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Sand, Sun, and Sex Tourism:

What Really Happens During College Spring Break

Melissa Lee Brumer

AMST 3500
Professor Julie Kim
Professor Oneka LaBennett
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Abstract

College spring break has become a popular event that lasts for a week or two each year in March. The partying and drinking that occur on the beaches of popular North American vacation destinations may seem unrelated to the prostitution found in Amsterdam's red light district. What, if anything, do travelers to these two different destinations have in common? Recent scholarship has argued that it is necessary to expand the definition of 'sex tourism.' Scholars have also researched college students' behaviors during spring break trips. These studies show that students engage in drinking and sexual behaviors that pose threats to their health. However, there is a lack of scholarship that associates spring break with sex tourism. This project reviews literature on each topic. Then, it examines spring break in the media by reviewing MTV's portrayal of the yearly event in the show *Spring Break*. Finally, the project analyzes a survey conducted in October 2011 that asked college students about their actual spring break experiences. By expanding the definition of sex tourism and considering students' spring break experiences, the project argues that although students may not consider themselves sex tourists, spring break is a type of sex tourism.

Sand, Sun, and Sex Tourism: What Really Happens on College Spring Break

For two weeks in the middle of March each year thousands of college students journey south to take over popular North American vacation destinations. They travel in groups of friends prepared to leave behind their schoolwork and other obligations in order to have a good time. They invade the beaches and pools, drink until they pass out, and scope out potential 'hook-ups.' Across the Atlantic Ocean, men from all over the world visit Amsterdam, Netherlands. Many of these international tourists arrive at the capital city hoping to get one thing- sex in exchange for money. They walk down the streets of the red light district looking for women they can pay in return for a lap dance, oral sex, or even vaginal intercourse. The women display their bodies in windows, hoping to attract customers so they can legally prostitute themselves to these men. What, if anything, do these two different types of tourists have in common? While it is seemingly evident that the visitors in Amsterdam who pay for sex are defined as sex tourists, can the college students be considered sex tourists as well? What really happens during college spring break?

Several scholars conduct ethnographic research at spring break locations. They research and observe through surveys and on-site fieldwork. Scholars find that spring break travelers engage in behaviors that pose threats to their health. They conclude that what students really do during spring break is engage in risky behaviors such as binge drinking, casual sex, and sex without the use of condoms.[1] There is also an increasing amount of scholarship on the subject of

[1] Sevil Sonmez et al., "Binge Drinking and Casual Sex on Spring Break," *Annals of Tourism Research* 33, no. 4 (2006): 895-917.; Megan E. Patrick et al., "'I Got Your Back:' Friends' Understandings Regarding College Student Spring Break Behavior," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40, no. 1 (2011): 108-120.; George L. Smeaton et al., "College Students' Binge

sex tourism found in tourist studies, anthropology, criminology, psychology, sociology, and several other fields of study. Despite this abundance of scholarship on spring break and sex tourism as separate ideas, there is almost no existing scholarship that brings the two topics together. A few scholars have mentioned the association of the two briefly in their work, but there has been no scholarship that specifically focuses on the association between sex tourism and spring break. This project brings the two subjects together and examines how they are connected.

My project consists of four main parts. First, I examine literature that reflects on the definition of sex tourism and verifies the complications involved when attempting to define the term. I pay special attention to the cases of sex tourism in the Caribbean region and the effects of globalization there. Drawing from this scholarship, I argue that it is possible and necessary to expand the definition of sex tourism. I then review studies that were conducted at spring break locations, considering mostly studies that observe both alcohol consumption and sexual behaviors during college spring break. I conclude from these studies that spring break provides an opportunity for students to 'let loose,' as students partake in activities and show behaviors that are out of the ordinary for them. Next, I analyze MTV's show *Spring Break* and the cultural message it conveys about spring break to its audience. I argue that MTV's selected and created depictions of college spring break lead its viewers to form beliefs about the spring break atmosphere based on the sexually suggestive material featured on the show. Finally, I evaluate results from my own survey that was conducted in October 2011 to research students' actual spring break experiences. The results show that students have the opportunity to participate in

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Drinking At Beach-front Destination During Spring Break," *Journal of American College Health* 46, no. 6 (1998): 247-254.; Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, Edward S. Herold, and Dawn Mewhinney, "Casual Sex on Spring Break: Intentions and Behaviors of Canadian Students," *The Journal of Sex Research* 35, no. 3(1998): 254-264.

sexual activities while they are away during spring break. Students not only engage in sexual behaviors themselves, they expect other students to do the same. I conclude using an expansive definition of sex tourism, arguing that students who travel to spring break destinations with the intentions, opportunities, and expectations to engage in sexual encounters participate in a type of sex tourism, even though these students may not consider themselves sex tourists.

