“BUT I THOUGHT SHE LIKED ME”: AN INTERVENTION CAMPAIGN
FOR THE SELECTIVE INFORMATION PROCESSING
OF NONVERBAL SEXUAL REFUSAL CUES
BY UNDERGRADUATE MALES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication

by
Beth Joy Bollinger
Spring 2014
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Beth Joy Bollinger:

“But I Thought She Liked Me”: An Intervention Campaign for the Selective
Information Processing of Nonverbal Sexual Refusal Cues by Undergraduate
Males

Meghan Moran, Chair
School of Communication

Patricia Geist-Martin
School of Communication

Emilio Ulloa
Department of Psychology

Lisa Gates
University of California, San Diego

4/23/2014
Approval Date
Copyright © 2014
by
Beth Joy Bollinger
All Rights Reserved
DEDICATION

To my family:

Mom, Dad, Matthew, and Aaron. For picking up the phone every time I called you late at night after class, excited and willing to listen to each new thesis discovery.

Mom: for writing down the title to every paper I ever wrote, crafting my models on post it notes, and always knowing the difference between Phase 1, 2, and 3. Your care, love, and interest encouraged me to keep writing even through the dark of night. Thank-you.

Dad: for being proud of my scholarship and reminding me that it is people who are important. Your persistence and joy in life remind me that even when given something tough, God has given us the strength and courage to remain joyful. Thank-you.

Matthew: for telling that scared freshman in college to always study what makes her happy. Your big brother insight all those years ago allowed me to embrace the thesis I have today. For the countless hours spent editing papers and giving feedback. I hope this thesis is a step up from my first paper you edited, “Beowulf.” Thank-you.

Aaron: for being more excited about this than even I am. You constantly challenged my notions of the male perspective and influenced how I perceived it. You’re listening ear during my “TODB” (totally overdramatic Beth) moments meant the world. You believe I can do, be, or think anything. Thank-you.

To my kindred spirits:

For those who have left me voicemails, cut out articles, or CC’d me on emails to share new insight, reports, and encouragement on my topic. You have scoured the Internet, books, and newspapers to keep me more informed than I ever thought possible. You also keep reminding me why this research is undeniably important. You know who you are. Thank-you.

To survivors:

For every individual who had a story to share and who chose to entrust me with its details, emotions, judgment, and redemption. You encourage me to see this topic with fresh eyes and a tender heart; you’re inspiring. Thank-you.
I need feminism, because my university teaches “How To Avoid Getting Raped” instead of “DON’T RAPE” at freshmen orientation.
-Who Needs Feminism tumblr
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“But I Thought She Liked Me”: An Intervention Campaign for the Selective Information Processing of Nonverbal Sexual Refusal Cues by Undergraduate Males
by
Beth Joy Bollinger
Master of Arts in Communication
San Diego State University, 2014

As the prevalence of rape on college campuses continues to grow communication research surrounding rape must be expanded as well. Current communication research evaluates rape as a result of a miscommunication; this thesis research challenges that notion. Through the application of selective information processing theory to undergraduate males’ understanding of nonverbal sexual refusal cues, consent and rape can be examined. In order to study selective information processing of nonverbal cues, this thesis is comprised of two phases. Phase One is a pilot test demonstrating whether selective information processing is occurring in the minds of undergraduate male. Phase Two consists of focus groups, used to illuminate the most effective methods of educating undergraduate males of consent and selective information processing. Selective information processing has the potential to change the focus of research and expand our understanding of the communication or lack of communication surrounding rape. Implementing the methods used by this thesis can expand the field of communication in new and innovative directions. This research allows for communication scholars to challenge current beliefs, as well as critique and change the current definitions, interactions, and understandings of rape.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. vi
LIST OF TABLES ..................................................................................................................... x
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................. xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ...............................................................................................................1
   Research on Rape .................................................................................................... 4
   Verbal Communication ....................................................................................... 5
   Victim Blaming ................................................................................................. 5
   Language of Consent ....................................................................................... 6
   Rape Scripts ....................................................................................................... 6
   Nonverbal Communication ............................................................................ 7
   Nonverbal Expectations & Exchanges ........................................................... 8
   Nonverbal Miscommunication ...................................................................... 9
   Selective Information Processing ............................................................... 11
   Information Load & Selective Information Processing ................................... 12
   Selective Information Processing and Education ......................................... 14
   Research Questions & Hypotheses ............................................................... 14

2 METHODS .....................................................................................................................16
   Phase One: SIP Experiment ............................................................................. 16
   Survey Protocol ............................................................................................... 16
   Participants ....................................................................................................... 17
   Experimental Manipulation ........................................................................... 19
   Information Load and Interest Level Manipulation ........................................ 19
   Manipulation Check ....................................................................................... 21
   Measures .......................................................................................................... 21
   Dependent Variable ....................................................................................... 21
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Key Terms</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thesis Organizing Table</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participant Characteristics of Phase One</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cue Ratings for How Much the Woman Wants to Have Sex With You (a)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nonverbal Cue Information Load Scenario Possibilities</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participant Characteristics of Phase Two</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

Figure 1. Phase one hypothesis 2 relationship ................................................................. 15
Figure 2. Relationship between information load and the importance placed on cues .......... 32
Figure 3. Relationship between information load conditions ............................................. 32
Figure 4. Social networking use by age groups ................................................................. 53
Figure 5. Social media site use from 2012-2013 ............................................................... 54
Figure 6. Posting & watching videos on social networking sites ..................................... 55
Figure 7. Male online video watching types .................................................................... 56
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first acknowledge and extend my unending gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Meghan Moran. Meghan, you supported me through every step of this research and encouraged me to continue asking the difficult questions. You answered every email I sent without complaint and always made time for me in your office, as only a saint could. You support me while pushing me to be the best version of a researcher, and the best version of myself, that I can be. You inspire me.

Next, I would like to thank the other members of my thesis committee: Dr. Patricia Geist-Martin, Dr. Emilio Ulloa, and Dr. Lisa Gates. You all pushed me outside of the box of ideas I couldn’t think past. Patricia, for the hours you spent giving me feedback and probing me to think deeper about consent; your belief in me meant the world. Emilio, for your willingness to partner with this research and believe in the value of this topic. Lisa, for all of your emails sent with encouraging comments, constructive feedback, and love poured throughout.

To my entire thesis committee: thank-you. This research would not be what it is without your insight, wisdom, and care.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One in five female college students report a rape experience during college (Paul et al., 2013). This thesis focuses on a date rape perspective, defining it as sexual intercourse, unwanted by the victim, with someone whom they have engaged in social interaction voluntarily for more than an instant. A list of key terms used throughout this thesis can be found defined in Table 1. This thesis research primarily focuses on undergraduate students, because rape literature has continually found this student population to be at high risk for rape (Armstrong, Hamilton, & Sweeney, 2006; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date Rape</td>
<td>Sexual intercourse, unwanted by the victim, with someone whom they have engaged in social interaction voluntarily for more than an instant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective Information Processing</td>
<td>Simplifying the judgment formation and evaluation process by focusing selectively on consistent pieces of decision-relevant information, while neglecting inconsistent pieces of decision-relevant information.¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Load</td>
<td>The amount of information available to serve as a basis for judgment.²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Information Load</td>
<td>When the information load is high (multiple pieces of decision-relevant information) and processing is difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Information Load</td>
<td>When the information load is low (fewer pieces of decision-relevant information) and processing resources for resolution are available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent Miscommunication</td>
<td>Where both man and woman fail to interpret the other’s verbal and non-verbal cues, with the resulting communication failure ending in rape.³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ¹ Yoon, Sarial-Abi, & Gurhan-Canli, 2012, p. 93, ² Kardes, Cronley, Kellaris, & Posavac, 2004, p. 368, ³ O’Byrne, Hansen, & Rapley, 2008, p. 17

Communication rape research is primarily divided into two large areas of focus: verbal and nonverbal communication. However, the most recent date rape studies have investigated nonverbal communication. Past scholarship has evaluated nonverbal refusal cues (i.e., messages that say “no” through touch, facial expression, tone, and other nonverbals), through the lens of miscommunication—individuals failing to interpret the others’ verbal and nonverbal cues resulting in a communication failure that ends in rape. Interestingly, this
scholarship often places blame for the outcome on the female victim because it is perceived that she is the one who failed to communicate her desires accurately.

This thesis challenges the understanding of rape primarily as a result of miscommunication by applying selective information processing (SIP) theory to undergraduate males’ understanding of females’ nonverbal sexual refusal cues. Selective information processing is defined as the “simplifying of judgment formation and evaluation process by focusing selectively on consistent pieces of decision-relevant information, while neglecting inconsistent pieces of decision-relevant information” (Yoon et al., 2012, p. 93). No research has applied selective information processing to any rape or nonverbal cue situation evaluation before. Investigating the connection between information processing and nonverbal cue understanding can indicate if nonverbal cues are actually being interpreted incorrectly, or if in fact they are being ignored in a rape outcome.

Instead of evaluating the miscommunication of nonverbal messages, this thesis research illuminates the possibility for SIP to be a factor in undergraduate males’ decision making processes; SIP may be influencing the decisions that result in rape. The goals of this thesis will be accomplished in two phases: Phase One will involve an experiment to demonstrate whether SIP is occurring in undergraduate males’ decision making processes in determining if they will attempt to have sex with a woman. This approach offers a new perspective to look at rape and conduct rape research. Phase Two will build upon Phase One by incorporating the use of focus groups to learn how undergraduate males understand consent and discover the best strategies for discussing consent with them. I will use this information to identify effective methods for educating undergraduate men about SIP. A description of both phases can be found in Table 2.

Typically, communication scholarship that investigates rape justifies rape as a result of miscommunication and places blame on the victim. If observed from the perspective of selective information processing, however, miscommunication is not the best explanation for date rape. Rather than victim blaming, research that confirms how SIP is occurring in undergraduate males’ decision making processes offers an opportunity to change how young males and others—including females, parents, and educational programs—perceive nonverbal refusal and consent. As a result, SIP can be incorporated into campaign
Table 2. Thesis Organizing Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test undergraduate males to discover if selective information processing is occurring in their decision making process of sexual nonverbal refusal cues regarding whether they will attempt to have sex with a woman.</td>
<td>Utilize focus groups to learn the best ways to discuss consent and campaigns with undergraduate males and discover effective methods for educating undergraduate men of SIP.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H's/RQ's</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: In high information load conditions, undergraduate males will be more likely to ignore nonverbal refusal cues than in low information load conditions.</td>
<td>R1: How do males evaluate the form, content, and worth regarding instructional messages of consent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Information load will moderate the relationship between actual interest level and perceived interest level. Actual interest level and perceived interest level will be positively related in low information load levels. Actual interest level and perceived interested level will have no relationship in high information load levels; males will perceive interest level to be high regardless of actual interest</td>
<td>R2: How effective do males think these instructional messages are?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1: How do males evaluate the form, content, and worth regarding instructional messages of consent?</td>
<td>R3: What information needs to be included in the design of an educational message to teach males about the forms of communication that signal a female’s consent or non-consent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2: How effective do males think these instructional messages are?</td>
<td>R4: What pressures or decision making goes on in the mind of an undergraduate male in a situation where selective information processing may occur?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3: What information needs to be included in the design of an educational message to teach males about the forms of communication that signal a female’s consent or non-consent?</td>
<td>R5: What are the best methods of educating undergraduate males that SIP may be occurring in their decision making through key words or images?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Method | Post-test only randomized experiment | Focus groups |
| IV | Experimental Condition (High vs. low info load) | N/A |
| DV(s) | Likelihood of ignoring nonverbal Cues | N/A |

Interventions and potentially reduce miscommunication and the prevalence of rape.

Understanding that the discussion of rape is difficult and contains many varying factors, this thesis research narrows its outlook and focuses only on heterosexual undergraduate males. First, a review of rape literature is offered. Second, the research questions guiding this thesis are described and the methodology detailed. Third, the results are explained and discussion shared. Finally, implications are given and directions for future research discussed. In order to make sense of the need for this thesis research, investigating the connection between selective information processing theory, rape, and interventions—the scholarship surrounding the topic of rape and consent by communication scholars must be first discussed.
**RESEARCH ON RAPE**

There are many roles communication plays prior to a rape. However, this thesis research focuses on nonverbal sexual refusal communication, specifically miscommunication. Rape is a term that contains various categories, such as stranger rape, acquaintance rape, and date rape. These categories represent various types of rape, signaling the varied experiences that can lead to rape. This research looks exclusively at the date rape category, evaluating communication exchanged before, during, and after rape.

