

## **Using Popular Media Portrayals to Investigate Undergraduates' Perceptions of Sexual Consent**

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Sexual assault is sexual activity without consent, but what is consent? Undergraduates' understandings are often messier than the consensual/non-consensual binary. U.S. university undergraduates watched videos depicting consensual sexual interactions and sexual assaults. Scenes were drawn from popular television programmes and pornographic websites, and varied in their inclusions of verbal consent, alcohol consumption, and coercion. The results show promise for the method of using popular media vignettes to investigate undergraduates' consent perceptions. Findings illustrate that women who never viewed pornography found the scenes less consensual than men who frequently viewed pornography. Despite U.S. law requiring universities to provide sexual consent education to incoming students, such sexuality education had only limited effects on perceptions of consent. Findings suggest that semester-long educational courses were more effective than one-time trainings in impacting perceptions of consent.

Keywords: sexual consent, sexual assault, affirmative consent, vignette, higher education

#MeToo went viral globally in 2017 and spotlighted sexual violence across institutions, including universities (Burke 2019). Approximately 28 percent of undergraduate women in the U.S. experience sexual assault, many while incapacitated by alcohol (Mellins et al. 2017), and survivors may experience negative outcomes, such as lower grades or posttraumatic stress (Mengo and Black 2016).

Sexual assault reflects a lack of consent and constitutes violence and gender inequality. Disproportionately, women and trans people experience it (Mellins et al. 2017). Gender is more than individual identity and structures relationships through processes across the interactional, organizational, and cultural levels, using perceived differences to '[signify] relationships of power' (Scott 1986, 1067). Gender impacts how people use sexual scripts, the norms for sexual encounters, including consent (Gagnon and Simon 1973). The conventional U.S. sexual script holds that men pursue more sexually intimate behaviours, while women set boundaries (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013). This sexual script normalizes sexual assault and is heteronormative (Gavey 2005). Scholars find men and women communicate and interpret consent differently (Jozkowski and Peterson 2013). Gillander Gådin and Stein (2019, 934) argue that schools are sites for 'changing gender relations' to achieve equality. Thus, consensual sexual interaction is a feminist goal in pursuing gender equality.

Sexual consent is words or actions that communicate agreement to sexual activity in a coercion-free environment (Hickman and Muehlenhard 1999). This research asks, what explains undergraduates' perceptions of consent? I define 'perceptions of consent' as holistic understandings of a sexual interaction, which are often messier than the binary of consensual/non-consensual. I analyse what features students consider acceptable or problematic across variations from explicitly consensual sexual interactions to sexual assaults.

This exploratory study contributes a refined methodology to understand the interplay between the context of sexual interactions and how students perceive consent. Prior U.S. studies have often focused on individual attitudes and rape myths rather than investigating these understandings within realistic situations (Phipps and Smith 2012). Consent scholars call for research on context and sexual consent (Muehlenhard et al. 2016). I sought to elicit undergraduates' evaluations of sexual interactions from popular media as a proxy for the context of hookup culture, varying verbal consent, alcohol consumption, and coercion. Respondents viewed popular media scenes, selected from fictional television shows for their demographic and pornography, answering questionnaires after each scene. Questions focused on undergraduates' evaluations of the scenes and the reasoning behind their evaluations. Undergraduates obtain their sexual scripts from many sources, including popular media. At least half of college-aged men report viewing pornography, compared to one third of college-aged women (Carroll et al. 2008). Pornography influences sexual scripts, and men learn sexual information from pornography (Sun et al. 2016). Feminist debate on pornography has highlighted questions about how men learn scripts from pornography (Rosen 2006), but whether pornography impacts women's scripts for consent has attracted less attention. Popular media provide depictions of consent that might appear representative to respondents, especially for college-aged men who report viewing pornography, thereby improving research's existential realism (the depictions' plausibility as real events), which is a significant form of validity. Using popular media scenes as stimuli offers researchers knowledge of the contextual details in the interactions to which participants respond, which future studies can systematically vary. Scenes from popular media are widely available, allowing for replication and extension.

To comply with federal law, U.S. universities implement sexual assault prevention programmes for new students (Gronert 2019). These programmes are often one-time interventions;

research suggests that semester-long courses more effectively shift students' understandings (Jozkowski 2015; Freyd and Smidt 2019). Interventions often focus on consent and alcohol. Among U.S. undergraduates, perpetrators often assault someone who has drunk so much that they are incapacitated (Mellins et al. 2017). University violence prevention educators focus on addressing alcohol and sexual violence (Klein et al. 2018). Hook up culture normalizes sexual interaction while intoxicated (Wade 2017).

The article proceeds as follows; I situate the research in the context of U.S. universities' legal obligations. Then, I summarize the research methodology. I analyse the findings, showing that the gendered consumption of pornography and the effect of sexuality education mattered for students' perceptions of consent. Lastly, I consider the research's contributions and suggest university actions to better prevent sexual assault.

