

Understanding of “Sexual Consent” among Indian Male and Female College Students

Dr. Gulgoonajamal^{*}, Deshna Jain¹

ABSTRACT

The present study assessed the Indian male and female collegestudents' understanding of "sexual consent" and examined gender differences regarding this understanding. The participants were college-going students from different states of India (Male, n = 38; Female, n = 33). The tests administered to the participants included the two subscales “awareness and discussion” and “sexual consent norms” from "Sexual Consent Scale – Revised" by Humphreys and Brousseau (2010), and the "Process Based Consent Scale" (Glance, Zatzkin, & Kaufman, 2020). The understanding of “sexual consent” was low in both male and female college students. While both male and female participants showed low “awareness and discussion”, “ongoing consent”, and “communicative sexuality”, they showed higher agreement with “sexual consent norms” and “subtle coercion”. Further, both male and female college students did not differ significantly in their understanding of "sexual consent". Both male and female college students showed a poor understanding of "sexual consent" and did not differ significantly from each other on it. These findings are supported by the existing research on conservative social structure in India (Waldern et al., 1999; Bhugra, Mehra, de Silva, & Bhintade, 2007; Hindin & Hindin, 2009), "sexual scripts" model (Muehlenhard et al., 2016) and gender inequality (Primoratz, 2001) deeply embedded in Indian society. Little research has been conducted in India on an understanding of "sexual consent" among the public in the context of personal relationships. Hence, the present study can be seen as an important contribution in this area to examine the concept of "sexual consent" among Indians from different social strata, to spread awareness, and to design intervention programs.

Keywords: *Sexual consent, affirmative model, sexual scripts, sexual consent norms, subtle coercion, ongoing consent, process-based consent*

1. Introduction

Fiction depicts a bipolar form of sexuality with a highly romantic version at one extreme and a violent version at the other. The latter involves the explicit use of power to subjugate and exploit the weaker party which in most cases women and violation of human rights (mostly women's rights), so it invokes the state's legal system. In such situations, women are at the receiving end, suffering atrocities at the hands of their oppressors and the judicial system actively work to give justice to the victims and to punish the perpetrators. The question of "sexual consent" does not arise where sex is used as violence with a clearly defined victim and perpetrator. On the other hand, many of us believe or like to believe that "sexual consent" is taken in romantic sexual relationships as after all these relationships are based on love, care, equality, and togetherness. However, the reality is less than romantic. Even the fictional accounts of romantic sexual relationships, if analyzed minutely can be seen as setting and strengthening the gender stereotypes. Women in

romantic relationships are also at the receiving end. There is hardly any mention of women's wishes, preferences, or desires. What is more harmful is that even in romantic sexual relationships, men are always the initiators of the sexual activity using coercion with refusing women who eventually give in to the men's demands for having sex. To make it worse, subtle acts of coercion are often shown as turning into aggression and violence leading to rape. Lastly, to put a seal of social expectation and acceptance, women are shown to enjoy “secretly” such forced sexual acts, believing that their refusal and their partner's aggressive overtures make them more desirable. Fiction more than often translates into reality with the result that most people are ignorant about their rights in sexual relationships, such as the right to refuse sex, to stop during the act in case of discomfort or due to change of mind, etc. In other words, ignorance surrounds the concept of “sexual consent” that leads to a spiral of sexual crimes against women, thousands of litigations, and endless physical and psychosocial suffering for the victims and sometimes for the clueless ‘perpetrators’ as well.

1. Department of Psychology, Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi
^{*} Corresponding author ✉ gulgoona.jamal@zh.du.ac.in

Received: 21 September, 2022
 Available online: 31 December, 2022

The “National Crime Records Bureau” (NCRB, 2022) of India reported that in comparison to the year 2020, crime against women increased by 15.3% in 2021. Crime rate (incidence of crime against women per one lakh population) against women also increased by 8%. Out of the total crimes against women, 31.8% involved “cruelty by husband or his relatives, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty, kidnapping and abduction, and rape” (NCRB, 2022). Unfortunately, most sexual violence cases in India are not reported (NCRB, 2018), however, this trend has changed in the recent years, with more cases of rape being reported now (Shahidullah, 2017). The factors behind these statistics include scenarios where no individuals around the victim, including friends, family, and legal authorities, believe that a crime took place (“you’re just imagining it”). In many other cases, the victims' character is questioned, and the validity of their claims is established through psychologically brutal interrogative means to prove the assault in court - and they might even have to go through repeated threats and revenge crimes. The victim must bear heavy financial and emotional damage, with no guarantee of receiving justice. The assault by itself is a petrifying and accusatory public attitude that may be internalized by the victims which negatively affects their self-concept and psycho-social functioning thereby adding insult to injury (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Law, 1999). Thus, apart from being the victim of the assault, the survivor also becomes a victim of shifted blame. The responsibility is lifted from sexual assault being a committed crime to a suffered tragedy, or even invited misfortune; and so, the whole burden of the event is left upon the victim while the perpetrator receives little blame and various justifications.

Certain “rape myths” are common across societies. These refer to public views about the circumstances of sexual violence, its perpetrators, and their actions. A common myth about rape is that “it is a violent, brutal act perpetrated by a stranger in a secluded location at night”. Rape by a stranger is referred to as “real rape” by Estrich (1987) and it is expected to be different from “acquaintance rape”, which is rape by a familiar person. A familiar perpetrator may be a relative, colleague, friend or even a neighbour whom the victim knows and trusts. A woman may also be raped by a “dating partner” who could be a recent acquaintance, or a trusted person (Bletzer & Koss, 2004). This distinction makes it clear that sexual assault does not only happen at the tip of a knife or under physical threat. Any type of sexual intimacy turns into assault if any of the people involved do not actively consent to it. This realization makes understanding active “sexual consent” crucial to identifying, preventing, and punishing sexual assault.

The offender does not always approach the victim to hurt or violate them. Oftentimes actually, the perpetrator does

not realize that their actions are harmful and account for harassment. For instance, if a person consents under heavy alcohol influence, and sleeps with someone, it cannot be considered as a consensual interaction. Similarly, if a person keeps on trying to persuade their partner for intercourse until the partner relents, that too is not a situation of freely given sexual consent. These situations where there is no explicit threat, but where an individual is not consenting freely or in a sound condition, create grey areas for the victim as well as for the legal proceedings. These grey areas open discussion for understanding the different ways and contexts in which sexual consent is provided and where it is absent, and what “sexual consent” really means.

“Sexual consent” has been described in varied ways, such as “section 375 of the Indian Penal Code” describes it as “consent is an unequivocal voluntary agreement when the woman communicates a willingness to engage in the specific sexual act through words, gestures, or any other means of verbal or nonverbal communication”. Bedsworth (2022) has described sexual consent as, “when an able person willingly agrees to sexual activity with a partner. Both people should not doubt that the other wants to participate. Consent does not happen just one time before or at the beginning of sex. It continues throughout any sexual activity and every time you have sex”. Beres (2007) has described it as a “voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity”. Yet another definition by Marcantonio, Willis, and Jozkowski, (2020) says that “it is a freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of willingness to engage in sexual activity”. Beres (2007) has noted that “it is a mental and a physical act, where mental act implies a covert consent which involves a decision or a feeling of willingness whereas the physical act implies an overt consent and involves verbal/nonverbal expression of willingness”. The willingness is inferred or presumed mentally by the other person; hence it can be called the “inferred consent” (Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, & Peterson, 2016). Since, the consent is inferred by people based on their understanding, hence, different individuals can differently interpret it. In other words, different individuals use a different set of assumptions about typical/atypical responses, signals, and cues to ensure that their partner is willing to engage in sexual behavior. However, such assumptions being idiosyncratic, the probability of misinterpretations is high often leading to ugly situations which end up in legal battles and cause mental and physical trauma to the victims. Some models have been suggested to bring lucidity to the entangled issue of consent. Two such models are the “affirmative” model and the “sexual scripts” model.

