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The Intersections of Normative Heterosexuality and Sexual Violence: University Men's Talk about Sexual Behavior in Intimate Relationships

Nicole K. Jeffrey [1] ⬤ · Paula C. Barata [2]

Abstract

Research on men's sexual violence against women has focused on individual- and peer-level contributors of sexual violence, with comparatively less focus on broader social contributors. Using four focus groups with a total of 29 Canadian heterosexual university men and a form of discourse analysis, we moved beyond this common focus. In particular, we examined how participants talked about sexual behaviors in intimate relationships and the dominant social norms or discourses about heterosexuality that they used. Participants' conversations constructed a dominant version of heterosexuality that is male-centered and may support sexual violence. Specifically, they suggested that men have a higher and uncontrollable sex drive; that heterosexual initiation and progression occur naturally and without (men's) verbal communication; and that men misinterpret women's ineffective communication and this miscommunication causes sexual violence. They positioned these heterosexuality practices and dynamics as biologically determined and as generally the same across occasions and people. Some men did challenge male-centered and sexual violence-supportive discourses with varying degrees of success at shifting the conversation. Our results have important implications and highlight the need to encourage men's critical engagement with alternative discourses about heterosexuality that do not support sexual violence and that privilege both women's and men's sexuality.

Keywords Heterosexuality · Sex offenses · Intimate partner violence · Discourse analysis · Social norms · Psychology of men

Introduction

Research on men's sexual violence against women has focused predominantly on individual- and peer-level predictors of sexual violence perpetration such as negative attitudes toward women, stereotyped beliefs about sexual violence, exposure to family violence, problematic alcohol use, and peer approval of sexual violence (see Tharp et al. 2013 for a review). This work, although important, has revealed little about the broader

✉ Nicole K. Jeffrey
nicole.jeffrey@uwindsor.ca

Paula C. Barata
pbarata@uoguelph.ca

[1] Psychology Department, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, ON N9B 3P4, Canada

[2] Psychology Department, University of Guelph, 50 Stone Road E, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1, Canada

social norms and ideologies that contribute to sexual violence. Prevention efforts with men have also focused predominantly on changing individuals' knowledge and attitudes related to sexual violence and have had little effect on men's sexual violence behavior (Anderson and Whiston 2005; Casey and Lindhorst 2009; DeGue et al. 2014; Ricardo et al. 2011). Indeed, men's sexual violence against women remains pervasive, especially among young populations and in intimate relationships (Fedina et al. 2018; Kilpatrick et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2017). Throughout the present paper, we use the term "intimate relationships" to refer to romantic relationships that are generally longer-term and more committed or steady as compared to dates, hookups, and other casual romantic relationships.

Some researchers have moved beyond the individual level and pointed to the importance of social factors in predicting men's sexual violence. For example, peer pressure for sex as well as peer approval and use of sexual violence predict men's sexual violence perpetration (see Tharp et al. 2013 for a review). Qualitative researchers (especially those using discourse analysis) have highlighted the importance of language

and talk as a source of evidence of prevailing social norms and ideologies beyond the peer level. They argue that individuals' ways of talking are shaped by the language and shared social norms that they have available to them and that the act of speaking both evokes and reproduces these norms (Cameron 2001; Gavey 1989). In particular, they highlight the ways that "everyday taken-for-granted normative" social discourses (i.e., culturally shared ways of talking about something and acting in relation to it) can "set up the preconditions" for sexual violence (Gavey 2005, pp. 2–3). We argue in the present paper not that dominant and, therefore, normative ways of doing and talking about heterosexuality *are* sexual violence, but that normative heterosexuality is intersected with sexual violence and can, thus, obscure "distinctions between what is [sexual violence] and what is *just sex*" (Gavey 2005, p. 2, emphasis in the original). In other words, we argue that the dominant social construction of heterosexuality is often male-centered and patterned in ways that can work to support men's sexual violence against women and make it invisible. Sexual violence is often verbally or psychologically coercive rather than physically violent, especially in intimate relationships (Salwen and O'Leary 2013; Smith et al. 2017; Wegner et al. 2014). Such forms of sexual violence may be particularly intersected with constructions of normative heterosexuality.

The Social Construction of Heterosexuality

Culturally shared dominant discourses about the meanings and practices of normative heterosexuality are stereotypical. They hold that men are biologically driven to persistently desire (hetero)sex (previously termed the male sexual drive discourse); that women are gatekeepers who are responsible for controlling men's sexual drive and determining when to engage in sex (previously termed the female sexual gatekeeping discourse); that heterosex is natural or biological; and that women and men communicate differently, which can lead to misunderstandings (Frith and Kitzinger 1997; Gavey 1989, 2005; Gavey et al. 2001; Hollway 1989, 2005; Waldby et al. 1993). Although we refer to dominant *hetero*sexuality discourses in our paper, sexuality has also long been critiqued as a site of power and subordination for social groups other than heterosexual women and men, including lesbian women and gay men (Gavey 2005). The male sexual drive discourse we noted, for example, constructs a need and persistent pursuit of sex among "all healthy normal men" (Gavey 2005, p. 104; Hollway 1989, 2005) and has been linked to the construction of sexuality and sexual violence among gay men as well (e.g., Braun et al. 2009). However, in the context of sex and relationships between women and men, this discourse works in conjunction with the others (and especially the female sexual gatekeeping discourse) to pattern a dominant, normative version of heterosexuality in ways that privilege

men's desires and foster violent practices (Gavey 2005; Hollway 1989, 2005).

Research finds that women and men continue to rely on traditional, male-centered discourses about heterosexuality, including those about men as initiators with stronger and biologically driven sexuality and women as gatekeepers (Allen 2003; Cense et al. 2018; Crawford et al. 1994; Hird and Jackson 2001; Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Seal and Ehrhardt 2003; Waldby et al. 1993). For example, U.S. university men in Jozkowski and Peterson's (2013, p. 519) study who responded to open-ended survey questions about consent "endorsed their role as sexual initiator" and sometimes reported that they "always want [sex]." Young Aotearoa/New Zealand men in Brown et al.'s (2018) focus group study were ambivalent about women's pleasure and reinforced discourses privileging men's pleasure. Similarly, British and New Zealander male adolescents in Hird and Jackson's (2001) focus groups reported that males have a stronger sex drive than females, and they referred to biology, chemistry, and hormones to describe males' sexual drive and attraction. They also described females as "responsible for both stimulating and satisfying men's sexual urges" (p. 34). These discourses position men as the agents of heterosexuality and women as the objects.

Dominant, male-centered constructions of heterosexuality also work to foster men's sexually violent and coercive practices. Research has demonstrated the link between sexual violence and some of the stereotypical but normative heterosexuality discourses we noted. Women and men use dominant discourses to describe and explain sexual violence as a normal and expected part of heterosexuality (Hird and Jackson 2001; Jeffrey and Barata 2017, 2019; Romero-Sánchez and Megías 2013). For example, adult men and male adolescents described sexual violence as resulting from men's physiological needs, "frustrated sexual energy," or men not wanting or being able to stop sex once started (Hird and Jackson 2001; Jeffrey and Barata 2019; Romero-Sánchez and Megías 2013, p. 9).

Dominant discourses about consent and communication also work to construct a male-centered and violent version of heterosexuality and support sexual violence. For example, dominant theories and discourses hold that sexual violence is often the result of miscommunication between sexual partners, whereby women fail to effectively communicate and men misinterpret women's communication (see Frith and Kitzinger 1997 for a review). Some academic literature and lay women and men have relied, and continue to rely, on these discourses about miscommunication to explain men's sexual violence against women (see Frith and Kitzinger 1997 for a review). However, qualitative and discursive researchers have demonstrated that these discourses do not necessarily accurately reflect heterosexual experiences but, rather, are used as a rhetorical *resource* to explain or justify sexual violence (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Ehrlich 1998; Frith and Kitzinger 1997; O'Byrne et al. 2008).

