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Original article

The Role of Hypermasculinity, Token Resistance, Rape Myth, and Assertive Sexual Consent Communication Among College Men


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ABSTRACT

Purpose: A greater understanding of how college men's gendered beliefs and communication styles relate to their sexual consent attitudes and intentions is essential within the shifting context of negative to affirmative consent policies on college campuses. The results of this study can be used to help design more effective sexual consent interventions.

Methods: Three hundred seventy undergraduate college men completed cross-sectional online surveys. Hierarchical multiple regression examined how hypermasculinity, token resistance, rape myth acceptance, and sexual communication assertiveness were associated with consent-related attitudes, intentions, and interpretations.

Results: Bivariate correlations among all variables were significant. In multivariate analyses, sexual communication assertiveness was positively associated with all consent outcomes, and token resistance and rape myth acceptance were negatively associated with some. Hypermasculinity was not a significant factor.

Conclusions: Programs seeking to improve sexual consent communication among college men should reduce destructive beliefs and encourage sexually assertive communication.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

The present study examined how the sexual consent communication attitudes, intentions, and interpretations of college men are associated with sexist and hostile beliefs and healthy sexual communication styles. Results suggest that college men hold healthier consent attitudes and intentions when they also feel comfortable communicating consent in an assertive (not aggressive) style.

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Increased attention on campus sexual assault has prompted many colleges to revise their sexual assault policies and associated prevention and education programming [1], with many schools adopting programs focused on improving students' understanding of sexual consent communication [2,3]. How college men understand sexual consent is of particular interest to prevention scholars and practitioners, because, as a group, men are more likely to perpetrate sexual assault and/or hold rape-supportive attitudes than women [4–7]. Research also indicates that men are more likely to interpret communication signals, such

as caressing or agreement to move to a more private space, as indicative of sexual consent and more likely to initiate sexual activity compared with women [8,9]. Additionally, the atmosphere associated with college, such as college party culture and shared living spaces, may also create unique contexts that increase the importance of studying consent among college men (see Reference 8 for a review of these contexts). Thus, it is important to consider how college men's gendered beliefs and preferred communication styles may play a role in their understanding of sexual consent, which could ultimately impact how and whether they engage in active, affirmative consent with their sexual partners.

First, it is important to note that there is no uniformly accepted definition of sexual consent (see Reference 8 for a review); however, for the purposes of the present study, we focus on explicit verbal consent and inferred consent, which requires an individual to interpret verbal and nonverbal communication. Scholars have noted that consent is understudied compared with sexual assault and that more research is needed to understand how sexual consent is interpreted and practiced [10,11]. One important connection between the previous research on sexual assault and the burgeoning research on sexual consent may be to examine the well-known antecedents of sexual assault within the context of sexual consent communication. Previous research indicates that stronger beliefs about hypermasculinity, token resistance, and rape myths are associated with rape culture, which is defined as a setting in which rape is pervasive and normalized because of societal attitudes about gender and sexuality [12,13].

Hypermasculinity is the prototype of an exaggerated masculine performance, such that the “stereotypical man” often performs his gender through hostility, domination of women, and calloused sexual behavior [6]. Hypermasculinity emphasizes the heterosexual conquest of women as an important aspect of performing traditional masculinity [6]. Hypermasculinity can extend beyond the sexual realm, such that hypermasculinity endorses traditional ideas about the need for men to be highly respected and to gain that respect by being aggressive and unfeminine [14]. Hypermasculine men may then misinterpret or ignore sexual communication signals from their female partners, especially when their female partners' wants and signals are in opposition to their own. Hypermasculine men may also rationalize their aggressive behaviors by subscribing to less progressive beliefs about how women communicate sexual consent, such that they believe women want to be dominated by men and engage in “token resistance” as a submissive tactic.

Token resistance is the heteronormative belief that women typically say “no” to sex with a man when they really mean “yes,” and is a form of sexual miscommunication that may contribute to some young men's (mis)understanding of consent [15,16]. Within a culture of hypermasculinity, men may view token resistance by women as a necessary barrier to overcome in sexual interactions, using persistence and coercion with a female partner to obtain a perceived (although potentially unwilling) yes [15]. A stronger belief in women using token resistance is associated with greater misperceptions about sexual consent. For example, in situations where women expressed that they only wanted to kiss, men still believed that these women wanted to engage in sexual intercourse because they agreed to some sexual activity [17,18]. Young men with these types of hostile and sexist beliefs are therefore more likely to subscribe to rape myth beliefs that assign blame to the victims of sexual assault instead of the perpetrators, because they believe or rationalize that the victim

actually “wanted it,” despite not giving clear, willing consent to all sexual activities [19].