Defining 'Sex Tourism'

In only the past forty years, sex tourism has emerged as a legitimate area of tourism studies.[2] Despite this recent development in scholarship, travel and sexual encounters have been linked since the earliest days of travel.[3] Sex tourism is a problematic area of research because it is often related to prostitution. With the exception of a few locations, prostitution is usually illegal. Government authorities are hesitant to discuss prostitution and sex tourism. As a result, it is difficult to obtain accurate information about prostitutes and those who seek them. For scholars who have conducted research on the subject, a level of uncertainty remains regarding the size and the impact of the sex tourism industry.[4]

The term 'sex tourism' brings together the already related terms 'sex' and 'tourism.' Several attempts to define sex tourism are vague, broad, and incomplete, however. Simon Carter and Stephen Clift argue that the "normal working definition," which is "taken as travel for which the main motivation is to engage in commercial sexual relations" is oversimplified.[5] Expanding

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[2] Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall, *Sex Tourism,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), xi.
[3] Bob McKercher and Thomas G. Bauer, "Conceptual Framework of the Nexus Between Tourism, Romance, and Sex," in *Sex and Tourism*, ed. Bob McKercher and Thomas G. Bauer (Binghamton: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2003), 3.
[4] Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, xi.
[5] Simon Clift and Stephen Carter, "Tourism, International Travel and Sex: Themes and Research," in *Tourism and Sex*, ed. Stephen Carter and Simon Clift (London: Pinter, 2000), 6.

the definition of sex tourism implies that the term is not restricted to just the 'ideal' sex tourist who "purposely takes a holiday to have sex, stays away from home for at least 24 hours, meets the sex provider for the first time, has sexual intercourse as a result of direct monetary exchange, and obtains sexual gratification in encounters which last a relatively short time."[6] But, describing sex tourism simply as "sexual intercourse while away from home" can allow "a discussion of different paradigms."[7] The problematic status of the meaning of sex tourism reveals the need to address several issues when defining the term.

Martin Oppermann suggests the consideration of several parameters when examining sex tourism, including: intention and opportunity, monetary exchange, length of time, prostitute-tourist relationship, sexual encounter, and who travels.[8] For each of these parameters, Oppermann argues that an individual case of sex tourism can fall along several continua. For example, some sex tourists travel with the primary goal of seeking out sex, while others do not intend to have sex at all during a trip. Many tourists will travel with some intentions to seek sexual encounters, but sex will not be their primary purpose for travel. Such tourists fall on a continuum of the intention to have sex parameter, somewhere in between the extremes. A sexual tourist may spend less than an hour engaging in sexual activities, while another will spend years pursuing a sexual relationship abroad. The sexual tourist may seek a long-term relationship or just a one-time encounter from a sex provider. Again, many tourists will fall somewhere in between the extremes. Because tourists can fall differently along these continua, it is clear that there are several possible variations of sex tourists.

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[6] Ibid., 261.
[7] Chris Ryan, "Sex Tourism: Paradigms of Confusion?" in *Sex and Tourism*, ed. Bob McKercher and Thomas G. Bauer (Binghamton: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2003), 36.
[8] Martin Oppermann, "Sex Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, no. 2 (1999): 255.

Of course these are more than just a few variables that may differ in each individual case of sex tourism. It is also important to acknowledge that some sexual tourism involves sexual acts that aren't heterosexual, although much scholarship is devoted to strictly to sex tourism that is heterosexual. Some scholarship has been devoted to gay and lesbian sex tourists. Sex tourism is not limited to commercial situations, but instead can include payments in forms other than money, or even no payment at all. Tourism can also be considered sex tourism, despite the fact that vaginal intercourse has not occurred. A sex tourist may engage in a variety of sexual behaviors, or even no physical sexual behavior at all. In many cases, those who participate in sex tourism would not even consider themselves sex tourists.

Travel destination is another variable that is considered in sex tourism scholarship. Oppermann suggests that sex tourism is widespread, existing in: "Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia Africa, Australia, or Oceania."[9] Sex tourism is often associated with red light districts, such as the one found in Amsterdam, Netherlands, where women put their bodies on display with hopes that a passerby will pay them for sexual services.[10] In Amsterdam, prostitution is regulated and the state attempts to control the sex industry.[11] In other places, like the Philippines and Brazil, legislation has been enacted to combat the problem of child sex tourism. In places like these, children are trafficked and prostituted illegally.[12] These are just a few examples of the multitude of scholarship on sex tourism destinations and the types of sex tourism that occurs at them.

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[9] Oppermann, "Sex Tourism," 251.
[10] Nancy A. Wonders and Raymond Michalowski, "Bodies, Borders, and Sex Tourism in a Globalized World: A Tale of Two Cities- Amsterdam and Havana," *Social Problems* 48, no. 4 (2001): 553.
[11] Ibid., 558.
[12] Jayne Hoose, Stephen Clift, and Simon Carter, "Combating Tourist Sexual Exploitation of Children," in *Tourism and Sex*, ed. Stephen Carter and Simon Clift (London: Pinter, 2000), 79.