As is clear from its name, the “affirmative” model proposes that “sexual consent” should be an affirmation by both the partners for engaging in sexual behavior (Beres & MacDonald, 2015). “Silence or lack of resistance by a

partner cannot be interpreted as consent". Further, non-consent is assumed till consent is affirmed actively by both the partners. On the other hand, in "sexual scripts" model, consent is assumed till the partner is actively informed of the non-consent. Traditionally, a man should be the initiator of sexual behavior while a woman should play "hard to get" and must be responsible for giving consent. (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Such "sexual scripts" imply that men are neither guarded about "sexual consent" nor are they much worried about sexual assault (Humphreys, 2007).

Such "sexual scripts" lead to several prejudices against women, for example, the onus lies on the woman to stop the sexual advances and in the case of non-consensual sex, the woman is blamed for "not doing enough" to stop it. Further, the unwilling woman may not be able to refuse or resist the sexual coercion because she might be afraid of being blackmailed, intoxicated, or passed out. Since the partner in most of the "non-consensual" sex situations does not fit the stereotypical rapist who could be armed, hence such a scenario may confuse the woman. Furthermore, sometimes suddenness of sexual behaviors may catch the victim off-guard not providing her with a chance to refuse. Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras (2008) talk at length about these gender roles in sexual consent in heterosexual relationships and how disguised or direct pressure from partners can lead to women consenting to sex out of the free will.

It is important to understand "sexual consent capacity" while assessing "sexual consent". Beres and MacDonald, (2015) describe "sexual consent capacity as what distinguishes unmarried people who are legally permitted to have sexual relations from those who are not." Such a description assumes that marriage automatically grants sexual consent."It is permissible to a person with sexual consent capacity to have sexual relations with another adult who also has sexual consent capacity". This concept of "sexual consent capacity" sheds light on the existence of political implications of sexual consent and how just consenting is not enough.

Some recent literature talks about the societal and political context of sexual consent. These perspectives involve feminist ideologies and standing patriarchal structures that often produce female victims. The academic and activist discussions about sexual consent within the feminist approach have brought forward two strands of thought (Popova, 2018). The first strand has its roots in radical second-wave feminism which focuses on powerful and oppressive social structures that limit women's sexual consent capacity as it is tied down to their feelings of physical and/or social security. The second strand involved agency provided by legal and psychological perspectives to communicate consent.

Primoratz (2001) talks of the "radical feminist perspective on rape" and consent as "Rape is only the most dramatic

epitome of the inequality of men and women and the degradation and oppression of women by men". It further adds, "the presence or absence of consent would indeed mark the difference between legitimate sexual intercourse and rape, if the social conditions in which a woman gives or refuses consent were those of equality of power and freedom of choice". Unfortunately, social realities are far from ideal as deeply engrained gender inequality forces women to negotiate for sex on a highly unequal basis that ranges from avoidance of violence from the partner, to avert falling prey to other predatory males, getting psychosocial and economic support, etc. Some examples of these would be an individual consenting to sex to win their partner's approval or to want to be perceived as appealing. It may also stem from the belief that a person must provide sex to their partner – especially in a committed relationship, or that they must lose their virginity or have casual sex to maintain or elevate their status quo. These insecurities commonly become triggers which can be used to obtain consent.

In her article, Primoratz (2001) talks about 'verbal sexual coercion' where a partner obtains consent by either threatening to end the relationship, or by saying that they are reconsidering their relationship or feelings because they want their needs fulfilled, or by threatening to find a better accommodating partner. Primoratz (2001) also mentions the need for a standard gravity of what can be considered coercive sexual consent, asking if such verbal coercions equal explicit threats. Jozkowski (2011) quotes "It seems that 'pushing ahead' in a sexual encounter without providing an opportunity for consent should be conceptualized as aggressive or assaultive behavior; yet it is not clear whether current conceptualizations of non-consent would include these deceptive behaviors." Such considerations open room for discussion of the social situations which hold the power to pervert freely given consent.

According to Beres and MacDonald (2015), the concept of freedom is inherent to the way consent is defined. That is, the social context for sexual consent must be free from "coercion/force or undue influence". However, the notion of freedom in consent hits a roadblock when its social contexts are reviewed, for example, in a relationship, one partner might consent to sexual activity to avoid repetitively explaining why they do not want sex or because they have said "no" enough times before and feel guilty or burnt out.

The present scenario of Indian society is such that even though women are progressing as business runners and intellectuals, they are still expected to follow a predetermined value set when it comes to gender roles and their roles in a relationship (Waldner, Vaden-Goad, & Sikka, 1999). Additionally, as it has been for centuries, the Indian setting continues to hold the view that sex serves the

sole purpose of procreation, taking place exclusively within heterosexual, monogamous marriages. In this effect, it is seen as a crucial activity to which a couple must consent as they now should "carry the line forward". Waldner et al. (1999) also wrote in their study that in contrast to the West, dating is less frequent in India due to the continued and strongly adhered practice of arranged marriages. This leaves little room for conversation about consent in a pre/unmarried situation as the activity is not viewed in its purpose for the possibility of pleasure or as a means for romantic bonding. Parents seldom provide their children with the "birds and the bees" talk and so not only do teenagers enter the discovery phase of their sexualities unprepared about health implications, liberties, and exploratory practices, but also do not get the exposure, encouragement, or motivation to think about other important associated practices like the role of pleasure, asking for and giving consent. Moreover, this notion gives the impression that marriages assume consent. Since sexual intimacy is preserved for marriage, once an individual gets married, they must engage sexually with their spouse. This impression not only takes agency and meaning away from marital consent, but also does so with a wide gender gap because the onus of sexual consent is left upon the woman (and lust upon the man), and because she is now made to understand that this is her wifely duty, the wife must consent, and the husband must lust. These expectations in and out of committed relationships like marriage leave very detailed descriptions of gendered behavior in acquiring sexual consent.

"The gendered assumption of consent is reflective of the gendered nature of sexual violence" Beres (2007). This gendered way of perceiving is not limited to women but stretches to men in that they are assumed to always consent, and so their consent is seldom if ever contested. This holds men to the position of the undisputed initiator and women to the position of the passive receiver in heterosexual relationships. This gendered positioning puts the burden of responding, limiting, and deciding to participate in sexual activity on women thereby leaving little choice for "woman-desired" and "woman-initiated" heterosexual relationships (Beres, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). A strong example of this would be the study conducted by Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) which found that most male and female college students endorsed the traditional "sexual scripts" when engaging in sexual activities. It means that males usually initiated a conversation around sex by asking if their partner wanted to do it – so asking for or taking consent from their partner was the male's responsibility, whereas, at the same time, females tended to give consent to their partner or indicate their will as a response.

