Are Queer Men Queering Consent? A Scoping Review of Sexual Consent Literature Among Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer Men

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Abstract

Objectives: To review the literature on Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (GBTQ) men and sexual consent.
Methods: Eight electronic databases were searched in June 2022, yielding 1924 articles; 30 were included for review after screening.
Results: We found a growing body of literature focused on GBTQ men, with an increasingly intersectional lens. Most studies adopted a nuanced definition of sexual consent. Many discussed the unique sexual scripts developed by GBTQ men to communicate consent, especially in sex venues, and how unfamiliarity with these scripts creates vulnerability for newly 'out' men. A common theme was the impact of heteromasculine norms on sexual encounters between GBTQ men.
Conclusions: The reviewed literature problematizes binary definitions of consent and miscommunication theories of assault. It both celebrates and problematizes GBTQ sexual cultures. We encourage future research to adopt more explicitly anti-carceral approaches to studying sexual consent and violence.

Keywords

Sexual consent, sexual violence, sexual scripts, GBTQ men, scoping review

Introduction

In 2004, Beres et al. published an article arguing that research on sexual consent has primarily focused on heterosexual practices and encounters, and that scholars need to consider whether queer people may have different approaches to consent. Since that time, a small yet notable body of literature has emerged, examining how individuals of different gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations navigate sexual consent. This research brings with it varied theories and frameworks for understanding consent—which has implications for how we understand *violations* of consent. This, in turn, influences how sexual violence and harm are addressed, socially, politically, and legally. What can research on the queering of consent offer the broader field of sexuality studies and sexual violence prevention? To address this question, we undertook a scoping review of a subset of this literature pertaining to gay, bisexual, trans, and other queer (GBTQ) men. We limited our search to men and transmasculine people to focus on the unique gendered roles that masculinity may play in sex cultures and consent practices, but our findings provide insight regarding queer consent more broadly.

The Beres et al. (2004) article we used to define the start of our search called for more research into how queer people 'do' consent, for two key reasons. First, while consent had been

thoroughly analyzed in legal terms, a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon would require investigating "how [queer] sexual partners actually communicate with one another" (2004, p. 475). Second, the few studies investigating consent prior to Beres et al. (2004) only addressed heterosexual encounters, and it was hypothesized that non-heterosexual partners might communicate and practice consent differently because sexual scripts, including norms around consent, are shaped in part by the unique interplay between sex and gender. To test this, Beres et al. (2004) developed and employed the Same-Sex Sexual Consent Scale. Their findings suggested that the sexual scripts of both lesbians and gay men entail greater flexibility around initiating and gatekeeping roles, and that, like heterosexuals, they employed non-verbal consent behaviours much more than explicit verbal ones.

In more recent work, Beres (2022) continued to engage with the role of non-verbal and non-explicit communication in queer adults' sexual consent practices. She argued that heteronormative scholarship frames sexual consent as a "knowledge problem": assault occurs because of "miscommunication" wherein "[p]eople are framed as not knowing whether their partners are consenting to sex because of the perception that indirect and nonverbal communication is too vague, ambiguous or complex" (p. 142). Edenfield (2019) similarly argued that mainstream, heteronormative education materials and institutional policies often describe the ideal sexually consensual encounter in legalistic, binary terms, wherein consent is a contract rendered null unless both parties explicitly, verbally, enthusiastically, and soberly communicate and agree upon their specific sexual desires. The miscommunication theory of consent enables assault because it allows aggressors to "feign ignorance" that they simply did not pick up on non-explicit or non-verbal cues (Beres, 2022, p. 149). The sexual violence prevention initiatives developed in response then focus on teaching people *skills*: how to understand what consent is and it is not, and how to communicate sexual desire in explicit, verbal ways. The goal becomes establishing an unambiguous sexual agreement that can be achieved so long as everyone expresses themselves clearly and effectively, with legal repercussions posited as the key deterrent (Edenfield, 2019).

Beres (2022) challenged this miscommunication theory of consent, noting that samples of both heterosexual men (Jozkowski et al., 2017) and queer adults of all genders (Beres, 2022) demonstrate that, on the contrary, people are able to "tune in" to their partners' non-verbal and non-explicit communications: "subtle shifts in tone, body tension or relaxation, invitations and expressions", and the "notion of 'being present'" (Beres, 2022, p. 150). While genuine miscommunication can occur, Beres emphasized that people can and do understand ambiguous, non-verbal, and other non-explicit sexual cues. This has important implications, because it effectively expands the notion of what constitutes effective consent communication, and, by extension, what constitutes a violation of that consent. Despite broadening the definition of sexual violation, this approach is anti-carceral—meaning it does not believe solutions to sexual and gendered violence can be found within state systems of law enforcement (Bernstein, 2010).

The focus is not to determine if consent meets certain legal thresholds or to use threats of punishment to motivate people to learn a particular style of communication skills. Rather, the goal is to support people in developing a sense of sexual ethics and empathy based in the values of transformative rather than punitive justice, by creating environments where it is safe for them to self-reflect and change their behaviour accordingly (Beres, 2022; Buggs & Hoppe, 2023; Critical Resistance and Incite!, 2003; Edenfield, 2019; Hindes, 2023; Ison, 2019; Kukla, 2018; Levine & Meiners, 2020).

The way consent is conceptualized, then, deeply influences proposed solutions to sexual harm. Recognizing the unique histories of gay cruising and non-verbal consent cultures, we hypothesized that literature on GBTQ men specifically would discuss consent in nuanced ways and push against the miscommunication framing that Beres (2022) links to punitive and skills-based solutions, perhaps lending instead to anti-carceral and ethics-based solutions. To explore our hypothesis, we set out to analyze this subset of queer consent literature by conducting a scoping review. In the following sections, we define the approach we took with this scoping review and outline our specific research questions and methods.

Scoping Reviews

Scoping reviews "aim to map the literature on a particular topic or research area and provide an opportunity to identify key concepts; gaps in the research; and types and sources of evidence to inform practice, policymaking, and research" (Daudt et al., 2013, p. 55). Rather than simply summarizing *what* is said about GBTQ men's consent, however, our aim was to explore *how* sexual consent is researched: how it is conceived and framed across studies. As do many scoping reviews, we incorporated a critical perspective on these trends in addition to summarizing them, in hopes that we might "not only identify gaps, but interrogate the space between gaps" (Webster et al., 2017).

Recent scoping reviews have examined sexual violence among gay, bisexual, and trans men (Dame et al., 2020), intimate partner violence among gay and bisexual men (Callan et al., 2020), and sexualized drug use among men who have sex with men (Patten et al., 2020), which inevitably touched upon elements of sexual consent. In this review, we are interested in studies where consent—its presence or absence—is a key organizing concept. That said, 'consent' is an ambiguous concept whose definition is neither self-evident nor universally consistent. At its most basic, consent denotes some form of agreement to engage in sexual activity. As such, how it is defined inevitably influences how sexual coercion, violence, and assault are defined, since the absence of consent is typically central to their meaning (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2024). Because the reviewed studies do not employ identical language or terminology, varied vocabulary is used throughout this article to reflect different shades of sexual agreement and disagreement. Generally, we defer to "non-consensual sex" as a catchall for sex that was not

agreed to but did not necessarily entail physical or psychological coercion, "sexual violence" to describe sex that was not agreed to and involved some form of force or coercion (including assault), and "unwanted sex" for sex that was agreed to and not coerced but that one person did not desire or would have preferred not to have (noting that concepts such as 'coercion' and 'desire' are also deeply complex and lack semantic consensus).

In this scoping review, we asked:

1. What are the main consent-related topics raised in the articles?
2. How do these studies define consent, and what implications might this have for understandings of sexual assault?
3. How do the articles frame GBTQ men's unique experiences and cultures of consent?
4. In what ways do the research trends change over time?

Our overarching aims were to assess the range of existing literature about how GBTQ men experience and interpret consent, to consider how consent is framed within that literature, and to critically assess the potential consequences of such framings.

Methods

Two of the authors (SMc and VW) developed a search strategy guided by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework and in collaboration with a research librarian from Dalhousie University (Shelley McKibbon). Eight databases were selected based on the likelihood they would offer relevant literature: Academic Search Premier, PsycInfo, CINAHL, Gender Studies Database, Public Affairs Index, Social Work Abstracts, MedLine, and Sociological Abstracts. All databases were searched in June 2022. Our full search strategy is included in Table 1. Note that while we included Two-Spirit in our search, none of the retrieved studies identified any Two-Spirit participants. As such, we use the acronym GBTQ when referencing our data set.

