

Perceptions of Consent in Male-Initiated Versus Female-initiated Ambiguous Sexual Interactions

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Abstract

Sexual script theory explains that there are socially learnt gendered roles in sex which play an important part in the research of sexual consent. According to these scripts, it can be assumed that men prefer implicit consent, women prefer explicit consent, men's consent can generally be assumed, and males will downplay theirs and other's victimisation of unwanted sex. These assumptions are often supported by consent research which use methods relating to traditional scripts, such as vignettes depicting males initiating sex. It is unknown if the same expectations of sexual consent are present in a situation in which a female initiates sexual advances instead. The current study examines if there is a difference in how male sexual consent is perceived compared to female sexual consent by utilising two vignettes, one which depicted a male initiating sex with a female and one which depicted a female initiating sex with a male. Perceptions of consent by 127 participants were measured using a vignette and scale based on those used in a previous study on sexual consent by Humphreys (2007). The vignette was adapted to create a variation where a female initiates sex with a male. When introducing a vignette depicting a female initiator, some findings still align with sexual scripts such as gendered implicit and explicit consensual preferences. However, the assumption that men generally always consent to sex due to an innate desire was not supported and the feminine role of 'victim' is also put into question. The findings highlight a need for modern revision of traditional sexual script theory as the basis of understanding consent.

Introduction

'Another woman falls prey to the patriarchy, what's her name?' is the response male rookie cop character, Carl, receives in episode six of the final season of the popular television show *Shameless* (Maritescu, 2021). This occurs when Carl reports being coerced into unprotected sex with female character Tish in regardless of him not consenting to sex without a condom. Despite the series being a fictional comedy drama, the reactions to Carls' situation reflects typical attitudes that male victims of sexual assault experience. When Carl shares his experience with his family his father tells him he was lucky to have sex with a woman willing not to use a condom and when he goes to report the sexual assault the officer assumes the victim of the assault was female. The writer of the episode, Maritescu, explained that it is important to consider the complex issue of consent when depicting sex in media (Friedlander, 2021). The episode presented an ambiguous depiction of consent and assault. Maritescu notes that people often think that consent is black and white and uses the episode to bring awareness to what constitutes consent in reality (Friedlander, 2021).

As mentioned, issues of sexual consent, or lack of consent which Beres (2007) notes is defining of sexual assault, is traditionally viewed as a women's issue due to the influence of feminist movements in the 1960's and 1970's and more recently with the rise of the #MeToo movement in late 2017 (Popova, 2019). The emphasis on the female experience of sexual assault is justified given findings which note that more than half of all women are likely to experience unwanted sexual advances in their lifetime (Baum, 2019). The #MeToo movement being particularly revolutionary in giving voices to women, over 30% of whom are likely to be sexually harassed by a male colleague (Baum, 2019).

Acknowledgement of the female experience of non-consensual sexual interactions is undeniably important. However, the concept of male sexual abuse is often juxtaposed against the idea of the more commonly studied and understood idea of female sexual abuse which can lead to minimalization of the issue (Sitto & Lubinga, 2020). For example, in America, a review of federal

studies by Stemple and Meyer (2014) found that prevalence rates of some forms of sexual victimisation, such as non-consensual sex, was similar between males and females. Despite findings that the number of women raped was nearly equal to the number of men 'made to penetrate' in the 2012 National Crime Victimization Survey, Stemple and Meyer (2014) note this was not so readily remarked upon in media. The fact sheet presented to summarise the findings of the survey instead emphasised that women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Previous studies (Smith et al. 2021) into the effects of sexual assault on male victims greatly highlight the importance of further exploration into the topic of male sexual consent. Men forced to have non-consensual sex are more likely to experience psychological effects such as mental health issues and lower life satisfaction as well as poorer overall health than non-victimised males (Smith et al. 2021).

Sexual consent is a complex issue which has been explored thoroughly in studies such as Humphreys' (2007) research into how situational and participant factors affect perceptions of sexual consent. The study found that many factors had an effect on participants' perceptions of sexual consent in an ambiguous heterosexual sexual interaction. These factors include relationship history of the participant, with longer relationships being perceived as more consensual and needing less explicit consent. Gender of the participant also had an effect of consent perception with Humphreys (2017) finding that female participants expected more explicit sexual consent than male participants, alluding to theories that females consider the issue of sexual consent more serious than males.

Titkova (2018) explored how participants perceived the ambiguity of female sexual consent in different relationship lengths. Vignettes were used which depicted a male initiating sexual intercourse with a female. Titkova (2018) does mention that there is, however, a limitation of male-initiated focused studies in that it fails to take into consideration the reversing of gender roles, that is, if a female initiates sexual intercourse with a male. According to traditional sexual scripts there is an assumption that men always want sex (Palermo et al., 2022) and this assumption

is supported in a traditional vignette, like that seen in Titkova's study, where a male initiates sex. Exploration into reversal of these roles has yet to be made and there is an opportunity to explore if societal gendered stereotypes remain true and that participants' perceptions of male sexual consent is consistent in both a situation where the male is the initiator of sex and as a responder to female initiation.

What is Sexual Consent?

On their website The New Zealand Police (2022) explain that 'a person consents to sexual activity if they do it actively, freely, voluntarily and consciously without being pressured into it'. A lack of sexual consent leads to sexual assault which is described as a forced sexual act or behaviour such as sexual intercourse, sexual touching, or exposure (New Zealand Police, 2022). This description of sexual assault is based on the definition of a sexual violation in the Crimes Act 1961 (s. 128). Section 128A of the Crimes Act 1961 goes into detail as to what may not be considered as sexual consent noting that, although an individual engages in sexual activity, this does not always amount to consent. For example, a lack of resistance does not equate to sexual consent or if the individual is engaging in sexual activity due to overt or implied force.

Interestingly, as McDonald (2021) notes, that while an effort was made to remain gender neutral in section 128A of the Crimes Act 1961 regarding rape, the anatomical distinctions remained. McDonald (2021) notes that rape specifically included the insertion of one person's penis into another person's genitalia, implying the gendered roles within rape and thus implying that a cis woman is unable to commit rape. A man therefore is only able to be raped by a cis man and any sexual violations carried out by a woman on a man would instead be considered unlawful sexual connection according to the Act. The Act makes no mention of anal penetration by a female using their fingers or an object as mentioned in the CDC National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey Summary Report (as cited in DiMarco et al., 2022).

The Crimes Act 1961 definition also fails to consider a less recognised form of rape, as described by Smith et al. (2021), where victims are made to penetrate. Although adding these aspects to the definition of rape has no legal effects in New Zealand, as both rape and unlawful sexual connection can result in a penalty of a maximum of 20 years (Community Law, 2022), expanding the definition does allow for a greater understanding of sexual assault of males by females. When including these aspects into the definition of rape, data shows that the rapists of men are women 80% of the time (DiMarco et al., 2022). Measurement inconsistencies currently exist due to a lack of research and understanding around what constitutes male rape. Mulder et al. (2020) explain that the gendering of rape plays into and reinforces stereotypes of masculine as perpetrator and feminine as victim. Weare (2021) explains that men who experience being made to penetrate a woman often go on to experience mental health issues and emotional difficulties which impact their behaviours and relationships.

Sexual coercion, as defined by French et al., (2015) occurs when there is a lack of sexual consent and involves the use of methods such as “physical force, harm, authority, blackmail, verbal persuasion, manipulation, pressure, or even alcohol or drugs” (p. 42) in order to initiate or advance sexual interactions. Despite issues of sexual consent largely being regarded as a female issue, significant results around rates of sexual coercion have been found in men. A study by Russell and Oswald in 2002 found that 45% of male university students experienced sexual coercion (Platt & Busby, 2009) and national studies in the US found that 22% of men experienced forms of sexual victimization by females such as coerced intercourse and unwanted sexual contact (French et al., 2015). It should be noted, however, that the accuracy of these statistics is largely affected by the stigmatization experienced by male victims of sexual coercion (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016).

