

Women's Safety & Justice Taskforce

Community Attitudes to Sexual Consent

Research Report 2022



Contents

	page
Executive summary	3
Research background & approach	9
How does the community approach the topic of sexual consent?	16
How is consent generally understood?	21
How can consent be communicated?	23
When is consent needed?	26
Who is responsible for consent?	32
How does alcohol influence perceptions of consent?	39
Other insights surrounding rape myths	43
Sexual consent education	49
Conclusions & future research considerations	55



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1)

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The overall objective of the research is to explore current community understanding, attitudes and behaviours towards sexual consent in Queensland. The research involved conduct of 14 focus groups that included a total of 94 Queensland residents aged 18 and over across Queensland between late March and April 2022.

A content and language warning is given for this report. In line with the topic of sexual consent it includes references to sexual assault and violence. Community member quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate findings and in some cases use explicit language and/or recount past experiences. Support is available and key support service contact details are listed on page 15.

HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY APPROACH THE TOPIC OF SEXUAL CONSENT?

Knowledge and confidence in discussing consent varies across the community. Some find it difficult to express their views on the topic or find the right words and can be self-conscious about saying the 'wrong' thing amongst peers.

Society's understanding of sexual consent is thought to have improved and advanced in recent years due to discussions about sex, and consequently sexual consent, becoming more socialised.

However, generational differences in confidence of speaking on the topic appear present across the community.

Across age groups, issues of sexual consent are thought to be more relevant to single people or people engaging in 'hook-up' culture and it is acknowledged that these days there are greater perceived risks of reputational damage and prosecution when navigating sexual consent.

When community members refer to non-consensual sexual activity, the term 'sexual assault' is commonly believed to refer to a spectrum of non-consensual sexual behaviour, with rape being considered the most extreme form of sexual assault.

When referring to a sexual assault, many community members assume the extreme of rape, when there is an absence of further details available.

Sexual assault allegations are considered very serious claims that will negatively affect the lives of both parties. It is a commonly held assumption that if the accused is found not guilty, the allegation will still negatively impact them for the rest of their life.

When referring to sexual assault allegations, community members often focus on comprehending the situation with the intent to understand how clearly sexual consent was communicated.

There is a perception that it is unfair to label someone as having committed a sexual assault if they weren't made aware that the sexual act was non-consensual.

HOW IS CONSENT GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD?

Community members are generally confident in their own understanding of consent on a conceptual level. However, they acknowledge that in real life sexual consent is not a black and white concept and can be a difficult 'grey' area to navigate.

At an overall level, sexual consent is perceived to be permission between parties to undertake and participate in sexual activity. It is considered a form of communication and respect between people and is always necessary when undertaking a sexual act.

Additionally, on a conceptual level, it is perceived that sexual consent:

- Can be communicated both verbally and through body language
- Needs to be continuously monitored throughout a sexual act
- Involves both parties having responsibility for ensuring the sexual activity is consensual
- Can be withdrawn during a sexual act.

However, several real-world situational factors impact expectations of sexual consent and contradict or challenge the community's conceptual understanding.

Situational factors that influence perceptions of consent include:

- How well each party knows the other
- Whether the sexual acts are new or considered intense
- How far the sexual activity has progressed.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (2)

HOW CAN CONSENT BE COMMUNICATED?

On a conceptual level, it is believed that sexual consent can be communicated in a variety of ways, including verbally and physically through body language. However, verbal and physical consent are thought to have varying degrees of clarity.

Verbal communication is commonly perceived as the clearest form of consent and consequently the clearest form of refusal or withdrawal of consent.

Body language while considered a legitimate form of consent is contentious as it is considered subjective and at risk of being misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Expectations also exist in how consent should be communicated based on how well the parties know one another.

Body language is considered more appropriate to communicate consent for parties in a relationship or who know each other well, as they are expected to be familiar and more accurate at reading each other's body language.

Verbal consent is considered more appropriate if the parties don't know one another well, such as casual sex or new relationships, as these parties aren't familiar with each other's body language and therefore the risk of misinterpretation of body language is perceived to be higher.

WHEN IS SEXUAL CONSENT NEEDED?

On a conceptual level, it is believed that consent needs to be monitored throughout a sexual act. However, some community members question the feasibility of reading body language throughout a sexual act.

Some believe that as a sexual act progresses, it is feasible for parties to get caught up in the heat of the moment and miss or misinterpret body language consent cues.

Most community members believe that consent can only be given in the moment and cannot be assumed based on factors such as prior behaviour or the clothing someone wears.

However, some believe that consent can partially be assumed, based on prior sexually explicit behaviour, such as 'sexting' or sending nude images, until indicated otherwise.

Conceptually it is believed that sexual consent can be withdrawn at any point during a sexual act. However, there are mixed opinions about when consent can be withdrawn.

For most, it is strongly felt that sexual consent can be withdrawn at any point during a sexual act.

However, some community members perceive that there is a point during sex beyond which consent can no longer be withdrawn, but had trouble articulating when this point is.

Again, while conceptually there is an understanding that consent can be withdrawn, there are also expectations around how it is withdrawn in real-world scenarios.

Many in the community expressed an expectation that if consensual sexual activity is underway, and a party changes their mind and withdraws their consent, the withdrawal needs to be communicated clearly, through explicit body language or verbal communication.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSENT?

On a conceptual level, it is strongly felt that both or all parties are responsible for ensuring sexual activity is consensual. However, in reality, once there is initial consent, it appears the onus falls on the party who is withdrawing consent.

It is also commonly expected that communication will escalate to verbal or explicit physical refusal in situations of withdrawal or refusal of consent, such as pushing or slapping, if other cues are not recognised.

While conceptually, both parties are considered responsible for ensuring consensual sexual activity, some community members acknowledge not all are equal in their ability to express consent.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (3)

It is common for women and LGBTIQ+ community members to acknowledge that communicating consent or a lack of consent requires confidence and agency, which not all in the community have in equal share. Those in domestic violence relationships, young people, in particular young women, are often associated with being most at risk of lacking the confidence or agency to give informed consent.

In addition, it is also recognised that consent requires an understanding of what they are consenting to (informed consent). Women and parents of teens often express concern about young people and sexually inexperienced people lacking the life experience or sexual knowledge to give informed consent.

Amongst men, little discussion was had of the confidence and agency required to give and refuse consent, suggesting these factors are not as top of mind amongst the men in the community, and education may be required.

Social pressures are also seen to be influencing factors across men and women regarding giving or refusing consent.

Young women and parents with teens or young adult children spoke of the social and personal pressure young people can feel to engage in sexual acts and how this can make saying no or refusing consent more difficult. Some men in the community acknowledge specific social pressures that could impact men's ability to refuse or withdraw consent.

Women and LGBTIQ+ community members also appear more knowledgeable about how power dynamics and imbalances, such as age and authority, can complicate the ability to give consent.

Amongst men, acknowledgment of power dynamics influencing someone giving or refusing consent is limited in discussions to a man's physical strength potentially intimidating a woman. This suggests the influence of power dynamics on consent are not top of mind amongst men, and education may be required.

Suspicious are raised for some men and women when a woman consents in the moment and later claims the sex was non-consensual. These community members become suspicious that the woman regretted a sexual encounter rather than it being an issue of sexual consent. This view is more likely to be expressed amongst those less attuned to the influence of power dynamics on giving informed consent.

While both parties are considered responsible for ensuring sexual activity is consensual, stereotypes are thought to exist in society that place a greater onus on women as receivers of sexual advances to communicate or clarify consent.

Many community members acknowledge that in real life, a convention exists of the initiator 'trying something on' and the onus falling on the receiver of sexual advances to either confirm or refuse consent.

In addition, a heteronormative gender stereotype is believed to exist within society, that men typically initiate sex and seek consent, and women, as the receivers of sexual advances, give consent.

Through discussions, it was also observed that community members often defaulted to asking questions about how the woman informed the man of her withdrawal or refusal of consent rather than asking questions about how the man confirmed or gauged consent. This further suggests a stereotype exists where the onus of consent falls on the woman.

HOW DOES ALCOHOL INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF CONSENT?

Alcohol consumption is not considered a valid excuse for sexual assault. However, community members struggle to articulate how claims of sexual assault should be navigated when alcohol is involved.

Alcohol consumption is considered to make the communication and understanding of sexual consent more problematic and, therefore, the ability to assign fault more contentious.

