

This study examined the associations between sexual coercion and well-being (anger, coping, depressed mood, self-esteem, social anxiety, and social isolation) based on gender and college enrollment. Participants were 872 women and 527 men, ages 19 through 22 years. Women were more likely than men to report having experienced sexual coercion. In addition, noncollege women were more likely than college women to report having experienced rape and sexual abuse. Participants who reported experiencing sexual coercion had poorer social and psychological adjustment. The effect of coercion on well-being did not differ for college and noncollege young adults. Type of sexual coercion (no coercion, pressure, and violent coercion) related to adjustment differentially for women and men. Pressured women had lower well-being scores than either women who were not coerced or violently coerced. In contrast, violently coerced men had lower scores for well-being than either pressured men or men who were not coerced.

Sexual Coercion and Well-Being in Young Adulthood Comparisons by Gender and College Status

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Sexual coercion is a concern for many youth. Approximately one half of college women have experienced some form of sexual victimization including unwanted sexual contact, attempted rape, or rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Baier, Rosenzweig, and Whipple (1991) reported that

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15% of men and 25% of women in their undergraduate sample ($n = 702$) had intercourse at least once in their lifetime due to psychological or verbal coercion. In addition, 1% of men and 12% of women in the study experienced rape. In relation to dating, Struckman-Johnson (1988) found 22% of college women and 16% of college men ($n=623$) reported that they had been pressured into sexual intercourse on a date at least once in their lives. These studies indicate that many young adults, particularly women, have experienced undesired sexual activity. Also, women report more violent physical coercion, both with and without psychological coercion, than men (Struckman-Johnson, 1988).

There is little agreement about what types of sexual acts constitute sexual victimization (for a review, see Allgeier, 1987). However, many people have reported that they consider a variety of different sexual experiences as unwanted or victimizing. These experiences include rape, partner pressure, inability to give consent due to intoxication, sexual abuse, and peer pressure (Allgeier, 1987). In the present study, sexual coercion was defined as any of the following: rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and pressure to have sex. Although each of these experiences may differ in the amount of force or violence involved, the essential feature of sexual coercion is the lack of voluntary participation by one person, the victim.

THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL COERCION

Peplau, Rubin, and Hill (1977) argued that few researchers have studied the psychological meaning of sexual behavior for individuals. Sexually coercive experiences, in particular, are likely to hold different psychological meanings for individuals than desired sexual experiences and may shape sexual and nonsexual adjustment (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Wyatt, Guthrie, & Notgrass, 1992). Studies have shown that sexual coercion has negative short-term and long-term effects (Muehlenhard, Goggins, Jones, & Satterfield, 1991; Siegel, Golding, Stein, Burnam, & Sorenson, 1990; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Analyzing how sexual coercion relates to specific aspects of psychological and social adjustment is an essential part of this growing literature.

Siegel and colleagues (1990) found that women were more likely than men to report emotional reactions to sexual assault. These reactions included anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety. In addition, for both men and women, differences were found in levels of depression based on a spectrum of sexual coercion. Depression was more prevalent for those whose assault resulted in

sexual intercourse than for those whose assault consisted of other forms of physical contact, such as touching. Also, depression was more prevalent for those who were physically threatened than for those who were pressured by persuasion (Siegel et al., 1990). In particular, victims of sexual assault report higher levels of fear, anxiety, stress, and depression; poorer social adjustment and sexual functioning; and lower self-esteem than nonvictims (Murphy et al., 1988; Resick, 1993). These findings highlight the importance of considering the spectrum of sexual coercion and the different effect victimization can have on well-being depending on the type of coercion that occurs.

The current study extends the literature on well-being and sexual coercion by using multiple measures of well-being and by including both college and noncollege youth. Both psychological well-being (anger, depressed mood, coping, and self-esteem) and social well-being (social anxiety and social isolation) were explored. Specifically, did individuals who reported sexual coercion also report lower levels of well-being than those who did not report sexual coercion? Further, within-group differences for those who had experienced sexual coercion were explored. Sexually coercive experiences were divided based on the amount of force or violence that may have been involved.

GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO SEXUAL COERCION

Sexuality and victimization are embedded in American culture. Living in a patriarchal society forces women to be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men due to a power inequity (Fine, 1988; Millett, 1970). Women are less powerful personally and professionally in the context of American society and are more likely to be victimized in some way. Power inequity may also be experienced by non-White, poor, or nonheterosexual men (Bem, 1993). One way in which people are victimized is through sexual coercion. Social power inequity facilitates the victimization of particular groups by other groups. In addition, social roles based on power hierarchies create circumstances in which sexual victimization can be perpetrated. A less powerful person can easily be exploited.

In addition, American culture continues to perpetuate a "sexual double standard" (Burkhart & Fromuth, 1991; Masters, Johnson, & Kolondy, 1986; Peplau et al., 1977). This double standard encourages men to seek as much sexual activity as possible and encourages women to limit their sexual experience. These societal-level scripts manifest in differing attitudes men and women have about sexual permissiveness, and the level of intimacy men and women require before sexual activity occurs. Oliver and Hyde (1993)

conducted a meta-analysis of 177 empirical studies with evidence regarding gender issues and sexuality. They found large gender differences for sexual permissiveness. Males were more accepting of casual premarital intercourse, reported higher frequencies of intercourse, more sexual partners, and earlier ages for first intercourse than females.

Societal scripts related to sexuality may have implications for how often men and women are coerced into sexual activity. In addition, these conceptualizations of sexual expression may provoke different emotional reactions or different intensity of reaction for women and men. For instance, women are more likely to find themselves being coerced as men attempt to gain sexual access. Because women are expected to limit sexual activity, experience with coercion resulting in intercourse may reduce a woman's positive perception of self because she believes she "failed" in her role. Self-blame may be exacerbated if the man is someone with whom the woman is acquainted (Resick, 1993).

Similarly, men who are coerced may experience disruption of sexual scripts. Being a victim of sexual coercion is not compatible with the idea of always being willing to have sex. This inconsistency may produce emotional distress for men. Further, men may be coerced by other men. A woman may verbally pressure a man, but it is less likely she could physically threaten or harm a man. Emotional distress related to coercion for men may be a result of being coerced by another man. A victimization experience may be incompatible with both a man's sexual script and heterosexuality.

Because of the differences that exist between men and women regarding sexuality and the evidence that more women experience sexual coercion than men, differences between men and women were examined in this study. More women were expected to report sexually coercive experiences than men. In addition, gender was considered as a moderating variable for the relation between experiencing sexual coercion and well-being. By considering gender as a moderator, differences in the direction or intensity of the relationship between sexual coercion and well-being for women and men could be assessed. In other words, did the relationship between sexual coercion and well-being differ for men and women? It was expected that women who had sexually coercive experiences would report lower levels of well-being than women who had not, and that men who had sexually coercive experiences would not report lower levels of well-being than men who had not. This prediction was based on evidence presented by Siegel and colleagues (1990), indicating that women who were sexually assaulted were more likely to report emotional distress than men who were sexually assaulted.

SEXUAL COERCION AND COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Many researchers have studied sexual coercion and victimization based on the experiences of undergraduates. This reliance on college samples may be problematic when trying to generalize findings to all young adults (Hopkins, 1977). The examination of similarities or differences between college and noncollege youth is critical to the growth of the current literature on sexual coercion and well-being. Because the preponderance of research on coercion involves college students, it is not clear that the research can be generalized to those youth who do not attend college. It is not known whether noncollege and college youth face similar issues related to sexual victimization. Therefore, increasing our understanding of any differences between these two groups of youth is important for those who counsel victims of sexual coercion.

The present study includes noncollege youth in two important ways. First, prevalence rates of sexual coercion for college and noncollege youth are compared. Second, the relation between sexual coercion and well-being was examined for college and noncollege individuals. By using college enrollment as a moderating variable, differences between these two groups of youth could be assessed. In particular, was the relation between sexual coercion and well-being different for those in college and those not in college?

