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Relationship Type and Sexual Precedence: Their Associations With Characteristics of Sexual Assault Perpetrators and Incidents

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Abstract

Although most sexual assaults are committed by men who know their victims, few researchers have considered how characteristics of perpetrators and incidents differ depending on the victim–perpetrator relationship. This study addresses this gap with a community sample of 204 men who reported committing a sexually aggressive act in an audio computer-assisted self-interview. 2 (Relationship Type: Committed vs. Casual) × 2 (Sexual Precedence: Yes vs. No) ANOVAs revealed significant main effects of relationship type and sexual precedence associated with individual difference and incident characteristics. These findings demonstrate the importance of developing theories and prevention programs tailored for different relationship contexts.

Keywords

alcohol; relationship between victim and perpetrator; sexual assault; sexual precedence

More than 80% of adolescent and adult sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the victim knows, most frequently within a romantic or sexual relationship (Black et al., 2011; Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). For example, in a nationally representative sample of adult women, 62% of the forcible rapes that occurred since age 18 were committed by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend, or date (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In a nationally representative sample of female college students, Koss et al. (1988) found that among those who had been raped since age 14, 11% were assaulted by a stranger; 25% by a friend, coworker, or neighbor; 21% by a casual date; 30% by a steady date; and 9% by a spouse or other family member (with the remainder leaving the question unanswered). In an ethnically diverse sample of male college students at a large urban university, among those who acknowledged committing an act of sexual aggression since age 14, 5% reported that the victim was an acquaintance, 4% that she was a friend or coworker, 33% a casual date, and 58% a steady dating partner (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001).

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Although most sexual assaults occur in the context of a relationship that has (or has the potential to have) romantic and sexual dimensions, few researchers have tried to differentiate between the characteristics of sexual assaults perpetrated in committed relationships as compared with those perpetrated in casual relationships. Traditional dating scripts link emotional and sexual intimacy; however, casual relationships often include sexual precedence, which has been defined as having previously engaged in consensual sex (Bogle, 2007; Stinson, 2010). Sexual precedence produces a sense of entitlement in many perpetrators that contributes to sexual aggression (Livingston, Buddie, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2004). Understanding the associations between relationship status and sexual assault characteristics requires consideration of the type of relationship (e.g., friend vs. romantic partner), as well as the past sexual history between the individuals (regardless of how they label the relationship). Thus, this study adds to the research literature by examining theory-driven hypotheses about the role of relationship type (committed vs. casual) and sexual precedence (yes vs. no) in sexual assaults perpetrated by a community sample of young, single men.

Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Assault in Different Types of Dating Relationships

The only theory we could locate that specifically addressed potential differences among perpetrators who committed sexual assault in different types of dating relationships was Shotland's (1985, 1992) theory of date rape. Although several aspects of this theory are outdated, it provides a useful starting point for hypothesis development. In the initial model, Shotland (1985) distinguished between early and relational date rape. He argued that it is unreasonable for a man to have expectations for sexual intercourse at the beginning of a relationship; thus, early date rape typically involves perpetrators with psychopathic personality traits who prey on many women. In contrast, relational date rape occurs before a couple has fully established sexual ground rules. It is typically committed by men with poor impulse control and high expectations for sex, who misperceive the woman's sexual intentions and then feel entitled to sex when refused. Shotland (1992) expanded upon the initial two groups by adding later stages of relationships (including marriage) in which consensual sexual intercourse had occurred. He theorized that perpetrators who previously had sexual intercourse with their partner believe that she is obligated to have sex with them and assert their relationship power through sexual dominance if refused.

Shotland (1985, 1992) portrayed a very traditional view of dating that did not apply to many young adults' relationships even at the time it was published (Murstein, 1980; Petersen & Hyde, 2011). Shotland assumed that for most women and men, sexual intercourse only occurred in serious, committed relationships. Casual sexual relationships have become even more acceptable and prevalent in recent years. One common, nontraditional sexual relationship is "friends with benefits," in which friends who do not consider each other as potential romantic relationship partners engage in sexual activity so they can have a sexual release without the "strings" of a relationship. Afifi and Faulkner (2000) found that 51% of their college student sample had engaged in sexual activity with a friend on at least one occasion, with 56% of those individuals reporting that this had occurred with more than one

friend. “Hooking up” is also extremely common, with prevalence estimates among college students ranging from 53% to 76% (Flack et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Stinson, 2010). Hooking up involves some level of sexual activity, ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, usually with a stranger or acquaintance and without the expectation of developing a relationship (Bogle, 2008). In a qualitative study of college students and recent alumni, Bogle (2008) found that hooking up was the most commonly discussed script for how college men and women interact together sexually. Flack et al. (2007) found that two thirds of the unwanted sex reported by their study participants occurred during hook ups, suggesting that although these experiences may begin as consensual, they do not always end that way.

Although different types of relationships have become more prevalent and acceptable, White (2009) observed that overall “there have been remarkably few changes in the traditional script” (p. 2). This includes expectations for men to initiate sexual relationships, men to be more interested in sex than women, more costs associated with casual sex for women than for men, and acceptance of common rape myths (Bartoli & Clark, 2006; Laner & Ventrone, 2000). Thus, underneath these seemingly egalitarian open, casual sexual relationships, traditional gender roles often produce different expectations for women and men that sometimes culminate in forced sex.