Acceptance of rape myth beliefs is the extent to which an individual holds “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” [20]. Rape myths serve to shift responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim [21] and are often related to other hostile attitudes and behaviors toward women that may influence how and whether young men engage in sexual consent communication [19]. A better understanding of the relationship between rape myth acceptance and sexual consent among college men may be especially relevant as a dominant sexual script among college men is that women are responsible for refusing or giving consent [8,22].

Whereas hypermasculinity, token resistance beliefs, and rape myth acceptance have all been shown to be associated with negative sexual attitudes and behaviors, sexual assertiveness, defined as “the ability to develop assertive behaviors in a sexual context,” has been linked to positive sexual attitudes and behaviors, especially in regard to communication among partners [23]. Sexual assertiveness is different from the sexual aggressiveness associated with hypermasculinity described previously. Aggressive communication is concerned with the initiator expressing his or her desires in a way that violates the rights of others in preference for their own desires, whereas assertive communication is focused on expressing desires in a way that is also respectful of the rights and desires of others [24]. Being sexually assertive would therefore include communicating openly about ones' sexual desires and willingness to engage in sexual activity, both of which are important in establishing affirmative, clear consent.

The relationship between hypermasculinity, token resistance beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and sexual communication assertiveness and its association with sexual consent attitudes and intentions may provide important insights into some of the underlying processes that may inform antecedents of sexual violence. The present study also examines the association between those negative predictors of sexual violence, the role of sexual communication assertiveness as an important and understudied aspect of sexual consent, and college men's ability to correctly interpret simple and complex sexual consent situations.

Further understanding about factors contributing to sexual consent communication attitudes, intentions, and interpretations for college men has practical significance by contributing to the strategic design of interventions to reduce campus sexual assault and theoretical significance within the field of sexual communication research. Therefore, the present study was designed around one key research question: How are hypermasculinity, token resistance beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and sexual communication assertiveness associated with consent communication attitudes, intentions, and interpretations?

Methods

Participants and procedures

Participants were 370 undergraduate college men at a public university in the southwestern region of the United States who were recruited through university email listserv announcements. Data for this online survey were collected over three time points in 2014–2015 within two semesters with nine students indicating they may have previously participated; those students were eliminated from the sample. Based on the research

Table 1
Sample characteristics

Variable	n	%
Fraternity member (or pledge)	60	19.9
Year in school		
Freshmen/first year	58	19.3
Sophomores	63	20.9
Juniors	78	25.9
Seniors	101	33.9
Race and ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	207	68.8
Hispanic/Latino	51	16.9
Asian/Asian American	17	5.6
Mixed race inclusive of white/Caucasian	14	4.7
Black/African-American	12	4.0
Had vaginal and/or anal sex	216	71.8
In a monogamous relationship	151	50.2
Survey participation time point		
Early spring	104	34.6
Late spring	111	36.9
Fall spring	86	28.6
	Mean	SD
Age	20.59	1.75
Number of sexual partners	4.15	5.51

SD, standard deviation.

Total N = 301.

goals and concepts examined in this study (i.e., token resistance), an additional 57 students were not included in the sample because they indicated they did not have an exclusive attraction to women. Lastly, an analysis of univariate outliers revealed three cases that were outliers on multiple dependent variables. Those outlier cases were also excluded from analysis, which resulted in $N = 301$. Students who clicked the survey link saw an informed consent form before viewing the online questionnaire. Participants received a \$5 or \$10 online gift card for completing the survey depending on which semester they took the survey. See Table 1 for sample characteristics. All procedures were approved by the university's institutional review board.

Measures

All measures, except for the complex scenarios score, were composite averages created from five-point Likert scales ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") unless otherwise indicated. Reported reliability is based on the current study.

Hypermasculine attitudes. A scale of seven items about masculinity expectations for men was adapted from the Masculine Ideology Scale ($\alpha = .76$) [14]. One example item is "It is essential for a guy to get respect from others."

Token resistance beliefs. A scale of seven items about belief in token resistance was adapted from the Token Resistance to Sex Scale ($\alpha = .87$) [18]. An example item is "Women usually say 'no' to sex when they really mean 'yes'."