Aggressive initiation of sexual behavior by males as an indication of consent in heterosexual relationships is another important gender difference. In a study by

Jozkowski and Peterson (2013), male participants reported that they directly showed their consent to have sex rather than asking about the "sexual consent" of their partner. This behavior was used as a "direct order" for sex by some males, while other seven indicated their consent through direct and physical force. Further, contemporary young adults also believed in "sexual norms" regarding women's and men's sexuality. Furthermore, gender difference regarding "sexual consent" goes on to say that "because women are conceptualized as gatekeepers, they often find themselves in contradictory situations. That is, they may not resist strongly enough and thus be perceived as at fault for experiencing forced sex, conversely, they may engage in some sexual activity but halt the activity before sexual intercourse and thus be labelled a "tease" and again be conceptualized as being responsible for men forcing sex on them; or they may agree to sex too quickly or with too many partners, thus being perceived as a "slut". According to Glace, Zarkin and Kaufman (2020), due to gender differences in the perception of consent where women are supposed to give their consent to men and not vice versa, subtle coercion by males in heterosexual relationships pertaining to consent is likely to be supported by males. It is evident from the reported research that sexual consent cannot be meaningfully studied as a psychosocial phenomenon without considering the gender differences deeply embedded and widely prevalent in society across cultures.

Even though it is popular as a culturally diverse country, India is not immune to these differences either. India is a patriarchal society with a socioeconomic power balance tipped in favor of males. With little economic independence and social advocacy for women's rights, sexual conduct is also commanded by traditional gender roles (Waldner et al, 1999). Moreover, in a collectivist society, mild sexual coercion may be validated to fulfil social responsibilities such as sex for progeny, and marital stability so that the family structure remains intact. In such a social structure where sexual coercion is used to fulfil family and social duties, it is impossible to view it as a violation of individual rights (Waldner et al., 1999).

Media and culture also play an important role in promoting socially expected and accepted gender-specific expression of sexuality. For example, following the tradition of feminine passivity, sex education for girls in schools focuses on risk factors, morality, and diseases (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Popular culture also gives paradoxical messages to girls, such as they should exude sensuality but should not look ready for sex. Boys and young men on the other hand feel under pressure to be involved in sexual activities as sexual prowess is seen as evidence of their masculinity. Therefore, apart from learning from observation, the youth also face pressure to conform to certain notions of sexual behavior. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) describe these differences as the

“sexual double standard”. Growing up imbibing culturally appropriate ideas of sexual behavior, individuals usually start to test their theories and explore their sexualities from their later teenage years to early adulthood. This makes it important to study the behavior of youth and hold interventions at this stage so that healthier behavior might be encouraged. Jozkowski (2011) found that college students thought of sexual consent as an indication of saying “yes” to sex, whereas non-consent was an indication of refusal or saying “no” to sex. Theoretically, it sounds straight and simple. In real life, however, it may become complicated when a person does not get an opportunity to say yes or no in a sexual relationship. Jozkowski and Peterson (2012) found that college students negotiate consent by the traditional “sexual scripts” so that some males showed aggression or deception to gain consent.

While earlier studies such as Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) and Hall (1998) reported nonverbal cues as the main indicators to communicate consent by college students, later studies such as Jozkowski (2011) found that majority of college students used verbal cues to indicate their consent. Though the implications of such studies can vary, but it can be inferred that there exist differences in practicing sexual consent not only when expressing it is concerned, but also when perceiving a partner's consent is involved. This variance in interpretation leaves room for miscommunication and honest mistakes on the part of partners engaging in, or about to engage in sex. Since, the interpretation of non-verbal cues can be idiosyncratic so it may lead to confusion in heterosexual relationships, particularly due to the gender differences in the socialization of males and females regarding interpretation of consent (Glance, Zatzkin & Kaufman, 2020). Another example of this variance in perceiving sexual consent is a study by Jozkowski, Manning and Hunt (2018) that says that despite ambiguity and vagueness in consent cues, most of the college students can decipher these correctly. According to Jozkowski et al. (2018), consent cues are universally understood as all the college students interpreted some consent cues as vague and others as clear.

It becomes important to understand what is perceived as “sexual consent” to better define what it can be, or it must not be. Sexual consent is seen in different lights, in different contexts, and is associated quite strongly with gender roles and expectations. It is propagated by the need for power, to display “masculinity” or “femininity”, and by media and cultural education. The college going youth of India experiences education about sexual activity mostly from sources outside of their safe spaces because of the taboo associated with premarital sex – even talking about it openly. So, it is no surprise that there is an alarming lack of research around sexual consent and how Indian youth understands it. Hence, the present research aims to study

the Indian male and female college students' understanding of “sexual consent” and to examine the gender difference on this understanding. The hypotheses guided by research literature are: 1) There will be a lack of understanding of “sexual consent” among Indian college students; 2) There will be significant gender difference on understanding of “sexual consent”.

2. Method

Design

The present research employed cross-sectional design where two social sections, i.e., Indian college students both male and female were administered the measures of “sexual consent”.

Snowballing technique was used via online platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and email to approach the male and female college students between the ages of 18 to 23 years. Eighty-five students showed willingness to participate in the study, however, six were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Out of 79 students, 71 (Males = 38, Females = 33) gave informed consent and were enrolled as participants. All the participants (belonging to different states in India) were enrolled for the undergraduate courses in colleges across Delhi, had functional knowledge of English, were heterosexuals, unmarried, and belonged to medium to high socioeconomic status.

Measures

“Sexual Consent Scale – Revised (SCS-R)” by Humphreys and Brousseau (2010). “It measures beliefs, attitudes, and behavior about how sexual consent should occur between sexual partners.” It has five sub-scales, namely, “Perceived Behavioral Control, Positive Attitude toward Establishing Consent, Indirect Behavioral Approach to Consent, Sexual Consent Norms, and Awareness and Discussion” out of which the present research used the latter two sub-scales. The reason for doing so was to avoid overlapping questions in the other scale which has also been used in the present research. “Sexual Consent Norms and Awareness and Discussion sub-scales have 7 and 4 questions, respectively. The items are to be answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 which stands for “strongly disagreed” to 7 for “strongly agreed”. Last item in Awareness and Discussion sub-scale is reverse scored. High score on a sub-scale corresponded to high attribute that was measured by the sub-scale”.

“Process Based Consent Scale” (PBCS; Glance, Zatzkin, & Kaufman, 2020). “Consent is measured as a process-based or an ongoing activity between sexual partners. This scale has 17 questions which are divided into three sub-scales – ongoing consent (5 items), subtle coercion (6 items), and communicative sexuality (6 items). The items are to be answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 which stands for “strongly disagreed” to 7 for “strongly agreed”.

Higher the score on a sub-scale, higher was the attribute that was measured by the subscale”.

Procedure

Keeping in mind the lockdown protocols considering the Corona virus pandemic, college going students in different states of India were approached and sent a Google form via social media channels like Instagram and WhatsApp. The Google form included a consent form with details of the study and a section to collect demographic details (to which they could only progress if they consented to participation), followed by test items from the 2 scales.