Date rape can be defined in various ways, most notably as a branch of acquaintance rape, where “miscommunication” regarding consent occurs between two individuals who know each other and are usually on a date. However, there is no consensus in literature for one definition of date rape. There are different definitions by authors (Armstrong et al., 2006; McCaw & Senn, 1998; Verberg, Wood, Desmarais, & Seen, 2000), often linking date rape to acquaintance rape. Being there is no consensus in the literature, I chose to settle on the following as the definition of date rape: sexual intercourse unwanted by the victim, with someone whom they have engaged in social interaction voluntarily for more than an instant. This definition encompasses both traditional definitions of date rape, as well as acquaintance rape. Additionally, although date rape involves people of different genders and encompasses diverse situations, this research discusses date rape from the most dominant situation researched: date rape by a man with a woman.

It is argued that men may not think that they are raping someone in a date rape situation, because “miscommunication” occurred regarding consent. From this perspective, poor communication is to blame for the date rape; the coerced sexual encounter was not really rape because the man was not aware the woman was not consenting (McCaw & Senn, 1998). There are many situations where date rape is intentional, however, this research evaluates the role of communication and this notion of “miscommunication” as it is discussed and studied in verbal and nonverbal communication research throughout history. In order to understand “miscommunication” and the research questions communication scholars are asking about nonverbal communication, first I examine verbal communication. Second, I discuss how nonverbal communication is studied. Throughout both sections, I note that victim blame is a primary outcome, either intentionally or unintentionally, of both verbal and nonverbal rape communication studies. Third, and finally, I will discuss selective
information processing. I argue that selective information processing is important to link to research on miscommunication, as it has the ability to create a bridge between rape scholarship and miscommunication.

**VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Victim discourse is an area of research of verbal communication in rape literature. Instead of describing the components that comprise a rape, scholars have asked what the victim specifically said throughout the assault. Victim discourse became tied to the evaluation of how actively or venomously a woman said “no” throughout the rape. It was up to the woman to prove her innocence—to remove blame from her rape outcome. Grubb and Turner (2012) offer an overview of this “no” study phenomenon. They evaluate how the focus of “no” has affected scholars in their rape outlook.

The typical myths associated with rape, such as substance use, gender roles, and clothing worn by the victim (Grubb & Turner, 2012), uncovers that verbal scholars early on focused on the study of “no,” assuming that women were the cause of rape. It is the myth that women are “asking to be raped” based on their substance use or clothing choice (Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). With this in mind, verbal communication scholars began to place blame on the victims of a rape scenario. In the following sections, I discuss how victim blaming, language of consent, and rape scripts have been depicted throughout verbal communication scholarship.

**Victim Blaming**

One area of research on verbal communication is victim blaming. Victim discourse, or the art of saying no, is not the only focus in verbal studies. Many scholars explore how women were given the responsibility of saying no (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Feminist scholars have been particularly helpful in this investigation and victim blaming is one of the largest areas of study within rape research. The role of verbal communication in victim blaming is unmistakable. Most research on victim blaming asks how responsibility is placed upon victims (Curtis, 1974; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Although victim blaming occurs in many ways, studying how a woman says no often has been tied to how much consent was expressed before and during a rape. Studying this language of consent often placed more blame on the victim for not saying “no” vehemently enough.
Language of Consent

A second area of the literature on verbal communication is research that evaluates the exact language of consent. Many scholars define consent differently, ranging from a mental act—the decision to agree to engage in sex—to a physical act, expressing verbal or nonverbal agreement (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Muehlenhard, Powch, Phelps, & Giusti, 1992). The study of the term consent and its meaning has impacted rape literature. As Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) point out, “consent as a mental act and consent as a physical act do not always correspond with each other”. This difference forged new paths in rape literature, moving verbal study from examining only a victim’s blame to studying greater concepts of consent. What is important to realize, however, is that studying the language of consent has contributed to conflicted findings in literature.

Depending on which consent version scholars operate from, the definition of rape and its implications may be different from one scholar to the next. Often, participants are unable to give a concrete definition of consent, leaving a scholar to write research with varied consent definitions. A lack of agreement in how and when consent occurs limits research by forcing it to spend time understanding the concept of consent, rather than working from a consent definition, agreed upon by most. If scholars and their research had a better definition of rape, more time could be spent conducting research on rape, rather than conducting research from varied definitions. Beginning to form a consistent rape definition will not only help scholars, but will also help the understanding of how the definition of rape influences rape script culture.

Rape Scripts

A third area of verbal communication centers on the scripts exchanged before, during, and after a rape scenario (Cermele, 2010). A script contains information about a sequence of events that involve props, roles, and rules (Littleton & Axsom, 2003), are highly resistant to change, and often function unconsciously by an individual or group (Demorest, 1995). Furthermore, it is a schema for a particular type of event, or put in another way, it is a “cognitive structure that represents organized knowledge about a given domain” (Littleton & Axsom, 2003, p. 465). Extensive research focuses on the absence of or limited verbal exchanges spoken during a rape. Many scholars argue that rape is a learned scripted
interaction (Cermele, 2010; McCaughey, 1997) in the sense that the roles and behaviors are clearly defined for the victim and rapist (Cermele, 2010). In particular, Cermele (2010) argues for the value of promoting rape prevention stories, rather than continually sharing the narrative of victim failure or miscommunication alone.

Even though scholars promote change in current rape scripts, much of research still operates from a basis that “the middle of the script is a little fuzzy; limited information is disseminated about what to do once a rape is attempted or in progress” (Cermele, 2010, p. 1164). Although forging new communication studies by suggesting the reconstruction of rape scripts, the underlying belief is that rape scenarios are filled with miscommunication. One problem with focusing on miscommunication is that more often than not, miscommunication research places blame on the victim.

**Nonverbal Communication**

The study of verbal communication has directly affected how nonverbal communication is studied in rape. The verbal discrepancy for the definition of consent, the associations attached to rape terms (frequently assigning victim blame), and outlooks of miscommunication are beliefs embedded in nonverbal communication research. The beliefs represented in verbal communication research have often become the beliefs used for evaluating nonverbal communication.

Carney, Hall, and LeBeau (2005) have identified aspects of nonverbal behavior that articulate the importance of understanding the exact nonverbal messages that are being exchanged between communicators. It has been found that the level of social power an individual possesses relates to the likelihood that the individual will infer certain emotions or nonverbal behaviors from another (Carney et al., 2005; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). The greater social power possessed, or believed to be possessed, the more likely individuals’ expectations will guide their perceptions of the behaviors of others (Carney et al., 2005; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978).

This research is important to include in a discussion of rape, because if undergraduate males believe they have power within a rape scenario, arguably, it would be probable that they would read the nonverbal messages of their partners in such a way that confirms their own expectations or desires. For instance, if an undergraduate male believes he has the power
in a dating situation because he is the one who paid for dinner, he might believe that he is “owed” something in return for that payment. Therefore, instead of focusing on nonverbal refusals throughout the night, he might assume because of his power, that his actions are being received as accepting or wanting sex. Many scholars might view this exchange as a miscommunication; however, it can be argued that it is a conscious choice to allow expectations to guide nonverbal interpretation. Carney et al. (2005) argue that power differences influence nonverbal communication perception. A rape scenario is one of great power imbalance, and this is valuable to keep in mind while discussing the role nonverbal communication plays in a rape scenario. The following section discusses how verbal language influenced nonverbal language, examines the study of victim and rapist nonverbal exchange, and describes nonverbal miscommunication as depicted throughout nonverbal communication scholarship.

**Nonverbal Expectations & Exchanges**

One component of nonverbal communication in rape literature focuses on the nonverbal exchanges communicated between the victim and rapist leading up to a rape. Particularly, some literature focuses on the dress of a victim as a possible factor contributing to rape (Armstrong et al., 2006; Doherty & Anderson, 2004; Masser et al., 2010). Often times, research on the nonverbal messages sent by women’s clothing is forced to evaluate the expectations society places upon a woman or her clothing (Doherty & Anderson, 2006). Some argue that clothing should not be evaluated as a factor for rape, but nonetheless, the expectation that women who wear certain clothes are asking to be raped (Armstrong et al., 2006; Luchjenbroers & Aldridge, 2007) still communicates a nonverbal message. In fact, it communicates a nonverbal expectation that women (or victims) hold the responsibility to prevent rape. Some scholarship indicates that the way victims choose to dress contributes to rape outcomes, because of the nonverbal messages exchanged through clothing choices.

In addition to clothing, communication, and expectations, many scholars have also evaluated a pattern of nonverbal gestures that might be specific to victim profiles versus nonvictim profiles. Murzynski and Degelman (1996) evaluated four specific nonverbal features of body language (stride length, weight shift, body-limb movement, and foot movement) in hopes of finding a pattern consistent to victims. Their study uncovered
evidence that men decode body language cues and make judgments on a seemingly submissive victim based on what they decode (Murzynski & Degelman, 1996; Richards, Rollerson, & Phillips, 1991). For rape research, this means the study of nonverbal communication is supreme; men judge and evaluate a woman’s submissiveness based on nonverbal cues. A thought process is occurring in male minds and nonverbal cues play a key role in turning that process into a decision and outcome. The work of Murzynski and Degelman (1996) explains the exchange between nonverbal body cues and male decision making. Their work is crucial to rape literature, because it demonstrates “a causal relation between body language and judgments of vulnerability to sexual assault by strangers” (Murzynski & Degelman, 1996, p. 1623). They connected rape literature study of nonverbal communication to the depth of individuals’ ability to premeditate decisions to rape. Understanding that nonverbal communication is not always studied as a premeditated act, like Murzynski and Degelman (1996) suggest, is important to remember. Contrary to this, however, is another major area of nonverbal communication, coming from the belief that nonverbal miscommunication is a reasonable explanation for rape outcomes.

**Nonverbal Miscommunication**

A second component of nonverbal communication is nonverbal miscommunication. Much of rape literature focuses on nonverbal miscommunication that occurs between two individuals before an assault. In this thesis, I define miscommunication as the result of “both man and woman failing to interpret the other’s verbal and nonverbal cues, with the communication failure ending in rape” (O’Byrne et al., 2008, p. 171). There is support in date rape literature for the idea that in some instances, the rape of a woman might result because of miscommunication (DeSouza & Hurtz, 1996; Krueger, 1995; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991; Osman, 2003; Sawyer, Desomond, & Lucke, 1993; Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, & Leviskaya, 1994). In many of these cases, it is presumed that when a woman says “no” to sex she really means “yes.” One study found that of the men interviewed, over half agreed that women must resist and they must say “no” an average of three times before the men will start to believe she means it (Mills & Granoff, 1992). Some scholars argue that this repetition is accounted for by the miscommunicated
messages exchanged (Osman, 2003); nonverbal messages confusing a man into believing that a woman’s “no” actually means “yes.”

Kowalski (1992) found that if a woman engaged in any kind of intimate activity (such as kissing, petting, etc.), a man would assume she also had a willingness for further sexual behaviors. Even if a woman protested verbally, because of her nonverbal behaviors, a man may still perceive her vocal refusals as sexual interest. It is important to note, it has been found that men interpret a woman’s behavior with a tendency towards sexual terms (Abbey, 1990; Abbey, Cozzarelli, McLaughlin, & Harnish, 1987; Abbey & Melby, 1986; Goodchilds, Zellman, Johnson, & Giarrusso, 1988; Kowalski, 1992; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). Therefore, it is possible that miscommunication occurs when a man’s perception of a woman’s nonverbal behavior does not match the image she wishes to project (Kowalski, 1992).

Although there is research evaluating the miscommunication occurring both verbally and nonverbally during rape, there is one study in particular that does not evaluate miscommunication. The research of O’Byrne, Rapley, and Hansen (2006) and O’Byrne, Hansen, and Rapley (2008) disagrees with the dominant miscommunication model (Tannen, 1990) and suggests that men have a “refined ability to hear sexual refusals that do not contain the word ‘no,’ but also—and importantly—an equally refined ability to ‘hear’ the subtlest of non-verbal sexual refusals” (O’Byrne et al., 2006, p. 133). Through research that included focus group discussions, O’Byrne et al. (2006) found that undergraduate men can explicitly articulate a subtle understanding of how refusal is normally achieved and that they can actually hear a woman’s refusal, including refusals that include a verbal “no” and refusals that do not. As a result of these findings, they conclude that (date) rape does not usually result from misunderstandings, but rather, from the thoughtful intention by men to reach sexual penetration.

O’Byrne et al. (2006) are some of the few researchers drawing the connection between male understanding of a woman’s nonverbal behaviors and a decision to continue with rape. Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) agree that miscommunication is an “unlikely explanation for rape” and found that the differences between women and men’s ideas about sexual consent signals were so small that they suggest men reinterpret what women are saying to match what they want to hear, therefore using miscommunication as an excuse for
raping. Understanding how verbal communication has studied victim blaming, the language of consent, and rape scripts is important to see with their connections to the nonverbal communication studies of victim and rapist nonverbal exchanges and nonverbal miscommunication. The history of rape research is directly tied to our current understanding of rape. Realizing that nonverbal miscommunication is a dominant explanation for rape by communication scholars illuminates the importance for why this thesis research challenges that notion, using selective information processing (SIP) as grounding for its arguments.