Rape myth acceptance. A scale of 16 items was adapted from the Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) ($\alpha = .87$) [25]. An example item is "When girls get sexually assaulted, it's often because the way they said 'no' was unclear."

Sexual communication assertiveness. A scale of seven items was used to assess participants' comfort verbally communicating

consent and desire in sexual encounters in an assertive (not aggressive) style ($\alpha = .74$). Six items were used from the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness [26], which originally consisted of 25 items; the six items used were those items associated with communication (e.g., "I feel uncomfortable talking during sex" and "I feel uncomfortable telling my partner to slow down or stop during sexual encounters that may lead to intercourse" [both reverse coded]). The scale also included one item about direct verbal consent communication practices that stated, "I provide sexual consent through verbal communication (e.g., words and sounds)."

Attitudes supporting sexual consent communication. A scale of eight items measuring support for having and obtaining sexual consent through clear communication was adapted from the Positive Attitude Toward Establishing Consent Sub-scale of the Sexual Consent Scale ($\alpha = .90$) [27]. An example item is "I feel that verbally asking for sexual consent should occur before proceeding with any sexual activity."

Intentions to obtain and respect consent communication from a sexual partner. A scale of five items ("very unlikely" to "very likely") measuring how likely a participant would be to ask for consent before sexual activity and to stop sexual activity if consent was rescinded or if a partner was silent was adapted from the Sexual Consent-Related Behavior Intentions Scale ($\alpha = .85$) [9]. An example item is "I will ask my partner for consent before engaging in sexual activity."

Interpretation of sexual assault in consent scenarios. A scale of 12 items ("definitely not sexual assault" to "definitely sexual assault") informed by relevant literature [10,11,28–30] that also used or discussed sexual consent scenarios and previous qualitative work by the authors that included 11 focus groups with college students about their experiences related to dating, hooking up, consent, and sexual assault was developed to measure participants' ability to interpret if consent was provided during various sexual scenarios ($\alpha = .87$). See Table 2 for scale items.

Interpretation of sexual consent in complex scenarios. Unlike the composites for the other variables, an index from five items sums the number of scenarios participants correctly identified as consensual (or not) based on the study university's official definition of sexual consent. Five scenarios with three response options ("Yes, the sex was definitely consensual," "Unsure about whether the sex was consensual," or "No, the sex was definitely not consensual") were created for the present study (see Table 2). Scenarios were based on scenarios developed by Yale's Committee on Sexual Misconduct, which stated scenarios were based on "extensive research literature" [31] and also on the authors' previous qualitative work in this area. Additionally, the scenarios for the present study were edited by a committee of approximately 25 undergraduate students who evaluated them for clarity and realism. Unsure was coded as incorrect since undergraduates on the committee indicated that unsure may be the socially desirable response when a participant personally thinks something is consensual even though he may think it does not meet the legal definition of consent. On average, 4.8% of the participants reported incorrect responses, 12.0% were unsure, and 83.3% correctly identified any given scenario. A participant's number of correct responses was then summed to create an index, which ranged from 0 (no correct responses) to 5 (all correct responses).

