

## Men Pressured and Forced Into Sexual Experience

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*A predominantly heterosexual sample of 204 college men were asked to report incidents of pressured or forced sexual touch or intercourse since age 16. About 34% indicated they had received coercive sexual contact: 24% from women, 4% from men, and 6% from both sexes. Contact involved only sexual touching for 12% and intercourse for 22%. Sexual contact was pressured in 88% of the 81 reported incidents by tactics of persuasion, intoxication, threat of love withdrawal, and bribery. In 12% of the incidents, sexual contact was forced through physical restraint, physical intimidation, threat of harm, or harm. Contact was initiated by an acquaintance or intimate in 77% of incidents. The negative emotional impact of male contact was rated significantly higher than the impact of female contact. Men with and without coercion experience did not differ, however, for scale scores on sexual esteem, depression, and preoccupation. Interviews with 10 subjects revealed complex reactions to coercive male and female contact, including doubts about one's sexuality, resentment of unexpected or forceful contact, and fear of telling others about the event.*

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**KEY WORDS:** sexual coercion of men; pressured sex; forced sex; unwanted sex; rape.

### INTRODUCTION

According to a small body of research conducted in recent years, a substantial number of nonincarcerated adult American men are pressured or forced into sexual encounters. The evidence suggests that men experience unwanted sexual contact from male and female acquaintances and strangers by means that range from strong verbal pressure to violent force (Struckman-Johnson, 1991).

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Because there has been so little research on this subject, it is difficult to determine the actual prevalence of sexual coercion of males. According to U.S. Department of Justice Statistics (1990), over 9000 men are victims of rape or attempted rape each year. Another estimate cited in a human sexuality textbook (Gordon and Snyder, 1989) is that perhaps 1 in 10 rape victims is a man. Several studies of rape crisis centers confirmed that from 10–20% of rape victims were men (Forman, 1982; Kaufman *et al.*, 1980.) Since experts assume that most cases of male assault are not reported to authorities, these estimates may be conservative (Calderwood, 1987; Myers, 1989.)

One of the best estimates of the prevalence of sexual coercion of men comes from a representative household survey of Los Angeles citizens conducted by Sorenson *et al.* (1987). Of 1480 men interviewed, 7.2% reported that, as adults, they had been pressured or forced to have sexual contact. The incidence rate rose to 16% for white, college-educated men 18 to 39 years old. In a majority of cases, the unwanted contact was perpetrated by a female acquaintance, usually by verbal pressure. However, nearly 10% of the men were physically harmed or threatened, and about 30% experienced a combination of harm, threats, and verbal pressure. Intercourse — oral, vaginal, or anal — occurred in 39% of the cases.

Several studies of college students have also documented pressured and forced sex for men. Lott *et al.* (1982), surveying a stratified random sample of students, staff, and faculty at an Eastern college, found that 29 of 377 men (8%) had experienced forced sexual contact and 2 men (0.05%) had been sodomized during their lifetime. Nearly all perpetrators were other men, usually an acquaintance of the victim.

Most other campus surveys have focused on coercive sex between men and female dating partners. At a Minnesota college, Murphy (1984) discovered that 12% of 230 male college students had been forced to have intercourse with a dating partner. In all but a few cases, the force was psychological, not physical. Similarly, Struckman-Johnson (1988) found that 16% of 268 Midwestern college men said they had been forced to have sexual intercourse while on a date. Follow-up surveys with a subsample of subjects revealed that most men yielded to psychological pressure, although some physically coercive and alcohol-related tactics were used.

Sandberg *et al.* (1987) reported that 48% of 141 men at a Midwestern college had been verbally pressured into sexual intercourse by a dating partner, and that 6% had been physically forced. College students at a private Eastern college were asked if they had ever been coerced into kissing, touching, and intercourse (Poppen and Segal, 1988). Of 77 men, 44%

reported having at least one type of coercive experience. Strategies by the partner included being made to feel inadequate, continual arguments, lies, and threats to end the relationship. Physical force was used against 14% of the men.

Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) asked men at a large Southwestern university if they had ever engaged in "unwanted" — rather than forced — intercourse. Of 507 men sampled, 63% said they had had sex due to internal, situational (e.g., peer pressure), or partner-related pressure. The most common reasons cited were sexual enticement, a desire to help the woman, and intoxication. Several men (6.5%) reported that they had been physically coerced.

The present research was undertaken to expand the data base on the prevalence and dynamics of pressured and forced sexual experiences among college men. The study was designed to address several issues raised by previous research. First, the study incorporated a comparison for the number of incidents perpetrated by women versus by men. In most previous campus studies, men were asked about coercive sex with an assumed female dating partner (e.g., Muehlenhard and Cook, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Given that surveys by Sorenson *et al.* (1987) and Lott *et al.* (1982) uncovered cases of other male-initiated assaults, it is important to assess unwanted sexual contact with both sexes.