3. Results

The present research assessed the Indian male and female college students' understanding of “sexual consent” and examined the gender difference on this understanding for which scores were obtained on “Sexual Consent Norms” and “Awareness and Discussion” which are the subscales of “Sexual Consent Scale-Revised, SCS-R” by Humphreys and Brousseau (2010) and on three subscales of “Process Based Consent Scale” (PBCS; Glace, Zatkin, & Kaufman, 2020), namely, “Ongoing Consent”, “Subtle Coercion” and “Communicative Sexuality”. The mean scores obtained for the male and female college students on each item of all the subscales as well as the total mean scores for each subscale were analyzed by using t-test for independent groups. Further, for all the subscales, responses obtained on each item were analyzed in terms of percentage for both male and female college students. Furthermore, for both the groups, correlations among the various measures of “sexual consent” were calculated through Pearson's correlation (r). The statistical analyses were conducted with the help of “Statistical Product and Service Solutions, version 21.0”

“Sexual Consent Norms” Subscale has 7 questions, and so the maximum score for this subscale can be 49 (7×7) whereas the midpoint is 24.5. The mean scores obtained were much higher than the midpoint of 24.5 for male as well as female participants (29.95 & 31.24, respectively), indicating that students agreed with established sexual consent norms. Further, male ($M = 29.95$, $SD = 9.36$) and female ($M = 31.24$, $SD = 8.87$), college students did not differ significantly on the “Sexual Consent Norms”, $t(69) =$

0.60, $p > 0.05$, indicating that male and female participants in the present research had similar views regarding sexual consent norms (Table 1). Though, gender difference was insignificant, however, further item analyses showed that for most of the items of the “sexual consent norms”, greater percentage of both male and female college students showed strong agreement. Moreover, for 4 out of 7 items, greater percentage of female than male college students showed strong agreement (Table 2).

“Awareness and Discussion Subscale” has 4 questions, and so the maximum score possible for this subscale is 28 (7×4) whereas the midpoint is 14. The mean scores obtained were lower than the midpoint of 14 for both male and female participants (9.84 & 9.70, respectively) signifying that they did not actively take part in discussions about sexual consent. Further, it is evident from (Table 1), that the male ($M = 9.84$, $SD = 5.18$) and female ($M = 9.70$, $SD = 4.81$) college students did not differ significantly, $t(69) = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$, on “Awareness and Discussion” which indicates that both male and female participants in the present study were similar in how aware they were and how often they discussed “sexual consent”. The lower level of “awareness and discussion” about “sexual consent” shown by both male and female college students was further corroborated by the analyses of participants' responses to each item of the subscale into a percentage. For 3 out of 4 items measuring “awareness and discussion” about “sexual consent”, more than 50% of both male and female participants showed strong disagreement, whereas a very small percentage (less than 25%) of them showed strong agreement (Table 2).

The “Ongoing Consent” subscale has 5 questions, and so the maximum score possible for this subscale is 35 (7×5) while 17.5 is the midpoint. The obtained mean scores for male and female participants (9.24 & 8.24, respectively) were much lower than the midpoint of 17.5, which indicates that both male and female college students had a low understanding of “sexual consent” as an “ongoing process”. Further, male and female participants did not differ significantly in their understanding of “sexual consent” as an ongoing process ($M = 9.24$, $SD = 6.75$; $M = 8.24$, $SD = 3.76$, resp.), $t(69) = 0.75$, $p > 0.05$ (Table 1). A very small percentage (less than 7%) of both male and

Table 1: Difference between male and female college students on measures of “sexual consent”

Measures	Males (n=38)		Females (n=33)		t(69)
	M	SD	M	SD	
“Sexual Consent Norms”	29.95	9.36	31.24	8.87	0.60 (ns)
“Awareness & Discussion”	9.84	5.18	9.70	4.81	0.12 (ns)
“Ongoing Consent”	9.24	6.75	8.24	3.76	0.75 (ns)
“Subtle Coercion”	32.16	7.24	33.33	7.00	0.69 (ns)
“Communicative Sexuality”	13.66	7.22	13.15	5.72	0.32 (ns)

* $p < .05$, ns= non-significant

Table 2: Difference between male and female college students (%) on responses for each item of "sexual consent" measures

Measures	Males (n=38)		Females (n=33)	
	1 (%)	7 (%)	1 (%)	7 (%)
“Sexual Consent Norms”				
1. “I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship”.	36.8	23.7	24.2	30.3
2. “I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a casual sexual encounter than in a committed relationship”.	34.2	26.3	12.1	33.3
3. “I believe that the need for asking for sexual consent decreases as the length of an intimate relationship increases”.	5.3	34.2	6.1	33.3
4. “I believe it is enough to ask for consent at the beginning of a sexual encounter”.	13.2	26.3	21.2	33.3
5. “I believe that sexual intercourse is the only sexual activity that requires explicit verbal consent”.	2.6	50	6.1	63.6
6. “I believe that partners are less likely to ask for sexual consent the longer they are in a relationship”.	2.6	15.8	18.2	12.1
7. “If consent for sexual intercourse is established, petting and fondling can be assumed”.	21.1	5.3	9.1	3.0
“Awareness & Discussion”				
1. “I have discussed sexual consent issues with a friend”.	50	5.3	51.5	3
2. “I have heard sexual consent issues being discussed by other students on campus”.	23.7	10.5	21.2	2
3. “I have discussed sexual consent issues with my current (or most recent) partner at times other than during sexual encounters”.	60.5	21.1	51.5	4
4. “I have not given much thought to the topic of sexual consent”.	60.5	5.3	57.6	6.1
“Ongoing Consent”				
1. “If my partner seems less than excited about sex, I will stop and ask if they want to be sexual with me”.	63.2	5.3	63.6	1
2. “If my partner is not expressing physical affection toward me during sex, I check in with them to make sure they want to have sex, even if they verbally agreed to sex”.	65.8	2.6	72.7	3
3. “If I am unclear about my partner’s body language, I make sure to verbally check in with them to be sure that they want to have sex”.	63.2	2.6	69.7	6.1
4. “I pay attention to my partner’s body language during sexual encounters to be sure that they want to have sex”.	57.9	2.6	66.7	6.1
5. “If I’m having sex with a partner who I’ve had sex with before, I still make sure to check in about their sexual needs and desires”.	60.5	2.6	42.4	0
“Subtle Coercion”				
1. “I would tell a partner that if they cared about me they would have sex with me”.	5.3	52.6	3.0	72.7
2. “When my partner says that they do not want to be a part of sexual activity, I try to change their mind”.	7.9	36.8	9.1	42.4
3. “Sometimes, people need a little verbal convincing to have sex”.	7.9	18.4	12.1	24.2
4. “I think that if you care about someone you should have sex with them even if you are not in the mood”.	2.6	55.3	12.1	66.7
5. “I think my partner should feel guilty if they do not want to have sex with me”.	5.3	65.8	2.8	76.1
6. “I am easily upset if I feel that my partner is not taking care of my sexual needs”.	2.6	28.9	6.1	27.3
“Communicative Sexuality”				
1. “I verbally tell my partner what I want sexually”.	18.4	5.3	27.3	3.0
2. “I ask my partner what they want sexually”.	39.5	2.6	33.3	1.0
3. “It is important to me to talk about my sexual needs and. desires with my partner often”.	28.9	2.6	42.4	6.1
4. “I know that it will not hurt my relationship with my sexual partner if I say no to sex when I don’t want to have it”.	47.4	2.6	48.5	6.1
5. “I value ongoing conversations about my and my partner’s sexual desires”.	50	2.6	51.5	3.0
6. “During a sexual activity, it is important to me that my partner knows what I am comfortable with”.	55.3	2.6	87.9	3.0

Note: “1 = Strongly Disagreed, 7 = Strongly Agreed”

female college students strongly agreed with most of the statements regarding “sexual consent” as an “ongoing process” (**Table 2**).