Table 2
Scenario items^{a,***}

Item prompt: If two people had sex (including oral, vaginal, and/or anal) under the following conditions, please indicate whether you believe it to be sexual assault or not.	M	SD
<i>Interpretation of sexual assault in consent scenarios (scale 1–5)</i>		
Both partners verbally agreed to have sex (reverse coded).	4.70	.676
One partner gave the other alcohol or drugs without his or her knowledge.	4.62	.793
One partner had sex with the other when he or she was passed out.	4.61	.878
One partner used some degree of physical force (twisting his or her arm, holding him or her down or in any other way restraining or physically hurting the person).	4.46	.903
One partner pressured the other into having sex when he or she did not want to.	4.24	.867
One partner got angry at the other as a means of intimidating him or her into having sex.	4.19	.922
One partner verbally agreed to have sex and the other did so by nodding or providing some other nonverbal agreement (reverse coded).	4.02	.952
Both partners verbally agree to have sex but then one partner becomes unsure and says he or she may want to stop, but the other partner continues anyway.	4.00	.987
One partner had sex with the other when he or she was intoxicated (with alcohol and/or illicit drugs).	3.90	.960
One partner encouraged the other to consume alcohol or drugs to loosen him or her up.	3.81	.984
One partner is verbally and nonverbally expressing his or her interest when having sex but the other partner is silent and motionless.	3.61	.905
One partner does not actively resist having sex but also does not indicate whether he or she wants to have sex.	3.33	.903
<i>Interpretation of sexual consent in complex scenarios (scale 1–3)</i>		
Item prompt: Please read each of the following scenarios and indicate your level of agreement with whether you believe the sex that occurred was consensual (meaning that both partners gave their consent to engage in the sexual activity).		
Susan is at a party with her friends and has had too much to drink. Susan lies down on the couch and passes out. Michael is a handsome male, who has always had a crush on Susan. He sees that Susan is extremely intoxicated and decides to make an advance toward her. While she is highly intoxicated and unable to comprehend the situation effectively, he climbs on top of her and has sex with her.	2.95	.266
Susan and Michael have been flirting all semester, and agree to meet at a party. After dancing closely together for a while, Michael proposes going to one of their rooms and Susan agrees. On the walk to Michael's room, they send a few texts, letting Susan's friends know not to worry and asking Michael's roommate to please sleep somewhere else. Once in the room, they begin touching. Each is interested in hearing what the other wants, and each is paying attention to the other's signals. Throughout their sexual encounter, each person expresses his or her continued interest through verbal (e.g., "Yes, like that") and nonverbal (e.g., smiling) communication (reverse coded).	2.91	.364
Michael and Susan are dating. Susan is uncertain about whether they should have sex, but Michael is persuasive and finally obtains Susan's voluntary agreement. As they engage in sex, Susan says "wait—stop—that hurts." Michael nonetheless continues for several more minutes, restraining Susan. Afterward, Susan is upset. Michael apologizes, but says they were past the point of interruption.	2.79	.491
Susan is at a party. While at the party, she is flirting with all the guys. At the end of the night, she agrees to go for a walk with one of the guys. They both consent to take off their clothes and make out. Susan has been leading him on this entire time, but right before penetration occurs, she tells him "no." He ignores this and continues having sex with her anyway. She does not physically resist while he finishes.	2.75	.568
Michael and Susan are kissing and touching each other. Michael begins to intensify the sexual contact and Susan responds by pulling away slightly. Michael reads this signal and returns to less intense contact for a few minutes, but then intensifies the contact once more and begins having sex with Susan. Susan puts up no fight and offers no physical resistance; instead, she lies there motionless, without making a sound, and waits until Michael has finished before making a move to leave the room.	2.53	.671

SD, standard deviation.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Results

Statistical analysis

Bivariate correlations. Table 3 provides the means, standard deviations, ranges, and correlations for the study variables.

Significant correlations in the expected directions were found for all variables.

Hierarchical regression analysis. The research question was examined using two-step hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Covariates were entered into the first step, and hypermasculine

Table 3
Means, SDs, ranges, and correlations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Hypermasculine attitudes	—							
2. Token resistance beliefs	.46 ^a	—						
3. Rape myth acceptance	.48 ^a	.68 ^a	—					
4. Sexual communication comfort	-.36 ^a	-.36 ^a	-.32 ^a	—				
5. Attitudes supporting sexual consent communication	-.35 ^a	-.40 ^a	-.33 ^a	.46 ^a	—			
6. Intentions to obtain/respect consent communication	-.25 ^a	-.36 ^a	-.36 ^a	.53 ^a	.63 ^a	—		
7. Recognition of sexual assault in consent scenarios	-.39 ^a	-.41 ^a	-.32 ^a	.50 ^a	.57 ^a	.57 ^a	—	
8. Recognition of sexual consent in complex scenarios	-.20 ^a	-.43 ^a	-.35 ^a	.34 ^a	.35 ^a	.45 ^a	.47 ^a	—
M	2.77	2.21	2.23	3.99	4.12	4.35	4.13	4.16
SD	.68	.74	.65	.63	.67	.62	.58	1.04
Range	1–5	1.0–4.14	1.0–4.50	2.29–5.0	1–5	1.20–5.0	1.67–5.0	0–5

SD, standard deviation.

^a Correlation is significant at $p < .01$.

attitudes, token resistance beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and sexual communication comfort were entered into the second step as predictors for each of the dependent variables.