A second purpose of the study was to assess psychological consequences of sexual coercion. Although there are several works documenting negative consequences of assault for a small number of men seeking psychological or medical treatment (e.g., Goyer and Eddleman, 1984; Myers, 1989; Kaszniak *et al.*, 1988; Sarrel and Masters, 1982), there is little information on the effects of sexual coercion on male college students. In the present research, a scale measuring sexual well-being was administered. Comparisons of scale scores were planned to determine if coerced men had more negative attitudes towards their sexuality than noncoerced men.

Also, men who reported pressured or forced sexual contact were asked to rate the emotional impact of the most recent incident. Comparisons of impact ratings were planned to determine whether male- or female-initiated incidents were more upsetting.

A third feature of the study was that interviews were conducted with 10 subjects who had experienced coercive sexual contact. No other campus study has collected data through direct questioning of subjects. The interview data, in combination with survey responses, were expected to reveal a detailed and realistic portrayal of sexual coercion among college men.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The original subject pool consisted of 215 men who volunteered to participate in the study for extra credit points for four courses in introductory psychology, introductory and advanced social psychology, and sex roles. All courses attracted students from a wide variety of majors at this small Midwestern liberal arts college. After eliminating 11 subjects who failed to complete several pages of the instrument, the final sample consisted of 204 men.

### Instrument

#### *Sexual Experiences*

A major decision of the study was how to define and measure a coercive sexual experience — one that occurs against one's will or free choice. Adopting a definition similar to that used by Sorenson *et al.* (1987), sexual coercion was defined as an experience of being pressured or forced by another person to have contact which involved touching of sexual parts or sexual intercourse — oral, anal, or vaginal.

"Pressured" contact was defined as an experience which resulted from types of *psychological* coercion, including verbal persuasion, threat of love withdrawal, bribery, and use of intoxication. Although these tactics have been described by male subjects as coercive in other studies (e.g., Poppen and Segal, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988), they involve a relatively low level of coercion exclusive of physical force or intent to harm. Representing a higher level of coercion, "forced" contact was defined as an experience resulting from *physical* coercion: physical restraint, physical harm, physical intimidation, threat of harm, and use of weapons.

The questions for measuring the occurrence of coercive sexual touch and sexual intercourse are shown below. Items for opposite-sex experiences appeared first in the survey, followed by an identical set for same-sex experiences:

Since the age of 16, have you ever been pressured or forced by a person of the (OPPOSITE/SAME) SEX to have sexual contact which involved touching of sexual parts of your body (but not intercourse)? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_ How many times has it happened? \_\_\_

Since the age of 16, have you ever been pressured or forced by a person of the (OPPOSITE/SAME) SEX to have sexual contact which involved sexual intercourse?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_ How many times has it happened? \_\_\_

Subjects who answered yes to either of the above questions were asked to categorize the *Most Recent Episode* according to the following strategies: persuasion, bribe, love withdrawal, threatened harm, scared you because they were bigger and stronger, weapon present, got you drunk, and physically harmed you.

To further clarify whether touching or intercourse occurred during the most recent incident, subjects indicated all acts which took place: attempt at contact, person touched your sexual parts, person made you touch his/her sexual parts, and intercourse occurred — vaginal, anal, or oral. Subjects were also requested to indicate their relationship to the initiator and to describe briefly how the incident occurred.

### *Psychological Consequences*

The instrument had two measures for reactions to coercive experiences. First, those subjects with at least one coercive experience were asked to “Please rate the extent that this event has had a negative effect on you.” The semantic differential rating scale ranged from *has had no negative effect on me* (1) to *has had a severe negative effect on me* (7).

Second, all subjects were administered the Sexuality Scale developed by Snell and Papini (1989) to assess dimensions of sexual well-being. The Sexuality Scale consists of three 10-item subscales for measuring sexual esteem, depression, and preoccupation. Sexual self-esteem, defined as having confidence and positive regard for one’s capacity to experience sexuality, is measured by items such as “I am a good sexual partner.” Sexual depression is defined as a tendency to feel saddened and discouraged about one’s capability to relate sexually to another individual. An example item is “I feel sad when I think about my sexual experiences.” Sexual preoccupation, defined as a tendency to think about sex to an excessive degree, was assessed by items such as “I think about sex all the time.”

Subject responses are collected on a 5-point Likert scale labeled with disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree or disagree, slightly agree, and agree. Snell and Papini (1989) used factor analyses to determine that the three subscales measured conceptually independent dimensions. The subscales were found to have high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .78–.94.

## Interview Format

A small subsample of subjects who volunteered to discuss their coercive experiences were asked when it happened, the age of participants, and the sequence of events. Subjects were questioned about how they felt about the incident when it happened and in the present, if the event affected how they relate to men and women, and how many people they had told about the incident.