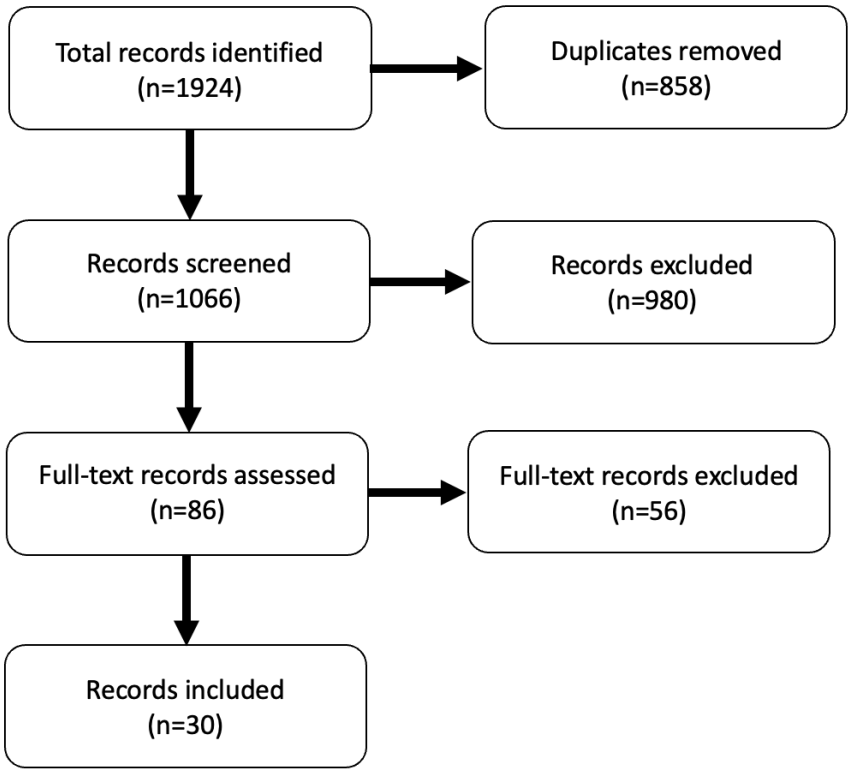
Table 1. Search Strategy

Concept 1: Population		Concept 2: Consent
(men OR male OR man) N3 (gay OR queer OR trans OR homosexual OR bisexual OR two spirit OR 2S OR sexual minority) OR "men who have sex with men" OR MSM	AND	Sex* N3 (consent* OR negot* OR communicat* OR coerc* OR nonconsensual OR unwanted)

All retrieved articles were imported into Covidence (an online software tool for managing reviews) for organization and screening (Figure 1). From June to August 2022, two reviewers (SMc and VW) independently screened all articles at the title/abstract and then full-text stage. The reference lists of all included articles were hand-screened for additional sources, though

none were added through this process. There were few screening conflicts; when these arose—usually in relation to whether consent was central enough to the article's thesis—they were resolved via discussion between the two reviewers.

Figure 1. Search Results



Literature published from 2004 onward was included, inclusive of Beres et al.'s (2004) call for more research "examining sexual consent within same-sex relationships" (p. 475), to assess the growth of the field. Only peer-reviewed literature and graduate theses or dissertations were included. Some articles include GBTQ men along with other demographics, but we excluded articles where we could not differentiate the findings. We excluded articles focused exclusively on couples negotiating non-monogamy, examinations of hypothetical scenarios rather than actual practices, and those which only looked at rates of reporting sexual assault after the fact. Commentaries that were not research were excluded. We also excluded two articles where we could not access the full text through university libraries.

The more complex exclusion criteria had to do with the role consent took in the study. Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010) noted that while scoping reviews tend to use broad research questions since they are exploratory by definition, it is useful to combine broad questions with specific goals and definitions of key terms to aid the selection of relevant articles. Given our interest in how consent is defined, we focused on articles that examined how participants

describe or communicate consent, or how they interpret violations of consent. We did not include studies about intimate partner violence or the sexual abuse of minors. We also excluded articles that only discussed consent as a mediator of sexual health. A substantial number of retrieved studies addressed sexual communication only as it relates to safer sex negotiation and disclosure of HIV or PrEP status. If the abstract implied that there would be some unpacking or elaboration of these communication practices, we included it in the full-text screening where we could then decide if the discussion was substantial enough to contribute meaningfully to our research questions. This exclusion is not to downplay the formative role that HIV has played in shaping GBTQ men's norms and practices in the negotiation of sexual health and beyond (e.g., Berkowitz & Callen, 1983). However, for our purposes, we sought articles that delved into what consent and consent violation *means* to participants.

After full-text selection, from September to November 2022, the included studies were extracted and charted in Microsoft Word by two of the authors (VW and SMc). The studies were split in two alphabetically and each of the reviewers extracted one half, then read each other's work and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. The extraction process was also guided by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and the charting details are summarized in Table 2. The extracted data included sample size and study population, study design and methods, and key findings. The included articles were reviewed through a blend of superficial topic summary and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019) by two authors (SMc and CY) from November 2022 to February 2023. Specifically, each researcher conducted a blend of coding approaches: open inductive coding to address RQs 1 and 4 and identify key topics across studies and over time (presented under "Main Topics Raised" and "Trends Over Time") and deductive coding to answer RQs 2 and 3 regarding how the articles defined consent (presented under "Defining Consent") and how they frame GBTQ men's sexual cultures (presented under "Consent Cultures & Sexual Scripts). Because reflexive thematic analysis is being used as a methodological framework to describe the studies, rather than to conduct a meta-analysis of the data itself, the same process was applied to all studies regardless of their qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches. All coding was discussed between the three lead authors (VW, SMc, and CY) to resolve discrepancies and arrive at a final set of thematic summaries upon which to base the manuscript.

Table 2. Full chart

Author(s), Year	Title	Country	Sample Size/Study Population	Study Design/Methods	Key Findings
Aspin et al. (2009)	**An investigation of the phenomenon of non-consensual sex among Maori men who have sex with men.**	New Zealand	8 Maori men having sex with men (MSM) ages 24-50 who had been raped or sexually coerced by another man at least once in their lifetime.	Qualitative – Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Consenting participants participated in a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Non-consensual sex (NCS) was defined by three distinct stages: a sense of shock and freeze response towards initial NCS advance; denial and blame shortly following NCS; and silence. Older, persuasive, and manipulative were common characteristics of perpetrators, with young age, inexperience, and low sense of self-worth characteristics of those subjected to NCS. Many long-term health impacts were associated with NCS.
Beres et al. (2004)	**Sexual consent behaviors in same-sex relationships**	Canada, United States, Europe	257 (127 men, 130 women) LGBQ people from universities across Canada, the United States, and Europe who had reported engaging in sex with someone of the same sex within the last year.	Quantitative – Listservs and e-mailing lists for GLBT individuals from universities across Canada and the United States were used to recruit for an online survey.	Nonverbal consent behaviours were more frequent than verbal behaviours, both in initiating and responding to sexual consent. Findings point to a universal sexual script that favours nonverbal behaviours over verbal consent behaviours, which most MSM tend to follow.
Bourne et al. (2015)	**"Chemsex" and harm reduction need among gay men in South London.**	United Kingdom (South London)	30 gay men who had engaged in chemsex (used crystal methamphetamine, mephedrone or GHB/GBL immediately before or during sex) within the last 12 months.	Qualitative – Push notifications on a gay social networking app, paid advertisements in a gay magazine, promotional business cards in gay bars and businesses, and referrals from gay non-profit service providers were used to recruit participants. Consenting participants engaged in a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Chemsex created fuzzy boundaries regarding consent. Drug use often created periods of unconsciousness, which was perceived as normal for many men who had sex on GHB/GBL. Three participants described instances of anal penetration while unconscious due to drug use but did not classify the experience as sexual assault or rape. Overdosing was the most immediate harm association, though chemsex was found to affect social relationships, and social, mental, and physical well-being. Sexual health services were preferred over support services such as therapeutic settings or drug clinics, due to their comfortability and knowledge around chemsex and the gay community.
Braun et al. (2009a)	**'Risk' and sexual coercion among gay and bisexual men in Aotearoa/New Zealand-key informant accounts**	Aotearoa/New Zealand	23 people working in professional and community roles in areas related to gay men's health and well-being and/or sexual assault.	Qualitative – Maximum variation purposive sampling strategy with snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Consenting participants engaged in a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	MSM consent practices varied depending on location, social context, skill base, and experience. Age was found to impact sexual coercion or pressure to have sex, as younger or inexperienced men reported feeling more susceptible to unwanted sex.
Braun et al. (2009b)	**Sexual Coercion Among Gay and Bisexual Men in**	Aotearoa/ New Zealand	19 MSM who identified as having experienced unwanted, regretted,	Qualitative – Word of mouth, snowball sampling, outreach in gay community	Participants were coerced into unwanted or non-consensual sex through force, inability to consent due to intoxication, manipulation by older or more experienced

