

Research In Brief

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Jocks, Gender, Binge Drinking, and Adolescent Violence

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Authors' Note: The colloquial use of the term *jock* as synonymous with *athlete* may mask important differences in meaning. A jock (usually but not always an active sports participant) is markedly enthusiastic about sport, either for its own sake or as a route to popularity, status, or belonging.

Adolescent violence is a source of concern for youth, parents, educators, researchers and public policy makers. In contrast, physical aggression in a sport-related context is not only tolerated but actively encouraged. This study investigated whether a link exists between athletic involvement and elevated levels of adolescent violence outside of sports.

The investigation examined how the relationship between athletic involvement and adolescent violence varies across dimensions of athletic involvement (athletic participation vs. jock identity), types of violent behavior (family violence vs. non-family violence), and gender, as well as the impact of binge drinking on this relationship.

Findings

Six hundred and eight Western New York adolescents were asked to evaluate their own levels of athletic involvement, violent behavior, and alcohol consumption over the past year. Researchers found:

- Jock identity but not athletic participation was associated with more frequent violence.
- Jock identity predicted non-family violence but not family violence.

continued inside

Collecting Data on Alcohol Use and Alcohol-related Victimization: A Comparison of Telephone and Web-based Survey Methods

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Traditional methods of data collection, such as person-to-person interviews, have often been used for research on sensitive topics such as alcohol use, risky sexual behavior and personal victimization. Web-based surveys are now being used as an alternative means of gathering sensitive data. In the current study, data from web-based surveys were compared to data collected from interviewer administered telephone surveys on alcohol use, cigarette use, illicit drug use, and victimization (e.g., victim of theft, physical assault, or sexual assault) by college-age women.

Findings

- Web-based surveys were an effective and efficient means for collecting data from college women about their alcohol and other drug use as well as their experiences with alcohol-related victimization.
- Survey completion rates were higher for the web-based survey (60 percent) than for the telephone survey (46 percent). In addition, individuals appeared to be more inclined to respond to personal or sensitive items in web-based compared to telephone surveys.
- The personnel cost for the interviewer-administered telephone survey was six-times higher (\$26.19) than the cost of the web-based survey (\$4.23).
- There were no significant differences for reports of alcohol or drug use, cigarette smoking or use of illicit drugs, between the web-based and telephone-based surveys.

The Study

- Seven-hundred first-time freshmen women from the incoming class of 2003 at a large state university in western New York were invited to participate in the study. Three hundred and seventy women (53 percent) completed the survey.
- The average age of participants was 18.5 years. The majority of the women were single (98 percent) and full time students (99 percent).
- Most of the women were of European descent (73 percent) with

continued inside

Jocks, Gender, Binge Drinking, and Adolescent Violence (cont'd)

- The link between jock identity and non-family violence was stronger for boys than for girls.
- Binge drinking predicted family violence among non-jocks only.

The Study

- Data for this study were derived from the longitudinal Family and Adolescent Study (Barnes & Farrell, 1992). A sample of Western New York adolescents, between the ages of 13 and 16 years initially, were interviewed six times over a period of seven years. African American families were deliberately overrepresented (211 out of the original 699 participants) to facilitate testing for ethnic differences.
- Adolescent family violence was measured by asking how often in the past year the respondent “pushed, shoved or hit a parent or another adult in your family” or “threw something at someone in your family when you were angry.” Non-family violence was measured by asking how often in the past year the respondent had “beaten up someone on purpose” or “been involved in a physical fight with a gang or group of friends.”
- Four sociodemographic items were included in the analysis: gender, age, ethnicity (i.e., Black and White/Other), and socio-economic status (i.e., family income, mother’s highest level of education, father’s highest level of education).
- Binge drinking was measured by asking respondents how often during the past year they had consumed five or more drinks of a single type of alcoholic beverage (i.e., beer, wine, or liquor) in one sitting.
- To measure objective athletic involvement, respondents were asked to report if they had participated in any school sports (i.e., football, basketball, baseball, swimming, track) during the past year. Subjective athletic involvement was measured by asking adolescents to evaluate how closely they identified with the label “jock;” those who reported that the label fit “very well” or “somewhat well” were classified as having a jock identity.