Relationship Type

A preference for casual sex with many different partners is a risk factor for sexual assault perpetration, and men who sexually assault a casual partner are more likely to enjoy and seek out casual sexual relations as compared to men who sexually assault a committed partner (Abbey, Parkhill, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2006; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995). Sexual assaults that involve casual partners also frequently involve alcohol use by the perpetrator and/or the victim as part of an unplanned social interaction (Abbey, Clinton-Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki, & Buck, 2003; Harrington & Leitenberg, 1994; Littleton, Grills-Taquechel, & Axsom, 2009; Ullman, Karabatsos, & Koss, 1999). Many young adults report that alcohol gives them the “liquid courage” needed to feel comfortable in casual sexual situations (Cooper, 2002; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Paul and Hayes (2002) found that intoxication was a central component of college students’ descriptions of their best and worst hook ups. Common post hoc explanations for unwanted sex during a hook up include alcohol’s effects on victims’ judgments and victims being taken advantage of due to their incapacitation (Flack et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Casual, alcohol-fueled interactions in which people are looking for sexual partners frequently involve sexual misperceptions (Abbey, 2002). When a man who does not know a woman well is sexually attracted to her, he tends to “see what he wants to see” and takes any positive response as a sign of sexual interest (Snyder & Stukas, 1999). Steady partners can make mistakes, but they are more skilled at decoding their companion’s cues (Abbey, 1987). In addition, alcohol exacerbates the likelihood of misperception because it reduces people’s capacity to focus on multiple sources of information, leading them to focus on the most salient cues in the situation, which tend to be those that fit their preexisting hypothesis (Steele & Josephs, 1990). Although sexual misperceptions are often quickly resolved, many

researchers have demonstrated in laboratory and survey research that misperception contributes to men's sexual aggression, particularly when they are intoxicated (Abbey et al., 2001; Abbey, Parkhill, Jacques-Tiura, & Saenz, 2009; Shea, 1993).

Perpetrators' tactics are likely to differ as a function of their relationship with the victim. Perpetrators who do not know their victims well need to use strategies to isolate them from the group to be alone with them (Norris, Nurius, & Dimeff, 1996; Testa & Livingston, 1999). Perpetrators who do not know their victims well also frequently encourage them to drink heavily because intoxicated victims are less likely to notice danger cues, are more likely to agree to be alone, and to engage in some consensual sexual activities (Harrington & Leitenberg, 1994; Lisak & Miller, 2002; Testa, VanZile-Tamsen, & Livingston, 2007). In contrast, isolating and alcohol tactics may not be necessary in an ongoing relationship in which the victim trusts the perpetrator and frequently spends time alone with him (Cleveland, Koss, & Lyons, 1999; Littleton et al., 2009; Livingston et al., 2004). Verbally coercive strategies such as guilt are more likely to be used by perpetrators in committed relationships (Livingston et al., 2004).

Sexual Precedence

Many Americans believe that once a woman has consensual sexual intercourse with a man—whether they are married or not—she no longer has the right to refuse him, and that a sexual assault which occurs among individuals who have previously had consensual sexual intercourse is less serious than other sexual assaults (Auster & Leone, 2001; Humphreys, 2007; Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Binderup, 2000). Laboratory research demonstrates that men who feel entitled to have their needs fulfilled become angry and punitive toward those individuals who deny them what they believe they rightfully deserve (Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 2002; Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003).

In one of the few studies that systematically examined the role of sexual precedence in sexual coercion incidents, Livingston et al. (2004) focused on perpetrators' choice of tactics, victims' resistance strategies, and whether the relationship continued. Sexual assault survivors reported that perpetrators with sexual precedence were more likely to use negative verbal persuasion including threats to end the relationship, seek sex elsewhere, swear, pout, or express dissatisfaction with the relationship. In contrast, perpetrators without sexual precedence were more likely to use positive verbal persuasion including complimenting her appearance, telling her he loved her, and telling her it would deepen their relationship. Contrary to Livingston et al.'s (2004) hypothesis, women's use of direct and forceful resistance was not associated with sexual precedence. Relationships without sexual precedence were more likely to end after the incident than were relationships with sexual precedence.

This Study's Goals and Hypotheses

The main goal of this study was to identify similarities and differences in characteristics of sexual assault perpetrators and incidents associated with the relationship context and sexual precedence between the victim and perpetrator. Overlap was expected between relationship

status and sexual precedence, such that a larger proportion of the perpetrators in a committed relationship with the victim were expected to have previously had consensual sex with the victim as compared with perpetrators in a casual relationship with the victim. However, we also anticipated finding perpetrators in casual relationships with sexual precedence and perpetrators in committed relationships without sexual precedence. This study addresses several gaps in the existing literature. Despite the acknowledged diversity among sexual assault perpetrators, few researchers have considered if the characteristics of perpetrators and incidents differ based on relationship characteristics. In addition, a large portion of sexual assault perpetration research has focused on incarcerated perpetrators and college samples. This study also expands on past research through its use of a community sample of young, single men identified through telephone screening in a large metropolitan area.

A secondary goal of this study was to further theory development in this research area. Although Shotland's (1985, 1992) theory of date rape is clearly conceptualized and presents testable hypotheses, its assumption that consensual sexual intercourse only occurs in long-term committed romantic relationships is outdated. Consequently, only the relevant components of this theory were used to develop hypotheses for the current study. For example, Shotland (1985, 1992) hypothesized that perpetrators who only knew the victim casually would score high on psychopathy-related personality traits because it is unreasonable to expect to have sex so early in a relationship. This hypothesis does not fit current sexual norms, thus we did not expect to find support for it. Based on the empirical literature described above, we hypothesized that as compared with committed relationship perpetrators, casual relationship perpetrators would be more impulsive, have more positive attitudes about casual sex and more casual consensual sexual partners, drink heavily in general and during the sexual assault incident, be with a victim who drank heavily, be less likely to have planned to be together, misperceive the victim's sexual intentions for a longer period of time, and use more isolating and alcohol tactics. After the incident, casual relationship perpetrators were expected to feel more strongly that the victim led them on, that she was responsible for what happened, and be less likely to continue to see her in the future as compared with committed relationship perpetrators. Sexual aggression within intimate relationships tends to occur repeatedly (Testa et al., 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Thus, committed relationship perpetrators were expected to report perpetrating more acts of sexual aggression than casual relationship perpetrators.