For example, Frith and Kitzinger (1997, p. 524) document-ed that miscommunication theory was "useful for women attempting to sustain heterosexual relationships" because it helped them avoid blaming men and gave them a greater sense of control (i.e., they can prevent future sexual violence if they improve their own communication). Researchers have also demonstrated that women have a sophisticated understanding of the "culturally normative ways of indicating refusal" in a variety of social interactions (i.e., indirectly with pauses, hedges, apologies, compliments, etc.; Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p. 293). Kitzinger and Frith (1999, p. 310) argued that men who claim misunderstanding of such indirect refusals "are claiming to be cultural dopes," ignorant of "how refusals are usually done and understood to be done." Indeed, follow-up research demonstrated that men, too, have a sophisticated understanding of these normative, indirect refusals but draw on miscommunication arguments to justify sexual violence (O'Byrne et al. 2008; O'Byrne et al. 2006).

Some research has begun to examine how women and men resist or challenge dominant discourses about heterosexuality, formulating new cultural ideals. Often, this research has highlighted new discourses constructing women as active sex-ual subjects with their own sexual desires and autonomy (Allen 2003; Brown et al. 2018; Cense et al. 2018; Jackson and Cram 2003). The few studies that have examined men's alternative discourses suggested that men sometimes resist notions of sex as the most important part of relationships (Allen 2003) and women as passive recipients of sex (Brown et al. 2018; Crawford et al. 1994; Waldby et al. 1993). However, this resistance is often mixed. For example, men's talk in Crawford et al. (1994, p. 582) suggested that women are allowed to be initiators with their own desires, but only in terms of male-centered sex (i.e., penetration) and that "negotiation is typically about whether to have sex or not; not what kind of sex." Similarly, men in Brown et al.'s (2018) study talked about women as active agents of heterosex, but only to the extent that this improved men's pleasure.

Most of the past discursive research is dated and has examined the dominant heterosexuality discourses that women and men support and, to a lesser extent, resist. Very limited research has examined *how* women and men do this; that is, the rhetorical strategies and language that they use. Relevant to the current study, male adolescents in Hird and Jackson's (2001) studies used inherent, biological sexual differences to support a higher male sex drive and sexual violence. Frith and Kitzinger (2001) highlighted the scripted quality of women's descriptions of heterosex and how these formulations worked to normalize claims about women's inability to say "no" (i.e., *all* women have diffi-culty because it goes against the shared sexual script). Specifically, women worked up heterosex to be scripted by referencing (among others): (a) predictable stages of sexual activities, "as though there is a pre-given sequence"

(p. 218), and (b) widely shared knowledge about heterosex (e.g., "what most people think/what everyone knows"; using a "generalized 'you'"; pp. 219–220). No studies, to our knowledge, have looked at how university men rhetor-ically support and resist dominant heterosexuality con-structions or how they negotiate these constructions.

Current Study

The aim of the current study was to examine how Canadian university men talked and negotiated conversations about sex-ual behaviors in intimate relationships in focus groups with other men. Focus groups provide a look into "participants' social worlds" by capturing the language and social norms or discourses that they use and how these function in a social context (Frith 2000, p. 280). Thus, we moved beyond the common focus on individual-level contributors of sexual vio-lence to examine the social discourses evident in our sample of heterosexual university men's talk that may support sexual violence. We focused on men's discussions about sexual be-havior in intimate relationships given that sexual violence is especially common in this relational context (Smith et al. 2017; Wegner et al. 2014). Although some results applied broadly to any heterosexual relationships, we highlight some key findings specific to intimate relationships. We also sought to expand past research by examining (a) not only men's sup-port of dominant heterosexuality constructions, but also their resistance and (b) *how* men talked and negotiated these conversations—that is, the rhetorical strategies they used.

Method

Participants

Twenty-nine men participated in one of four focus groups with eight, eight, six, and seven men, respectively. The men were aged 18 to 23 years-old ($M = 19.1$, $SD = 1.4$). Most ($n = 25$) identified as heterosexual on the sexual orientation question of the demographics survey; the remaining four responded "male" but likely misunderstood the question and had previ-ously self-identified as heterosexual by responding to our study advertisements. Most participants ($n = 20$) identified as White/European, 2 identified as Black/African/Caribbean, 2 as Southeast Asian, and 1 as each of the following: South Asian, West Asian, Arab, East Indian/Punjabi, and European/Southeast Asian biracial. Most ($n = 16$) were first-year undergraduate students, 6 were second-year, 4 were third-year, 2 were fourth-year, and 1 was a second-year Master student.

All participants reported having had at least one exclusive, committed intimate relationship: 20 reported having had 1–2 exclusive committed intimate relationships, 7 reported having

had 3–4, and 2 reported having had 5–6. Most reported having ever engaged in kissing ($n = 27$), sexual touching ($n = 26$), oral sex ($n = 24$), and vaginal sex/penetration ($n = 23$); 6 reported having ever engaged in anal sex/penetration and 2 either did not respond or provided unclear responses. Participants reported having had 0–6 or more different intercourse (vaginal-penile penetration) partners: 5 participants reported 0 intercourse partners, 10 participants reported 1 partner, 5 participants reported 2–3 partners, 3 participants reported 4–5 partners, and 6 participants reported 6 or more partners.

Procedure

Upon approval by our university's institutional research ethics board (approval date: March 7, 2016), we recruited Canadian university men to participate in one of four focus groups. We recruited 21 men through the Psychology Department Participant Pool and eight through posters around campus. All Participant Pool participants would have been registered in one or more psychology courses. The posters were an attempt to recruit some non-psychology students. All advertisements (Participant Pool study description and campus posters) informed potential participants about the purpose of the research: to participate in "a focus group with about five other men and a male facilitator about men's thoughts on and experiences with sex, dating, and sexual pressures for men and women in relationships, including instances where men might pressure women into sex." Advertisements also indicated that participants would "not be required to speak about personal experiences" and that they must identify as male and heterosexual and be aged 18 to 24.

A White male undergraduate research assistant of similar age to participants facilitated the focus groups. Peer led focus groups and interviews with young people may help to reduce the power differential between the facilitator and participants and may foster more open conversations and use of shared language (Murray 2006; Stewart et al. 2007). It was also important in the current study given our specific interest in discussions between young men; an older adult facilitator might have influenced the conversations in important ways. The facilitator was from a different university than participants and did not know any of them. He had previous training in sexual violence prevention programming and was trained for the current study on how to effectively facilitate group discussions, including non-judgmental responding and encouraging conversation between participants with minimal intervention.

The focus groups took about 1.5 to 2 h each. After the informed consent process and a discussion about the importance of maintaining other participants' confidentiality, participants responded individually to a demographics survey. Next, the facilitator introduced participants to the purpose and format of the focus group, discussed ground rules, and led an icebreaker activity (each participant was asked to name "the

dumbest thing [he had] ever spent money on") to help further develop comfort and rapport. The facilitator instructed participants to think about steady dating relationships between men and women rather than more casual relationships, like hookups or casual dates, and to focus on couples aged 18 to 24. He also explained that participants were not expected to speak about their own experiences.

The focus groups were semi-structured. The facilitator asked participants the following main questions (with minor wording differences between groups): (a) What do you think most men expect out of a steady relationship with a woman?; (b) What do you think most men consider to be a good sexual relationship with a steady partner?; (c) What do you think a typical sexual encounter between steady dating partners looks like?; (d) What do you think about communication of sexual intention between steady dating partners?; (e) How do you think sexual relationships between steady partners change over time?; (f) What are some of the pressures that men experience in steady relationships with respect to sexual activity?; (g) What are some of the pressures that women experience in steady relationships with respect to sexual activity?; and (h) Given some of the pressures that women experience in steady relationships with respect to sexual activity, why do you think women sometimes end up having sex when they do not really want to? The facilitator also asked follow-up and clarification questions, for elaboration, and for additional comments/opinions; these questions/requests varied more widely across the groups than the main questions.