**SELECTIVE INFORMATION PROCESSING**

This thesis research uses selective information processing (SIP) to challenge the notion of miscommunication and provide another explanation to answer the question of the relationship between miscommunication and rape. There are various interpretations and applications of SIP, however, in this research selective information processing is defined as: “simplifying the judgment formation and evaluation process by focusing selectively on consistent pieces of decision-relevant information, while neglecting inconsistent pieces of decision-relevant information” (Yoon et al., 2012, p. 93).

Currently, most research of SIP is related to self-regulation, price-quality inference, or the role of information load during a decision making process (Kardes et al., 2004; Trudel & Murray, 2011; Yoon et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that consumer product purchasing is different than processing nonverbal communication in rape situations; however, scholars of SIP suggest the theory be applied to new forms of information processing and decision making (Trudel & Murray, 2011). By applying SIP to undergraduate males’ understanding of nonverbal refusal cues, I create a new paradigm to understand, examine, and utilize for conducting rape research.

Most work on selective information processing theory has been conducted in the context of dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1986; Jonas, Schulz-Hardt, Frey, & Thelen, 2001). In order for individuals to reduce dissonance in their decision making, the research of Schwarz, Frey, and Kumpf (1980) suggest that individuals “are likely to select consistent information when they have a strong commitment to their position” (p. 94). In other words, individuals will only choose information that is in alignment with their pre-crafted opinion, because it is easier to reduce dissonance than make decisions while feeling
ambiguity. In rape situations, this means that an individual may only select information to “listen to” if it confirms what is already that individual’s opinion. For instance, if an undergraduate male is unsure if a female wants to have sex with him, he may only select her positive communication to listen to, because it aligns with his position of liking her and wanting to have sex with her, because that is easier to process than information that may be contrary to his position.

Selective information processing literature says that individuals frequently simplify the judgment and evaluation process by concentrating selectively on pieces of the decision-relevant information and simultaneously disregard inconsistent pieces of decision-relevant information (Frey, 1986; Sanbonmatsu, Posavac, Kardes, & Mantel, 1998; Yoon et al., 2012). This particular aspect of selective information processing theory is central to its applicability to rape research. It has been found that it is easier to process belief-consistent information than belief-inconsistent information. The underlying belief of SIP is that when the evidence of a particular hypothesis meets a “minimum confirmation threshold, the hypothesis is accepted and information processing ceases” (Kardes et al., 2004, p. 368). This suggests that undergraduate men will have a tendency to stop piecing together information when they find enough information to support their desired outcome. In other words, an undergraduate male may stop processing or “listening” to sexual refusal cues on a date if there has been enough positive verbal or nonverbal cues to meet his belief that she is giving consent to sex. In essence, SIP may enable unconscious decision making by undergraduate males, because their information processing is being influenced by information load, information organization, and concern for closure. These influences will be discussed in more detail next.

**Information Load & Selective Information Processing**

SIP is moderated by the following factors: information load, information organization, and concern about closure (Kardes et al., 2004). An important determinant of SIP is the concern for closure, or any opinion “rather than confusion, ambiguity, or inconsistency” (Kardes et al., 2004, p. 369). As the need for closure increases, people consider less evidence, and therefore make immediate and snap judgments neglecting pieces of information that are inconsistent with their beliefs (Kardes et al., 2004). The higher
information load (i.e., many nonverbal messages in a short period of time) an undergraduate male encounters, the more likely he will be unconsciously selectively processing information that meets his desired outcome to make sense of the information load more quickly.

The work of Yoon et al. (2012) states, “under high information load, relative reliance on positive (vs. negative) information is greater for promotion (vs. prevention) focused individuals” (p. 94). This means that when multiple pieces of information are available, creating high information load, individuals will be motivated to reduce the complexity of the decision by searching for information consistent with their desired outcome (Fischer, Schultz-Hardt, & Frey, 2008). This concept explains the premise that if undergraduate males’ understanding of nonverbal gestures is constructed from the notion of miscommunication, they will stop processing nonverbal information that may be saying “no,” because their outcome desired was “confirmed.”

In order to reduce the complexity of a situation with high information load, research suggests that individuals will often unconsciously select information consistent to that which holds strongest to their position (Schwarz et al., 1980; Yoon et al., 2012). Individuals will rely and revert to the information that views their desired outcome in a positive light, most likely disregarding the information that does not. When high levels of information are being processed at one time, most research on selective information processing suggests that individuals will pick out the pieces of information that affirm the outcome most preferred, even if the overall information does not support it. That being said, most SIP research believes that individuals are goal driven and that they will make decisions based on influence of their self-regulatory goals (Yoon et al., 2012). Additionally, individuals enacting SIP have a difficult time self-regulating, because their ultimate goal is short-term indulgence (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). Conflicted, individuals will tend to choose a short term rather than a long term goal because controlling thoughts, attention, or emotions is more difficult long-term.

These understandings are important to connect to rape studies, because beginning to comprehend the information load that is involved before a rape will help scholars start to re-evaluate the current outlook of rape research. Starting to think about rape and information load through the framework of selective information processing allows for the possibility that undergraduate males are able to understand the information and nonverbal messages given to them, but that an information processing is occurring unconsciously. In short,
miscommunication may not be as common as communication scholars think. If SIP has the possibility inform a new perspective on rape understanding, research should begin to ask how SIP can be educated to undergraduate males and incorporated into their own understanding of their decision making processes.

**Selective Information Processing and Education**

Using SIP to study nonverbal cues opens up new opportunities for educational interventions to prevent rape. Some scholars have found that when educated about processing information formats, participants were able to process decision-inconsistent and decision-consistent information in a more balanced fashion (Fischer, Fischer, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2010). This discovery of SIP education is an important contribution to this research, because it suggests the possibility for education about SIP to directly affect individuals’ processing ability when making decisions later. Although current research is inconclusive on whether this decision making awareness affects easy-to-process information only, it is an area of research that can be applied to and tested on this topic.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES**

The goals of this thesis research are to investigate whether selective information processing is occurring in undergraduate males’ decision making processes regarding consent and to discover successful methods of discussing consent with undergraduate males to effectively educate them of SIP and consent. This research is comprised of two phases; Phase One utilizes an experiment to identify the occurrence of SIP in undergraduate males. Phase Two employs focus groups to identify effective discussions of consent and campaigns, uncovering effective methods for SIP education. Focus groups are imperative for any educational intervention of SIP awareness to be effective. In order to achieve the successful awareness, the aims of this thesis research are to:

- **Aim 1:** Test undergraduate males to discover if selective information processing is occurring in their decision making process of nonverbal sexual refusal cues.

- This aim will be accomplished through a randomized two-group post-test only experiment. The hypotheses associated with Aim 1 are:

- **H1:** In high information load conditions, undergraduate males will be more likely to ignore nonverbal refusal cues than in low information load conditions.
- H2: Information load will moderate the relationship between actual interest level and perceived interest level. Actual interest level and perceived interest level will be positively related in low information load levels. Actual interest level and perceived interested level will have no relationship in high information load levels; males will perceive interest level to be high regardless of actual interest.

The relationship found in hypothesis 2 can be illustrated in Figure 1. If these hypotheses are supported by the data, it will indicate that SIP is occurring.

![Figure 1. Phase one hypothesis 2 relationship.](image)

- Aim 2: Utilize focus groups to uncover the most effective methods of educating undergraduate males of selective information processing that may be occurring in their decision making processes.

- This aim will be accomplished through focus group discussions. The research questions associated with Aim 2 are:

- R1: How do males evaluate the form, content, and worth regarding instructional messages of consent?

- R2: How effective do males think these instructional messages are?

- R3: What information needs to be included in the design of an educational message to teach males about the forms of communication that signal a female’s consent or non-consent?

- R4: What pressures or decision making goes on in the mind of an undergraduate male in a situation where selective information processing may occur?

- R5: What are the best methods of educating undergraduate males that SIP may be occurring in their decision making through key words or images?
CHAPTER 2

METHODS

This research builds upon past rape research and furthers current scholarship of selective information processing. The discussion of sexual assault or sexual experiences in general can be difficult for undergraduate students to discuss candidly. This research, however, is imperative in order to begin understanding the connection between college males’ selective information processing and perceptions of sexual refusal cues. In order to connect these two scholarship topics, this research was conducted in two phases.

PHASE ONE: SIP EXPERIMENT

Selective information processing has yet to be applied to nonverbal cue understanding or rape research. With this in mind, it is important to first find if there is a correlation between information load and undergraduate males’ understanding of nonverbal sexual refusal cues. The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the impact information load (amount of nonverbal cues) has on undergraduate male attention paid to female negative (refusal) cues. In order to accomplish this, I conducted an online experiment to test selective information processing in undergraduate males. Phase One was approved by the Institutional Review Board in the spring of 2013.

Survey Protocol

Individuals who participated in Phase One were recruited from a large southwestern university’s Communication and Psychology department. Participants were informed that they could sign up online to participate in an online experiment in order to receive class credit for participation. After signing up for the study, participants were emailed a link to the experimental survey. The survey was hosted by Qualtrics, an online survey-hosting site. The survey began by asking questions to collect background information about the participants (ethnicity, year in school, and other basic demographic information). After completing background questions, the participants were randomly assigned to read a scenario involving multiple positive and negative nonverbal cues. If participants did not meet the inclusion
criteria (i.e., over the age of 18 years, male, and heterosexual), they were exited from the 
survey before going further and beginning the survey. Participants who met the survey 
criteria were then randomized into one of four conditions where they viewed a scenario that 
varied on information load (low, high) and interest (positive, negative), described in more 
detail under the section Experimental Manipulation.

Participants

Phase One enrolled 133 male heterosexual undergraduate students from a large 
southwestern university. Individuals participated either voluntarily or were offered extra 
credit for participation. All participants remained anonymous throughout their participation 
in Phase One. The majority of participants were freshman in college, Caucasian, and had 1 to 
5 sexual partners previously, but were not currently in a relationship at the time of this study. 
Additionally, 62% of participants were sexually active. A list of participant characteristics 
can be found in Table 3:

Table 3. Participant Characteristics of Phase One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Characteristics</th>
<th>Scenario A (low, positive)</th>
<th>Scenario B (low, negative)</th>
<th>Scenario C (high, positive)</th>
<th>Scenario D (high, negative)</th>
<th>Total (N=133)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=32)</td>
<td>(N=32)</td>
<td>(N=40)</td>
<td>(N=29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>55 (41.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>6 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>37 (27.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>23 (17.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Year Senior</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>9 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>27 (20.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>11 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>17 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>51 (38.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 3. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Characteristics</th>
<th>Scenario A (low, positive)</th>
<th>Scenario B (low, negative)</th>
<th>Scenario C (high, positive)</th>
<th>Scenario D (high, negative)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than one ethnicity</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>9 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Past Sexual Partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero (0)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>24 (18.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>70 (53.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 9</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>13 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 15</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>8 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or more</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>10 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in a relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>48 (36.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>81 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>82 (62.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>47 (35.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracted an STD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>123 (92.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>20 (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>110 (82.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. All values are unadjusted b. Cells may not add up to 100% because participants could select multiple ethnicities
Experimental Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to view one of four conditions that varied on information load and interest level. Each condition contained a base scenario that asked participants to imagine they were at a party and interacting with a young woman who was giving signals, or cues, to indicate that she was or was not interested in him. Fourteen nonverbal cues were created, forming seven cue pairs, each with one positive and one negative cue. The cues were developed by this researcher and received a manipulation check by presenting 196 undergraduate males with the cues through an online survey. The cues and the results of the manipulation check are in Table 4. A score of 1 or 2 indicated the participants thought the cue was negative and a score of 3 or 4 indicated that they thought it was positive. These cues were placed into a base scenario that read as follows:

Assuming you are single, read the following scenario. You are at a party where you see a very attractive girl. You go over to talk to her. [Cue]. You introduce yourself. [Cue]. You have a conversation. [Cue]. You have to move closer so she can hear you over the music. [Cue]. You keep talking, and lean in even closer. [Cue]. Some dancing has started in the next room. As you lean in, you put your hand on her. [Cue]. You really like this girl and want to keep talking. [Cue]. You think about how pretty she is as you follow her upstairs.

The scenarios were manipulated on information load (high, low) and interest level (positive indicating the woman is sexually interested in the male; negative, indicating she is not sexually interested in the male). The four nonverbal cue information load control possibilities are presented in Table 5.

Information Load and Interest Level Manipulation

In the low positive information load condition, three of the positive cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario; one of the negative cues was randomly selected and inserted into the scenario.

In the low negative information load condition, three of the negative cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario; one of the negative cues was randomly selected and inserted into the scenario.