### **U.S. Campus Sexual Violence**

U.S. law for addressing campus sexual violence is unique; laws mandate that universities address it outside of the criminal justice system and educate students about it. Title IX, passed in 1972, mandates gender inclusivity in kindergarten through postgraduate education. Title IX regulations are in flux as of this writing due to the Biden administration evaluating the prior administration's changes. Passed in 1990, the Clery Act requires universities to release annual reports and protect the rights of those involved in sexual assault adjudications. The 2011 Dear Colleague Letter established sexual assault as a Title IX violation that schools must address. In 2013, Congress renewed the Violence Against Women Act to include the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE Act), which revised and expanded Clery. The Campus SaVE Act requires schools to (1) define sexual consent in policy and (2) provide programmes to prevent gender-based violence (for more on U.S. law, see Dauber and Warner 2019; Gronert 2019).

### **Methodology**

I used popular media (television shows and pornography) to offer existentially realistic cases for participants to judge consent. I explain my sample, stimulus selection, how respondents participated, respondents' characteristics, and the analysis.

### ***Sampling***

Because many first-year students have not yet engaged in intercourse (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2016), sexual scripts depicted in popular media may be especially salient and these portrayals offer the opportunity to evaluate students' perceptions of consent. I therefore sampled only first-years. I recruited participants by emailing a list of first-years randomly selected from official rosters by the University Registrar.

### ***Stimulus Selection***

Two trained coders searched for stimuli. We looked for scenes of consensual sexual activity and sexual assault. We used Hickman and Muehlenhard's (1999) definition of sexual consent ('the freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of willingness') since it was like the legal definition for the research's location (Wisconsin Criminal Code, Statute 940.225). We defined scenes without verbal or nonverbal indications of consent as non-consensual. We varied the considerations in the videos to encompass verbal consent, intoxication, and coercion.

I chose videos that this undergraduate population watched. To identify popular television shows, I conducted a survey of undergraduates (class size=276, 88% response rate), modelled upon Tolman et al. (2007). Students completed an inventory where they selected how often they watched shows and their viewership platforms. To find popular pornography, we searched the most-viewed videos on the five most-visited pornography websites, according to Alexa Top 500 sites (<http://www.alexa.com/topsites>). At the time of selection (Fall 2015 semester), these sites were: Xvideos, Pornhub, Xhamster, Bongacams, and Xnxx.

Ethics guided scene selection and the consent process for participants. I drew the violent sexual assault scene from television, rather than pornography, to be less graphic. Only two scenes out of the six presented were depictions of sexual assault, so participants watched a greater number of consensual scenes. The consent process gave participants options to not watch all scenes and to stop participating at any time.

Because the hookup script abounds on U.S. campuses, my choice of scenes was structured to reflect it. The ‘hookup’ encompasses a range of non-romantic, casual sexual activities, including intercourse. The hookup script is embedded within hookup culture, which consists of hooking up, parties with alcohol, and peer discussions about and the pressure to participate in hookups (Wade 2017). Even students who do not engage in hooking up experience hookup culture, as students discuss hookups and attend parties together (Wade 2017). I thus selected scenes based on the following considerations central to the hookup script and sexual assault prevention interventions: verbal consent, intoxication, and coercion. Although undergraduates typically do not verbally consent, prevention education emphasizes verbal consent and universities have widely adopted affirmative consent policies (Gronert 2019; Willis and Jozkowski 2018). Affirmative consent consists of freely given positive verbal statements communicated throughout sexual activity free from the influence of alcohol or drugs (Muehlenhard et al. 2016). Students expect that alcohol consumption is part of hooking up; yet, alcohol consumption is associated with sexual assault (Flack et al. 2007). The final consideration was coercion, which remains part of undergraduate sexual interaction and perpetuates gender inequality as men disregard women’s boundaries in some hookups (Wade 2017). Coercion takes many forms, including asking someone to engage in sex until they relent, threatening someone, or physically forcing someone (Oswald and Russell 2006).

I ultimately selected four television and two pornography scenes (see Table 1 for selection considerations, hypotheses, and scene summaries). The scene from *Awkward* (TV

Verbal) and one pornography scene (Porn Verbal) illustrate verbal consent. The *Gossip Girl* scene (TV Intoxication) depicts intoxication. The *Girls* scene (TV Coercion) is coercive but not violent. The *Game of Thrones* scene (TV Rape) constitutes rape. The second pornography scene (Porn Insistent Persuasion) depicts subtle coercion via insistent persuasion: the man repeatedly begs for sex until the woman agrees.

[Insert Table 1]

While the six scenes varied in interactional characteristics, I held several variables constant: characters' relationship (implied as sexual/romantic relationships), race (appear white), different gender sexual partner, and sexual assault perpetration (men commit the assaults).