It is generally agreed that a person can be too drunk to give consent. Again, however, community members struggle to articulate how to identify someone as too drunk to consent, beyond extremes of alcohol consumption.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (4)

When someone is tipsy, they are generally considered capable of consent, and when someone is slurring their words, stumbling or passed out, it is generally assumed they are incapable of giving consent. However, community members are unsure how to navigate sexual consent between these ends of the spectrum of intoxication.

On a conceptual level, all community members agree that the sober or more sober person has greater responsibility when it comes to gauging consent. However, they acknowledge that this implies an ability to identify greater sobriety, which can be challenging.

People can react to alcohol differently, making identifying who is the more sober party difficult in real life. Community members can also easily envisage how a sober person may not have full control of a situation when alcohol is involved, therefore challenging the concept of the sober person having more responsibility.

OTHER INSIGHTS SURROUNDING RAPE MYTHS

Attitudes to sexual consent do not change if the parties are husband and wife.

All community members are firm in their own belief that a relationship between husband and wife does not influence the ability for either party to give or refuse consent. However, some acknowledge they think some within society do not hold this belief.

Freezing during sex is not unanimously considered a clear refusal or withdrawal of consent.

A spectrum exists in how community members consider freezing during a sexual act. On one end of the spectrum, they consider it a clear sign of refusal or withdrawal of consent.

Others consider it to be an indicator of needing to re-confirm consent. Some at the other end of the spectrum consider freezing an unclear form of refusal or withdrawal of consent.

A spectrum exists within the community of how a delay in reporting sexual assault is interpreted, and this impacts perceptions of a woman's believability.

Some community members appear more trauma-informed and understand that it may take time for someone to report an assault.

For these community members, a delay in reporting does not impact the believability of a woman's sexual assault claim.

However, others in the community appear to struggle to understand why a woman may delay her reporting and this leads some to be suspicious of ulterior motives motivating sexual assault allegations.

Suspicious raised about a delayed sexual assault allegation are:

- Why she might be reporting the sexual assault now rather than earlier?
- Whether revenge might be motivating her?
- Whether she might be financially motivated by the idea of receiving hush money through settlements?

Women appear to be more knowledgeable of potential barriers to reporting sexual assault than men.

Potential barriers to reporting sexual assault were not brought up in discussions among men, suggesting barriers to reporting are not as top of mind for men, and education may be required.

Rape myths about women's sexual assault allegations being motivated by fame or financial benefit or regretful sexual encounters appear to be present within the community.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (5)

SEXUAL CONSENT EDUCATION

Generally, the community believes consent is learnt through several sources, such as:

- Parents and family role models
- Life and sexual experience
- Friends and peers
- News, entertainment and social media reporting of sexual assault cases.

Very few community members recall learning about sexual consent at school. Amongst those that do, their sex education experiences varied and specific education on sexual consent is considered limited.

Educative metaphors of sexual consent are being consumed within the community; however, to varying degrees. Several younger community members have been indirectly or directly consuming sexual consent media, often in sexual consent metaphors, such as the *Tea and Consent* video.

Some younger women and LGBTIQ+ community members report seeking out and engaging with articles and podcasts about sexual consent. Those consuming specific sexual consent media, such as articles and podcasts, reflect that it has been key in informing their understanding and opinions about consent.

While not considered relevant for their personal learning about consent, pornography is thought to influence younger and sexually inexperienced people's understanding of consent in negative ways.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATING ABOUT SEXUAL CONSENT

Parents and family role models and schools are considered to have the largest responsibility when it comes to education about sexual consent.

Parents and role models are considered responsible for educating children about sexual consent. However, it is acknowledged that not all parents or households are appropriately equipped to teach children about sexual consent.

A key perceived strength of schools educating children about sexual consent is that schools provide the opportunity to standardise consent messaging and education. However, some felt that independent teaching professionals (as opposed to regular classroom teachers) would be better suited for such an important but sensitive topic.

An appetite is expressed for social marketing and messaging around consent within the community.

Consent is considered a legitimate social issue that warrants communication. Several community members compared this topic to other social issues addressed by marketing campaigns, such as drink driving and road safety. A role for the government is often seen in sexual consent messaging in either an ownership or supportive sense.



RESEARCH BACKGROUND & APPROACH



Research background and objectives

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established by the Queensland Government in March 2021 as an independent, consultative taskforce.

The Taskforce's terms of reference provide a broad remit to examine the experience across the criminal justice system of women and girls, both as victims and offenders. The Taskforce is to provide a report on its findings and recommendations to the Attorney-General on this part of its work by June 2022.

Women and girls in Queensland are significantly over-represented as victims of sexual offences (rape, attempted rape and other offences involving sexual violence).

Community attitudes that condone, justify, trivialise or downplay violence against women contribute to the prevalence of violence against women.

The Taskforce will be considering the need for cultural and attitudinal change across all sectors of society to improve women and girls' experience of the criminal justice system as victims of sexual offences.

To this end, this research aims to explore current community understanding of, and attitudes and behaviours towards sexual consent in Queensland.

The Taskforce will use the outcomes of this research to help inform its consideration on how to improve women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice system.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Taskforce identified that the research should support consideration of the following:

- a) The level of acceptance of 'rape myths' and how this contributes to the understanding of sexual consent
- b) The likelihood of blaming the victim or minimising the incident
- c) How community understanding and attitudes towards sexual consent are formed
- d) Community attitudes about who is responsible for informing children and young people about sexual consent
- e) If, and how, emerging societal factors such as pornography and dating apps may be contributing to community attitudes and prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls
- f) If, and how, community attitudes create barriers to preventing women and girls from reporting sexual offences
- g) How best to inform community understanding of, and attitudes and behaviours towards sexual consent



Research and participant recruitment approach

RESEARCH APPROACH

To address the research objectives a program was designed involving 14 focus groups with members of the Queensland community. The groups were conducted with specific audiences or segments who were identified as requiring attention within the study. These groups were identified by the Taskforce as those where there may be gaps in terms of participation in other consultation activities.

The following segments were targeted for participation:

General population groups

- Young adults aged 18-21
- Adults aged 22-29
- Adults aged 30-39
- Adults aged 40-54
- Adults aged 55 and over

Specific population groups

- First Nations (FN) peoples
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex & Queer (LGBTIQ+) people

Other specific audience groups of interest were represented within the general population groups, including people from Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and people living with a disability.

LGBTIQ+ groups were structured based on gender identification. Participants expressed comfort levels with taking part in a focus group of a single gender.

In designing an approach, consideration was given to the fact that gender differences in terms of awareness, attitudes and behaviours may be pronounced in a number of these groupings. For this reason, the focus groups were structured along gender lines, such that there were 7 groups with men and 7 groups with women. Furthermore, to provide

the most appropriate environment for participants to provide honest opinions on the topic without concern about the impact of their comments on people of another gender, the gender of the moderator was matched to gender of the participants.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT APPROACH

Given the comprehensive set of other consultation activities undertaken by the Taskforce and the inclusion and representation of a variety of specific community groups, it was seen as important that the research look to include a cross-section of the population with a view to generating a range of views and opinions. For this reason, participants were deliberately recruited using a traditional focus group recruitment approach rather than working through specific community groups to identify participants.

A screening questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the Taskforce and secretariat. The screening questionnaire was used to ensure a mix of participants was included in each focus group. The screening questionnaire addressed issues such as:

- Fit with segment definition including gender, age and background
- Comfort with discussions around the sensitive topic material
- Mandatory COVID-19 vaccination status due to venue requirements

Potential participants were reassured that the nature of the discussion would be general and that specific experiences would not be sought.

- Recruitment was undertaken by qualitative recruiters, using the screening criteria to ensure the composition of the groups included the characteristics required for the selected target segments
- An incentive of \$90 per attendee was offered to cover participants' expenses



Focus group design and participant overview

The table below sets out the final focus group design including location and final participant numbers. A total of 94 members of the Queensland community participated in the research.

