

Abstract

This was a grounded theory project that used a focus group and interview to examine the extent to which students at MacEwan University conceptualize connections between sexual violence and hook-up culture. During the focus group and interview, observational notes were recorded while the moderator maintained conversation with the participant(s). As per the information disseminated by the participants, it is evident that undergraduate students may define hook-up culture differently than their peers and, while there may be risks associated with engaging in hook-up culture, it is suggested that there may also be benefits. This study's limitations are concerned with participant sample and data collection. The findings of this exercise demonstrate that students conceptualize connections between sexual violence and hook-up culture.

Introduction

Sexual violence on post-secondary campuses is highly problematic (Moorman & Osborne, 2016, p. 547). While sexual violence has been recognized as a health issue and social concern for many years, it is only recently that sexual violence and its concerning effects of victimization have merited closer attention from media (Sutton & Simons, 2015, p. 2827). This media attention has, subsequently, resulted in a public outcry and has forced post-secondary institutions to implement sexual violence policies and programming. However, it has also led to an explosion of studies within academia. One of the areas that has not been studied extensively in the past but is increasing today is the study of uncommitted sexual encounters—otherwise known as hook-up culture—in connection to sexual violence.

Many studies concerning sexual violence discuss items that place an individual at higher risk for experiencing sexual violence, and one of the many risks is engagement in hook-ups (Flack Jr. et al., 2007; Sutton & Simons, 2015). While engagement in hook-ups increases the risk of sexual violence victimization, it is questionable as to whether or not students are aware of this reality. With today's attitudes surrounding relationships and intimacy, it is difficult to measure this, as, according to some, engagement in hook-up culture simply fills one's desire for pleasure (Pedersen, Tutenges, & Sandberg, 2017). In other words, perhaps the thoughts around engaging in hook-ups are less focused on the idea that there may be a risk for violence. Because it is unknown as to whether or not students conceptualize engagement in hook-up culture with sexual violence, this study seeks to discover the extent to which students conceptualize connections between sexual violence and hook-up culture.

Grounded Theory

This project was conducted as a grounded theory study. Observations, a focus group, and an interview were conducted with undergraduate students from MacEwan University in relation to hook-up culture and sexual violence.

Data Collection Techniques

This study was completed using qualitative methods. Three data collection techniques were used for triangulation: participant observation, one focus group, and one interview.