In the high positive information load condition, five of the positive cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario; two of the negative cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario.
Table 4. Cue Ratings for How Much the Woman Wants to Have Sex With You (a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gesture</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She keeps texting on her phone</td>
<td>1.69 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She puts down her phone and looks at you</td>
<td>3.17 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She creates space when you lean in to say something into her ear</td>
<td>1.88 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She leans in when you say something into her ear</td>
<td>3.30 (0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You put your hand on her back and she takes a step away from you</td>
<td>1.46 (0.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You put your hand on her back and she doesn't move away</td>
<td>3.08 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You put your hand on her knee and she lets you leave it there</td>
<td>3.33 (0.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You put your hand on her knee and she brushes it off</td>
<td>1.56 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She moves your hand from her thigh</td>
<td>1.70 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She does not move your hand from her thigh</td>
<td>3.31 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She keeps her arms crossed as she keeps talking to you</td>
<td>2.02 (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She touches your arm as she keeps talking to you</td>
<td>3.39 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you lean in to kiss her, she moves her head so you kiss her cheek instead of her mouth</td>
<td>2.08 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you lean in to kiss her, she kisses you back</td>
<td>3.82 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: (a) Higher scores indicate a perception that the woman was more interested*

Table 5. Nonverbal Cue Information Load Scenario Possibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Level</th>
<th>Low information load</th>
<th>High information load</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Condition 1</td>
<td>Condition 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3+ 1-</td>
<td>5+ 2-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Condition 2</td>
<td>Condition 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3- 1+</td>
<td>5+ 2+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the high negative information load condition, five negative cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario; two of the positive cues were randomly selected and inserted into the scenario.

**Manipulation Check**

A manipulation check of the cues listed above has been conducted; Table 5 lists the standard deviation of each cue. Participants were asked to read the following scenario:

You are at a party where you meet an attractive girl. Throughout the party, you talk to her. Rate the following on a scale of 1 to 4 about her interest with you. These actions do not build on each other, but they are independent and you should evaluate them on their own, separate from all the others.

After reading the above scenario, participants were asked to rate the cues in Table 5 from a scale of 1 to 4:

- 1 (not interested at all)
- 2 (slightly not interested)
- 3 (slightly interested)
- 4 (very interested)

The cues used in this pilot survey and the results from the manipulation check are presented in Table 4.

**Measures**

Many questions were asked in this experimental survey, as will be described below. Next, the following will detail the dependent variable used while conducting the experiment.

**DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

There are two dependent variables: perceived interest level and attention paid to cues.

**ATTENTION PAID TO CUES**

Participants were asked to evaluate each cue used within their condition and to rate how much influence each cue had on their decision (‘Does this girl want to have sex with you?’). They rated each cue’s influence by asking how important each cue was: (‘On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how important is this action in deciding if the girl wanted to have sex with you?’). This importance rating was asked for each cue used within the condition and was borrowed from a study conducted by Fischer et al. (2010).
INTEREST LEVEL

After reading the scenario provided them, participants were asked three questions:

1. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how much would you like to have sex with this girl?
2. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how much would you try to have sex with this girl?
3. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how much does this girl want to have sex with you?

After answering these three questions, the participant proceeded to rate each cue that was used in his scenario separately. He answered the following question for each cue, in order to determine its importance in making his decision for the three questions listed above:

Think about your answer to question 1. On a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much), how important was this action in helping you decide if the girl wanted to have sex with you?

The participant answered this question for each of the cues used in his condition. Their total scores were calculated by taking the average of attention paid to negative cues only.

Additional Experiment Questions

In addition to attention paid to cues and interest level, there were other questions asked in the experimental survey. There were a host of demographic questions (e.g., how many sexual partners have you had in the past, are you a member of a fraternity, how likely would you have sex with a girl after a party) asked, ranging from sexual history, rape myth acceptance, drinking habits, to personality traits. These questions were asked to gain a greater understanding of participant backgrounds and interactions with sex, consent, and college habits or experiences.

PHASE TWO: FOCUS GROUPS

Discussing sexual consent as a cue selection process from the perspective of undergraduate males pushes scholarship to evaluate consent from male interpretation and their own explanations for how it operates in their lives. Often, research evaluates consent from a standpoint that places men as the perpetrators only. However, discussing consent from the perspective of males allows for feminist research to use its power and critical perspective in scholarship and society for the interests of other women. In order to gain the undergraduate male perspective, focus groups were implemented. The following sections will
discuss the use of focus groups by: (a) offering a rationale for the use of online focus groups; (b) describing the focus of the online focus groups; and (c) detailing the procedures used for conducting the online focus groups. Next, a rationale for the use of online focus groups will be shared.

**Rationale for Online Focus Groups**

Currently, focus groups have proven to be a key qualitative tool for cultivating participants’ discussion of their perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Utilizing focus groups for this study encourages undergraduate males, who may feel uncomfortable discussing these topics individually, to find support to discuss their perspectives through the group dynamic. Additionally, focus groups create space for researchers to see an issue through the eyes, words, and hearts of their target audience. They allow for real-time interactions between researchers and participants.

While focus groups in general promote a group dynamic that facilitates discussion, there are benefits of discussing sensitive topics such as sex, sexual misunderstanding, and sexual consent in online focus groups. Since the discussion of sexual consent is a sensitive topic, online focus groups were chosen for this study. As computer technology permeates almost every aspect of youth (Kenny, 2005), particularly extensive online use among college students, an online focus group method was adopted for this study as an effective method of reaching participants and discussing consent. Although there are drawbacks to using an online method such as a lack of face-to-face interaction and potential for less focus group control, much research suggests that it can be just as effective as traditional face-to-face focus groups. First, online focus groups feature real time interactions between the researcher and participants (Oringderff, 2004). Second, participants’ responses often can be more open because the “disappearance” of the researcher minimizes the power of that authority in the collection of data (Wilkinson, 1998). A third benefit of online focus groups is that it allows a researcher to understand what is perceived as effective by undergraduate males when discussing consent; it allows me to uncover patterns to find what is most effective for the creation of campaigns discussing consent. Fourth, using online focus groups allows participants to maintain anonymity.
A fifth benefit of using online focus groups is that I was able to be the moderator during the discussions. Although I was discussing consent with undergraduate males, the anonymity of the online format not only protected my participants, but it also enabled me as a female researcher to moderate the focus group discussions regardless of my gender. Through the aid of the Internet, I simply become known as “moderator.”

**Focus of the Online Focus Groups**

The focus groups offer invaluable insight into the perspectives of males toward sexual consent. Understanding the ways that men describe their perspectives, including how they define consent, how they engage in gaining consent, and how they ignore the need to gain consent are key to discovering the problems, benefits, and opportunities for educating men about consent.

There were two aims for the online focus groups:

Aim 1: Utilize focus groups to uncover the most effective methods of educating undergraduate males of selective information processing that may be occurring in their decision making processes.

Aim 2: Discover effective methods for educating undergraduate men of selective information processing.

The research questions associated with these aims are:

R₁: How do males evaluate the form, content, and worth regarding instructional messages of consent?

R₂: How effective do males think these instructional messages are?

R₃: What information needs to be included in the design of an educational message to teach males about the forms of communication that signal a female’s consent or non-consent?

R₄: What are the best methods of educating undergraduate males that SIP may be occurring in their decision making through key words or images?

The script that was used throughout the focus groups can be found in Appendix A. The script was structured to first address how undergraduate males define consent. Then, it opened discussion for miscommunication of consent in sexual situations. Finally, it focused the discussion on memorable consent messages, their content, and ways to effectively educate males on consent in the future. In order to discover how undergraduate males discuss and understand consent, a moderator guide was created to direct the online focus group conversation (see Appendix A).
This moderator guide was crafted in order to direct the online focus groups to think about the meaning of consent, instances of consent misunderstanding, and finally memorable consent education. Questions aided this process, beginning with opening questions (i.e., year in school and if currently in a relationship), allowing participants to greet one another and become comfortable typing in the chat room. Next, the topic of sexual consent was introduced to the participants by asking “what word or words come to mind first when you consider the word ‘consent?’” Once consent had been introduced and definitions shared, a series of questions were asked in order to direct conversation towards experiences of consent misunderstanding. Then, key questions were asked to progress the conversation towards consent education (i.e., tell me about any campaign messages that you have heard). Finally, effective consent education was discussed, asking questions to prompt participants to share specific examples of what would make them pay attention, “listen,” and learn a consent message.

**Procedures for Conducting the Online Focus Groups**

In order to maintain participant anonymity, the focus groups were conducted online through the use of a chat room in Yahoo Instant Messenger. This particular online service was chosen because of its success with previous online focus group discussions (Stewart & Williams, 2005; Walker, 2013) and because it is a free service—allowing participants to download and participate in the focus groups at no cost. These online focus groups were approved by the Institutional Review board and data was collected in the spring of 2014.

The focus groups began once all participants had joined the designated chat room. They were asked to first think about word or words that come to mind when they hear the word “consent.” Consent was defined from the start of the focus group as sexual consent. Starting with discussions of the word “consent,” the focus groups then moved to instances when participants had misunderstood consent prior to sex. Memorable campaign messages regarding consent were discussed, and finally, participants were asked to create an effective campaign message to educate other students about consent. Throughout the entirety of the focus group, participants’ responses were probed and those in the focus group responded to each other as well as to the moderator prompted questions.
After the completion of the online focus groups, discussions were typed in the chat room and the chat room discussions were saved for later coding.

**Participants**

Participants were recruited through a large southwestern university’s Communication and Psychology departments. The focus groups were listed on a website, asking for student participation in focus group discussion about consent to sexual activity either voluntarily or for class extra credit. A total of 5 online focus groups were conducted, totaling a sum of 24 participants.

Participants who were interested in the focus groups were directed to email this researcher for further information. To those who replied, I emailed the consent document approved by the IRB, as well as an additional screening survey designed to gather participant characteristics and enable the focus groups to include participants from varied backgrounds (see Appendix B). This screening survey asked participants about their comfort level discussing sex and consent. It also asked for background information and school affiliations, allowing for better understanding of what interests and experiences the participants brought in to each focus group discussion. Knowing the level of hesitancy in discussing the topic of sex or consent prior to the focus groups offered understanding of the overall openness of participants prior to the discussion. Participants were instructed to read and sign the consent form, fill out the screening survey, and email them as attachments to the researcher. Upon receiving both documents, I emailed the participants instructions on how to download Yahoo Instant Messenger, create a free username, and join the focus group chat room at a designated date and time.

All of the email exchanges occurred about one week prior to the online focus group discussions. When originally signing up to participate in the focus group, participants selected the focus group time slot they desired to participate in and received emailed reminders up until the day of their online focus group discussion.

**Participant Characteristics**

There were a total of 24 participants and 5 online focus group discussions. Participants were recruited in the spring of 2014 from a large southwestern university. It is important to note that participant characteristic data is only partially representative of the
individuals that participated in the online focus groups. In order to secure anonymity, participants were asked to fill out and email a screening survey with their background information. After emailing this screening survey, participants were emailed instructions on how to participate in the online focus groups. There were 32 participants who emailed back their screening survey. However, some participants did not log in to the online chat room during their scheduled online focus group. Therefore, this data is representative of all 32 participants who emailed back their screening survey, however, only 24 individuals participated in the online focus group discussions.

Each online focus group lasted for one hour in length. The majority of participants were freshman (50%) and sophomores (33.3%) and from some type of science major (37.5%). Additionally, a large number of participants had no affiliation to on-campus clubs or on-campus employment (45.8%). The majority of participants had previously been in a relationship (i.e., a monogamous, stable, dating relationship) at some point in their lives (62.5%), while most participants currently were not in a relationship (50%), with 37.5% in a relationship, and two missing for this item. Finally, most participants ranged from about a 6-8 on a scale of openness to discussing past romantic experiences (1 being completely closed and 10 being completely open). Table 6 lists these participant characteristics in more detail.

**Data Analysis**

The use of qualitative focus groups is invaluable to this research. I used primary-cycle coding to uncover first-level codes (Tracy, 2013) within my online focus group transcripts. After the online focus groups concluded, I printed out the typed chat room discussion text. A total of 35 transcript pages resulted from the five online focus group discussions. Participants were given a code name, which represented commonly selected male names from the year 2012. All direct quotes from participants have not been altered. In cases where the meaning was confusing, a footnote was provided. Created code names will appear after direct participant quotes.
Table 6. Participant Characteristics of Phase Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Characteristics (a)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=32) (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Security</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Systems</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and/or Social Group Membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a Fraternity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a University Extracurricular Club</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a University Sports Team</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student that Commutes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student that is an Arts/Humanities Major</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student that is a Science Major</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student that is employed by one or more jobs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Student that focuses on Academic work only</strong> (i.e., no affiliation on campus and no employment)</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member of a religious group</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness to sharing about past romantic experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One (completely closed)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten (completely open)</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Been in a relationship before</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently in a relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of time in current relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 months or less</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months to one year</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year and one month to 2 years</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years and one month or more</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: a. All values are unadjusted, b. Data from screening surveys received (N=32)*
Data analysis took place in three phases. Phase one consisted of reading through the transcripts several times to locate specific words or phrases that represented a pattern of typical responses to the proposed research questions. Identifying phrases as a collection of three or more words that represent sexual consent understanding, resulted in fifty units of analysis that the participants used to define consent and cues they focused on to determine if consent was granted.