Hypotheses about sexual precedence were viewed as exploratory given the limited amount of relevant past research. Based on Shotland's (1992) theory, we hypothesized that in comparison with perpetrators without sexual precedence, perpetrators with sexual precedence would have high scores on sexual dominance, expectations for having sex with the woman, and the belief that the woman was obligated to have sex with them, and that they would feel less personal responsibility for what happened. Based on Livingston et al.'s (2004) findings, we also hypothesized that perpetrators with sexual precedence would be more likely to use negative, guilt-inducing verbal pressure tactics and be more likely to see the victim again as compared with perpetrators without sexual precedence.

Hypotheses about interactions between relationship type and sexual precedence were also viewed as exploratory. Perpetrators in a committed relationship with sexual precedence were

expected to feel the strongest sense of entitlement, thereby having the highest expectations of having sex and feelings of being owed. Perpetrators in casual relationships without sexual precedence were expected to have the most one-time-only past sexual partners and the highest level of alcohol consumption by themselves and their victims.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of a larger study of 470 single men from the Detroit Metropolitan area that was designed to examine the etiology of sexual aggression in a community sample (see Abbey, Jacques-Tiura, & LeBreton, 2011, for a description). Participants were required to be aged 18 to 35; not currently married, engaged, or cohabiting; and to have dated a woman in the past 2 years. Given the focus of the current article, the sample was restricted to participants who reported perpetrating at least one act of sexual aggression since the age of 14 (43%; $n = 204$).

Procedures

The Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan completed the sampling and interviewing under contract and the institutional review boards of both the University of Michigan and Wayne State University approved the study's procedures. A commercial telephone list that had a high probability of including 18- to 35-year-old men living in the Detroit Metropolitan statistical region was purchased to create the desired sampling frame, which is a standard sampling procedure used to efficiently identify stratified random samples of population subgroups (Groves et al., 2009). This tri-county region of more than four million people spans the socio-economic spectrum and includes a broad range of suburban and semi-rural communities, as well as the city of Detroit. The ethnic distribution of the sample was highly similar to that of the region (see Results section for more information about demographics).

Among eligible participants, 89% agreed to be interviewed. Professionally trained interviewers met participants at a mutually agreeable location. Interviewers discussed the consent form with participants and answered questions. The interview was completed on a laptop computer. The interviewer orally administered the first few sections, which contained the least sensitive questions. The computer was then handed over to participants who completed the audio computer-assisted self-interview independently. Interviews lasted 1 hr on average. Participants were paid \$50 to compensate them for their time.

Measures

Characteristics of perpetrators—Participants completed the following measures assessing individual difference characteristics.

Subclinical psychopathy-related personality traits—Williams, Paulhus, and Hare's (2007) Self-Report Psychopathy III scale was used to assess nonclinical psychopathy-related personality traits. This measure was developed for high-functioning populations and has strong internal consistency reliability and construct validity (Williams et al., 2007). The 20

personality items assess callous affect and interpersonal manipulation, personality dimensions typically associated with psychopathy. A sample callous affect item is, “I enjoy hurting the people who love me” and a sample interpersonal manipulation item is, “I find it easy to manipulate people.” Response options ranged from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .78.

Impulsivity—Williams et al.'s (2007) 10-item Erratic Lifestyle subscale was used to assess impulsivity. This subscale assesses attraction to and enjoyment of rebellious, impulsive, and sensation-seeking behaviors. A sample item is, “I enjoy taking chances.” Response options ranged from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Cronbach's alpha was .73.

Sexual dominance motivation—The 8-item Sexual Dominance subscale from Nelson's (1979) Sexual Functions Survey assessed the degree to which participants were motivated sexually by the desire to have control over their partner. This measure has demonstrated good internal reliability and convergent validity in past research (Abbey et al., 2006; Malamuth et al., 1995). A sample item is, “I have sexual relations because it makes me feel masterful.” Response options ranged from 1 (*not important at all*) to 4 (*very important*). Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Positive attitudes about casual sex—A 7-item version of Hendrick, Hendrick, and Reich's (2006) Sexual Permissiveness subscale from the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale was used to measure positive attitudes about casual sex. It has strong internal reliability and construct validity. A sample item is, “Casual sex is acceptable.” Responses options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Number of one-time consensual sex partners—Participants were asked how many different women they had consensual sex with *just one time* (Abbey et al., 2001). This item used an open-ended response format.

General frequency of heavy drinking—Participants were asked how often during the past 12 months they consumed 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a 2-hr time period (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2003). A drink was defined as 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler, five ounces of wine, or one shot of liquor. The response scale was reversed for data analyses so that it ranged from 0 (*0 days in the past year*) to 9 (*every day*).