## Procedures

### *Survey*

At the beginning of class in the sampled courses, students were told about an opportunity to take an anonymous survey on sexual behavior for several points of extra credit. They were given a detailed informed consent form which described the sensitive nature of the questions. Interested students were instructed to take a questionnaire from a box outside of the classroom at the end of the hour. They were requested to complete the survey in privacy and to return it the next class meeting. At that time, completed questionnaires and signed consent forms were collected in separate boxes in the classroom. Over 90% of the students in the four classes participated.

### *Interviews*

The decision to interview subjects was made after one subject approached an author to discuss the coercive experiences he had reported in the survey. He agreed to have his comments added to the research study. Because this subject's verbal description of emotional reactions to coercion was much more informative than any written comments received, the authors decided to pursue more interviews.

Although less than a month of the semester remained, men in two of the sampled classes were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed about a coercive incident that they had already reported in the survey. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and told that they would not be asked to identify perpetrators. They were offered \$5 in compensation for 30–45 min of time. In addition to the first subject interviewed, nine men came to one author's office for an interview over a three week period.

## RESULTS OF SURVEY

### Subject Characteristics

Of the final 204 subjects, 96% were heterosexual, 2% were homosexual, and 2% were bisexual. Seventy percent of the men were currently sexually active; 17% had sexual experience but were not presently active; and 13% were not yet sexually active. The average age of subjects was 21.8 (SD = 3.9). Ages ranged from 18 to 46 years.

### Overall Coercion Experience

Table I shows the distribution of subjects by categories of coercive experiences. A total of 69 of 204 men (34%) reported at least one coercive episode since the age of 16. Twenty-four percent of the sample had experienced female contact only; 4% reported male contact only; and about 6% had had both female and male contact. Reported incidents involved only sexual touching for 12% of the men and intercourse (vaginal, anal, oral) for 22%.

Combining all categories, the most commonly reported experience was sexual touching by a woman (23% of subjects), followed by intercourse with a woman (20% of subjects). Eight percent of the men had been touched by a man, and 4% had had intercourse with a man.

### Most Recent Incidents

Each subject could potentially provide information about two "most recent incidents": (i) either touch or intercourse by a woman and (ii) either touch or intercourse by a man. The 69 subjects with coercion experience provided information about 81 incidents. (Twelve of the men who described a female incident also reported a male incident.) Twenty subjects provided descriptions about an incident in which they were touched by a woman; 41 men described an episode of intercourse with a woman; 12 men described an incident of sexual touch by a man, and 8 men gave information about an episode of intercourse with a man.

### *Relationship to Initiator*

Table II shows the distribution of most recent incidents according to the subjects' relationship to the initiator. Combining all incidents, 77% of the cases occurred with an acquaintance or intimate friend, and only 7% were perpetrated by a stranger.

**Table I.** Distribution of College Men by Categories of Coercive Sexual Touching and Intercourse

Coercion category	Frequency of Men (N = 204)	% of sample
No coercion	135	66.2
Female-initiated		
Touch	18	8.8
Intercourse	9	4.4
Touch and intercourse	22	10.8
Male-initiated		
Touch	5	2.4
Intercourse	1	0.5
Touch and intercourse	2	1.0
Female- and male-initiated		
Touch (FM)	2	1.0
Touch and intercourse (FM)	2	1.0
Intercourse (FM)	2	1.0
Touch and intercourse (F) touch (M)	3	1.5
Intercourse (F), touch (M)	2	1.0
Intercourse (FM), touch (M)	1	0.5

In at least 90% of the cases of female-initiated contact, the woman was known by the man. For incidents of sexual touching, the woman was usually a casual acquaintance, but in cases of intercourse, the woman was likely to be either a casual acquaintance or a girlfriend.

The percentages for male-initiated incidents should be interpreted with caution because of the small number of incidents. Like female incidents, most cases of male contact were initiated by a person known by the subject, usually a casual acquaintance. No subject reported an incident with an intimate male friend, most likely because 17 of the 20 men reporting male contact were heterosexual.

### *Persuasion Tactic*

Table III displays the distribution of most-recent incidents according to the tactic used by the initiator. Each subject could check as many tactics that occurred, so percentages do not total to 100%. Combining all 81 incidents, the most commonly used tactics were persuasion (78%) and intoxication (43%). The least used were weapons (0%), physical harm (1%), and scared you with size (1%).

For cases of female touching and intercourse, persuasion was the most common strategy. In fact, 42% of subjects with female contact indicated that persuasion was the sole tactic used. Intoxication and love withdrawal were the next most frequently used strategies. No subject said that he was physically harmed by a woman, but several indicated that they were physically restrained or threatened with harm. Another small percentage were bribed.

Written descriptions — provided for 45 of 61 (74%) of the female incidents — explained how the strategies were implemented. Some men who marked “persuasion” indicated that a woman used “constant pressure,” “pleaded,” “nagged,” and “was desperate” for sex. Several said that the woman made them “feel guilty” about either not wanting sex or finding her desirable. One man was persuaded into an affair with his high school teacher through positive attention.