METHOD

Design

The data for this study were from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT)—a 13-year, eight-wave longitudinal study begun in 1983. The purpose of MSALT was to study the impact of normative and nonnormative life transitions through the analysis of adolescents' classroom and family contexts, personal beliefs, and values as the individuals moved from elementary school to junior high and then to senior high school (Barber, 1994; Eccles et al., 1989). The project has expanded over time to assess values, beliefs, and activities across the adolescent and young-adult years in many different domains, including work, school, family, leisure activities, and romantic relationships.

Sample

Ten school districts in Michigan were recruited to participate in the study and students were recruited in their math classes. The original sample

included 2,401 sixth-grade students. Eighty percent of the sample still eligible to participate were included in the current study. Wave 7, administered in 1992 through 1993, included 1,399 youth (872 women and 527 men). Ninety percent of participants were Caucasian. At Wave 7, the youth ranged in age from 19 to 22 years. Fifty-four percent of the participants were in college full-time (women, $n = 450$ and men, $n = 300$). Socioeconomic status was calculated for mother's occupation using the socioeconomic index (SEI) (Entwisle & Astone, 1994). The mean SEI for mother's occupational status was 48.4 (this rating represents occupations in sales support occupations and guides). The range of scores for the sample were from 21.2 (laundering and dry cleaning machine operators) to 92.3 (lawyers, and medical science teachers). The mean SEI for mother's occupation was 51.4 for college students in the sample and was 44.2 for noncollege participants.

The participants were involved in several types of intimate relationships: 6.4% were married, 7.4% were engaged, 5.0% were cohabiting, 1.6% were engaged and cohabiting, and 79.3% were single. Based on reported gender of partners or dates, 15 women were classified as lesbian and 13 men were classified as gay.

Procedure

At Wave 7, participants were sent survey booklets that included questions about family life, peer relationships, psychological health, physical health, leisure activities, academic experiences or college plans, financial information, job training, job information or future work, romantic relationships, dating experiences, and future marriage and family expectations. Completed questionnaires were returned during 1992 and 1993. The length of data collection was a function of a varying time period for returning booklets, and a large, ongoing, sample-relocation effort.

Measures

Measures of Sexual Coercion

Pressure variable. A measure of how often intercourse occurred in response to pressure asked "How often does it (sex) happen because you are pressured into it" and was rated on a six-level ordinal scale from *never* (1), *once in a while* (2), *about half of the time* (3), *about 3/4 of the time* (4), *almost always* (5), to *always* (6). Participants who responded 2 through 6 were coded as having experienced pressured sex.

Rape. Rape was assessed by the item, "Have you ever been raped?" and responses included *yes* or *no*.

Sexual abuse. Sexual abuse was measured by *yes* or *no* responses to the following question: "Have you ever been sexually abused?"

Sexual assault. Sexual assault was assessed by a series of questions measuring crime victimization. The initial question was, "Have you ever gotten beaten up, physically attacked, or sexually assaulted?" If participants responded affirmatively to this question, follow-up questions assessed which of the three the person had experienced.

A dichotomous composite variable, sexual coercion (yes/no), was created using these four items (pressured sex, rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault). Inclusion in the category of experience with sexual coercion was based on an affirmative response to one or more of the four experiences.

Well-Being Measures

Participants responded to 44 questions assessing their psychological well-being. The seven-point items each began with "How often do you. . ." and responses ranged from *never* (1) to *daily* (7). Scores were computed as a mean of the items in each scale. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of each subscale.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed by five items. Examples of these items include "feel sure of who you are" and "feel satisfied with yourself the way you are" ($\alpha = .85$).

Depressed mood. The Depressed Mood Scale is composed of eight items such as "feel unhappy, sad, or depressed" or "lose your appetite or eat a lot when you get upset" ($\alpha = .81$).

Social isolation. The Social Isolation Scale captures individual isolation from social activities ($\alpha = .78$). Examples of the eight items include "feel you are no longer close to anyone" and "feel your interests and ideas are not shared by those around you."

Social anxiety. Social anxiety captures the extent to which a person experiences discomfort when interacting socially. The four items describe times when you "feel nervous when meeting new people" and "feel shy" ($\alpha = .76$).