Methods

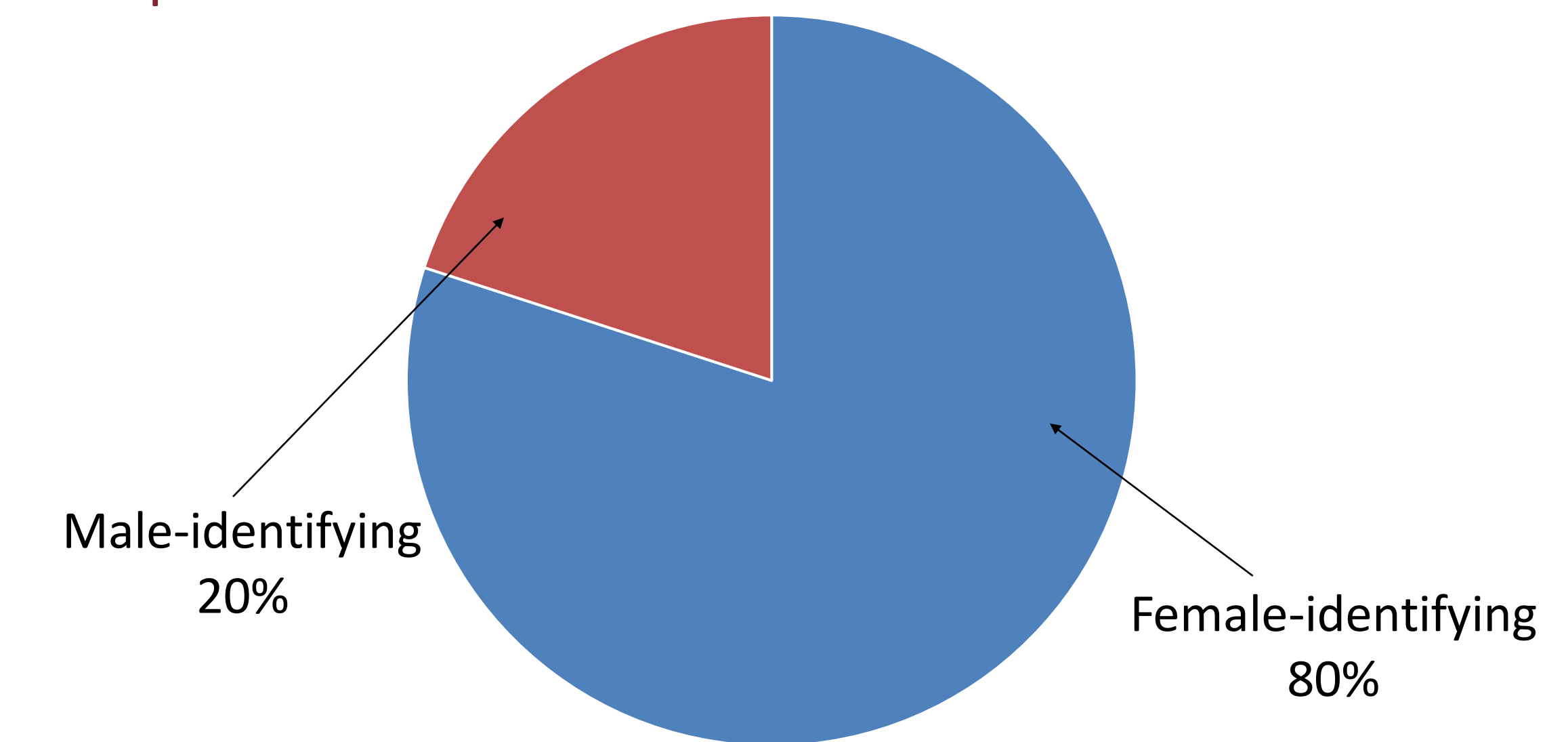
Sample Selection

The sample consisted of undergraduate students at MacEwan University that were enrolled in a Sociology class. Participant make-up included four female-identifying persons as well as one male-identifying person.

Coding Procedure

MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software, was used to code the verbatim transcriptions. In order to create thematic codes, action codes were created and then grouped together according to similarities.

Sample



Results

Common Themes

The themes discussed below were among the most represented thematic codes between the focus group and interview.

Engagement in hook-up culture is normalized: Within broader society, engagement in hook-up culture is normalized through not only media but also through the behaviour exhibited by many students, as it is often encouraged and thought of as being “part of the university culture”.

Engagement in hook-up culture comes with risk: Engaging in hook-up culture comes with many risks which may include, but are not limited to, the contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and/or sexual violence. The risk for sexual violence increases when a person engages in hook-up culture.

Engagement in hook-up culture comes with benefits: For many, engagement in hook-up culture is strictly associated with a desire for pleasure. For others, engagement may help to increase confidence in social and sexual atmospheres.

Engagement in hook-up culture is gendered: Male-identifying persons and female-identifying persons may think of engagement in hook-up culture differently due to its stigmatized nature (i.e. women are more likely to be labelled “slut” if they engage in hook-up culture).

Engagement in hook-up culture allows for exploration: Engagement in hook-up culture allows a person to explore different relationships and different people. This culture enables them to discover what type of love or relationship they desire in life.

“People get the sense that it’s part of the university life. I think that, outside of these walls, it’s not something that’s ideal to people. I think once people get into post-secondary they think it’s something that they have to want. Just to, you know, give it a try.”

“Other girls would slut-shame me because they don’t approve of that behaviour. I also think that’s a risk.”

“Hook-up culture allows people to find out what kind of love is suitable for them. That’s something people don’t think about; there’s not only one way of partnership, one way of loving, one way of intimacy.”

Conclusions

This study demonstrates the extent to which undergraduate students at MacEwan University conceptualize the connections between hook-up culture and sexual violence. Although the themes emerging from the focus group and interview were consistent in terms of there not being any major outliers, it is possible that there would have been an emergence of other themes aside from the ones mentioned in the results section had there been more focus groups and interviews conducted. Also, other themes may have emerged with a larger participant sample or a greater mixture of genders; in other words, a more representative sample. However, despite the limitations of this study, it remains evident that students do in fact conceptualize connections between sexual violence and hook-up culture.

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