The most common combination strategy for female incidents was persuasion and intoxication (25/61 incidents or 41%). A few men wrote that women purposely got them intoxicated to have sex. However, a majority indicated that they had become intoxicated at bars or parties and subsequently encountered a woman who wanted sex. One man wrote that he was drunk at a bar and his best female friend’s roommate drove him home, came into his house and “forced herself” on him. Another was drunk at a New Year’s Eve party and was led outside to a car by a woman who took off his pants and initiated intercourse.

Another man wrote that he came home drunk from the bars and passed out in a friend’s bunk bed. He awoke to find an acquaintance — who wanted to date him — “riding” him in order to “get off.” Another man wrote that he was intoxicated at a fraternity party and was pursued for several hours by an undesirable acquaintance. She eventually followed him to his room and pressured him into sex to prove that he did not find her unattractive. In another intoxication scenario, a man wrote that he had sex with a woman so that she would leave his house. Drunken persuasion for at least one man was fairly forceful. He wrote: “She took me to her room and forcefully pulled my pants off. She became very mad when I tried to stop her, so I gave in.”

One man who marked “bribery” said that a “fat chick” pulled him into a room at a party and requested sex. He said no but changed his mind when she offered a \$20 bill. Threat of harm for one subject occurred when a woman said she would tell everyone that he “couldn’t get it up.” Another man wrote that a “psycho” woman said she would kill herself if he tried to leave her and not have sex. In a physical restraint scenario, a man said a woman blocked the exit of a bar bathroom, and rather than use force to remove her, he allowed her to touch him.

Table II. Distribution of Most Recent Incidents of Coercive Sexual Experiences by Relationship to the Initiator

Relationship	Coercion category											
	Touch-F (n = 20)		Intercourse-F (n = 41)		Touch-M (n = 12)		Intercourse-M (n = 8)		Total (N=81)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Stranger	2	10.0	2	4.9	2	16.7	0	0.0	6	7.4		
Acquaintance/friend/new date	14	70.0	18	43.9	6	50.0	6	75.0	44	54.3		
Relative	0	0.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	1	12.5	3	3.7		
Boyfriend/girlfriend/fiance	4	20.0	15	36.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	19	23.4		
Spouse, ex-spouse	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	8.3	0	0.0	1	1.2		
Other (employer etc.)	0	0.0	4	9.8	3	25.0	1	12.5	8	9.9		

Table III. Distribution of Most Recent Incidents of Coercive Sexual Experiences by Strategies Used By the Initiator

Strategy	Coercion category <sup>a</sup>											
	Touch-F (n = 20)		Intercourse-F (n = 41)		Touch-M (n = 12)		Intercourse-M (n = 8)		Total (N=81)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Persuasion	17	85.0	31	75.6	8	67.0	7	87.5	63	77.8		
Bribe	1	5.0	2	4.9	2	17.0	4	50.0	9	11.1		
Love withdrawal	2	10.0	8	19.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	12.3		
Threatened harm	0	0.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	1	12.5	3	3.7		
Scared you with size	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	12.5	1	1.2		
Physical restraint	1	5.0	1	2.4	0	0.0	3	37.5	5	6.2		
Weapon present	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0		
Got you drunk	9	45.0	18	43.9	3	25.0	5	62.5	35	43.2		
Physically harmed you	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	8.0	0	0.0	1	1.2		

<sup>a</sup> Subjects could check all possible strategies that occurred so column percentages do not add to 100.

The percentages for male-contact cases in Table II should be viewed with caution due to the small number of incidents. Combining touch and intercourse cases, persuasion was the most frequently used strategy. It was the only strategy used in 7 of 20 incidents (35%). Intoxication was the next most common tactic. Bribery and physical restraint were mentioned for a greater percentage of male cases than for female incidents. Only one man indicated he was physically harmed in an incident.

According to written descriptions provided for 19 of 20 incidents (95%), the persuasion for two homosexual men was persistent verbal pressure from a male companion. One heterosexual male said his physician persuaded him several times to be touched. Several heterosexual men reported a persuasion/drunk strategy in which they were drinking with a gay or bisexual friend or acquaintance who asked them to "try it out" or to "prove friendship" by engaging in oral sex.

At least five men indicated that they were unexpectedly fondled or "grabbed" in the crotch area by an acquaintance or stranger. For example, one heterosexual man returned intoxicated from the bars, continued to drink at a party in his home, and then fell asleep in his bedroom. He was awakened by the sexual fondling of an unknown older man who had joined the party and remained after by pretending to pass out. Only one description of bribery was provided: A judge asked a man for sex to repay past favors. In one of the few clear descriptions of physical restraint, a man wrote that he was sexually fondled while being held down by a wrestling partner. Another indicated that he was physically restrained by an older male who forced him to have anal and oral sex.