### ***Hypotheses***

Based on scholarship on hookup culture and sexual consent, I test the following hypotheses. The first two concern respondent characteristics; the rest are scene-specific, with the scenes indicated in parentheses (Table 1).

- (1) Given the traditional sexual script where men seek sexual activity and women set boundaries, men will view the scenes as more consensual than women.
- (2) Given that semester-long courses more effectively shift how students perceive consent than one-time events, students enrolled in sexuality-related courses will label the scenes less consensual than students who attended sexuality-related events and students who neither attended events nor enrolled in courses.
- (3) Students will view scenes as consensual when they include affirmative consent, which prevention programmes emphasize (TV Verbal and Porn Verbal).
- (4) Students will label as sexual assault an interaction including violence and visible resistance, given undergraduates' scripts for rape (Littleton and Dodd 2016) (TV Rape).

- (5) Given that hookups often happen during/after social events that include alcohol, most undergraduates will label sexual activity between two conscious, intoxicated people as consensual (TV Intoxication).
- (6) Given that hookups sometimes include coercion, some students will not label an interaction involving nonviolent coercion as sexual assault (TV Coercion).
- (7) Students will label an interaction consensual when it lacks verbal consent but includes relevant nonverbal cues from students' sexual scripts (Porn Insistent Persuasion).

### ***Procedure and Measures***

The study used a within-subjects design; respondents viewed all six scenes in a randomized order. After each video, respondents answered the same questionnaire of 18 to 22 items; they answered six questionnaires. I piloted the questionnaire with six undergraduates and revised it based upon cognitive interviews with them. Revisions focused on question ordering and phrasing.

In the questionnaires, respondents were asked to summarize the scene they watched, then answer open-ended questions on the characters' relationship and communication. Two to four yes/no questions evaluated their understanding of consent. All respondents were asked: 'do you consider the sexual encounter to be consensual' and 'do you consider the events that occurred to be a sexual assault.' Respondents who labelled the scene a sexual assault were also asked: 'imagine you were the man, would you consider the events that occurred to be a sexual assault' and 'imagine you were the woman, would you consider the events that occurred to be a sexual assault.' All then were asked to rate the scene on a six-point scale ranging from completely consensual to completely nonconsensual (Figure 1). Each closed-ended item was followed by an open-ended item for explaining their responses. Finally, respondents indicated whether they had ever viewed this scene before the study.

Forty-one respondents comprised the analytic sample, excluding pre-test participants.



Respondents were each paid 25 dollars. After viewing all the scenes and answering the corresponding questionnaire, respondents answered a demographic survey. The IRB restricted what demographic information I could collect. The mean duration of participation was 71 minutes.

### *Participant Characteristics*

All respondents were first-years. Their average age was 19. Twenty participants were women; 21 were men. All had completed the university's required sexual assault prevention programme. Seven participants (4 men, 3 women) reported taking sexuality-related college courses in the social and biological sciences and four of those who took classes also reported attending sexuality-related events. Twenty-two respondents reported attending one-time sexuality-related events organised by student clubs or campus offices (13 men, 9 women). Students pursued diverse majors, ranging from the humanities to natural sciences. Almost half (18) reported that they regularly watched television shows like the stimuli. Gender and porn viewership were strongly correlated ( $\rho=0.6$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). Most men (14) reported watching pornography at least once a week; half the women (10) reported never watching pornography.

### *Analysis*

To examine undergraduates' perceptions of consent in response to the scenes, I used the consent scale as the dependent variable and used linear regression with individual fixed-effects to evaluate the within-subject effects of watching different scenes. I first used thematic analysis to code participants' explanations of their consent scale ratings to see what patterns emerged (Braun and Clarke 2006). I used the regression analysis to test the validity of my qualitative inferences. I used the following as fixed explanatory variables (nonvarying by individual): gender, frequency of porn viewership, and sexuality education. All students reported binary gender; 'woman' is the reference category. Porn viewership and sexuality

education were both coded into three categories to account for small cell sizes. Porn viewership's three levels were: never (reference category), moderate (less than once a month to three times a month), or frequent (at least once a week to daily). Sexuality education's three levels were: none beyond the college requirement (reference category), attended events, or enrolled in a course. The experimentally varied scenes were explanatory variables (treated as randomly assigned): media type, the scene viewed, and the sequence of viewing the scenes. Media Type is a categorical variable referring to whether the scene was filmed for TV or pornography (TV is the reference category). Scene Viewed is a categorical variable for the five scene types: Verbal (TV and Porn), TV Intoxication, TV Coercion, TV Rape, and Porn Insistent Persuasion. The two scenes with verbal consent (TV Verbal and Porn Verbal) are the reference category. Order accounts for the randomised order in which participants' viewed scenes. Model 1 includes no interactions, while Model 2 includes interactions between gender, porn viewership, and media type.

