

Predicting Self-Protection Against Sexual Assault in Dating Relationships Among Heterosexual Men and Women, Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals

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To measure self-protective behavior on dates, the Dating Self-Protection Against Rape Scale (DSPARS) was developed. The relationship among previous sexual victimization, self-perceived risk for sexual assault, rape awareness education, gender of dating partner, and DSPARS scores was assessed among 152 college students. Forty-two percent of the sample was male (mean age 21.08 years) and 58% was female (mean age 20.30 years). The participants were predominantly White (74%), with the remainder of the sample identifying as Latino (7%), Asian (7%), Black (5%), or other (3%). Sixty-eight percent of the sample self-identified as heterosexual, 10% as lesbian, 15% as gay, 5% as bisexual, and 2% did not indicate their sexual orientation.

The problem of acquaintance rape has received widespread attention in the research literature (e.g., Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Finley & Corty, 1993; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Mills & Granoff, 1992). These studies, many based on the theoretical premise of an inherent power differential between men and women, overwhelmingly address sexual assault in the context of heterosexual relationships where the victim is presumed to be a woman. Few studies have examined the sexual victimization of men by women in the context of dating relationships (e.g., Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Struckman-Johnson, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994), and even fewer have investigated sexual assault in dating relationships among gay men and lesbians (e.g., Brand & Kidd, 1986; Waterman, Dawson, & Bologna, 1989).

The prevalence rates for sexual assault victimization among women is well documented,

especially among women in college. For example, Koss et al. (1987) found that approximately 15% of 3,187 randomly selected female college students had been raped after the age of 14. Eighty-four percent of these women knew their assailants, and 57% of the assaults occurred on dates. Other studies have yielded comparable statistics on sexual assault rates for college-aged women (e.g., Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Finley & Corty, 1993; Mills & Granoff, 1992).

Although the research is not as extensive with respect to prevalence rates of sexual victimization of men, studies do indicate that men are also victims of sexual coercion in the context of dating relationships. Struckman-Johnson (1988) found that 16% of 268 male college students surveyed reported at least one forced sexual episode. Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) found that 63% of 507 men they surveyed had experienced "unwanted sexual intercourse" in a heterosexual relationship as a result of physical or psychological coercion.

What little research has been done on sexual assault among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals indicates that this population is not immune to the occurrence of sexual coercion. Baier, Rosenzweig, and Whipple (1991) found that 18% of 36 gay, lesbian, or bisexual students surveyed had been victims of physical sexual coercion. (Data were not broken down into discrete sexual orientation categories, nor was the perpetrator's relationship to the victim determined.) In a study addressing physical aggression among heterosexual and lesbian couples, Brand and Kidd (1986) established that 7% of the 55 lesbians surveyed had been sexually assaulted by a woman in the context of a dating relationship. Waterman et al. (1989) examined sexual coercion in the context of ongoing

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relationships and found that approximately 30% of 36 lesbians and 12% of 34 gay men participating in the study had been forced by their partner to have sex against their will. These statistics suggest that sexual assault in dating relationships is not confined to men victimizing women in heterosexual relationships.

Although gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual men report being victimized in the context of dating relationships, antirape education offered by many colleges and universities is typically targeted toward heterosexual women as victims who are assaulted by men in the context of heterosexual relationships (Cummings, 1992; Day, 1994; Gray, Lesser, Quinn, & Bounds 1990; Hanson & Gidycz, 1993). The major goal of campus rape-prevention programs is a reduction in a woman's risk of being sexually assaulted by a man.

To date, little research has been conducted on the extent to which individuals actually engage in rape prevention behaviors on dates. Hanson and Gidycz (1993) completed one of the few studies addressing this topic. These researchers conducted a study of 346 female college students that evaluated a sexual-assault prevention program offered at a Midwestern university. Results indicated that the group that participated in the prevention program "reported experiencing fewer situational factors associated with acquaintance rape during the course of the [intervention] than did subjects in the control group" (p. 1049). Other noteworthy findings occurred in this study. The prevention program was deemed ineffective in reducing the incidence of sexual victimization among participants who had been victims of a "severe sexual assault" (p. 1049) before participation in the program. Hanson and Gidycz concluded that "women with a history of victimization experience were much more likely to report victimization during the 9-week experimental period than were women without such history" (p. 1050). This theory of revictimization has been explored and corroborated by two other prospective studies (Gidycz, Coble, Latham, & Layman, 1993; Gidycz, Hanson, & Layman, 1995).