## Psychological Consequences

### *Sexual Well-Being*

Scores on the three sexuality subscales were created for each subject by assigning a value of 1 through 5 for responses ranging from disagree-agree and summing the points. Scores per subscale thus ranged from 10–50 points, with a higher score denoting a greater level of esteem, depression, or preoccupation. Subjects who did not answer more than three items per subscale were eliminated from the analysis ( $n = 20$ ). Subsequent review of these subjects' data revealed that in all cases they were virgins. Presumably, they felt unable to respond to the numerous scale items about being a good or confident sexual partner.

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted using three levels of subjects' coercion experience as the independent variable and the three sexuality subscale scores as dependent measures. Levels of the independent variable of coercion experience were created by grouping subjects as "not coerced" ( $n = 120$ ), "touched—but no intercourse—by either gender" ( $n = 21$ ) and "intercourse with either gender" ( $n = 43$ ). Subjects with opposite- and same-sex experiences were combined in touch and intercourse groups to create larger cell sizes.

Results of the MANOVA indicated there was no overall effect for coercion experience on sexuality subscale scores, Wilks's lambda = .9683,  $F(6, 358) = 0.9695$ ;  $p = 0.44$ . The overall mean score was 39.9 points (SD = 7.64) for sexual esteem, 32.7 points (SD = 7.95) for preoccupation, and 18.5 (SD = 8.04) for depression.

In summary, the results indicated that subjects with touch or intercourse coercion experience did not differ significantly from noncoerced subjects in their current level of sexual well-being, as assessed by the Sexuality Scale.

### *Impact of Incident*

A  $t$  test was conducted to determine if men with coercive female contact differed significantly from men with coercive male contact in their emotional reaction to the most recent episode. Ideally, the two comparison groups should have consisted of those subjects with female-initiated coercion experience versus those with male-initiated experience. One problem with this grouping was that 12 subjects had both male and female experience. To guarantee that the two groups were independent, only the ratings for the male-initiated incidents were used from these 12 subjects. Thus, the cell size was 49 for the female-contact group and 19 for the male-contact group. (One man did not rate the impact of a male-initiated incident.) The dependent measure for the  $t$  test was the scalar rating of the negative emotional impact of the most recent incident.

Results of the  $t$  test showed that ratings given to male-initiated incidents ( $\bar{x} = 3.47$ , SD = 2.01) were significantly higher than ratings given to female-initiated incidents ( $\bar{x} = 2.33$ , SD = 1.67),  $t = -2.39$ ,  $p < 0.02$ . As the scale ranged from *no negative impact* (1) to *severe negative effect* (7), the impact of the average female incident could be described as minimal, whereas the impact of the average male-initiated incident could be labeled as moderately negative.

The frequency distributions of the impact ratings provided more information about the range of reactions to incidents. About 47% of the female incidents were given a 1 score—indicating no impact, whereas about 23% of the female incidents were given 4–7 ratings—indicating strong negative reactions. In comparison, only 21% of the male-contact incidents received a 1 (no impact score), whereas 47% of the incidents were rated in the negative range of 4–7. In total, 22 of 69 coerced subjects (32%) rated at least one incident in this negative range.

To understand what type of incidents had the most negative impact, the data for all incidents rated 4–7 on the impact scale were reviewed. The information on 15 female-initiated incidents revealed few clues about why these events were rated as more aversive than others. Nearly all of the incidents involved sexual intercourse and were initiated by a known person usually through pressure tactics. Only two incidents involved force. Written descriptions were provided for only 8 of the 15 incidents. Four men indicated that they had sex after being made to feel very guilty about not desiring sex or their partner. Two men wrote that they regretted losing their virginity in their teens due to the persistent pressure of a girlfriend and a high school teacher.

A review of the 10 male-initiated incidents rated in the 4–7 range indicated that subjects were particularly upset by incidents of either touch or intercourse that involved physical restraint ( $n = 3$ ) and/or an unexpected or sudden approach, often while the men were drunk or sleeping ( $n = 5$ ). Most incidents involved acquaintances.

### Interviews

Ten men (9 heterosexuals and 1 homosexual) who completed the survey also participated in the interviews. Their ages ranged from 22–39 years ( $\bar{x} = 25.3$ ). Four of the men reported a same-sex incident; three discussed an opposite-sex episode; and three described incidents with both men and women.

The experiences described by interviewees may not be representative of the experiences of the other coerced men in the sample. In the authors' judgment, the interview incidents were somewhat more distressing or unusual than the typical incident reported by coerced men. For example, four of the men discussed an incident that had received a high negative impact rating in the range of 5–7. However, five men described incidents as surprising or confusing, more so than upsetting (impact ratings were 1 in all cases).

Although many of the interviewees had undergone some upsetting experiences, the group did not differ significantly from the other 59 men with coercion experience in Sexuality Scale scores for sexual well-being, Wilks's lambda = .9039,  $F(3, 60) = 2.1258$ ;  $p < 0.1064$ . Seven of the interviews are summarized below.