Sexual assault perpetration—A modified 16-item version of the Sexual Experiences Survey was used to assess sexual aggression (Abbey et al., 2006; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). This measure uses behaviorally specific language to assess a range of sexual activities (e.g., sexual touching; oral, vaginal, and anal intercourse) that happened since age 14 against the woman's wishes through the use of verbal pressure, physical force, or when the woman was too impaired to consent. Response options ranged from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*five or more times*). The *total number of sexually aggressive acts* was computed by summing responses. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .84.

Characteristics of sexual assault incidents—Participants who endorsed any of the sexual aggression items were asked to describe one incident in detail (Abbey et al., 2001). If

they endorsed more than one item, a computer algorithm prompted them to describe the most severe incident, which was operationalized by treating penetrative sex through force as most severe and sexual touching through verbal coercion as least severe. The remaining measures focused on the specific incident.

Victim–perpetrator relationship—Participants’ relationship with the victim was assessed with a single item. They checked the relationship type that best described their relationship with the woman at the time: stranger, acquaintance, casual friend or coworker, close friend, casual date, steady dating partner/girlfriend, wife or lived together as married, ex-wife or ex-steady partner.

Sexual precedence—One item asked how often prior to this interaction they had sexual intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex with the woman “when they both wanted to.” Response options ranged from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*10 or more times*). Responses were combined to create a *never* versus *one or more times* dichotomy.

Perpetrators’ expectations—Participants were asked the extent to which the two of them had *planned in advance to be together* that day, with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all planned*) to 5 (*completely planned*). Participants’ *expectation of having sex* prior to the interaction was assessed with a question that used response options ranging from 1 (*definitely didn't expect to have sex*) to 5 (*very likely that you would have sex*).

Misperception of sexual intent—The length of time that participants *misperceived the woman's interest* in having some type of sex during the interaction was assessed with a question that has been used in past research (Abbey et al., 2001). Response options ranged from 0 (*didn't happen*) to 5 (*more than 3 hours*).

Attempts to isolate the victim—Participants were asked to indicate how much they tried to get the woman to agree to go someplace with them where they could be alone. Responses options ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*).

Drinking during the incident—Participants reported the *number of alcoholic drinks they consumed* before and during the interaction with a drink defined as 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler, 5 ounces of wine, or one shot of liquor. Participants were also asked *how many drinks the woman consumed* to the best of their knowledge. These items used an open-ended response format.

Primary sexual assault tactic—The primary *tactic* the perpetrator used to obtain sex was taken from the stem of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) item which corresponded to this incident: overwhelming her with continual arguments and pressure (Koss et al., 1987), showing displeasure (sulking, making her feel guilty, swearing, getting angry, or threatening to end the relationship; Abbey et al., 2006), giving her alcohol or drugs (Koss et al., 1987), having sex when she was passed out or too incapacitated to consent or stop what was happening (Abbey et al., 2006), and threatening or using some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, grabbing, choking, pinching, keeping her from moving or physically hurting her; Koss et al., 1987).

Post-assault characteristics—Participants answered questions about their perceptions of the incident and what happened after the incident.

Explanations for the incident—Participants were asked several questions regarding how they thought about the incident after it happened. They were asked the extent to which the sex occurred because *she led him on* and *she owed him*. Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Participants were also asked how much the *woman was responsible* and how much *they were responsible* for what happened. Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*).

Future contact—Participants were asked how much *time they spent with the woman after that day*, with response options ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

Results

Data Cleaning

Given the limited amount of missing data (<0.5%), the conservative approach of mean substitution was used (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The distributions of all variables were examined to insure they were reasonably normal. Two variables with large skewness were winsorized: number of one-time sex partners and total number of sexually aggressive acts (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Descriptive Information About Victim–Perpetrator Relationship and Sexual Precedence

In the primary analyses described below, 128 participants' responses were combined to form the *committed relationship* group (62.7% of sample). Using the mutually exclusive checklist of relationship categories provided to participants, 58.3% ($n = 119$) reported that the unwanted sex occurred with a steady dating partner or girlfriend. Another 2.9% ($n = 6$) reported that they were married or living together as if married at the time, and 1.5% ($n = 3$) reported that the woman was a former steady partner or spouse. The responses of 76 participants were combined to form the *casual relationship* group (37.3% of sample). Using the same mutually exclusive checklist of relationship categories, 10.8% ($n = 22$) reported that the unwanted sex occurred with casual friends or coworkers, 9.3% ($n = 19$) with casual dates, 8.8% ($n = 18$) with acquaintances, 7.4% ($n = 15$) with close friends, and 1% ($n = 2$) with strangers that they had not previously met.

The *sexual precedence* group consisted of 68% of participants ($n = 139$) who reported that they had previously engaged in consensual vaginal, oral, or anal sex with the woman prior to this interaction on at least one occasion; with the remaining 32% ($n = 65$) categorized as *no sexual precedence*. As anticipated, prior consensual sex was more common in committed relationships; however, it occurred in all types of relationships, with the exception of strangers they had not previously met. Participants reported previously having consensual sex with 44% of acquaintances, 36% of casual friends or coworkers, 67% of close friends, 74% of casual dates, 76% of steady dating partners, and 100% of spouses, cohabitating partners, and ex-spouses, $\chi^2(df = 7, N = 204) = 26.73, p < .001$. Forty-eight percent of perpetrators were in a committed relationship with the victim that included previous

consensual sex, 14% were in a committed relationship with the victim that did not include previous consensual sex, 20% were in a casual relationship with the victim that included previous consensual sex, and 18% were in a casual relationship with the victim that did not include previous consensual sex.