The Hanson and Gidycz (1993) study has suggested that rape-prevention education is

instrumental in the performance of rape-avoidance behaviors. How does prior victimization relate to precautionary behavior? Hanson and Gidycz's findings intimated that prior victimization may reduce the use or effectiveness of rape prevention efforts. Some research has suggested that women who have been previously victimized are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety than nonvictims (Gidycz et al., 1993). Other theories that address the effects of prior victimization suggest that this depression and anxiety can lead to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, which could impede efforts at self-protection, thus increasing the chance for further victimization (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Wyatt, Guthrie, & Notgrass, 1992). Also, perpetrators may select victims who show signs of helplessness. Furthermore, previous sexual victimization may increase victims' awareness of what constitutes victimization, thus making them more likely to label forced sex as sexual assault.

If self-protective behavior against sexual assault in dating situations is a potential function of rape-awareness education and sexual victimization history, then self-protective behavior also may be influenced by the degree to which women believe they could be sexually assaulted in the future. According to the Health Belief Model (Janz & Becker, 1984), health-related behaviors result as an interaction of various motivating factors and barriers to the performance of the behavior. Motivating factors include beliefs about the behavior to be performed. For example, Day (1994) indicated that fear of sexual assault makes individuals "adopt numerous precautionary measures [that] curtail activities and behavior" (p. 742). This fear can be manifested in the self-perceived risk of future sexual assault victimization. If Day were correct, people who believe that the risk of sexual assault is high, and who also believe that few barriers exist that impede their self-protection, may be more likely to employ such strategies than those who perceive their risk of victimization as low. On the other hand, Gordon and Riger (1989) speculated that the relationship between self-protection against rape and perceived risk is more complex. For example, some individuals may

engage in many self-protective behaviors without admitting to increased risk, as this admission would make the stress from the fear of victimization too high. As the evidence surrounding this issue is conflicting, the relationship between self-perceived risk and self-protective behavior needs further examination.

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to develop a standardized scale, inclusive of gender and sexual orientation, that measures self-protective behavior on dates; (b) to document the incidence of sexual assault in dating relationships among heterosexual men and women, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals; and (c) to investigate possible predictors of self-protective behavior in dating relationships.

Based on the available evidence, the authors developed four hypotheses:

1. Heterosexual women will engage in more self-protective behavior on dates than heterosexual men, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals.
2. Exposure to rape-prevention education will be positively related to the degree of reported self-protective behavior on dates.
3. Rape and sexual assault victims will be less likely than people who have not been sexually victimized to engage in self-protective behavior against sexual assault on dates.
4. Self-perceived risk that one could be sexually assaulted in the future will be positively related to self-protective behavior.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred fifty-two college students volunteered to complete a survey on sexual assault and self-protective behavior. Various student groups were approached for volunteers. These groups included a training class for the university crisis hotline ($n = 35$ or 23% of the total sample); the campus lesbian, gay, and bisexual student association ($n = 10$ or 7%); a coeducational business fraternity ($n = 23$ or 15%); a student

government coalition ($n = 19$ or 13%); a human sexuality class ($n = 31$ or 20%); and the state university system lesbian, gay, bisexual student union ($n = 34$ or 22%).

The sample included 63 men (mean age 21.08 years, $SD = 2.40$) and 87 women (mean age 20.30 years, $SD = 1.50$). Two participants did not indicate their gender. The participants were predominantly White ($n = 112$ or 74%), with the remainder of the sample identifying as Latino ($n = 11$ or 7%), Asian ($n = 11$ or 7%), Black ($n = 7$ or 5%), or other ($n = 4$ or 3%). Seven participants did not provide race data. Sixty-eight percent ($n = 104$) of the sample self-identified as heterosexual, 10% ($n = 15$) as lesbian, 15% ($n = 23$) as gay, 5% ($n = 7$) as bisexual, and 2% ($n = 3$) did not indicate their sexual orientation.