### *Male-Initiated Contact*

Mr. A, the first subject to be interviewed, was a 26-year-old heterosexual man who had experienced extensive coercive sexual contact as a child and as a young adult. At the age of 10, A was playing "fort" with a friend when the 15-year-old bisexual brother of the friend unzipped his pants and performed oral sex. The perpetrator harassed him sexually for the next 3 years before moving away.

When A was a junior in high school, he was sexually harassed by a wrestling teammate for many months. A, who weighed only 130 pounds, was constantly assigned to wrestle with a much heavier teammate during practice sessions. The man would caress and squeeze his genitals while restraining him in wrestling holds, often taunting him with names. A felt powerless and unable to ask even the coach for help because the teammate was a popular student and captain of the football team. In A's opinion, the wrestler was a heterosexual (with a history of dating girls) who harassed him out of "meanness" and a need for power.

A was extremely upset by both situations, but reacted passively out of fear that the bigger boys would physically hurt him. Currently, A still felt anger and guilt about his passive behavior:

I get so pissed at myself now because I could have just kicked him. I could have took a beating, I could have fought him. I would have got my ass kicked, but at least I would have done something. So in a way, I felt then and I still feel that it was my fault.

A said that the incidents created confusion about his sexuality and fear and distrust of men:

But boy, it really ticks me off to hear another guy tell me I have a nice ass. I just want to kill them. I cannot handle another man being physically attracted to me. I can't get over . . . it's almost like I don't deserve to be a man because I'm attracting other men.. A man doesn't attract other men. A woman attracts a man. So it's like I'm in limbo. I'm an in-between. I'm not gay. I know I'm not gay, but then again, I can't establish my manhood.

A said that he feels defensive around other men and adopts a macho demeanor, even to the extent of lowering his voice in their presence. He reported a "staunch hatred" for homosexual men, although he said he would not act on this feeling unless a gay man tried to force him to have

sex. His relationships with women have often failed because he is too possessive — not because he distrusts women as much as he distrusts what other men are capable of doing to women.

Mr. B. was a 23-year-old heterosexual man who, at 18, experienced a single episode of unwanted touch by a college acquaintance. B had lived with his 24-year-old dorm roommate for a semester when one night the roommate asked “Have you ever made love to a man?” B answered no, and it was quiet. The roommate got up out bed, dropped his drawers, walked over to B’s bed, and reached under the sheets and fondled B’s genitals (over his underpants). B said to stop and crawled backwards. The roommate returned to his bed, masturbated, then said “Don’t tell anyone this happened.”

B said that he felt shocked, stupid, dirty, and used. He avoided the roommate for 3 months, and slept with “one eye open.” It took 6 months to stop thinking about it. Five years later, B said he was still angry at the roommate. “I understand that gay men need to check out guys for partners, but he should have asked.” B had just watched a rerun of the movie “The Accused” (a film about a barroom rape of a woman) the night before the interview and said:

It (the incident) was just like rape. You feel like its your fault. I didn’t fight him off. I can’t tell anybody because they will think you must have wanted him because you didn’t fight him off.

Mr. C, a 26-year-old heterosexual man, had experienced an attempt at contact from an authority figure. When C was 20, he was charged with a serious traffic offense. The judge, a married man with children, had the charges dropped. The judge immediately befriended C and over the next several years helped him legally and socially. One day when C was visiting his home, the judge told him that he had “two kinds of friends,” including those who gave him sex for favors. “In our relationship, don’t you think I’ve given you more than you have given me?”, the judge asked. C said yes, but not to lay a hand on him.

C was surprised by the attempt, but not traumatized. He liked the person and wanted to continue the friendship, although the judge refused. C said that the incident had the positive effect of making him more understanding of homosexuality. However, C felt fortunate that he was able to say no to such a powerful person.

### *Female-Initiated Contact*

Mr. D, a 22-year-old heterosexual man, was pressured into sexual contact by his high school prom date. Following the dance, D and his first-time date took a romantic walk along the river. Both were intoxicated. They stopped to kiss, at which point the girl took off her clothes and most of

C's clothes. She started to have oral sex with him, but he pulled her up. She then mounted him and tried to guide his penis in, but he stopped her and said "I don't want to do this." When she asked why not, he lied and said he had a curfew. They left in silence and never dated or discussed the incident again.

Initially, D was upset that the girl tried to have sex with him because he was a virgin and wanted the first time to be with someone "right." The girl was a "cute date," but not like his present girlfriend. He also felt uncomfortable with the way she initiated the sex—she was taking something away from his role in dating. After he told her no, he was afraid that she would go back and tell everyone that he refused sex and that his friends would think he was gay.

In fact, D wondered briefly if there was something "wrong" with him. Since he thought that "most guys would have gone for an easy lay," did his refusal mean that he was gay? Now that 5 years had passed, D said the event has had no long-term impact. In fact, he felt that he benefited by waiting for the right woman for a sexual relationship.