Descriptive Demographic Information

Contingency table analyses were used to compare the four groups formed by crossing victim–perpetrator relationship status with sexual precedence. There were no significant group differences in perpetrators' current age, age at the time of the incident, ethnicity, occupation, or religion. Perpetrators' average age at the time of the interview was 23.81 ($SD = 4.89$) and their average age at the time of the incident was 18.42 ($SD = 3.40$), $F(3, 200) = .78, p = .51$; $F(3, 200) = 1.61, p = .19$, respectively. Approximately 70% of participants self-identified as White, 19% as Black, 5% reported mixed ethnicity, 4% as Middle Eastern, 1% as Hispanic, and 1% as Asian, $\chi^2(15, N = 204) = 22.55, p = .09$. Twenty-six percent of participants reported that their primary occupation was being a student, 26% had a job in the service industry, 19% were laborers of some type, 10% had office jobs, 13% were professionals, and 6% were unemployed, $\chi^2(15, N = 204) = 22.33, p = .10$. Thirty-eight percent of participants reported being Protestant or another Christian denomination, 32% were Catholic, 25% had no religious preference, 2% were Jewish, and 3% had other religious affiliations, $\chi^2(15, N = 204) = 18.16, p = .26$.

Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance

A 2 (Relationship Type: Committed vs. Casual) \times 2 (Sexual Precedence: Yes vs. No) MANOVA was conducted with all the variables in Table 1 included as dependent measures. The multivariate main effects of relationship type and sexual precedence were significant, although the interaction was not, Pillai's Trace $F(18, 183) = 9.01, p < .001$; Pillai's Trace $F(18, 183) = 2.87, p < .001$; Pillai's Trace $F(18, 183) = 1.25, p = .23$, respectively. Given the significant multivariate main effects, follow-up 2 \times 2 univariate ANOVAs were conducted. Only the main effects were examined because the multivariate interaction was not significant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Relationship type—The left half of Table 1 includes the means, standard deviations, F , and p values associated with the main effects of relationship type. Four of the seven general characteristics of perpetrators were significantly associated with relationship type. As compared with perpetrators in a committed relationship with the victim, perpetrators in a casual relationship had significantly stronger sexual dominance motives, more positive attitudes about casual sex, a larger number of one-time-only sex partners, and more frequently engaged in heavy drinking.

All of the incident characteristics were significantly or marginally significantly associated with relationship type. As compared with perpetrators in a committed relationship with the victim, perpetrators in a casual relationship were less likely to have made plans in advance to be together and to have started the interaction with greater expectations of having sex. Perpetrators in a casual relationship also misperceived the woman's degree of sexual interest

for a longer period of time, reported trying harder to get her alone, drank more alcohol, and were with women who drank more alcohol during the interaction.

Three of the five post-assault characteristics were significantly associated with relationship type. As compared with perpetrators in a committed relationship with the victim, perpetrators in a casual relationship were more likely to feel that the woman had led them on and was responsible for what happened and were less likely to see her again after the incident.

Sexual precedence—The right half of Table 1 includes the means, standard deviations, *F*, and *p* values associated with the main effects of sexual precedence. Five of the seven general characteristics of perpetrators were significantly associated with sexual precedence. As compared with perpetrators without sexual precedence, perpetrators with sexual precedence were more impulsive, had stronger sexual dominance motives, had more positive attitudes about casual sex, and had a larger number of one-time-only sex partners. Perpetrators with sexual precedence also perpetrated more sexually aggressive acts since age 14 than did perpetrators without sexual precedence.

Only one of the incident characteristics was significantly associated with sexual precedence. As compared with perpetrators without sexual precedence, perpetrators with sexual precedence were more likely to have started the interaction with the expectation of having sex.

Three of the five post-assault characteristics were significantly or marginally significantly associated with sexual precedence. As compared with perpetrators without sexual precedence, perpetrators with sexual precedence were more likely to feel that the woman owed them sex and felt less responsible for what happened. Perpetrators with sexual precedence were also more likely to see the woman again after the incident.

Contingency Table Analyses

As described in the Method section, the stem of the SES item which corresponded to the incident participants described was considered the *primary tactic* used by the perpetrator to obtain the unwanted sex. A new variable was formed with five mutually exclusive categories which corresponded to the five types of tactics assessed: (a) showing displeasure, (b) overwhelming her with continual arguments and pressure, (c) giving her alcohol or drugs, (d) having sex when she was passed out or too incapacitated to consent or stop what was happening, and (e) threatening or using some degree of physical force. The primary tactic used to achieve the unwanted sex with the woman was associated with relationship type and sexual precedence, $\chi^2(df = 4, N = 204) = 12.08, p < .02$; $\chi^2(df = 4, N = 204) = 10.94, p < .03$, respectively. In addition, the contingency table analysis distinguishing between the four possible relationship by sexual precedence groups was significant, $\chi^2(df = 12, N = 204) = 26.22, p = .01$.

As can be seen in Table 2, almost two thirds of perpetrators in the committed relationship with sexual precedence group used displeasure as their primary tactic to obtain sex. Continual arguments and pressure was the only other tactic used by a sizable number of

perpetrators in this group (22%). Perpetrators in the committed relationship without sexual precedence group were fairly evenly split between showing displeasure (48%) and using continual arguments (42%). Displeasure was also used by almost half of the perpetrators in the casual relationship with sexual precedence group, with another 27% using continual arguments and 20% using one of the substance-related tactics. In combination, the two substance-related tactics were used by 41% of the perpetrators in the casual relationship without sexual precedence group, with a fairly even split among the remainder between continual arguments (31%) and showing displeasure (28%). It is noteworthy that although the use of physical force was extremely rare, it was only used by perpetrators in the two sexual precedence groups.

