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A professor of Philosophy and Public Policy, Archard focuses on sexual consent from an ethical and legal standpoint. His book explores the theory of sexual consent and its applications to various consent-related questions in a straightforward, example-driven manner. Starting with the Principle of Consensuality and Nonconsensuality, the author discusses everything from who can give consent to the need for verbal consent at various stages of relationships. This book is instrumental in better understanding ethical consent, and how it applies not only to sex, but situations of all kinds.


A Sociology lecturer at the University of Otago, Beres examines how heterosexual causal sex partners communicate and understand consent and how their experiences relate to “miscommunication” theory, which postulates that sexual assaults occur because of miscommunication between partners. Beres demonstrates that research arguing that men consistently overestimate women’s sexual interest is highly limited by lack of real life context in the surveys or role-plays and that despite popular belief, token resistance is not a commonly used feature of heterosexual sex. Through open-ended interviews, the author identifies that men and women use a complex combination of tactical knowledge and understanding of “refusal” or “active participation” behaviors to gauge partner’s willingness to engage in sex. She found that men and women are both highly literate in these social behaviors, which demonstrates that even with unfamiliar partners, “miscommunication” is not a probable cause for acquaintance rape.


Using a feminist perspective, this multi-disciplinary literature review reviews currently used definitions of sexual consent and the repercussions of each definition. Beres divides current definitions into “spontaneous” consent, the assumption of a shared meaning or a lack of clarification about a used definition, consent as agreement, and consent as a moral transformation of sex from “bad” to “good”. The author then examines a “communitive sexuality” model, which assumes that communication between willing partners takes place naturally, before
briefly reviewing what little we know about consenting behaviors and attitudes look like. Overall, the research specifically dealing with sexual consent and communication on sex is determined to be sorely lacking, and Beres argues that researchers must turn from research that only looks at sexual violence to conducting qualitative research on how people communicate and understand willingness and consent in healthy sexual relationships of varying contexts. Case studies and research demonstrated in this literature review comes from legal theorists, psychologists, and sociologists and the author is fair to point out heteronormative and its impact on questions of consent.

Brod, Henry. “Asking For It: Ethics and Erotics of Sexual Consent” (lecture, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, 2010). DVD. Published by Media Education Foundation.

In this recorded lecture, Brod, a philosopher, talks about the “affirmative consent standard” and the dangers of assumption. He repeatedly states that he advocates that explicit verbal consent is needed in unexperienced relationships, like hook-ups, because, as a culture, we have chosen this standard of safety for other dangerous behaviors, and because he believe body language is too unreliable. He uses several analogies to show that those who initiate sexual activity are responsible for obtaining consent and to demonstrate the huge risk of engaging in sexual activity while drunk or high. However, he does not approach this from only the victim’s perspective, but from potential perpetrator’s. Finally, he highlights the need for bystander intervention and addresses the idea that when practicing affirmative consent absolutely, eroticism may increase because people have confidence of safety and respect. While fairly short, this was a good audial tool for understanding ethical sexual consent and Brod’s lecture has been used on consent campaign websites visited during the course of research.


This powerful article shows that despite the prevalence of post-feminist rhetoric on female empowerment and individual right of choice, many women still are not able to freely say “no” to sex because of gender imbalance and social norms. Conducted in Australia, qualitative interviews with women in causal sexual relationships and intimate relationships show a distinctive gap between a claim to sexual agency and the reality that many are pressured or coerced into undesired sex. Most of the women interviewed emphasized their “choice” to participate in sex out of obligation to their partner or because they felt they couldn’t stop once they engaged in flirtatious or sexy behavior. The authors also note a huge difference between the women’s emphasis on a verbal, explicit no and the nonverbal, indirect consent they actually practiced. This article was extremely informative and helped explain the current, gendered, and power-based realities of sex and consent for women.