I also conducted separate linear regressions for the three scenes with the most variation in ratings: TV Intoxication, Porn Insistent Persuasion, and TV Coercion. Due to small sample size and limited degrees of freedom, I could not include interactions in these (Models 3, 4, 5) but added scene-relevant variables. Three levels of alcohol evaluations were inductively coded from the open-ended response in which participants explained their consent scale ratings: no mention of problems with intoxication, mention of potential problems, and the argument that intoxication invalidates consent. For the three-level categorical alcohol evaluation variable, the reference category was intoxication invalidates consent. Sequence effects for Model 4 were measured by prior viewing of the other scenes (reference category), or non-consensual scenes (TV Rape or TV Coercion) before the Porn Insistent Persuasion scene. For Model 5, prior scenes viewed was coded as viewing the TV Rape scene before the TV Coercion scene, the more consensual scenes (TV or Porn Verbal,

TV Intoxication, or Porn Insistent Persuasion) before the TV Coercion scene, or the TV Coercion scene first (reference category).

I focus on the regression coefficients' effect sizes, rather than the p-values, due to the small sample size. Since the consent scale has a minimum value of 1 (completely non-consensual) and a maximum value of 6 (completely consensual), a small effect size is 0.4 or less while a large effect size is 0.8 or more. Negative values indicate that respondents classified scenes as less consensual.

## **Results**

This section discusses all six scenes before focusing on the three scenes with the most varied responses: TV Intoxication, TV Coercion, and Porn Insistent Persuasion.

### ***Perceptions of the Scenes***

Respondents (n=41) mostly agreed on scene ratings (Figure 1). Most respondents rated the TV Verbal (30, 15 men, 15 women) and Porn Verbal (32, 19 men, 13 women) scenes as completely consensual, and the TV Rape scene as completely non-consensual (35, 16 men, 19 women). A plurality of respondents rated the TV Intoxication (18, 10 men, 8 women) and Porn Insistent Persuasion (15, 10 men, 5 women) scenes as mostly consensual, and the TV Coercion scene as mostly non-consensual (18, 9 men, 9 women). Most respondents labelled the TV Coercion (30, 15 men, 15 women) and TV Rape (40, 20 men, 20 women) scenes sexual assault.

[Insert Figure 1]

Models 1 and 2 (Table 2) suggest that 77 percent of the variance in respondents' consent scale ratings can be predicted from respondents' gender, pornography viewership, the interaction between gender and pornography viewership, sexuality education, media type, the specific scenes viewed, and the order in which respondents viewed the scenes.

[Insert Table 2]

Pornography viewership alone does not much change respondents' consent scale ratings as indicated by small effect sizes. The results from Model 1 suggest that, compared to respondents who never viewed pornography, moderate pornography viewers were more likely to view scenes as less consensual ( $\beta=-0.11$ ) while frequent pornography viewers were more likely to consider the scenes more consensual ( $\beta=0.11$ ).

Both Models 1 and 2 support Hypothesis 1 (men would classify the scenes as more consensual). In both, gender has the largest effect of all fixed respondent characteristics (gender, porn viewership, and sexuality education). Model 2 presents a better understanding of the effect of gender on participants' ratings, as gender and porn viewership are strongly associated in the sample. On average, relative to women who never viewed pornography, men who viewed pornography both moderately and frequently had slightly more consensual ratings ( $\beta\approx 0.3$ ,  $\beta\approx 0.02$ ). Men on average viewed the Porn Verbal and Porn Insistent Persuasion scenes as more consensual than women did ( $\beta=0.44$ ). Thus, gender and pornography viewership together impacted respondents' consent scale ratings: men who watched more pornography viewed all scenes as more consensual, especially the pornography scenes.

Hypothesis 2 (students taking sexuality-related classes would view the scenes as less consensual) was not supported. Compared to those who did not pursue sexuality education, on average participants who only attended events and those enrolled in classes' coefficients were similar ( $\beta\approx -0.3$ ,  $\beta\approx -0.2$ ). The slight differences between those with no sexuality education and those with sexuality education (classes or events) could be because all first-year students completed mandatory sexual assault prevention training.

In Models 1 and 2, which scene is being rated has the largest effect size, indicating that the features within the scenes impacted respondents' consent scale ratings, meeting the research's first goal. Using the TV Verbal and Porn Verbal scenes as a reference category,

consent scale effect sizes differed substantively for the other four scenes. Model 2 shows that respondents, on average, rated the other scenes as less consensual than the TV Verbal or Porn Verbal scenes to different degrees: TV Intoxication ( $\beta=-1.08$ ), Porn Insistent Persuasion ( $\beta=-1.38$ ), TV Coercion ( $\beta=-3.58$ ), and TV Rape ( $\beta=-4.45$ ). Each effect being at least one is meaningful since the consent scale's maximum value is six and all coefficients were statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ , see Table 2).