Mr. E, a 39-year-old heterosexual man, had unwanted sexual contact with a married woman. Four years earlier, E was divorced and lived part-time with a friend and his wife. The woman made numerous attempts at contact over a year's period. One night she came into his bed, put her legs over him, and fondled his genitals while he was sleeping. He awoke and angrily "kicked her out of the room." He moved out shortly thereafter.

E was upset because the woman was betraying her marriage and his friendship. E said he "tossed around the idea" that something was wrong with him for not having sex with her. Since she was a "gorgeous woman," was he normal for saying no? His friends "do it whenever they can," but sex to him was not worth destroying lives. E reported that there have been no long-term effects of the episode. He maintained his friendship with the couple and felt proud that he had followed his conscience.

### *Male- and Female-Initiated Contact*

Mr. F, a 21-year-old heterosexual man, had experienced two minor episodes of unwanted touch with male and female acquaintances. Just a few weeks before the interview, F was drinking at a local bar when an intoxicated woman put her arms around him and rubbed his hair. When he left with his friends, the girl and a friend got in the back seat with him. She "grabbed his face" and forcefully kissed him. He told her to stop and had her dropped off at her house. F was embarrassed by the event and wanted to get away from her, but he was not upset.

When F was 17, he worked at a restaurant in which he was sexually harassed by an openly gay male co-worker. The person made constant sexual remarks to F, and, at least once, grabbed him around the waist and picked him up. The co-worker tried to watch F change clothes at the end of his shift. F tolerated the "teasing" until one day when he was up on a ladder in the kitchen, the co-worker climbed up after him and "pinched him in the butt." F grabbed a frying pan and chased the co-worker through the dining room in front of customers. F was very angry and embarrassed, but recovered after a few days. He said he has maintained a casual friendship with the man, and does not consider himself antigay because of the incident.

Mr. G, a 29-year-old heterosexual male, had two aversive episodes of unwanted touch from a woman and a man. When G was 18 years old, a woman whom he had dated and had sex with several times came to his house and asked him out. G said no because he had plans with his own friends. He thought she had left and was taking a shower when the woman threw a cold glass of water into the stall and ripped off the shower curtain. G was stunned and told her to leave. The woman said she would not get out of the bathroom unless he had sex with her. She grabbed his arms, neck, buttocks, and "tried for the crotch." He pushed her to get out of the bathroom and locked himself in his bedroom. She pounded on the door for 15 min before leaving.

G was furious and scared of her at the time it happened. He had never seen the "fury of a woman scorned" and felt that she was on the verge of more violence. He refused to go out with her again. The event, however, did not have a long-term impact on him.

When G was 21, he began a serious relationship with an American woman while stationed overseas in the military. One weekend, G, his girlfriend, and her ex-boyfriend went skiing and then watched television together. G was relaxing on the bed when the ex-boyfriend asked him if he wanted a backrub. The man massaged G's back, then pulled down his shorts and rubbed his genitals. Outraged, G threw him off the bed and out of the apartment. His girlfriend was angry with G because she and the ex-boyfriend had planned for three-way sex. She ended her relationship with G the next day.

G said he was so angry when the man touched him that he wanted to kill him. When he discovered the two had planned it, he felt betrayed and set up. The immediate breakup with his girlfriend made the incident even more upsetting. G said the incident has made him less physically affectionate around other men, including his father. He reported feeling that men are capable of betrayal. He blamed the girlfriend for "making him a changed man." Looking back, G said the worst part was not being able to tell anyone out of fear that even a good friend would think there was "something homosexual" about him.

The remaining three cases included one heterosexual man who described a verbal attempt at contact by an intoxicated woman; a heterosexual male who was sexually harassed and blackmailed after turning down sex with two high school girls; and a homosexual male who was persuaded to have sex with an older, manipulative graduate student. Of the 10 men interviewed, 8 indicated that they had not told anyone or only a few close friends about the incident.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The major finding of the study is that approximately one third of a sample of college men had experienced an episode of pressured or forced sex since the age of 16. The predominantly heterosexual sample had had a variety of coercive sexual experiences with women (24%), men (4%), and both sexes (6%). For 22% of the men, at least one incident resulted in genital or oral intercourse.

Only 12% of the incidents reported by subjects could be described as forced sexual contact involving physical restraint, physical intimidation, harm, or threat of harm. The great majority of incidents (88%) involved pressured contact, including verbal persuasion, intoxication, emotional manipulation, and bribery.

As found in the Sorenson *et al.* study (1987), a majority of incidents were perpetrated by female acquaintances or girlfriends by means of verbal persuasion. The most identifiable pattern for female-initiated incidents was that of an intoxicated man being pursued and persuaded to have sexual contact. Another common scenario was that of a man yielding to his girlfriend's demand for immediate sex. There was no clear pattern that could describe the small number of male-initiated incidents, other than they usually involved persuasion and intoxication. Compared to female incidents, however, male contact was more likely to involve multiple strategies which included intoxication, physical restraint, and bribery.