Anger. The Anger Scale includes five items such as “feel like beating or injuring someone” and “have a hot temper” ($\alpha = .81$).

Coping. The Coping Scale refers to how well individuals deal well with adversity. Examples of the five items include “feel you are good at learning from mistakes” and “feel capable of coping with most of your problems” ($\alpha = .68$).

RESULTS

The Prevalence of Sexual Coercion

The measures of sexual coercion used to assess gender and college-status differences in prevalence were the four separate measures of unwanted sexual experience (rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault, and intercourse in response to pressure) and the sexual coercion composite variable. More women than men reported each of the four separate measures of sexual coercion. Thirteen percent of women and 1% of men reported being raped ($\chi^2 [1, N = 1,330] = 56.7, p < .001$). Eighteen percent of women and 2% of men reported experiencing sexual assault ($\chi^2 (1, N = [1,365] = 72.2, p < .001$). Fifteen percent of women and 2% of men reported experiencing sexual abuse ($\chi^2 [1, N = 1,353] = 56.2, p < .001$). Twenty-two percent of women and 13% of men reported having intercourse in response to pressure ($\chi^2 [1, N = 1,362] = 15.0, p < .001$). Overall, women (39%) were more likely to report at least one of the four indicators of sexual coercion than men (16%), $\chi^2 [1, N = 1,317] = 72.7, p < .001$.

Additionally, women reported experiencing more types of sexual coercion than men, $\chi^2 (3, N = 309) = 29.3, p < .001$. Of those who reported experiencing any sexual coercion, 68 men and 168 women reported only one type. Nine men and 71 women reported two types of sexual coercion. Three men and 63 women reported three types of sexual coercion. Finally, only women ($n = 17$) reported all four types of sexually coercive experiences.¹

Differences between full-time college students and noncollege young adults in prevalence of sexual coercion were examined. Chi-square analyses of college status were conducted separately by gender for each measure of sexual coercion. Analyses for women revealed differences between observed and expected frequencies of two of the sexual coercion measures based on college enrollment, with noncollege women being more likely to report experiencing rape and sexual abuse. Sixteen percent of noncollege women and 10% of college women reported being raped ($\chi^2 [1, N = 829] = 5.3, p <$

.05) and 19% of noncollege women and 11% of college women reported experiencing sexual abuse ($\chi^2 [1, N = 847] = 9.0, p < .05$). Reports of unwanted sexual experience for college and noncollege men were not significantly different.

Sexual Coercion and Well-Being

Differences in reports of well-being between those who reported sexual coercion and those who did not were examined. To test for moderator effects, both gender and college enrollment were included as predictor variables, and interactions with coercion status were tested. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine differences based on sexual coercion, gender, and full-time college enrollment status in the six dependent variables. A MANOVA was used because the well-being scales were correlated. Unique sums of squares was used as an option in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to adjust for unequal cell sizes (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

MANOVA results revealed that the dependent variables were significantly predicted by sexual coercion, (Wilkes criterion = .98, $F[6, 1,303] = 4.6, p < .001$), gender, (Wilkes criterion = .93, $F[6, 1,303] = 17.3, p < .001$), and college enrollment, (Wilkes criterion = .96, $F[6, 1,303] = 8.8, p < .001$), but none of the interactions of these independent variables were significant. Six follow-up $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine the relationships between the predictors and each of the dependent variables individually. Compared to those who did not experience sexual coercion, individuals who experienced sexual coercion reported more anger, ($F[1, 1,308] = 9.4, p < .01$), more depressed mood, ($F[1, 1,308] = 19.3, p < .001$), more social isolation, ($F[1, 1,308] = 8.7, p < .01$), and lower self-esteem, ($F[1, 1,308] = 14.0, p < .001$) (see Table 1).