	Aotearoa/New Zealand		forced, pressured, or coerced sex.	centres/clubs, and ads in gay media were used to recruit men for semi-structed interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	men, or a perceived obligation (i.e., agreeing to meet up online and feeling pressured to follow through upon meeting in person).
Brennan (2017)	**Stealth Breeding: Bareback without consent**	English language online forum	People posting on various gay discussion forums.	Qualitative – Textual analysis in the cultural studies tradition.	The author's analysis of online discourse demonstrates a disagreement over whether stealthing is sexual assault. For some, consent was given for penetrative sex but not for removing the condom during sex. Since the introduction of PrEP, stealthing is now also considered assault due to risk of HIV. The discourse explored various motivations for stealthing and defined it as queer defiance. Theories for understanding stealthing argue that stealthing is contextual, in that there is the criminal act of stealthing, but also playing with it in fantasy and pornography.
Brown (2020)	**Ceramics, clothing and other bodies: affective geographies of homoerotic cruising encounters**	United Kingdom (London)	Men frequenting three London-area cruising grounds.	Covert observational study with autoethnographic reflections.	Cruising encounters utilize the location, nonverbal communication, choreography of bodily movements/gestures, and the space of the cruising grounds to negotiate consent. Participants stated that they use eye contact, mimicking/mirroring movements, 'backward glance', and other nonverbals to communicate consent. Site-specific factors, such as the use of layout of the space and its contributes and how men use them, are used to communicate consent.
Currier & Manuel (2014)	**When Rape Goes Unnamed: Gay Malawian Men's Responses to Unwanted and Non-consensual Sex**	Malawi	Two MSM who have experienced unwanted sex.	Qualitative – Men were recruited through community groups for a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Two gay Malawian men discussed their experiences of unwanted sex when they were younger. Whereas Stanley emphasized that his experience as forced, Alex refused to label his experience as rape. Alex emphasized that he was of young age and his perpetrator was an older boy. Material incentives were used by the older boy to coerce Alex into having sex. Stanley stated that his verbal communication to deny sex was ignored by his perpetrator. Stanley feared rejecting the man's sexual advances out of fear retaliation and the possibility that the man would blackmail him into having sex in exchange for his silence about his gay identity.
Daroya (2022)	**"I See Nothing Wrong with Stealthing in Anonymous Sexual Situations": Assemblages of Sexual Consent in Gay, Bisexual, and other Queer Men's Accounts of**	English language online forum	Members of an online forum for gay men. Two hundred forum discussions were compiled, 40% from General Discussions and 60% from The Backroom (discussions of intentional seroconversion).	Qualitative – Thematic content analysis of online forum posts.	Many participants stated that in anonymous sexual contexts verbal consent can be challenging and some argue that implicit consent is given when entering sexualized spaces. Due to this, some participants believed that stealthing is morally acceptable in anonymous sexualized spaces. However, the findings suggest that views about consent and stealthing are complex. Some participants argued that stealthing is a form of sexual assault or rape and exposes individuals to sexual harm and STI transmission risk. Participants

	"Stealthing" in an Online Barebacking Forum				discussed that consent negotiation can be complicated by anonymity in sexualized spaces.
de la Ossa (2016)	**'Talk, listen, think': Discourses of agency and unintentional violence in consent guidance for gay, bisexual and trans men**	United Kingdom	17,113-word corpus from consent education documents produced by NGO Galop	Qualitative – Critical discourse analysis of written content.	Educational materials targeting gay, bi and trans men espouse several discourses: 1) that good consent is affirmative and active rather than a mere lack of resistance; 2) that sexual violence is often the unintentional result of unclear communication between sexually uncontrollable men; and 3) that assault is a mutual experience, and promoting clear communication is a shared community responsibility, which together perpetuate antiquated framings of men's sexuality as unruly.
Dietzel (2022)	**The Three Dimensions of Unsolicited Dick Pics: Men Who have Sex with Men's Experiences of Sending and Receiving Unsolicited Dick Pics on Dating Apps**	Canada	25 MSM over the age of 18 who reported using dating apps.	Qualitative – Snowball sampling and flyers posted at a university and Montreal gay village to recruit men for semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Results show that unsolicited DPs are embedded in sexual norms of MSM dating app culture. Three "dimensions" of unsolicited dick pics (DP) were identified: consensual, wanted, and typical, and unsolicited DPs are impacted by several factors (e.g., sexual arousal). While some DPs were consensually received, certain unsolicited ones were deemed harmful by participants. Findings demonstrate the diversity of MSMs experiences with unsolicited DPs and the complexity of the MSM dating app culture.
Dietzel (2021)	**"That's Straight-Up Rape Culture": Manifestations of Rape Culture on Grindr**	Canada	25 MSM over the age of 18 who reported using dating apps.	Qualitative – Snowball sampling and flyers posted at a university and Montreal gay village to recruit men for semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Rape culture manifests through unwanted sexual messages and images that are shared by dating app users. Certain users send messages to impose their sexual desires on their users or pressure users to engage in sexual activity, even after expressing disinterest. Participants said it is common for dating app users to share other users' sexual images without their consent. Unwanted sexual photos from users is another way in which rape culture manifests in MSM dating apps. Participants recognized that rape culture extends beyond dating apps and influences in-person encounters.
Ford (2021)	**Unwanted Sex on Campus: The Overlooked Role of Interactional Pressures and Gendered Sexual Scripts**	United States	110 (52 men, 58 women) queer and heterosexual college students who reported experiencing unwanted sex.	Qualitative – Follow-up invitations after a classroom survey and flyers on university campus were used to recruit men for a semi-structured interview. Grounded theory was used.	The threat of violence (due to physical appearance, strength, or size) often led participants to consent to sex that was not necessarily wanted or enthusiastic, but that was nonviolent or avoided escalation. Making a sexual partner climax was a tactic used to quickly end an unwanted sexual encounter. Unfamiliarity with queer sexual scripts often led to participants engaging in unwanted sex, due to an unawareness of what was normal or expected in specific MSM spaces or situations.

Ford & Becker (2020)	**"A Situation Where There Aren't Rules": UnwantedSex for Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Men**	United States	18 GBQ men at a private university who have experienced unwanted sex in college.	Qualitative – Men who reported having unwanted sex in a screening survey conducted in two introductory sociology courses and recruitment flyers on campus were used to recruit for a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Unclear sexual scripts, dominance, and homophobia were all markers of unwanted sex. Participants reported going along with unwanted sex due to an inability to remove oneself from a situation or feelings of expectation. Unwanted sex stemmed from factors such as dominance and power from one's sexual partner and a fear of being outed.
Gaspar et al. (2021)	**"You're Gay, It's Just What Happens" : Sexual Minority Men Recounting Experiences of Unwanted Sex in the Era of MeToo**	Canada	24 gay, bisexual, queer, and other MSM.	Qualitative – Individuals from a larger study called ENGAGE were recruited for a semi structured, in-depth interview. Grounded theory analysis was used.	Unwanted sex was perceived as inevitable among the participants, as they believed that non-consensual sex is common in gay culture. The results showed that sexual violence among GBM is normalized and minimized. Although the participants spoke of such experiences as being frequent, they did not view them as acceptable. Participants reported needing to be assertive during sexual encounters.
Gear (2005)	**Rules of Engagement: Structuring Sex and Damage in Men's Prisons and Beyond**	South Africa	23 ex-prisoners and current prisoners in Gauteng Province, South Africa.	Qualitative – Prisoners from Gauteng Province, South Africa, were recruited for interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.	Marriage-type relationships are common in men's prisons in which the male prisoners are either identified as either "men" or "women" in which the "women" become property of the "men" and are subjected to sexual violence. Another common relationship type in prison is marked by consensual sex or "doing each other favors", which the author notes blurs the gender roles established in male prisons. Gang rituals and norms also facilitate sexual violence in prisons.
Grov et al. (2014)	**Men who have sex with men's attitudes toward using color-coded wristbands to facilitate sexual communication at sex parties**	United States	47 cis MSM over the age of 18 who attend sex parties, and had 2+ casual male sex partners in the last 30 days.	Qualitative - Distribution of flyers at events and digital listervs via partnerships with sex party promoters were used to recruit men for interviews.	14.9% of participants felt positively about using color-coded wristbands to identify condom preferences. 29.8% favored the use of color-coded wristbands to communicate sexual positioning. However, some participants noted that the use of wristbands would eliminate useful verbal communication and the mystery of meeting new sexual partners. 55.3% expressed positive attitudes toward using wristbands to communicate HIV status. However, some men reported that dishonesty of HIV status was a potential deterrent of using wristbands, and others noted that disclosure is a person choice, not an obligation.
Marcantonio et al. (2021)	**Sexual consent cues among sexual minority men in the United States**	United States	234 sexual minority men over the age of 18 in the United States.	Mixed methods – Social media via posts on Facebook groups for SM, emails to BLGT focused listervs, and word-of-mouth were used to recruit participants for an open-ended survey.	Six consent cues were identified: explicit verbal, explicit nonverbal, no-response signal, implicit nonverbal, virtual consent, and implicit verbal. Sexual behaviour impacted consent cue type, with explicit verbal being used. Explicit verbal consent was the most reported consent modality across all sexual behaviours. For performing or receiving oral sex, explicit nonverbal, no-response signal, and explicit nonverbal consent were most frequently used.