Recent scholarship focuses on sex tourism in the Caribbean region. In developing regions like the Caribbean, the introduction of new forms of commodities is necessary for countries to compete in the global capitalist economy. The emphasis placed on the expansion of consumption has resulted in the commodification of desire in the forms of love and sex. These two forms serve as niches for sex workers in the Caribbean as they compete in the global world. The differences of race, gender, class, and nationalities between sex tourists and Caribbean sex workers are advertised to draw tourists into the region.[13] Sex tourists from developed nations travel to the Caribbean expecting not only sex, but also exotic and erotic sexual experiences. In order to successfully participate in the sex tourism industry, sex workers must tailor their services to meet the expectations of sex tourists.

By adapting their services to the demands of their customers, sex workers underscore the need to expand the definition of sex tourism. Local women in Havana, Cuba "make themselves available as sex partners and companions to privileged men from North America and Europe."[14] The men who travel to Havana look for an emotional and sensual experience, expecting sex workers to treat them as "pseudo-boyfriends."[15] A sex tourist can pay money for sex in Cuba, but the sex tourist may also compensate the sex worker in other ways, such as paying for meals, housing, or other gifts.[16] In the Dominican Republic's city Sosúa, sex workers hope to build transnational ties with clients in order to ensure financial security for themselves and their families; others hope to build long-term relationships or even aspire to marry clients.[17] Instead

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[13] Ibid., 16.
[14] Wonders and Michalowski, "Bodies, Borders, and Sex Tourism in a Globalized World: A Tale of Two Cities- Amsterdam and Havana," 559.
[15] Ibid., 563.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Denise Brennan, *What's Love Got To Do With It?* (United States: Duke University Press, 2004), 161-162.

of one-time monetary transactions in exchange for sex, sex tourism in the Caribbean often entails much more as a result of globalization.

Global forces are evident in the Caribbean as they are throughout the world. Globalization has caused changes in a broad global sense, but it has also affected several cities in local ways. Two processes that are associated with globalization are the movements of people across national borders in the forms of migration and tourism. These two forces create conditions that facilitate the growth of sex tourism.[18] Transnational spaces in the developing Caribbean region are referred to as "sexscapes" by Denise Brennan to link sex work to global forces.[19] Brennan uses the term sexscape to refer to a "kind of global sexual landscape and the sites within it," building off of Arjun Appadurai's terms (*ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, finanscape, and ideoscape*), which he coins to describe global cultural flows.[20] The variations of sex tourism that occur in different sexscapes are evidence that a single definition of sex tourism is inadequate. Instead of limiting the definition of sex tourism to a narrowly defined sex encounter, it is necessary to consider the many variables that factor into a sex tourism experience.

Defining 'Spring Break'

The growth of tourism in a globalized world is apparent in many different demographics today. Tourism was limited mostly to families, tour groups, and business people because of the once-high costs of travel. "This changed considerably in the U.S. in the late '50's and the '60's

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[18] Wonders and Michalowski, "Bodies, Borders, and Sex Tourism in a Globalized World: A Tale of Two Cities- Amsterdam and Havana," 545.
[19] Brennan, *What's Love Got To Do With It?,* 16.
[20] Ibid., 15.

when discretionary buying power shifted to college students."[21] As the availability of airline travel increased to the public, it became possible to fly to most major cities in a short amount of time for a price many people could afford. With the ability to afford travel and the freedom from obligations such as full-time employment, college students become a part of the tourist market. When they are not traveling with family, college students often travel in groups with their peers. A common time for students to travel is during spring break.

The words 'spring break' can evoke thoughts that engross more than just an interruption of the academic calendar during the spring semester at many North American colleges and universities. Spring break has its origins in Fort Lauderdale, FL in 1938, when the Colgate University swim team traveled there to practice in a newly built pool.[22] Over time, thousands of students made the southward-bound trip, which later came to be considered a bacchanalian event.[23] Today, over two million college students take a spring break trip each year, allowing it to be considered a "North American institution."[24] Many college students think of spring break as an opportunity to travel with friends and 'let loose.' These students become tourists enmeshed in a socially constructed spring break culture. But what does a spring break trip actually entail?

For many college students, spring break is a social event.[25] Students travel to enjoy time with people they already know. They often travel in groups with friends, perhaps even meeting up with other groups of students they already know. The students break from routine and daily

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[21] Jerry Gerlach, "Spring Break at Padre Island: A New Kind of Tourism," *Focus on Geography* 39, no. 1 (1989): 14.
[22] Bill Marsh, "The Innocent Birth of the Spring Bacchanal," *New York Times*, March 19, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/19/weekinreview/19marsh.html.
[23] Gerlach, "Spring Break at Padre Island: A New Kind of Tourism," 14.
[24] Sonmez et al., "Binge Drinking and Casual Sex on Spring Break," 896.
[25] Patrick et al., "'I Got Your Back:' Friends' Understandings Regarding College Student Spring Break Behavior," 109.

life to spend leisurely time with their classmates and peers. Many students, however, also hope to meet new people during their trip. They often seek out members of the opposite sex or try to become friends with the people they meet. Students can try to keep in touch with the new friends they make. Conversely, students may meet new people knowing that they may never see them again.