**TOTAL
PARTICIPANTS
94**

FOCUS GROUP OVERVIEW									
Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7*		
Descriptor	Older Men 55+ yrs.	Men in Twenties 22-29 yrs.	Men in Thirties 30-39 yrs.	Men who identify as LGBTIQ+	Men in Forties & Early Fifties 40-55 yrs.	Young Men 18-21 yrs.	First Nations Men (older)	First Nations Men (younger)	
Location	Toowoomba		Brisbane		Gold Coast	Townsville		Online video	
Number of participants	8	7	6	6	7	6	3	3	
Group	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
Descriptor	Older Women 55+ yrs.	Women in Twenties 22-29 yrs.	Women in Forties & Early Fifties 40-55 yrs.	Women who identify as LGBTIQ+	Young Women 18-21 yrs.	First Nations Women (mixed age)	Women in Thirties 30-39 yrs.		
Location	Sunshine Coast		Brisbane	Brisbane	Brisbane	Rockhampton			
Number of participants	8	7	8	6	6	6	7		

* Due to lower than expected attendance at the Townsville First Nations Men group, an additional online mini group was conducted to boost numbers.



Focus group discussion design

The focus group discussion guide was designed to start with a broad conversation about sexual consent and move through more detail and nuances as the conversation progressed. It was hypothesised that due to the moral nature of sexual consent, it might be difficult for some participants to share their personal beliefs on the topic and unintentionally defer and project more socially acceptable attitudes. Therefore, after a general discussion on people’s understanding of consent, the discussion moved on to scenario-based questions to illicit underlying attitudes and beliefs and explore the practicalities of negotiating consent in real-life situations.

The initial discussion of people’s understanding of consent covered topics such as: When is consent needed? How can consent be communicated? Who is responsible for consent? How can consent be refused? The discussion then transitioned into scenario-based discussions.

Two base scenarios were shared within the focus groups. One by one additional details were introduced, bringing new information to light or changing details. The scenarios were designed to be intentionally vague, so questions could be raised by community members that would give insight into the underlying questions and beliefs of sexual consent. This would allow moderators to observe and explore community member reactions and questions that may contrast previous discussion of sexual consent.

The base scenarios and additional factors were designed around rape myths reported in *Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, Discussion Paper 3: Women and girls’ experiences across the criminal justice system as victims-survivors of sexual violence and also as accused persons and offenders*, and in collaboration with the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce Community Attitudes Research project team.

The rape myth areas explored through the scenarios included:

- If whether a woman initiates sex influences perceptions of sexual consent
- If whether a relationship of husband-and-wife influences perceptions of sexual consent
- How alcohol consumption influences perceptions of sexual consent
- How freezing behaviour is understood, and whether this behaviour, versus active resistance, influences perceptions of sexual consent
- If physical injuries influence perceptions of sexual consent
- How reporting claim periods for sexual assault influence a woman’s believability
- Exploration of triggers of distrust of a woman’s allegation of sexual assault

EXAMPLE OF SCENARIO & ADDITIONAL FACTORS SHOWN

Base Scenario	<i>A man and a woman met at a party. At the party they were seen laughing and kissing. Later that night the woman went to the police and said the man sexually assaulted her.</i>
Additional factors	<i>He initiated sex and she didn’t respond (she froze)</i>
<i>(Shown separately one by one)</i>	<i>She had bruising on her body</i>

It was acknowledged across all focus groups that the scenarios were heteronormative in nature, and differences were explored for same sex or gender diverse people within all groups (not just LGBTIQ+ groups).



Sensitivity to issues and ethics

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential for focus group participants to reveal current safety concerns or to be negatively impacted by the nature of the discussions, such as by triggering past experiences, steps were taken to ensure appropriate processes were in place prior to conducting the focus groups.

It was seen as important to ensure that:

- Participants had a knowledge and understanding of the topic of the research before choosing to participate in the group. Participants were informed of the subject matter during the recruitment process and their comfort in participating and consent was asked before booking them into a focus group. In addition, a detailed consent form and information sheet was provided to participants before each focus group. The information sheet outlined:
 - Who is conducting the research
 - Why the research is being conducted
 - Participation expectations during the group
 - Potential risks of participating in the research
 - Support material if in discomfort or distress
 - As well as other details about confidentiality, feedback, privacy and information about the reporting of the research findings.
- The emotional and physical safety of participants was protected before, during and after their involvement in the focus group through acknowledgement that personal experiences would not be discussed, reassurance that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time.

- Safety concerns raised during the focus group were adequately responded to (e.g. through referral to appropriate counselling support or other services).
- Groups were carefully conducted by trained facilitators who were able to address any safety concerns that arose during the group discussions.
- In addition, each participant was given a written information sheet containing contact information for state-wide sexual assault services prior to and at the completion of the focus groups.

This research has received ethical clearance by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (GU Ref No: 2022/198).



Report interpretation

REPORT INTERPRETATION

Qualitative research is the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting non-numerical data, such as language. It is used to understand how an individual (or groups of individuals) subjectively perceive and give meaning to their experiences.

The research inputting into this report is qualitative in nature and as such it aims to explore aspects in depth rather than quantify attitudes or behaviours. Conversation transcripts have been thematically analysed to identify key trends and themes across the research objectives.

It is important to note that while specific LGBTIQ+ and FN groups were included in the research, the intention was to ensure their representation and to identify their perceptions, but not to specifically compare their differences to the general community or other sub-audiences of interest.

Enhance Research and the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce acknowledge that the topic of sexual consent and sexual violence is not only relevant to women and girls. However, due to the current objective of the Taskforce, to examine the experiences of women and girls across the criminal justice system, a focus on womens' and girls' experiences has been applied to this research and report.

In addition, a heteronormative lens has been used to frame this report. However, where relevant, gender-neutral language has been used where concepts are relevant despite gender identity and heterosexuality.

Where research findings differ across specific cohorts these have been reported by exception, with the research report generally outlining areas of consistent findings.

CONTENT & LANGUAGE WARNING

A content and language warning is given for this report. In line with the topic of sexual consent it includes references to sexual assault and violence. Community member quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate findings and in some case use explicit language and/or recount past experiences. If reading or thinking about sexual consent and/or sexual assault raises personal issues for you or causes distress, there are community support services available for both immediate and ongoing support to improve personal safety and ensure there is access to the healing, justice, and support. If you, or someone you know, would like more information or support, then the following services are available to assist.

- The Queensland Sexual Assault Line offers telephone support and crisis counselling to anyone – adults and young people of any gender identity – who has been sexually assaulted or abused, and for anyone who is concerned or suspects someone they care about might have been assaulted or abused. They can be contacted on 1800 010 120, 7 days per week 7.30am-11.30pm. <https://www.dvconnect.org/sexual-assault-helpline/>
- DV Connect is a 24 hour Crisis Support line for anyone affected by domestic or family violence, and can be contacted on 1800 811 811 or www.dvconnect.org
- Mensline Australia is a 24 hour counselling service for men, and can be contacted on 1300 78 99 78 or www.menslineaus.org.au
- Lifeline is a 24 hour telephone counselling and referral service, and can be contacted on 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
- Kids Helpline is a 24 hour free counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 25, and can be contacted on 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Suicide Call Back Service can be contacted on 1300 659 467 or www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- Beyondblue can be contacted on 1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au

HOW DOES THE COMMUNITY APPROACH THE TOPIC OF SEXUAL CONSENT?



There is a spectrum of knowledge and confidence in the community when discussing sexual consent

On one end of the spectrum, more informed community members often express greater confidence and steadfastness in their sexual consent views. These participants would be broadly aware of sexual assault or domestic violence statistics and refer to them in discussions. However, less informed or less confident community members were more uncertain of where they stood at times and had greater difficulty expressing their beliefs.

Some found it difficult to find the 'right' words when discussing sexual consent, as they didn't want to say the wrong thing to peers. Some also struggled to find the appropriate language to discuss their beliefs, sometimes catching themselves using language associated with rape myths or assigning blame and retracting their words due to them not aligning with their beliefs.

Often, community members openly acknowledged the difficulty of finding the right words to articulate their beliefs and attitudes towards sexual consent.

However, while knowledge and confidence talking about sexual consent varied, it is commonly acknowledged that 'consent' is broader than sexual consent. For example, it is generally believed that consent is required any time you are physically touching someone, such as a hug. Community members also commonly referenced medical professionals getting permission to touch before medical examinations as an example of this broader understanding of consent.

Some also extended the consent requirement when sharing something personal about someone, such as a personal or embarrassing story. However, it is acknowledged that requiring consent to share something about someone is perhaps not as socially accepted as requesting consent to touch someone (even in a non-sexual way).

"It's about communication between two people. They have to both agree that they want to go ahead with whatever activity. That's my understanding of it. So, they have to discuss it, say one says, would you like to whatever. Then the other one agrees and that's a consent." Woman, 55+ yrs.