Discussion

Although past research has demonstrated that most sexual assault perpetrators knew their victim (Kilpatrick et al., 2007), few studies have examined differences in sexual assaults based on perpetrators' relationship to the victim (Cleveland et al., 1999). All but two of the self-reported sexually aggressive men in this study knew the victim at least casually, and approximately 60% reported that they were in a steady dating relationship with the victim at the time of the incident. Relatedly, although researchers recognize that past consensual sex often makes men feel entitled to future sex, few studies have examined differences in sexual assaults based on the perpetrators' past sexual history with the victim (Livingston et al., 2004). Approximately two thirds of the self-reported sexually aggressive men in this study reported previously having consensual penetrative sex with the victim. Although relationship status and sexual precedence were associated, they were not redundant. Furthermore, these two dimensions of relationships did not interact in multivariate analyses of variance; each had independent effects. These findings demonstrate the importance of considering both relationship type and sexual precedence when examining the characteristics of sexual assaults.

Comparison of Casual and Committed Relationship Perpetrators

Overall, this study's findings support the hypotheses that were developed based on currently relevant elements of Shotland's (1985, 1992) theory of date rape. As anticipated, personality characteristics related to psychopathy (e.g., lack of concern for others' feelings and interpersonal manipulation) did not differentiate between perpetrators in casual and committed relationships with their victims. These two groups of perpetrators did differ, however, on several attitudinal, behavioral, and incident measures. As compared with perpetrators in a committed relationship with the victim, those in a casual relationship were more sexually dominant, more positive about casual sex, had more one-time-only sex partners, and more frequently drank heavily. Casual relationship perpetrators were less likely to have planned to be with the woman or to have sex with her, misperceived the woman's degree of sexual interest for a longer period of time, tried harder to get her alone, drank much more alcohol, and were with a woman who drank much more alcohol as compared with committed relationship perpetrators. After the incident, casual relationship perpetrators felt more strongly that the woman led them on and was responsible for what happened; they were also less likely to see her again.

Overall, the incidents described by the casual relationship perpetrators are consistent with a hook up script. Hook ups generally are unplanned and occur after hanging out and drinking at a party or bar (Bogle, 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Paul and Hayes (2002) found that even though hook ups with a specific individual were unplanned, hooking up with *someone* was expected. Thus, although casual relationship perpetrators may not have made plans to be with that specific woman, they might have had high expectations for having sex that day. In combination, high sexual expectations and alcohol-induced cognitive impairments can increase the likelihood that a man will misperceive a woman's degree of sexual interest and feel comfortable acting on his sexual urges despite the woman's protests (Abbey, 2011; George & Stoner, 2000). Intoxicated men with high sexual dominance motives who are rejected are likely to feel "led on" and justified in continuing with unwanted sexual activity (Abbey et al., 2009; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987).

Committed relationship perpetrators were less well defined than casual relationship perpetrators by the variables included in this study. Incidents that occurred within committed relationships were often in the context of planned activities (e.g., formal dates) and these perpetrators expected sex. Committed relationship perpetrators were more likely than casual relationship perpetrators to use verbal pressure (e.g., show displeasure and use continual arguments) in response to the victim's refusal to have sex. They were also more likely to see the woman again, indicating that this incident of coerced sex did not end their relationship.

Although sexual assault researchers acknowledge the range of types of relationships within which sexual assault occurs, the typical scenario used in experimental research is designed to examine the casual relationship prototype (Abbey et al., 2009; Gross, Bennett, Sloan, Marx, & Juergens, 2001; Noel, Maisto, Johnson, & Jackson, 2009; for an exception see Monson et al., 2000). There needs to be a greater focus in research and prevention programs on sexual aggression within romantic relationships. For example, Rinehart and Yeater (2011) suggested that prevention programs would be more effective if they taught women how to resist persistent nagging from romantic partners for sex, as well as how to control a hook up situation with a casual acquaintance.

Comparison of Perpetrators With and Without Sexual Precedence

Some of the findings regarding sexual precedence were expected and some were not. As hypothesized, perpetrators who previously had penetrative sex with the victim were more sexually dominant, expected to have sex with the woman that day, believed she was obligated to have sex with them, and did not feel responsible for what happened as compared with perpetrators who had not previously had penetrative sex with the victim. They also had committed more acts of sexual aggression than did perpetrators without sexual precedence. These men repeatedly find sexual gratification through pressuring previous sexual partners for sex to which they feel entitled. Perpetrators with sexual precedence were more impulsive, had more positive attitudes about casual sex, and had more one-time-only sex partners than did perpetrators without sexual precedence. Given the large proportion of perpetrators with sexual precedence who were also in committed relationships, the links between sexual precedence, impulsivity, and casual sex were surprising. Although there were no significant interactions between relationship type and

sexual precedence for these variables, future research with larger samples may be able to distinguish between (a) perpetrators with sexual precedence who prefer committed relationships, which they believe entitle them to sex whenever they want with their partner, and (b) perpetrators with sexual precedence who prefer sex with many different women, yet feel entitled to pressure even casual partners for repeated sex. Further theoretical elaboration of the circumstances under which relationship type and sexual precedence have interactive effects is needed to guide this research. For example, are there circumstances in which a man prone to aggression, who has not previously had sexual intercourse with his long-term dating partner, is most likely to force sex, and do they differ from the circumstances in which forced sex is most likely to occur in long-term sexually active relationships?