Psychologist at University of New Brunswick, Byers reviews several co-authored research studies to examine how well the framework of Traditional Sexual Scripts explains sexual interactions between heterosexual partners. She explicitly describes various components of the script before examining several tenets related to instigation, sexual coercion, and gender roles. She concludes that the traditional scripts of men as active instigators and women as more passive gatekeepers does not represent the “normal” dating/ sexual script for many couples, rather that pieces of it are adhered to depending on relationship status and an individual’s beliefs. For example, women are often instigators of sexual activity within steady, long term relationships. This summary is useful in characterizing that while many tend to hold to certain aspects of traditional sexual scripts, women’s refusals are usually accepted and men typically do not rely on physical violence, disproving many commonly held sexual myths.

This extensive report collected data from 27 AAU member universities to examine rates of sexual harassment, sexual assault, attempted rape and completed rape along with information on overall campus climate. This included asking students about their perceived risk on campus, their knowledge of resources available, and their thoughts on how an incident of sexual assault or misconduct would be received and handled by their schools. The goal of the report was to provide information to assist in the creation of prevention and response policies. The report found that 23% of female undergraduates reported sexual assault due to threats, force, or incapacitation. They also found that rates of sexual assault among LGBTQ+ students were comparable to women. Finally, found that only about ¼ of serious instances were reported to the school or law enforcement for a variety of reasons, including the belief that nothing would be done or the incident was not “serious” enough.


From the viewpoint of HIV research and safer sex promotion and informed by scripts theory, the authors examine the differences between actual and desired initiation patterns of 32 young men at a community college to demonstrate possible change to traditional gender and sexual scripts. About half of participants reported a male-dominated initiation pattern and of those, most desired a more female-dominated sexual initiation pattern. Driving factors were the desire to be seen as an object and the goal of sharing labor. Actual and desired egalitarian and female-dominated initiation patterns were driven largely by fear of rejection and pressure caused performance issues, rather than a change in the perceived sexual nature of women. The authors determined that changing intrapsychic scripts are merging with new cultural scripts and norms to produce both actual and desired actions that are not confined to currently held conventions of masculinity and femininity.


In this chapter, Edwards analyzes the gendered crime of rape and the difficulties of prosecuting such crimes in the dichotomous world of the criminal justice system. By providing several cases as evidence, the author demonstrates that women’s actions and the reasonableness of a “mistaken case of consent” are judged from a male’s perspective and cultural ideas of appropriate sexual behavior and scripts for men and women. She urges the criminal justice system to listen to the women’s words and actions to determine if consent was actually given instead of placing them in the position of playing victim and calm witness as they try to prove their moral innocence. However, this will be difficult to accomplish given the lack of flexibility for varying circumstances in guilty/non-guilty construction of trails, the dominance of the male perspective in our understanding of actions and a jury’s role in determining harm to victim vs appropriate punishment for the accused rapist. Overall, Edward’s work demonstrates the difficulties of prosecuting rape cases in court and the continuing need to listen to women’s voices and experiences involving sex and consent.

In utilizing a linguistic examination of a university’s sexual assault tribunal between an accused man and two victims, Ehrlich’s book analyzes the language we use to construct ideas of rape and sexual consent. Chapter 5 “The signals... between men and women are not being read correctly”: Miscommunication and acquaintance rape had particular relevance to current research. In this chapter, Ehrlich first dissects the idea that sexual assaults occur because of differences in gendered communication. She contends that “miscommunication” is, in fact, a deliberate use of dominate cultural norms of masculinity to reimagine women’s words or actions. She also concludes that various miscommunication theories ignore structural power imbalances between men and women but contends that we must look at how gendered or cultural background knowledge, which we use to make basic assumptions and interpretations, impacts how we should examine women’s and men’s perceptions of and reactions to sexual activity.