Measures

As no standardized measure exists for this variable, the Dating Self-Protection Against Rape Scale (DSPARS) was developed through consultation with local experts in rape and women's self-defense. In addition, the literature was searched for mention of behaviors thought to decrease risk for sexual victimization (e.g., Furby, Fischhoff, & Morgan, 1989; Gray et al., 1990; Levine-MacCombie & Koss, 1986; Ullman & Knight, 1992) and behaviors that have been empirically demonstrated as effective rape-prevention strategies (Bart & O'Brien, 1985). Using a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they engaged in a list of 18 behaviors thought to reduce one's risk for being sexually assaulted by a date. Participants were instructed to recall their actions with new partners, as the behaviors that the scale assesses make more sense in the context of a new romantic relationship as opposed to a committed relationship. To reduce a potential response set bias, four items were reverse-keyed. For purposes of analysis, the final score on the scale was an average rating of the items.

Reliability analyses were performed on the 18 DSPARS items. One-hundred twenty cases were included in the analysis, with 32 cases excluded due to missing data. Item-total correlations revealed that three items had a very

weak relationship to the scale total, and thus they were eliminated from the scale for further analyses. Two of these eliminated items were reverse-keyed items. Subsequent reliability analyses were run on the refined scale. Cronbach's alpha for the remaining 15 items was equal to .86, and to assess the scale's split-half reliability, a Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient was calculated and was equal to .81. The final scale items and their corresponding item-total correlations are presented in Table 1.

In addition to the DSPARS, participants completed items concerning previous sexual assault victimization, self-perceived risk for sexual assault, and experience with rape-prevention education. Previous victimization was assessed by asking participants if they had been physically forced to engage in oral sex, sexual intercourse, sodomy, or had been forcibly penetrated by objects or fingers either vaginally or anally since the age of 14 (questions pertaining to verbal coercion were not included). The age

TABLE 1.
Item-Total Correlations for Dating Self-Protection Against Rape Scale (DSPARS)

Item	Item-Total Correlations
1. Plan for what self-protective measure you would take if you were alone with your partner and he/she became sexually aggressive? .....	.55
2. Have a trusted friend(s) be with you and your dating partner? .....	.45
3. Abstain or limit your alcohol intake to three drinks or less? .....	.44
4. Let a friend or family member know where you are and whom you are with? .....	.58
5. Speak directly and assertively? .....	.42
6. Try to be alone with your dating partner? .....	.42
7. Talk to people who know your dating partner to find out what he/she is like? .....	.49
8. Pay attention to your dating partner's alcohol/drug intake? .....	.54
9. Provide for your own transportation so you do not have to depend on your dating partner for transportation? .....	.29
10. Consider using self-defense strategies such as karate against your dating partner if the need arises? .....	.56
11. Meet in a private place instead of a public place? .....	.31
12. Try to be aware of common household objects that could be used as weapons if your dating partner became sexually aggressive? .....	.68
13. Make yourself aware of exits from the area where you and your dating partner are? .....	.66
14. Try to be aware of where other people are who may be able to help you in case of an emergency? .....	.70
15. Carry enough money with you to get a taxi in case of an emergency? .....	.47

Note. Participants were asked to respond to the tabled items preceded by the stem, "When you are with dating partners, how often do you..."

cutoff of 14 was modeled after Koss et al. (1987). Participants responded to the question, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that you could be raped or sexually assaulted in the future?" by circling a number on a 6-point Likert-type scale, 1 (*not at all likely*) to 6 (*very likely*). Participants were asked if they had ever attended any seminars or workshops on sexual assault or rape prevention, read any articles or books on sexual assault prevention, or had any college courses in which sexual assault and rape prevention were discussed.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the selected campus groups to approach members about volunteering for this research. Participants received no compensation. Surveys were either administered in a group setting or were distributed to participants who were asked to return the surveys in a sealed envelope at a later time. Seventy-five surveys were distributed in the latter manner and 53 were returned, resulting in a 71% return rate for this subgroup.