### *Scene-Specific Perceptions*

I look first at the two verbal consent scenes and the TV Rape scene, where ratings were consistent across individuals. I then explore ratings of the three polarizing scenes: TV Intoxication, TV Coercion, and Porn Insistent Persuasion (Figure 1).

Respondents' classifications of the TV Verbal, Porn Verbal, and TV Rape scenes indicate that those scene-specific hypotheses were supported. Students overwhelmingly rated the TV Verbal and Porn Verbal scenes as consensual, as Hypothesis 3 anticipated. Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported as students almost unanimously viewed the violent scene with victim resistance (TV Rape) as sexual assault.

#### *TV Intoxication: problematic but accepted*

The regression models and participants' scene ratings partially support Hypothesis 5 (students would deem intoxicated but conscious sexual activity consensual). On average, respondents did not find the TV Intoxication scene as consensual as the verbal consent scenes. Yet, sexuality education (events or courses beyond university requirements) had a notable effect for this scene while having almost no effect on the other scenes' ratings. Men and women pursued sexuality education at similar rates. Compared to counterparts without sexuality education, those who attended sexuality-related events viewed this scene as somewhat less consensual ( $\beta\approx-0.5$ ). Those enrolled in sexuality courses found the scene even less consensual ( $\beta=-1.19$ ).

[Insert Table 3]

In students' open-ended responses, all but one recognized that the main characters were consuming alcohol and likely drunk. Nevertheless, most students (32) rated this scene as consensual (Table 3, Model 3; Figure 1), supporting Hypothesis 5.

Respondents fell into three orientations towards drunken sexual interaction: did not mention problems, mentioned potential problems, and argued intoxication made consent invalid. Those with sexuality education most often espoused the second and third orientations. Those who mentioned potential problems with intoxicated sex labelled the scene more consensual than those who thought intoxication negated consent ( $\beta=0.92$ ). Furthermore, respondents who did not mention problems labelled the scene much more consensual ( $\beta=2.22$ ). The following quotations best encapsulated each orientation. All 11 respondents who rated the TV Intoxication scene completely consensual are in the first category, making no mention of problems associated with alcohol consumption and sexual activity: 'I rate this scene as completely consensual because both people seemed interested and willing to engage in a sexual encounter' (man). This no-problem orientation contained the fewest respondents with sexuality education (5).

Twenty-seven respondents expressed the second orientation, mentioning potential issues associated with sex and alcohol, but hesitating to label the interaction sexual assault. These students rated the scene: mostly consensual, somewhat consensual, and somewhat non-consensual. They recognized that drunkenness makes it difficult to infer people's intentions: 'Because it is always brought into question if alcohol is involved. Even if, like in this situation, they both consented' (man). Fourteen students with sexuality education expressed this orientation.

Only three respondents represented the third orientation, explicitly saying intoxication removed the ability to consent. All pursued sexuality education and rated the scene mostly

non-consensual. One wrote, ‘Both characters were intoxicated, and intoxicated people are unable to give consent’ (woman).

*TV Coercion: gendered observation of consent*

Hypothesis 6 was unsupported, as students were surprisingly inclined to view nonviolent coercion as assault. Only a minority rated the scene as somewhat consensual (2), mostly consensual (1), or completely consensual (1). Most students classified the TV Coercion scene as sexual assault (30). Porn viewership, gender, and scene order help explain these ratings.

Frequent porn viewership (14 men, 3 women) had the largest effect on respondents’ perceptions (Table 3, Model 5). Frequent porn viewers rated the scene as more consensual than those who never watched pornography ( $\beta=1.12$ ). Moderate porn viewers (7 men, 6 women) rated the scene marginally more consensual ( $\beta=0.14$ ).

Gender had a small effect on respondents’ ratings ( $\beta=-0.36$ ). However, this may be due to a linear dependency between gender and porn viewership (a multicollinearity check of Model 5 suggests that gender and porn viewership may marginally be considered linear combinations of each other; VIF=12.77 for gender, 8.24 for men who watch porn moderately, 14.66 for men who watch porn frequently). Because gender and pornography viewing are strongly associated in the sample, the effect of masculinity may be stronger in the quantitative results for the pornography viewership variable. In women’s open-ended responses explaining their ratings, most women cited Natalia’s lack of consent (15), while no pattern emerged for men.

The order of watching scenes had a modest effect. Those who viewed TV Verbal, Porn Verbal, the TV Intoxication, and/or the Porn Insistent Persuasion scenes before the TV Coercion scene found the scene less consensual ( $\beta=-0.68$ ).