While sexual assault against men is slowly being brought to light in an academic and societal context much of the focus so far has been placed on specific circumstances, such as male on male rape and male sexual assault in prison populations, with little exploration into sexual

assault of men by women (Mulder et al. 2020). The information that does exist about women as perpetrators of sexual assault mainly focuses on assaults against male children or adolescents (Greathouse et al, 2015).

Age and Education's Role in Consent

As noted by Graf and Johnson (2021) sexual violence occurs much less in adult and older age groups compared to younger age groups. Large numbers of male and female students report being sexually victimised at university with MacDougall et al. (2020) explaining newfound independence and party culture associated with campus life may play a role. Because of this, much of the research existing on perceptions of sexual consent focus on students and younger adults. How different age groups are viewed within a sexual context (young adults being more 'at risk', middle aged adults being 'capable of knowing better', and older adults often considered asexual) could have an influence on how they express their understanding of consent (Graf & Johnson, 2021). The significance of differences in comfort about sexual discourse between age groups is important because, as Shumlich and Fisher (2020) explain, people who are uncomfortable using sexual communication are less likely to express or deny sexual consent.

Graf and Johnson's (2021) study, which looked at understanding of sexual consent over a lifespan, found that all age groups understood the basic core elements of consent, noting it is agreed by all age groups that consent is conceptualised as an agreement to engage in sexual activity. However, younger adults were more likely to introduce additional themes, such as explicit consent and capacity to consent, making for more expansive definitions of consent. This potentially signalled a greater understanding of consent by younger participants than with middle-aged adults and older adults. The study found that younger adults placed the most importance on consent, followed by middle-aged adults, with older adults placing the least importance.

Sex education is often designed under the assumption that sexual activity is a male's responsibility and there is a requirement, more so than with females, to know what to do in such

encounters (Measor, 2004). This can lead to anxiety and shame around responsibility and an expectation for control for males which is not similarly required of females (Measor, 2004). Measor (2004) notes that this can even lead to an avoidance of sex education by males due to shame formed by the association between masculinity and innate sexual knowledge. Despite these expectations for knowledge, sex education also reflects what Hilton (2001) describes as the established ideals of feminine responsibility and masculine irresponsibility, with much more emphasis placed on protective measures in female education. Similarly, Thiessen et al. (2021) notes that sexual education from parents seems to reflect gendered ideals with much more female participants in their study recalling encouragement from parents to protect themselves and reinforcing the idea of women as gatekeepers of sex. It has been found that boys are less likely to discuss sex with their parents and instead often rely on media for sexual information (Jampel & Addis, 2021). Jampel and Addis (2021) note that this reliance on culturally and socially influenced media can in turn lead to the internalisation of established sexual scripts.

Sexual Script Theory

Early psychoanalytic and biological psychological perspectives of sex emphasised innate drives and instincts associated with humans, but in the late 1960s and 1970s were counteracted by the more socially constructed idea of sexual scripts which largely linked to gender scripts (Wiederman, 2015). Sociologists such as Simon and Gagnon (1986) applied scripting theory, that is culturally collective guides requiring individuals to adhere to specific established social roles, to sexuality. As Popova (2019) explains, heterosexual sex is often viewed and analysed through scripts which are assumptions made about sex. Sexual scripts are cognitive models that aid individuals in identifying and navigating social and sexual interactions (Firth & Kitzinger, 2001). Newstrom et al., (2021) further note that these sexual scripts are informed by the surrounding culture, social world, and previous sexual interactions of an individual and are used to organise sexual behaviours. Individuals behave in ways consistent with scripts, making the scripts self-fulfilling prophecies, and

there is often resistance and difficulties in using behaviours inconsistent with scripts (Jones & Hostler, 2001).

There are three assumptions within sexual script theory, as noted by Palermo et al. (2022), which emphasises the male role of initiator of sex in traditional heterosexual sexual encounters. These are that men consistently want sex, women have less of an interest in sex compared to men, and that women are expected to be the ones to limit sexual interactions (Palermo et al., 2022). The more researched topic of sexual assault against women has found that traditional sexual scripts, which view males as innately more sexual and unrelentless in their push for sex, increases non-consensual sexual interactions (Shumlich & Fisher, 2018). Shumlich and Fisher (2018) explain that within sexual scripts there is the idea of token resistance where women are required to act resistant to sex, saying no sometimes even when they mean yes, which can have dangerous consequences when a woman is not interested in having sex, but a male continues to pursue thinking the resistance is disingenuous.

Through social learning, men, from a young age, are expected to behave in masculine appropriate ways. This can be an issue, as Jampel and Addis (2021) explain, because a link has been found between men who endorse masculine norms and hostile sexual aggression towards women. The male gender role can require men to conform to traditional ideals which can have behavioural and cognitive consequences such as inhibition of emotional connection and vulnerability as well as promotion of aggression, sexual violence, and promiscuity (Nicholls, 2021). These scripts are dangerous to women, as victims of sexual assault by men, as well as damaging to men. Rigid conformity to masculine norms is also linked to psychological issues such as higher rates of depression and unwillingness to seek help for mental health problems (Jampel & Addis, 2021). The scripts also lead to males' unwillingness to share inconsistencies with the scripts with peers which often leads to an avoidance of speaking about distressing sexual behaviour or events (Jampel & Addis, 2021).

Due to this established theory of sexual scripts, Davis and Boden (2012) explain that it is often difficult for people to comprehend males as victims of sexual assault coerced by a dominant female, or for the man to be unwilling at the opportunity for sex. This is identified in prevention work trends regarding sexual assault on college campuses and the focus it has on teaching male students to identify consent without acknowledging the possibility of men as victims (Ford & Maggio, 2020). This has led to a number of male rape myths, which are assumptions about the kinds of people who commit rape and what a victim of rape looks like (Popova, 2019), including the idea that men cannot be raped by a woman, can defend themselves against rape by a woman, and are not affected by rape or at least not as affected as women are (Hammond et al., 2016).

Men as Victims

According to the male sexual drive discourse, unlike women who have significantly lower desire and drive, men are often seen as the dominant driving force in sex (Torenz, 2021). Torenz (2021) explains that according to the discourse, once they have become aroused, men have an innate insatiable sex drive. This infers that women have little to no sex drive and instead desire only to be desired by men in a heteronormative situation. Because women are seen as having the role of gatekeeping sex, within traditional sexual scripts, the role of male sexual consent can be downplayed by encouraging the idea that men are responsible for and may even experience pleasure as a victim of sexual coercion (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016). This is reflected in real life examples with Sitto and Lubinga (2020) describing how men who admitted to being the victim of sexual assault were explicitly told that men cannot be raped nor sexually abused.