Tactics Used to Obtain Unwanted Sex

Although signs of displeasure such as sulking, making the woman feel guilty, swearing, getting angry, and threatening to end the relationship were frequently used by perpetrators in all four groups, this tactic was used most frequently by perpetrators in the committed relationship with sexual precedence group. Perpetrators in the committed relationship without sexual precedence group were equally as likely to use signs of their displeasure and the second verbal tactic, continual arguments and pressure. These findings demonstrate the importance of sexual precedence in perpetrators' choice of tactics. Perpetrators in committed relationships with sexual precedence assume that the woman should always be available to them sexually and use the relationship as emotional leverage. On the other hand, perpetrators in committed relationships without sexual precedence seem to be split between being comfortable using their relationship as leverage and trying to persuade the woman that she should be ready to have sexual intercourse with them (cf. Livingston et al., 2004). Individual difference factors, such as length of the victim–perpetrator relationship or perpetrator's willingness to use interpersonal manipulation, likely influence the tactic choice of committed relationship perpetrators without sexual precedence. Regardless of its precise form, verbal coercion has long-term negative psychological, social, and health consequences for victims (Black et al., 2011; Zweig, Crockett, Sayer, & Vicary, 1999).

Perpetrators in a casual relationship without sexual precedence were most likely to try to get the woman intoxicated or use her impairment as their primary tactic. It seems reasonable that men who do not know a woman well and who have never had sex with her would be less likely to believe they could talk a reluctant woman into having sex and be more likely to select a victim who is unable to verbally or physically resist. Previous analyses with this data set (Abbey & Jacques-Tiura, 2011) found that alcohol was the primary substance used in these incidents; none involved date rape drugs such as Rohypnol. Despite the attention to date rape drugs in the media, alcohol is the drug of choice for most perpetrators (Abbey, 2011; Lisak & Miller, 2002). Casual relationship perpetrators with sexual precedence showed the greatest variability in their choice of tactics, suggesting heterogeneity in their motives and their willingness to seize whatever strategy seems likely to be effective in that situation.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. Most studies of self-reported perpetration rely on college samples, thus the use of a representative sample of young men from one large metropolitan area is a strength. The use of audio computer-assisted self-interviewing procedures allowed participants to answer sensitive questions privately, thus promoting more honest and open responding (Turner et al., 1998). The interview included a number of standardized measures of personality, attitudes, and experience with known reliability and validity.

Few researchers have considered the effects of relationship type and sexual precedence; thus, it is important to replicate these findings using other samples and methodologies. This study's cross-sectional design is a limitation because causality cannot be established. Many studies of sexual assault perpetration do not include questions about the incident; therefore, it was a strength of this study that participants described one incident in detail. However, this is also a limitation because many participants reported perpetrating more than one act of sexual aggression, and it is not known if these other incidents were similar to or different from the one described. One of the challenges associated with violence research is obtaining all the information researchers want without overburdening participants. An important goal for future research is to develop a better understanding of patterns of sexual aggression by collecting descriptive information about all sexually aggressive acts that perpetrators report.

Implications for Prevention Programs and Future Research

Sexual precedence and entitlement are frequently discussed in the wife rape literature. In their review article, Bergen and Bukovec (2006) quote a woman interviewed in Bergen (1996) “who was told repeatedly by her partner, ‘That's my body—my ass, my tits, my body. You gave that to me when you married me and that belongs to me’ (p. 20)” (p. 1381). The findings reported in this article suggest that many perpetrators who have previously had sex with a woman feel entitled to sex, even if they have only known her briefly and are not in a committed relationship. The widespread nature of sexual entitlement beliefs suggest that they are an integral component of gender socialization and need to be addressed in universal prevention programs (Humphreys, 2007; Monson et al., 2000). In addition to addressing myths about sexual entitlement, prevention programs are likely to be more effective if they are tailored to specifically address the different characteristics of sexual assaults associated with casual and committed relationships (Rinehart & Yeater, 2011). Programs aimed at decreasing heavy drinking and risky sexual behaviors are likely to be most effective in preventing sexual assault perpetration by men who target women they do not know well. In contrast, programs that emphasize the importance of respecting partners' sexual wishes are more likely to be effective in preventing sexual assault perpetration by men who target relationship partners. Most adolescents and young adults receive little information about healthy sexual relationships and do not realize that they are more likely to have a satisfying sexual relationship if they take their partner's needs into account, rather than only focusing on themselves. Peer groups often promote risky behaviors, such as casual sex and heavy drinking, as well as beliefs of sexual entitlement and rape supportive beliefs. Therefore, it may also be necessary to address group norms that promote sexual aggression and provide men with skills for how to negotiate and discount peer pressure that promotes sexually aggressive behavior (Thompson, Koss, Kingree, Goree, & Rice, 2011).

There is surprisingly little theory to guide hypothesis development regarding potential differences in sexual assault characteristics based on the type and stage of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. As noted above, this study's findings provide a clearer profile of sexual assaults that occur in casual as compared with committed relationships. The large dating violence literature can be a source of hypotheses for researchers interested in understanding sexual assault that occurs in committed relationships (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; O'Leary, Slep, & O'Leary, 2007; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). One important limitation, however, is that most of these studies focus on physical and emotional violence and do not assess sexual violence. Although these forms of violence can co-occur, there are important differences between men who are physically aggressive and men who are sexually aggressive toward their dating partners (Bergen & Bukovec, 2006; White, McMullin, Swartout, Sechrist, & Gollehon, 2008). We echo the comment by White et al. (2008) that there needs to be more communication and knowledge transfer between sexual assault and interpersonal violence researchers. Increased collaboration between researchers who study different types of violence against women would aid in the articulation of more nuanced theories, as well as the development and evaluation of comprehensive prevention and treatment programs.