After each focus group, the facilitator gave participants a list of available community resources. Men who participated through the Psychology Department Participant Pool received two bonus grades toward an eligible Psychology course of their choosing and men who we recruited via advertisements posted around campus received $20 CAD. Although the second author was teaching a psychology course at the time, neither author was directly affiliated with the Participant Pool (which is run at the departmental level) or involved in participants' selection of which course(s) to allocate their bonus grades.

Theory and Analysis

We examined how men talked and negotiated conversations about sexual behavior in intimate relationships in focus group conversations with other men—at times supporting and at times challenging dominant constructions of normative heterosexuality that are violent and male-centered. Normative heterosexuality was a useful framework for encompassing the discourses that were most evident in participants' talk. It encompassed the overlap between discourses about both women/femininity and men/masculinity in the realm of sexual behavior. Our analysis drew on the principles of feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis (Gavey 1989, 2005;

Hollway 2005; Potter and Wetherell 1987; Weedon 1997). Feminist poststructuralist forms of discourse analysis assume that knowledge, experience, and subjectivity are produced through discourse and, thus, text is analyzed for what it accomplishes socially and how it "constructs a specific reality" (Gavey 1989; Hollway 2005; Potter and Wetherell 1987, p. 2; Weedon 1997). Dominant discourses are patterned, widely shared ways of talking about the world and often appear natural and "support and perpetuate existing power relations" (Gavey 1989, p. 464). Alternative discourses challenge dominant ones by offering new cultural ideals as people actively struggle to "produce new versions of meaning" (Weedon 1997, p. 102).

Feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis typically approach participant narratives "in *their own right* and not as a secondary route to things 'beyond' the text like attitudes, events or cognitive processes" (Potter and Wetherell 1987, p. 160, emphasis in the original). However, our approach departed from this purely linguistic approach in that we read men's accounts as both discursive productions and descriptions (albeit partial) of actual heterosexual dynamics (Gavey 2005; Gavey et al. 2001). These opposing understandings of language (as constitutive and as straightforward description) allowed us to identify and subvert the discursive productions of men's talk while still, at times, speaking to material heterosexual practices.

An undergraduate research assistant (different from the focus group facilitator) transcribed the focus group recordings verbatim, and the first author read and re-read the transcripts. The first author conducted a preliminary analysis and coded the transcripts in NVivo 12 (qualitative analysis software) into broad categories reflecting men's reported experiences and views (e.g., sexual violence tactics and interpretations, sexual communication, relationship and gender norms). This preliminary coding and analysis were insufficient, however, for highlighting the dominant male-centered and sexual violence-supportive discourses that appeared common in men's talk. Thus, the authors then conducted a discursive analysis whereby we examined men's talk at multiple levels.

First, we examined men's talk in relation to broader discourses about heterosexuality and how it reflected and constructed particular discursive and material versions of heterosexuality (Level 1). The first author used NVivo 12 to locate and code chunks of conversation in which participants supported and challenged the following dominant discourses related to heterosexuality that have previously been discussed in the literature: men's sexual drive, women's sexual gatekeeping, heterosex as natural, and sexual miscommunication (Frith and Kitzinger 1997; Gavey 1989, 2005; Hollway 1989, 2005; Waldby et al. 1993). Second, we examined the immediate interactional function of men's talk to identify how men actively worked up these particular constructions in ways that strengthened

their claims and often made them credible or difficult to challenge (Level 2; Edwards 1994, 1995; Frith and Kitzinger 2001). Here, the first author identified various rhetorical strategies that worked to strengthen men's claims and the extent to which they directed the conversations. The second author provided feedback on drafts of the written analysis and identified additional rhetorical strategies. The first author then went back to the transcripts to ensure that the analysis still fit the data and to find additional exemplifying excerpts.

We divided the results according to the following three conversation topics: (a) heterosexual drive, (b) heterosexual initiation and progression, and (c) heterosexual (mis)-communication. Our results point to the relatively common general patterning of heterosexuality as male-centered and sometimes violent in participants' relevant conversations. However, we did not necessarily identify each specific discourse and rhetorical strategy because of its frequency in the data but rather because of its meaningfulness in relation to the other discourses and rhetorical strategies and to our overall research purpose (Braun and Clarke 2013). The conversations sometimes veered toward casual relationships and some accounts applied to both casual and intimate relationships; however, we tried to highlight some key findings about heterosexuality within intimate relationships. Where possible, we selected extracts that demonstrated tensions between participants and between dominant and alternative accounts. In order to keep the negotiation between participants and shifts in conversation intact (including agreements and disagreements), we present some lengthy extracts and we mostly discuss resistance strategies within sections about how men legitimized dominant discourses. We identify participant quotes using pseudonyms that we created for the present paper. Ellipses represent removed quotes or sections of quotes.

Reflexivity and Quality Checking

Reflexivity—that is, "critical reflection on the research process and on one's own role as a researcher"—is a key tenant of both qualitative and feminist research (Braun and Clarke 2013, p. 10; Hesse-Bibber and Piatelli 2012). It may be particularly important in poststructuralist and other postpositivist research that understands knowledge and meaning as "made rather than found" (Mauthner and Doucet 2003, p. 414). Thus, our roles as researchers and co-constructors of the knowledge produced in our research must be acknowledged. We are woman-identified, feminist social psychology researchers with a longstanding interest in men's violence against women. Our interpretation of the data in the present paper was one among many possible interpretations. By providing many verbatim extracts, the reader can evaluate our interpretations.

We engaged in several validity and quality checking processes relevant to qualitative and discursive research. We checked our interpretations of the data across the focus group transcripts, across data sources (i.e., with our related interview study with men who had used sexual violence against an intimate partner; see Jeffrey and Barata 2019), as well as against the extant psychological literature (triangulation; Lather 1986). We were deliberate and mindful in selecting our design and procedures to ensure that they supported our goals for our study and respected our epistemological assumptions (Levitt et al. 2017). Finally, we made every effort to identify in our analysis a practically important range of linguistic patterns and to give coherence to a body of discourse (Potter and Wetherell 1987)—in this case, the body of discourse pertaining to normative heterosexuality and its potential overlap with sexual violence. In particular, we attempted to show how the relevant dominant and alternative discourses fit together and their functions and effects in talk (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

Results

Participants legitimized a dominant, male-centered and sometimes violent version of heterosexuality. Related to the three conversation topics we noted previously, they legitimized a dominant version of heterosexuality whereby (a) men have a higher and uncontrollable sex drive compared to women, (b) heterosexual initiation and progression occur naturally and without (men's) verbal communication, and (c) men misinterpret women's ineffective communication and this miscommunication causes sexual violence. These legitimized discourses about heterosexuality represent Level 1 of our analysis. Participants did this legitimizing mainly by using essentializing language that worked up specific heterosexual dynamics and practices as pre-given and part of a regular, recognizable pattern; specifically, as (a) natural and biological (i.e., biologically essential) and (b) scripted (i.e., socially essential). These rhetorical strategies represent Level 2 of our analysis. In general, biologically essentialist language characterized heterosexuality as predetermined, immutable, and stable fact. Socially essentialist language (script formulations) characterized heterosexuality as "having a recurring, predictable, [and, sometimes,] sequential pattern" (Edwards 1995, p. 319). This essentializing language and positioning then allowed men to further legitimize a dominant version of heterosexuality by marginalizing heterosexuality practices that do not fit the alleged norm. Each of these strategies was rhetorically useful because they strengthened men's claims and were often difficult to challenge within the focus group conversations.

Nevertheless, some men did challenge dominant discourses with varying degrees of success at shifting the conversation. We summarize the results in Table 1.