					Conversely, for penetrative or anal sex, explicit verbal consent was most reported. Relationship type also influenced consent. Explicit nonverbal, implicit verbal, and implicit nonverbal cues were used more often in casual sexual relationships. Virtual consent cues were also commonly reported with first time and causal relationships but were rarely used in long-term partnerships.
Martin & Coolhart (2022)	**"Because your dysphoria gets in the way of you...it affects everything." The mental, physical, and relational aspects of navigating body dysphoria and sex for trans masculine people.**	United States	10 AFAB trans masculine people.	Qualitative – Posters on transgender Facebook groups and at therapeutic clinics were used to recruit for a phenomenological interview.	The mental experience of body dysphoria led participants to physically transition. This second puberty brought on by testosterone created many positive physical and emotional effects for participants. Participants also discussed how they negotiate body dysphoria with their partners using physical boundaries (e.g., limiting touch in certain areas). Participants described the importance of partnered support and communication in reducing body dysphoria and increasing pleasure in sexual activity.
Mata et al. (2022)	**A Mixed Methods Study of Sexuality Education Experiences and Preferences Among Bisexual, Pansexual, and Queer (Bi+) Male Youth**	United States	56 Bi+ male youth aged 14-17 living in the U.S.	Mixed methods – Community based organizations, social media, and existing study participant registry maintained by the Institute of Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing at Northwestern University were used to recruit participants for an online survey and one-on-one interview.	71% of participants found that sexual health was covered in some way within school-based sexuality education. Although there was a small percentage of queer-inclusive education, most found a heteronormative focus (i.e., abstinence only, no discussion of queer inclusivity). Relationship types, kink and fetishes were excluded. Other sources for sexual health information include the internet, peers, and parents or guardians. Specified sexuality programs for bisexual youth were suggested to better inform and help build community.
McInnes et al. (2011)	**Responsibility, risk and negotiation in the discourse of gay men's group sex**	Australia	Men who engage in group sex with other men (999 surveys, 16 interviews)	Mixed methods – Data was derived from a larger study (TOMS) which included 996 quantitative surveys and 16 qualitative interviews.	Three key aspects of gay group sex encounters affect responsibility: 1) explicit verbal communication is uncommon, but there are other factors used to communicate sexual consent (“absent presence”); 2) certain sexual contexts involve “active passivity” on the part of the participants, either towards the sexual event or towards other men in the group, but there remains agency within this passivity, and 3) individuals have a shared responsibility for their own sexual decision-making and risk-taking, in order to co-create the desired “hot” sexual atmosphere.
McKenna et al. (2021a)	**Predictors of Sexual Consent Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Among Sexual Minority Cisgender and**	United States	251 cisgender and nonbinary sexual minority young adults in the United States who are comfortable answering questions about sex who	Quantitative – Social media, college campuses, non-profit organizations, and LGBTQ+ organizations were used to recruit participants for a survey.	Gender was found to be a large predictor of consent practices, specifically in that traditional masculine identification illustrated less adaptability towards consent, in part due to heteronormative/masculine sexual scripts. Nonbinary individuals, and less masculine identifying

	Nonbinary Young Adults.		had previously engaged in penetrative sex (penis/object/fingers).		cisgender men, however, were found to have more adaptive consent behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs.
McKenna et al. (2021b)	**Gender and sexual minority status as predictors of sexual consent attitudes among cisgender young adults.**	United States	310 cisgender (57 sexual minority) young adults in the United States who are comfortable answering questions about sex who had previously engaged in penetrative sex (penis/object/fingers).	Quantitative – Social media, college campuses, community groups, and MTurk were used to recruit participants for a survey.	For sexual minority individuals, consent was found to be a positive association, fewer assumptions were made, and behavioural control around consent was increased for sexual minorities as opposed to heterosexual individuals. Heterosexual men had much lower positive attitudes towards consent and made more assumptions; though assumptions about consent were also made by sexual minority men.
McKie et al. (2020)	**Is There Space for Our Stories? An Examination of North American and Western European Gay, Bi, and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men's Non-consensual Sexual Experiences.**	Canada, United States, and Western Europe	350 men who have had at least 1 consensual sexual experience with another man in adulthood and self-identify as gay, bisexual , bi-curious or Two-Spirited.	Mixed methods – MTurk hookup sites, community organizations, flyers, social media, and word of mouth were used to recruit for a survey asking both quantitative and qualitative questions.	More than half of participants noted that communication barriers could complicate exiting an unwanted sexual encounter. Participants discussed various methods for diverting an unwanted sexual encounter, such as lessening intimacy, turning the partner off, or declining the sex act. Others spoke about accepting an unwanted sexual encounter to avoid escalation. The participants often reported using less direct or nonverbal tactics to communicate sexual consent. Unclear sexual scripts make consent negotiation complicated and challenging for GBM.
Menning & Holtzman (2014)	Processes and Patterns in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Sexual Assault: A Multimethodological Assessment	United States	381 (no specification of heterosexual vs sexual minority) men and women, plus sexual minority people (oversampled for SM).	Mixed methods – Email and snowball sampling were used to recruit university students for a survey with both quantitative and open-ended questions.	Compared to women and to heterosexual men, sexual minority men are more likely to feel obligated to have unwanted sex, particularly when 1) there is some form of transactional relationship, or 2) out of a sense of internalized shame and low-self esteem.
Namaste et al. (2021)	**Willed ambiguity: An exploratory study of sexual misconduct affecting sexual minority male university students in Canada**	Canada	8 sexual violence service providers and 5 men with lived experience of sexual misconduct.	Qualitative – Word of mouth, snowball sampling, social media, print posters, and ads in local daily newspaper were used to recruit for a semi-structured interview.	Factors fostering “willed ambiguity” of the sexual misconduct of sexual minority students included societal expectations of gay sexual activity, gender norms and masculinity, and the risk of isolation or financial problems. Participants reported difficulty recognizing sexual misconduct between men due to the expectation that gay male culture is highly sexualized. Gendered power dynamics also contribute to sexual misconduct whereby those in positions of authority in the university invite students to sexualized spaces. Participants noted that refusing to participate in these networks may result in being labelled sexually conservative or their masculinity being questioned or result in social isolation or financial precarity.

Richters et al. (2012)	**Consensual Sex Between Men and Sexual Violence in Australian Prisons**	Australia	Random sample of 2,018 men in prison in NSW and Queensland.	Quantitative – Random invitation to participate in a telephone survey (random invitation but they could agree/deny, 76% response rate)	7.14% of participants reported engaging in sexual activity with another inmate, with the majority engaging only in manual sex. Reasons for engaging in sexual activity with another inmate were for pleasure, protection, or to pay for goods or a debt. 2.6% of participants said they had been forced or frightened into unwanted sexual activity in prison, some repeatedly.
Sternin et al. (2021)	**Sexual consent: Exploring the perceptions of heterosexual and non-heterosexual men**	Canada, United States, Western Europe	564 men (251 heterosexual, 313 queer).	Qualitative – Social media, MTurk, posters, and ads in dating apps were used to recruit for a survey of one open-ended question.	Both heterosexual (H) and queer men perceive sexual consent to be faster, more immediate, and less emotionally involved in queer men's sexual interactions. Ambiguous sexual scripts for queer men may also cause challenges in sexual consent negotiation, leaving them vulnerable to unwanted sexual interactions. H men were more likely to report that sexual consent negotiation is universal across H and queer populations than queer men, as queer men have been confronted with unique sexual consent and safety challenges that H men may not have had to address.
Stewart (2022)	**An exploration of sexual consent, sexual non-consent, and nonverbal sexual consent communication behaviors, amongst community stakeholders**	United States and Canada	13 sexuality researchers and 22 MSM who reported having a history of a sexual experience with another male-identified person.	Mixed methods, Delphi method (iterative survey process, to arrive at a consensus opinion of the topic at hand) Snowballing campaign	The Panel and the individual stakeholders (SHS) were largely in agreement about what constitutes sexual consent. Six categories of sexual consent qualities were generated, which emphasize mutuality, use of verbal and nonverbal behaviours, and impact of inequity on consent. There was agreement about what constitutes sexual non-consent, which involves not all parties agreeing to the sexual activity and using verbal and nonverbal cues. Participants were also largely in agreement regarding nonverbal sexual consent communication behaviours.
Wilkerson et al. (2021)	**Sexual Violence and Chemsex among Substance-Using Sexual and Gender Minorities in Texas**	Texas (United States)	1273 survey respondents (sexual and gender minority Texans over the age of 13) and 22 interviewees (substance-using sexual minority men)	Mixed Methods – Social media and recruitment through community centres for surveys. Snowball sampling used to recruit participants for interviews.	Survey results: 12.8% of participants experienced sexual violence within the 12 months prior to completing the survey. Among those reporting sexual violence, 13.2% reported no drug use with sex party attendance and 30.2% reported drug use and sex party attendance. Participants in the drug use and sex party attendance were 12.5 times more likely to experience sexual violence. Young age and a non-monosexual sexual identity predicted sexual violence. Interview results: multiple participants attributed their experiences of sexual violence or sexual assault with substance use. Participants described a predatory power dynamic in chemsex parties where the "weakest" are targeted by more powerful people. Others describe that consent negotiation is often dismissed in chemsex environments.

Results

Search Outcomes

A total of 1924 records were found through the database search. After removing duplicates, 1066 records were screened and 86 assessed at full text for eligibility. A total of 30 articles were included in the review, after excluding 56 records that did not meet our criteria. Included studies varied in study method, setting, and sample size/population. In addition to the chart details provided in Table 2, Table 3 summarizes the studies' region of origin, employed methods, and year of publication.