The “Subtle Coercion” subscale has 6 questions, and so the maximum score possible for this subscale is 42 (7 x 6) and the midpoint is 21. The mean scores of 32.16 and 33.33 obtained by male and female college students, respectively were much higher than the midpoint of 21, which implies that the participants tend towards coercive behavior in a sexual setting. Further, there was no significant difference between male (M = 32.16, SD = 7.24) and female (M = 33.33, SD = 7.00) college students on “subtle coercion”, $t(69) = 0.69$, $p > 0.05$ (**Table 1**). Furthermore, a greater percentage (above 35%) of both male and female college students strongly agreed with most of the items measuring “subtle coercion”. Surprisingly, a greater percentage of female than male college students strongly agreed with 5 out of 6 items of this subscale (**Table 2**).

The “Communicative Sexuality” subscale has 6 questions, and so the maximum score possible for this subscale is 42 (7 x 6) while the midpoint is 21. The mean scores of 13.66 and 13.15 obtained by male and female college students, respectively were lower than the midpoint of 21, which indicates that the participants in the present study were not communicative about sexuality. Further, male (M = 13.66, SD = 7.22) and female (M = 13.15, SD = 5.72) college students did not differ significantly on “communicative sexuality”, $t(69) = 0.32$, $p > 0.05$ implying that they did not differ significantly from each other in the way sexual preferences were communicated to their partner (**Table 1**). Furthermore, a very small percentage of both male and female college students strongly agreed with the items measuring “communicative sexuality” (**Table 2**).

Lastly, gender differences were found only in the case of one item in each of the subscales of “subtle coercion” and “communicative sexuality”. For item 5 of the “subtle coercion” subscale, “I think my partner should feel guilty if they do not want to have sex with me” of the “subtle coercion” subscale, female college students (M = 6.79, SD = 0.65) showed significantly greater mean score than the male college students (M = 6.00, SD = 1.80), $t(69) = 2.38$, $p < .05$. For the item 6 of “communicative sexuality” subscale, “During a sexual activity, it is important to me that my partner knows what I am comfortable with” of the “communicative sexuality” subscale, male college students (M = 1.95, SD = 1.45) showed significantly greater mean score than the female college students (M = 1.15, SD = 0.44), $t(69) = 3.03$, $p < .01$ (**Table 3**).

The correlation of “Awareness and Discussion” was significantly negative with “sexual consent norms” and significantly positive with “ongoing consent” for both male ($r = -.37$, $p < .05$; $r = .38$, $p < .05$, resp.) and female ($r = -.45$, $p < .01$; $r = .32$, $p < .05$) college students. Further,

only for male participants, “awareness and discussion” was significantly negatively associated with “subtle coercion” ($r = .34$, $p < .05$) and significantly positively associated with “communicative sexuality” ($r = .47$, $p < .01$). Further, a significant positive correlation was found between “sexual consent norms” and “subtle coercion” ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) for male college students only. “Ongoing Consent” showed a significantly negative association with “subtle coercion” and a significantly positive association with “communicative sexuality” for both male ($r = -.49$, $p < .01$; $r = .81$, $p < .01$, resp.) and female ($r = -.32$, $p < .05$; $r = .41$, $p < .01$) college students. Lastly, a significantly negative relation was found between “subtle coercion” and “communicative sexuality” for both male ($r = -.43$, $p < .01$) and female ($r = -.32$, $p < .05$) college students (**Table 4**).

4. Discussion

The present research studied the understanding of “sexual consent” among Indian college students and examined if there exist any gender differences in this understanding. The mean scores obtained by both male and female college students on the “Awareness and Discussion” were much lower than the subscale’s midpoint and did not differ significantly. Further, more than 50% of the participants (both male and female) showed very low scores on awareness and discussion suggesting that the topic of sexual consent was not very actively discussed or pondered upon by both male and female participants of the present study. Indians have traditionally followed the system of arranged marriages that continues in the present times. Hence, as compared to the West, dating and pre-marital relationships are less frequent among Indians (Waldner, Vaden-Goad, & Sikka, 1999). This observation by Waldner et al. (1999) has been corroborated by Bhugra, Mehra, De Silva and Bhintade (2007) who have reported that premarital sex was a taboo among Indians of all age groups, where young respondents enumerated factors like fear of pregnancy out of wedlock, social norms, and parents’ trust and expectations prevented them from getting involved in premarital sexual relationships. All the participants also emphasized the need for sex education among youth.

For most teenagers, their friends and cousins were the sources of information about sex as they lamented about the lack of reliable sources of sex education, like safe sex practices. Though media and books can serve to imbibe more harmful schemas of what sexual activity, communication and consent feels like, by promoting sexual scripts and sexier scenarios as opposed to healthy ones, yet the participants relied on their equally clueless peers, media and fiction to understand about sexual relationships (Hindin & Hindin, 2009). This was exemplified in a study by Hust, Marett, Ren, Adams, Willoughby, Lei et al. (2014), which reported negative

Table 3: Difference between male and female college students' responses on each item of measures of "sexual consent"

Measures	Males (n=38)		Females (n=33)		t(69)
	M	SD	M	SD	
"Sexual Consent Norms"					
1. "I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship".	5.08	1.95	5.06	2.30	.04(ns)
2. "I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a casual sexual encounter than in a committed relationship".	4.13	1.88	4.55	2.05	.89(ns)
3. "I believe that the need for asking for sexual consent decreases as the length of an intimate relationship increases".	5.82	1.69	6.27	1.55	1.18(ns)
4. "I believe it is enough to ask for consent at the beginning of a sexual encounter".	4.37	2.19	4.64	2.40	0.49(ns)
5. "I believe that sexual intercourse is the only sexual activity that requires explicit verbal consent".	5.76	1.58	5.94	1.84	0.43(ns)
6. "I believe that partners are less likely to ask for sexual consent the longer they are in a relationship".	4.16	1.81	3.36	1.99	1.76(ns)
7. "If consent for sexual intercourse is established, petting and fondling can be assumed".	3.37	1.78	3.45	1.37	0.23(ns)
"Awareness & Discussion"					
1. "I have discussed sexual consent issues with a friend".	2.03	1.50	2.12	1.56	0.26(ns)
2. "I have heard sexual consent issues being discussed by other students on campus".	3.24	1.91	3.15	1.81	0.19(ns)
3. "I have discussed sexual consent issues with my current (or most recent) partner at times other than during sexual encounters".	2.55	2.42	2.39	2.03	0.30(ns)
4. "I have not given much thought to the topic of sexual consent".	2.03	1.70	2.03	1.61	0.01(ns)
"Ongoing Consent"					
1. "If my partner seems less than excited about sex, I will stop and ask if they want to be sexual with me".	1.95	1.63	1.67	1.08	0.84(ns)
2. "If my partner is not expressing physical affection toward me during sex, I check in with them to make sure they want to have sex, even if they verbally agreed to sex".	1.14	1.43	1.45	0.91	0.98(ns)
3. "If I am unclear about my partner's body language I make sure to verbally check in with them to be sure that they want to have sex".	1.82	1.47	1.58	1.09	0.77(ns)
4. "I pay attention to my partner's body language during sexual encounters to be sure that they want to have sex".	2.03	1.55	1.76	1.35	0.77(ns)
5. "If I'm having sex with a partner who I've had sex with before, I still make sure to check in about their sexual needs and desires".	1.71	1.31	1.79	0.86	0.29(ns)
"Subtle Coercion"					
1. "I would tell a partner that if they cared about me they would have sex with me".	5.82	1.69	6.27	1.55	1.18(ns)
2. "When my partner says that they do not want to be a part of sexual activity, I try to change their mind".	5.08	1.95	5.06	2.30	0.04(ns)
3. "Sometimes, people need a little verbal convincing to have sex".	4.13	1.88	4.55	2.05	0.89(ns)
4. "I think that if you care about someone you should have sex with them even if you are not in the mood".	5.84	1.59	5.91	2.05	0.16(ns)
5. "I think my partner should feel guilty if they do not want to have sex with me".	6.00	1.80	6.79	0.65	2.38*
6. "I am easily upset if I feel that my partner is not taking care of my sexual needs".	5.29	1.80	4.76	1.94	1.20(ns)
"Communicative Sexuality"					
1. "I verbally tell my partner what I want sexually".	2.89	1.57	2.94	1.77	0.11(ns)
2. "I ask my partner what they want sexually".	2.08	1.44	2.55	1.64	1.28(ns)
3. "It is important to me to talk about my sexual needs and desires with my partner often".	2.68	1.63	2.42	1.54	0.69(ns)
4. "I know that it will not hurt my relationship with my sexual partner if I say no to sex when I don't want to have it".	2.13	1.49	2.27	1.77	0.36(ns)
5. "I value ongoing conversations about my and my partner's sexual desires".	1.92	1.30	1.82	1.21	0.34(ns)
6. "During a sexual activity, it is important to me that my partner knows what I am comfortable with".	1.95	1.45	1.15	0.44	3.03**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, ns = non-significant