Men's Talk and Negotiation about Heterosexual Drive

Participants used essentializing and marginalizing language to legitimize a particular, dominant version of heterosexuality whereby men want sex more than women do and have biological urges that need to be satisfied (previously labeled the male sexual drive discourse; Gavey 1989; Gavey et al. 2001; Hollway 1989, 2005).

Essentializing men's sex drive

Participants essentialized the male sexual drive (and, at times, justified sexual violence) by positioning men's higher sex drive and uncontrollable urges as (a) natural and biologically determined and (b) scripted. First, they referred to biology/chemistry, hormones, and men's physiological needs and "natural higher sex drives" (Warren, Group 1). For example, two men in Group 3 repeatedly used language about men's physiological need in a conversation about sexual pressure in relationships. They explained that some women end up having sex when they do not want to because "it takes less…for a guy to be more sexually aroused" (Frank) and because women might feel pressure to "relieve" their partner when he is "really pent up" (Samuel). And they explained that "a lot of sexual frustration" (Samuel) and "withdrawal from sex" (Frank) might lead men to pressure or force their partner into sex. In a discussion about why some men try to have sex with many women and might intentionally ignore signs that a woman does not want to have sex, Damian suggested that one reason is because it is "the way that they're wired" and others soon continued with a focus on hormones and biology/chemistry:

> **Extract 1 (group 1)**
> Warren: Like a higher sex drive would obviously lead you to that if something was—(Todd: Testosterone)—Testosterone, yeah testosterone is obviously a huge factor.
> Damian: If you play sports, like contact sports you tend to be generally more—(Warren: Amped up)—Amped up.
> Warren: So, for you to get your work out…you get a natural start…It seems to be like if your physical desire outweighs your like rationale or like your, yeah.
> Simon: Does testosterone really affect like–? (murmurs of affirmation of testosterone's effect) Because I don't work out at all…but like everyone says that testosterone—but like how, though?
> Damian: It's…like a chemical reaction in your brain, like literally you feel elevated.

Table 1 Summary of results: Patterns of discourses and rhetoric in participants' talk

Level 1 Patterns Level 2 Sub-patterns	Description
(1) Heterosexual Drive	Men have a higher and uncontrollable sex drive, and this causes sexual violence and pressure on women to have unwanted sex.
(a) Biological Essentializing	• Reference to biology/chemistry, hormones, and men's physiology to identify men's higher and uncontrollable sex drive as stable scientific fact—and sometimes to explain sexual violence (e.g., Extract 1).
(b) Social Essentializing	• Use of generalizing language to identify men's higher and uncontrollable sex drive and women's lower sex drive as predictable—and sometimes to explain sexual violence (e.g., Extracts 2, 3).
(c) Marginalizing Non-Normative Practices	• Reference to men's low sex drive and women's high sex drive as rare and abnormal (e.g., Extracts 2, 3).
(2) Heterosexual Initiation and Progression	Heterosexual initiation and progression occur naturally and without (men's) verbal communication.
(a) Biological Essentializing	• Not applicable
(b) Social Essentializing	• Reference to partners already knowing each other's preferences, universal gendered initiation roles, a universal sexual progression sequence, and generalizing language to identify initiation and progression as predictable (e.g., Extracts 4, 5).
(c) Marginalizing Non-Normative Practices	• Reference to (men's) verbal requests as disruptive of the natural/typical sexual progression (e.g., Extracts 4, 5).
	• Reference to men who verbally communicate and women who want men to verbally communicate as rare and abnormal (e.g., Extracts 4, 5).
	• Reference to (men's) verbal communication as *clearly* undesirable (e.g., Extracts 4, 5).
(3) Heterosexual (Mis)Communication	Men misinterpret women's ineffective communication and this miscommunication causes sexual violence.
(a) Biological Essentializing	• Not applicable
(b) Social Essentializing	• Use of generalizing language to identify women's and men's communication roles and styles as predictable—and sometimes to explain sexual violence (e.g., Extract 7).
(c) Marginalizing Normative Practices	• Reference to women's normative communication as *clearly* and problematically ineffective (e.g., Extract 7).
(4) Resistance	Alternative discourses or resistance to dominant discourses about heterosexual drive, initiation and progression, and (mis)communication.
	• Use of indirect disagreements including hedging or qualifying one's resistance, first partially agreeing with a dominant claim before resisting, and questioning a dominant claim.
	• Use of direct disagreements.

Patterns marked (1) through (4) represent the main conversation topics and discourses (or discursive *content*) that participants legitimized (Level 1 of our analysis); sub-patterns marked (a) through (c) represent the rhetorical strategies that participants used to do so (Level 2 of our analysis)

Warren: It's the same way dopamine can make you feel better like any drug or like alcohol changes your brain.
Damian: It's like when you have a Red Bull [an energy drink] and you're like really low on energy and then you feel it—that's what it does.
Warren: You're amped.
Damian: You're amped.
Warren: You're ready to go.

This conversation demonstrates how biologically essentialist language appeared as stable fact and strengthened men's claims such that they were difficult to challenge. Indeed, other men were unable to effectively challenge such appeals, especially without contrary scientific evidence. Simon (Extract 1) challenged this conversation by simply questioning testosterone's effects: "Does testosterone really affect like–?". However, his questioning was

quickly shut down by further biologically framed affirmations from Damian and Warren.

Second, participants legitimized the male sexual drive discourse by characterizing it as scripted or socially essential—in this case, as generally the same across occasions and people. In Extracts 1 to 3, they referred to a general "you," "he," "she," "guys," and "girls" in place of all men or all women and used continuous present tense to identify these dynamics as part of a typical pattern among all people ("testosterone is"; "your physical desire outweighs"; Edwards 1995; Frith and Kitzinger 2001). In Extracts 2 and 3, they also used generalizing language to more explicitly emphasize that *most* men have a higher sex drive and *most* women have a lower sex drive. Part of this generalizing involved drawing on alleged personal observation or opinion to emphasize universality ("I feel like," "from what I've seen," "I find"):

> **Extract 2 (group 2)**
> Bernard: I feel like there are more occasions where she doesn't feel like doing it, then– (murmurs of agreement)
> Doug: It depends on the girl. Yeah, I think it depends on the person.
> Facilitator: Okay.
> Doug: I don't think that men are biologically more—like have higher libidos or anything, it just depends on the person.
> Facilitator: So, you think there's more—um some of you might think there's more just personality differences? Just depending on the person? (murmurs of agreement)
> Collin: Yeah, I think it is depends on the person, but I also do think that men do—I don't know if it's backed by science, but I feel like from the majority, from what I've seen men do have higher libidos than women. And you can meet like the odd woman who is like, has a very high libido, so it all depends on the person…
> Oliver: I think it's common perception that men typically have, uh, higher sex drives. But um, as he was saying (gesturing at Doug), I think it depends on the person. I've heard of people…their female partner, would be more—have a higher libido than them.
> **Extract 3 (Group 4)**
> Mathias: …Obviously it's the same for girls. If a girl wants to try something new and the guy is like, for some reason, "No" or something, he doesn't want you to and then it should stop as well. It's same on the both sides, you have to know when to stop…
> Abdul: I find guys would be less likely to stop (Mathias: Oh yeah, yeah) like to not want to do this.
> Mathias: Yeah, generally guys would like not stop the girl, obviously, but like there might be the odd guy who's like, "I don't know how I feel about that," and like obviously a lot of guys are just like "ehh, go for it."

Each of these generalized script formulations helped strengthen men's claims because they appeared "as part of a regular pattern…a recognizable external world rather than a product of wrong or biased reporting," especially in the face of doubt (Edwards 1995, p. 325). Indeed, as one example, Collin (Extract 2) used script formulations and alleged personal observation ("the majority, from what I've seen men do have higher libidos than women") in the face of Doug's challenge ("I don't think that men are biologically more—like have higher libidos"). Their specific use of "guys" and, especially, "girls" here and elsewhere may further support generalized script formulations. Past research suggests that "girl" carries connotations of lack of maturity and sometimes lack of sexuality, whereas "woman" carries more connotations of sexuality and male terms are not as commonly distinguished based on sexuality connotations (Bebout 1995).

