

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | POSTER

Sexual Consent: How Relationships and Sexual Self-Disclosure Affect Signaling and Interpreting Cues for Sexual Consent

Nicholas P. Newstrom, PhD, LMFT

Michael H. Miner, PhD, LP

Steven M. Harris, PhD, LMFT

Sexual assault is a pervasive public health problem. In 2012, one in five women and one in 71 men are victims of sexual assault (Black et al., 2012). Recent news events have highlighted the sexual assaults committed on U.S.A. college campuses and the risks posed to college-aged women (Muehlenhard, Peterson, Humphreys & Jozkowski, 2017). Moreover, some of these cases were instances of sexual assault occurred when (1) the perpetrator knew the victim (i.e., date rape) and (2) the perpetrator reported misinterpreting the willingness of their partner to engage in sexual activity (Sanchez, 2017 June; Stahl, 2016). This paper presentation explored the results of a recent cross-sectional study that investigated sexual communication. Using a sample of 309 heterosexual subjects recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, I investigated how individuals signaled and interpreted cues to engage in sexual intercourse. Specifically, I was interested to what extent relationship status and sexual self-disclosure (e.g., sharing one's sexual preferences with each other) affected sexual consent cues. I found that gender was significant factor for how men and women signal consent as women reported more likely to indicate consent through direct verbal cues (e.g., "I want to have sex with you") and statements about intoxication level (e.g., "I'm really drunk") whereas men communicated consent through indirect nonverbal signals (e.g., taking off their shirt). Additionally, males were more likely to report indirect signals and statements about intoxication as indicative of consent.

This presentation will conclude with a discussion on how the results of this study can inform sexual consent policies and assist couples on clearly articulating their interest in engaging in sexual behaviors. Further strategies/study designs for future researchers to investigate this phenomenon will also be explored.

Dr. Newstrom is the Michael E. Metz postdoctoral fellow at the University of Minnesota, Program in Human Sexuality. As a fellow, he is involved in providing therapy at the Center for Sexual Health and conducting sexuality research. His research interests include exploring risk factors for committing sexual abuse in adult and juvenile male populations. More specifically, he is interested in how consent is indicated between sexual partners.