"Also, probably I don't even know how to word that, how bad a lot of people are at picking up on the body language side of consent. Because a lot of the time you hear people saying, well they didn't, they didn't explicitly say no. So they kind of just try to brush it off. So, that's probably where my brain would go." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"... but I also know growing up, there was a very big part with Mum and Dad as a kid. If I say no, it means no. Now that might be... It doesn't have to be necessarily in the terms of being sexual consent, it's 'I've said no, you can't have that lolly because it's dinner time.' ..." Man, LGBTIQ



Society's understanding of sexual consent is thought to have improved and advanced in recent years due to discussions about sex, and consequently sexual consent, becoming more socialised

Generationally, people feel society is more open to talking about sex now, compared to in the past. Consequently, it is felt that society is more open to talking about sexual consent and has a greater awareness of the topic. For example, older community members note a stark difference between how their parents communicated and educated them about sex and sexual consent, and how they would educate and inform their children on this topic today.

Older community members tended to express a belief that navigating sexual consent is harder these days for younger people, as sexual consent was not as widely discussed or considered when they were young. For example, some older women reflected that they had experienced sexual assault in their past, but at the time they hadn't considered it as sexual assault due to a perceived lack of agency in the situation.

Sexual consent is also thought to be more relevant to younger age groups, as they are perceived as more likely to be navigating new relationships or be single and engaging in casual sex.

In contrast however, younger community members appear more confident discussing sexual consent, due to growing up during times where there is greater social discourse on the topic.

Across age groups, sexual consent is thought to be more relevant to single people or people engaging in 'hook-up' culture. Due to the greater discourse and understanding of sexual consent these days, it is acknowledged that there are greater perceived risks of reputational damage and prosecution.

"...But yeah, definitely there are more risks for young men probably these days [to navigate sexual consent]." Man, 55+ yrs.

"Well, growing up, my parents didn't talk to us about anything, we all just had to figure it out ourselves. It was just more of a taboo thing, don't talk about it. But then once I had my kids, then I was like, oh, I'm going to change this. And yeah, and so even my husband, we could sit at the table and we'll just start talking about it and he's just like, 'Do you want to just tone it down a bit?' And I'm like, 'No, let's be all open and transparent about everything and don't keep secrets from each other'." Woman, FN

"...If you, at my age, are going out with someone of the same age or older, those ideas of consent may not be as strong as for younger people these days. Because younger people are being fed that from a very young age. 'Get consent, get consent'. Because it's how the society is now..." Woman, 40-55 yrs.



There is a generally agreed upon spectrum of sexual behaviour and the language used to refer to non-consensual activity is also largely agreed upon within the community

A spectrum of sexual activity is acknowledged, starting with flirty behaviour (such as eye contact, light touching and kissing), which isn't very sexual, to highly sexual behaviour (such as penetrative sex) at the other end of the spectrum. It is acknowledged that sexual behaviour typically builds up from low sexual behaviour to highly sexual behaviour, and a similar spectrum is spoken of when discussing non-consensual sexual activity.

When it comes to non-consensual activity, at the lower end of the spectrum is what people constitute and describe as *sexual harassment*. For example, it is generally agreed that if a man 'came onto' someone at a party and was flirting with them or tried touching (lower-sexual) or kissing them and was then informed the other party wasn't interested and stopped, then that was a misunderstanding. However, if he continued to flirt, attempted to kiss or touch the person after a refusal of consent, this then constitutes sexual harassment.

***Sexual assault* is generally considered the overarching term that reflects mid to higher non-consensual sexual activity, from unwanted groping to penetrative sex.** Non-consensual penetrative sex is commonly referred to as 'rape' and is considered the most extreme form of sexual assault.

While *sexual assault* is acknowledged as a broad term that can apply to a spectrum of non-consensual sexual activity, many community members assume the extreme of rape when discussing sexual assault without further details.

Community members acknowledge that consent is always required across the spectrum of sexual behaviour. However, they did consider that the importance of consent increases along the spectrum of sexual behaviour. For example, It was considered more excusable to misread consent signals at the softer end of the spectrum (flirting, light touching or kissing) than the more sexually explicit end of the spectrum (penetrative sex).

"I read recently, you can always change your mind, you or your sexual partner can decide at any time that you don't want to keep going, even if you have already started having sex. If this happens, both people should stop, if you don't, that's sexual assault." Woman, 55+ yrs.

"It's rape. Doesn't matter where in this process. You could have started without consent or you finished it without consent, it's still a sexual assault. It's still rape." Man, LGBTIQ+.

"I probably wouldn't call assault if you told someone not to kiss you and they still tried to. I wouldn't say, 'Oh, they've assaulted me'. I'd feel a bit violated, but I probably wouldn't call it assault until it was like I think that'd be more like harassment." Woman, 22-29 yrs.



It is common for community members to focus on whether fault can be assigned rather than simply acknowledging a sexual assault occurred

A sexual assault allegation is believed to be a very serious claim that will negatively affect the lives of both parties. Even if the accused is found not guilty, it is expected that the allegation will potentially negatively impact them for the rest of their life.

Many community members believed that a woman's sexual assault allegations would likely be true in most cases. However, they also felt some women would make false allegations, and therefore each sexual assault allegation needs to be thoroughly investigated.

When referring to sexual assault allegations community members often focus on comprehending the situation with the intent to understand how clearly the sexual consent was communicated.

Most are empathetic to a woman's claims of being sexually assaulted and acknowledge that if a woman claims sexual assault, she undoubtedly has had a negative experience. However, many are also empathetic towards the man, and wondered if fault can be fairly assigned to him if he did not understand that the woman wasn't consenting. **There is a perception that it is unfair to label someone as having committed sexual assault if they weren't made aware that the sexual act was non-consensual.**

Most acknowledge that sexual assault allegations often come down to a 'she said' versus 'he said' paradigm, which can make it difficult to assign fault. In addition, community members acknowledged that any delay in reporting sexual assault often makes it more difficult for the police to gather evidence to support the allegation.

"Assuming she's telling the truth, which she probably is...But even then it still has to go through the process of innocent until proven guilty." Man, FN

"I think the further away it gets, it's harder to prove... I'm not saying that she can't not report it 10 years down the track or 30 years down the track because it could still have happened, but it starts to get a bit more washed out. There has to be more evidence if it's further down the track." Man, 40-55 yrs.

"Men aren't mind readers...[regarding withdrawal of sexual consent being communicated clearly] I think it would be very hard to prove to an entire courtroom of people that he was in the wrong." Woman, 30-39 yrs.

"... And then that's what's classed as date rape, if you keep going when you've told them to stop. But then it's the he said, she said and there's no proof, who's going to tell the proof that said, 'No, I said to stop'. And that's the difficult part when you're going and challenging that guy, do you have that proof?" Woman, FN



HOW IS CONSENT GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD?



Community members are generally confident in their own understanding of consent on a conceptual level. However, it is acknowledged that in real life sexual consent is not always clear cut and can be difficult to navigate

At an overall level, sexual consent is described as permission between parties to undertake and participate in sexual activity. It is considered a form of communication and respect between people and is always necessary when undertaking any sexual acts.

Additionally, on a conceptual level, it is believed that sexual consent:

- Can be communicated both verbally and through body language
- Needs to be continuously monitored throughout sexual activity
- Involves both parties having responsibility for ensuring the sexual activity is consensual
- Can be withdrawn at any time and at any stage during sexual activity

However, several real-world situational factors impact expectations of sexual consent and contradict or challenge the community's conceptual understanding.

Situational factors that influence community expectations of sexual consent include:

- How well each party knows the other
- Whether the sexual acts are new (to the individual or new to the couple) or considered 'intense'
- How far the sexual activity has progressed

This disconnect between the community's conceptual and real-world understanding and expectations of sexual consent will be explored throughout this report.

It presents a real a challenge for people in terms of how they are able to navigate these differences and apply their conceptual beliefs in reality.

"Having the other person's approval. Before they engage in anything." Man, FN

"I think you can plan ahead and go yeah, this day, this night. Yeah. But, it still should be in the moment, then you're allowed to change your mind." Woman, 30-39 yrs.

"... you can take that back at any stage that you wish and I guess, so it's got to be sort of an ongoing agreement." Woman, 40-55 yrs.

"Any party should have the right to say no even if it's like halfway through or they should have the right to withdraw it." Man, 18-21 yrs.