Table 3. Summary of Study Characteristics

Region	**n**
United States & Canada	15
United Kingdom	3
Australasia	5
United States, Canada, & Europe	3
English language online forums	2
Africa	2
Method	**n**
Qualitative (interview or open-ended survey)	16
Mixed Methods	6
Quantitative	4
Textual Analysis	3
Observational Study	1
Year	**n**
2004-2009	6
2010-2014	5
2015-2019	3
2020-2022	16

Most studies were from Anglophone countries and employed qualitative methods. There was a notable increase in publications in recent years. While we use the acronym GBTQ throughout, as this represents our populations of interest, the reviewed studies employed a variety of different terms to define their study populations: mostly variations on gay, bi and queer men (GBQ), 'sexual minority men', and occasionally, men who have sex with men (MSM). That said, the majority of participants across the studies identified as gay, bisexual, or queer. We describe this finding further in the 'Trends Over Time' section.

Main Consent-Related Topics Raised

Many of the studies explored the contextual nature of consent, both in terms of the various methods of communicating sexual dis/interest and how those methods are deployed in context-

specific ways. Half of the reviewed studies discussed different methods of communicating consent (Beres et al., 2004; Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Daroya, 2022, de la Ossa, 2016; Gaspar et al., 2021; Grov et al., 2014; Marcantonio et al., 2021; Mata et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a, 2021b; McKie et al., 2020; Menning & Holtzman, 2014; Sternin et al., 2022; Stewart et al., 2022) including: explicit verbal consent (i.e., agreeing or saying "yes"), explicit nonverbal consent (e.g., intimate touching, presenting condoms, removing clothing), no-response signaling of consent (e.g., appearing interested without resisting or verbally agreeing), implicit nonverbal consent (e.g., subtle behaviours, eye contact), implicit verbal consent (e.g., implying a sexual connotation), and virtual cues (e.g., discussing sexual interests and consenting online prior to meeting in person).[1] Across these studies, three factors were described as influencing the consent communication methods used by GBTQ men: 1) different sexual behaviours, 2) different types of sexual relationships, and 3) the location of sexual activity.

Behaviours

Regarding sexual behaviours, Marcantonio et al. (2021) observed that explicit nonverbal, no-response signaling, and explicit nonverbal gestures were most frequently used when performing or receiving oral sex, whereas explicit verbal consent was most prevalent for penetrative or anal sex. Gaspar et al. (2021) found that GBTQ men who engaged in rough sex or BDSM play tended to utilize more overt forms of consent. Sexualized drug use was another behaviour that shifted how consent was communicated and characterized. Three articles (Bourne et al., 2015; Stewart, 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2021) delved into consent dynamics within the realm of "chemsex", which involves using substances like methamphetamine to enhance sexual experiences, often within in a group setting. This literature described predatory practices within chemsex settings, where an aggressor would target the "weakest" individuals in the room and take advantage of their drugged state, penetrating individuals when they were unconscious and unable to effectively resist unwanted sex (Wilkerson et al., 2021, p. 2147). At the same time, the men in these studies described chemsex consent as a "blurry line" (Bourne et al., 2015, p. 1173). In this context, a degree of consent is implied due to participation, and the specifics of consent are not consistently revisited after initial agreement (Bourne et al., 2015; Wilkerson et al., 2021). Two articles (Brennan, 2017; Daroya, 2022) analysed online forums where GBTQ men posted about "stealthing", defined as "the removal (or alteration) of condoms and ejaculation during penetration without consent" (Daroya, 2022, p. 1). Both studies revealed varied viewpoints amongst forum users, some denouncing stealthing as inherently unethical and justifiably illegal due to its non-consensual nature, and others expressing enjoyment of stealthing as a fantasy in written material and pornography. Interestingly, other forum users suggested that stealthing might be morally acceptable in anonymous sexual contexts like bathhouses where entry is

[1] Marcantonio et al. (2021) is the article that explicitly used these 6 terms; other articles used similar terms like "verbal and nonverbal consent", "verbal and nonverbal negotiation", et cetera.

considered implicit consent, arguing that morality is not objective but rather context-dependent (Daroya, 2022, p. 7).

Relationships

Methods of communicating consent also varied based on the nature of the relationship. Notably, McKie et al. (2020) found GBTQ men use less explicit verbal communication in casual sexual relationships compared to long-term relationships. Similarly, Marcantonio et al. (2021) found that casual sexual relationships often witnessed the frequent use of explicit nonverbal, implicit verbal, and implicit nonverbal cues to convey consent. Conversely, as familiarity and intimacy deepened with a sexual partner, explicit verbal consent became more prominent.

Moreover, the dynamics of transactional relationships, defined as associations involving material exchanges beyond explicit sex work agreements, also impacted consent practices. Several studies described instances where younger men with fewer economic resources felt obligated to engage in unwanted sex with partners who provided them with material goods or resources such as money, gifts, or housing (Currier & Manel, 2014; Gear, 2005; Menning & Holtzman, 2014; Richters et al., 2012).

Location

Location of the sexual encounter was found to impact GBTQ men's consent modalities, as several articles emphasized the uniqueness of men's negotiations in sex venues, such as bathhouses or cruising sites (Brown, 2008; Braun, Terry, et al., 2009, Daroya, 2022; Gaspar et al., 2021; Grov et al., 2014; McKie et al., 2020; McInnes, 2011; Sternin et al., 2022). Consent negotiations were found to operate differently in these venues because they embrace a culture of anonymity and silence, making nonverbal negotiation more common than verbal (Daroya, 2022; McInnes, 2011). Physical gestures, eye contact, mirroring/mimicking each other's movements, and utilizing the physical space (e.g., tapping a foot under a bathroom stall) were often used as an invitation for sex (Brown, 2008; Daroya, 2022). As with chemsex contexts, entering the space was generally considered a form of implicit consent (Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Daroya, 2022).

The internet was another location that has influenced how consent is communicated, as both a venue where digitally-mediated sexual encounters unfold and as a means by which in-person encounters are arranged (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Dietzel 2021, 2022; Marcantonio et al., 2021; Sternin et al., 2022). Dietzel (2022) found that dating app platforms reflect a fluid power dynamic between men, who often report being both a sender and recipient of unwanted sexual images or advances on dating platforms. Dietzel (2022) also found that GBTQ men may disregard concerns about consent in favour of desirable or immediate sexual interactions. Marcantonio et al. (2021) found that men more often used virtual consent cues—discussing and agreeing to sexual activities online in advance of meeting—in first time and causal relationships, but rarely in long-term partnerships. Marcantonio et al. (2021) also suggested that technology

has blurred the lines of consent, as virtual consent cues do not always translate seamlessly to in-person interactions, which can result in assumptions and miscommunications regarding consent to in-person sexual activity. Men in several studies (e.g., Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; McKie et al., 2020) described situations where they felt an "implicit contract to have sex" (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009, p. 350) because they met someone from a dating/hook-up app in person after discussing sex on the app. These men described feeling an obligation to have sex with the other person, even if they did not find the partner attractive or were no longer interested in having sex upon meeting face-to-face.

Diversions

Related to consent modalities were tactics that GBTQ men had developed to divert unwanted sex. McKie et al. (2020) documented several strategies people used, such as consenting to a different act, like oral sex, in order to avoid anal intercourse or deliberately being awkward in hopes of lessening their partner's arousal and desire for them. Both McKie et al. (2020) and Ford and Becker (2020) found men used strategies to bring an unwanted sexual encounter to a close more quickly, such as working to expedite their partner's orgasm. McKie et al. (2020) and Ford and Becker (2020) also found that men sometimes conceded to unwanted sex in order to avoid violent escalation.

Sexual Scripts

A common explanatory framework throughout the reviewed studies was 'sexual scripts', a concept coined by Gagnon & Simon (1973) that describes cultural or community expectations about how sexual encounters 'ought' to proceed—who should initiate sex, what activities should be engaged in and in what order, what reactions are considered appropriate, and so on—given the broader sociocultural context that imbues sexual feelings and symbols with meaning (Beres et al. 2004; Braun, Schmidt, et al, 2009; Brennan, 2017; de la Ossa, 2016; Dietzel, 2022; Ford, 2021; Ford & Becker, 2020; Gaspar et al., 2021; Marcantonio, 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a, McKenna et al., 2021b; McKie et al., 2020; Sternin et al., 2022; Stewart, 2022). Some studies described how GBTQ people are more likely to have rejected heterosexual scripts and norms in favour of different configurations; others suggested that heteronormative scripts can infiltrate homosexual encounters. This is expanded on below, as these findings are relevant to our third query into how the reviewed studies discuss GBTQ men's consent practices and cultures. First, however, we pull back to describe how consent is defined and framed in the reviewed studies.

