

# A (Preliminary) Qualitative Exploration of Play Party Experiences Among Attendees with a History of Sexual Assault



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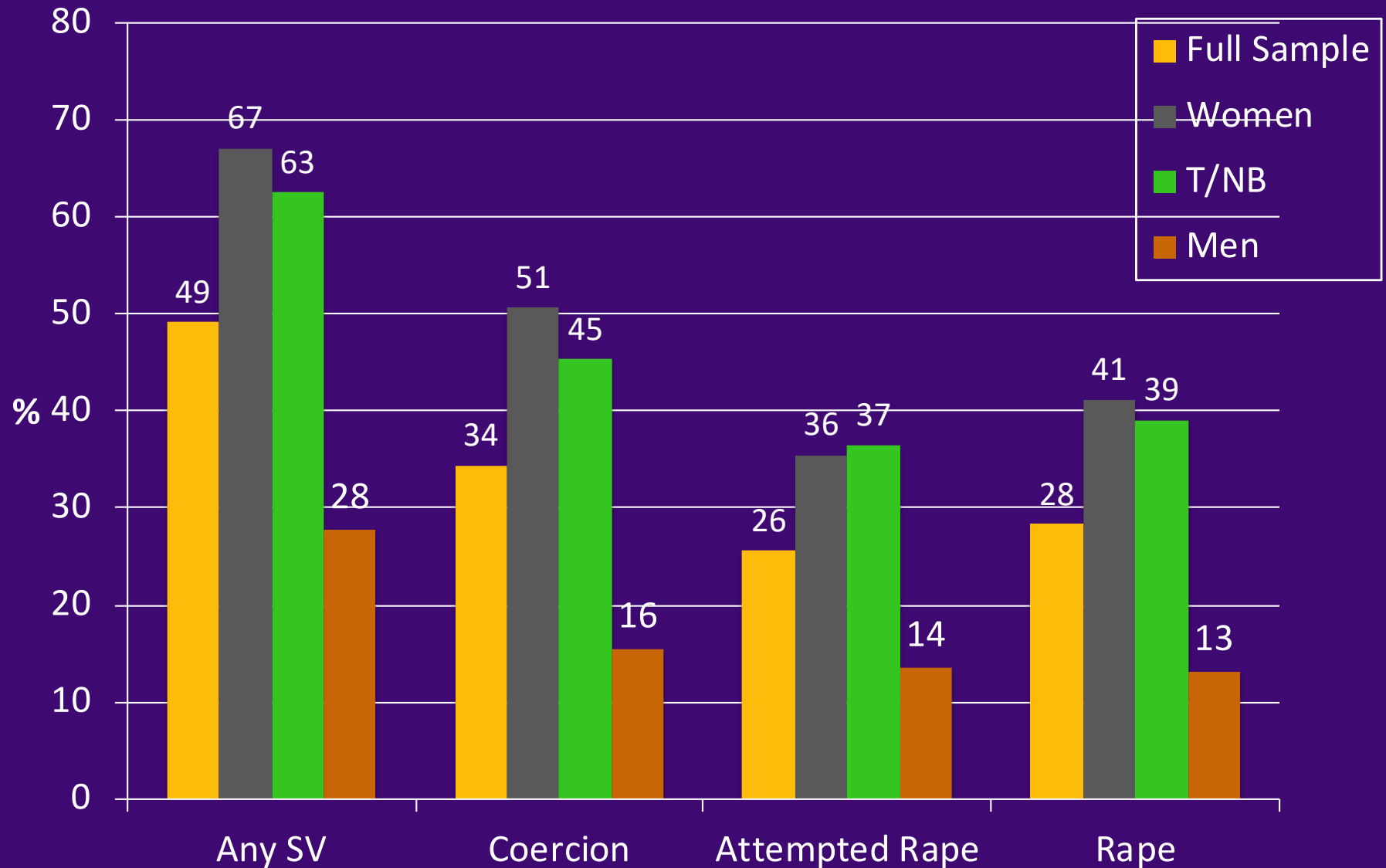
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# The Play Party Context