"... consent should be happening all the time and continuous..." Woman, 40-55 yrs.

"Well, two partners agreeing to have sexual intercourse." Man, 55+ yrs.



HOW CAN CONSENT BE COMMUNICATED?



It is believed that sexual consent can be communicated in a variety of ways, including verbally and physically through body language

Verbal communication is typically the top-of-mind form of consent for community members. **Verbal communication is also commonly perceived to be the clearest form of sexual consent between parties.** Nevertheless, it is also considered 'awkward' and a 'mood killer' in real-life situations by many in the community. Due to this associated awkwardness and objectivity, verbal consent is often more strongly associated with a refusal or withdrawal of consent, with many stating 'no means no' early in discussions.

Body language is considered both a legitimate and contentious form of communication when it comes to consent. It is typically considered the more 'real world' way in which consent is gauged. However, it is considered contentious due to the subjectivity of body language and the skill often required to read it.

When it comes to body language, consideration of multiple positive body language indicators is thought necessary to give consent. For example, eye contact alone is not considered enough to assume consent and multiple indicators (such as eye contact, body positioning, engagement in conversation, and potentially touching) are needed to be present to communicate some form of consent. In addition, body language consent is often spoken of as a more complex set of social behaviours, such as actively participating or reciprocating in an activity. The need to read multiple body language indicators adds to the complexity of reading and interpreting body language.

As mentioned earlier, verbal communication is often considered the clearest form of consent when it comes to the withdrawal or refusal of consent. In contrast, negative or withdrawing body language is generally considered unclear. It is often associated with a signal to check-in or reassess the other party's consent rather than an explicit withdrawal or refusal of consent.

"... Because they generally know 'no, means no'. Everyone knows no means no." Man, 30-39 yrs.

"I think there's also body language that can imply whether consent is being given or not, too. Such as a person pushing you away or moving your hand away from them. Those sort of implied movements without any words being exchanged..." Man 40-55 yrs.

"Whether your, say mirrored actions, and the reciprocation from the other party, it's just a body language thing for me. I've never gone, 'Can I stick my dick in your vagina?' It's just ... That's just going to kill the moment..." Man, 22-29 yrs.

"Also, probably I don't even know how to word that, how bad a lot of people are at picking up on the body language side of consent. Because a lot of the time you hear people saying, well they didn't, they didn't explicitly say no. So, they kind of just try to brush it off." Woman, 18-22 yrs.



While conceptually it is believed sexual consent can be communicated verbally or through body language, expectations exist about how consent is communicated in real-life scenarios

There is an expectation that the better you know someone, the more confident and accurate you should be in reading their body language. Therefore, it is expected that if you are in a relationship, or even friends, you would be more reliant on gauging body language to inform consent than verbal consent.

Reliance on verbal consent is often linked to early relationships or ‘hook-ups’ with strangers, as these parties lack the knowledge of one another to read and gauge body language accurately.

A greater reliance on verbal consent is also expected when two parties know each other well but undertake a new sexual act. It is expected that a verbal discussion of the new sexual activity should occur. Since the act is new, each party should be extra vigilant in ensuring the other party is comfortable. Verbal check-ins are considered appropriate if there is any doubt about someone’s comfort levels.

Some also feel verbal consent should be relied upon if two parties undertake very explicit or risky sexual acts, such as rough sex. It is expected that the two parties will have a verbal discussion beforehand.

Expectations also exist in how consent should be given based on how far sexual activity has progressed. For example, if consensual sexual activity is underway, and one party changes their mind. In this case, it is expected that withdrawal of consent should be explicitly communicated verbally or through strong and obvious body language, such as pushing or slapping. Expectations of withdrawal of consent will be explored in more detail further in the report.

“I doubt a lot of couples are still saying, ‘Hey, can I have sex with you tonight?’ It seems weird for a couple... it doesn't have to be verbal every time, but it is about understanding how the other person is feeling and how you are making them feel.” Man, 18-21 yrs.

“When you say seeking consent, to me, that's making sure that my partner is also consenting. So I feel like I do that every time. Not verbally with my boyfriend. I just, if he's into it, then I'm assuming that's consent, especially because we've had this entire relationship where consent is assumed, but it's kind of like... I could say no as well. I don't know how to explain it.” Woman, 18-22 yrs.

“Comfortable with that person and you get an understanding, you know them more. The verbal consent for both of you, you'll pick up on their body language, whether they're accepting of it or not.” Woman, 55+ yrs.

“... but now I think sometimes you need to be explicit particularly if it's a new relationship or you just met or somebody wants more than the other person, then sometimes being absolutely explicit is what is required.” Woman, 40-55 yrs.



WHEN IS CONSENT NEEDED?



On a conceptual level, it is acknowledged that consent needs to be monitored throughout a sexual act. However, differing opinions form when applied to practical scenarios.

Community members who are more informed about sexual consent tend to believe that sexual consent should be constantly monitored throughout a sexual act. This aligns with the belief that consent can change at any time.

However, others were less steadfast in their views and expressed doubts about the practical ability to always be attuned to the other party's body language throughout a sexual act.

These people believe that as a sexual act progresses (moving along the spectrum from low to high sexual behaviour), it is feasible for changes in body language consent to be missed or misunderstood in the heat of the moment.

In these situations, it is assumed that if sexual consent has been given earlier in a sexual act, and the sexual act has progressed to a certain point, then pleasure levels may make it difficult to be attuned to the other party's body language cues.

*"It's not just a one-off checkpoint either. Everyone has to be okay throughout the whole experience."
Man, LGBTIQ+*

"... you'd think maybe, is there an assumed what has to be a clear no? Because maybe those subtle body language things aren't picked up in kind of the heat of the moment." Woman, LGBTIQ+

"... he may not have known, as sad as that is. We need to see. Was she like, 'Oh, I was just going along with it, but I guess in my mind, I just changed it. I didn't really want it to happen.' Because that's really hard to read. If someone is really enjoying themselves, and that's what they're focusing on and that's what they wanted to do this whole evening during their date. I think it's a bit hard to tune into the other person." Woman, 22-29 yrs.

"...nowadays you've got to sort of stop and see, what does she want? Does she want to go further than this? Or are we going to stop here until our next meeting?" Man, FN.



Most community members agree that consent cannot be assumed. However, some feel consent can be assumed in some cases based on prior sexually explicit behaviour

Some community members believe that consent can only be given in the moment and cannot be assumed based on prior behaviour. However, others believe that consent can be assumed based on prior explicit behaviour until indicated otherwise.

It is commonly felt that sexual consent needs to be gauged through a progression of multiple verbal and/or body language cues along the sexual activity spectrum. For example, consent for penetrative sex cannot be gauged from kissing or touching alone, as these cues are not considered explicit or sexual enough to inform permission for penetrative sex.

When it comes to more explicit prior sexual behaviour, such as sending nude images or having explicit sexual discussions with one another ('sexting'), some believe consent can be assumed until informed otherwise. However, it is important to note that those who believe consent can be assumed based on prior behaviour still express the opinion that consent can be withdrawn at any time. Therefore, while some felt consent could be assumed based on prior behaviour, they also believe both parties have the right to change their mind.

It is a commonly held opinion that sexual consent cannot be assumed based on the clothes someone, a woman in particular, wears.

Revealing or suggestive clothing is typically seen as sending certain 'signals' or 'invitations' about being interested or open to flirting or sexual activity, but is not something sexual consent can be gauged off.

A similar perception of dating apps is held, with some believing the brand and reputation of a dating app can suggest or send a signal that someone might be interested in casual sex versus a relationship. **However, it is strongly acknowledged that use of certain dating apps does not imply consent.**

"...you might be sexting and that could give the impression that, hey, I'm definitely interested in having sex. That doesn't mean that when we meet we're going to have sex. And that's not me saying that I invite you or that I'm consenting to giving the sex. I think it's when you get there and you meet that person, you reconfirm that situation. Do you still want to have sex? Yes. Great. Go and do what you want." Man, LGBTIQ

"If they've given it directly like, directly said in the chat, that they consent to one another, then yes, but even then it can be revoked ..." Man, 22-29 yrs.

"It should be in the moment. Even if you say let's meet up later and have sex or whatever, and then they come over, you're like, no, not feeling it, but you still give it at that given time." Woman, 30-39yrs.

"If you are going straight to their house, I feel like, with social media and things like that, it is implied that if you are going there at 10 o'clock at night, there's not much else you're going to be doing." Woman, 22-29 yrs.