Defining Consent

Given the complexity and context-dependent descriptions of consent noted above, it is unsurprising that most reviewed studies did not adopt a rigid definition of sexual consent, some noting there is limited research on what constitutes sexual consent and an overall lack of consensus on what sexual consent is or how it is communicated (Sternin et al., 2022; Stewart,

2022). Gaspar et al. (2021) argued that some definitions of consent "may overstate or understate the issue, collapsing together or ignoring complex social processes" (p. 1205). Instead of providing explicit definitions, the current literature typically assumed a shared understanding of sexual consent among readers (Stewart, 2022). Some studies outlined various principles of GBTQ men's sexual consent, including "freely given" (Stewart, 2021, p. 41), "affirmative" (Ford, 2021, p. 50), and "free, specific, and retractable" (de la Ossa, 2016, p. 379). Several articles (Dietzel, 2022; Marcantonio et al., 2022; McKie et al., 2020; Sternin et al., 2022) referred to Hickman and Muehlenhard's definition, defining sexual consent as "one's freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of their sober and conscious feelings of willingness to engage in a particularly sexual behaviour, with a particular person, within a particular context sexual activity" (1999, p. 259).

The reviewed studies generally refrained from using legal definitions of sexual consent or assault as a benchmark. Several studies argued that legal frameworks often oversimplify the complexities inherent in sexual relations and neglect the nuances of communication between sexual partners (Beres et al., 2004; Daroya, 2022; Sternin et al., 2022). For example, Daroya (2022) argued that reducing sexual consent to a "juridical matter reduces human relationships into legal concerns, neglecting the complexities of sexual relations" (p. 4). Similarly, Beres et al. (2004) contended that "although legal definitions of consent are important, an understanding of sexual consent requires that researchers study how sexual partners actually communicate with one another" (p. 475).

The studies generally presented sexual consent as a multifaceted and contextual concept, and have emphasized its nuance, complexity, and relational nature (Daroya, 2022; McKenna et al., 2021a, 2021b; Sternin et al., 2022). For example, Braun, Schmidt, et al. (2009) found that "several men […] discussed experiences that, while clearly identified as unwanted, were also tinged with traces of curiosity, desire, and pleasure" (p. 357). Namaste et al. (2021) identified contextual and social factors, such as power imbalances and precarious social positions, that made consent "murky" (p. 1043). Sternin et al. (2022) argued that sexual consent's definition must encompass "both the inward (voluntary willingness) and outward (communication to another person)" dimensions (p. 513) Additionally, studies revealed that sexual consent could be expressed as a behaviour, using both verbal and non-verbal cues, and through direct and indirect means, with non-verbal approaches being particularly common among GBTQ men (Beres et al., 2004; McKie et al., 2020; Stewart, 2022). Queer sexual consent was also found to occur without explicit verbal or direct communication, such as in bathhouses or sex venues, where non-verbal cues, contextual factors, and the environment played significant roles (Fernandez-Davila, 2021; Grov et al., 2014; Marcantonio et al., 2022; McKie et al., 2020).

Rather than a strict definition of sexual consent, some studies focused on understanding the factors contributing to non-consensual experiences and situations lacking clear and voluntary

consent, including assault, coercion, and unwanted sex (Beres et al., 2004; Braun, Schmidt et al., 2009; Braun, Terry et al., 2009; Gaspar et al., 2021). For example, some studies differentiated between wanting to engage in sex and consenting to sex (Dietzel, 2022; McKie et al., 2020; Sternin et al., 2022). By exploring the dynamics of non-consensual experiences, these studies sought to understand the complexities of sexual interactions beyond a simple binary of "consensual" and "non-consensual". These studies acknowledged that consent is not always straightforward or easily defined, recognizing the importance of understanding the dynamics of non-consent for addressing issues related to sexual violence and coercion (Stewart, 2022). For example, Carmody (2005) and Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) wrote that sexual assault is "undoubtedly tied to sexual consent since sexual assault is defined as sexual behaviour in the absence of consent" (as cited in McKenna et al., 2021b, p. 1). However, some critics caution that framing certain social practices developed by queer men—such as cruising—"under the rubric of sexual coercion" can be a misrepresentation that overstates harm and may inadvertently "reproduce notions of gay sex as dangerous, the exact opposite of what gay and queer liberation politics has aimed to do" (Gaspar et al., 2021, p. 1206).

To summarize, no singular definition of sexual consent was used across studies. Legal frameworks were generally avoided, as they oversimplified complex sexual relations. Sexual consent was portrayed as multifaceted, contextual, and expressed through various verbal and non-verbal cues. Some studies focused on definitions of, and factors contributing to, non-consensual experiences as an alternative avenue to gain a better understanding of consent.

Queer Consent Cultures & Sexual Scripts

As we are interested in how articles frame GBTQ men's unique consent cultures, we tracked when and how queerness was evoked to contextualize findings. Several studies described men who are newly 'out' as more vulnerable to coercive sexual encounters for a few key reasons. Because heteronormative sexual scripts are culturally dominant, inexperienced GBTQ men may lack an idea of how a sexual encounter between men could or should unfold, and the studies discussed these men's confusion with how to communicate and progress through sexual acts. As a result, these studies asserted that GBTQ men are more likely to acquiesce to the advances of someone who is older or more sexually experienced (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Ford & Becker, 2020; Mata et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021b).

It was noted by many studies that GBTQ men have developed unique sexual scripts for navigating sex venues and cruising grounds, but men who are younger or newly out have limited knowledge regarding the sexual norms of these spaces, which may carry a level of implied consent for sexual advances (Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Ford, 2021; McKie et al., 2020; Sternin et al., 2022). A few articles suggested that this is exacerbated by the perceived lack of non-sexualized spaces available to those who have recently come out or who are seeking community

connection, since venues tailored to GBTQ men are often bars, nightclubs, bathhouses, or saunas (Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Sternin et al., 2022).

Being in the closet and having concern about being outed was cited as another factor that could make GBTQ men vulnerable to coercion (Aspin et al., 2009; Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Currier & Manuel, 2014). Several men in Ford and Becker's study (2020) reported engaging in anonymous sex to decrease their risk of being outed, which increased their risk of unwanted sex. These articles described homophobia and stigma as drivers of exploitation, as men pursue sex in a secretive manner that may involve unsafe locations or increase the likelihood people will use blackmail as a means of pressure. Currier and Manuel (2014) noted that, in countries where homosexuality is criminalized, this is compounded by fear of legal repercussions. Even without an explicit threat of being outed, internalized shame and low self-esteem were also uncovered as factors leading GBTQ men to feel pressured to engage in unwanted sex (Aspin, 2009; Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Ford & Becker, 2020; Gaspar et al., 2021; Menning & Holtzman, 2014).

Gender roles in GBTQ men's sexual dynamics were also raised by several studies as influencing sexual consent and coercive practices. For example, cis men with a more masculine presentation were read as hypersexual and expected to initiate sex and be the insertive partner, while those with a less masculine or more feminine presentation were expected to be the receptive partner, felt less able to refuse sex, or felt more pressure to ensure their partner's orgasm (Currier & Manuel, 2011; McKie et al., 2020; Ford & Becker, 2020). In Gaspar et al.'s (2021) study, trans men having sex with cis men shared concerns that their socialization as women led them to be more compliant to the desires of their partners. Some studies suggested that heteronormative sexual scripts of masculine-dominant-active and feminine-submissive-passive may be transferred onto homosexual encounters. They argued that this is especially likely among men who are more newly 'out' or less familiar with alternative queer sexual scripts (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Ford, 2021; Ford & Becker, 2020; McKenna et al., 2021a, 2021b; McKie et al., 2020) or among men who engage in "compensatory behaviour by oversubscribing to extreme masculine attitudes" including sexual aggressiveness to combat the insinuation that a queer identity threatens their masculinity (Willer et al., 2013, as cited in McKenna et al., 2021b, p. 10).

Racial dynamics were discussed in a few papers. Aspin et al.'s (2009) study among Māori men found that sexual violence was used as a mechanism to "maintain hierarchical power relations" (p. 41) inflected by racial and colonial inequality, as perpetrators may exploit factors such as ethnicity, age, and social status to normalize inequality and assert dominance. Further, Māori men who were assaulted were less likely to access support because health and social services lack culturally appropriate programming that incorporate a Māori worldview (Aspin et al., 2009). Dietzel (2021) and Gaspar et al. (2021) also noted how racial fetishization influences the way GBTQ men navigate sexual consent. In both studies, racialized participants described how

racism shapes the abusive and coercive sexual dynamics they've encountered, such as being referred to by racial slurs or sexualized according to racist stereotypes of aggressive Black masculinity.

Several articles described how GBTQ men actively resist heteronormative sexual scripts and develop alternatives. Beres et al. (2004) posited that queer people who transgress gender norms may be more aware of gender stereotypes, which enables and encourages them to resist sexual scripts that hinge on gendered sexual roles, for example, with men being more flexible because there is no clear "gatekeeper" role like women play in heterosexual sexual interactions. Sternin et al. (2022) similarly argued that sexual minorities are more sensitive to power dynamics on account of their marginalization and may create more egalitarian partnerships and/or efficient approaches to consent as a result. McKenna et al. (2021b) posited that sexual minorities have less assumptions about and a more positive attitude towards consent, in part because they are operating outside of rigid heterosexual scripts. While the ambiguity that results from working outside heteronormative scripts might create opportunities for confusion and coercion, as noted above, it can also open space up for more flexible sexual expectations and explicit consent negotiations.