Conclusions from a study by Smith et al. (1988) found that male victims of sexual assault by female perpetrators were considered more likely to have encouraged the episode and to have derived sexual pleasure from it than was the case for men who were victims of other males. Smith et al. (1988) notes that these findings are likely due to the dissonance between stereotypical beliefs of a male's role in sex and the passivity of a male when a victim of a female. Stemple and Meyer (2014)

also highlight the role that sexual arousal can play in the minimalization of male sexual assault. It is explained that it is not uncommon for a male victim to experience sexual arousal during nonconsensual sex but that presence of arousal may add to the disbelief of male victims (Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

Stemple and Meyer (2014) explain that the dismissive attitude toward male victims is due to stereotypes that men always want sex can lead to and perpetuate mental health issues for those victims. Male sexual victimisation can have a harmful effect on the victim's self-esteem and relationships as well as lead to serious issues such as depression, suicidal ideation, and anxiety (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Stemple and Meyer (2014) further explain that the resistance to acknowledge male victims is not just supported by stereotypes but also by the amount of physical force used in the sexual assault of men by women. This amount is often assumed that less physical force is used by women initiating non-consensual sex than that used on female victims of men and therefore the level of force used tends to correlate to the level of victimisation (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). Although DiMarco et al. (2021) do note that male victims of sexual assault suffer comparable rates of physical injuries to female victims, the knowledge that physical force is not a crucial nor essential factor of sexual assault should also be noted (Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

As Stemple et al. (2017) explain it can be difficult for men to come to terms with sexual victimisation by a female perpetrator due to ideas that men should enjoy and celebrate the opportunity for sex. This can sometimes lead to male victims being assumed as responsible for the assault. Stemple et al. (2017) emphasise that until these stereotypes of sexual victimisation are addressed there will be ongoing issues with inaccurate and unempathetic responses to victims of female perpetrators. Male victims of sexual assault are considered abnormal by patriarchal societies' standards which can lead to marginalisation (Sitto & Lubinga, 2020). Due to innate masculine standards, it is noted that men are more likely to downplay another man's non-consensual situations. A study by Smith et al. (1988) found that men were significantly more

blaming towards male victims of sexual assault than female participants were. Huitema and Vanwesenbeeck (2016) also found that assumptions of male victims deriving pleasure and experiencing less distress from female initiated coercive sex were more common among male participants than female participants.

Existing ideas of masculinity can also affect how men view their own unwanted sexual experiences with a female. Living up to masculine standards and not being ridiculed can be motivating factors for men to engage in unwanted sex (Ford & Maggio, 2020). Through their interviews with college men, who reported unwanted sex with women, Ford and Maggio (2020) identified that men would frequently minimise experiences of non-consensual sex, use humour when describing events, and self-blame to reduce adverse effects such as emotional distress.

Yes Versus Not No

Torenz (2021) explains that 'no means no' assumes that sex is consensual until a participant says no, while 'yes means yes' assumes that sex is only consensual when all involved participants explicitly agree. Torenz (2021) highlights the distinctive difference between the two forms of consent with 'no means no' being largely related to the criminalisation of sex with little regard for what 'correct' sex should be, while 'yes means yes' has more of a positive focus on what constitutes as 'good' sex. This may be why, as Shumlich and Fisher (2020) explain, there has been a shift from 'no means no' messaging and awareness to more affirmative consent in the form of 'yes means yes' with that yes also required to be enthusiastic. A particular benefit of affirmative consent is that the responsibility of consent is placed on the person who initiates sex rather than delving into whether or not a victim of a sexual violation said no (Torenz, 2021).

Humphreys (2007) found that women were more evenly split on whether they considered assuming consent until hearing a 'no' or, the more affirmative, assuming 'no' until receiving verbal consent as the appropriate way to negotiate sex. However, they found that males much more preferred to assume consent until hearing a 'no'. Humphreys (2007) notes that this aligns with the

idea that men are required to initiate sexual activity and that women should act as the gatekeeper of sex as explained in traditional sexual scripts. This is similar to the findings by Hust et al. (2017) that men are more likely to use more implicit or nonverbal cues to initiate sex while women are more likely to use explicit or verbal cues. This gendered use of consent types again aligns with traditional scripts with the assumption that a man would consistently want sex and so implicit consent is sufficient while a woman is required to explicitly accept or deny that sex.

By what was found in these studies it seems that males were more likely to affiliate with the earlier dominant idea of 'no means no', or consent as the default. This correlates with sexual scripts theory which describes males as perpetually interested in having sex and therefore the aggressive pursuer in sex while women are depicted as passive and act as sexual gatekeepers (Hardesty et al., 2022; Newstrom et al., 2021). The issue with 'no means no', as Hardesty et al. (2022) point out, is that this can have a minimising effect on the impact of sexual assault of men because a male, as a gatekeeper of sex, does not align with existing cultural ideas and expectations. The use of explicit verbal consent is not the preferred method by men, and this may perpetuate issues with men navigating non-consensual sex initiated by women.

Although now considered more popular, there are also issues with utilisation of affirmative consent. Hardesty et al. (2022) explore an awkwardness which can surround affirmative consent noting that asking permission requires identification of sexual activity which is an ambiguous boundary. There are limits to knowledge regarding what constitutes explicit consent and when it is relevant or appropriate to seek. A man may avoid explicitly asking for permission due to worries of being viewed as uncertain or hesitant which does not align to his gendered role as the leader of sexual interactions (Piemonte, 2020). In a similar vein a women may not feel it her place to ask explicit consent due to worries of being viewed as initiating promiscuity which does not align with her gendered role as the passive gatekeeper. Explicit verbal consent can be uncomfortable and have the effect of 'ruining the mood' by misaligning with cultural standards of sex as a seamless

spontaneous encounter. This leads to a preference for implicit cues despite a modern social acknowledgement that explicit affirmative consent can reduce miscommunication (Piemonte et al, 2020).

Current Study

Previous research into sexual consent has focused almost exclusively on contexts in which a male initiates sexual advances (Humphreys, 2007; Titkova, 2018). While this context works alongside traditional theories surrounding sex consent (Palmero et al., 2022), it is unknown if the same expectations of sexual consent are present in a situation in which a female initiates sexual advances instead. The current study aims to investigate this question by presenting two vignettes, one where a male, Kevin, initiates sex and one where a female, Lisa, initiates sex. The vignettes will be randomly assigned to participants, and they will be asked to complete a questionnaire which will explore the participants perceptions and indications of sexual consent. The results will be compared to examine if there is a difference in how male sexual consent is perceived compared to female sexual consent.

Regarding types of consent used it was hypothesised that male participants would view implicit sexual interactions, such as giving non-verbal consent, between Kevin and Lisa as more consensual than female participants. Findings are expected to be similar to those found by Hust et al. (2017) that men are more likely to utilise more implicit or nonverbal cues to initiate sex, while women are more likely to use explicit or verbal cues.

Given the assumptions according to traditional sexual script theories that men consistently want sex (Palermo et al., 2022) it would be assumed that a male would be just as consenting in a situation where he is initiating sex with a female as when a female is initiating sex with him. Therefore, it was hypothesised that participants would perceive Kevin as equally consenting in both situations Kevin initiating sexual intercourse with Lisa and Lisa initiating sexual intercourse with Kevin.

There is existing stigma surrounding male sexual assault by a female initiator due to ideas that men cannot be victims of sexual assault (Hammond et al., 2016). Studies have found that males will downplay their victimisation of unwanted sex and that males can often be more blaming of male victims than females (Smith et al., 1988). Therefore, it was hypothesised that male participants would perceive Kevin as more consenting when Lisa is initiating intercourse with Kevin than female participants.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling via social media advertisements and venue-based-time sampling with the handing out of leaflets. The initial sample included 161 participants. Participation was open to all individuals over the age of 16 and participation was voluntary. From the original sample, data were excluded from 34 participants as they did not fully complete the survey.

There were more female participants ($n = 88$, 69%) who volunteered to participate than male participants ($n = 38$, 30%) with one participant identifying as gender diverse. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 79 with a mean age of 30.54 ($SD = 10.64$) years.

