

## **Consent Synopses**

### Article 1: Sexual Compliance: Examining the Relationships Among Sexual Want, Sexual Consent, and Sexual Assertiveness

I want to start this summary with noting I am not as confident in the relevance for our conversation of consent, however it is still a really interesting read and I wanted to share. The authors of this article begin by providing an over view of what the following terms mean; sexual decision making (sexual consent and sexual want), sexual compliance, sexual ambivalence, and sexual assertiveness. These terms are some that I had never heard of or are concepts that I had heard of but had never had fully defined and laid out for me. Sexual decision making is broken into two elements, sexual consent ("considered to be the behavioural expression of that desire or willingness, may include both verbal and nonverbal acts indicating one's desire and/or agreement to engage in sexual activity") and sexual want ("internal desire or willingness to engage in sexual activity"). Sexual compliance is "the act of consenting to unwanted sexual activity", sexual ambivalence is defined as the "level of desire and willingness for sexual activity being undecided" unfortunately sexual ambivalence is associated with increased risk for sexual assault, coercion into sexual activity as well as increased sexual compliance. Sexual assertiveness is defined as "external behaviour that communicates what one wants in a sexual context, including what one sexually wants, refusing what one does not want, and advocating for safe sex/prevention practices". Authors identify that individuals that have strong sexual assertiveness may be better equipped to express consent as well as express refusal of consent. These terms were helpful for me to get a better understanding of sexual violence, consent, and sexual activity as a whole as they provide definitions and connections to each other. The researchers used a survey method where participants (308 undergraduate females) were asked to respond to questions in relation to their most recent sexual experience. Through research it was concluded that "women who display more sexual assertive behaviours exhibit higher levels of refusal behaviour when confronted with unwanted sexual advances", further it was noted that women in relationships reported higher rates of sexual compliance, "sexual activity may actually demonstrate commitment to the relationship and/or promote intimacy within the relationship". Low sexual assertiveness was reported to relate to sexual compliance,

and unwanted/ coerced consent behaviours. One quote to note is "a woman may just have to respond to a man's initiation of sexual activity, as absence of verbal consent (no response) is often interpreted as sexual consent", this was discussed in relation to sexual assertiveness but shows a large connection to our discussion of affirmative consent versus the old patriarchal view of consent (no means no versus yes means yes). Researchers concluded that "enhancing sexual assertiveness may be an important factor in efforts to enhance clarity of sexual communication" and that "discussion of sexual boundaries prior to sexual activity resulted in men and women demonstrating shorter response times when asked to identify at what point a woman wanted a man to stop making sexual advances".

## Article 2: The alcohol contexts of consent, wanted sex, sexual pleasure, and sexual assault: Results from a probability survey of undergraduate students

In the context of this article they described sexual assault as follows "active sexual assault (involving physical force) and incapacitated sexual assault (involving an inability to provide consent, such as due to being asleep, unconscious, or intoxicated), noting that alcohol use is associated with both. Researchers state that when alcohol is discussed in relation to sexual assault it is viewed through three lenses, "1) sexual assault can include sex when a person is unable to consent due to alcohol or drug use, 2) a victim's alcohol consumption does not make the assault their "fault" and/or 3) that alcohol is associated with reported assaults" however the complexities behind alcohol and assault are rarely examined despite the large overlap. Previous research has stated that 1 in 6 US adults report alcohol being used in relation to their most recent sexual encounter, "this underscores a broader cultural connection of alcohol and sexual experiences that are usually consensual, wanted and pleasurable". Researchers used a method of survey (7020 participants) to examine the following when discussing their most recent sexual experience; alcohol use (was alcohol involved, how much, both individuals or one), wantedness (how much they wanted to participate), sexual pleasure (did they find to experience pleasurable), and non-consensual sex (asked to indicate during which period of their life if ever they had encountered sexual violence due to being drugged, incapacitated due to being too high or drunk, force or threats, asked who the person was (stranger, friend, acquaintance, family, etc.), asked if and who they reported to (friend, police, family, doctor/nurse, counsellor, etc), and finally if the experience happened during college they were asked if they had ever avoided or dropped a class to avoid seeing an individual as well as asked if they had missed class due to emotional difficulties). One major thing to note in the research findings is the discussion of non-consensual sex and sexual orientation, it was found that the highest rates of sexual violence among women were reported in those who identify as bisexual, followed by heterosexual, unsure of sexual orientation, those identifying as asexual or other and lesbian/gay women. In men the highest reporting of sexual violence was in those identifying as homosexual or bisexual, followed by those uncertain of their sexual orientation, and finally heterosexual men. Researchers concluded that "alcohol was linked with sex that was generally rated as less pleasurable and was more likely to be unwanted (albeit consensual)", however "the high prevalence of drunk sex is important in light of current debates related to sexual behaviour, consent, assault and intoxication". The current discussion of consent and the prevalence of it being sober

or non intoxicated is contradicting to how college aged individuals view and engage in sexual activity. It was concluded that "conflating alcohol and sexual assault allows campus policies to avoid discussions of the complexities of sexual consent that reflect desire, sexual development and communication". Closer working relationships between scientists that study alcohol use and scientist that study sexual development may help improve the understanding of the issue and their connection to each other.