Analysis & Results

Analysis of the data encompassed three steps. First, self-identified jocks and non-jocks were compared with respect to both demographics and behavioral (i.e., binge drinking, athletic participation, and frequency of violent behavior) characteristics. Second, analyses were conducted to predict family violence including tests for interactions between jock identity and gender, race, binge drinking frequency, and athletic participation. Third, comparable analyses were conducted to predict non-family violence.

Descriptive comparisons of jocks and non-jocks. Nearly one-third of the respondents (196 adolescents) identified themselves as jocks. Jocks were more likely to be male (47 percent of boys compared to 20 percent of girls) and White (37 percent compared to 22 percent Black). They also reported higher average family socioeconomic status. Jocks were disproportionately likely to be participants in school athletics when compared to non-jocks, although not all adolescents who participated in sports viewed themselves as jocks. Jocks reported significantly more frequent incidents of non-family violence (including

beating someone up and fighting with a gang or groups of friends) compared to non-jocks. However, no significant differences were found between jocks and non-jocks in levels of violence against family members.

Family violence. Both age and binge drinking frequency were significant predictors of family violence. Younger teens reported higher frequencies of assaulting a family member, as did those who reported binge drinking more often. Controlling for the effects of gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, binge drinking, and athletic participation, jocks did not engage in significantly more family violence than non-jocks. Importantly, binge drinking alone was associated with family violence for non-jocks.

Non-family violence. Male adolescents reported more non-family violence as did those who were younger and lower in family socioeconomic status. Binge drinking was also associated with this form of violence. Athletic participation did not predict non-family violence but jock identity did. Analysis by gender indicated that this link applied primarily to male (particularly White male) adolescents. Participation in school sports also moderated the relationship between jock identity and non-family violence. Jocks who reported participation on a school sports team were less violent than jocks who did not participate on a sports team. No such distinction was found for adolescents who did not identify with the jock label.

Further Discussion

This analysis supports previous research by Nixon (1997) and Ellis and Janelle (2000) which concluded that athletic participation by itself does not lead people to be physically aggressive in non-sport contexts. Adolescents who participate in school sports report no more family or non-family violence than those who do not participate in sports. It is identification with the jock label that is clearly associated with higher levels of non-family violence.

Most previous research has examined objective rather than subjective measures of athletic involvement. Further examination of the beliefs, values, and behavioral dispositions associated with jock identity is needed in order to identify those elements that may promote problem behavior. It may be that the jock identity is less about a narrowly-focused commitment to athletics and more about embracing a more encompassing vision of masculinity that emphasizes not only athletic competence but toughness, recklessness, domination, and winning at all costs. The current study suggests that, by reinforcing the already strong pressures to adopt the least healthy facets of this definition of masculinity, jock identity is particularly toxic for adolescent boys.

Based on this study, jock identity does not operate similarly for girls. Girls were less likely than boys to translate athletic physicality into violent behavior in non-athletic settings. Girls may have defined their own athletic identities in different terms, emphasizing group participation and skills development rather than domination and winning.

Collecting Data on Alcohol Use and Alcohol-related Victimization (cont'd)

12 percent Asian, 6.5 percent African, and less than 2 percent each of Latin, Native American or Native Alaskan descent.

- Women were invited to participate by postal and electronic mail and after acceptance, randomly assigned to either the web or telephone group. They were able to access the project web site or were telephoned to complete the survey over a seven-week period with weekly reminders as needed. Participants were paid \$10.
- The Daily Drinking Questionnaire (Collins et al., 1985) was used to obtain information from the women about their alcohol use since entering the university. Researchers asked about daily, weekly and recent drinking patterns as well as how often in a typical month the women drank four or more alcoholic drinks per drinking occasion. In addition, they asked the women about their illicit drug use (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, opiates, ecstasy, GHB, stimulants and hallucinogens).
- The Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (White & Labouvie, 1989) was used to collect data on a broad range of alcohol-related negative consequences (e.g., inability to do homework or study for a test, passing out, fainting suddenly). In addition, two questions were asked about risky sexual behavior (e.g., regret about engaging in sexual activity, unprotected sexual activity) and three questions were asked about victimization (e.g., victim of theft, victim of physical assault, victim of sexual assault).