The ANOVA results also indicated that gender was significantly related to three of the individual measures of well-being. Men reported higher averages of anger ($M = 3.0$) than women ($M = 2.7$), ($F[1, 1,308] = 21.4, p < .001$). Men also reported higher levels of coping ($M = 5.2$) than women ($M = 4.9$), ($F[1, 1,308] = 20.0, p < .001$). Women reported higher levels of depressed mood ($M = 3.7$) than men ($M = 3.4$), ($F[1, 1,308] = 11.6, p < .001$).

Main effects were also found for college enrollment status. Noncollege individuals reported higher levels of anger ($M = 3.0$) than college students ($M = 2.6$), ($F[1, 1,308] = 33.8, p < .001$) and more depressed mood ($M = 3.8$) than college students ($M = 3.5$), ($F[1, 1,308] = 8.2, p < .01$). Also, nonstudents reported greater social isolation ($M = 3.2$) than college students ($M = 3.0$)

TABLE 1: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Well-Being Main Effects for Sexual Coercion

	<i>Coercion (n = 398)</i>	<i>No Coercion (n = 918)</i>	<i>F statistic</i>
Anger	2.9 (1.2)	2.7 (1.1)	<i>F</i> = 9.4*
Coping	4.9 (0.9)	5.0 (0.9)	<i>F</i> = 0.4
Depressed mood	3.9 (1.0)	3.5 (1.0)	<i>F</i> = 19.3**
Self-esteem	4.5 (1.2)	4.8 (1.1)	<i>F</i> = 14.0**
Social anxiety	3.9 (1.4)	3.7 (1.3)	<i>F</i> = 0.9
Social isolation	3.2 (1.0)	3.0 (0.9)	<i>F</i> = 8.7*

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

($F[1, 1,308] = 5.0, p < .05$). Additionally, college students reported higher levels of self-esteem ($M = 4.9$) than noncollege individuals ($M = 4.5$) ($F[1, 1,308] = 20.7, p < .001$).

Type of Sexual Coercion and Gender

Finally, differences in well-being based on the likely level of violence related to the sexually coercive experiences were examined. Three categories of sexually coercive experiences were defined. The first category, the no-coercion group, included individuals who did not report any form of sexual coercion. The second category, the pressured group, included individuals who reported intercourse in response to pressure, but did not report rape, sexual abuse, or sexual assault. The third category, the violently coerced group, included individuals who reported rape, sexual abuse, or sexual assault, but not intercourse in response to pressure. The categories reflect different types of experiences that individuals may have had based on a spectrum of sexual coercion. The third category, the violently coerced people, reflects a more extreme type of coercion than the second category, the pressured individuals. These three categories were then examined for differences in well-being.

A 2×3 MANOVA was used to test for differences by gender and type of sexually coercive experience (no coercion experience, pressure, and violent

coercion) in the six well-being scales. The unique-sums-of-squares method was used. The MANOVA results indicated that well-being was associated with type of sexually coercive experience, (Wilkes criterion = .96, $F[12, 2,466] = 4.3$) = $p < .001$) and the interaction of gender and sexual coercion type, (Wilkes criterion = .97, $F[12, 2,466] = 2.9$, $p < .001$). Gender was significantly associated with well-being, as discussed earlier, (Wilkes criterion = .94, $F[6, 1,233] = 13.4$, $p < .001$). Six follow-up 2×3 analyses of variance were conducted to examine the relationships between type of sexual coercion, gender, and each well-being variable separately.

Main effects for type of sexual coercion were found for anger, coping, depressed mood, self-esteem, and social isolation (see Table 2). Follow-up Tukey tests were used to compare each of the three types of groups with each other: no coercion and pressured sex, no coercion and violent coercion, and pressured sex and violent coercion. Differences between groups were found for depressed mood with participants who did not report sexually coercive experiences reporting less depressed mood than the pressured and violently coerced groups. The pressured group had lower self-esteem than the group that reported no experience with sexual coercion. Contrasts were also found for social isolation with the pressured group reporting more social isolation than the no-coercion group. The no-coercion group had higher coping scores than the pressured group. No significant differences were found for anger using Tukey tests.