For some students, the physical movement to a spring break destination can also mark an opportunity to leave behind everyday lifestyles. A spring break setting can encourage "situational disinhibition,"[26] providing a type of liminality for students for a week or two every spring. Spring break, like many types of vacations, presents travelers with the opportunity to temporarily distance themselves from their everyday lives. As a result, students' engagements in risky behaviors on spring break may be different from or more exaggerated than what is typical for them. Two behaviors that have been studied are alcohol use and engagement in sexual activities. These two behaviors are important to scholars because they pose potential threats to students' health.

For decades, college spring break in America has been associated with alcohol consumption. The connection between spring break and drinking is not only still present but also growing. Travel companies that specialize in spring break vacations offer trip packages that are all-inclusive, meaning customers pay a one-time fee for an unlimited amount of food and drinks. These packages allow students to drink as much as they please at affordable prices. Alcohol companies sponsor events like free concerts at spring break locations. Hotels and various companies host drinking games and competitions that encourage students to drink large amounts

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[26] Sonmez et al., "Binge Drinking and Casual Sex on Spring Break," 896.

of alcohol at fast rates. *TIME* magazine goes as far as to deem the "debauchery" that happens during spring break a "bacchanal."[27]

Students are motivated to go on spring break because the setting provides an opportunity for them to drink.[28] As they travel, students intend to drink and get drunk during their trip. Binge drinking[29] is prevalent at beaches, bars, and various other spring break locations.[30] Some spring break travelers drink until they pass out; others drink without the intention of getting drunk.[31] Students drink with friends, and some even make pacts with friends to get drunk during their trip.[32] While there are some slight gender differences, both males and females drink during spring break vacations.

Spring break is not only associated with alcohol use, but also with sexual behaviors. The infamous Girls Gone Wild videos, which capture women willing to expose their naked bodies to a camera crew, originated from TV news assignments that documented nudity during spring break.[33] Although not everyone is willing to be naked during spring break, wearing minimal clothing is common for students. Warm weather and beaches allow students to walk around in bathing suits; females are often seen in string bikinis, and males are often topless. But exposed bodies alone do not result in sexual behaviors at spring break locations. Travel organizations and

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[27] Lauren Bohn, "A Brief History of Spring Break," *TIME,* April 1, 2009, http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1888317,00.html.
[28] Sonmez et al., "Binge Drinking and Casual Sex on Spring Break," 904.
[29] This is taken to mean "consumption 5 or more drinks in a row, regardless of whether the drinker is a man or a woman." From: Smeaton et al., "College Students' Binge Drinking At Beach-front Destination During Spring Break," 247.
[30] Ibid., 252.
[31] Sonmez et al., "Binge Drinking and Casual Sex on Spring Break," 905.
[32] Megan E. Patrick et al., "I Got Your Back": Friends' Understandings Regarding College Student Spring Break Behavior," 113.
[33] Karen C. Pitcher, "The Staging of Agency in *Girls Gone Wild*," Critical Studies in Media Communication 23, no. 3 (2006): 200-201.

clubs host parties and concerts that encourage students to dance on stage and participate in contests that are sexually suggestive. Students openly express their sexuality by kissing strangers in public. The spring break atmosphere itself facilitates sexual behaviors.

Free from restrictions found at home, students engage in sexual behaviors that may be out of the ordinary for them. Both males and females report having sex while they are away on spring break. A significant number of these students have casual sex[34] with someone they meet during spring break. Some of the students who are in relationships have sex with someone other than their relationship partners. Another observation is that students who have sex during spring don't always use condoms.[35] It is evident that the spring break setting is full of students willing to engage in a variety of sexual behaviors. But for the most part, "sexual activities on spring break are scripted as casual and lacking long-term commitments of consequences."[36] As students travel to destinations with such attitudes, they promote the opportunities for casual sex on spring break. A student who engages in sexual behaviors on spring break may not act (or may not have the opportunity to act) the same way at home.

While some students report having sex only with other students and spring break goers, there are some reports of students who have sex with the local natives of the spring break destination.[37] Students who pay sex workers and prostitutes at spring break locations can be

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[34] The term 'casual sex' used in reference to spring break is taken to mean sex that is "initiated rapidly, often within hours of meeting, and as temporary, not lasting beyond the spring break period." From: Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, and Mewhinney, "Casual Sex on Spring Break: Intentions and Behaviors of Canadian Students," 254.
[35] Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale and Edward S. Herold, "Condom Use on Spring-Break Vacation: The Influence of Intentions, Prior Use, and Context," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 29, no. 5 (1999): 1010-1027.
[36] Ibid., 1012.
[37] Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, and Mewhinney, "Casual Sex on Spring Break: Intentions and Behaviors of Canadian Students," 260.

considered sex tourists, especially if their intentions for traveling involve sex. However, students who engage in sexual behaviors with other students they meet on spring break or with even other students they already know are also participating in sex tourism. Students physically travel to spring break destinations with expectations participate in behaviors that are out of the ordinary for them. For many students, high levels of alcohol use along with lowered inhibitions associated with a vacation experience often result in sexual engagements. As a result of these atypical behaviors, college spring break can be considered a type of sex tourism.