In this study, the author, a Psychology professor at Trent University, used three varying vignettes showing an ambiguous sexual encounter to examine how length of relationship and students’ gender impacted analysis of consent within the scenario. Humphreys found that length of relationship did impact the perceived clarity of sexual intent and appropriateness of non-verbal consent negotiation, with the 1st date scenario requiring more explicit consent than the 3 months dating or 2 years married scenarios. He also concluded that the change in expectations occurs very quickly, with even just a few prior experiences being enough to change people’s opinions. Furthermore, Humphreys demonstrated that women, more than men, emphasize the need for explicit consent, regardless of the relationship status, and theorized the difference was largely caused by different socialization within traditional sexual scripts. This research demonstrates that men and women offer different expectations and perceptions of consent, which may support the theory of miscommunication-caused sexual assault.


Jozkowski, Assistant Professor of Community Health Promotion at the University of Arkansas, addresses the question of viability for an affirmative consent policy on college campuses. Framing the argument on the background of California’s 2014 “Yes means Yes” legislation and several terrible accounts of misogynistic assault campaigns held by prominent fraternities across the US, the author argues that affirmative consent policies have the potential to work only if college campus culture changes. Additionally, she discusses how when instances of sexual assault or rape campaigns do occur, serious repercussions need to be given to those responsible. She further reasons that women’s socially acceptable sexual behavior prevent “yes” from being respectable while women’s conversation style prevents “no” from being taken as a serious unwillingness to have sex, leaving women in a compromised position and theoretically responsible for assault prevention. Therefore, she concludes, that until cultural scripts and college culture with regards to women’s sexual behavior changes, an affirmative consent policy is not highly effective.


In designing a new Consent to Sex Scale, the authors use a three phrase plan to create and assess the validity of a scale that could be used to better measure how college students consent to vaginal-penile sex. Using the open-ended results obtained from 185 students, which ensures relatability to the target population, the constructed survey, which included the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance scale and Token Resistance to Sex scale, was administered to 685 students. Results showed that college students largely follow traditional sexual scripts with men using “Initiator” and “Removal” behaviors more than women, who scored higher on “Passive” behavior.
and “Nonverbal Signals of Interest”. Passive behavior was correlated with acceptance of the Rape Myth scale and Token scale for women while Initiator and Removal behavior was correlated with the scales for men, further showing that sexual consent behaviors are linked with traditional belief in gender roles. The authors noted high validity for the new scale based on current results correspondence with past research and various statistical tests, but argued that results are not generalizable to all students. Furthermore, the focus on vaginal-penile sex ignores the typical progression of sexual behavior and may mean this scale misses how consent is negotiated across a wide range of progressing activities.


In a continued examination of the data collected in Jozkowski’s 2011 doctoral dissertation, the authors analyzed how consent is communicated and interpreted, with special focus given to gender differences. After coding open-ended responses, four main themes emerged: young people seem to endorse the traditional sexual script, women are responsible for oral sex, men use aggression towards women, and men use deception to initiate vaginal or anal sex. The implications of each theme was discussed, particularly with regards to how these themes impact the conceptualization of token resistance and acquaintance rape. Although relatively short, this article clearly outlined data collected on young people’s ideas of consent and their subsequent behaviors.

Jozkowski, Kristen N., Zoë D. Peterson, Stephanie A. Sanders, Barbara Dennis, and Michael Reece. “Gender Differences in Heterosexual College Students’ Conceptualizations and Indicators of Sexual Consent: Implications for Contemporary Sexual Assault Prevention Education.” *Journal of Sex Research* 51, no. 8 (2014): 904-916.

The authors aimed to understand how sexual consent is defined by college students and if gender differences exist in those definitions and how the students, themselves, expressed and interpreted consent or nonconsent from their partners for various sexual activities. They conducted an open-ended survey at a Midwestern university and found that there were gendered differences in how consent was expressed or interpreted, largely based on traditional sexual scripts, but that no difference in the overall definition of sexual consent existed. Data was clearly expressed in several tables and the authors went through each of their research objectives, discussing implications for miscommunication between men and women. They concluded that despite defining consent as explicit communication, most people still rely on nonverbal consent signals, which may increase the chance of sexual assault. Finally, the authors discussed how their work could be used to improve sexual assault prevention programs and US college campuses. This article was especially insightful regarding my questions about gendered-based consent/ nonconsent communication.