The results suggest that most men had no or very mild negative reactions to their most recent episode of unwanted female contact. However, one fifth of the men with unwanted female contact did have a strong negative reaction to the experience. Most men who reported a recent episode of male-initiated contact had moderate to strong negative reactions to that experience. A *t* test confirmed that male contact incidents were rated as having more negative emotional impact than female experiences.

The stronger adverse reactions to male contact most likely reflect the fact that most men reporting such incidents were heterosexual. They were probably not anticipating or desiring a same-sex experience. Written descriptions and interview data underscored the unsettling reactions of heterosexual men to sexual contact by another man. In addition, episodes of male contact—as compared to female incidents—were more likely to involve negative tactics of physical restraint and bribery.

The interviews reveal the following variety of reactions that men reported for female-initiated coercive sexual contact: (i) A sense of loss of control in that one cannot choose the timing or partner for a sexual experience; in that dating roles are reversed and that one is no longer in charge. (ii) A sense of bewilderment and embarrassment in an unwanted approach; confusion in how to say no without hurting the woman's feelings. (iii) Lingering doubts about one's heterosexuality if he resisted a sexual opportunity with a woman. (iv) Fear, anger, and resentment of a woman's physically aggressive behavior. (v) Fear of telling others about the incident because they may not believe him or may doubt his sexual identity. (vi) A positive feeling, in some cases, that one has "done the right thing" in resisting unwanted sexual contact.

Interviews with men about male-initiated contact reveal the following variety of reactions: (i) Bewilderment and even shock by the sexual approach of another man. (ii) A sense of helplessness and violation if contact occurred unexpectedly or forcefully. (iii) Fear, anger, and resentment of the man's physically aggressive behavior; fear that he would be injured if he resisted; guilt if he did not resist. (iv) Lingering doubts about one's sexuality and if there was something "homosexual" about himself that caused the approach. (v) Lingering resentment of men in general or homosexual men; defensive reactions and fear of physical touch in the presence of men. (vi) A positive reaction, in some cases, of developing more understanding or sympathy for homosexual men. (vii) Fear of telling others about the incident because they may question one's sexual orientation.

The results of the study indicate that men with touch or intercourse coercion experiences did not differ from noncoerced men according to measures of overall sexual esteem, depression, and preoccupation. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that coercion experience did have negative effects on men's sexuality which could not be measured appropriately by Snell and Papini's (1989) Sexuality Scale. Using multiple measures of sexual esteem may be advisable in future research.

In summary, the present study sheds light on a relatively unexamined dimension of male sexuality. In contrast to the prevailing stereotypes that adult men direct and dominate sexual interactions (Zilbergeld, 1978), these data show that men can be subjected to the control of others. Although most subjects with coercion experience in this study did not appear to be significantly affected by the event, nearly a third had a strong negative reaction at the time of the incident.

These results raise questions for future research. In particular, what factors can explain men's reactions to sexual coercion: gender of the initiator, the relationship, the tactics used, the subject's sexual or sex-role attitudes, or a combination thereof?

The present study suggests that heterosexual men are most upset by contact initiated by another man, who is either an acquaintance or stranger, which occurs in a sudden or unexpected manner and/or involves any kind of physical restraint. Based upon interviews and written descriptions, we theorize that men's emotional reaction to coercive male contact is largely mediated by their feelings about their own sexual identity and homosexuality (e.g., fear of being gay, being labeled gay, fear of homosexual men). Feelings of physical violation, only occasionally mentioned in descriptions and interviews, may play a secondary role. In future research, one could assess how homophobia or traditional sex beliefs relate to men's reactions to hypothetical or real episodes of male sexual contact.

For female-initiated situations, it would be interesting to investigate what mediates men's *minimal* negative reaction to coercive sexual contact. For example, why is it that some men in our study gave 1 (no impact) ratings to events in which their clothes were forcefully removed or their beds were entered by women with whom they were barely acquainted? One possible explanation is that due to men's sex role socialization to seek sexual opportunities, heterosexual men may view coercive contact by a woman as a "sexual experience," not a violation of will (Smith *et al.*, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991).

We add to this our theory that men who are coerced into sex by women may resent either the tactic or the woman, but because the outcome is "sex role congruent"—they achieved sexual intercourse—the negative emotional reaction is mitigated. In future research, one could investigate the relationship between men's attributions about the sexual and social appropriateness of coercive female sexual contact and men's emotional reaction to hypothetical or real episodes.

The results of this study and of future research on these questions can ultimately be used to educate high school and college men and women about the complicated dynamics of sexual interaction. Greater public awareness of this issue will help men break the silence about coercive sexual

encounters, clarify sexual boundaries with potential partners — both female and male, and to seek support and treatment if they have been adversely affected by such an experience.

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