On a conceptual level, it is acknowledged that anyone can withdraw consent. However, there are mixed opinions about *when* consent can be withdrawn

It is commonly thought that consent can be withdrawn at any time during a sexual act.

For some, it is strongly felt that sexual consent can be withdrawn at any point during a sexual act but not afterwards. While this view is expressed across men and women, some men in particular strongly feel that consent cannot be withdrawn after the event.

For those who held this opinion, it is considered unfair to the other party if consent is withdrawn after sexual activity, as post-rationalisation is out of the other party's control. It is felt that consent can only be informed based on the information present and available to the other party at the time and therefore the other party can not be found at fault for acting on the information available to them at the time.

"Didn't realize she was trying to push me or like, I didn't see any of ... and she didn't say no at all. And she seemed into it, that's where you've got to be really clear. Because again, men aren't mind readers." Woman, 30-39 yrs.

"I think it's fine to withdraw at any time during, but not after. You can't withdraw a consent after you've hooked up." Man, 30-39 yrs.

"Any party should have the right to say no even if it's like halfway through or they should have the right to withdraw it." Man, 18-21 yrs.



However, some community members did consider there is a point during sex that consent can no longer be withdrawn or at least assigning fault becomes problematic

Some community members are unsure whether it is appropriate to withdraw consent past a certain point during sex.

The inference here is that this point is after the sexual act was underway. **However, they struggled to articulate further when this point of 'no return' might be.**

On the other hand, some consider the assigning of fault when consent is withdrawn during sex becomes problematic as the man (it is generally considered to be most likely to be a man in this scenario) may not have realised a withdrawal of consent has occurred. It again is seen to come down to a perception that it is feasible for someone to get caught up in the 'heat of the moment' or 'throes of passion' and miss or misinterpret a withdrawal of consent.

Again, these community members believe if the man didn't realise the woman had withdrawn consent, then fault cannot be assigned to him, as he can only make decisions based on the information he had at the time.

"Even in like one point in time, you might start doing something with someone, but then, you're okay, this is fine, but then 10 minutes later, you change your mind. And they're like, well, you already agreed. So, there might be a bit of conflict between, well, you already said yes. And you're not allowed to go back from what you said or differing viewpoints on that." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"But then consent is not necessarily either a yes or no, which I said it should be, but talking in terms of, in the act, like you're in the throes of passion and maybe you slap their arse or do some butt stuff, then they don't say no, but they might swat you away or something like that. There's no consent there, but ..." Man, 30-39 yrs.

"Probably depends what they were actually doing at the time. If they got in the room and they were having a drink and then she said at that point, 'Look nothing further is going to happen.' But if they were getting extremely passionate and she was half undressed, and he was half undressed and what have you." Man, 55+ yrs.

"... maybe he didn't hear her say stop. I mean, it comes back to that whole thing of like, what is consent or withdrawal of consent. Is that a factor in terms of how she communicated that she wasn't consenting anymore?" Woman, 55+ yrs.



Again, while there is a conceptual understanding that consent can be withdrawn, there are also expectations around how it is withdrawn in real-world scenarios

Many in the community expressed an expectation that if consensual sexual activity is underway and a party changes their mind and withdraws their consent, the withdrawal of consent needs to be communicated clearly, through strong and obvious body language or clear verbal withdrawal of consent.

There is also an acknowledgment within the community that body language alone may not be an acceptable form of communication for withdrawal of consent, as it might be missed or misread during a sexual act.

As mentioned earlier, verbal withdrawal of consent is considered the clearest and most effective way to communicate. Overt and explicit body language, such as pushing away, is also thought to be an appropriate option. However, some think there can still be a risk that it may be misinterpreted. For example, there were some men and women who mentioned that pushing or scratching might be misinterpreted as acts of passion and enthusiasm during a sexual act.

Again, the need for the withdrawal of consent to be clearly communicated to the other party comes back to the idea of allocating fault. Whereby, it is seen as difficult to place any blame on a person if it was possible for them to miss the signals of either refusal or withdrawal of consent by being lost in the 'heat of the moment'.

*"...Because you know, pushing off a human who has quite a heavy body is very different to pushing away if a behaviour was uncomfortable and to change the position. But if it was, if there's heavy pushing, bit of slapping, bit kind of yeah ... That becomes explicit."
Man, 30-39 yrs.*

*"It probably hard for him to know that consent's going to be pulled away. Even she's probably out of the lead and a lot this stuff. So that's where the grey area gets even greyer. Like it's ... unless she's clearly saying, 'Don't. Just stop it.' Or whatever."
Man, 30-39 yrs.*

*"She initiated it. She was, but she would have to verbally, I would think or push away and say, stop."
Woman, 40-55 yrs.*

*"I think the talk, specially in this situation, the talk of consent, like it's been said, it needs to be verbal or 'get off', push. Because just being... your body language... Because, during the moment, he's not going to be able to ..."
Woman, 18-22 yrs.*



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSENT?



On a conceptual level, it is strongly felt that both or all parties are responsible for ensuring sexual activity is consensual

However, in reality, once initial consent has been communicated or established, the onus is then seen to fall onto the other party to communicate any changes such as withdrawal of consent.

When discussing scenarios of a woman consensually participating in sex and then changing her mind and withdrawing consent, community members often questioned how clearly the woman communicated the withdrawal of her consent.

They commonly attributed how clearly she communicated her withdrawal of consent to be the key issue in whether any fault can be assigned. These community members struggled to assign any fault due to the belief that as a sexual act progresses, the chances of body language cues indicating the withdrawal of consent can be missed due to being caught up in the 'heat of the moment'.

It is also commonly expected that communication will escalate to verbal or explicit physical refusal in situations of withdrawal or refusal of consent, such as pushing or slapping, if other cues are not picked up.

"... the responsibility is on him to make sure he's got the consent. The responsibility on her is to make sure her consent's being heard. I think they both share that responsibility. He needs to understand whether or not she's saying yes or no, and she needs to understand whether he's understanding her." Woman, 22-29 yrs.

"It's probably one of those questions, it should be a case of it shouldn't matter, it should be both sides should be communicating, but I think it tends to fall on the side of someone has to say they don't consent..." Man, LGBTIQ

"Even if the person doesn't pick up on those cues, you would then escalate to making it more obvious." Man, 22-29 yrs.

"I think physical cues as well [can indicate a withdrawal of consent], but I think verbal is probably, a safer way in terms of making sure that it's both parties know what each other is wanting to agree to." Woman, 40-55 yrs.



While conceptually, both parties are considered responsible for ensuring consensual sexual activity, some community members acknowledge not all are equal in their ability to express consent

It is common for women and LGBTIQ+ community members to acknowledge that communicating consent, or a lack of consent, requires confidence and agency, which not all have in equal share.

Women and LGBTIQ+ community members acknowledge that giving consent requires the following:

- A person being confident in understanding how they are feeling in a sexual situation
- A person having the agency to communicate how they feel about sexual acts or a sexual situation
- A person understanding what a sexual act entails to make an informed decision about their participation

Life and sexual experience are considered important factors that can help facilitate informed consent. A lack of life experience can mean ignorance of sexual social cues. A lack of sexual experience can lead to ignorance of what a particular sexual act involves; e.g. stories were shared in discussions of young women and girls not understanding that some can infer an invitation to one's house late at night as an invitation for sexual activity. Due to their young age and life experience, these young girls found themselves in sexual situations that they needed to navigate.

It is also acknowledged that expressing a refusal or withdrawal of consent can sometimes require higher levels of confidence and agency and be difficult to do in certain situations.

*"I guess also being able to like say no and have that autonomy over your own body and have that confidence."
Woman, 22-29 yrs.*

*"I have a young niece that doesn't know how to say no, so whenever she goes off with somebody, she's like, 'I don't understand.' And I'm like, 'You need to learn to say no, stop.'... She goes, 'I'm too uncomfortable, I'm too scared'."
Woman, FN*

*"We were saying before, when we're older, we've got more guts and confidence to be like, no, but the younger kids, the teenagers, don't have that confidence and you wish they would."
Woman, 30-39 yrs.*

*"... She doesn't have the power to do anything else. Yeah. So I think for us to assume that she should, to say she should be doing more, I think that's unfair because that's how she's reacting."
Woman, LGBTIQ+.*



Those in relationships where domestic and family violence is present, young people, in particular young women, are often associated with being most at risk of lacking the confidence or agency to give informed consent

Across the community (both men and women), there is a common understanding that relationships where domestic and family violence is present would impact a person's ability to express their refusal of consent.