Phase two began by reviewing the fifty phrases to identify patterns that focused more specifically on participants’ abstract discussion of consent, allowing for a more precise understanding of the process of how undergraduate males understand and process sexual consent as discussed in the online focus groups. During phase two, I identified patterns in phrases that represent three main dimensions of males’ conceptualization of consent: (a) familiarity, (b) common sense, and (c) differential moments. It was found that these dimensions embodied three larger trajectories that participants used to describe their consent understanding. The three trajectories in which undergraduate males construct understanding of consent are: (a) receiving understanding, (b) pursuing understanding, and (c) constructing understanding.

Phase three consisted of examining the three trajectories by interweaving the phrases and words found in the entire focus group discussions. This affirmed the patterns found throughout exemplar stories or phrases, and defining “communicative moments” that these three trajectories illuminate in undergraduate male construction of consent understanding. Phase three analysis revealed that many of the participants articulated similar words, phrases, or ideas regarding consent, revealing “communicative moments.” This confirmed the patterns and trajectories uncovered and suggested possible implications for the discussion of consent and possible consent education in the future.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in order to build upon past rape research and further scholarship evaluating selective information processing. Specifically, this research employed the use of an experimental survey and focus groups in order to engage undergraduate students on the topic of selective information processing, rape, and consent. Conducted in two phases, the following are the results of the phase one experiment and phase two focus group discussions.

PHASE ONE: SIP EXPERIMENT RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 was evaluated using a multiple factor ANOVA to test whether undergraduate males will be more likely to ignore nonverbal refusal cues in high information load conditions than in low information load conditions. Information load and interest level were entered as fixed factors. The results indicated a significant interaction effect for information load and positivity or negativity of the scenario, $F(1, 125) = 5.91, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$. There was also a main effect for the positivity or negativity of the scenario $F(1, 125) = 6.18, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$. Specifically, positive information load scenarios ($M=3.16, SD=.09$) had a 95% confidence interval which ranged from 2.98 to 3.34 while negative information load scenarios ($M=3.48, SD=.09$) had a confidence interval which ranged from 3.30 to 3.67. The hypothesis was supported. The relationship between information load and the importance placed on the positive or negative cues is depicted in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 2 was evaluated using a multiple factor ANOVA to test if information load will moderate the relationship between actual interest level and perceived interest level. The results indicated that there was no main effect of information load on perceived interested level $F(1, 125) = .66, p = .42$. Finally, there was no interaction effect for information load, the positivity or negativity of the information load, and perceived interest level, $F(1, 125) = .34, p = .56$. The hypothesis was not supported. The relationship between information load conditions is depicted in Figure 3.
Figure 2. Relationship between information load and the importance placed on cues.

Figure 3. Relationship between information load conditions.
PHASE ONE: SIP EXPERIEMENT DISCUSSION

This experiment attempted to examine the role of selective information processing in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues. This study is important, as it highlights the role of information load in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues. This section examines the hypotheses in the order presented in the results.

Hypothesis 1 presumed that in high information load conditions, undergraduate males will be more likely to ignore nonverbal refusal cues than in low load conditions. Consistent with scholarship on selective information processing (see Kardes et al., 2004), it was found that information load did have an effect on the participants’ understanding of nonverbal sexual refusal cues. Specifically, it was found that in high information load conditions, either negative or positive, undergraduate males thought that the woman wanted to have sex with them.

This discovery is important, as it displays how the number of nonverbal cues in a date rape situation may indeed contribute to how an undergraduate male processes those cues. According to selective information processing literature and this hypothesis result, the number of nonverbal cues in a situation plays a large role in how information is processed by undergraduate males. In dating situations and sexual encounters, there are many opportunities for nonverbal cues to be communicated, interpreted, and understood. Illuminating the impact the number of cues in a situation or encounter has on undergraduates’ cognitive processing ability is extremely valuable.

Additionally, hypothesis 1 contributes to current rape research on miscommunication, as it adds to the discussion of the role of nonverbal cues prior to rape. In particular, hypothesis 1 shows how the number of nonverbal cues affects the way undergraduate males interpret sexual refusal cues. Realizing that there is a way to pinpoint consent understanding, even in just the role of information load, suggests that rape may not be the result of miscommunication. Rather, there may be something else occurring in the (nonverbal) communication between two potential sexual partners that is contributing to this outcome. Hypothesis 1 suggests that information load, or the number of cues communicated—plays a role in sexual refusal understanding by undergraduate males. Information load playing a part in this understanding may suggest that something is being communicated, interpreted, and understood, and it may not always be miscommunication.
Hypothesis 2 presumed that information load moderates the relationship between actual interest level and perceived interest level. This hypothesis was not supported, as it was found that load did not moderate the relationship between actual interest level and perceived interest level. Instead, it was found that there was no relationship between the positivity or negativity of the information load and perceived interest level. Currently, there is no selective information processing literature that evaluates the role of SIP in sexual refusal cue understanding.

Finding no relationship between actual interest level, perceived interest level, and information load does not align with the theory of SIP; however, this finding does not mean SIP is not occurring. There is evidence from hypothesis 1 that what SIP is expected to look like was in fact occurring in undergraduate males’ decision making. Although hypothesis 2 is not supported, this result still offers insight into the potential role of selective information processing of undergraduate males because the role of information load was found to be significant, particularly in relationship to the ignorance of negative cues in high information load scenarios. As hypothesis 1 discussed, part of SIP is confirmed to be occurring in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues—the role of information load and processing positive or negative cue understanding. Taking those cue understandings and changing them into perceived interest level is another aspect of SIP.

One key factor of SIP is the occurrence of cognitive dissonance between a long-term goal and a short-term goal. Although it appears that information load does not moderate perceived interest level, it is possible that in the scenario created, there was not enough cognitive dissonance to create SIP. Additionally, the participants may not have had enough time to find dissonance in a long-term goal versus a short-term goal in the short amount of time taken to read the survey and answer the questions after. Although perception of interest may not be influenced by information load, there are still many aspects of SIP to be explored in order to fully answer if SIP is occurring in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues.

PHASE TWO RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Phase Two employed a qualitative approach to complement the quantitative findings of Phase One. Online focus groups were utilized to engage undergraduate students on the
topic of consent, miscommunication, consent understanding, and effective consent education methods. These focus groups were grounded in online focus group research, furthering scholarship that evaluates consent and rape. Conducted over a two month period, the results of the Phase Two online focus group discussions are as follows.

**Phase Two: Focus Group Results**

The results from five online focus group discussions illuminated some important communication trajectories to keep in mind when thinking about how undergraduate males construct consent understanding. After an initial coding of transcripts, the following three communication trajectories were identified: receiving understanding, pursuing understanding, and constructing understanding. Each of these trajectories embodies a different perspective on undergraduate males’ views of consent. The focus group findings challenge current campaigns on consent, revealing the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication of consent and illuminating the confusion males encounter when faced with situations involving sexual consent.

Undergraduate males may construct understanding along one trajectory, or they may construct understanding through multiple trajectories during their experiences with consent and sex. Oftentimes, participants articulated ways in which they constructed consent understanding through one trajectory, and in another instance with another trajectory. These trajectories represent broader processes that undergraduate males engage in as they navigate consent understanding in various sexual situations and encounters.

**Receiving Understanding**

One communication trajectory that undergraduate males utilize to construct consent understanding is receiving understanding. This particular trajectory is constructed in different ways, but it is defined as how undergraduate males gain or accept consent understanding through interactional moments. It was noted by participants that receiving understanding occurs primarily through three dimensions: common sense, familiarity, and interpretation. Next, these three dimensions will be detailed, offering exemplar participant statements to represent each dimension and its role in receiving consent understanding.
Common Sense

Common sense is a dimension that was discussed multiple times by participants regarding their knowledge of consent. When asked how they understand that they are receiving consent prior to sex, many participants stated that it is something that everyone just knows. “Of course, it is not hard to learn” (Michael) and “for the most part . . . most people have a somewhat universal understanding of it” (Matthew). These two statements show how participants receive consent understanding; it is something they perceive as already known, learned, and accepted by any individual.

One of the first questions in each focus group asked participants to “type what word or words come to mind when you hear/read the word ‘consent.’” Right from the beginning, participants understood that consent was in reference to sexual consent. One word was listed in four of the five focus groups—multiple times—by participants as the first word that came to mind in relation to consent: permission. This word is significant, because it implies that consent is a verbal interaction. There are few instances when permission is not thought of as “yes” or “no.” When probed further to define how they knew they have permission prior to sex, participants responded with, “When two or more people come to a mutual consent” (Jacob; Brandon). In this example, it can be shown how many of the participants did not disassociate the word consent from an interaction, word, or tangible image. Rather, each time they typed the word permission, they then defined the word permission with consent, which was the word they were asked to explain in the first place. Here, participants struggled to define consent, although they acknowledged that permission must be spoken in order to receive consent. As one participant stated, “It should be common sense” (Aaron). Again, the meaning of permission was stated as common sense, even when the participants could not define permission without referencing consent.

I believe the struggle to create a definition is important to illuminate, because it suggests a greater problem in how undergraduate males receive consent understanding. Although participants were able to provide a word for consent, they were unable to create a picture of what types of interaction would represent consent. As was continually mentioned in every focus group, and therefore becoming its own pattern, understanding what, when, and how consent is given was extremely confusing. I believe this may be because the word consent, in essence, is a word that students simply do not have a clear definition for other
than the word consent itself. The idea that consent is common sense is problematic. Believing consent “is something you just know” (Joshua) forces individuals to intrinsically know what consent looks like for every interaction and does not address how to construct consent for those who just might not “have consent common sense.” This dimension of common sense is troubling, as it also implies that to have common sense, someone must be so familiar with consent that it may not need to be learned. This notion of familiarity will be discussed next.

**Familiarity**

A second dimension of receiving understanding that was mentioned by participants as a way to gain consent understanding is through familiarity. This dimension encompasses the feelings expressed by participants that in order to gain consent understanding, they must have experienced that interaction before. They need to be familiar with the verbal and nonverbal consent messages in order to gain understanding. As one participant shared, “the best way to learn different signs of consent is through experience” (Kevin). In fact, in one exchange between participants, those who had familiarity with relationships or consent previously felt as if they could answer the question, but those who did not could not give a strong description of how they gain consent understanding:

“I usually don’t proceed to take it to the next level unless I am 100% certain that I have her consent” (Christopher).

“Yes, she will stop your hands from going into her private area” (Kevin)

“Never occurred to me” (Michael)

“That hasn’t happened to me, but sometimes body language can be confusing on both ends” (Aaron).

This exchange shows how males who were unfamiliar with gaining consent did not know how to engage in this conversation. In particular, Aaron acknowledged that he did not have experience gaining consent, so his only contribution was that consent seemed confusing, in particular body language surrounding (non)consent.

Familiarity was expressed through long-term relationship experiences, personal interactions, and the experiences of friends. Participants shared the level of familiarity they had with different ways consent is received correlated to how well they could interpret or receive understanding. One example of a participant receiving consent understanding through a friend’s consent experience is shared:
“There’s a couple of situations where my male buddies though[t] he was ‘getting it in’ because his female companion invited him over to her house. But she really invited him over to her house just to hang out . . . he misunderstood her consent and learned from that situation” (Daniel).

Here, consent understanding is received through the experience of a friend rather than personal experience. This participant shared that he learned how to read a girl’s “signals” better after his friend shared this experience.

Many participants did not receive consent understanding through a friend but through their own interactions in moments where consent was communicated. When asked how they receive consent understanding, the following are examples of participant responses:

“You can only know the next day, if you call her to have sex and she doesn’t reply” (Daniel).

“Basically, if she sticks around with you throughout the night” (Craig).

“[When] you attempt to make the moves and she does not follow” (Deleir).

All of these examples show how participants felt that they could only receive consent understanding through personal experience. In these examples, familiarity came through past consent interactions, even if in those interactions males may not have received consent understanding collaboratively with their partner and in ways that the female intended.

In conjunction with personal experiences, participants with past long-term relationship experience felt particularly familiar with how to receive consent understanding. As one participant shared, he learned consent, “from having a girlfriend and having many sexual encounters with her so I have a lot of practice” (Matthew). It is important to understand that relationship familiarity is a primary dimension that undergraduate males use to receive consent understanding. As another participant stated, “I have only had sex with one girl ever (the one I am in a current relationship with) and we had talked about having sex before the act took place” (Ryan). Again, this participant felt confident in receiving consent understanding because his relationship experience, even though it was only one girl, taught him the familiarity and “common sense” that surrounds receiving consent understanding. This notion of familiarity directly impacted the way Ryan interpreted his girlfriend’s (non)consent. This notion of interpretation will be discussed next.
**Interpretations**

The third dimension that displays the trajectory of receiving understanding for consent is interpretations. Participants articulated this dimension primarily as an interpretation they must do in order to understand the consent “signs” or “signals” given to them by females. In particular, all of the participants agreed that nonverbal communication is confusing to understand. As one participant stated, “its extremely difficult to read a girls hints” (Brandon).