RESULTS

Incidence of Sexual Assault Victimization in the Sample

Fourteen percent ($n = 21$) of the participants reported being physically forced to engage in either anal, vaginal, or oral sex, or being digitally penetrated in the anus or vagina since the age of 14. In terms of the percentage of victims in each gender category, 20% ($n = 17$) of the women and 6% ($n = 4$) of the men had been sexually assaulted by means of physical coercion. To examine the relationship between victim status and gender, a chi-square analysis was performed. The test was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 4.77, p < .05$, indicating that women in this sample reported being victims of physical sexual coercion significantly more often than men.

The proportion of victims in each sexual orientation category revealed that 16% of the heterosexual women, 27% of the lesbian women, 13% of the gay men, and 43% of the bisexual individuals self-identified as victims of physical sexual coercion. None of the heterosexual men

indicated that they had been sexually assaulted. Three of the 4 male victims identified themselves as gay and 1 as bisexual. Of the gay male victims, all 3 had been assaulted by a male in the context of a dating relationship. The bisexual man had been assaulted by a female dating partner.

Analysis of the 17 female victims' sexual orientation showed that 11 (65%) self-identified as heterosexual, 4 (24%) as lesbian, and 2 (12%) as bisexual. Seven of the 11 heterosexual women (64%) were assaulted by a man in the context of a dating relationship, and the remaining 36% ($n = 4$) were assaulted by male acquaintances. All 4 lesbian women were assaulted by a male dating partner (none were assaulted by a female dating partner). The 2 bisexual female victims were also victimized by a man in the context of a dating relationship.

In summary, the data indicate that all but 1 of the 21 sexual assault victims in this sample were attacked by a man. In addition, 81% ($n = 17$) of those victims were assaulted in the context of a dating relationship. The remaining 19% ($n = 4$) of the victims were heterosexual women who had been assaulted by a male acquaintance.

Factors Associated With Self-Protection on Dates

Analysis of variance. To explore the relationship between self-protective behavior on dates and gender and sexual orientation, a 2 (male and female) \times 2 (heterosexual and homosexual) analysis of variance was conducted on a total of 115 cases. Thirty cases were excluded due to missing data. The category of bisexual was not included in the analysis of variance because of the small sample size ($n = 7$). The analysis revealed the following: a significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 114) = 6.79, p < .01$, with women scoring significantly higher than men on the DSPARS; no significant main effect for sexual orientation, $F(1, 114) = .79, p < .38$; and a significant gender by sexual orientation interaction, $F(1, 114) = 12.92, p < .001$. The effect size was calculated for the interaction, and the eta squared was equal to .10. Due to the significant interaction, simple main effects were examined for significance. To control for

experiment-wise error, the modified Bonferroni method (Holland & Copenhaver, 1988) was employed. Based on this analysis, one significant difference emerged: heterosexual women scored significantly higher on the DSPARS than heterosexual men, $t(78) = -6.54, p < .001$. On the DSPARS, heterosexual women had the highest mean item rating ($M = 3.95, SD = .94, n = 54$), followed by bisexual women ($M = 3.71, SD = .68, n = 3$), gay men ($M = 3.34, SD = .80, n = 20$), bisexual men ($M = 3.23, SD = .24, n = 2$), lesbians ($M = 3.16, SD = .80, n = 13$), and heterosexual men ($M = 2.86, SD = .56, n = 28$).

Multiple regression analysis. The results of the analyses reported above suggest that individuals who date men (i.e., heterosexual women, bisexual individuals, and gay men) may be more likely to engage in self-protective behavior on dates. Based on this speculation and previous research addressing other factors discussed in the introduction that may predict self-protection on dates (i.e., self-perceived risk for sexual assault, degree of rape-awareness education, and whether or not one had been sexually assaulted in the past), a regression model was created and tested. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed on 112 cases (40 cases were excluded due to missing data) to determine the extent to which the following six variables predicted self-protection on dates: (a) whether or not an individual dates men, (b) respondents' self-perceived risk for future sexual assault victimization, (c) whether or not an individual had ever attended any seminars or workshops on sexual assault and rape prevention, (d) whether or not an individual ever read any articles or books on sexual assault prevention, (e) whether or not an individual ever had college courses in which sexual assault and rape prevention were discussed, and (f) whether or not one had been sexually assaulted by means of physical force since the age of 14. Three variables were retained the final model, adjusted $R^2 = .24$, and $F(3, 108) = 17.66, p < .0001$. The stepwise multiple regression indicated that participants who date men are more likely to engage in self-protective behavior and that exposure to rape-prevention education is positively related to DSPARS scores, particularly whether or not the respondent

