifying statements	0–7	1.26 (1.50)	1.94 (1.70)	15.10	.001	0.035
Number of egalitarian statements	0–8	1.42 (1.71)	0.81 (1.16)	11.84	.001	0.027

Note. Max = maximum value; Min = minimum value.

<sup>a</sup>Coded as 0 = nonperpetrator; 1 = perpetrator.

<sup>b</sup>0 = primary identification not as a student; 1 = primary identification as a student.

egalitarian statements, the fewer objectifying statements friends used, and the more egalitarian statements friends used. The more pressure participants reported feeling to have sex by any means, the more comfortable they were with their friends' use of objectifying statements, the more objectifying statements they reported friends using, the less comfortable they were with their friends' use of egalitarian statements, and they reported their friends as making fewer egalitarian statements. Participants' comfort with their friends' use of egalitarian statements was unrelated to their comfort with friends' use of objectifying statements or the number of objectifying statements they used with friends.

Table 4 presents the results of a hierarchical logistic regression predicting past-year sexual aggression. This model fit the data well (Hosmer-Lemeshow  $\chi^2 = 7.20$  [ $df = 8$ ];  $P = .52$ ; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.29$ ). A model

adequately classified participants if there was at least 25% improvement over the chance classification rate (i.e., the proportional-by-chance accuracy rate, calculated as 1.25 times the chance rates of 62.0%, 55.5%, 6.5%, respectively).<sup>30</sup> The classification matrix indicated that this set of predictors correctly classified 78.3% of men overall, correctly classified 92.1% of past-year nonperpetrators, and correctly classified 38.0% of perpetrators<sup>31</sup>; these rates were all higher than the proportional-by-chance accuracy rates of 77.5%, 69.4%, and 8.1% respectively.

Baseline perpetration was entered into the model first. As hypothesized, participants who were previously sexually aggressive were nearly 5 times more likely than other participants to have been sexually aggressive in the past year (Wald  $\chi^2 = 39.96$ ;  $P < .001$ ). Age, student status, and friends' variables were entered simultaneously at the second step. As

hypothesized, compared with men who were not sexually aggressive in the past year, past-year perpetrators perceived significantly more pressure from their friends to have sex by any means (Wald  $\chi^2 = 6.13$ ;  $P = .01$ ), felt significantly less comfortable with their friends making egalitarian statements about women (Wald  $\chi^2 = 9.99$ ;  $P = .002$ ), and reported significantly more objectifying phrases when describing how their friends talked about women (Wald  $\chi^2 = 9.05$ ;  $P = .003$ ). None of the other predictors were significant in multivariable analyses.

## DISCUSSION

Approximately one quarter of the young single men in this study reported that they made a woman engage in some type of sexual activity during the past year when they knew she was unwilling or unable to consent. Sexual assault perpetration at baseline was related to a 5-fold increase in risk for perpetrating over the past year. All of the bivariate relationships between past-year perpetration and current protective and harmful aspects of male friendships were significant. Most effects were small in magnitude, although perceived pressure for having sex by any means had a medium-sized effect.<sup>32</sup> In multivariable analyses, friends' pressure for sex by any means, comfort with friends making egalitarian statements, and friends' use of objectifying statements remained significant after controlling for baseline rates of perpetration.

**TABLE 3—Correlations Among Friends Variables: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, MI; 2008–2009**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Satisfaction with male friends	–					
Pressure for sex using any tactic	-0.18***	–				
Comfort with objectifying statements	-0.03	0.14**	–			
Comfort with egalitarian statements	0.11*	-0.21***	-0.03	–		
Number of objectifying statements	-0.16***	0.20***	0.15**	-0.01	–	
Number of egalitarian statements	0.14**	-0.14**	-0.25***	0.20***	-0.17***	–

\* $P < .05$ ; \*\* $P < .01$ ; \*\*\* $P < .001$ .

**TABLE 4—Parameter Estimates for the Hierarchical Logistic Regression Model Predicting Past Year Sexual Aggression: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties, MI; 2008–2009**

	OR (95% CI)
Step 1	
Baseline perpetration status <sup>a</sup>	4.62 (2.87, 7.42)
Step 2	
Age	0.99 (0.94, 1.04)
Student <sup>b</sup>	1.37 (0.73, 2.56)
Satisfaction with male friends	1.03 (0.80, 1.34)
Pressure for sex by any means	1.66 (1.11, 2.47)
Comfort with objectifying statements	1.08 (0.92, 1.28)
Comfort with egalitarian statements	0.75 (0.63, 0.90)
Number of objectifying statements	1.27 (1.09, 1.48)
Number of egalitarian statements	0.85 (0.70, 1.03)

Note. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio.

<sup>a</sup>Coded as 0 = nonperpetrator; 1 = perpetrator.

<sup>b</sup>0 = primary identification not as a student; 1 = primary identification as a student.

Many young men report that they feel pressure from male peers to display their masculinity through stories about their sexual escapades that emphasize the number of sexual partners and their ruthless pursuit of them, rather than the quality of their relationships with women.<sup>20</sup> Previous research demonstrated that sexually aggressive men perceive more pressure to have sex, greater peer approval of forced sex, and more pressure from friends to engage in sex by any means compared with other men.<sup>12,14,15,18</sup> Our study replicated and extended these findings by assessing the content of friends' conversations about women, in addition to perceived pressure to comply with sexually aggressive norms.