Table 4: Correlations among measures of “sexual consent” for male (n = 38) and female (n = 33) college students

Measures		“Sexual Consent Norms”	“Ongoing Consent”	“Subtle Coercion”	“Communicative Sexuality”
“Awareness & Discussion”	Males	-.37*	.38*	-.34*	.47**
	Females	-.45**	.32*	.03	.26
“Sexual Consent Norms”	Males		.13	.46**	-.01
	Females		-.22	.28	-.01
“Ongoing Consent”	Males			-.49**	.81**
	Females			-.32*	.41**
“Subtle Coercion”	Males				-.43**
	Females				-.32*

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

effects on “sexual consent” seeking behaviour among college students who were exposed to men's magazines with sexually explicit content. It was suggested that the depiction of men as “sexual aggressors” was internalized by the readers who then showed lower intention to seek “sexual consent” from their partners. On the other hand, a significantly greater intention to refuse unwanted sexual activity was expressed by those exposed to women's magazines.

On the “Sexual Consent Norms”, mean scores obtained were much higher than the midpoint of the subscale score for both groups and showed no significant gender difference. This finding implies that irrespective of gender, the participants highly agreed with the general rules associated with “sexual consent”. Though no significant differences were found between male and female college students on their understanding of “sexual consent norms”, however, item-wise analysis revealed that females showed greater agreement with most of the established sexual consent norms. Further, one of the questions in the subscale addressed the ongoing nature of “sexual consent”, i.e., “I believe it is enough to ask for consent at the beginning of a sexual encounter”. While a greater percentage of both the groups of participants agreed to this statement, surprisingly, a greater percentage of female than male participants agreed to it. Similar findings were reported by a study where “sexual consent” was perceived as a static event that occurred just before having sex (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Clearly, the participants in the present study just like participants of Muehlenhard et al.'s (2016) research, did not understand “sexual consent” as an ongoing process, which can be revoked at any time during a sexual act and refusal to do so amounts to physical violation. Unfortunately, such an understanding that once initiated sexual acts cannot be stopped is a “rape myth” that often leads to sexual violence to hurt survivors of sexual assault. (Glance, Zatzkin, & Kaufman, 2020),

Another item in the subscale examined the participants' belief regarding the sexual activities that needed consent

through a question, “I believe that sexual intercourse is the only sexual activity that requires explicit verbal consent”. Not only did more than 50% of both male and female participants agreed with this statement, but a greater percentage of females (64%) than males (50%) strongly agreed with it. These findings are in line with Humphreys' (2007) study which reported that many participants did not give importance to consent for the minimal sexual activities like cuddling.

Some other items questioned the association of relationship status with sexual consent. These questions were, “I think that obtaining sexual consent is more necessary in a new relationship than in a committed relationship”, “I believe that the need for asking for sexual consent decreases as the length of an intimate relationship increases” and “I believe that partners are less likely to ask for sexual consent the longer they are in a relationship” (SCS-R, Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010). Many of male and female participants in the present study believed that “sexual consent was more important in the new relationship” and its importance decreased with the length of the relationship. These findings are in line with a study by Humphreys (2007) that examined the effect of relationship length on “sexual consent” and reported that the perceived need for “sexual consent” is influenced by relationship status. That is, the need for explicit “sexual consent” is more in the case of new relationships as compared to older and more established relationships. Contrary to Humphreys' (2007) study that reported gender differences, the present study did not find significant gender differences. One reason for this contrast could be that while the former included both married and unmarried participants the latter included only unmarried participants who were assessed on their understanding of “sexual consent” in premarital sexual relationships. Moreover, research such as Humphreys (2007) and Humphreys and Brousseau (2010) has reported that regardless of relationship status, explicit “sexual consent” is deemed necessary by more women than men. Like these

research studies, in the present study, though no statistically significant gender differences were found, however, it also showed that far more females (18%) than males (3%) strongly disagreed with the statement regarding the decreasing importance of sexual consent with the increasing length of the relationship. This strengthens the existing research which has demonstrated that women as compared to men are more concerned about their safety in sexual relationships and take a more serious view of sexual assault (Glance, Zarkin, & Kaufman, 2020).

On the "Ongoing Consent", the mean scores obtained by both male and female college students were not significantly different from each other and were much lower than the midpoint of the subscale score which indicates that the participants in the present study did not have a good understanding of "sexual consent" as an "ongoing process". For most items of the subscale, most male and female participants showed disagreement. However, responses on an item which enquired if individuals would pay as much attention to "sexual consent" with a partner whom they have been with before showed that far more males (61%) than females (42%) strongly disagreed with it. According to Beres (2014), the feminist perspective views "sexual consent" as a process that begins with the initiation of sexual activity and goes on throughout the sexual activity which can be helpful in the prevention of sexual violence. Overall, most of the participants in the present study disagreed that they would indeed check in with their partners even if they have been previously sexually involved with them. This finding contrasts with some studies such as Humphreys (2007) and Humphreys and Brousseau (2010), but corresponds to a recent study by Marcantonio, Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley (2018), which reported that college students agreed that "sexual consent" can be assumed as the sexual relationship progresses from the beginning of a relationship without any sexual activity to engaging in sexual activities frequently with a partner, rather than repeatedly asking for the "sexual consent".