had read any articles or books on sexual assault and whether or not the respondent had been in any college courses where rape prevention was discussed. In this sample, respondents' victimization status and self-perceived risk for sexual assault were not positively related to self-protective behavior.

DISCUSSION

The results of the reliability analysis indicates that the DSPARS is a satisfactory beginning for a scale measuring self-protective behavior on dates. Both reliability coefficients are in excess of .80, demonstrating acceptable reliability. Further research to examine the factor structure of the scale is needed. It should include larger samples representative of all sexual orientation categories within each gender group. The scale, like most scales pertaining to sexual coercion, is limited by its retrospective and self-report nature. The extent to which behaviors assessed by the scale are predictive of a person's current and future behavior is a possible topic for future research.

Regarding content validity of the DSPARS, the scale is composed of items representing behaviors that experts in the field believe and that empirical research has shown can decrease the risk of rape victimization. The findings that heterosexual women—most often the targets of rape-prevention education—and those who have been exposed to rape-prevention education are more likely to have higher DSPARS scores suggest that the scale also has construct validity. Of course, further research is needed relating the DSPARS to other theoretically relevant variables. Nonetheless, given the scale's initial reliability estimates and the dearth of measures addressing this construct, the DSPARS has promise as a valuable research instrument.

In this sample, the incidence of sexual assault victimization among heterosexual women was 16%, which is comparable to the figure reported by Koss et al. (1987). This provides evidence for the validity of the questions used to measure physical sexual coercion in this research. The sample employed by Koss et al. was a national probability sample, so it appears

that this sample of heterosexual women may be a good representation of heterosexual college women with respect to their experiences of sexual assault.

Heterosexual men in this sample reported no sexual victimization by female dating partners. In Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's 1994 study, only one of the 204 college men surveyed reported being forced to have intercourse with a woman by means of physical coercion, but 40 participants in that study reported having sexual intercourse with a woman as a result of psychological coercion. Struckman-Johnson (1988) found that eight men in her sample of 23 male sexual assault victims were physically forced to have sex by a female dating partner. As in the previously cited study, the female perpetrators in Struckman-Johnson's (1988) study were more likely to use such tactics as psychological pressure and intoxication of the victim to force him into sex. This suggests that the current study's lack of finding victimization of heterosexual men by female dating partners could be a function of the study's focus on physical force.

Of the gay men in this study, 13% were victims of sexual assault in the context of dating relationships, a figure that is comparable to the victimization rate in gay relationships reported by Waterman et al. (1989). Among the lesbians in the current study, 23% reported being victims of sexual assault, but all were victimized by male dating partners. This finding is not comparable to the percentages reported by either Waterman et al. or Brand and Kidd (1986), which were 30% and 7%, respectively. Those studies, however, focused on longer-term relationships and the participants in those studies were older than those in the current one, creating more circumstances in which sexual assault could occur. Also, in both the Waterman et al. and Brand and Kidd studies, the wording of the questions used to ascertain victim status could have been interpreted by respondents to include psychological coercion.

Only one participant, a bisexual man, reported being victimized by a woman. Of the seven bisexual individuals participating in this research, 43% reported being physically sexually assaulted, which is more than double the

victimization rate reported by Baier et al. (1991). This finding indicates that more research is needed to investigate further the incidence of sexual victimization among bisexuals to determine whether this population is at a higher risk for victimization than other groups, and to ascertain the factors that influence this potential increase in risk.