### Article 3: Unblurring the lines of sexual consent with a college student-driven sexual consent education campaign

In this research study the authors are evaluating how a campaign focused on sexual consent effected college aged individual's views on sexual consent and sexual violence over a period of time. Researchers used "any sexual encounter absent of clear, uncoerced, affirmative consent given or obtained by a sexual partner" as a broad definition of sexual assault. Directly after this definition they noted the lack of understanding among college students in relation to consent and their perception of coercion being problematic when receiving consent. Universities and colleges often provide training or education related to bystander prevention, consent, and sexual violence awareness however this training/education is normally provided once throughout the college or university experience and may not produce lasting effects. The campaign being examined in this research study was created and implemented by undergraduate students with the goal of "unblurring the lines of sexual consent through peer-to-peer and mediated messaging". They focused on generating open conversation by "gathering and displaying questions and responses posed by other students about relevant topics (consent, dating, gender or sexual stereotypes). Researchers note that peer-to-peer communication shows promise in engaging historically hard to reach students (college men and sorority or fraternity individuals). Members of the sorority and fraternity community expressed concerns that "sexual assault prevention programs unfairly target them as potential sexual assault perpetrators or victims", resulting in them being less likely to participate in such programs. College men indicated that they are more open to sexual assault prevention and awareness strategies when they "were approached in a non-confrontational, alliance building fashion by other men". With this in mind researchers took in these considerations when trying to appeal to these hard to reach audiences. To assess the effectiveness a survey was provided before, during and after the campaign was launched. The questions included in this online survey (992 participants) assessed aspects such as positive attitudes about establishing consent before engaging in sexual activity; perceived behavioural control to obtain consent from a partner; how likely they were to ask for consent prior to sexual activity and to stop sexual activity if consent was rescinded or if a partner was silent; whether they considered different situations to be sexual assault or not including grey areas of sexual assault. These questions were responded to based on a five-point scale. It was concluded through research that the campaign was effective at improving college students sexual consent understanding over time. Comparing baseline reports (before surveys) to final surveys there was "significantly greater positive attitudes about establishing sexual consent before engaging in sexual activity, perceived behavioural control to obtain sexual consent from a partner, intentions to ask for consent prior to sexual activity and to stop sexual activity if consent was rescinded or

is a partner was silent, and understanding of what constitutes sexual assault. Concluding researchers state that students need to be exposed to multiple components multiple times to increase effectiveness of programming. This research provided insight that the hard to reach student populations also saw improvement in their views and understanding through the campaign (ended up at a similar understanding level to their peers with healthier views).

#### Article 4: Sexual Violence Response and Prevention: Studies of Campus Policies and Practices

In this article authors review and examine sexual victimization on college campuses, specifically examining various issues surrounding campus policies and practices aimed at sexual violence and sexual harassment response and prevention. The authors look specifically at the variation of definitions for terms such as consent, sexual violence and sexual harassment, the unintended negative consequences of mandatory reporting, the exclusive focus of policy and procedure on victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment being problematic, and the relationship between campus characteristics and effective sexual violence and sexual harassment policy going unexplored and under appreciated. First looking at the theme of inconsistent and under defined terms authors note that "vague definitions and cultural scripts can substantially reduce the likelihood of student reporting behaviour". These inconsistencies can lead to a lot of issues when it comes to survivors reporting and confidence in the procedure/institution as a whole. "Policies that are not clear about which behaviours warrant reporting and who has the responsibility to respond to reports can lead to inaccurate data collection, misappropriated resources, and a failure to provide victims with appropriate services". Secondly authors review the unintended consequences of mandatory reporting, specifically in relation to designating faculty members as mandatory reporters. Individuals "sometimes confide personal issues to faculty members whom they trust as part of a relationship building process", "requiring victim advocates and faculty members to report disclosures deprives students of an additional confidential resource". This raised a question for me of how can we at UFV ensure we are respecting confidentiality while also doing our best to ensure support service, reports and so on are available after disclosures. The authors also note that mandatory reporting "takes control away from the victim" as they no longer have the choice in making the report. Further is discussed the potential of mandatory reporting contributing to secondary victimization, policies prohibiting retaliation does not stop it from happening, remaining a member of the college/university community is not something that comes easily or immediately after a report. The third theme evaluated is the lack of inclusion, many stakeholders are omitted from the policy making process. Authors noted that "respondents consistently expressed concern and frustration that they were not included in the creation of policies and processes to govern the actions that occur when sexual violence is reported". The lack of inclusion has resulted in a "lack of consideration for victims, alleged perpetrators and the staff and advocates who provide critical support for victims". Finally, authors discussed the importance of campus context, "the influence of campus characteristics on the existence, comprehensiveness and effectiveness of sexual violence and sexual harassment policy and procedure". I found this section interesting as authors stated "campuses with a more visible female presence... have

higher reporting rates than campuses without a visible female presence. Additionally, having a female president was particularly influential on the reporting of sexual assaults". This was interesting to me when looking at UFV, as I believe we have a female president. The information provided in the article is based off of US schools however I do believe these aspects are things that still apply in the context of UFV. It was concluded that "inconsistency in the definitions of what constitutes sexual violence or sexual harassment, the unintended consequences of mandatory reporting, the lack of inclusiveness in the development of policies, procedures and programs, and the impact of the campus climate on policy and practices are key for future research. Authors finished by stressing the importance that "victims of these acts need to receive assistance and services which they are not only legally entitled, but are also ones that effectively and completely address their present needs to prepare them for their future".

Tamzen Trowell