Some studies reported that the GBTQ men felt pressure to always be ready and willing to have sex because of a cultural insinuation that gay culture is synonymous with hypersexuality. This made it more difficult for people to reject sexual advances and more likely to engage in sex that, while not physically coerced, was unwanted (Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Dietzel, 2021, 2022; Ford & Becker, 2021; Gaspar et al., 2021; Grov et al., 2014; McKie et al., 2020). De la Ossa (2016) argued that this presumption of gay hypersexuality and an "uncontrollable" desire for sex is a "common misconception[n] about sexual violence" (p. 378). This stereotype does not only mischaracterize all GBTQ men as potential sexual predators, but simultaneously excuses violence as an "understandable mistake that any man might make, ultimately shifting responsibility for sexual violence onto victims/survivors" (p. 379). In some cases, these same pressures to be hypersexual made study participants less likely to identify coercive sex when it happened (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Ford & Becker, 2020).

Trends Over Time

The most apparent trend that our scoping review of literature on GBTQ men's consent revealed was the recent growth in literature. As noted in Table 3 above, there were as many articles published between 2020-2022 as had been published throughout the previous 15 years. Additionally, studies in this field became increasingly intersectional in their analyses. More recent studies of consent among GBTQ men were more likely to examine race and gender (e.g., trans and cis), or to acknowledge their failure to do so.

In keeping with broader sociopolitical changes and research norms, most of the earlier studies in our sample did not specify if men were cis or trans, and some actively excluded trans and Two-Spirit individuals (Beres et al., 2004; Grov et al., 2015; Menning & Holtzman, 2014). More recent studies specified cis versus trans participants (Dietzel, 2021, 2022; Marcantonio, 2021; Wilkerson, 2021), focused directly on trans experiences (Martin & Coolhart, 2022), or engaged in a more nuanced analysis of gender dynamics, beyond the influence of hegemonic masculinity upon an exclusively cisgendered sample (de la Ossa, 2016; Gaspar, 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a, 2021b; Mata, 2022). No studies identified any participants as Two-Spirit, though Aspin and colleagues (2009) study of Māori men in Aotearoa/New Zealand discussed the need for sexual healthcare and resources that are culturally appropriate for the Indigenous *takatāpui* community.

Racially, most of the studies—regardless of year—had predominantly white samples, except for one focused on Māori experiences (Aspin et al., 2009), one study from Malawi (Currier & Manuel, 2014) and one from South Africa (Gear, 2005). Very few of the studies supplied a racial analysis (exceptions include Aspin et al., 2009; Currier & Manuel, 2014; Dietzel, 2021; Gaspar, 2021). More recent studies were more likely to measure and report racial demographics, whereas some earlier pieces did not, were more likely to acknowledge the lack of diversity in their sample and their failure to produce meaningful racial analyses, and were more likely to call for research to address this gap (e.g., McKenna, 2021a, 2021b; Martin & Coolhart, 2022; Mata, 2022; Stewart, 2022).

Discussion

Beres et al.'s (2004) original call for more study of consent practices among non-heterosexual populations appears to have been heeded, as this review found a growing body of work produced about GBTQ men. In addressing our first research question, we found that a common topic in this literature was the myriad ways that consent is communicated in different GBTQ spaces, very often in non-verbal or other non-explicit fashions. Several contextual elements that impact how consent is communicated were raised, such as the type of sexual behaviour involved, the type of relationship between the sexual partners, and the location in which the sexual activity takes place. The contextual nature of consent is not unique to GBTQ men, however. Studies of primarily heterosexual university students have repeatedly shown that they mostly operate on implied or inferred consent cues, but that explicit verbal consent is preferred for novel sex acts, for vaginal or anal intercourse, or in newer relationships (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). The main difference between heterosexual and queer use of non-explicit consent cues is how the different sexual scripts play out: heterosexual scripts place men as initiators and women as gatekeepers, whereby the sex is considered consensual until she resists in a sufficiently explicit manner (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). On the other hand, queer men do not have a single clear sexual script

within which to interpret non-verbal cues, enabling both more freedom and more opportunity for misunderstanding (Dietzel, 2023).

Our second research question asked how consent is defined in these studies and the implications this might have for understanding sexual assault more broadly. While there was no consensus across studies, there were trends and similarities in how consent was defined, and many authors cited Hickman and Muehlenhard's (1999) definition of consent. Inconsistency can make it difficult to compare findings across consent studies, but it also represents and demonstrates the contextuality and subjectivity of consent. Various scales have been developed to 'measure' consent among both hetero- and homosexual populations in a consistent and unified manner, but these scales have been criticized as lacking in their ability to capture context and nuance. A call for more nuanced qualitative and mixed-methods work was previously named as an important path for future research (Muehlenhard et al., 2016) that seems to have been heeded here. These studies are more descriptive than prescriptive: researchers intended to examine queer men's consent practices but did not aim to impose their conceptualizations of consent on participants' experiences to (in)advertantly characterize them as consensual or non-consensual. Most studies describe how people are 'doing' consent (or not), how this changes by context, and how similar experiences might be interpreted differently by different people.

The body of reviewed literature problematizes the theory that sexual assault is the result of miscommunication, especially how this theory is shaped by the "male sexual drive discourse" which "sees men as sexually insatiable and male sexuality as naturally an uncontrollable drive" (Hollway, 1984, p. 63), a force that can be uniquely compounded when discussing men's sexual encounters with each other. For example, de la Ossa (2016) critiqued a corpus of consent materials targeting queer men for how these materials frame sexual assault as "mistakes" that occur "in the heat of the moment" due to unintentional communication breakdowns driven by men's 'naturally' insatiable sexual desire (p. 374). Several other pieces noted that the insatiable 'sex drive' discourse is accepted wisdom among many GBTQ men, with often detrimental outcomes (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Braun, Terry et al., 2009; Dietzel, 2021, 2022; Ford & Becker, 2020, McKie et al., 2020, Sternin et al., 2022). Similarly, Namaste et al. (2020) pushed back against uniquely queer forms of evasion, wherein the "acceptance of behaviours that could be deemed problematic was sometimes established through the invocation of 'queer', something assumed to be politically radical, anti-establishment, and anti-normative" (p. 1051).

There is little reference to legal definitions or imperatives in the reviewed articles. None operationalized consent according to legal terms. Even the articles investigating behaviour that is illegal in many jurisdictions (e.g., chemsex and stealthing) do so without exercising reactive condemnation, actively resisting the dominant framework of consent-as-contract. For example, in discussing stealthing, Daroya (2022) wrote that treating stealthing as a legal problem is "overly simplistic since it reduces human interactions into legal problems" and instead of

"establishing a normative argument about stealthing and consent, I aim to examine how consent is articulated and how it emerges within a wider relational field of human and nonhuman entities" (p. 2).

While the reviewed articles did not espouse legal thresholds or definitions for sexual consent, and many noted the shortcomings of carceral processes as evidenced by GBTQ men's hesitancy to report sexual assault to police, none presented an explicitly anti-carceral analysis of consent discourse (see Ison, 2019 and the 2023 collection "Unsafe Words", edited by Buggs & Hoppe, for many examples). Public conversations about consent are often shaped by white carceral feminism, a school of feminism "that looks to the coercive power of the state—police, criminal courts, prisons—to achieve gender justice" (Srinivasan, 2021, p. 159). Within mainstream culture, this has manifested, for example, in calls for harsher punishments as a deterrent to sexual assault (Levine & Meiners, 2020), or in pressure on universities and colleges to adopt affirmative consent policies that critics argue "criminalize everyone" by insisting consent must be established through explicit verbal assent to be considered valid (Muehlenhard et al., 2016, p. 482). Much has been written about how carceral 'solutions' to sexual violence and consent violations are not only ineffective at reducing harm but actually *cause* enormous harm to marginalized communities because they are founded on upholding white supremacist, ableist, cisheterosexist, and classist power structures (Bernstein, 2010; Critical Resistance and Incite!, 2003). This is of special pertinence to sexually marginalized communities given the historically fraught relationship queer people, kinky people, and sex workers have with policing (Buggs & Hoppe, 2023; Edenfield, 2019).

Studying sexual violence through an anti-carceral framework both confronts harm caused by the carceral state, while also setting the groundwork for more effective interventions into violence prevention. Much of the research we reviewed focuses on the experience of being coerced, assaulted, or victimized, rather than the experiences of perpetrating such coercion and violence. This limits our ability to unpack why and how assault happens (Gaspar, 2021). While a focus on victimization can provide valuable information on the impacts of sexual violence, it can also implicitly reinforce victim-blaming logics that concentrate on how to 'not get raped' rather than on how to 'not rape'. An anti-carceral landscape might be more conducive to doing research from the perspective of perpetrating sexual violence, as it would create a safer environment for GBTQ men (and others) to speak of their experiences causing harm. This work is necessary to go beyond simply understanding how consent operates in ideal circumstances, to understanding what is necessary to address the harms of consent violations.