*Porn Insistent Persuasion: prior experience matters*

The Porn Insistent Persuasion scene offered some support for Hypothesis 7 (relevant nonverbal cues would be interpreted as consent). While most students deemed it consensual, their ratings of it varied most (Figure 1). Viewing a non-consensual scene beforehand, pornography viewership, and gender contribute to this variation.

Viewing a non-consensual scene beforehand had a large effect size ( $\beta=1.14$ ) and is associated with respondents rating this scene more consensual. Viewing pornography frequently or moderately had modest effects, although gender might obscure the extent to which pornography viewership influenced ratings. Model 2 shows that the interaction between gender and porn viewership impacted much of the within-subjects' ratings. Gender had the largest effect for the Porn Insistent Persuasion scene ( $\beta=1.06$ , Model 4). Since women were the reference category, one can consider this a measure of masculinity's effect on ratings. Like the TV Intoxication scene, this scene activated gendered sexual scripts.

## **Discussion**

This exploratory study uses video vignettes drawn from popular media as a proxy for the context of hookup culture to investigate how U.S. undergraduates perceive consent. Sexual assault, pervasive at universities, is defined by the lack of consent in sexual interactions but is the meaning of consent clearly or consistently understood by undergraduates? My findings suggest this is not the case. Realistically understanding undergraduates' perceptions of consent is crucial for preventing sexual assault. Further research using popular media will be able to sample scenes that include features even more sensitive to pornography viewership, consent and intoxication, and the recency and types of sexuality education that shape these perceptions. Although researchers could use the same popular media scenes I chose for replication, the strength of the design is to present a variety of realistic presentations to capture the elements that matter most in the context of student sexual interaction.



I found two highly correlated individual characteristics shaped respondents' perceptions of consent across all scenes: gender and pornography viewership. Regression with individual fixed-effects revealed that men who frequently viewed pornography considered the scenes more consensual than women who never viewed pornography. Frequent pornography viewers, 82% of whom were men, also viewed the TV Coercion scene as more consensual (Model 5). These findings add to the literature on the gendering of sexual scripts.

In this small sample, sexuality-related classes substantively impacted respondents' perceptions of consent only for the TV Intoxication scene (Model 3). They had no substantive effect, however, across the six scenes (Models 1 and 2). This disconnect may be attributable to the mandatory online sexual assault prevention training all respondents had previously completed; the programme stressed that consent was only valid when sober. These first-year students evidently could repeat the official sexual consent policy but as that policy was inconsistent with hookup culture, they disbelieved it (Wade 2017). Students who rated the TV Intoxication scene as less consensual chose to take academic sexuality-related courses. My findings suggest that, while students learn from short-term initiatives, including mandatory programmes, they do not incorporate information about alcohol impairment into their perceptions of consent, as a minority of respondents took the stance that intoxication affects the ability to consent. Students who pursued semester-long sexuality courses appear to remember and apply the content (Jozkowski 2015), though my results cannot distinguish between an effect on students' perceptions of consent and self-selection into course-taking.

Required high school sexual education may partially explain results. It is difficult to know whether and how pre-college sexuality education interacted with students' perceptions as most states' public schools are required to emphasize abstinence from sex and only nine states mandate "comprehensive healthy relationship education," which includes consent

education (SIECUS 2020 pp. 10-12).

One implication is that programmes would be better served by taking a more nuanced approach to sex and alcohol. Sexuality education, whether one-time or long-term, has the potential to be better incorporated into undergraduates' sexual scripts by emphasizing that consent is integral to combining any drinking with sexual interaction *and* the situations under which students cannot accept the consent of a person impaired by alcohol.

What does this mean for university efforts to prevent sexual assault? Semester-long courses in the social and biological sciences appear promising, but undergraduates took these courses as part of their academic studies, not to meet sexual violence prevention education requirements. These courses likely were structured differently than a one-time training. A semester-long course goes beyond U.S. universities' legal requirements. Universities may institute one-time prevention programmes as a form of symbolic compliance (Edelman 2016). To use education to change perceptions of consent, universities must commit to institutional courage, meaning addressing and preventing harm members of the institution commit or experience and/or harm the institution perpetuates (Freyd and Smidt 2019). Universities that go beyond legal requirements and move from one-time trainings to semester-long courses would signal such a commitment (Freyd and Smidt 2019). Education beyond students' first year is also important as knowledge gained during their first year may diminish.

This research situates undergraduates' perceptions of consent in the context of hookup culture and the scripts they learn from media, but it has limitations. As an exploratory study, the small sample size allowed for analysis of effect size but limited analysis of confidence intervals and statistical significance. The small cell sizes meant that the interaction between pornography viewership and gender in Models 4 and 5 could not be analysed. Because the sample attended a large, primarily white public U.S. university, the results may not be generalizable to undergraduates in different contexts. Because respondents had to opt into the

study, selection bias is a concern, although it is mitigated by respondents' diversity on other measures. The research is also limited from knowing demographics, such as race, sexual orientation, and status of being sexually active, due to restrictions from the IRB. Lastly, because the scenes were not specifically produced for this study, my methodology trades influence over scenes' features for existential realism.