Participants were able to select multiple ethnicities they identify with. Of the 127 participants the majority identified as New Zealand European ($n = 82$, 65%), 25 participants (20%) identified as Asian, 14 participants (11%) identified as Māori, 12 participants identified as European, six participants identified as Pasifika, and two participants identified as African. Nine participants identified as other ethnicity.

Materials

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to provide their age, gender, and ethnicity using a demographic information form.

Vignettes

Two vignettes, based on those created by Humphreys (2007), were used. Both the vignettes depicted a scenario involving a heterosexual couple (Kevin and Lisa) on a date which leads to sexual intercourse. The wording of the two vignettes were identical except for the adjustment of names, pronouns, and anatomy to suggest one portraying a sexual interaction initiated by a male and one portraying an interaction initiated by a female.

Kevin and Lisa just finished eating a wonderful dinner at [Kevin's or Lisa's] place. It was a special night because they were on their first date together. They had rented a romantic comedy to watch after dinner. [Kevin or Lisa] popped in the DVD and lay down partially on [Kevin's or Lisa's] stomach, in between [his/her] legs. About 20 minutes into the movie, it was clear that [Kevin or Lisa] was not that interested in the plot of the movie. [He/she] reached down and brushed [his/her] hand slowly against [his/her][chest/breast]. Somewhat startled by the sensation, [Lisa or Kevin] looked up at [him/her] and moved [his/her] hand away gently. They have not been sexual before tonight, but [Kevin or Lisa] didn't really feel like starting anything sexual, and, besides, [he/she] was really enjoying the movie. After a few minutes, [Kevin or Lisa] again rested [his/her] hand on [his/her] [chest/breast] and started massaging it through [his/her] sweater. [He/she] leaned in and began to kiss [him/her]. [Kevin or Lisa] kissed back, though not very enthusiastically, and then continued watching the movie; however, it seemed the movie was the furthest thing from [his/her] date's mind. [Kevin or Lisa] began removing [Kevin's or Lisa's] top, as well

as unbuttoning the top of [his/her] own jeans. Very soon both were close to naked. They missed the rest of the movie having sex.

Perceived Consent

The degree of consent perceived by the participant was measured using a 15-item scale based on an original 17-statement scale used in a previous study on sexual consent by Humphreys (2007) (Appendix A) The original study by Humphreys (2007) treated each of the 17 statements as separate variables however, because conducting analyses on a large number of dependent variables leads to Type I error inflation, items were combined to reduce the number of variables used in the analyses. Four items were combined to create two 2-item subscales (Lisa was consenting, Kevin was consenting), one 6-item subscale (implicit consent assumed), one 3 item subscale (explicit consent needed), and one 2-item subscale (verbal consent ruins mood). Responses to these items were scored on a 7-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

Lisa was Consenting. The first subscale looked at Lisa's consent and included the statements 'Lisa consented to sexual activity' and 'Lisa's nonverbal behaviours clearly indicate that she has consented to sexual activity'. The two items in the scale were internally consistent ($\alpha = .92$).

Kevin was Consenting. The second subscale looked at Kevin's consent and included the statements 'Kevin consented to sexual activity' and 'Kevin's nonverbal behaviours clearly indicate that he has consented to sexual activity'. The two items in the scale were internally consistent ($\alpha = .90$).

For the remaining 13 items created by Humphreys (2007), a principal component analysis was conducted and found that 11 items reduced down to 3 correlated components. Due to low cross loadings on two components, two items 'Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent verbally before proceeding' and 'more explicit communication is necessary in this situation' were excluded and a final principal component analysis using an oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) was conducted. The

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure confirmed sampling adequacy and was 'meritorious' (Kaiser, 1974) at $KMO = .81$ and Bartlett's test of sphericity showed that the correlations amongst the items was sufficiently large ($\chi^2(55), = 656.84, p < .001$) for conducting principal component analysis. Three components had eigenvalues greater than 1, and visual inspection of the scree plot (see Appendix B) supported a three-component solution with each component explaining more than 10% of the variance with 69% of which explained by the three components. The first component included six items and included items that asked about assumed or implied consent, which was labelled as 'Implicit Consent Assumed'. The second component included three items asking about explicit consent, which was labelled 'Explicit Consent Needed', and the final component was labelled 'Verbal Consent Ruins Mood'. See Table 1 below for component loadings.

Table 1.*Pattern Matrix's of Sexual Consent in a Principal Component Analysis Using a Direct Oblimin Rotation*

	Principals		
	Implicit consent assumed	Explicit consent needed	Verbal consent ruins mood
This couple was able to read each other's signals with enough accuracy to assume sexual consent	0.874		
Sexual consent is okay to assume in this context	0.843		
This couples' nonverbal behaviours are just as effective as verbal communication to indicate sexual consent	0.821		
If Lisa/Kevin really didn't want to have sexual relations, she/he would have stopped Kevin/Lisa	0.664		
The approach Kevin/Lisa took to initiating sexual activity is acceptable	0.663		
Kevin's/Lisa's nonverbal behaviours clearly indicate that he/she is asking for consent to engage in sexual activity	0.547		
Kevin/Lisa should have asked consent to kiss Lisa/Kevin		0.908	
Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent to touch Lisa's breast/Kevin's chest		0.811	
Consent should be asked for and given before any kind of sexual activity began		0.761	
Verbally asking for consent would have been awkward			0.966
Verbally asking for consent would have "Wrecked the mood"			0.862

Loadings less than .30 were excluded

Consent expectations

To measure participants' overt views on sexual consent statements adapted from the original study by Humphreys (2007), as well as the variation conducted by Titkova (2018), were included. From the following statements the participants were asked to select the statement they agree with more:

*“**BEFORE** making sexual advances, one should always verbally ask for and obtain a ‘yes’ to engage in any sexual activities (i.e., assume ‘no’ until you get a ‘yes’).”*

*In making sexual advances, it is okay to continue **UNTIL** the partner indicates otherwise (i.e., assume ‘yes’ until you hear a ‘no’)”*

Consent expectations were coded as 1 for “assume ‘no’ until you get a ‘yes’” and a 2 for “assume ‘yes’ until you hear a ‘no’”.

Political Orientation and Student Status

The participants were asked to indicate their political orientation by selecting a number on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 representing left-wing political orientation and 10 indicating right-wing political orientation. Lastly, the participants were asked to indicate if they were a university student by answering the question ‘Are you a university student?’ to which they could respond yes or no. Student status was coded as 1 for non-student and 2 for student.

Procedure

Data were collected using the online survey platform Qualtrics. The study was advertised on the researcher's personal social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram) and on Facebook and Reddit New Zealand-based communities. Leaflets were also handed out by the researcher at the Auckland University of Technology North Shore campus. The online survey platform randomly allocated the participants to one of the two vignettes. Participants only read one vignette before

completing the survey. Of the 127 participants 63 received the vignette portraying a sexual interaction initiated by a male, and 64 received the second portraying an interaction initiated by a female.

This study was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (application number 22/130).