From the Beach to the Television: MTV's Spring Break

Spring break is a cultural practice understood not only by college students, but also by the broader North American society. But where how does an entire society gain a common understanding of an event that involves mostly college students? Mass media often provide coverage of the yearly event, offering a chance for followers to get an idea of what occurs at spring break destinations from their own homes. One television network known for its spring break broadcasting is MTV.

> Nothing says MTV Spring Break better than great weather, sexy pool parties and kick-ass musical performances by some of the hottest emerging and established artists. This spring, what happens in Vegas is on MTV with Spring Break 2011 airing on MTV, MTV2 and mtvU. Don't miss the live performances and the non-stop partying airing the week of March 28th.[38]

This excerpt, taken from *About Spring Break 2011* on MTV's website, claims that the network lets its visitors know what spring break is all about. MTV offered the public a chance to

[38] MTV Viacom International Inc., "About Spring Break 2011," *Spring Break,* http://www.mtv.com/shows/spring_break/2011/series.jhtml

watch all of the sexy pool parties and non-stop partying on television, assuring them that the saying "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" did not apply to 2011's spring break. Instead, camera crews were set up all around the Palms Casino Resort to capture every moment of weeklong party. Students participate in the partying and willingly broadcast themselves on camera. They arrive at spring break with an attitude that what happens during their trip can be out of the ordinary for them because they are in a destination where only a few people may know them. However, MTV captures students' behaviors and makes them available to the public.

As MTV broadcasts its coverage of spring break each year, it provides its viewers with hand-selected video clips of the event. The selection of video clips that the network chooses to air shapes the public's perceptions of what the typical college spring break entails. MTV further molds cultural beliefs about spring break by hosting contests and parties that facilitate the association of spring break with alcohol consumption and sexual behaviors. Although the televised production covers a selected part of only one of a multitude of spring break destinations each year, MTV becomes a source that projects limited coverage of one event onto the generalized cultural beliefs about the larger spring break experience.

Whether it is airing live performances from popular musicians, exclusive spring break contests, or regular programming, MTV often features similar settings for its shows during the weeks that the network covers spring break each year. The coverage of Jim Jones' performance in 2009 at Panama City Beach serves as examples of the common images found on the network. MTV placed the stage next to the water so both the sand and the ocean were in several shots. The male performers were shown without shirts. The huge audience consisted mostly of young adults in bathing suits. Views of the entire crowd showed mostly skin with speckles of color where bathing suits and clothing were worn. Close-up shots of the audience featured females

with string bikinis, eagerly singing the words to the song and dancing along to the music. Males and females were shown holding red cups, a sign of alcohol consumption. The song the performers sang, "Pop Champagne," was also associated with alcohol consumption.[39] The scantily clad performers and audience, as well as the suggestion of alcohol consumption promote the association between spring break and a party atmosphere to viewers.

MTV also hosts a number of contests and games specially created for spring break. A video clip from 1993 shows a swimsuit competition. The contestants looked like erotic dancers as they strutted down a runway and removed clothing to the beat of music. Contestants were dressed in themed clothing, including a police officer uniform, a cowboy costume, and a construction worker costume. A large crowd cheered the audience on as the contestants stripped to reveal skimpy bikinis that barely covered enough to be shown on television.[40] As both men and women put their bodies on display for a live audience, viewers watched at home.

In 2010, MTV held a competition that lasted for the duration of spring break called the "Spring Break Challenge." Episode 4, "Balls of Glory," teams of spring breakers competed against one another to get their "balls in" a hole.[41] The title of the game and the physical actions involved were sexual innuendos. This particular episode opened with the popular artists LMFAO. One member of the group was shown in bed next to an unattractive naked partner. The camera focused on an empty bottle to imply that he had been drinking the night before. As a

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[39] MTV Viacom International Inc., "Jim Jones – 'Pop Champagne'" *Spring Break '09: Live From Panama City Beach,* http://www.mtv.com/videos/misc/357679/pop-champagne-live.jhtml#id=1607542

[40] YouTube, *MTV Spring Break Bikini Contest 93*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBo8XbFYsi0&feature=related

[41] MTV Viacom International Inc., "Episode 4: Balls of Glory," *Spring Break 2010*, http://www.mtv.com/videos/spring-break-challenge-ep-4-balls-of-glory/1634686/playlist.jhtml#series=2211&seriesId=623&channelId=1

result of his regrettable one-night-stand, the group member gnawed his arm off. After running down the hall with his pants down, he met his friends and told him "you know what happens when you've got those beer goggles."[42] This satirical opening was included to be comical, but it suggested that incidences of binge drinking and casual sex do occur during spring break.

As the episode continued, viewers were exposed to the challenges created by the network for spring break. In one challenge, participants competed in a popular drinking game 'flip-cup.' This challenge presented viewers with the association between spring break and drinking. During the main challenge the commentators wear bathing suits and vests. They make several comical comments to relate the game to sex. The competitors embrace the sexual references: at one point one female competitor mounts another and "humps" her.[43] After a commercial break, LMFAO returns to show viewers what they jokingly painted on passed out students. One male had a penis drawn on his chest, while a female was completely naked.[44] By the episode's conclusion, the viewers had been exposed to MTV's account of spring break shown through a competition they created. The forty-eight minute episode was filled with sexually suggestive comments and actions. It also featured instances of suggested alcohol consumption.