Analyses of variance showed that the gender \times type of coercion interaction was significant for three well-being scales: anger, depressed mood, and social anxiety. Therefore, the relationship between type of sexually coercive experience and these three indicators of well-being was moderated by gender. In other words, the direction or magnitude of the relationships between the predictor and the dependent variables is dependent upon another variable, the moderating variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). One-way analyses of variance were conducted separately for men and women for the three dependent variables to examine differences between those experiencing no coercion, pressure, and violent coercion. In order to identify the significant contrasts between groups, follow-up Tukey tests were conducted for each significant ANOVA (see Table 3).

Tukey tests revealed differences by coercion type in depressed mood for both women and men. For women, the pressured group reported more depressed mood than the no-coercion group and the violently coerced group. For men, the violent coercion group had higher levels of depressed mood than both the no-coercion group and the pressured group.

TABLE 2: Means (and Standard Deviations) of Well-Being Main Effects by Type of Sexually Coercive Experience

	<i>No Coercion</i> (<i>n</i> = 918)	<i>Pressured</i> (<i>n</i> = 179)	<i>Violent</i> (<i>n</i> = 148)	<i>F</i> statistic
Anger	2.7 (1.1)	2.9 (1.2)	2.8 (1.2)	<i>F</i> = 10.0**
Coping	5.0 ^a (0.9)	4.8 ^b (0.9)	5.0 (0.8)	<i>F</i> = 4.0*
Depressed mood	3.5 ^a (1.0)	3.8 ^b (1.1)	3.7 ^b (1.0)	<i>F</i> = 10.5**
Self-esteem	4.8 ^a (1.1)	4.4 ^b (1.2)	4.6 (1.1)	<i>F</i> = 7.6**
Social anxiety	3.7 (1.3)	4.0 (1.4)	3.8 (1.4)	<i>F</i> = 1.4
Social isolation	3.0 ^a (0.9)	3.2 ^b (0.9)	3.1 (1.0)	<i>F</i> = 4.1*

NOTE: No Coercion = Respondents reported no to rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault, and did not report intercourse in response to pressure; Pressure = Respondents reported intercourse in response to pressure, and no to rape, sexual abuse, and sexual assault; Violent = respondents reported rape, sexual abuse, or sexual assault, and did not report intercourse in response to pressure.

a. and b. symbolize groups that are significantly different from each other.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Type of sexual coercion was also significantly related to anger for both women and men. For women, differences were found between the pressured women and the no-coercion group, with the pressured women reporting more anger than the no-coercion group. For men, differences for anger suggest that the violent coercion group was more angry than the no-coercion group and the pressured group.

Finally, social anxiety differed by type of sexual coercion for women only. The pressured group of women was more socially anxious than the no-coercion group and the violent coercion group.

Thus the relationship between well-being and types of sexual coercion was moderated by gender for anger, depressed mood, and social anxiety. Women who reported experiencing pressured sex generally reported lower levels of well-being than women who reported no coercion. In contrast, the violently coerced men reported the poorest adjustment compared to the pressured men and the no-coercion group of men. In fact, the violently coerced men reported more depressed mood than the violently coerced women, ($F[1, 145] = 4.3, p < .05$), reversing the gender difference in depressed mood found in the other two groups.

TABLE 3: Well-Being by Sexual Coercion Type for Women and Men

<i>Women</i>	<i>No Coercion</i> (n = 507)	<i>Pressured</i> (n = 116)	<i>Violent</i> (n = 133)	<i>F statistic</i>
Anger	2.6 ^a (1.1)	2.9 ^b (1.2)	2.7 (1.1)	<i>F</i> = 4.2*
Depressed Mood	3.6 ^a (1.0)	4.0 ^b (1.0)	3.7 ^a (1.0)	<i>F</i> = 7.9***
Social anxiety	3.7 ^a (1.3)	4.2 ^b (1.3)	3.8 ^a (1.4)	<i>F</i> = 5.8**
<i>Men</i>	<i>No Coercion</i> (n = 411)	<i>Pressured</i> (n = 63)	<i>Violent</i> (n = 14)	<i>F-stat</i>
Anger	2.9 ^a (1.2)	2.9 ^a (1.2)	4.3 ^b (1.7)	<i>F</i> = 8.8***
Depressed mood	3.4 ^a (1.0)	3.5 ^a (1.1)	4.3 ^b (1.1)	<i>F</i> = 6.1**
Social anxiety	3.8 (1.2)	3.7 (1.4)	3.8 (1.4)	<i>F</i> = 0.2

a. and b. symbolize groups that are significantly different from each other.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