Furthermore, the data revealed a significant interaction between gender and sexual orientation. As predicted, heterosexual women reported engaging in the most self-protective behavior on dates. Heterosexual women are usually the intended audience of rape-prevention education efforts. One possible interpretation of this finding is that education and information related to sexual assault prevention may actually impact heterosexual women's self-protective behavior. This corroborates Hanson and Gidycz's (1993) findings on the evaluation of rape prevention programs, which help to document the effectiveness of such programs. However, no causal conclusions can be drawn from the current study because of its correlational design.

Contrary to expectation, neither prior sexual victimization nor self-perceived risk for sexual assault predicted the degree to which one engaged in self-protective behavior on dates. The association between these variables may be complex and their relationship to self-protective behavior on dates obfuscated. Some victims may be hypervigilant and fearful about future victimization (high self-perceived risk for future victimization), whereas other victims may be in denial or experiencing learned helplessness in protecting themselves (low self-perceived risk). How self-perceived risk for future victimization and previous sexual assault victimization interact to influence self-protective behavior needs to be investigated further.

As predicted, a direct relationship was noted between rape-awareness education and self-protective behavior on dates. Two of the three education variables were significantly related to an individual's propensity to engage in self-protective behavior on dates: whether or not one had read any articles or books on sexual assault and rape prevention, and whether or not one had taken any college courses where rape prevention

had been discussed. These findings indicate either that reading rape prevention materials and attending relevant courses do influence behavior, or that people who score high on self-protective behavior seek out such reading material and courses. In addition, individuals who choose to read rape awareness literature or take classes in which sexual assault prevention is discussed may have attitudes and beliefs that promote precautionary behavior on dates. Further research examining attitudes and personality variables that predict self-protective behavior needs to involve all sexual orientation groups. In addition, further research could shed light on what type of classroom-based rape-prevention education (i.e., lecture, discussion, research on the topic) is the most effective in increasing self-protective behavior on dates.

Another significant predictor of self-protective behavior against sexual assault on dates is whether or not an individual dates men. This is consistent with our finding that across all sexual orientation groups, perpetrators of sexual assault on dates are predominantly male. Aspects of the masculine role that encourage qualities such as aggression and dominance may breed sexually predatory behavior.

This study's findings and the scale produced for it have numerous implications for student affairs practitioners. The instrument employed in this research is an innovative and much-needed tool that can be used for both research and practice. The DSPARS can be employed as a vehicle for needs assessment for rape-prevention education and as a measure to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. Most existing scales used in this field focus on attitudinal assessment (e.g., Rape Myth Acceptance, Adversarial Sexual Beliefs), but the DSPARS evaluates the extent to which individuals report actually performing behaviors that decrease victimization. Finally, the scale can be used as a means to facilitate discussion during workshops regarding various self-protective strategies and to function as a guide for instructors as to which behaviors to target for change.

The results and implications of this study need to be evaluated in light of its research limitations. The results are based on a sample

of self-selected volunteers who may or may not be representative of college students in general, and the sample sizes for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual groups are modest, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. As previously addressed, the design of the study is retrospective. Participants may not have remembered or reported past events accurately. Even with these limits on generalizability, the results merit consideration due to the paucity of data on the studied groups.

As previously discussed, more research is needed to document further the reliability and validity of the DSPARS. In addition, other research employing the scale could be performed that would have ramifications for rape-prevention education. For example, an inquiry into the reasons why some people engage in high-risk behaviors relevant to sexual assault could assist rape-prevention educators in designing effective curricula. To educate effectively all sexual orientation groups, knowledge of any differences in the reasons for high-risk behavior across sexual orientation and gender groups would be useful. Other research could examine the extent to which self-protective behavior against rape relates to other self-protective behaviors such as engaging in safer sexual practices, including the use of condoms, dental dams, or both.

Although the focus of this article is on the victim's role in preventing sexual assault, the authors do not intend to reinforce the notion that the victims and potential victims of sexual assault should be responsible for its eradication. The responsibility for stopping rape begins and ends with perpetrators. Rape-awareness education for both potential victims and perpetrators should acknowledge that dating and sexual assault can be a violent combination that exists among all sexual orientation groups, with the curriculum of such programs actively including gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexual men.

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