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Biography

Rhiana Wegner is currently a postdoctoral trainee at the University of Washington, in the department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. She received her PhD in social psychology from Wayne State University. Her primary program of research has focused on elucidating the risk factors for sexual assault perpetration and victimization. . She is specifically interested in understanding the roles of alcohol, misperceptions of sexual intent, and the victim–perpetrator relationship in sexual assault perpetration.

Jennifer Pierce is a social health psychology doctoral student at Wayne State University. She is interested in the antecedents and consequences of sexual assault and dating violence. Her research interests related to the perpetration of sexual aggression and dating violence include understanding the cognitive, behavioral, and situational factors that contribute to the propensity to perpetrate aggression against women. In the domain of victimization, she is interested in understanding the factors that influence recovery as well as the mental and physical health effects of victimization.

Antonia Abbey is a professor of psychology at Wayne State University. She received her PhD in social psychology from Northwestern University. She has a long-standing interest in women's health and reducing violence against women. Her research interests in the domain of sexual assault include understanding the causes of sexual assault, alcohol's role in sexual

assault, and sexual assault measurement issues. She has published more than 100 journal articles and book chapters and has served on a variety of national advisory committees.

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Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Main Effects of Relationship Type and Sexual Precedence From Analyses of Variance.

Variable	Relationship type				Sexual Precedence							
	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>		
Perpetrators' characteristics												
Psychopathy-related traits	2.20	(0.42)	2.15	(0.45)	0.96	.33	2.19	(0.47)	2.13	(0.38)	1.30	.26
Impulsivity	3.04	(0.57)	3.04	(0.66)	0.42	.52	3.10	(0.65)	2.90	(0.56)	5.01	.03
Sexual dominance	2.10	(0.62)	1.92	(0.64)	5.02	.03	2.04	(0.63)	1.89	(0.64)	4.84	.03
Attitudes about casual sex	3.21	(0.72)	2.99	(0.93)	6.37	.01	3.14	(0.87)	2.91	(0.83)	5.22	.02
No. of one-time sex partners	5.49	(6.54)	3.41	(4.82)	8.97	.003	4.57	(5.67)	3.37	(5.39)	4.76	.03
Frequency of heavy drinking	3.29	(2.44)	2.39	(2.14)	6.43	.01	2.81	(2.35)	2.55	(2.17)	2.65	.11
Total no. of sex aggressive acts	4.74	(3.69)	5.70	(4.70)	0.02	.88	6.04	(4.67)	3.85	(3.20)	8.90	.003
Sexual assault incidents' characteristics												
Planned to be together	2.59	(1.52)	3.93	(1.32)	33.96	<.001	3.63	(1.44)	3.02	(1.66)	1.57	.21
Expectation of having sex	2.34	(1.33)	3.00	(1.47)	3.43	.07	3.12	(1.46)	1.98	(1.10)	23.30	<.001
Length of misperception	1.61	(1.44)	1.07	(1.36)	4.63	.03	1.22	(1.40)	1.37	(1.44)	0.01	.94
Isolation tactic	2.51	(1.42)	1.99	(1.35)	3.11	.08	2.10	(1.39)	2.37	(1.41)	0.25	.62
No. of drinks he consumed	4.95	(5.95)	2.33	(4.78)	13.66	<.001	3.27	(5.21)	3.38	(5.78)	0.44	.51
No. of drinks she consumed	4.25	(4.65)	1.95	(4.21)	15.76	<.001	2.85	(4.55)	2.72	(4.45)	1.13	.29
Post-assault explanations												
She led him on	2.88	(1.40)	2.27	(1.25)	9.55	.002	2.45	(1.33)	2.60	(1.37)	0.002	.96
She owed him	1.37	(0.88)	1.34	(0.67)	0.21	.65	1.41	(0.79)	1.23	(0.66)	3.07	.08
She was responsible	2.75	(1.12)	2.33	(1.00)	4.66	.03	2.44	(1.04)	2.58	(1.12)	0.01	.93
He was responsible	3.08	(1.04)	3.19	(1.07)	0.70	.40	3.06	(1.04)	3.35	(1.07)	5.03	.03
Future contact	2.75	(1.23)	4.45	(0.84)	116.12	<.001	4.05	(1.11)	3.31	(1.51)	4.48	.04

Note. SP = sexual precedence.

Table 2

Contingency Table Analyses for Perpetration Tactic.

Perpetration tactic	Committed relationship with sexual precedence (n = 99)	Committed relationship without sexual precedence (n = 29)	Casual relationship with sexual precedence (n = 40)	Casual relationship without sexual precedence (n = 36)	Total within perpetration tactic (n = 204)
	n (%) ^a	n (%) ^a	n (%) ^a	n (%) ^a	n (%) ^b
Showed displeasure	61 (62)	14 (48)	19 (48)	10 (28)	104 (51)
Used continual arguments and pressure	22 (22)	12 (42)	11 (27)	11 (31)	56 (27)
Gave woman alcohol or drugs	6 (6)	2 (7)	6 (15)	8 (22)	22 (11)
Took advantage of an incapacitated woman	8 (8)	1 (3)	2 (5)	7 (19)	18 (9)
Threatened or used physical force	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (5)	0 (0)	4 (2)

^aPercentage represents within the relationship and sexual precedence subgroup.

^bPercentage represents within all perpetration tactics.