Marginalizing women's high sex drive and men's low sex drive

Essentializing language allowed participants to then further legitimize men's higher sex drive by marginalizing and abnormalizing heterosexuality practices that do not fit the established, recognized norm. Collin's "odd woman who… has a very high libido" (Extract 2) stressed that it would be rare and abnormal for a woman to have a high sex drive. Likewise, Mathias' comments in Extract 3 stressed that it would be rare and abnormal for a man to decline sex: "If… the guy is like, for some reason, 'No'"; "generally guys would like not stop the girl, obviously, but like there might be the odd guy…" As a result, they positioned any case where sex drive "depends on the person" as an "odd" exception to the rule.

This language, especially, may have worked to prevent any disputes because such a dispute might identify a man in the group as abnormal. Indeed, when Oliver resisted after Collin's marginalizing language in Extract 2 (Collin: "you can meet like the odd woman who is like, has a very high libido"), he did not use personal observations or opinions that would identify him as odd. Instead, Oliver spoke abstractly about how he has "heard of" women with higher sex drives. This contrasted with men's use of personal observation and opinion to support the dominant discourse. It also contrasted with Doug's stronger resistance (Doug: "I don't think that men are biologically more—like have higher libidos or anything") before Collin's marginalizing language. Oliver's comment also still implied that couples among whom the woman has a higher sex drive are rarer and do not fit the norm.

Men's Talk and Negotiation about Heterosexual Initiation and Progression

Participants used similar essentializing and marginalizing language to legitimize a specific dominant version of heterosexual

initiation and progression whereby heterosex is natural and starts naturally, and men do not need to communicate. This construction was related to a number of dominant discourses previously identified in the literature, including those that hold that heterosex is natural and "already mapped out," that men are the agentic subjects of sex, and that women are sexual gatekeepers responsible for controlling men's sexuality (Gavey 1989; Gavey et al. 2001; Hollway 1989, 2005; Waldby et al. 1993, p. 246).

Essentializing (men's) noncommunication

Participants essentialized noncommunicative heterosexual initiation and progression (and, at times, justified sexual violence) mainly by variously characterizing them as if they were scripted. Some referred to heterosex within intimate relationships, specifically, as if it were scripted or predetermined by suggesting that partners "already know what [each other] likes and doesn't like" (Moe, Group 4), "each other's intentions in sex" (Rick, Group 2), and "how to initiate" (Damian, Group 1). In other instances, script formulations negated the need for verbal initiation on the basis that heterosexual (a) gendered initiation roles and (b) progression are "already mapped out" (Waldby et al. 1993, p. 246). Participants used several strategies to work up these dynamics as scripted. First, they often used continuous present (and sometimes future) tense to identify these dynamics as part of a typical pattern (Edwards 1995; Frith and Kitzinger 2001). As in Extracts 4 and 5, they set up gendered initiation roles as consistently the way it is—"it [is]… body language" for men (men are actors only) and "it [is] a preference for the girl" who "[will] say…'Yes/No'" (women are gatekeepers responsible for verbal communication):

> **Extract 4 (group 2)**
> Roy: …I don't think many guys, especially in a relationship, ask after a while. Because like you've been with each other for a long time, so it's probably just mostly body language…
> Doug: Yeah, like you don't verbally say, "Okay, can we have sex?" (murmurs of agreement) I feel like…it's like body language until if they don't want it, then they'll say "No," as opposed to "Can we have sex?" "Yes/No," you know?
> Oliver: I feel like a lot of people would feel like that would just kill the mood if like in the middle of building up to that you're like "Can we have sex?"
> Arie: Unless they're into that (laughter).
> Oliver: Unless they're into that.
> **Extract 5 (Group 4)**
> Liam: Limits, yeah, are definitely like a big part of it…if you try to, whatever, take her shirt off and then whatever she like (mimics having his hand slapped away) or whatever it is, then you just—you stop there, and you

don't keep doing it. But at the same time, you kind of have to try to push the boundaries with each time going forward and then seeing where her comfort level is at…
> Facilitator: So, um, do you think that's kind of a typical way of going about exploring boundaries, or do you think that there's any—what other ways do you think, um–?
> Mathias: I mean, obviously there's the way of like, the consent thing that we had, like that we talked about like—
> Jerry: You can ask.
> Mathias: You can ask. Um, a lot of people I feel like again, people are like "Oh, it's not awkward, you can just ask and be really sexy about it." It's like, but like, really? (murmurs of agreement) Like some girls have legit told me like if a guy asks me, I will immediately just walk away. I'm just like, "Well, alright then. So, don't ask."
> Liam: Like that would be weird. If you're just making out and you're just like "Oh, can you give me a blowjob?" That would be really weird to ask (laughter and agreement).
> Mathias: Yeah, it's like—it's like, "No, not anymore." But like if you're like in a steady relationship…you've probably done some other stuff before…If you're going to like initiate it, you want to like, you already know like she kind of like is okay with it. Then like, don't push boundaries, like don't go from like oh, like we're making out, to oh, I'm about to like shove my hand up you (laughter). Oh, like– (cut off by laughter).
> Liam: Like hand moving up the leg and then if she pulls the hand off the leg (shrugs).
> Mathias: Yeah, like push boundaries, but don't push them super hard. Like again, like it's a preference for the girl, like, obviously you want to push your boundary, but don't keep pushing that boundary afterwards.
> Liam: Yeah, like it can sort of seem like coercion, and that's like, whatever, bad, like to keep insisting and forcing yourself upon somebody, but I think there is a line before, whatever, coercion, where whatever, you can try without asking. I think there's like a line between going too far and just seeing what you can do.
> Mathias: And I feel like for guys and girls, like a lot of them are like—they enjoy the buildup of like not asking, they enjoy like silence (murmurs that it's more natural)…like building up the tension, like you like breaking past that barrier or something…
> Abdul: Yeah, like, I just find like asking for it verbally just kind of kills the mood, so like you ask in a nonverbal way.
> Mathias: Yeah, like obviously the guy, the consent thing, he brought that up (referring to Mike Domitrz's Can I Kiss You? program), it's—it's "if you ask, it's not going

to be awkward, it's not going to kill the mood." But, like, it does. Like people like, guys and females both agree like, oh there might be like the odd guy will ask, there might be the odd girl who wants the guy to ask, but like, I feel like generally a lot of people are just like, "Don't ask. Try and if I don't like it, stop."

…

Abdul: I think it depends on how you ask. Because if you're just sitting there like, "Hey, you want to have sex?" *(murmurs of agreement)*

Mathias: There's no mood to kill—you're just killing any opportunity you had.

Abdul: But it's like you stop kissing and then, um, touching and whatever, and then you say it in a kind of sentimental or sexual way. I think that more likely go in your favor, then just straight up, you're not doing anything and just asking.

Wesley: Like giving them a consensual form, like you know? (holds up consent form).

Mathias: Yeah, can you sign this? Imagine walking up to a girl: "Can you sign this?" (holds up consent form, everybody laughs).

Moe: …I think asking specifics definitely kills the mood, but…just like pushing the boundaries, I think saying "Is this okay?" Like that doesn't feel weird—or like, "Do you like this?" Like, that doesn't kill the mood, but it gives them a way out if they want it.

Liam: Yeah, I guess that's more subtle.

Mathias: Yeah, and you feel like asking for specifics, it's like…if you say that verbally, like "Oh, do you want to give me a blowjob?" it's like, well, you've said that, it doesn't exactly sound like the cleanest thing to do. But like, asking is an option, and saying "Do you like that? Is this okay?" I feel like that's a good thing, it's just if you are asking like specifics and stuff it's a risk to take it. Who knows, the risk might become a reward, but you're not, you're taking a risk for sure doing that.