Results

Because there were significantly more female participants ($n=88$) than male participants ($n=38$) chi-square tests and t-tests were conducted to check that the randomisation of participants to the two different vignettes was unbiased, making the two vignettes comparable. As seen in table 2 the assignment of male and female participants to the two vignette types was even $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 0.01, p = .907$. Assignment of students and non-students to the two vignette types was also even $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 0.32, p = .571$.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether the participants in the two vignette groups differed by age and political orientation. As seen in Table 2 there was no significant difference between the age of participants who were presented with the Kevin initiation vignette and participants who were presented with the Lisa initiation $t(124) = 0.38, p = .709$. There was also no significant difference between the political orientation of participants who were presented with the Kevin initiation vignette and participants who were presented with the Lisa initiation $t(123) = 1.73, p = .087$.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics Showing Gender, Student Status, Age and Political Orientation for Participants presented with the Kevin initiation vignette and participants presented with the Lisa initiation

	Kevin Initiation	Lisa Initiation	<i>p</i>
Participant gender			
Male	19	19	.907
Female	43	45	
Student Status			
Student	25	29	.571
Non-student	37	35	
Age			
M	30.90	30.19	.709
SD	10.85	10.58	
Political orientation			
M	3.25	3.88	.087
SD	1.91	2.16	

A Pearson's correlation was conducted on the five subscales as well as the factors of age, political orientation, consent expectations, and student status as seen in Table 4. There was a strong positive correlation between consent expectations and the implicit consent subscale and a moderate correlation with the verbal consent ruins the mood subscale. This means that participants who agree more with assume 'yes' until you hear a 'no' were more likely to agree that implicit consent could be assumed and agree that verbal consent ruins the mood. There was a small but similarly positive correlation between consent expectations and the Lisa was consenting subscale, meaning that participants who agree more with assume 'yes' until you hear a 'no' were more likely to assume Lisa was consenting than participants who agree more with assume 'no' until you get a 'yes'. There was a

significant moderate negative correlation between consent expectations and explicit consent, with participants who agree with assume 'no' until you get a 'yes' more likely to agree that more explicit consent was needed. There was also a small positive correlation between consent expectations and political orientation, with assume 'yes' until you hear a 'no' associated with participants with more right leaning views.

There was a significant moderate positive correlation between political orientation and the implicit consent assumed subscale as well as the verbal consent ruins the mood subscale. More right leaning political views were associated with participants agreeing that implicit consent could be assumed, and that verbal consent ruins the mood. There was a significant small positive correlation between political orientation and the Lisa was consenting subscale, with more left leaning political views associated with lower perceptions that Lisa was consenting. Age and student status did not correlate with any variable except each other, suggesting that younger participants were more likely to be students.

Table 4.

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for the five Measures of Sexual Consent, Age, Political Orientation, Consent Expectations, and Student Status

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Lisa was consenting									
2. Kevin was consenting	-.30***								
3. Implicit consent assumed	.54***	.27**							
4. Explicit consent needed	-.46***	-.10	-.47***						
5. Verbal consent ruins mood	.32***	.04	.44***	-.35***					
6. Age	.09	.17	.14	-.13	.08				
7. Political orientation	.19*	-.07	.34***	-.13	.31***	.02			
8. Consent expectations	.27**	.16	.54***	-.39***	.31***	.14	.22*		
9. Student Status	.05	-.09	-.07	.12	.12	-.39***	.17	-.09	

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 5.*Results of Unadjusted and Fully Adjusted ANOVA conducted on the Five Subscales*

	Unadjusted			Fully Adjusted		
	F	p	η^2	F	p	η^2
Lisa was consenting						
Gender	0.97	.328	.008	0.99	0.32	.008
Vignette	95.87	<.001	.440	106.17	<.001	.478
Gender*Vignette	0.23	.630	.002	0.46	.500	.004
Kevin was consenting						
Gender	0.42	.517	.003	1.03	.313	.009
Vignette	91.07	<.001	.427	103.06	<.001	.470
Gender*Vignette	1.69	.196	.014	0.50	0.480	.004
Implicit consent assumed						
Gender	8.69	.004	.066	9.01	.003	.072
Vignette	1.28	.260	.010	0.78	.380	.007
Gender*Vignette	0.00	.981	.000	0.02	.879	.000
Explicit consent needed						
Gender	0.44	.508	.004	0.08	.772	.001
Vignette	8.43	.004	.065	8.82	.004	.071
Gender*Vignette	0.73	.394	.006	0.49	.487	.004
Verbal consent ruins mood						
Gender	0.62	.433	.005	1.12	.292	.010
Vignette	1.13	.290	.009	0.87	.353	.007
Gender*Vignette	1.31	.255	.011	0.98	.323	.008

Fully adjusted includes covariates age, political orientation, consent expectations and student status

Unadjusted F(1,122), Fully adjusted F(1,116)

Gender was coded as 1 = female and 2 = male

Vignette was coded as 1 = Kevin as initiator and 2 = Lisa as initiator

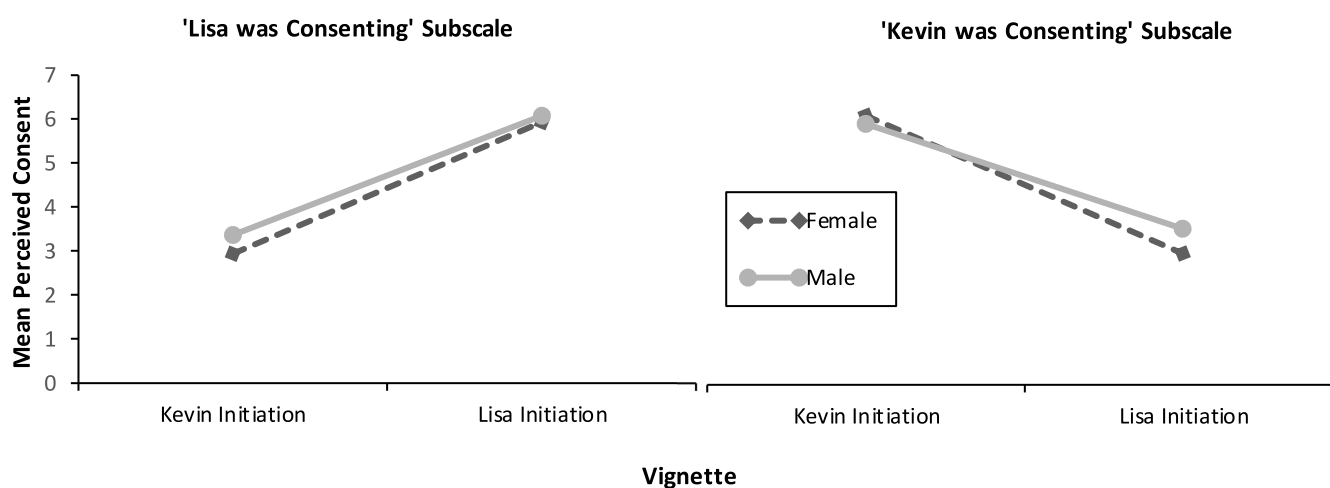
A two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of gender and vignette on each of the five subscales. As seen in Table 5 there was a significant main effect for vignette type when participants were asked if Lisa was consenting. As shown in Figure 1 participants perceived Lisa as more consenting when presented with the Lisa as initiator vignette than when presented with the Kevin as initiator vignette. Figure 2 also suggests that both male participants were slightly more likely than female participants to report that Lisa was consenting both when Lisa was initiating the sexual encounter and when Kevin was initiating.

However, this effect was not statistically significant. There was no interaction between gender and vignetter type.

Similarity when asked if Kevin was consenting a main effect was found for vignette type, as seen in Table 4, with participants who were presented with the vignette where Kevin was the initiator more likely to assume that Kevin was consenting (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also suggests that female participants were slightly more likely than male participants to report that Kevin was consenting when Kevin was initiating the sexual encounter but slightly less likely than male participants to report that Kevin was consenting when Lisa was initiating. However, this effect was not statistically significant. There was no significant interaction between gender and vignette type.

Figure 1.