Covariates. Three covariates shown to have the potential to influence variables within the study were entered into all analyses: (1) fraternity membership (0 = no, 1 = yes) was included as research indicates rape culture is present beyond an individual's attitudes and often fostered by college institutions, such as fraternities, that contribute to the perceptions and realities of sexual consent through the promotion of party culture and gendered spaces [13,32,33]; (2) number of sexual partners (range 0–20); and (3) if participants were in a monogamous, committed romantic relationship at the time of the survey (0 = no, 1 = yes). A fourth covariate was added to account for different survey time points (0 = early spring, 1 = late spring, 2 = fall).

Attitudes supporting sexual consent communication

The hierarchical multiple regression with consent attitudes as the dependent variable produced a significant model at the second step, $F(8, 236) = 13.66, p < .001$. Token resistance beliefs had a significant negative association with consent attitudes, whereas sexual communication assertiveness had a significant positive association. Neither hypermasculinity nor rape myth acceptance had a significant relationship with consent attitudes (see Table 4).

Intentions to obtain/respect consent communication

With consent intentions as the dependent variable, a significant model was produced at the second step, $F(8, 236) = 16.27, p < .001$. Rape myth acceptance had a significant negative association with consent intentions, whereas sexual communication assertiveness had a significant positive association. Neither hypermasculinity nor token resistance beliefs had a significant relationship with consent intentions (see Table 4).

Interpretation of sexual assault in consent scenarios

The hierarchical multiple regression with sexual assault interpretation in consent scenarios as the dependent variable produced a significant model at the first ($F(4, 236) = 3.78, p < .05$) and second steps, $F(8, 236) = 17.93, p < .001$. Token resistance had a significant negative association with sexual assault interpretation, whereas sexual communication assertiveness had a significant positive association. Neither hypermasculinity nor rape myth acceptance had a significant relationship with sexual assault interpretation in consent scenarios (see Table 4).

Interpretation of sexual consent in complex scenarios

With sexual consent interpretation in complex scenarios as the dependent variable, significant models were produced at the first ($F(4, 236) = 2.97, p < .05$) and second ($F(8, 236) = 13.29, p < .001$) steps. Token resistance and rape myth acceptance had significant negative associations with sexual consent interpretation, whereas sexual communication assertiveness had a significant positive association. Hypermasculinity did not have a significant relationship with sexual consent interpretation in consent scenarios (see Table 4).

Discussion

The present study sought to understand how hypermasculinity, token resistance beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and sexual communication assertiveness are associated with consent communication attitudes, intentions, and interpretations. The present study focused specifically on dependent variables representing healthy sexual consent communication as key outcomes that are necessary to help reduce college campus sexual assault and improve related educational programming. Researchers have pointed out that much of the college sexual assault programming emphasizes the importance of obtaining consent but fails to explain what counts as consent [8]. Furthermore, studies have shown that college students often confuse communication cues that may signal a likelihood of future consent with signals of actual agreement (consent) [8]. The lack of emphasis on helping to interpret sexual consent communication and to disentangle likelihood from actual consent underlines the importance of the current study's measures related to consent interpretation.

Results of the present study consistently marked the importance of an individual's level of comfort in his or her sexual communication assertiveness. Greater sexual communication assertiveness was associated with positive attitudes, intentions, and ability to interpret sexual consent communications. Sexual consent education programming should consider providing instructive practice on how to engage in sexual communication that is assertive (not aggressive). The importance of normalizing sexual communication assertiveness makes intuitive sense as assertive communication inherently considers the rights and the well-being of the communication partner, which are aligned with healthy sexual consent communication practices.

Token resistance beliefs were also found to be a factor associated with destructive attitudes and interpretations related to sexual consent communication. Token resistance beliefs become especially problematic when men do not correctly interpret sexual situations because they believe that women regularly practice token resistance, which may then result in greater instances of sexual harassment and assault. Based on these findings, we recommend that sexual consent programming should consider addressing token resistance fallacies within their educational materials. The emphasis on decreasing token resistance beliefs may become especially important within the shifting cultural (and legal) context from negative consent ("only no means no") to affirmative consent ("only yes means yes") [34].

The present study found that rape myth acceptance was associated with destructive consent intentions and a lower ability to correctly interpret complex consent scenarios. The association with intentions seems to align with the scripts inherent within rape myths, such that women are responsible for consent; thus, males may have lower intentions to be the responsible party that initiates the obtaining of consent. Surprisingly, rape myth acceptance was not associated with the simple sexual assault interpretation scenarios, many of which seem to repeat common rape myths (e.g., "One partner had sex with the other when he or she was intoxicated"). The difference in rape myth acceptance association with the simpler consent scenarios and the more complex scenarios may be due to operational differences in item wording. The simpler scenarios are not gendered, whereas the complex scenarios clearly indicate a male perpetrator and a female victim, and thus may be more likely to trigger associations with rape myths.