Again, their specific use of "guys" and "girls" here may have further supported the scripting of men as sexual agents and women as sexual gatekeepers given that "girl" can sometimes carry connotations of a lack of sexuality (Bebout 1995).

Similarly, they set up a particular sequence of sexual activity progression as the way heterosex routinely or consistently plays out. Men in all four groups outlined a very similar, formulaic "one thing leads to another" (Liam, Group 4) progression from kissing or sexual touching to intercourse as the ultimate goal or endpoint. And they used continuous present tense to do so, suggesting that foreplay regularly "turns into that [sex]" (Liam, Group 4) and "clothes start coming off" (Abdul, Group 4). In this case, they also essentialized by referring to the way in which sex "just happens naturally" (Damian, Group 1); that is, they often described actions without a clear subject,

as in Liam and Abdul's immediately preceding comments. This worked to further script heterosex and emphasize that there is no room or need for verbal requests or communication (and that some men might even need to "push boundaries," as Liam and Mathias noted in Extract 5).

The second way that men worked up heterosexual initiation roles and progression as scripted and, thus, part of a typical pattern was by using generalizing language. Specifically, they emphasized universality by (a) referring to a general "you" in place of all men; (b) more explicitly emphasizing that many or most people conform to this natural progression and agree that men do not or should not ask for sex; and (c) using "You know?" to identify that these are shared, recognizable norms (Edwards 1994). Each can be seen in Extracts 4 and 5; for example: "you don't verbally say, 'Okay, can we have sex?'… you know?"; "guys and girls, like a lot of them." As in conversations about sexual drive, part of this generalizing also involved drawing on alleged personal observation or opinion ("I think/I don't think," "I feel like") to provide concrete evidence and emphasize universality. Their experiences with some people were used rhetorically as a stand-in for all or most people, like in Mathias' (Extract 5) claim that "some girls have legit told [him]" that men should not ask.

Marginalizing (men's) verbal initiation

The prior essentializing language set the stage for men to further legitimize dominant discourses by marginalizing and abnormalizing heterosexuality practices that do not fit the alleged norm. As in Extracts 4 and 5, men did this in several related ways. Some built on the script formulations we noted to position verbal requests as disruptive of the natural/typical progression of heterosex. They emphasized that it is "awkward," "weird," and "kills the mood" when a man asks for sex. The disruptiveness was clearly ascribed to the asking itself rather than the expectation or desire. For example, as in Liam and Mathias' exchange in Extract 5, it is only weird to ask for oral sex while kissing. The sexual script sets up oral sex after kissing as a typical progression, and Mathias explicitly suggested that a hypothetical woman in this scenario no longer ("no, not anymore") wants to engage in oral sex after the verbal request, specifically.

Relatedly, participants built on the generalizing language we noted to then position men and women who act against these patterns as abnormal exceptions. For example, Mathias (Extract 5) emphasized that only the "odd guy will ask" and "odd girl who wants the guy to ask." Arie and Oliver (Extract 4) suggested that only people who are "into" verbal requests (i.e., exceptions to the rule) would be okay with this approach. In other words, men and women who go against the natural and agreed-upon sexual script not only are in the minority (generalizing language) but also are strange (abnormalizing language). These two related ways of marginalizing may have been particularly strong and difficult to challenge because doing

so would identify a man in the group as the "odd guy" or as okay with being awkward or "killing the mood." Few men resisted, especially by refuting the awkwardness of asking (although some offered potentially less disruptive alternatives—more on this point follows).

Finally, men built on the typical sexual progression that they had previously mapped out and used extreme or exaggerated examples and language to marginalize asking for sex as *clearly* undesirable. For example, in Extract 5, Liam and later Mathias emphasized the weirdness and undesirability of verbally asking for sex by using the example of suddenly asking for a "blowjob." Wesley and Mathias (Extract 5) likened asking for sex with using a "consensual form." In other cases, men started by marginalizing extreme or exaggerated ways of not asking for sex so that, in comparison, milder ways of not asking appeared normal and reasonable. For example, Mathias (Extract 5) argued that men cannot go from "making out" to "[shoving their] hand up [her]." The extreme and graphic language emphasized that this example is clearly bad. However, Liam and Mathias then used this to position other, less extreme ways of not asking (i.e., moving one's hand up a woman's leg and "[pushing] boundaries") as normal and reasonable in comparison. Some (e.g., Liam, Extract 5) used a similar strategy to differentiate milder versions of pressure and boundary-pushing from clear or extreme sexual violence (i.e., using physical force or going against a clear/strong refusal).

Using extreme or exaggerated examples to marginalize asking for sex had varying degrees of success in the focus group conversations. Most of the instances we reported here elicited laughter from the group, presumably demonstrating men's agreement (and discomfort) with the extremity and disruptiveness of the behaviors. Perhaps as further evidence of the strength of this strategy, men who did resist did so by first agreeing with the extremity. Presumably referring to Wesley and Mathias' "consensual form" example, Moe (Extract 5) first agreed that "asking specifics definitely kills the mood." The extremity was likely such that Moe had to agree (see More on Men's Resistance in a later section). However, it was also the extremity that actually allowed Moe to resist by introducing alternative ways of asking ("is this okay?," "do you like this?") that, in comparison, were read by the other men as reasonable. Indeed, in this case, Liam and Mathias responded with partial agreement and toned down their original claims about the disruptiveness of not asking (Liam: "Yeah, I guess that's more subtle"; Mathias: "Yeah…asking is an option…"). In another example, Frank likened asking for sex with a "legal agreement" and Samuel resisted by first agreeing with the extremity:

Extract 6 (group 3)
Frank: …in a steady relationship, I can't imagine it would be like "Do you want to do it?" It's kind of crazy, it's like a legal agreement kind of thing.

Samuel: I know, and this—this is just me, okay? I prefer a clear-cut concise, okay, I hate ambiguity…Yes, no sane person or not many people are going to be okay with that clear-cut box…being Mister Roboto [presumably meaning mechanical, robotic] with being exact may kill one mood, but at least you know that ahead of time so you can use that information to, later on in a relationship or in another encounter. But that's just me.
Facilitator.: What do you guys think? We're talking about sexual communication…
Darius: I feel like if you've been in a relationship awhile like you're more likely to have like more explicit uh communication…you know this person…you can almost guarantee that you've talked about pretty much everything. So, I don't see why your sexual preferences or just communicating in general during sex would be any different.
Daniel: Yeah, I agree with him. I feel like in a steady relationship after a long time…like…"I'm curious about this, I want to try this."…It's clear and concise, really.

Like previously, the extremity of the preceding excerpt (in this case, Frank's "legal agreement") was likely such that Samuel had to agree ("I know…Yes, no sane person or not many people are going to be okay with that"). However, unlike Moe, Samuel then abnormalized himself along with the extreme (it is "just him"). In this way, he left space for others to disagree and continue abnormalizing verbal requests. Nevertheless, Darius and Daniel did not explicitly disagree; they partially agreed by claiming that long-term couples have clear and explicit communication. However, they referred more to communicating sexual preferences and, therefore, did not as fully or clearly resist dominant discourses negating verbal initiation and progression as compared to Samuel.

Men's Talk and Negotiation about Heterosexual (Mis) Communication

Relying on similar essentializing strategies, participants legitimized particular, dominant versions of heterosexuality and sexual violence whereby women alone are responsible for clear communication and whereby miscommunication causes sexual violence (related to the previously identified miscommunication argument; Frith and Kitzinger 1997).

