Learning objectives

- To understand that sexual assault is a significant public health problem among college students
- To learn about risk factors for sexual assault perpetration among college students
- To understand that sexual assault perpetration risk can change during college years
- To understand that risk factor levels can change during college and longitudinal studies can illuminate how time-varying risk factors differentiate men who follow different sexual aggression trajectories
Background

• Sexual assault (SA) a significant public health problem among college students

• Results in adverse psychological, physical, social, and educational consequences

• 20–25% of women experience attempted or completed rape at some point during college (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000)

• 14–31% of male students report perpetrating SA (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2013; White & Smith, 2004)
Sexual assault among college students

- They know each other: 48%-partner or romantic acquaintance; 25% non-romantic acquaintance; 5% casual or first date, 11% stranger.

- Alcohol involved in > 50% incidents (Abbey, 2002).

- Not likely to be reported: Victimizations of students (80%) less likely to be reported to police than nonstudent victimizations (67%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).
Sexual assault in general population

- DOJ: Rape and sexual assault rates higher for female nonstudents (7.6/1,000) than female students (6.1/1,000); but this is reversed for males

U.S. Department of Justice report: "Rape And Sexual Assault Among College-Age Females, 1995-2013"
Kilpatrick et al. (2007) Drug-facilitated, incapacitated, and forcible rape: A national study
Factors contributing to SA in college students

• Age range of college students connotes risk:
  ➢ 18-24 year old females have highest rate of SA victimization compared to females in all other age groups
  ➢ 80% of female victims experience first rape before age 25

• Context of college also may increase risk:
  ➢ Decreased parental monitoring
  ➢ Increased alcohol use
  ➢ Increased sexual activity
Theoretical frameworks for studying SA

• *Confluence model* (Malamuth et al., 1995): Hostile masculinity and impersonal sex; expanded to include alcohol (Abbey et al, 2011) and peer norms (Swartout, 2013)

• *Theory of Triadic Influence* (Flay et al., 1999): Intrapersonal, social/situational, cultural/environmental

• *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Ajzen, 1985): Attitudes, norms, perceived control

• *Theory of Emerging Adulthood* (Arnett, 2000): Transition from adolescence to adulthood
Social-ecological model: A framework for prevention
CDC meta-review of SA perpetration risk factors

**Individual**

- Sexual behaviors: very significant
  - Multiple sexual partners (21/25)
  - Impersonal sex (12/13)
  - Early initiation of sex (7/7)
  - Exposure to sexually explicit material (6/9)
  - Motivation for sex/sex drive (4/4)
CDC meta-review of SA perpetration risk factors

Individual, continued…

• Sexual & violence-related cognitions: very significant
  – Rape myth acceptance (31/36)
  – Hostility towards women (32/42)

• Psychosocial and interpersonal factors: mixed
  – Delinquency (16/24)
  – Empathic deficits (13/20)
CDC meta-review of SA perpetration risk factors

Relationship (Peer)

• Peer attitudes and behaviors: lots of significance
  – Peer approval of forced sex (4/4)
  – Peer sexual aggression (3/3)
  – Peer pressure for sexual activity (6/7)

• Hyper-masculine/all male peers: significant
  – Fraternity membership (8/11)
  – Sports participation (8/12)
CDC meta-review of SA perpetration risk factors

Relationship (Family)

• Family environment:
  – Child sexual (20/34), physical (15/21), emotional abuse (4/5)

• Family characteristics: generally ns

• Family relationship: mixed
  – Exposure to parental violence (18/22)
CDC meta-review of SA perpetration risk factors

Community/Societal
- Gender-based: not significant
- Structural: mixed results
• Is risk for SA perpetration constant or can it change over the course of the college years?

• As risk factors for SA change during college years, do these changes correspond with SA risk?

Importance of longitudinal research
## Perpetration Rates during College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; year</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; year</th>
<th>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-perpetrator</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted Contact</td>
<td>8.4 (2.4)</td>
<td>9.9 (2.7)</td>
<td>9.3 (3.0)</td>
<td>7.9 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Coercion</td>
<td>6.8 (3.4)</td>
<td>7.4 (4.8)</td>
<td>7.3 (5.0)</td>
<td>7.5 (4.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Rape</td>
<td>3.5 (1.1)</td>
<td>3.6 (1.7)</td>
<td>3.2 (1.3)</td>
<td>4.0 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>4.5 (4.5)</td>
<td>4.9 (4.9)</td>
<td>3.7 (3.7)</td>
<td>3.9 (3.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent hierarchical coding.
Low/None: 70.9%; Increasing: 8.1%; Decreasing: 12.4%; High: 8.6%

Thompson, Swartout, & Koss (2013). Trajectories and predictors of sexually aggressive behaviors during emerging adulthood. Psychol Violence
Peer approval of forced sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Main effect of class, p< .001
- Class X time, p < .001
- Posthocs: Decreasing SA group had smaller reductions and increasing SA group had greater increases than other groups
Peer pressure for sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
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<th>Wave 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Main effect of class, $p<.001$
- Class X time, $p < .01$
- Posthocs: Increasing & decreasing groups differed from other groups
Rape supportive beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Main effect of class, $p < .001$
- Class X time, $p < .05$
- Posthocs: Increasing and decreasing groups differed from other groups
Conclusions and Implications

- Heterogeneity among SA perpetrators and likelihood of engaging in SA can change during college.
- Peer norms and rape supportive beliefs are important targets for intervention, as changes over time in these variables corresponded with perpetration risk.
- Programs need to address changing risk factors throughout college years.
Conclusions and Implications

• Primary prevention - focus on risk factors associated with increasing trajectory group because as these risk factors increased over time, some males without a history of SA prior to college increased perpetration likelihood

• Interventions designed to decrease rape supportive beliefs and negative peer norms can lead to decreased risk for SA among men who already have engaged in SA behaviors
What needs to be done/gaps

• Longitudinal studies

• Prevention programs that target malleable risk and protective factors

• Social/community-level risk factors: we know little about what factors at this ecological level increase or decrease risk for SA perpetration
References