Further, on the "Subtle Coercion", the mean scores obtained by the participants did not show significant gender differences and were also much higher than the midpoint of the subscale score indicating a tendency toward coercive sexual practices among both male and female college students. For three out of six statements on the subscale of "Subtle Coercion" which equate having a sexual relationship with caring about the partner, not only more than 50% of both male and female participants strongly agreed but a greater percentage of females than male participants showed strong agreement with such statements. For the two statements that were about refusal at the primary request for sex, followed by the person trying to persuade their partner to have sex with them, a

strong agreement was shown by most of the male and female participants. Moreover, a greater percentage of female than male participants strongly agreed to these statements. Thus, not only majority of participants agreed with subtle coercion, but interestingly far more female than male participants showed agreement with the use of subtle coercion in sexual relationships. One of the reasons for the occurrence of this phenomenon can be explained by the concept of "token resistance" which according to Muehlenhard and Rodgers (1998) means an explicitly expressed refusal with underlying implicit consent. In other words, a situation where "no" means "yes". In the present study, it can be argued that both males and females followed traditional "sexual scripts". Hence, females might show "token resistance" as they believe that they are expected to do so, and it makes them more desirable to their partner. They also might be using this strategy as a touchstone to check their attractiveness, believing that their partner would coercively challenge the resistance only if he found them attractive. Similarly, males might also perceive their female partner's refusal to have sex as "token resistance" which they are expected to challenge and overcome with persuasion and coercion. However, the belief about "token resistance" may increase the risk of actual refusal being misperceived as "token resistance" by males so that they may continue with the sexual activity despite several warning signs to "stop" from their partners (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Such misperceptions could turn the subtle coercion into aggressive sexual behaviour leading to violence against women. Fantasia (2011) has reported sexual coercion among adolescents who either assumed sexual consent or took it through persuasion. Further, Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) have reported gender differences, such that, as compared to females, relationship status was not a mediator in the perception of sexual relationships for males as they viewed sex as an outcome of clear understanding, acceptance, and consensus.

According to another research by Jozkowski, Manning, and Hunt (2018), for males, social settings and not private settings require consent, whereas, for females, consent is needed in both social and private settings. Contradictory findings regarding "token resistance" have been reported by some earlier studies, such as O'Byrne, Hansen and, Rapley (2008) found that women clearly understand different ways of refusing sexual activity to their partners and men also understand the refusals. Muehlenhard and Rodgers (1998) also found that participants clearly understood when they meant to refuse sexual activity without indulging in any paradoxical behavior of saying "no" when in reality, they meant "yes", that is "no" meant "no".

In the present study, on "communicative sexuality", the mean scores obtained by both male and female college

students did not differ significantly and were much lower than the midpoint of the subscale. This finding implies that both male and female participants did not communicate about sex-related issues with their partners. Further analyses showed that for all the statements in the subscale of "communicative sexuality", a very small percentage of both male and female participants strongly agreed. However, an interesting finding was that far more females (88%) than males (55%) strongly disagreed with a statement about the importance of one's feelings during sexual activity for the partner. These results are suggestive of the lack of communication regarding sexuality among both men and women and point toward the stereotypical roles of men and women assumed in sexual relationship in Indian society. That is, while it is expected, and accepted for men to explicitly talk about their likes, dislikes, and preferences regarding sexual activities, women are supposed to be tight-lipped about their feelings and preferences for the same. This gender difference can be seen as a typical outcome of traditional "sexual script" (Humphreys, 2007).

In the present study, a significant difference between male and female college students was found only in one statement in each of the subscales of "subtle coercion" and "communicative sexuality". On the former, which talks about the partner's guilt for not having sex, a significantly greater mean score was obtained by female than male college students. Whereas, on the latter, which is about the importance of one's feelings during sexual activity for the partner, a significantly greater mean score was obtained by male than female college students. That is, more females than males believed that their "partner must feel guilty if he does not want to have sex with them". On the other hand, more males felt that "their partner should give importance to their feelings (likes and dislikes) during a sexual activity". This finding further supports the view that in sexual relationships, most Indian adult males and females adhere to established sexual norms and "sexual scripts" (Waldner et al., 1999). As aforementioned, most participants, particularly, female college students in the present study believed that explicit "sexual consent" is necessary only for sexual intercourse which implies that only it is seen, especially by women, as the real and important activities in a sexual relationship. Hence, in the present study, it is suggested that female college students might perceive the refusal of their partner to have sex with them as a rejection and an insult when they are ready to "give away themselves completely" to their partner. Male college students, on the other hand, are more demanding of their partners, believing that their partners should give importance to their feelings during sexual activity. Such a belief may have sprouted from the traditional "sexual script" (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008, O'Byrne et al., 2008) which says that males as initiators of sexual acts can be coercively demanding while females as the protectors

of their chastity should be the resisters who eventually are expected to comply with the partner's demands (Bhugra et al. 2007; Hindin & Hindin, 2009).

The findings so far discussed have shown that the understanding of "sexual consent" is low among both male and female college students as most of them have scored low on "awareness and discussion", "ongoing consent", and "communicative sexuality" whereas they have obtained high scores on "sexual consent norms" and "subtle coercion". These findings have been further corroborated by the correlations obtained for both male and female participants. That is, for both males and females, the greater the "awareness and discussion" lower was agreement with "sexual consent norms" and the higher was "ongoing consent" and "communicative sexuality". The greater the agreement with "sexual consent norms", the greater was the agreement with "subtle coercion". Although this relationship was not significant in case of female participants, nevertheless, it was a positive relationship. Further, the greater the "ongoing consent", the lower was the agreement with "subtle coercion" and the higher was the "communicative sexuality" for both male and female participants. Furthermore, the greater the agreement with "subtle coercion" lower was the "communicative sexuality". Overall, the first hypothesis was retained as the present findings indicated that the understanding of "sexual consent" was low among Indian college students, however, the second hypothesis was rejected as male and female college students did not differ significantly in their understanding of "sexual consent".

These findings can be understood in the light of the "affirmative" (Beres, & MacDonald, 2015) and "sexual scripts" (Muehlenhard et al., 2016) model and feminist perspective (Primoratz, 2001; Popova, 2018). In the present study, since most of the male and female college students strongly agreed with statements supportive of "sexual consent norms" and "subtle coercion", hence they were more inclined towards the "sexual scripts" model. Further, gender differences were not found as it seems that through the socialization process, females have internalized the social norms about gender-specific roles. According to Primoratz (2001), for women, the social context of consent plays an important role. That is, the capacity to give or refuse consent is meaningful only when women have equal power and freedom as men. Irrespective of what political and legislative bodies may say about women's rights, the ground realities are different. Due to socially embedded gender inequality, women may not have the choice of consent as they may have to negotiate for sex for their social and economic security. Secondly, Indian society is conservative with gender roles written in black and white with the balance tilting in favour of men. According to Waldner et al. (1999), most Indians still view sex as "procreational" rather than "recreational" and they also have a strong

belief in the family system which does not accept sex out of marital relationships, hence dating is seen as a fling or a scandalous affair. Thus, sexual relationship is viewed as an outcome of a marital relationship which is a means to get progeny, for it is expected to stabilize and strengthen the marital relationship, that in turn will propagate the family system. Hence, an idea of sex as a “duty” already leaves little or no space for consent and addition of traditional “sexual scripts” only makes it even more irrelevant. In fact, such a social perspective advocates for an assumed “sexual consent” in a marital relationship with men being the initiators and the women being the compliant partners. A society that accepts “sexual scripts” as norms, cannot be conducive to open discussions with adolescents and young adults about dating and sexual practices. Therefore, it is not surprising that the present study found a low understanding of “sexual consent” for Indian male and female college students.