Regarding our third research question concerned with how articles frame GBTQ men's unique experiences of consent, many of the studies describe consent cultures that would not meet most normative or legal thresholds of consent because they are not explicit, verbal, or sober. That said, heterosexuals are not typically operating along these lines either: research shows their

descriptions of consent "seem to be influenced by legal definitions and/or affirmative consent policies, reflecting the idea that consent is mutual agreement made while unimpaired by alcohol and drugs", but they do not actually behave accordingly (Muehlenhard et al., 2016, p. 474). For GBTQ communities, however, the practices of silent and covert consent negotiations found in bathhouses and cruising grounds stem less from heteronormative sexual scripts, and were instead developed in response to the criminalization of homosexuality (Daroya, 2022) and are frequently cited as honourable cultural artifacts of resistance (e.g., Brown, 2008).

The legacy of criminalization and pathologization that has borne GBTQ men's consent cultures also makes research describing these same sexual practices delicate work. Interrogations of 'gay culture' are often disparaging, rife with stereotypes of 'perversion' and 'deviancy', causing concrete harm when reflected in media and public discourse (Hindes & Fileborn, 2021). For one, research that takes 'gay men', 'queer men', or 'GBTQ men' as its subject (the present study included) can imply that these are homogenous communities, flattening varied and diverse experiences. Secondly, a focus on sexual consent and sexual assault among GBTQ people can insinuate that queer men's cultures are inherently dangerous, risky, and harmful, or that queer men are deviant, criminal, or predatory (or, simultaneously, pathetic victims)—old ideas that have long been used against all queer people and which are seeing an especially troubling resurgence in recent times (Braun, Schmidt, et al., 2009; Gaspar et al., 2021; Namaste et al., 2020). When queers are perceived as sexually excessive and deviant "it is only a short step to concluding that sexual assault is a part of queer territory" (Ison, 2019, p. 161).

Many of the reviewed articles included a strong caveat demonstrating awareness that their research risks pathologizing GBTQ men's sex, and an assertion that their work should not be interpreted this way (Braun, Terry, et al., 2009; Currier & Manuel, 2014; Ford, 2021; Gaspar et al., 2021; Namaste et al., 2021). If anything, the studies that refer to sexual cultures or "scripts" were much more likely to pathologize hegemonic *hetero*masculinity, and the influence this has on sex between men and transmasculine people. Sexual harms were often interpreted as the product of heterosexual scripts being transferred onto the queer context and normalizing problematic dominant/submissive dynamics.

At the same time, the articles in our review are not naïvely celebratory. As noted above, Namaste et al. (2020) pointed out that "there are often implicit assumptions operating in 'queer' culture that normalize certain [problematic] behaviours" because "certain articulations of 'queerness' assume that all expressions of sexuality are inherently radical" (Namaste et al., 2020, p. 1051). Dietzel (2021), Gaspar et al. (2021), and Aspin et al. (2009) highlighted the racism central to many sexual spaces and practices inhabited by GBTQ men, including digital spaces. Many articles also discussed how gay clubs and sex venues can be difficult to navigate safely and confidently, especially for people who are newly out (Braun, Terry et al. 2009; Ford, 2021; McKie et al., 2020; Sternin et al., 2022). Others pointed out that the sexual harms GBTQ men

experience are often dismissed because sociocultural norms of masculinity fail to imagine men as potential victims of sexual violence (Braun, Terry et al., 2009; Menning & Holtzman, 2014; Namaste et al., 2021; Richters et a., 2012; Wilkerson et al., 2021).

Relatedly, and a point of caution we wish to advance, is that some articles allude to the tendency to dismiss sexual violence between men by suggesting that GBTQ men sometimes fail to 'correctly' label their experiences as sexual assault (Ford & Becker, 2020; Gaspar et al., 2021; Namaste, 2020; McKie et al., 2020; Bourne et al., 2015; Currier & Manuel, 2014; Gear, 2005). It is important to critique the forces that cause GBTQ men to downplay sexual violence. At the same time, care must be taken to avoid insinuating that sexual assault is self-evident, and that GBTQ men who describe their experiences otherwise are victims of 'false consciousness'—the concept that a subordinated class unwittingly embodies the ideology of the ruling class due to a fundamental misunderstanding of power and social relations, accepting their oppression as natural and self-evident (Marx & Engels, 1932). Claims of false consciousness often serve to infantilize already oppressed groups, characterizing them as unable to accurately perceive their own experiences and social conditions, which can justify paternalist interventions into their lives (for example, the 'end-demand' model of sex work law reform, Belak & Bennett, 2016; Bruckert, 2015; McBride et al., 2021).

Finally, regarding our fourth research question about temporal trends, we found an increasing amount of literature regarding GBTQ men's consent practices with a notable increase in publications since 2019. This was likely spurred by the intensified public discussion of sexual violence, sexual ethics, and consent practices that occurred in 2017 following the #MeToo movement (Jaffe, 2018) alongside the critique that queer populations were being left out of that same discussion (Ison, 2019). Over time, the reviewed studies increasingly included and analyzed additional factors beyond sexuality. Smaller research samples are conducive to producing nuanced, qualitative data, but they are not generalizable and cannot account for how consent practices and coercion experiences vary across intersectional lines and consent mediums (Dietzel, 2023). While research samples often continue to be predominantly white and cisgendered, there is widespread appreciation that factors such race, class, gender identity and presentation, citizenship, ability, age, and so on inflect how consent is communicated and how coercion is experienced. The call for more research to unravel these factors has been heeded by recent work regarding, for example, sexual racism among GBTQ men (Dietzel, 2022b); meanings and struggles around sexual consent for sexual minorities more broadly (Worsdale & Kosenko, 2024), and how racial, cultural, sexual, and gender factors influence consent concepts and communications among emerging adults at large (Baldwin-White & Christensen, 2021).

Strengths and Limitations

To our knowledge, this is the first scoping review of how the literature frames the consent practices of GBTQ men, rather than a related variable such as sexualized drug use, sexual assault, or intimate partnership violence. Focusing on the nature of consent itself allows a high-level assessment of how consent is framed, discussed, and operationalized, which also has implications for how violations of consent—and therefore how sexual coercion, violence, and assault—are understood and addressed. That said, a limitation of the literature is that there is no consistent understanding of consent, which challenges any attempt to effectively gather, summarize, and analyze literature on the subject. While we believe it is generally positive that consent and coercion are treated in a nuanced way, this does complicate comparative and review studies.

A limitation of this review is that our analysis has not engaged deeply with the complexities of the different subject positions under the 'GBTQ' umbrella, which represents many diverse communities and experiences. This is partly due to the results of our literature search. While research is diversifying, most of the reviewed material focused on (presumably cisgendered) gay and bisexual men. Some research recruited men who have sex with men (MSM) who may not identify as GBTQ and may not have any connection to queer culture and spaces, but we have not assessed if and how these differences played out in study findings.

An additional limitation is that we may have missed interesting studies, especially those appearing within monographs, edited collections, and anthologies that may not be indexed in the databases we searched. While we did not apply geography or language limits to our search, we only employed English-language search terms. Some non-English articles were retrieved, and their abstracts were translated, but these did not meet inclusion criteria. As a result, the reviewed material is largely limited to predominantly Anglophone countries. Searches in other languages would be a welcome effort to de-center the primacy of Anglophone scholarship and perspectives (Chambers et al., 2018; Hohti & Truman, 2021). Finally, we did not conduct a quality assessment and cannot speak to the quality of the included studies.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This scoping review sought to analyze the current literature examining sexual consent among GBTQ men: how it is defined, described, and practiced. The findings of this review suggest that this growing body of work problematizes normative notions of consent by pushing back against binary definitions of consent, legalistic thresholds of harm, and the notion that sexual assault primarily results from miscommunication. It also takes a balanced approach to both celebrating and problematizing aspects of sexual cultures common to GBTQ communities and spaces,

recognizing that neither a simplistic and uncritical 'sex positivity', nor an overly binary understanding of consent, can do justice to the realities of sexual consent and violence.

While problematizing legal definitions and interpretations of sexual consent, the reviewed literature did not engage directly with anti-carceral politics. We feel there is room for more consent research that applies an explicitly anti-carceral orientation to its analysis and understanding of how sexual consent and sexual violence are conceived, defined, and articulated. Future study in this area might explore if, and how, carceral logics inform GBTQ (and other) people's experiences of sexual consent and violence. Researchers in this field should also continue the current intersectional trajectory and delve into how different subjectivities of gender, race, sexuality, age, class, ability, and so forth further inflect experiences of consent (and non-consent).

In efforts to understand consent violations, future research should take on the challenge of asking people about sexual harms they have caused, rather than only focusing on people's experiences of being harmed. This goal also involves research and activism aimed at creating a culture where it is safe for people to unpack harms they have committed, with an outcome of understanding and restitution, rather than vilification and punishment. Feminist Black, Indigenous, and other communities of colour have long developed and documented anti-carceral forms of accountability and transformative justice to address sexual harms (e.g. Chen, Dulani, & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016), and research projects might consider how they can fold these same principles into their design.

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