As was expected, women experienced more sexual coercion than men. This finding is consistent with previous research (Baier et al., 1991; Koss et al., 1987; Struckman-Johnson, 1988). Differences between college and noncollege individuals were also examined, and noncollege women were found to be more likely to have experienced rape and sexual abuse than college women. These results indicate that using only college student samples may bias estimates of prevalence of sexual coercion by underestimating rates of sexual abuse and rape for women. Experiencing sexual abuse or rape may contribute to a developmental pathway that is less likely to include college. These experiences may alter a women's goals, efficacy, or opportunities for education. Research on sexual coercion should include more diverse populations to further illuminate any differences and similarities that may exist for college and non-college individuals.

In addition to prevalence of coercion, this study focused on links between sexual coercion and well-being. For both women and men, and college and noncollege youth, experiencing sexual coercion was associated with poorer adjustment. Specifically, participants who had been sexually coerced reported more anger, social isolation, and depressed mood, and lower self-

esteem. These findings are consistent with previous work (Koss et al., 1988; Muehlenhard et al., 1991; Murphy et al., 1988; Siegel et al., 1990). Further, these findings extend previous research conducted with college samples to a more diverse sample that included both college and noncollege youth. In addition, using indicators of both psychological and social adjustment creates a more comprehensive understanding of the associations between experience with sexual coercion and well-being. This study went beyond previous work on psychological adjustment by examining the relationship between sexual coercion and both social anxiety and social isolation.

Additional findings indicate that the type of sexual coercion a person had experienced was associated with well-being in different ways for women and men. The types of coercion examined were differentiated by the amount of choice and violence involved in the experience. The extent to which a person had control in the situation or perceived a choice regarding the experience may have influenced whether that person blamed herself or himself, or the perpetrator. Women who had experienced pressured intercourse experienced more depressed mood and social anxiety than women who were not coerced or those who were violently coerced. Pressured women also experienced more anger than the women who were not coerced. These differences are moderate in size. For example, the difference in mean social anxiety scores between the pressured women and the women who were not coerced represents .65 of a standard deviation.

In contrast, the coerced group that was most poorly adjusted for men was not the pressured group, but the group that was coerced through rape, sexual assault, or sexual abuse. These men reported more depressed mood and anger than the men who were not coerced and the men who were pressured. The results for men are consistent with findings of Siegel and colleagues (1990) that those who were physically threatened during the assault were more likely to report depression. However, our findings suggest that violent coercion and pressured sex may have different meanings for women and men. The results for men represent substantial differences between groups. For instance, the mean difference in anger between the violent coercion group and the other two groups is 1.2 standard deviations.

Also, the violently coerced men report more anger and more depressed mood than the violently coerced women. This difference is opposite from conventional knowledge about depression. Research has shown that women tend to report greater depression than men. The current finding indicates that men who are violently coerced were experiencing the most distress. Perhaps the gender of the perpetrator may exacerbate the negative effect of a coercive experience. Men and women who are violently coerced may be more likely

to be coerced by men. For male victims, this may add a dimension to the emotional consequences of an experience.

Different associations between well-being and type of sexual coercion for men and women may be related to how men and women understand their sexual scripts and interactions. For example, women may be aware of their vulnerability to sexual victimization (Fine, 1988), whereas men may never feel they could be the target of sexual coercion. Awareness of vulnerability for women may enable them to better cope over time with a violently coercive sexual experience than a pressured experience. Although a woman's sexual script requires her to limit sexual interactions, in a violent situation a woman may be better able to place blame on the perpetrator than on herself. Also, women who experience violent coercion may be provided with support because rape, unlike pressured sex, is recognized as a problem that requires crisis intervention for women. In support of this idea, women's self-esteem has been shown to recover within a year of being raped (Murphy, et al., 1988), perhaps reflecting the crisis intervention they receive.