MTV entertains its viewers with portrayals of the spring break atmosphere. Some of the show is staged, such as the clips of LMFAO. A lot of the show, however, is actual coverage of a college spring break destination. MTV chooses a single destination each year to represent on television. MTV also hosts concerts and contests for spring break travelers. As it covers spring break, MTV shows sexual and drinking behaviors of college students. It's viewers form ideas of what spring break is like based on what they see on television. As a result, even people who

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[42] Ibid., about 3 minutes
[43] Ibid., about 11 minutes
[44] Ibid., about 22 minutes

have never taken a spring break trip themselves are able to form beliefs about what spring break might be like. Through the television medium an entire society can experience spring break.

Current and Former College Students' Spring Break Experiences

In October 2011, I conducted an online survey in order to better understand college students' actual spring break experiences.[45] To recruit participants, I used the online social networking website Facebook to post a link to my survey. After clicking the link on Facebook, students were redirected to the online survey. Research participants were anonymously asked several questions pertaining to spring break and their own spring break experiences. Although participants were not required to answer every question, ninety graduates and current students from thirty-three different institutions participated in the survey. 80% of participants were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, while the remaining 20% were age twenty-three or older. 76% of participants were currently enrolled in a college or university as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors.

To participate in the survey, participants were required to be eighteen years of age or older. Participants were assured that the survey was anonymous. They were not required to answer every question and they were allowed to terminate the survey at any time. The survey consisted of twenty questions total. The first five questions asked about biological sex, age, class standing, school, and sexual orientation. The next question asked if the participants had ever seen *MTV's Spring Break.* If the participants answered 'yes,' they were asked to check off each of what they had seen on the show from a list of nine behaviors. All participants were then asked if they had ever traveled to a destination other than home during spring break. If the participants

[45] For survey questions and results, please see Appendix.

answered 'yes,' they were redirected to a page that asked several questions about their most recent spring break trip. They were asked open-ended, multiple choice, and yes or no questions. All participants were also asked to rate how likely they thought eight behaviors were to occur during a spring break trip according to a five-point scale. They were also asked a series of yes or no questions pertaining to alcohol use and sex. Questions were designed to apply to both students who had gone on a spring break trip before as well as those who had not.

For students who have never been on spring break before, motivations to go on a spring break trip and expectations of what will happen once the students get to their destinations must originate from sources other than previous experiences. Students can develop an understanding of what happens during spring break from a variety of sources, such as stories from friends or the media. Media, such as MTV *Spring Break*, broadcast spring break coverage. 73% of research participants report that they have seen MTV's *Spring Break*. When asked to report what they have seen on the show, 97% of respondents said they've seen both males and females drinking, which can be evidence of the association between spring break and alcohol consumption. 95% have seen contests that were sexual in nature. Students also reported actually having seen "hook-ups" on television. 94% said they've seen heterosexual hook-ups, while only 38% report having seen homosexual hook-ups. But 92% of participants report having seen females kissing other females, while only 15% report having seen males kissing other males. The survey provided no definition for the word "hook-up," but there was a large discrepancy between the amount of participants who said they have seen homosexual hook-ups (30%) and those who said they have seen females kissing other females (92%).

The word hook-up was purposely used in the survey. The term's definition may seem ambiguous, but Justin R. Garcia and Chris Reiber define it:

> "A "hook-up" is a spontaneous sexual interaction in which: 1) the individuals are explicitly not in a traditional romantic relationship with each other (i.e., not dating, not boyfriend/girlfriend), 2) there are no a priori agreements regarding what behaviors will occur, and 3) there is explicitly no promise of any subsequent intimate relations or relationships. The hook-up can comprise various sexual behaviors, and may include any or all of the following: heavy kissing and/or petting, oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, and/or intercourse."[46]

While the term 'sex' may be thought of as limited to vaginal intercourse, the term hook-up encompasses the wide variety of sexual activities that may transpire between students during spring break. A student who has engaged in oral sex, for example, may consider the behavior to be a 'hook-up,' but not 'sex.' By asking the participants about their hook-up experiences, it was possible to capture responses about incidents of sexual encounters that may not have been admitted to with the use of the word 'sex.'