Participants believed that they needed to figure out the “signs” given by a girl, primarily through body language, in order to receive consent understanding, but that they had a hard time learning how to read them. One participant stated, “In a relationship, [it’s] more of just giving each other hints, rather than fully communicating” (Brandon), to which another participant chimed in, “Agree with that” (Jason). This idea that consent understanding is received through interpretation is troubling, as interpretation often is left up to the one reading “the signals” rather than the one communicating.

Through common sense, familiarity, and interpretation, participants articulated three dimensions that comprise how they receive consent understanding. All of these dimensions illuminate different ways participants receive understanding. Next, it will be discussed how participants pursue understanding on a trajectory that looks very different from receiving consent by receiving understanding. Receiving understanding is often a more passive trajectory taken to receive consent. This trajectory is important to discuss first, as it was often stated as the most prominent trajectory taken by the online focus group participants. Subsequently, a more active trajectory will be described where participants do not receive understanding from those around them but rather pursue that understanding through action.

**Pursuing Understanding**

A second communication trajectory that undergraduate males may utilize is pursuing consent understanding. Distinct from receiving understanding, the pursuing understanding trajectory occurs when undergraduate males are not passive receivers of consent but actively pursue consent understanding through actions. Rather than waiting to “read a signal” or understand consent from experience, those on the trajectory to seek understanding actively take steps to gain consent. The two dimensions revealed within the pursuing understanding
trajectory are asking for clarity and pushing boundaries. Each of these dimensions is enacted in various ways, but in both, there are active steps taken by undergraduate males to gain or understand consent. It is a trajectory filled with intentional effort to gain consent rather than passively attempting to pursue or “figure out” consent. In order to actively pursue consent, clarity may need to be sought. Next, the dimension of asking for clarity will be explained.

**Asking for Clarity**

Asking for clarity was one dimension mentioned by many participants throughout the focus group discussions. This dimension is defined as actively pursuing clarity in sexual situations. Many of the instances where participants stated a need to ask for clarity were situations when sexual consent was with a new individual with whom they had never interacted. One participant articulated this by saying, “With somebody new verbal consent is necessary” (Adam). This quote displays how one aspect of pursuing consent is accomplished by actively pursuing consent understanding. In this case, that pursuing is attained through asking for clarity in verbal communication.

Although this example shows verbal clarification, it was found that many undergraduate students did not know how to seek understanding in clarification of nonverbal communication. In particular, this is evidenced by the following exchange by one participant. The lines have been reproduced as they were typed in the focus group chat room:

> “I’ll go farther
> If I take off your shirt and you allow it
> By not even saying no or look[ing] uncomfortable about it
> Hell, even smiling as I do it
> You are consenting for me to keep going.
> The smile is a nonverbal cue” (Cody).

This example shows how this participant sought clarity by “going farther” until (non)consent occurred. This is important to illuminate, as it shows that clarity does not always come in the form of positive consent understanding. Rather, in this instance, the participant chose to find clarity by continuing to push sexual advances. Even in this example, it is displayed how nonverbal communication (such as smiling or body language), is confusing for participants to differentiate as needing clarity for consent. Nonverbal communication is thus assumed as
consent because the participant sought understanding by pushing boundaries as a way to reach clarity.

**Pushing Boundaries**

A second dimension found by those on the pursuing understanding trajectory is pushing boundaries. This dimension is very important to illuminate, as it displays how many of the participants sought understanding through often aggressive, physical interactions rather than waiting to “listen” or pursue consent understanding from their partner.

There were many examples of participants pushing boundaries in order to seek consent understanding, but as one participant articulated, pursuing understanding is “in the moment you realize what is going on and what you are going to do” (Cody). This quote is important, because it displays how the participants felt that once they “knew what was going on,” they could instantly “know what they wanted to do.” This is extremely problematic and will be discussed further, but the point needs highlighting now in order to fully express the depth to which participants rely on their own judgments rather than their partner’s verbal or nonverbal communication to define consent. Pursuing consent is still done through the perspective of the undergraduate male rather than the actual consent that may be conveyed by their partner.

In another example, one participant said that he, “always go[es] by feel” (Deleir). Others agreed by saying they seek consent through:

- “Body language” (Craig)
- “The way [she] comes onto you” (Joshua)
- “Body movements” (Justin)

Again, consent understanding is pursued through nonverbal body language. More than body language, however, is the idea that nonverbal language is communicated through pushing boundaries, possibly even consent boundaries. An undergraduate male may “feel” as if consent is achieved, but without asking, it may be false clarity. This false clarity is essential to notice, as it often contributes to further pursuit of consent understanding in the future, as well as a continued affirmation to pursue consent in similar patterns for the future. Both receiving understanding and pursuing understanding are trajectories employed by undergraduate males. A third trajectory of consent is *constructing consent understanding,*
which involves the creation of individual consent definitions rather than receiving or pursuing definitions from others. This third trajectory will be explained next.

**Constructing Understanding**

A third trajectory that may be employed by undergraduate males is constructing consent understanding. This trajectory embodies the ways participants actively create consent understanding. Constructing consent understanding involves individuals “listening” to consent messages and incorporating them in to their own definition of consent to use in sexual encounters. Two dimensions were found within this trajectory: visual images and peer credibility. First, visual images will be explained in order to display the important role images play in consent construction. The last two dimensions will be further expounded upon in order to fully describe how undergraduate males construct consent understanding.

**Visual Images**

The first dimension in which consent understanding is constructed is through visual images. This was brought up many times throughout each focus group discussion. Participants stated that “wording wouldn’t matter because it might lead to sex” (Craig) and consent education needs to come through “eye-opening” (Noah) or “visual adventure” (Jacob). All of these quotes display how many undergraduate males construct consent through visual images, rather than words.

As one participant shared, consent construction occurs when things are visual because “people would rather look at something than read” (Jason). This construction of consent is interesting, as it differs from much of the current consent education provided to students. Similar to receiving consent understanding through experiences or pursuing understanding through pushing boundaries, undergraduate students have articulated that whether it is through body language or friends’ experiences, visual images or “visual adventures” are what they are using to construct consent understanding both in and out of sexual encounters. Often these encounters are constructed from personal experience or peer experience that is then shared. Visual images are just one way undergraduates construct consent. A second, extremely influential way in which they construct consent understanding is through peer credibility.
Peer Credibility

A second dimension found within the constructing understanding trajectory, is peer credibility. Participants stated that they did not remember any educational messages instructing them on how to construct consent. Rather, consent was constructed when their peers shared “first hand experience with a girl rather than when I learned it in a class” (Juan). This is important to highlight, as it shows the power of peer influence on consent construction.

All three trajectories influence the ways in which undergraduate males construct consent. Receiving understanding, pursuing understanding, and constructing understanding each have dimensions which are unique to their particular trajectory, however, undergraduate males can construct consent using one, two, or all three trajectories. As shown through the results of these online focus group discussions, consent construction can take many forms. The following discussion illuminates the understanding that can be drawn from these trajectories and the implications they hold for future consent education.

**PHASE TWO: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

This research began as a way to explore how undergraduate males discuss and understand consent. After conducting five focus groups and discussing consent with 24 participants, three trajectories emerged as ways undergraduate males construct consent understanding: receiving understanding, pursuing understanding, and constructing understanding. Next, interpretations, implications, and directions for future research will be discussed.

**Communicative Moments**

It is important to first discuss the “communicative moments” found within all three trajectories of consent understanding. A “communicative moment” is when an individual has an interactional moment either himself or has learned from a friend’s description of an interactional moment, where consent understanding was constructed. Each trajectory displays various communicative moments that were used to obtain understanding. Some examples were found in interactions with a long-term relationship partner, others were found while pushing the boundaries of nonverbal communication, and some were constructed through visual images or peer narratives of consent. All of these moments influence the way
undergraduate males receive, pursue, and/or construct consent understanding. These communicative moments shape how they believe consent can be understood, interpreted, and “heard” in sexual encounters.

**Consent As Common Sense?**

Many participants stated that they construct consent understanding in communicative moments by simply having common sense. This is a particularly troubling discovery, as it displays how undergraduate males feel as if consent is intrinsic in their minds, and they therefore do not need to learn it. However, many participants stated that they had misunderstood consent prior to sex. This tension is apparent, as undergraduate males feel that consent is common sense, and they have that common sense, yet they still find themselves in communicative moments where consent is misunderstood. If consent is assumed to be common sense, it begs the question if undergraduate students are perhaps ignoring particular verbal or nonverbal consent, because the interaction doesn’t match what they believe is the consent that everyone knows. Furthermore, believing that consent is common sense leaves room for undergraduate students to feel as if they never need to learn how to “hear” consent in the first place.

The idea that consent is common sense may lead undergraduate males to not realize or gain a desire to learn about consent. That they believe they must have familiarity with consent in order to really “understand” or “hear” consent is troubling. Every individual has a different experience and encounter, or lack thereof, with consent and sex. If undergraduate students are articulating that they are learning communicative moments about consent from either their own history or a friend’s history, there is a large gap in proper consent education and understanding that can supervene in these moments. What may have constructed consent in one situation may not mean or enable consent construction in another.

Tapping into the power of social networking will be key for scholars to begin building the bridge (or creating a bridge) of familiarity with education. Familiarity can come through past consent interactions; however, those interactions might not have constructed consent understanding correctly. This is problematic because participants are going to keep working from that outlook—even if it’s wrong—just because they are familiar with it. This issue needs to be addressed in consent education because undergraduate students might not
consider that consent must be mutually constructed in each interaction, rather than experienced so that they can be provided a familiar rule of thumb.

**Consent Through a Hint?**

Consent as “common sense” or learned familiarity suggests the act of “learning consent” may come at the expense of those situations. In short, this idea implies that some experiences may be needed in order to learn what it looks like to ignore, misunderstand, or not realize consent was missing. Essentially, rape may occur in order to figure out what a “no” looks like “in a real life experience.” This is an unacceptable way for individuals to learn consent. Many participants stated that experience was needed to learn consent because nonverbal communication looks different for every individual. That difference may be true, but basic nonverbal refusal communication can be taught to undergraduate males in order to start the conversation of nonverbal consent identification without “real life experience.”

An addition to the concept of consent learned through experience is that a female is offering consent (or non-consent) through “signs” or “hints” via her nonverbal communication. The notion of interpreting “signs” and “hints” was mentioned by an overwhelming number of participants as the primary nonverbal communication by females regarding consent. However, it was also the most confusing aspect of consent. Believing that females “hint” at what they desire rather than verbally state their desire leads to the notion that undergraduate males must experience all of these “hints” in order to know which signal consent and which do not. This idea elucidates a tension between what undergraduate males think a female is saying and the education of what constructed consent looks like. The prospect that consent can be hinted at or given through signs must be addressed by researchers and educators.

Believing that consent understanding is received through interpretation is troubling, as interpretation often is left up to the one reading received or pursued “signals” rather than the constructing consent through communication. This tension positions the undergraduate male as the one who is receiving or “listening” to consent, and the power of consent communication is not placed in the hands of both individuals involved. Indeed, nonverbal language can be difficult to understand. If undergraduate males believe that they can simply learn what nonverbal “hints” mean on their own or through experience, there is a great risk
that they may stop listening to the actual consent being given in those communicative moments and instead rely on how they chose to “hear” those “hints” in the past. Choosing to use past experiences to dictate current interactions may lead undergraduate males to push consent boundaries because those boundaries looked different for different partners in the past.

**May I Push the Consent Boundary?**

Although some participants sought consent understanding through asking for consent clarity, many participants found clarity by continuing to push the boundaries they felt surrounded sexual consent. Instead of asking for consent, participants articulated the desire to attempt various sexual advances until they constructed push back—rather than asking for consent before attempting those sexual advances. As one participant stated, “Us guys go for it, if she is saying no, then we back up” (Jacob). This is extremely worrisome, as it illuminates how undergraduate males may ignore learning how to construct understanding of nonverbal consent until they have gone too far. Furthermore, nonverbal communication (such as smiling or body language) may be hard for participants to differentiate as needing clarity. Often, participants stated that verbal consent was the only way to actually “hear” consent. If this is true, undergraduate males may lack nonverbal consent understanding because they believe pushing consent boundaries is acceptable until verbal (non)consent is given. Again, this research shows that undergraduate males may push boundaries first, rather than asking to proceed past boundaries or recognizing those boundaries initially.