The study offers two contributions: a methodology that accounts for context and some empirical insight into the limitations of mandated Campus SaVE trainings as a response to campus sexual assault. First, the substantial effect of the scenes in the individual fixed-effects models shows the promise of this methodology (Models 1 and 2). The scenes elicited different evaluations from participants in both their quantitative ratings and open-ended responses. Second, while sexuality education did not substantively alter respondents' combined scene ratings, it did impact their ratings of the TV Intoxication scene. The linkage of sex and alcohol is one of the most prevalent problems on U.S. campuses, given hookup culture and the high incidence of sexual assault while the victim is incapacitated by alcohol. This is a scenario to which universities direct their mandated interventions, but with little effect. These interventions remain unlikely to override the demands of hookup culture to mix drinking and sexual activity as long as they remain a single "lesson from the administration." These findings have consequences for sexual consent education, suggesting that interactive semester-long courses have the potential to foster change on campus. Such courses may convince more students to shift their sexual scripts to recognize that intoxication undermines consent, but they are unlikely to encourage student buy-in if they present messages about consent and drinking in absolutist terms. It is crucial that scholars investigate student perceptions of both alcohol and sexuality education to encourage universities to pursue commitments to institutional courage (Freyd and Smidt 2019).

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**Table 1: Scene Descriptions**

	<b>TV Verbal</b>	<b>TV Intoxication</b>	<b>TV Coercion</b>	<b>TV Rape</b>	<b>Porn Verbal</b>	<b>Porn Insistent Persuasion</b>
<b>Source</b>	<i>Awkward</i> , S3, E14	<i>Gossip Girl</i> , S5, E18	<i>Girls</i> , S2, E9	<i>Game of Thrones</i> , S4, E3	200 <sup>th</sup> most viewed, xnxx.com	5 <sup>th</sup> most viewed, xvideos.com
<b>Selection Considerations</b>	Verbal consent	Intoxicated and conscious	Coercion	Rape, physical force, verbal refusal	Verbal consent	Insistent persuasion
<b>Hypotheses</b>	Consensual	Consensual	Divided	Sexual Assault	Consensual	Consensual†
<b>Summary</b>	While in Collin's bed, Collin asks Jenna if she is 'sure' she wants to have sex. Jenna replies, 'yeah, I'm sure.' Then Collin grabs a condom.	After drinking alcohol at separate locations, Blair and Dan engage in sexual activity in a public elevator.	Adam says, 'get on all fours. Crawl to my bedroom.' Natalia complies, and he grabs her and throws her onto the bed. He ejaculates on Natalia's chest.	Jaime and Cersei discuss a death. Cersei kisses Jaime and steps away from him. Jaime grabs her, pins her down, and rapes her.	Filmed from the man's perspective, he asks, 'Want to ride it?' The woman response, 'Yes, let me fuck you.' Then, they engage in intercourse.	Richie sneaks into Brenda's bedroom. They discuss how they should not engage in sex but ultimately engage in sexual activity.
<b>Length</b>	00:31	02:50	03:19	01:46	01:31	02:49

**Notes:**

Scenes available upon request.

For Source, S refers to 'season,' E refers to 'episode.'

†When selecting the scenes, the researcher did not realise that Porn Insistent Persuasion included possible verbal sexual pressure and classified it as consensual. This is why the selection consideration and hypothesis do not align.

**Table 2: OLS Regression Models Predicting Students' Perceptions of Consent for All Scenes with Individual Fixed-Effects**

Dependent Variable: Consent Scale	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Respondent Characteristics</i>		
Male	0.45* (0.20)	0.15* (0.16)
Porn Viewership		
Moderate	-0.11 (0.19)	-0.17 (0.20)
Frequent	0.11 (0.24)	0.27 (0.38)
Sexuality education		
Events	-0.34* (0.15)	-0.37* (0.16)
Classes and/or events	-0.22 (0.21)	-0.25 (0.20)
<i>Scene Characteristics</i>		
Media type: Porn	-0.01 (0.14)	-0.18 (0.20)
Viewing order	0.08* (0.04)	0.08* (0.04)
Scene viewed		
TV Intoxication	-1.08* (0.23)	-1.08* (0.23)
TV Coercion	-3.58* (0.19)	-3.58* (0.19)
TV Rape	-4.45* (0.16)	-4.45* (0.16)
Porn Insistent Persuasion	-1.39* (0.22)	-1.38* (0.22)
<i>Respondent-Scene Interactions</i>		
Gender*Media type		
Men viewing porn scenes		0.44 (0.29)
Gender*Porn Viewership		
Men Moderate		0.30 (0.36)
Men Frequent		0.02 (0.37)
Porn Viewership*Media type		
Moderate		0.004 (0.31)
Frequent		-0.14 (0.27)
Intercept	5.33* (0.20)	5.41* (0.19)
Observations	246	246
F Statistic	182.03*	117.26*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.77	0.78