The term 'hook-up' also captures the belief that it is no coincidence that both alcohol consumption and sexual behaviors are associated with college spring break. On many college campuses, hooking-up has become a normative experience.[47] Alcohol consumption often facilitates the hooking up process for students. "Alcohol consumption is known to have a direct link with willingness to engage in actualized casual sex, among both men and women."[48] The survey results that show that participants were motivated to take a spring break trip by the

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[46] Justin R. Garcia and Chris Reiber, "Hook-up Behavior: A Biopsychosocial Perspective," *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 193.
[47] Tracy A. Lambert, Arnold S. Kahn, and Kevin J. Apple, "Pluralistic Ignorance and Hooking Up," *The Journal of Sex Research* 40, no. 2 (2003): 129.
[48] Garcia and Reiber, "Hook-up Behavior: A Biopsychosocial Perspective," 193.

opportunity to consume alcohol can be linked to the participants who reported that they had the opportunity to hook-up with someone during their visit. Respondents also said that they expect to find both alcohol use and sexual behaviors at spring break destinations. Finally, the participants report that both alcohol consumption and hooking-up actually did occur during spring break.

Of the eighty-five participants that answered the question, fifty-eight (68%) reported that they have traveled to a destination other than their home for spring break. Five of these respondents visited Mexico; eleven went to the Caribbean; and fifteen traveled to Florida for their spring break vacation. The places that most students visited for spring break were places known for their beaches and warm weather. Many of these places offer a wide variety of deals on hotels, food, and drinks, making them popular destinations for students. 72% of participants reported traveling with friends during their trip. Students can share hotel rooms with their friends to lower the costs of their spring break trip. 50% of survey respondents stayed in a hotel. These students can also travel with friends who share motivations for traveling on spring break. 47% of participants reported one of the reasons why they took the trip was because their friends were going as well, while only 14% said a reason to go was to visit family. 48% also reported partying as a motivation and 33% answered that one reason they took the trip was "to drink."

Participants were asked to rate how likely they thought several things were to occur during a spring break trip based on a five-point scale, ranging from very likely to very unlikely. 98% of participants believed drinking was very likely to occur at spring break destinations. 69% believed underage drinking was very likely to occur and 24% believed that underage drinking was likely to occur during a spring break trip. 81% of participants believed that binge drinking was very likely to occur and a remaining 13% said that binge drinking was likely to occur during

a spring break trip. This data reflects the expectations of drinking, underage drinking, and binge drinking during a spring break trip. When asked if "you or anyone you know ever drank when underage during spring break," 98% of participants answered 'yes.' 66% of participants answered that they, or someone they know, has drank until the point of passing out during spring break. Students report participating in or observing behaviors that suggest alcohol consumption during spring break.

Students also report expectations of sexual behaviors. Based on the same five-point scale, 76% of respondents believed heterosexual hook-ups were very likely to occur and a remaining 14% believed they were likely to occur during a spring break trip. Only 22% of respondents thought that homosexual hook-ups were very likely to occur and 20% thought they were likely to occur. Just as participants did not recall seeing homosexual hook-ups on MTV's television portrayal if spring break, they also did not believe that homosexual hook-ups were as likely to occur as heterosexual ones. 40% of participants did think that sex with someone a person meets during a spring break trip was very likely and 27% said it was likely. Furthermore, 24% and 27% of participants believed that unprotected sex during spring break was very likely and likely, respectively. Participants demonstrated that risky sexual behaviors (engaging in casual or unprotected sex) are expected to occur at spring break destinations. 65% of participants reported that they or someone they know had sex during spring break and 35% said that they or someone they know had unprotected sex. These results suggest that students are actually having sex while away and some are of these students are engaging in risky sexual behaviors by having sex without the use of a condom. While only 27% of participants that traveled during spring break reported that they intended to hook-up with someone during their trip, 35% said they hooked-up with someone. 67% of participants, however, reported that they

had the opportunity to hook-up with someone, even if they actually didn't. The survey results imply that students are intending to hook-up with other people, are hooking-up with other people, and have the opportunity to hook-up with people during a spring break trip.

Linking Sex Tourism to Spring Break

My survey did not specifically ask participants if they would consider themselves sex tourists, but it is likely that few would have answered 'yes.' When the survey asked students to provide the reasons they made a spring break trip, only 10% answered 'to hook up with someone.' Students were not asked their main motivations for taking the trip, but instead were asked to choose all of the reasons that applied to them. Few students answered that hooking-up with people was even one among several motivations for taking the trip. 27% of students who traveled during spring break, however, answered that they did intend to hook-up with people during their vacation. Martin Oppermann's first sex tourism parameter combines travel purpose with intentions to have sex with 'strangers.'[49] Based on data collected from my survey, it is necessary to separate motivations or purpose from intentions. Few students named potential sexual encounters as motivations to take their trip, but a significant amount intended to have some sexual experiences while away.

With the exception of those who seek out local prostitutes, students usually do not pay for sexual experiences during spring break. Also, unless students seek out prostitutes or have sexual encounters with people living at their spring break destination, all of the people involved in a sexual encounter during spring break travel. There is usually not a 'sex seeker' and a 'sex

[49] Oppermann, "Sex Tourism," 255.

provider,' as Oppermann describes.[50] Instead, both (or all) of the people involved in the sexual encounter usually travel to the spring break destination and students often mutually agree to engage in sexual behaviors. Sexual encounters at spring break locations tend to fall on one side of Oppermann's 'length of time spent together' parameter.[51] Spring break travelers tend to engage in casual sexual relationships that last for only the duration of their vacation.