5. Conclusion

In the present study, both male and female college students exhibited a low understanding of the concept of “sexual consent”, measured in terms of “awareness and discussion”, “sexual consent norms”, “ongoing consent”, “subtle coercion”, and “communicative sexuality”. While both male and female participants showed low “awareness and discussion”, “ongoing consent”, and “communicative sexuality”, they showed higher agreement with “sexual consent norms” and “subtle coercion”. Further, both male and female college students did not differ significantly in their understanding of “sexual consent”. Lastly, for both male and female participants, the greater the “awareness and discussion”, the greater was “ongoing consent” and “communicative sexuality”, and lower was “sexual consent norms” and “subtle coercion”. Furthermore, the greater the agreement for “sexual consent norms” and “subtle coercion” were the “ongoing consent” and “communicative sexuality. These findings are supported by the existing research on conservative social structure in India (Waldern et al., 1999; Bhugra et al 2007; Hindin & Hindin, 2009), “sexual scripts” model (Muehlenhard et al., 2016) and gender inequality (Primoratz, 2001) deeply embedded in Indian society.

6. Limitations and Implications

The sample in the present study was limited to only college students within the age range of 18 to 23 years from the medium to high-income group. The concept of “sexual consent” can be different in different contexts, such as marital status, gender identity, e.g., homosexuals, heterosexuals, non-binary, transgenders etc., sexual orientation e.g., LGBTQ+, disability status, and socioeconomic status. However, all the participants were unmarried, heterosexuals, “temporarily able bodied”, and from medium to high-income group, hence “sexual consent” could not be examined contextually. Despite

these limitations, the present study has some important implications. Though the Indian Penal Code has laws regarding “sexual consent”, these are usually cited in the context of the workplace, while little research has been conducted on an understanding of “sexual consent” among the public in the context of personal relationships. Hence, the present study can be seen as an important contribution to this area.

The present research has found a low understanding of “sexual consent” among educated young adults. So, it gives an impetus to research to examine the concept of “sexual consent” among public from different social strata and to design intervention programs to spread awareness. Such programs can enable the people to understand and exercise their rights in sexual relationships, so that unpleasant and dangerous situations, like harassment, molestation, rape, and violence against women could be avoided in our society.

7. References

1. Bay-Cheng, L. Y., & Eliseo-Arras, R. K. (2008). The making of unwanted sex: Gendered and neoliberal norms in college women's unwanted sexual experiences. *Journal of Sex Research, 45*(4), 386-397.
2. Bedsworth, J. (2022). <https://www.goodrx.com/health-topic/sexual-health/what-is-sexual-consent>
3. Beres, M. A. (2007). 'Spontaneous' sexual consent: An analysis of sexual consent literature. *Feminism & Psychology, 17*(1), 93-108.
4. Beres, M. A. (2014). Rethinking the concept of consent for anti-sexual violence activism and education. *Feminism & Psychology, 24*, 373-389. doi: 10.1177/0959353514539652
5. Beres, M. A., & MacDonald, J. E. (2015). Talking about sexual consent: Heterosexual women and BDSM. *Australian Feminist Studies, 30*(86), 418-432.
6. Bhugra, D., Mehra, R., de Silva, P., & Bhintade, V. R. (2007). Sexual attitudes and practices in North India: A qualitative study. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 22*(1), 83-90.
7. Bletzer, K. V., & Koss, M. P. (2004). Narrative constructions of sexual violence as told by female rape survivors in three populations of the southwestern United States: scripts of coercion, scripts of consent. *Medical Anthropology, 23*(2), 113-156.
8. Estrich, S. (1987). *Real Rape*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
9. Fantasia, H. C. (2011). Really not even a decision anymore: Late adolescent narratives of implied sexual consent. *Journal of Forensic Nursing, 7*(3), 120-129.
10. Glace, A. M., Zatzkin, J. G., & Kaufman, K. L. (2020). Moving toward a new model of sexual consent: the development of the process-based consent scale. *Violence Against Women, 1077801220952159*.

11. Hall, D.S. (1998). Consent for sexual behavior in a college student population. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, 1.
12. Hickman, S.E., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (1999). "By the semi-mystical appearance of a condom": How young women and men communicate consent in heterosexual situations. *Journal of Sex Research*, 36, 258–272.
13. Hindin, J., & Hindin, M. J. (2009). Premarital romantic partnerships: Attitudes and sexual experiences of youth in Delhi, India. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 97-104.
14. Humphreys, T. P., & Brousseau, M. M. (2010). The sexual consent scale—revised: development, reliability, and preliminary validity. *Journal of Sex Research*, 47(5), 420-428.
15. Humphreys, T. (2007). Perceptions of sexual consent: The impact of relationship history and gender. *Journal of Sex Research*, 44(4), 307-315.
16. Hust, S. J., Marett, E. G., Ren, C., Adams, P. M., Willoughby, J. F., Lei, M., Weina, R., & Norman, C. (2014). Establishing and adhering to sexual consent: The association between reading magazines and college students' sexual consent negotiation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(3), 280-290.
17. Jozkowski, K. N., & Peterson, Z. D. (2013). College students and sexual consent: Unique insights. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50(6), 517-523.
18. Jozkowski, K. N. (2011). *Measuring internal and external conceptualizations of sexual consent: A mixed-methods exploration of sexual consent* (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University).
19. Jozkowski, K. N. & Peterson, Z. D. (2012). College students and sexual consent: Unique insights. *The Journal of Sex Research*, doi:0.1080/00224499.2012.700739
20. Jozkowski, K. N., Manning, J., & Hunt, M. (2018). Sexual consent in and out of the bedroom: Disjunctive views of heterosexual college students. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 41(2), 117-139.
21. Marcantonio, T., Jozkowski, K. N., & Wiersma-Mosley, J. (2018). The influence of partner status and sexual behavior on college women's consent communication and feelings. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 44(8), 776-786.
22. Marcantonio, T. L., Willis, M., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2020). Women's sexual consent: Potential implications for sexual satisfaction. *Current Sexual Health Reports*, 1-7.
23. Muehlenhard, C. L., & Rodgers, C. S. (1998). Token resistance to sex: New perspectives on an old stereotype. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 22(3), 443-463.
24. Muehlenhard, C. L., Humphreys, T. P., Jozkowski, K. N., & Peterson, Z. D. (2016). The complexities of sexual consent among college students: A conceptual and empirical review. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4-5), 457-487.
25. NCRB (2022). <https://journalsofindia.com/ncrbs-report-on-crime-against-women/>
26. O'Byrne, R., Hansen, S., & Rapley, M. (2008). If a girl doesn't say 'no'... young men, rape and claims of 'insufficient knowledge'. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 18(3), 168-193.
27. Popova, M. (2018). <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/33328>
28. Primoratz, I. (2001). Sexual morality: Is consent enough? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 4(3), 201-218.
29. Shahidullah, S. M. (2017). *Crime, Criminal Justice, and the Evolving Science of Criminology in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*. Palgrave and MacMillan
30. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N., & of Law, F. (1999, March). Towards a cultural definition of rape: dilemmas in dealing with rape victims in Palestinian society. In *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22(2), 157-173.
31. Waldner, L. K., Vaden-Goad, L., & Sikka, A. (1999). Sexual coercion in India: An exploratory analysis using demographic variables. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 28(6), 523-538. among college students: A conceptual and empirical review. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4-5), 457-487.