- Play parties, broadly defined, include swingers clubs or parties, kink or BDSM events and spaces, and other sex party or orgy scenarios.
- Minimal existing literature about these communities
  - Mostly focused on sexual risk behavior
- Conducted an anonymous online survey of 1,386 play party attendees
  - “any gathering of 6 or more people where full nudity was allowed AND people openly engaged in sexual and/or kinky activities.”
  - Recruited via social networking and via various media outlets and appearances
  - Examined demographic, sexual health, and psychosocial health, along with sexual victimization experiences among a subset of respondents (Koss et al., 2007).

# Prevalence of Adult Sexual Victimization



N = 870

# Sexual Victimization and Psychosexual and Behavioral Health Characteristics

- Compared to non-victims, those who were raped since the age of 14
  - Had lower levels of sexual assertiveness (35.53 vs. 37.31,  $F(3, 845) = 6.21, p < .001$ ).
- Compared to non-victims, those who experienced any sexual victimization were more likely to report having engaged in consensual unwanted sex (22.6% vs. 57.4%,  $X^2(2) = 39.00, p < .001$ ).

# Potential Explanations & Responsibilities

- Some may interpret findings as evidence of hypersexuality in response to sexual trauma and/or the eroticization of abuse.
- Responsibility to understand and disseminate a more complex and full picture
- (A few) potential explanations:
  - Current perspectives on consent that facilitate naming events prior to play party involvement
  - Emotionally processing sexual trauma
  - Rule/boundary focused spaces facilitate safety
- Responsibility to understand, and hopefully improve, the experiences and needs of those who have experienced sexual violence

# Present Study: Research Questions

- How do survivors of ASA navigate and experience play parties?
- What connections do ASA survivors make between their sexual victimization history and their play party experiences?
- How do ASA survivors understand the prevalence rates of ASA in the survey?

# Qualitative Research Methods

- Eligibility screening survey sent to 580 survey respondents who indicated interest in future research.
- Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss et al., 2007).
  - Since the age of 14
    - Sexual coercion
    - Attempted rape
    - Rape (via intoxication or force)

# Qualitative Sample (So Far...)

- 66 completed the eligibility screening survey
- 42 endorsed any sexual victimization since the age of 14 and attended at least 1 play party in the past year
- Aiming for 30 interviews
- N = 9 (Ages range from 28-72; all white)
  - 3 NB
  - 2 Men
  - 4 Women
- Of the 9, since the age of 14
  - Sexual coercion (9/9)
  - Attempted rape (8/9)
  - Rape via incapacitation or force (8/9)



# Emerging Themes

- Comfort in sexual spaces that are consent-focused where boundaries are respected
  - “It’s given me a lot of control back.”
- Processing/catharsis
  - “Being in a scene can pull things to the surface where you’re then forced to deal with them.”
- Balancing benefits of unwanted consensual sex with risks of sexual refusal
  - “I’ve seen how guys act when they think they’re going to get something when they’re not. And being alone in a much larger male’s house, I was perfectly happy to say, ‘You know what? I’m going to have the sex and go home and not potentially bad create a bad situation for myself’.”
  - “I’m really not interested in you, but I don’t feel like making it awkward and I don’t have an objection to the sex.”
- Contrasting kink/swinger/sex party spaces with mainstream contexts
  - Community policing: “People get blackballed if they’re bad actors.”
  - Behavior and communication distinctions

# Discussion

- Multiple pathways to and motivations for play party attendance among those who have experienced sexual victimization.
- Most of the participants (7/9) reported childhood sexual abuse
- Therapeutic implications
  - When asked what they would want a therapist to know about kinky people with a sexual violence history, one participant said that, “it doesn’t mean people are broken, but it’s a way to process and heal.”
  - Adapting consent and boundary setting practices in non-play party spaces and relationships
- Educational and cultural implications
  - Creating cultures of consent may facilitate healing and comfort among sexual assault survivors and likely also prevents sexual assault in those contexts.

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# Questions?



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