Beyond domestic violence, it is also felt that young people, particularly young women, are most likely to be at risk of not having the confidence and agency to give informed consent. This reduced confidence and agency is often attributed to age-related social pressures, general development, as well as life and sexual inexperience.

For example, some women shared stories and expressed concern about young girls participating in sexual activity without fully comprehending that they are participating in a sexual act or understanding what the sexual act entails due to their sexual inexperience.

Other young women spoke of the social pressure sometimes applied in sexual situations and the pressure this places on them to comply rather than genuinely consent.

Amongst males, discussion about low confidence and agency impacting a person's ability to give informed consent was limited to situations of domestic violence. This suggests an understanding of informed consent being potentially limited and not as top of mind amongst men in the community.

"And I can think of enough, quite a few examples, just in my own life where I technically now I could say I was raped, and I'm sure we've all had that." Woman, 55+ yrs.

"... So that whole idea of, oh, well you've already said yes. Or there's also that aspect of like guilt, being guilted into saying yes. And so, you can feel bad. You want to make this person happy and like you or people most of the time. And then they'll be, oh, come on, blah, blah, blah. I want to please. And then you are kind of guilted into saying yes and consenting to it." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"Scenarios that I didn't think was sexual assault in my own life. And now thinking back, I'm like, 'Yes. I did not consent to that.' But that happened. It just keeps ringing in my head, and I'm like that happened actually quite easily in my life and I didn't even think about it as sexual assault. But now looking back I'm like, yeah." Woman, 40-55 yrs.



Social pressures are seen to be influencing factors across men and women regarding both the giving and refusal of consent

Young women, and parents with teens or young adult children, spoke of the pressure young people can feel to engage in sexual acts and how this can make saying no or refusing consent more difficult.

Young women in particular spoke about social pressures to be sexually active or inactive and social judgement about who they are sexually active with, making sexual consent for their age groups more complicated. In addition, egos and 'saving face' amongst peers when rejected or refused is also an influencing factor making navigating consent potentially more complicated for some younger community members.

Some men acknowledged social pressures for men to be highly sexual and have a positive social status amongst peers attached to being seen as sexually active and 'getting some'. These men believe that these social pressures can make it difficult for men to say no to sex. In addition, they also believe male reporting of sexual assault is under-reported due to these social stigmas and gender stereotypes attached to males within our society.

"... we did it because we felt really pressured to. ...when people do have sex after they've said no a bunch of times and then finally, they just do it to get it over with. Like, that doesn't mean that you had her permission to have sex." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"Yeah. I think the interesting thing is that there's going to be, what's the power differential? This could be a really big guy for example, this is the front rower for the footy team. There's a lot of women who go, 'I don't know if I can even say no to this because what the fuck's going to happen.'" Man, 30-39 yrs.

"So, I know somebody whose wife was desperate to have a baby. And every time the temperature was right... he would get the call and she would be like, that's it...come home. And he would say to me, 'Oh my God, I don't want to go home.' And all of his mates, 'cause he would talk to his friends about it, and they were like, 'Oh yeah, you know, you're a big stud.' Nobody took him seriously. In that, he actually didn't want to do this." Woman, 40-55 yrs.

"A lot of people also, don't always acknowledge that they're getting pressured when it's by a partner because they're like, oh, love me. And they love my body... It's easier to kind of pick up on [being pressured] when it's someone who's just a hook-up or just a casual fling than when you're in a committed relationship or you have serious feelings for someone." Woman, 18-22 yrs.



Women and LGBTIQ+ community members appear to be more aware of how power dynamics and imbalances can influence one's ability to give or refuse consent

While there are varying degrees of understanding, the complexity of power dynamics and their influence on a person's ability to give or refuse consent was expressed by women and LGBTIQ+ community members. In addition, these community members appear more knowledgeable on the influence that power dynamics and imbalances, such as age differences, workplace seniority, and greater sexual experience, can have on a person's ability to give or refuse consent than men within the community.

Amongst men, acknowledgment of power dynamics influencing someone giving or refusing consent was limited in discussions to a man's physical strength potentially intimidating a woman. **The limited discussion of power dynamics' influence on consent suggests this is not top of mind amongst men, and education may be required.**

Suspicious are raised for some men and women when a woman consents in the moment and later claims the sex was non-consensual. They become suspicious that the woman regretted a sexual encounter rather than it being an issue of sexual consent. This view is more likely to be expressed amongst those less attuned to the influence of power dynamics on giving informed consent.

Community members aware of the influence of power dynamics believe that those who hold more power in a relationship have more responsibility to ensure sexual activity is consensual. However, this is contingent on self-awareness of power dynamics in relationships.

These particularly informed community members expressed a belief that consent during a sexual act can be invalidated after a sexual act, if a power imbalance was at play which influenced the person to consent to something they otherwise wouldn't have.

"... dynamic between, can you really say a situation where an 18-year-old with a 40-year-old, can you really say that she had given consent in that environment? I think the age, the stature, perhaps, and even work environment. She's an office junior, and he's an office director. Can there ever be true consent?" Man, LGBTIQ+

"If there was any sort of power imbalance. Because if the woman said he came onto her and she said yes, if there's some sort of power dynamic imbalance. That's not really consent as much as it is a coercion." Woman, LGBTIQ+

"I think it's also influence. It's not just powers in male/female, it's influence in society. If you were, I don't know, if the male was someone like a football player, who's looked up to, the female may be less inclined to not give consent. She may feel the pressure to consent." Woman, 30-39 yrs.

"...I think a lot of people, I feel, confuse regret with consent. So, if they regret sleeping with whoever, then it's like, I must not have truly consented, whereas in the moment they may have..." Man, 30-39 yrs.



Stereotypes are thought to exist within society that may place a greater onus on the receiver of sexual advances and women to communicate or clarify consent

Many community members acknowledge that in real life, a convention exists of the initiator ‘trying something on’ and the onus falling on the other party, ‘the receiver’, to respond or communicate their consent.

This ‘trying something on’ behaviour happens as a progression of sexual behaviour and not as a direct and outright assumption of consent until informed otherwise. For example, someone might try touching someone’s arm and if this is not rejected, they might try kissing them and so on.

However, some community members struggle to articulate how to navigate an absence of consent, or when there is no clear indicator of consent either. Some acknowledge that if it isn’t clear whether the recipient is or isn’t consenting, the initiator would likely continue progressing their sexual advances until explicitly informed of a refusal of consent through this convention. Therefore, while both parties are thought responsible for ensuring the sexual activity is consensual, it is generally thought that in real-world scenarios, the communication of consent often falls more on ‘the receiver’.

Some people, particularly younger women, acknowledge that this convention coupled with social pressure or lack of agency of the receiver of sexual advances can sometimes lead to the initiator being pushy or insistent, creating pressure to ‘give in’.

Additional evidence of the stereotype that places the onus of consent on the receiver of sexual advances was noted when **community members often defaulted to asking questions about how the woman informed the man of her withdrawal or refusal of consent rather than asking questions about how the man confirmed or gauged consent.**

Community members also acknowledge a gender stereotype present in society that may influence some people’s expectations of consent. **Whereby men typically initiate sex and therefore seek consent, and women are the receivers of sexual advances and give consent.** However, research participants acknowledge they do not espouse this belief, but they believe that others in the broader community do.

“When I was a young man, I had a girlfriend. We were making out, and one thing led to another, and she pushed my hand away because she’d never been there before. I’ve tried again, and then she’s enjoyed it. So where does that line break, where I have broken that trust of consent by pushing that boundary? But by pushing that boundary, she’s found a new level of acceptance. So, it’s circumstantial what happens in a situation. So, I don’t know whether I was right or wrong, but as young, horny teenager, you do push your limits. You do experiment, you do ask more of people than you probably should do. So, was that consent after I pushed my limits?”
Man, 40-55 yrs.

“I think there’s probably more of a perception that it’s more on the female’s behalf. There’s a perception that men are quite sexually active and want to partake. I think that’s just the general way of society in mind. Whereas females may be intended to think that you have to ask for consent also, rather than vice versa.” Woman, 30-39 yrs.



HOW DOES ALCOHOL INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF CONSENT?