Figure Showing Mean Perceived Consent for 'Lisa was Consenting' and 'Kevin was Consenting' Subscales

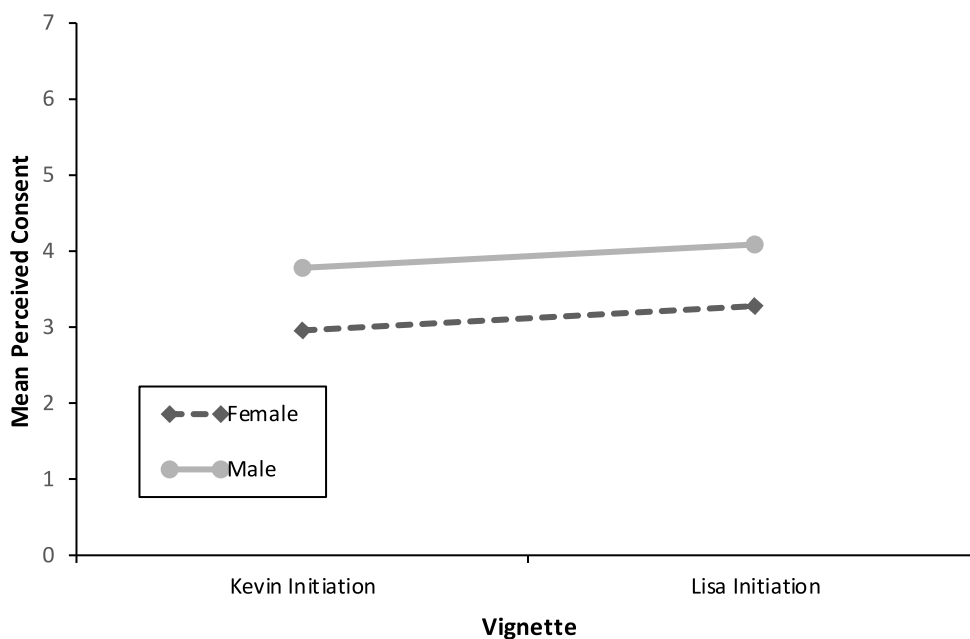


As can be seen in Table 3, when asked if consent was implicitly assumed a main effect was found for participant gender, with males more likely to report that consent could be assumed (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also suggests that both male and female participants were slightly more likely to report that consent could be assumed when Lisa was initiating the sexual encounter, compared to

when Kevin was the initiator. However this effect was not statistically significant. There was no interaction between gender and vignetter type and was not significant.

Figure 2.

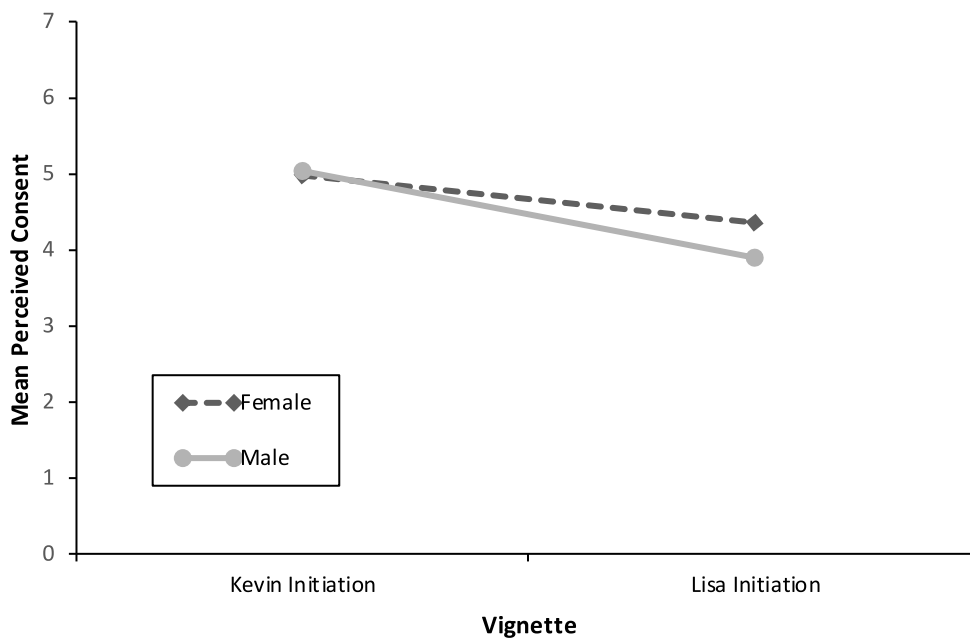
Figure Showing Mean Perceived Consent for 'Implicit Consent Assumed' Subscale



When asked if consent was explicitly needed a main effect was found for vignette type, as seen in Table 3, with participants who were presented with the vignette where Kevin was the initiator more likely to assume that more explicit consent was needed (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also suggests that female participants were slightly more likely to report that more explicit consent was needed when Lisa was initiating the sexual encounter, compared to male participants. However, this effect was not statistically significant. There was no significant interaction between gender and vignette type.

Figure 3.

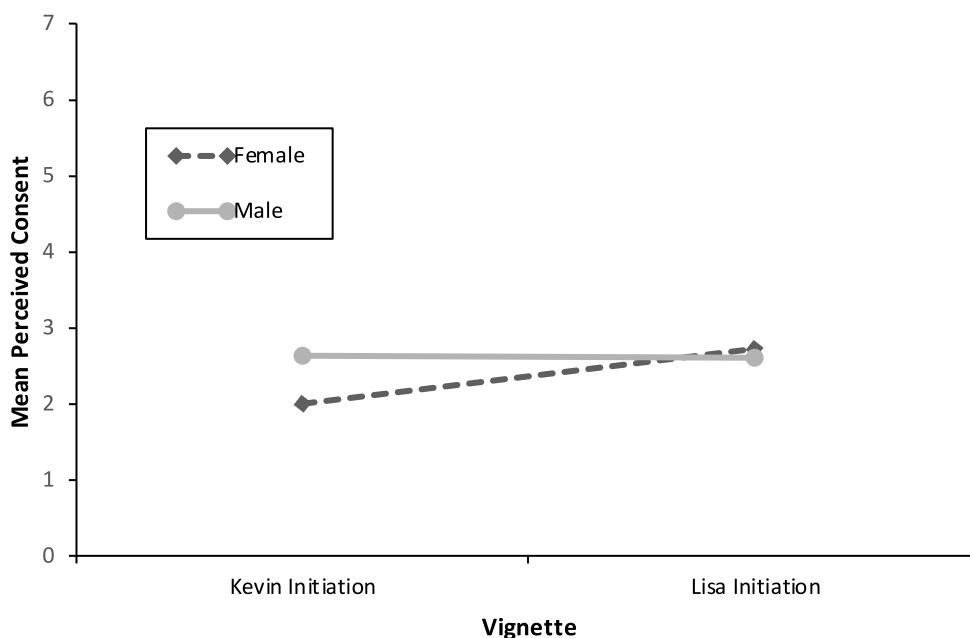
Figure Showing Mean Perceived Consent for 'Explicit Consent Needed' Subscale



Unadjusted there were no significant main effects with 'verbal consent ruins the mood' as the dependent variable. Figure 4 suggests that male participants were slightly more likely to report that verbal consent would have ruined the mood when Kevin was initiating the sexual encounter, compared to female participants. However, this effect was not statistically significant. There was no significant interaction between gender and vignette type. When adjusted there was a significant effect for the covariates of participant consent expectations and political orientation.

Figure 4.