<sup>a</sup>Note: \*p<0.05, two-tailed test

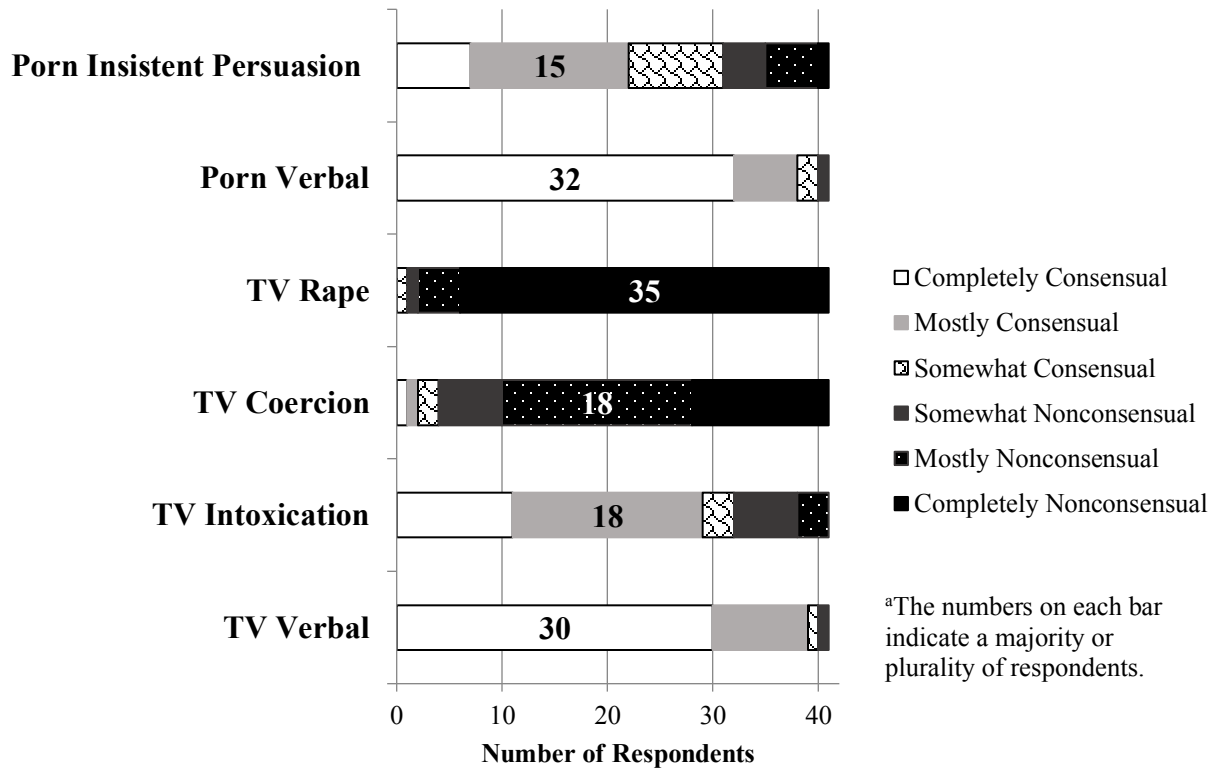


**Table 3: OLS Regression Models Predicting Students' Perceptions of Consent for Individual Scenes**

Variables	Model 3: TV Intoxication	Model 4: Porn Insistent Persuasion	Model 5: TV Coercion
<i>Respondent characteristics</i>			
Male	0.94* (0.32)	1.06* (0.44)	-0.36 (0.41)
Porn Viewership			
Moderate		-0.82 (0.49)	0.14 (0.45)
Frequent		-0.36 (0.54)	1.12* (0.50)
Sexuality education			
Events	-0.58 (0.34)		
Classes and/or events	-1.19* (0.43)		
<i>Respondent-Scene Interactions</i>			
Alcohol Evaluation			
Mentions problems	0.92 (0.64)		
No problems mentioned	2.22* (0.62)		
Viewed Non-consensual Scene			
Prior		1.14* (0.37)	
Prior Scenes Viewed			
TV Rape			0.27 (0.43)
Any scene except TV Rape			-0.68 (0.47)
Intercept	3.12* (0.61)	3.46* (0.39)	5.12* (0.46)
Observations	41	41	41
F Statistic	9.17*	5.23*	2.89*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.57	0.37	0.29

<sup>a</sup>Note: \*p<0.05, two-tailed test

**Figure 1. Students' Consent Scale Ratings, n=41<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup>The numbers on each bar indicate a majority or plurality of respondents.