Table 4
Summary of hierarchical regression analyses

Sexual consent attitudes as dependent variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Fraternity membership	-.071	.106	-.666	.059	.091	.655
Number of sexual partners	-.013	.008	-1.627	-.010	.007	-1.567
In a relationship	.105	.087	1.205	-.013	.075	-.177
Survey time point	.072	.054	1.327	.045	.047	.973
Hypermasculinity				-.051	.063	-.808
Token resistance beliefs				-.210	.068	-3.065**
Rape myth acceptance				-.101	.077	-1.323
Sexual communication comfort				.338	.065	5.188***
R ²	.033			.324		
F for change in R ²	2.00			24.51***		
Sexual consent intentions as dependent variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Fraternity membership	-.100	.103	-.968	.013	.085	.150
Number of sexual partners	-.011	.007	-1.484	-.010	.006	-1.658
In a relationship	.091	.084	1.074	-.041	.071	-.575
Survey time point	.074	.053	1.401	.033	.044	.740
Hypermasculinity				.112	.059	1.879
Token resistance beliefs				-.106	.064	-1.642
Rape myth acceptance				-.231	.072	-3.200**
Sexual communication comfort				.454	.061	7.403***
R ²	.033			.363		
F for change in R ²	1.99			29.56***		
Sexual assault recognition in consent scenarios as dependent variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Fraternity membership	-.207	.094	-2.209*	-.081	.078	-1.039
Number of sexual partners	-.010	.007	-1.473	-.008	.006	-1.409
In a relationship	.076	.077	.986	-.038	.064	-.590
Survey time point	.102	.048	2.130*	.076	.040	1.910
Hypermasculinity				-.094	.054	-1.735
Token resistance beliefs				-.207	.058	-3.540***
Rape myth acceptance				-.047	.065	-.712
Sexual communication comfort				.316	.053	5.688***
R ²	.061			.386		
F for change in R ²	3.78**			30.18***		
Sexual consent recognition in complex scenarios as dependent variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Fraternity membership	.126	.165	.761	.297	.143	2.081*
Number of sexual partners	-.034	.012	-2.868**	-.030	.010	-2.943**
In a relationship	.184	.135	1.359	.053	.118	.446
Survey time point	-.066	.084	-.788	-.078	.073	-1.063
Hypermasculinity				.167	.099	1.683
Token resistance beliefs				-.478	.108	-4.437***
Rape myth acceptance				-.277	.121	-2.297*
Sexual communication comfort				.336	.103	3.273**
R ²	.049			.318		
F for change in R ²	2.97*			22.51***		

SE, standard error.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The present study found that hypermasculinity was not directly associated with sexual consent communication attitudes, intentions, or interpretations. This insignificant finding for the role of hypermasculinity contrasts with traditional literature that typically finds strong direct associations between hypermasculinity and sexual violence [35,36]. More recent research, however, has also noted some inconsistencies of the effect of hypermasculinity on sexual aggression toward women and suggested that perhaps hypermasculinity is not a unidimensional concept, but rather a multidimensional concept with varying dimensional impacts [37,38]. It is possible that some dimension of hypermasculinity can manifest as a protective instinct where men

intend to honor and protect their partner. More research is needed to understand the potentially complex role of hypermasculinity on sexual consent communication.

The present study was among the first to look at outcome variables specific to healthy sexual consent communication within the context of beliefs associated with sexual violence and healthy sexual communication (assertiveness); however, there are important limitations to note. The data were from self-reported repeated cross-sectional surveys, and thus, our ability to infer causation is limited. Many of the variables and discussion within this article are focused on heteronormative beliefs, and future research should examine if and how these issues may be reflected

outside of that context. The means for most variables were highly skewed, which is not surprising, given the taboo nature of the topic; however, this non-normal distribution should be noted and may have affected analyses. This research also did not address what is likely an important factor, the role of alcohol consumption on sexual consent communication. Future research may also want to examine how beliefs and behaviors are shaped over time as policies and programming efforts move toward affirmative consent. Despite these limitations and suggestions for future research, these results suggest that more work is needed to foster healthier sexual consent communication attitudes, intentions, and interpretations among college men.

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