Additionally, participants shared how once they felt as if they “knew what was going on” in a sexual encounter, then they instantly could decide “what they wanted to do.” This mentality does not push consent boundaries; it ignores them completely. Undergraduate males may not wait to ask or hear to consent, as they already decided what the outcome could be. The depth in which undergraduate males may rely on their own judgments, rather than their partner’s verbal or nonverbal communication to define consent is something that must be addressed by scholars and educators alike. How this consent construction can be achieved is discussed next.
Let’s Construct Consent, But How?

As was shown through the focus group results, it appears as if traditional consent education is not accurately conveying what consent is or how it may look in various sexual situations. Often, participants articulated that they could not remember any messages educating them about consent, which suggests current consent education may be unmemorable. Additionally, participants articulated that visual images and peer credibility influence the ways in which they construct consent. These focus group discussions illuminate four major aspects that consent education should consider for the future.

First, participants expressed that humor and consent education should go together. Rather than focusing on sentimental or traditional fear appeals relating to consent, participants discussed the importance of using humor to create memorable messages about consent. Participants were clear to mention that the humor should not come at the expense of the message but should convey consent in a way that forces their attention and invites them to learn and listen.

Second, participants discussed the static nature of posters attempting to educate on consent and suggested a social media approach to future educational attempts. It was often mentioned that a poster, if done well, might be an effective means to convey consent education. However, it was quickly followed by discussions of how posters are easy to ignore. In fact, many participants stated that they actively attempt to ignore images or posters because they feel so inundated by product marketing in their everyday lives. This discussion is important to keep in mind, because although poster campaigns have been successful in the past, in this current technological generation, posters may no longer be the best means for education. Participants illustrated the need for education to come through the channels of technology—smartphones, computers, and television—and not from traditional outlets such as classroom discussion, posters, or seminars. As one participant so aptly stated, “Think smartphones, not paper” (Kevin).

Third, participants discussed the importance and influence of learning about consent through experience or their friends’ experience. Emphasizing the importance of learning from a friend’s experience is needed, as this can be a key tool used to educate with social media. Using various social media platforms was mentioned as a possible new avenue that begins engaging with technology in contrast to traditional educational formats. The use of
social media engages the desire for computer or smartphone use and also allows friends to “share” educational messages through various social media channels. Essentially, authority creates the message, but it is peers who distribute it. Therefore, many undergraduate students may be more attentive to the message and desire to “listen” to something coming from a friend rather than an educator or authority figure.

Additionally, using social media allows for the incorporation of nonverbal and verbal consent communication to be explained and explored. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Vine, and Instagram—visual images (such as static images and videos) can be created to bridge the gap between nonverbal and verbal communication understanding. Moreover, each of these platforms allow for peers to “retweet” or “share” the educational message or campaign so that it creates a grassroots movement that appears to be by peers and for peers.

Finally, using social media platforms allows for the possibility of consent education to become efficient, effective, and memorable. Participants stated a desire for memorable and efficient consent education. I believe social media platforms offer this outcome, as many of the formats constrain a message to a short (6 to 10 second) time frame. Creating visual images and stories about nonverbal and verbal consent, within these constraints, force educators and researchers to create educational programs that are concise and innovative. Using social media platforms to spread campaigns and messages can allow for a consent education that is provoking and visual in ways that are not simply static images or text. Specific strategies and suggestions for incorporating social media into future consent campaigns and educational programming will be discussed in this study’s implications and future research.
CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The method of survey analysis and focus group discussion allowed me to uncover the potential role of SIP in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues, as well as how undergraduate males construct notions of and discuss sexual consent. One hundred and fifty-seven participants contributed to this research, both through the experimental survey and the online focus groups. Using a mixed method approach, I was able to test undergraduate males’ understanding while also actively engaging in discussion to uncover effective ways to discuss consent and SIP in the future.

It was found that information load does play a role in undergraduate males’ understanding of sexual refusal cues. It was also found that undergraduate males discuss consent through three trajectories: receiving understanding, pursuing understanding, and constructing understanding. The following sections will discuss the implications and future research opportunities from this thesis. First, I will examine implications from this research. Second, I propose opportunities for future research. Third, I detail a consent education campaign. Fourth, I discuss the limitations in this research. Finally, I further explore conclusions that can be found from this research and what those conclusions mean for future research.

IMPLICATIONS

This research, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, engages in the communicative discussion of consent and sexual refusal. Currently, many scholars have found that rape and sexual assault are the result of “miscommunication” between undergraduate males and their sexual partners. This research challenges that notion, finding that miscommunication is just one way to view the actions of consent understanding by undergraduate males. Important implications can be drawn from this research, particularly by providing new insights about how to interpret and measure undergraduate males’ understanding of consent, miscommunication, and the ways in which to educate with respect
to both. Next, I will discuss the implications of this research, highlighting the definition of consent, the role of nonverbal communication in consent understanding, the idea of continual consent, and finally, implications of what a visual depiction of consent can look like.

**Understanding Consent Through Dialogic Theory**

This thesis illuminates how consent communication is not simply a monologue from one partner to another, nor is it a passive agreement of one partner’s perspective to another (Geist & Dreyer, 1993). Rather, through the application of dialogic theory (Bahktin, 1981), this thesis displays how undergraduate men are receiving the consent messages sent by women. At the same time, they are not participating actively in constructing consent understanding. Dialogic theory states that understanding is the given in relationships and that understanding can only occur through dialogue that one partner contributes and that dialogue is then discussed by both to construct understanding (Bahktin, 1981). What is found through this research, conversely, is that too often undergraduate males are passive or inactive in constructing consent understanding.

Rather than believing that sexual assault and rape are a result of miscommunication, one implication from this research is that women may be communicating clearly and intentionally, not miscommunicating. In fact, men are receiving their messages, but they are not participating in active consent understanding construction. From this perspective, it becomes clear that miscommunication may not be the best way to describe the understanding of sexual refusal cues by undergraduate males. Furthermore, selective information processing compliments this notion, arguing that men are receiving messages but may be constructing the understanding differently.

**Changing The Way We Educate on Consent**

An implication from this research is the influence on how scholars, educators, and community members alike can educate on consent in the future. Recognizing that current consent education is not particularly salient in the minds of undergraduate males is important. Future consent education can and should incorporate more visual images that address the notion of education through peers. My participants had a difficult time providing a definition for consent. Effective consent education needs to begin by creating a consent definition that
incorporates both the acknowledgement of verbal and nonverbal consent. Additionally, it needs to teach undergraduate males that consent is not a discussion that happens once. Instead, asking for consent must be continuous throughout a sexual encounter. Finally, finding ways in which to educate undergraduate males on how to construct consent understanding in more examples than one will allow undergraduate males to begin to identify the role of consent in scenarios that might not have been educated on before.

The role of social media should be incorporated into consent education. Making use of peer networks on social media could potentially be extremely influential for education. It was discussed how undergraduate males learn from experience and their friends’ experiences. Using social media as leverage to build bridges between education and perceived experience is important for consent education to consider and employ as technology continues to permeate young adult society.

Although there is much work to be done, there are current and direct ways in which consent education can begin addressing these issues surrounding undergraduate male consent understanding. The use and implementation of social media can begin to answer many of the nascent questions raised from this research. Next, I will give a detailed description for future research.

In this description—and important to these implications—is a consent education campaign that will be described for future research to test as an effective new consent education platform.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

There are multiple opportunities for future research. This thesis research is first to evaluate if the role of SIP has the potential to influence nonverbal cue understanding. Although the findings from Phase One did not indicate such a correlation, more scholarship needs to be conducted, perhaps on a larger scale, to evaluate this possible interaction. As there continues to be “misunderstanding” or confusion surrounding consent understanding by undergraduate males, researchers need to continue to evaluate reasons this may be occurring.

This research is also a paradigm shift in current rape communication research. It challenges the notion of miscommunication in consent and provides dialogue on how to change education measures taken to discuss consent. Although this is an important step, this
research and its discussions were shared by a specific group of individuals—heterosexual undergraduate males. Scholarship should begin to evaluate different variables that were excluded in this thesis research. Studying the role of alcohol in relationship to selective information processing and nonverbal consent communication will be key for future research, as alcohol is one of the largest proponents in undergraduate student experiences. Additionally, scholarship can begin evaluating how verbal and nonverbal communication and consent is perceived in various settings, scenarios, and instances of rape occurring between those who are not just male and female.

Consent Intervention Campaign

It is my desire that the findings of this research are not just suggestions but are also motivations for other scholars and educators to begin (re)addressing consent education for undergraduate students. I believe the findings of both Phase One and Phase Two have immense insight and potential for future consent campaigns, and so I have created an example of what these findings can look like when incorporated into consent education. First, the applicability of social media for campaigns will be shared. Second, an overview of the campaign will be given. Third, an outline of the social media platforms will be described. Fourth, examples of the social media visual depictions will be explained. Finally, a strategy for incorporating social media “logistics” will be detailed.

Social Media Use & Education

It can be an overwhelming task to utilize social media as an avenue for education. However, it has great potential for success and impact. Social media use is currently continuing to grow among young adults. “Between February 2005 and August 2006, the use of social networking sights among young adult internet users ages 18-29 jumped from 9% to 49%” (Pew Research Center, 2013a, para. 4). Figure 4 depicts this rise of social networking and social media use by age group.

Additionally, it has been found that “40% of cell phone owners use a social networking site on their phone, and 28% do so on a typical day” (Pew Research Center, 2013b, para. 5). Most noticeably, young adults are more likely to use social media and social networking on their phones than other groups. In fact, between 2012 and 2013, the most used
social media were: Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram. Figure 5 depicts these findings conducted by the Pew Research Center.

Furthermore, young adults posting videos and watching videos on social networking sites is on the rise. In particular, online users between the ages of 18-49 post the most videos, watch the most videos, and have increased the watching and posting of videos on social networking sites by the greatest margin among all other age groups (Pew Research Center, 2013d). These findings are depicted in Figure 6.

It is important to draw attention to these findings, because they have a direct impact on the use of social media for consent education. This information displays how social media use is becoming a staple for young adults. It also displays its continual growth in use by young adults, and it also supports the idea that images or videos may be the best way for undergraduate students to learn about consent, as was confirmed in Phase Two of the online focus group findings. This data supports the choice of social media use in the intervention campaign detailed below for possible future consent education.

Campaign Overview

This intervention campaign will use social media as its platform to educate undergraduate males on issues of consent. It will incorporate visual depictions by using various social media applications. By utilizing short social media videos, various consent situations (verbal, nonverbal, and both combined) can be depicted by college-age actors and actresses. Many of the focus group participants stated that humor is the best way to create a memorable message. Therefore, it is suggested that the videos focus on using humor to educate undergraduate students on different ways to identify (non)consent. It is proposed that through the use of video on social media platforms, undergraduate students will be able to see an active representation of (non)consent. The focus group discussions exposed the memorability of visual (non-static) images to discuss consent. Using video is a prime example of incorporating short visual messages to educate on consent. This video consent representation will be “shared” through those platforms, so students will receive these videos through other social media users re-posting the video. This can be a way in which to allow
students to feel as if their friends are sharing consent experiences and consent education, in contrast with that information stemming from an educator.

**Re-Sharing**

One key aspect to a social media campaign is the ability for these platforms to be “shared.” The thought behind the ability for social media to be shared from one individual to another is that students will feel as if their friend—versus an educator—is telling them a message, a story, or a past experience. Therefore, these messages and stories have the potential to be listened to and incorporated into undergraduate students’ consent understanding. One aspect illuminated from Phase Two focus groups is that participants learned consent or how to navigate consent from their own experiences, television, or their friends’ experiences. Using social media platforms that can be “shared” through images, by friends and to friends, can incorporate the desires uncovered in these focus groups.

In particular, social media could be used as the initial platform for numerous reasons. First, it has been found that social media sites are primarily used for education, such as how-to videos (Pew Research Center, 2013c) more than any other type of video. In particular,
males watch videos for educational content almost twice as much as any other content. Figure 7 displays this information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All</th>
<th>Type of Video</th>
<th>Male (a)</th>
<th>Female (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>69%¹</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>40%⁴</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>49%³</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>25%⁵</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, July 25 – July 28, 2013. No55 online video watchers age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on all online video watchers is +/- 4.8 percentage points.

Note: Percentages marked with a superscript letter (e.g., ¹) indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter.

Furthermore, once a video is uploaded, all followers of the user who uploaded the video can watch it. Those users can then “share” that video so all of their networks can view it. This ripple effect allows for a video to reach large numbers of individuals quickly. Also, many social media user profiles are not made private. Therefore, the chances of an educational video spreading are more likely on these social media platforms. Finally, social media allows for users to connect an intervention video to many other social media sites, therefore, broadening the reach of who can see the video. Rather, it can spread to all of the most commonly used social media platforms with the simple action of clicking the “share” option.