This literature review aims to define concepts used in sexual perception research, analyze findings and explanations for gendered differences in sexual intention perception, and finally, offer direction for future research. By examining themes across the literature, the authors argue that some explanations for gender differences are more supported by research than others and reason that situational influences such as alcohol and the targets ethnicity impact perception. The article highlights the validity of research on sexual intention perception differences between men and women and is useful in showing that gender constructs may influence sexual consent behavior and rates of sexual assault.

Lisak and Miller’s data is frequently referenced by studies, organizations, and institutions that claim sexual assaults are usually committed by repeat offenders. Theirs seems to be the most recent study on the topic, however data was initially collected almost 20 years ago, making the relevancy of their statistics as an accurate reflection of the reality of sexual assaults committed on college campuses today questionable. However, the author’s discovery that 63% of the 120 self-reported rapists were “repeat rapists” with a mean of 5.8 rapes each, is powerful. These men were also connected with significantly higher levels of other violence, compared to both single time rapists and non-rapists, showing a strong link between multiple types of sexual violence. The authors conclude that these results, which are similar to previously conducted research on repeat offense rates and violence, may explain why high levels of victimization are reported despite few men reporting they committed a violent act.


This study was conducted by the Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation (SHIFT), a program created with students and faculty to help combat sexual assault after a very prominent case of sexual assault on Columbia University’s campus in 2013. The data was collected, with a very high- response rate, from a random sample of undergraduate students from Columbia University and Barnard College in New York City. Researchers found that instances at these two colleges were in line with the national average of one-in-five, with 28% of undergraduate women reporting an instance of sexual assault. 38% of gender-conforming students reported being sexually assaulted. The date also confirmed past studies on factors that lead instances of sexual assault, including alcohol use and participation in fraternities. It was helpful that this study looked explicitly at how students were assaulted and what method the perpetrator used to complete the assault. As stated in other studies, alcohol and coercion were main factors. This was a very timely study, being conducted in 2017, and the data on risk factors was helpful for this analysis.


By analyzing current research, the authors, who have all contributed to the field of understanding sexual consent and behavior, attempt to provide context for several components of sexual consent’s conceptualization and use among college students. First, they discuss how factors like new found freedom, pressure to fit in, and alcohol contribute to high rates of assault, especially among first year students. Next, the authors examine the complexity of sexual consent, often posing, but not answering difficult questions, to the reader. Finally, they discuss research findings, mostly with respect to gender differences and miscommunication theory, and discuss various implications for college consent policies, future research, and sexual assault prevention programs. This review is a valuable summary of current research and does a good job at highlighting both the complexity of consent and how far we still need to go with regards to research and education.


After reviewing the mixed results of sexual coercion research conducted in the 1980’s and 90’s, the authors conducted their own study to examine behaviors used after someone has initially said “no” to sex. Termed “postrefusal sexual persistence,” the authors grouped various actions under “sexual arousal tactics,” “emotional manipulation and lies,” “alcohol and drug intoxication,” and “tactics of physical force and harm” labels. The most commonly experienced method, by both men and women, were sexual arousal tactics followed by emotional manipulation. However women reported higher levels of experiencing coercion overall and while
sexual arousal tactics were most commonly used by perpetrators, men reported higher usage levels than women in every category. Interestingly, similar levels of violent coercion and perpetration were reported by both men and women. This article demonstrates that men also experience high levels of sexual coercion, and that alcohol is tightly connected with sexual coercion. Furthermore, it is important to note that men and women largely experience and use the same types of sexual coercion, which may debunk various gendered stereotypes.


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