Martin Oppermann does not include a parameter for the opportunity to have sex during travel in his article "Sex Tourism," but in the case of spring break it is helpful to consider a continua for a spring break traveler's opportunities. 67% of participants who took a spring break trip answered 'yes' when asked if they had an opportunity to hook-up with someone during their spring break trip. Others may not have had the opportunity to hook-up with someone else. The parameter for a sex tourist's sexual encounter is directly applicable to spring breakers. At one end of Oppermann's parameter is 'voyeurism,' and at the other is 'intercourse.'[52] Students may go to spring break destinations to see their peers in swimsuits kissing other people in public, participating in bikini contests, or dancing on stage. They also may seek out sexual partners. In my survey, 35% of respondents that took a spring break trip reported that they had hooked-up with someone during their vacation. The ambiguous term 'hook-up' can mean a number of sexually related behaviors, as already discussed. From my survey, it is clear that students fall along a continua of sexual experiences during a spring break trip. It is possible, though not essential to consider other parameters of sex tourism for spring break travelers. Each individual student may fall differently along each of the mentioned continua and they fit into the proposed parameters. Expanding the definition of sex tourism and recognizing that each individual case of

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

sex tourism will fall along several continua, it can be argued that what really happens during college spring break can often be considered sex tourism.

Appendix: My Survey Questions & Results

Question 1: What is your sex?

Male	26	29%
Female	64	71%
Total	90	

Question 2: What is your age?

18	6	7%
19	3	3%
20	17	19%
21	39	43%
22	7	8%
23+	18	20%
Total	90	

Question 3: What is your undergraduate status?

Freshman	5	6%
Sophomore	6	7%
Junior	15	17%
Senior	42	47%
Graduate	15	17%
Other	7	8%
Total	90	

Question 4: Where did you/do you go to undergraduate school?

*Respondents answered 33 different colleges and universities.

Question 5: What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual	86	98%
Homosexual	1	1%
Bisexual	1	1%
Other	0	0
Total	88	

Question 6: Have you ever seen MTV's *Spring Break*?

Yes	66	73%
No	24	27%
Total	90	

Question 7: What are the things you've seen on MTV's Spring Break? (Check all that apply)

Males drinking	63	92%
Females drinking	63	92%
Underage drinking	37	54%
Drug use	14	21%
Contests that are sexual in nature	62	91%
Homosexual sexually suggestive behavior	25	37%
Heterosexual sexually suggestive behavior	61	90%
Females kissing other females	60	88%
Males kissing other males	10	15%

Question 8: Have you ever traveled to a destination other than your home for spring break?

Yes	58	68%
No	27	32%
Total	85	

Question 9: How likely do you think the following things are to occur during a college spring break trip?

	Very likely	Likely	Moderate	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Total
Drinking	78 92%	4 5%	2 2%	0 0%	1 1%	85
Drug Use	21 25%	25 30%	26 31%	5 6%	7 8%	84
Underage drinking	59 69%	20 24%	4 5%	0 0%	2 2%	85
Binge drinking	69 81%	11 13%	2 2%	2 2%	1 1%	85
Heterosexual hook-ups	65 76%	12 14%	5 6%	2 2%	1 1%	85
Homosexual hook-ups	19 22%	17 20%	25 29%	13 15%	11 13%	85
Sex with someone met during a spring break trip	34 40%	23 27%	20 24%	3 4%	5 6%	85
Unprotected sex	20 24%	23 27%	27 32%	8 9%	7 8%	85

Question 10: Have you or anyone you know ever drank when underage during spring break?

Yes	83	98%
No	2	2%
Total	85	

Question 11: Have you or anyone you know ever drank until the point he or she passed out during spring break?

Yes	56	66%
No	29	29%
Total	85	

Question 12: Have you or anyone you know ever had sex with someone he or she met during a spring break trip?

Yes	55	65%
No	30	35%
Total	85	

Question 13: Have you or anyone you know ever had unprotected sex while on a spring break trip?

Yes	30	35%
No	55	65%
Total		

* Participants were told to answer the following questions about their most recent spring break trip:

Question 14: Where did you travel for spring break?

* Participants answered the open-ended question with various answers

Question 15: Whom did you travel with? (Check all that apply)

Friends	44	72%
Family	12	20%
Alone	2	3%
Other	3	5%

Question 16: Where did you stay?

With family	7	13%
Friend's house	12	21%
Hotel	28	50%
Other	9	16%

Question 17: Why did you go? (Check all that apply)

To get away	41	71%
To party	28	48%
To drink	19	33%
To hook-up with people	6	10%
To see family	8	14%
Because friends were going	27	47%
Other	9	19%

Question 18: Did you hook-up with anyone during your spring break trip?

Yes	18	35%
No	33	65%
Total	51	

Question 19: Did you intend to hook-up with anyone during your spring break trip?

Yes	14	27%
No	37	73%
Total	51	

Question 20: Did you have an opportunity to hook-up with someone during your spring break trip? (Even if you didn't actually hook-up?)

Yes	34	67%
No	17	33%
Total	51	

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