Results & Discussion

The use of web-based surveys is an effective and efficient means for collecting data from college women about alcohol and drug use as well as alcohol-related victimization experiences. Web surveys increase flexibility for participants by, for example, allowing them to start and stop the survey repeatedly until completion.

These findings add to existing research by comparing web-based and interviewer-administered telephone survey methods. Completion rates were higher with the web compared to telephone methods. Web-based data collection was more cost-effective based on personnel costs with a tracking and reminder e-mail time of 12 minutes compared with, on average, 2.7 telephone calls and call backs and 74 minutes of interviewer time with the telephone method. In addition, substantially less personnel training was required to monitor completion rates and reminders for the web-based survey compared to the interviewer-administered telephone survey.

Although there were no differences in alcohol and other drug use data based on survey method, there were differences in specific alcohol-related negative consequences reported by women. Women who responded to the web survey were more likely to admit unfavorable occurrences whereas women who responded to the telephone survey were more likely to place a favorable spin on their behavior. For instance, women who responded to the web survey were more likely to respond in ways that might draw criticism or concern about their character from others (e.g., "Felt I was going crazy"), whereas women who responded to the telephone survey were more likely to respond in ways that suggest their taking steps to reduce or control a potential alcohol problem (e.g., "Cut down on my drinking"). These findings

suggest that women may be more forthcoming in admitting alcohol-related negative consequences when responding to web surveys than to interviewer-administered telephone surveys.

Perhaps due to a sense of anonymity felt by web-responders, rates of alcohol-related victimization and risky sexual behavior were reported more by women responding to the web survey. Similar to other research, the rates of victimization were low across this study; however, sexual assault was reported more frequently by web participants compared with telephone participants.

Limitations

As a preliminary study, only two modes of survey administration were compared and on only one university campus. Therefore, the results may not be representative of all college women. In addition, alcohol-related victimization has a low base rate of occurrence (approximately 10-15 percent of women over one to two semesters at university). Future studies might cover a longer period of college attendance with a larger group of women in order to replicate these findings. In addition, future studies might benefit from the addition of a measure aimed at gauging the extent to which the individual responds to questions as a means of making a favorable impression.

Summary

Overall, this study is the first to have compared web-based and interviewer-administered telephone data collection for personally sensitive topics. Findings suggest that web surveys are an efficient and cost-effective method of data collection with a large number of participants; they cost less, require a shorter period of time, and are adaptable to a variety of alcohol-related topics.

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Jocks, Gender, Binge Drinking, and Adolescent Violence (cont'd)

The research team found that jock identity was most closely associated with non-family violence among White male adolescents. One possible explanation of this is that Black adolescents may interpret being a jock more as a matter of physical competence (e.g., being strong, fit, or able to handle oneself well) than as participation in a sport-centered and violence-tolerant subculture. However, measures tailored to assess race-specific (and for that matter, gender-specific) meanings of the term jock do not currently exist.

The study results partially affirm previous research (Bloom & Smith, 1996) regarding a “cultural spillover” effect between adolescent athletic involvement and violence in non-sport settings. However, this finding was limited to jock identity and non-family violence; no significant relationship was found between athletic involvement and family violence.

Notably, binge drinking predicted family violence by non-jocks but not by jocks. The researchers hypothesized that jocks may be more likely to binge drink in specifically structured athletic contexts (e.g., as a bonding ritual with other jocks) where the behavior is considered normal and thus less stigmatized. In contrast, non-jocks may be more likely to drink alone or as part of a larger adolescent problem-behavior syndrome that also includes violent family conflict.

Aggression, used in socially acceptable ways and in the pursuit of culturally-defined goals, is a highly valued trait in American society. Many sports incorporate and even sanction aggression and violence in games. Furthermore, athletic participation has been considered a training ground for competition and achievement in business, politics, and the military. Parents, researchers, educators, and policy makers interested in understanding and channeling this behavior should examine both athletic participation and jock identity to better understand violent behavior. With respect to adolescent boys in particular, the goal should be to encourage athletic participation while discouraging development of the jock identity.

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