Figure Showing Mean Perceived Consent for 'Verbal Consent Ruins Mood' Subscale



Discussion

Sexual script theory has played a prominent role in the understanding of heterosexual sexual consent. One such way scripts affect gendered roles is through consent negotiation with the Louisiana Contextual Science Research Group (2021) pointing out that, due to these established scripts, men often place less value on nonverbal cues than women. Previous research (Hust et al., 2017) found that men are more likely to utilise more implicit or nonverbal cues to initiate sex, while women are more likely to use explicit or verbal cues. These ideas were expected to be reflected in the current study. There is also the assumption in traditional sexual script theory that men consistently want sex and therefore are always consenting (Palermo et al., 2022). The current study also assumed that a male would be perceived as consenting in both a situation where he is initiating sex with a female and where a female is initiating sex with him. Traditional sexual script theory can lead to assumptions that men cannot be victims of sexual assault (Hammond et al., 2016). Studies have found that males will downplay their victimisation of unwanted sex and that males can often be

less empathetic to male victims than females (Smith et al., 1988). Results from the current study were expected to reflect this by finding that male participants would perceive a male being initiated on by a female to be more consenting female participants.

Similar to findings of previous research on perceptions of sexual consent using only a male initiating vignette (Humphreys, 2007; Titkova, 2018) the hypothesis that male participants would view implicit sexual interactions between Kevin and Lisa as more consensual than female participants was also supported by the current study. Male participants were more likely to agree that implicit consent could be accurately assumed in both vignettes when compared to female participants. This showed that male participants were more likely to agree that the nonverbal behaviours of the couple indicated consent and that there was an opportunity for the recipient of initiation to stop the interaction if they were not consenting. It is possible that female participants require more use of verbal cues to consider a sexual situation as consensual, therefore aligning with typical gendered patterns of sexual consent negotiation, with men placing less value on nonverbal cues than women (Louisiana Contextual Science Research Group, 2021).

Newstrom et al. (2021) explains that a reason men may be more hesitant in using explicit behaviour and communication may be due to masculine cultural expectations as the leader in sex, allowing them a way to save face if their partner is unwilling to have sex. Use of more implicit consent cues can be problematic because, as Newstrom et al. (2021) explain, nonverbal cues can lead to misinterpretation as each person involved in a sexual encounter brings their own learnt interpretations of behaviours. Newstrom et al. (2021) further note that due to sexual scripts men and women are socialised to indicate and interpret consent differently in sexual encounters. One example of an indication of consent, that can get muddied by implicit use, is token resistance. Shumlich and Fisher (2018) describe token resistance as when a woman disingenuously acts resistant to sex, in avoidance of coming off as too easy, and with an expectation of a man to continue to pursue her in order to 'wear her down'. The issue with this, as Shumlich and Fisher (2018) explain, is

that often when a man or woman appears to be unwilling to have sex, they genuinely mean it. Miscomprehension of ambiguous behaviour as consenting due to learnt gendered roles, such as token resistance, can therefore lead to unwanted sex.

Although findings were not conclusive there was a slight implication that both male and female participants felt as though implicit consent could be assumed more so in a situation where a female initiates sex than when a male initiates sex. There was a slight inclination that, when Lisa was initiating sex with Kevin, participants felt as though the use of nonverbal behaviours was appropriate and Kevin would be able to stop the interaction if he was not consenting. Although this aligns with the assumption that men could stop sex with a female initiator with the typically associated logic that men are often physically stronger and able to defend themselves (Weare, 2021) the findings were not substantial and therefore further research would be needed.

When Lisa is the one initiating sex, participants feel that less explicit consent is needed compared to when Kevin is initiating. This means that participants were less likely to feel as though Lisa should have explicitly asked consent when she was initiating sexual intercourse with Kevin. Inclusion of the adapted statement 'Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent to touch Lisa's breast/Kevin's chest' in the 'explicit consent needed' subscale should be acknowledged when analysing this finding. It could be argued that a women's breasts are considered more taboo and sexual in comparison to a males chest, and therefore is not an accurate comparison of consent. Consideration of differences in the sexualisation of gendered body parts is needed in future research utilising vignettes comparing male and female sexual initiation.

Traditional sexual script theory proposes that a man's consent is generally always implied due to cultural and societal beliefs that men always want sex (Shumlich & Fisher, 2020). Thus, it was hypothesized that participants were likely to perceive Kevin as equally consenting in both vignettes. However, the current study found that the perceptions of Kevin's consent differed depending on whether he was initiating sex with Lisa or if Lisa was initiating sex with him. Thus, the findings do not

reinforce the idea that men have a constant desire for sex that is described in sexual script and masculinity theories (Palermo et al., 2022). In fact, the current study found that participants' perceptions of consent were similar between initiator genders. Participants saw the initiator, whether male or female, as being more consenting and the recipient of initiation, whether male or female, being seen as considerably less consenting. Interestingly, while the findings of the traditional male initiator vignette reinforce the ideas of sexual script theory, the findings of the female initiator vignette do not. When Lisa is initiating sex with Kevin, perceptions of consent adjust to place Kevin, despite his gender, in the traditionally 'feminine' scripted role as the one who gives or withholds consent as the gatekeeper of sex.

Within sexual scripts masculinity is often synonymous with the initiator (Huitema & Vanwesenbeeck, 2016) and yet the current findings indicate that initiation is perceived as a consensual act no matter the gender of the initiator. Much of the research that exists on consent relies very heavily on sexual script theory as a key aspect for understanding consent. The current study shows that this theory may not be wholly explanatory of consent. The vast majority of past studies (Humphreys, 2007; Titkova, 2018) investigating consent have relied on vignettes depicting male initiation which align with traditional scripts, few studies have reversed those roles as was done in the present study. Adjustments outside the traditional theory framework, such as a female initiating sex with a male, produces results that do not align with the key ideas of men as innate sex-wanting initiators and women as gatekeeping recipients.

Simon and Gagnon (1986) explain that sexual scripts are largely created from cultural scenarios reflecting societally shared understandings. The everchanging influence of peer interactions, education, and media on culture (Seidler et al., 2022) means that what was once a mutual cultural understanding about sex in the late twentieth century when Simon and Gagnon introduced the theory may not be relevant today. An example of major cultural change that could have an effect on sexual scripts is what Tornez (2021) explains as post-feminist discourse: that sex is

considered positive and desirable for the modern woman. Through their analysis of popular television show *Love Island* Denby (2021) explains that while certain aspects of gendered scripts still exist, such as the expectation for men to propose relationships or marriage, modern media reflects that women are now liberated to initiate sexual intercourse. The influence of sexual script theory can still be seen in heterosexual sexual relationships in media (Denby, 2021) however, the current study highlights an opportunity for traditional sexual scripts to be revised with a modern lens to act as a more accurate basis for modern understanding of sexual consent.

It was hypothesised that male participants would perceive Kevin as more consenting, when Lisa is initiating intercourse with Kevin, than female participants. Males found Kevin slightly more consenting when Lisa was initiating sex, however the findings were not conclusive. So, while studies have found that males can often be more blaming of male victims than females (Smith et al., 1988) the same was not found in the current study when considering the recipient of initiation as the 'victim'. Male participants also found Lisa to be slightly more consenting when Kevin is initiating intercourse with Lisa, although the findings were not definitive. So, there is a possibility that males in general are more likely to find the recipient of initiation more consenting than female participants. This is consistent to what was found by Smith et al. (1988) that female participants were more likely to view sexual assault as more stressful for both male and female victims, with Smith et al. (1988) noting that women may have a more realistic understanding of the traumatic nature of sexual assault because women are more likely to be victims of assault. Given the insignificant differences further research would be needed.