However, a woman who was pressured may less readily blame the perpetrator. Perhaps she may have felt she should have prevented it, or that she had the opportunity to prevent it, and did not. Additionally, the women reporting pressured sex may have been experiencing ongoing pressure, whereas a rape could be an isolated incident. This pressure may be continuously perpetrated by an abusive partner. Pressure may be more debilitating because it could be something a woman struggles with more often and in the context of an abusive relationship. These additional aspects related to pressured sex may exacerbate the emotional effect of coercive experiences for women.

Another possible explanation is that women who are less well-adjusted may be more likely to give in to pressure. Perhaps women with high levels of self-esteem were also pressured, but were more able to resist pressured sex. Because the data used here were measured concurrently, no conclusion can be drawn regarding the direction of effects. It is unclear if experiencing pressure contributes to low well-being or if low well-being contributes to a greater likelihood of having sex in response to pressure. Prospective data are needed to examine predictors of giving in to coercion.

Men's experiences with coercion related differently to well-being based on the type of sexual coercion a man experienced. Men who were pressured nonviolently into sexual activity may have been able to reconcile this experience with their sexual script. Perhaps a man was pressured, but still felt as if he made a choice to have sexual intercourse. Unlike women's experiences, a man's sexual script may protect him from feeling negative about himself because he had sex. However, in a more violent situation, such as rape or

assault, the man was not choosing for this experience to occur. Further, men may not receive the social support that women do after a violent sexual experience.

Sexual scripts are violated in three ways for men who are violently coerced. The first way his sexual script is violated is that the man did not want the sexual experience to occur, therefore, he did not desire any sexual experience, as his script would suggest. The second way his script is violated is the introduction of feelings of sexual vulnerability for a man that may not have been evident before the experience. Men may experience sexual vulnerability for the first time after a coercive experience. Third, men may be violated by other, more powerful men. The issue may extend beyond not desiring the sexual experience to being violated by someone of the same gender. Perhaps the experience elicits more emotional distress due to homophobic reactions or attitudes a man may hold.

The current study was limited by the absence of information regarding the perpetrator of the sexual coercion. Information regarding the sex of the perpetrator and relationship the perpetrator has or does not have with the victim is important. Issues related to men victimizing men could not be examined with these data. In addition, knowing what type of relationship the victim had with the perpetrator would allow researchers to examine links between sexual coercion and well-being for different relationship contexts. A man or woman may be affected in different ways or more intensely if he or she is sexually coerced by an intimate partner or relative rather than a stranger or acquaintance. A person involved in a committed intimate relationship that involves sexual coercion may have difficulty trusting others and integrating the victimization into a "loving" context (Muehlenhard et al., 1991).

The diversity of sexual coercion (from verbal coaxing to physical restraint) and the sensitivity required when assessing sexual coercion both contribute to the necessity to use more than one measure. Despite the strengths, the coercion measures used for this study are not clearly differentiated based on how the coercion was experienced. Specifically, the processes by which a person was coerced were not examined. People may have been coerced through violent physical harm, psychological manipulation, nonconsent due to intoxication, peer pressure, verbal coaxing, or a combination of these strategies. A person's well-being may have been influenced differently depending on the coercion strategy used by the perpetrator.

In conclusion, this study has emphasized that more women than men have sexually coercive experiences, and that noncollege women have more sexually coercive experiences than college women. Also, the present study has demonstrated that sexual coercion is related to poorer psychological and

social adjustment. These two findings together highlight the importance of understanding the experience of sexual coercion for women, and in particular noncollege women, who are usually not represented in studies of sexual coercion.

NOTE

1. Reporting multiple types of coercion does not necessarily indicate multiple incidents. For example, reports of sexual assault and rape may both pertain to a single incident. In addition, reporting only one type of coercion, such as sexual assault, could include multiple coercive episodes of the same type. For this reason, the number of types of coercion was not used as a predictor variable.

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