Our findings were exploratory because we developed or adapted several new measures and also used qualitative analyses. Past-year perpetrators were more comfortable with their friends' use of objectifying language about women and generated more examples of past conversations that included objectifying language about women they were dating or wanted to date compared with

nonperpetrators. When considered together, only the number of objectifying statements made with friends remained significant. Many of the objectifying statements were extremely pejorative. One participant who provided multiple objectifying examples responded, "I hope I can take something home tonight. Let's get shit faced and see if we can score some pussy." The use of this type of language among friends encourages treating women as a collection of body parts that exist to satisfy men's sexual needs, rather than as equals who can provide support and friendship as well as sex.<sup>20,24,33</sup> These findings might reflect an interactional process of deviancy training in which peers reinforce sexually aggressive behavior through positive responses to hostile and rule-breaking talk.<sup>34,35</sup>

In a complementary manner, past-year perpetrators were less comfortable with their friends' use of egalitarian statements about women and generated fewer examples of past conversations that included egalitarian language about women they were dating or wanted to date compared with nonperpetrators. Contrary to the findings regarding objectifying statements, when considered jointly, men's comfort with egalitarian statements made by friends remained significantly negatively related to past-year perpetration, but their number of egalitarian statements did not. These findings supplemented those of Foshee et al.,<sup>36</sup> who surveyed adolescents multiple times from middle school through high school. Within-person analyses demonstrated that less physical dating violence perpetration occurred at timepoints when these adolescents had more friends with prosocial beliefs. These findings further suggest that openness to positive comments about women and relationships might serve as a protective group norm against sexual aggression.

Most past research that examined the role of peers in sexual aggression focused on students. We used a community sample of young, single men recruited for a study of men's dating experiences. Participants who identified their primary occupation as being a student were more likely to have been sexually aggressive in the past year; however, in multivariable analyses, only friends' influence remained significant. Thus, our study extended past research by demonstrating that friends influenced each other's likelihood of being sexually aggressive in community settings as well as on college

campuses. As the age of marriage increases and short-term casual relationships become normative,<sup>37,38</sup> young adults are likely to rely on their friends to set expectations for acceptable behavior with dating partners.<sup>20</sup>

### Limitations

There were some limitations to our study in addition to its strengths. We only included the peer measures at follow-up, and these were modified or developed for this study. Although these measures demonstrated good reliability, the findings need to be replicated in future studies that assess peer norms and sexual aggression at multiple timepoints so that their reciprocal influence can be evaluated. Furthermore, although rigorous sampling procedures were used to obtain a large community sample that was reasonably representative of the demographic characteristics of the area, only 1 region of the country was sampled. Thus, it is important to replicate these findings in other regions with different ethnic compositions. As is commonly found in logistic regression analyses with a relatively low frequency outcome,<sup>39</sup> our model was more accurate in classifying individuals who had not perpetrated in the past year than in classifying past-year perpetrators. Nonetheless, prediction rates were acceptable.<sup>30</sup> Past research suggested that including other established risk factors (which were beyond the scope of this article) would further distinguish recent perpetrators from nonperpetrators.<sup>25,40</sup> Because of the perpetrators' heterogeneity,<sup>41</sup> future research is needed to determine the circumstances in which friends have a strong influence on sexual aggression proclivity.

### Implications for Prevention and Intervention Programs

Bystander interventions focus on ways in which peers can reduce sexual violence against women and are among the most widely implemented sexual aggression programs on college campuses.<sup>42,43</sup> Bystander programs typically have 3 core components: (1) teaching bystanders how to intervene in a safe and prosocial way, (2) encouraging bystanders to speak out against social norms that perpetuate sexual violence, and (3) fostering skills that will assist bystanders in supporting victims of sexual violence.<sup>44</sup>

Although these programs have been effective at reducing rape supportive myths, increasing prosocial bystander attitudes, and increasing self-reported likelihood of intervening in the future,<sup>42</sup> not all members of a peer group are guaranteed to take part in the training, and little is known about how information from these interventions is diffused through social networks.<sup>45</sup> Research has suggested that participants in these programs feel more confident responding to peers' overt forms of sexual violence (e.g., stepping in when someone is taking advantage of a visibly intoxicated woman), but feel less confident confronting peers in "low risk" situations, such as when a friend makes a sexist comment.<sup>46</sup> Our study's findings suggest that an important future direction for bystander interventions is to address "low risk" situations because they foster a climate in which sexual aggression is perceived as normative. Objectifying and sexist statements are inherently gendered, thus, we echo the conclusion by McCauley et al.<sup>47</sup> that gender neutral language is inappropriate for bystander programs.

## Summary and Conclusions

In this study, we developed measures to assess multiple dimensions of male friendships that were significantly related to being sexually aggressive over a 1-year time interval. Past-year perpetration was associated with feeling pressure from friends to have sex with women by any means, including lies, intoxication, and physical force. Men's discussions with their friends about women foster norms about sexual aggression. Perpetrators felt less comfortable when they used egalitarian language that promoted dating relationship intimacy and generated more objectifying statements used in conversations with friends. Thus, male friendships could be protective by promoting gender equality or risk-enhancing by promoting the sexual subjugation of women. Sexual assault prevention and treatment programs should encourage men to be aware of the corrosive effects of using sexually objectifying language about women and encourage more egalitarian language in casual conversations with friends. ■

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## Contributors

A. J. Jacques-Tiura led the data analyses, interpretation of results, and drafting the article. A. Abbey was principal investigator of the project, led the study design, contributed to the interpretation, and drafted portions of the article. R. Wegner, J. Pierce, S. E. Pogram, and J. Woerner contributed to the data analyses and interpretation, and each contributed to drafting the article. All authors contributed to editing and revising the article, and all authors have seen and approved of the final version.

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## Human Participant Protection

Wayne State University's institutional review board approved all study procedures.

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