More conclusive results from the current study show that both male and female participants are sympathetic to less-consenting 'victims' regardless of the gender. Which, again, does not align with traditional sexual scripts. It is a common societal assumption that to be a victim is essentially synonymous with femininity (Curry, 2019) whereas the current study reflects that it is the recipient of initiation, regardless of gender, is seen as less consenting in a sexual interaction. As mentioned

earlier the effect of time on mutual cultural understandings, which underline sexual script theory, may be one reason for this deviation. What should also be acknowledged is developments in the understanding of male mental health with increased efforts to destigmatise men's experiences with mental issues and willingness to seek help (Seidler et al., 2022). Much like with female sexual empowerment discussed earlier, traditional masculine ideals as underlying assumptions, that men should be strong, self-reliant, or even indifferent when faced with adverse experiences such as non-consensual sex, still hold truth (Seidler et al., 2022). However, the current findings note potential societal adjustments to these stereotypes that should be further explored when studying male sexual consent in the future.

The disruptiveness of consent in sexual interactions has been researched with varied outcomes. Unlike some previous studies which found verbal consent to be viewed as rigid and embarrassing (Hardesty et al., 2022) the current study found that verbally asking consent does not wreck the mood of sexual intercourse. The findings of the current study align with those found by Piemonte et al. (2020) which note direct explicit verbal consent having little effect on the mood of sexual interactions. One explanation for the variation in findings could be due to age, with Hardesty et al.'s (2022) study into awkwardness of affirmative consent having predominantly included younger students while Piemonte et al.'s (2020) and the current study features a wider age range. However, a relationship between age and verbally asking consent wrecking the mood in the current study was not found. There is opportunity for future research to further expand on these varied results into whether consent can awkwardly affect the flow of sexual interactions. There is a slight trend indicating that while male participants felt the mood was affected by consent equally between both vignettes, female participants felt as though the mood was wrecked less by consent in a situation where Kevin was initiating. Piemonte et al. (2020) explain that there is an expectation for women to avoid showing interest in, and desire for, sex and so woman as the initiator asking consent may be perceived as more odd by female participants who have learnt such scripts. Given the insignificant difference further research would be needed to draw acceptable conclusions.

Limitations and Future Research

Key limitations in the current study relate to the sample used, particularly the size and outreach. Due to time constraints and COVID-19 restrictions the sample size was limited. A larger sample size may have led to more definitive conclusions. The snowball sampling method used also meant that the sample largely consisted of friends and close communities to those of the researcher and who shared similar views. This may have resulted in selection bias, as the participants who completed the study were those with similar ideas of sex, and so were more similar than different in their understanding of sexual consent. This was also reflected by the majority of participants having a left-leaning political orientation and very few participants identifying as having more right-leaning conservative views. Future studies of on the topic should aim for a more varied sample featuring differing views of sex, and therefore consent.

Given that social messages about masculinity and gendered sexual roles are learnt from a young age (Jampel & Addis, 2021) future research could look further into the inclusion of traditional sexual scripts in education and the effect this has on learnt gendered understandings of consent. Previous research has identified differences in the male and female experience of sexual education and how these are often affected by established gendered scripts (Measor, 2004; Thiessen et al., 2021; Jampel & Addis, 2021). Given the push for inclusion of the topic of consent in sexual education within countries like New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2020) it would be interesting to investigate whether these gendered differences and conformities to scripts in general sexual education also exist for consent education. Jampel and Addis (2021) highlight a male reliance on media for sexual education and investigation into the effects of increasing media presence on these scripts would also be an interesting avenue for future research.

The current research looks very generally at male consent in female initiated sexual interactions with no consideration of particular connotations typically associated with male sexual assault victims of female perpetrators. These aspects include age, power dynamics and race. Studies

have found limited but interesting results when exploring racial differences in the experiences of male non-consensual sex particularly with Asian American and African American men (French et al., 2015). French et al. (2015) note a lack of diversity when studying male sexual victimisation, requiring much more examination of racial differences in male sexual coercion. Little research exists looking into the effects of age and power dynamics regarding male victims of non-consensual sex. Miller et al. (2021) found complicated feelings in boys who had experienced sexual advances by older women, noting a mix of curiosity and interest as well as non-consent and un-wanting, with the former being posited as being influenced by cultural norms. Miller et al. (2021) also note the increased likelihood of younger males from economically poor regions to engage in non-consensual sex in exchange for money and protection.

Implications

The current study finds that in some ways traditional sexual scripts persist, regarding perceptions of explicit and implicit consent, but in other ways it may not have such an influence, such as perceptions of initiator and receiver consent. Culturally learnt stereotypical assumptions about the male role in sex can influence the social judgements of heterosexual sexual assault against men. It can also affect how men judge themselves after experiencing non-consensual sex with a female due to confusion around the incongruence of being a victim and their masculine scripted role as the dominant initiator of sex. Despite heterosexual non-consensual sex being traumatic for male victims and leading to ongoing emotional issues and sexual aversion and impairment (Smith et al., 1988) past research has found evidence that adherence to masculine norms means that victims are often unwilling to seek help which commonly leads to psychological issues such as depression and substance use (Jampel & Addis, 2021). The current study does note changes in cultural perspectives of male roles and willingness to ask for help but also acknowledges that negative effects of masculine gendered roles are still ongoing.

Despite slight cultural changes, the issue of male sexual consent still requires significantly more societal and professional understanding and, much like Smith et al. (1988), the current study calls for the establishment of support and treatment programs for male victims of sexual assault which parallel those already established for female victims. Given the prevalence of males who experience non-consensual sex (Jampel & Addis, 2021) awareness of deviations from typical masculine sexual scripts is integral in normalising the common abnormalities from these scripts.

Conclusion

The current study adds to the already thoroughly explored topic of female sexual consent as well as the less explored topic of perceptions of male sexual consent. Consistent with previous explorations in perceptions of consent using only male initiated vignettes (Humphreys, 2007; Titkova, 2018) the current study supported previous findings of males preferring implicit consent and females preferring explicit consent, adding to assumptions that females consider the issue of sexual consent as more serious than males. The current study further adds to discussion of consent by addressing the limitation of male initiated focused studies and their failure to take into consideration situations where a female initiates sexual intercourse with a male. A key finding of the current study was that the assumption, put forth in traditional sexual script theory, that men generally always consent to sex due to an innate desire was not supported. By analysing perceptions of both male and female initiated vignette results it was found that initiation is perceived as a more consensual act no matter the gender of the initiator and that the recipient of initiation was less consenting regardless of the gender. It is posited that these variations from sexual script theory are due to cultural shifts over time and highlights a need for modern revision of the theory given its prominent use as the basis of understanding consent.

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Appendix A

Perceived Consent Scale

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree		Neutral			Strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Kevin consented to sexual activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Lisa consented to sexual activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Kevin's nonverbal behaviours clearly indicate that he has consented to sexual activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Lisa's nonverbal behaviours clearly indicate that she has consented to sexual activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent verbally before proceeding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Verbally asking for consent would have 'wrecked the mood'	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. This couple's nonverbal behaviours are just as effective as verbal communication to indicate sexual consent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Sexual consent is okay to assume in this context	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. More explicit sexual communication is necessary in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Verbally asking for consent would have been awkward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. The approach Kevin/Lisa took to initiating sexual activity is acceptable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent to kiss Lisa/Kevin	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Kevin/Lisa should have asked for consent to touch Lisa's/Kevin's breast/chest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Consent should be asked for and given before any kind of sexual activity began	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. This couple was able to read each other's signals with enough accuracy to assume sexual consent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. If Lisa/Kevin didn't want to have sexual relations she/he would have stopped Kevin/Lisa	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B

Scree Plot

Figure 5.

Figure Showing Scree Plot from Principal Component Analysis