Essentializing women's and men's (mis)communication

Participants essentialized heterosexual (mis)communication by again using continuous present tense and generalizing language. This language worked to script women's and men's communication roles and practices as taken-for-granted, agreed upon knowledge. They often began conversations about sexual communication by emphasizing that it "is"

(present tense) very important and that "you" (i.e., everyone) "[needs] to communicate." However, as in Samuel's and Daniel's next comments, they then specified that the general "you" for whom communication is important is women, specifically:

Extract 7 (group 3)

Samuel: …there has to be that line of communication. You're not, if you really don't want the guy to bring those, um, I'm just—handcuffs or whatever, and you don't say that you don't like them, how's he necessarily supposed to know, aside from maybe picking up body language?…it streamlines the process to use your words…

Eric: Communication is really important. Like obviously, like you need to communicate with your partner, like "Okay, this kind of thing."…If she likes this, then do this…

Facilitator: I see.

Daniel: Yeah, I agree. Communication is definitely important and also, I guess, in general, guys tend to be a bit more stupid in the sense that, like, we—we don't get cues from the girls. So, like, we just tend to go along with it, even though the girls are intending to give us a cue, like hey we cannot do this, but we tend to do it anyways. But like, so talking it out, is a lot more important than giving out cues or body language…

Samuel: Well, if you're talking about the whole, like, signals. One: it's cryptic as hell—sorry about the language, but how are you supposed to know that twirling the uh hand at a one-half degree angle means that she wants you to take her on a dinner date at the pub in Brisband at this point in time…We're supposed to be the ones who make the first move…if she gives a signal, guy pursues. But at the same time, if the guy's wrong, he can end up in a lot of trouble, so you would tend to play cautiously. So, with the issue of not picking it up, it's, okay, one party is not being verbal enough; the other party has a lot of legal repercussions to, uh, pursuing a wrong cue, and it's just a mess.

Frank: I feel like…women and girls in general…they play mind games a lot more…you can't always tell, like 'cause some girls like to like play with you, mess with you. I don't know, just I feel like that itself makes guys a lot more hesitant…I would always second doubt or like myself, "Does it really—does it really mean anything?"…

Eric: A sign from one girl is different from a sign from another girl…So, it's—it's really complicated too. It kind of goes both ways though, obviously a guy kind of does the same thing. The guy has to be forthcoming, like it can go out of his way sometimes, so kind of like the guy has more responsibility, I want to say.

Samuel: Um, to go off of what he said (gesturing at Frank) about again the girls and their play or maybe getting a bit of contact as a signal…signals can easily, easily backfire.

Thus, much like in other conversations we noted, they characterized the specific parts to be played by men and women as already set: Men are responsible for acting and women (again often referred to using the term "girls," which may be associated with a lack of sexuality; Bebout 1995) are responsible for reacting and communicating.

However, they expanded this argument in conversations that were more specific to sexual violence, like that in Extract 7 (subtly referred to: "he can end up in a lot of trouble"; "legal repercussions"). They added—again using continuous present tense and generalizing language—that (a) women and men communicate differently; (b) men do not understand women's communication; and (c) although women are responsible for communication, they are generally ineffective communicators. Each worked to stress women's need to improve by communicating clearly and effectively and to blame sexual violence on miscommunication. For example, in Group 1, Warren said that "there is a difference in how…females and males communicate"; that, "in general, a lot of guys are…straight to the point" and women "are much more subtle." Daniel (Extract 7) suggested that men in general "tend to be…stupid" at understanding women's communication. Samuel and Eric's comments throughout Extract 7 suggested that women in general communicate unclearly and unpredictably and that this can lead to men's misunderstandings. These script formulations worked to position women as responsible for predicting and improving their own ineffective communication *and* predicting and preventing men's misunderstandings (because both are routine and predictable and are part of women's communication role).

In conversations about (mis)communication, men also used exaggerated language and examples similar to those used in the previous marginalizing sections. However, in this case, they were not marginalizing communication practices that do not fit the norm. Instead, they were adding a layer of denigration to their arguments about women's ineffective (but typical) communication. Specifically, they used exaggerated language and examples to emphasize that women's communication is clearly and problematically ineffective: "cryptic as hell"; "twirling the hand at a one-half degree angle"; "play mind games" (Extract 7). Together with the script formulations, this denigrating language worked to position men's misunderstanding and resulting sexual violence as reasonable and expected outcomes of women's clearly ineffective communication. Like previously, the strength of exaggerated examples may have meant that Eric (Extract 7) had to resist dominant discourses about (mis)communication by first agreeing with the extremity of some of Samuel and Frank's claims: "A sign

from one girl is different from a sign from another girl…It kind of goes both ways though…the guy has more responsibility, I want to say" (Eric).

Men's miscommunication arguments in this section contrasted their conversations in other sections about the normalcy of nonverbal communication and the disruptiveness of men's verbal communication. In other conversations they also reported that men understand women's communication. For example, when asked explicitly whether men know when their partners do not want sex, most men in one group responded simultaneously: "Yes." In other groups, they described how men "can tell" when women are uncomfortable or do not want sex. Some argued that men do not need to communicate because women will indicate (nonverbally) when they do not want sex, thereby implying that men often recognize and understand these types of refusals. It was in conversations more specific to sexual violence (like Extract 7) that men claimed *not* to understand women's refusals. This pattern is similar to that found in O'Byrne et al. (2008) and further supports the rhetorical function of the miscommunication argument; that is, it likely does not straightforwardly reflect heterosexual experiences but rather is used as a resource to justify sexual violence and absolve men of their responsibility for (mis)understanding women. The findings here also extend past research by highlighting *how* men rhetorically work up the miscommunication argument in ways that are difficult to resist.

More on Men's Resistance

Men often resisted dominant discourses in ways that are typical of disagreements done in everyday interactions: indirectly; likely in an effort to minimize their force, preserve consensus, and avoid conflict (Brown and Levinson 1987; Pomerantz 1984). Indirect disagreements tend not to be as strong as direct ones (Pomerantz 1984) and, indeed, they rarely successfully shifted the conversations in our study. For example, some hedged or qualified their resistance and this left space for others to disagree or return to the preceding dominant claim. Mathias' hedged resistance in Extract 3 (men and women should know when to stop but men would only "for some reason" want to stop) allowed Abdul to interject and agree with the latter ("I find guys would be less likely to stop"). Similarly, soon after Extract 4, Bernard challenged the awkwardness of asking for sex by abnormalizing and hedging his own counter position. He said that it is "a little bit funky to not say anything at all" because a woman might not feel able to decline if she is not asked directly, "but [that he didn't] know how often that happens… because…there are a lot of opportunities from the Netflix to like penetration…to like opt-out, physically." This created the space for two men to disagree with his resistance: They continued with his hedging and claimed that women would indeed stop unwanted sex.

Although indirect disagreements are typical of everyday interactions (Brown and Levinson 1987; Pomerantz 1984), in the current study, they may also speak to the degree and strength of the dominant discourses and legitimizing strategies. For example, Mathias and Bernard (immediately prior) may have softened their resistance so as not to strongly oppose most of the other men in the group. Other men prefaced their disagreement by first (partially) agreeing. Although a typical form of disagreement (Pomerantz 1984), in the current study, this strategy tended mostly to be used following extreme examples. For example, in response to a comparison of asking for sex with a consent form, Moe resisted by first agreeing that "asking specifics definitely kills the mood" (Extract 5). In response to a comparison of asking for sex with a legal agreement, Samuel resisted by first agreeing: "I know…Yes, no sane person or not many people are going to be okay with that" (Extract 6). In response to comments about women playing "mind games," Eric resisted by first agreeing that "a sign from one girl is different from a sign from another girl" (Extract 7). It appeared that, in response to extreme examples, resistors had to start by agreeing to avoid being seen as extremely opposed to the group. The extremity may also have been such that resistors actually did agree with the extreme version of the argument but not a milder version. Finally, the conversation in Extract 1 was replete with biologically and scientifically framed arguments about the effects of testosterone that appeared as stable fact. Possibly because he did not have equally strong scientifically framed evidence to the contrary, Simon challenged the conversation by simply questioning the other men's claims about testosterone's effects ("Does testosterone really affect like–?"). His indirect disagreement/resistance was not effective in changing the conversation; instead, it invited the other men to provide further evidence of their dominant claims about testosterone.