**Video Stories**

The goal of using video through social media platforms is to create a story or “consent experience” that can educate undergraduate students. Learning about consent from peer experiences was the number one stated consent message remembered during Phase Two’s focus groups. Creating short vignettes representing a variety of (non)consent
situations is key. Borrowing from a few ideas stated during the focus group discussions, one example of a video story could be the following: two individuals are on a date and it is apparent because they are dressed up, sitting on top of the car, looking at the sunset on “lover’s lane.” In this short shot, various different consent messages can be conveyed. Using the varied messages of (non)consent creates a larger narrative of consent identification. Ensuring that nonverbal and verbal consent are conveyed in various situations is important throughout these video narratives. Many of the participants in Phase Two explained how one difficulty in constructing consent arises from the tension they find when their consent experience does not match the scenario(s) they believe have been taught to them to ask for consent in. This tension illuminates the potentially narrow story representations of current consent education. Using video stories to convey larger consent narratives and craft multiple varied visual depictions of consent situations directly addresses this particular tension held by some undergraduate males.

Choosing Your Actors & Actresses

It is acknowledged that this final step may not be realistic for some researchers, but it is important to note. Choosing who will be in these social media intervention videos is important. Researchers should realize that for every social media platform, there are individuals who are “famous” on them. For instance, most universities have “Vine famous” students. These are students who are known for their innovative Vine videos and who have a lot of followers on their social media platform. There are also students famous for their Instagram photos or twitter phrases.

I suggest that researchers incorporate these “famous” students into their videos; use these already created social media networks to share the intervention campaign message. Hiring “famous” students allows for the researcher or educator to create a consent message, film the video, and then have that “famous” student distribute the video through their social media platform. Using these students is a specific choice, as it allows for educators to distance themselves from the consent educational experience and become replaced by famous peers. This incorporates peer influence by allowing it to seem like it is that peer’s consent experience to learn from while simultaneously spreading the consent message to more students than may be in an educator or researcher’s immediate network. Instantly, a
large following of students (and non-students alike) will be marketed the video, which can then be shared, re-vined, re-tweeted, or re-posted on other social media outlets. Identifying and then leveraging the individuals in a particular location who already hold influence could be an important step in the dissemination of the intervention campaign.

**SUMMARY OF THE INTERVENTION**

1. *Select a social media platform* (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Vine). Researchers can and should use multiple social media platforms to test their consent education campaign effectiveness.

2. *Create a video*. This research argues for the implementation of videos over static images, as videos allow for more consent realities to be depicted. It is important in these videos to show consent conveyed both verbally and nonverbally. Furthermore, displaying consent in a variety of situations will be key in helping undergraduate males begin to identify consent in situations that seem unclear to them. It is also important to note that in this step, it is recommended that the videos do not have slogans attached to them or catch phrases at the end. This again begins to confine consent to verbal definitions alone. Creating consent scenarios, however, allows for a larger range of consent experiences to be shared.

3. *Spread the video*. Not only creating a video, but also strategically selecting who will be sharing the video and what their social networks look like can be instrumental in the distribution and implementation of the intervention campaign. Selecting prominent students on campus to participate in and then share the video is one suggestion. Another is to find “Social media famous” individuals, particularly students, to spread the intervention campaign. This step is essential, as it allows for the intervention campaign to be viewed as a lesson or experience being shared by friends to friends rather than an educational video crafted by administrators.

4. *Market the intervention campaign*. This step is where the video can be launched into different formats in order to achieve a more far-reaching social media campaign. One suggestion is to create a video but capture still shots of particular “images of (non)consent” to be then used on Instagram. Those videos and photos can be shared on Facebook or re-tweeted on Twitter. Creating funny or dramatic video/photo captions can help to spread the campaign.

5. *Test the effectiveness of the intervention campaign*. In this final step, it becomes the task of the researcher to test the effectiveness of the created social media intervention campaign. This can occur in a variety of ways, but testing its effectiveness (as well as perhaps its effectiveness on various different platforms of social media) will be key in illustrating the role technology may play in properly educating young adults in the future.
LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this research. First, SIP has never been demonstrated in connection to nonverbal communication before, let alone in relation to rape. This thesis research is the first to attempt to demonstrate a potential paradigm shift in communication misunderstanding. Phase One is the first survey used in an attempt to illuminate SIP and nonverbal communication. It was found that in high information load conditions, undergraduate males are more likely to ignore nonverbal sexual refusal cues than in low information load scenarios. Although a strong correlation was not found between information load moderating actual interest level with perceived interest level, the finding does not necessarily mean SIP is not occurring. Future research should take sample size into account and test SIP with a larger study, perhaps with significantly larger numbers, different sexual orientations, or differing past relationship experience. Grounded in Phase Two’s focus group understanding, it is worth asking if perceived interest level is too difficult to manipulate in experimental conditions. Individuals need visual depictions of nonverbal refusal cues in order to process the perceived interest. Future research should find a way to contextualize perceived interest level in real life interactions or visual depictions for a more accurate perceived interest level variable. Moreover, future research can control for various other factors that may influence SIP. There is much more room for research to continue to test SIP and cue understanding.

Second, this thesis research looks at a very specific scenario of nonverbal cue understanding. By looking at potential date rape scenarios, this research excludes many factors in its analysis. This thesis research does not look at the role of alcohol, relationship status, drug use, length of acquaintance, or stranger rape. This thesis research chooses to look at the role of SIP in male to female relationships, while SIP may not only be found in the male sex or only male to female relationships. This limitation deserves to be questioned and explored in future research.

Although there is a lack of generalizability from this controlled study, there are advantages that result from it. Having a controlled study allows for the isolation of information load, its role in decision making, and the creation of implications drawn from the results. Through random assignment, any variance in how participants may have perceived the condition is evenly distributed across the conditions. Therefore, this research
demonstrates new variables that can be tested in communication research and allows for the replication and expansion of these results in future studies. The understandings, implications, and future research drawn from this controlled experiment are grounded in both qualitative and quantitative methods and understanding.

Third, there were limitations associated with conducting focus groups. The focus groups were conducted online, so there is a possibility that participants did not write the most accurate responses in the discussion. Given the nature of meeting online, participants may not have felt comfortable typing in an online format to discuss consent. Yet the benefit of anonymously sharing information may also have enabled participants to disclose experiences more robustly than if they would have been in a face-to-face discussion, attaching their identity to their story. All participants needed access to the Internet in order to participate as well, limiting the participation from individuals who may not have Internet access. Also, these focus groups may not be representative of the entire population, as most of the participants were fairly open to discussing consent. With these limitations in mind, conducting online focus groups did allow for participants to share stories that they may not have in a face-to-face discussion. It allowed participants convenience, as they could join the focus group discussion from anywhere they desired with the use of the Internet and by simply “logging in.”

Fourth, this thesis research is not used to justify the actions of males in date rape. This research does not approve or support date rape actions, but seeks instead to provide scholars with a new outlook for possible miscommunication explanations. This thesis research needs to be tested and examined in much more detail in future research. Its purpose is to provide a new perspective in communication scholarship for research to explore and should by no means be used as a justification or excuse for rape.

**CONCLUSIONS**

It is my hope that this consent intervention campaign will spark ideas and be tested as a possible new and effective method for consent education. The implications for future research, or “Phase Three” of this thesis, resulted from the trajectories arising from Phase Two’s online focus group discussions. From those discussions, an intervention campaign was crafted in order to inform undergraduate males of consent.
The intervention campaign created from this thesis research is a starting point. Future research should continue to test the effectiveness of this campaign and discover methods to make it more effective. If proven effective, this education campaign has the potential to be used in multiple mediums other than those created for this research. Scholars should begin to find effective ways to translate the message of SIP understanding in visual media formats, possibly creating an intervention campaign that can be used for television, commercials, and films. Finding more than print representations of SIP education is an important next step for future research.

These focus groups may not fully represent the diversity of all undergraduate male perspectives on consent, but it is a starting point for scholars. Future research should begin to hold focus group discussions with those whose voices are missing from these findings. Evaluating the role of alcohol will be important for scholarship to consider as consent education research moves forward. Cultivating dialogue to educate others of possible SIP occurrence, as well as innovative consent education, will be essential in order to educate undergraduate populations in this markedly technological age.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

PHASE TWO FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT
Moderator Type Script:

Welcome everyone. Could each of you type hello, so I can make sure this Chat room is working properly? Thank you.

I want you all to take a moment and locate the consent form that was emailed to you earlier. Please review the consent form right now so that you are aware of the risks associated with participation in this online study. After you have finished reviewing the consent form and you wish to participate today, please type: “I have read the consent form emailed to me and agree to participate in this focus group discussion”. If you do not wish to give consent, please exit the chat room now.

Now that we have consent from everyone, please address one another by the usernames you have created. Please do not type any identifying information since I cannot guarantee that what is written in this chat room will stay in this chat room.

Now that we have some of the logistics out of the way, we can begin. To start off, I’ll introduce myself. I am moderator and I am going to help guide this discussion. I will ask questions. Feel free to type answers at any time to offer your perspective in response to my question or someone else’s response. If someone types something interesting, go ahead and respond to what you find interesting about what they wrote. This is a conversation and I would like to see everyone participate in this free-flowing interaction. You’re not in class; so don’t worry about waiting for me to type a question or type your
name to address you specifically. If you have something to say—go ahead and write it at any time.

Does anyone have any questions so far? If you do, please type them into the chat room text box. Some of the conversation might make you feel uncomfortable. Know that you are not required to type something. However, whatever your experience is, no matter how different it is from anyone else’s experience, your opinion is valuable. If at any point in this discussion you need to leave the chat room, please know that you can get sign out. The numbers for the Student Counseling Center [insert #’s here] and [institution name] IRB [insert #’s here] are additional resources for you, if you feel that after this discussion you want to talk to someone about it.

Okay, great. Before we get into the questions, it would be great for all of us to know:

(1) **Opening Question:**

Please type what year you are in school.

(2) **Opening Question:**

Please indicate if you are currently in a romantic relationship.

**Moderator Script:**

Great, thank you everyone. Next, we are going to start talking more specifically about relationships.

(2) **Introductory Question:**

What word or words come to mind first when you consider the word “consent”? Take a moment to type your response.
Let’s go around the room, starting with [insert participant name]—and type your reaction to reading what others wrote. [Participant 2]? [Participant 3]? Does anyone have anything else to add?

(3) Transition Question 1:

Now that we’ve explored each of your responses to the word “consent, I want to know if I asked us to have a discussion about consent, what do you think that would mean?

(4) Transition Question 2:

To help us settle on one definition of consent, let’s have a discussion. Which one would you like to use as we continue?

Great. Now let’s turn the discussion to relationships.

(5) Transition Question 3:

Have you ever experienced a time when you thought you gained a girl’s consent to have sex, but then realized you did not? As we engage in this discussion, please be sure to exclude all names, identifying situations, and other information that reveal any location or people involved.

(6) Key Question 1:

Have you ever been in a situation where you misunderstood consent prior to sex? If so, describe the misunderstanding? At what point do you know or feel confident that you have consent?

(7) Key Question 2:

How do you react when you are going to learn about the “right way to hear consent?”

(8) Key Question 3:
Can you tell me about any campaign messages (Ex: commercials, lessons from high school, etc.) that you have heard?

(9) Key Question 4:

Have you ever talked with others about these messages?

(10) Key Question 5:

If you were to see a message describing “consent before sex,” how would it be worded to make you want to listen or pay attention to it?

(11) Ending Question 2:

Describe a message that you think would be most effective to teach others about consent.

Moderator Script:

Is there something we haven’t talked about that is important to consider on this topic of consent?

Moderator Script:

Before we conclude, do you have any recommendations that can help this focus group be better in the future?

Moderator Script:

These are all really interesting ideas. Thank you so much for participating in this discussion with me! Well, thank-you for your time. If you have any questions about this discussion or study, please contact the researcher listed on the information sheet you received through your email. Please also remember the contact information for the Student Counseling Center and [institution’s name] IRB department that was typed in at the beginning of this chat room discussion, as well as is listed in the consent form that
was emailed to you. Thanks for sharing this discussion with me and I hope you all have a great day!
APPENDIX B

PHASE TWO PARTICIPANT SCREENING SURVEY
1. Are you an undergraduate male?
   Yes  No
2. What is your major?
3. Which of the following describes your academic and/or social group membership? Check all that apply:
   ☐ Member of a Fraternity
   ☐ Member of a University Extracurricular Club
   ☐ Member of a University Sports Team
   ☐ Student that Commutes
   ☐ Student that is an Arts/Humanities Major
   ☐ Student that is a Science Major
   ☐ Student that is employed by one or more jobs
   ☐ Student that focuses on Academic work only (i.e., no affiliation on campus and no employment)
   ☐ Member of a religious group
4. Please rate the following:
   How open are you to sharing about your past romantic experiences?
   (1 being completely closed and 10 being completely open)
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. Have you ever been in a relationship before? (i.e. monogamous, dating relationship)
6. Are you currently in a relationship (i.e. monogamous, exclusive, dating relationship)?
7. For what length of time have you been in your current monogamous, exclusive dating relationship?
   __________ years  __________ months