Some men did resist using more direct disagreement strategies. Although these tend to be considered stronger than indirect disagreements (Pomerantz 1984), they were similarly ineffective at shifting the conversations in the current study. Again, this pattern may speak to the degree and strength of the dominant discourses and legitimizing strategies. For example, Doug's strong and abrupt resistance in Extract 2 ("it depends on the person…I don't think that men are biologically more— like have higher libidos or anything") elicited only quickly hedged agreement from Collin that returned the conversation to the male sex drive ("depends on the person, but…"). Jerry resisted early on in Extract 5 by suddenly stating, "you can ask" and was immediately silenced by language about the awkwardness of asking and use of extreme examples. Similarly, although Eric began by agreeing with an extreme example in Extract 7, his proceeding abrupt and perhaps unexpected resistance ("the guy has more responsibility" and "has to be forthcoming") did not gain any traction among the others, and Samuel quickly silenced it by returning the

conversation to Frank's extreme mind game example. Ultimately, almost all examples of resistance were unsuccessful in the context of the dominant discourses and legitimizing strategies that dominated the conversations.

Discussion

The current research examined how university men talked and negotiated focus group conversations about sexual drive, initiation and progression, and (mis)communication in heterosexual intimate relationships. Participants legitimized a dominant, male-centered and sometimes violent version of heterosexuality whereby men have a higher and uncontrollable sex drive compared to women, heterosexual initiation and progression occur naturally and without (men's) verbal communication, and men misinterpret women's ineffective communication and this miscommunication causes sexual violence. These constructions were related to heterosexuality discourses that have been discussed in the literature for over 30 years (Frith and Kitzinger 1997; Gavey 1989; Hollway 1989; Waldby et al. 1993). Participants legitimized these constructions mainly by essentializing heterosexuality and marginalizing practices that do not fit the alleged norm. Like male adolescents in Hird and Jackson's (2001) studies, men in the current study relied on biologically essentialist language to support the higher male sex drive (and sexual violence). They also relied on socially essentialist language. For example, like women in Frith and Kitzinger's (2001) study, men in the current study talked about heterosex as if it were scripted with predictable gender roles and stages and used generalizing language to refer to widely shared knowledge about heterosex.

Essentializing and, especially, marginalizing rhetorical strategies were often difficult to challenge in the focus group conversations. Nevertheless, some men did challenge dominant discourses, although often with little success at shifting the conversation. In one of the only instances of effective resistance, Moe (Extract 5) used another man's extreme example so that his alternative appeared reasonable in comparison. In general, men who resisted used indirect but typical disagreement strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987; Pomerantz 1984). Although they tended to be ineffective at shifting the conversations, they may have allowed men to acceptably introduce alternatives while maintaining sociability and avoiding conflict (Brown and Levinson 1987; Pomerantz 1984).

The present study highlights the ways that normative heterosexuality is intersected with and, thus, can obscure men's sexual violence against women. For example, the male sexual drive discourse constructs a need and persistent pursuit of sex among men (Gavey 2005; Hollway 1989, 2005), and men in the current study sometimes used this reasoning to explain or justify sexual violence. They argued that some men might

intentionally ignore signs that a woman does not want to have sex because it is "the way that they're wired" and their biologically essentialist language further framed the uncontrollable male sex drive as stable fact. In other words, they framed sexual violence as just normal male behavior or part of normal heterosexuality. Similarly, men in the current study drew on dominant discourses about miscommunication and used socially essentialist language in ways that again worked to explain or justify sexual violence as expected: Women and men communicate differently and women are generally ineffective communicators, and so men's misunderstandings and resulting sexual violence are reasonable and expected outcomes. Men in the current study also used dominant discourses and rhetorical strategies to frame heterosex as natural and already mapped out—mapped out according to a predetermined progression from kissing to intercourse and mapped out in intimate relationships because partners already know what the other wants and is acceptable. This talk worked to emphasize that there is no room or need for men's verbal requests or communication because heterosex always plays out the same way. This noncommunicative sexual initiation and progression may not always be sexual violence, but it does seem intersected with sexual violence and obscures a clear distinction between the two (Gavey 2005).

Limitations

Our findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, participants' talk was produced in a particular social context of research: Focus groups with young, mostly White, Canadian university men on the topic of heterosexual intimate relationships. Accounts produced by different samples and in different contexts may be very different. For example, men may have engaged in particular (masculine) reputation management strategies given that they were in conversation with a group of only men. However, because these conversations took place in a research context and the facilitator often asked for other opinions, alternative discourses may have been more common than in more lay conversations (and, yet, they were still rare). The language of the focus group questions and the fact that we encouraged participants not to discuss personal experiences may have also influenced men's talk. For example, some questions began: "what do you think most men…" and "what do you think a typical sexual encounter…" This language may have facilitated the scripted and generalized formulations. However, these strategies were fairly extensive in the conversations and are similar to those in two previous studies that examined women's and male adolescents' language in legitimizing heterosexuality discourses (Frith and Kitzinger 2001; Hird and Jackson 2001).

Future Research Directions

Future research should continue to examine men's talk about heterosexuality in different settings and among diverse samples with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, and so on. This body of work would allow for stronger generalization claims or may identify important differences across settings and samples in the language and discourse that men use. Few men in our study successfully challenged dominant discourses and shifted the focus group conversations. Future research might also examine where and how men *do* sometimes take up alternative discourses and challenge dominant discourses in their daily lives. From there, research can examine how sexual violence prevention efforts and educational campaigns might disrupt dominant discourses and foster men's critical engagement with alternative discourses.

Practice Implications

Our results highlight some of the social discourses that may contribute to men's continued use and justification of sexual violence against women and point to potentially productive ways to shift these social discourses. Thus, our results have important implications for sexual violence prevention efforts, educational campaigns, and, ultimately, for improving women's lives, relationships, and well-being. In particular, our results highlight the need to encourage men's critical engagement with alternative discourses about heterosexuality that do not support violence and that privilege both women's and men's sexuality. It is possible that encouraging men to discuss and reflect on their own personal experiences that contrast dominant discourses (e.g., in which they asked for sex or a woman had a higher sex drive or actively desired sex) might help normalize these types of experiences. Our results also suggest that new and alternative discourses about heterosexuality must include or be accompanied by an explicit challenging of old ones. For example, we, as well as others (e.g., Hird and Jackson 2001), have argued for the development of alternative and positive discourses around women as desiring agents of sex, in which women's desire is understood in its own right and not merely as a response to men's desire. We also argue for the need for men to take more responsibility for communicating verbally and problematizing arguments about disruptiveness. However, our results suggest that when men do introduce new and alternative discourses about sexual drive and communication, they easily get shut down by essentialist claims and marginalizing rhetoric. Thus, it is not only the male-centered content of dominant discourses that must be challenged, but also the underlying rhetoric that supports them. Men should be educated to understand and think critically about how their talk supports a male-centered and violent form of heterosexuality. Early comprehensive sex education should also counter purely biological approaches to human sexuality, emphasize the diversity of human sexuality and preferences, and disrupt the scripting of heterosexuality.

Conclusions

A majority of sexual violence prevention strategies has focused on changing individuals' knowledge and attitudes and has had little effect on reducing sexually violent behavior. Our research adds to the limited body of work about the social discourses and rhetorical strategies that support sexual violence—knowledge that may be crucial for disrupting and reducing men's sexual violence against women. Participants' talk speaks to the broader male-centered ideology of Western society. In particular, it highlights the ways that normative heterosexuality is intersected with and, thus, can obscure men's sexual violence against women. Making this link visible is key to disrupting some of the social discourses that contribute to men's sexual violence.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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