Alcohol consumption is not considered a valid excuse for non-consensual sexual activity (sexual assault), but it does complicate the situation

Community members find it challenging to articulate how claims of sexual assault should be navigated when alcohol is involved. Alcohol consumption is considered to make the communication of sexual consent more challenging and, therefore, the ability to assign fault more contentious.

When it comes to communicating about sexual consent, alcohol is seen to impact:

- Cognitive functions and can impair decision-making and ability to communicate about sexual consent
- The believability of both parties regarding what they can remember and whether their recollection is accurate
- The ability to accurately read or interpret body language, which increases the chances and risk of body language consent or refusal of consent cues being missed
- The level of sexual inhibition a person has may be different and make them more likely to consent to something they usually wouldn't

“My nieces get themselves into a situation or may be in a situation where they think it's okay, then suddenly they come to the realisation. ‘No, I'm not okay with this’ and they may be on their own and feel vulnerable. They're incapacitated or unable to make good conscious decisions.” Woman, 30-39 yrs.

“How drunk was he? Was it to the point where he was just after what he wants and what he needs in that moment, instead of thinking and tuning into her and her body and what she's saying? Because maybe she was very explicit, and it just fell on deaf ears.” Woman, 22-29 yrs.

“Well, if they're both drunk then it's ... Maybe she wasn't clear, and he didn't pick up on it. So, it all becomes messy.” Man, 30-39 yrs.

“It's just a bit of a mess isn't it. If they're drunk, they're probably not considered having capacity to give consent, but also if they're drunk, they're probably considered not having capacity to ascertain whether consent has been given or not. So, it's all this consent that if they're drunk, their awareness of even knowingly perceiving consent is shot.” Man, 55+ yrs.



It is generally agreed that a person can be too drunk to give consent

However, community members struggle to articulate how to identify when someone becomes too drunk to consent beyond extreme intoxication behaviour.

On one end of the spectrum of alcohol consumption, if one or both parties are tipsy or have only had 'one or two' or 'a few' drinks, they are generally considered capable of making a decision about sexual activity and whether they choose to give or refuse consent. However, community members do acknowledge that alcohol can affect people differently, and one or two drinks has the potential to impair some members of the community significantly.

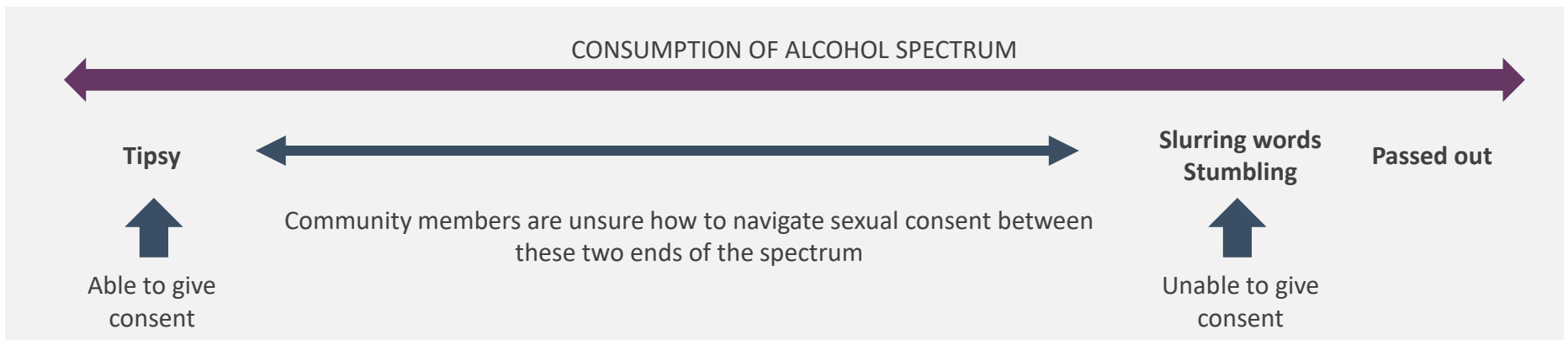
At the other end of the alcohol consumption spectrum, if one or both parties are slurring their words, stumbling or passed out from alcohol, this is considered a clear indicator that they cannot give consent.

However, community members are unsure how to navigate sexual consent when alcohol is involved in between these two ends of the spectrum. They struggle to assign any fault, as a sexual assault is still perceived to be entirely possible. At the same time, community members can also easily envisage how a refusal or withdrawal of consent could be missed due to impairment from alcohol.

"Well, you can be too drunk to sign a contract. So that's definitely yes." Man, 30-39yrs.

"... you can't drive a motor car drunk so why should you drive someone else drunk." Man, 55+ yrs.

"I don't think there's a drink rule. So, like a 'three drinks and that's it, you're incapable', because obviously alcohol depends on body weight. It depends on, there's so many factors in there." Woman, 22-29 yrs.



Generally, community members agree that the sober, or more sober, person has greater responsibility when it comes to gauging consent

However, community members acknowledge that it is difficult to read how drunk some people truly are. People can react to alcohol differently, making identifying who is the more sober party difficult in real life. They can also easily envisage how a sober person may not have full control of a situation when the other party has been consuming alcohol, therefore challenging the concept of the sober person having more responsibility.

When alcohol is involved, three scenarios were examined:

- Typically, if the woman is drunk and the man is sober, the woman becomes more believable in claims of non-consensual sex and sexual assault, as community members typically assume the man is predatory.
- If the woman is sober, but the man is drunk, community members typically oscillate between assuming the man took advantage of her in his drunken state, or he was too drunk to realise she wasn't consenting.
- Community members found it difficult to navigate whether sexual activity was consensual or not if both were drunk. Both parties are considered impaired, and it becomes contentious trying to assign blame or responsibility for consent.

“Well, not really, even when you're drunk and she's sober he can still force himself onto her because he doesn't know what he's doing.” Woman, FN

“And to carry that thought on even further, the person that's perhaps asking or not asking very well, they're probably inebriated too. And if they weren't, they might not have heard that cue, or that lack of cue but because their inhibitions maybe are gone or they're a bit inebriated, they might not have the thought process to say, 'no, this is not right'.” Woman, 55+ yrs.

“But then in this scenario what happens if she was sober and he had a few drinks, maybe she said she is a recovering alcoholic, so she doesn't drink, but he had some beers or something. And then he's the one that's drunk and he's not able to stop as soon as she says no, because he's impaired.” Man, 30-39 yrs.



OTHER INSIGHTS SURROUNDING RAPE MYTHS



Attitudes to sexual consent do not change if the parties are husband and wife

All community members are firm in understanding that a relationship between husband and wife, or other forms of partnership, does not influence perceptions of consent. Both are entitled to refuse or withdraw sexual consent any time they have sex.

However, some community members did acknowledge that perceptions of sexual consent between husbands and wives may vary, especially amongst some strongly patriarchal cultures. They acknowledge that they do not espouse this belief but that there may be some people within the broader community who do not believe a wife can be raped by her husband.

“No, I think it's one of those myths, that a married person can't be raped by their partner. And I've heard an American politician say it once, that there's no rape in marriage. Yeah, which I think any rational person nowadays would be like, 'well, that's bullshit'.” Man, LGBTIQ

“I was just going to say, like any man, depending if you raise them too as well, and you're teaching him when someone, a woman says no, she means no. To stop. So, whether you're in a casual situation or whether you're in a husband-and-wife situation, like I said, when you hear no, that no means no.” Man, FN

“There's also like the cultural aspect where in a lot of cultures, once you're married, your ability to consent is taken away from you. You have to go along with it.” Woman, 22-29 yrs.

“Yeah, when you're married. Some nationalities and some religions, when you marry your husband, you're your husband's property and you cannot say no.” Woman, 55+ yrs.



Freezing during sex is not unanimously considered a refusal or withdrawal of consent

A spectrum exists in how community members consider freezing during a sexual act.

On one end of the spectrum, some community members consider it a clear sign of refusal or withdrawal of consent. These people often refer to the fight, flight or freeze response, acknowledging that freezing is a legitimate reaction when feeling threatened or in danger.

However, others don't consider it as clear cut. Rather, they view freezing as signalling something isn't right and that the person needs to check in with the other party and confirm their consent.

Many also believe freezing can be challenging to interpret and were quick to suggest and consider situations of freezing where it could be misunderstood or misconstrued. These scenarios included some suggesting that freezing behaviour might be linked to the way a person participates in the sexual act (e.g. someone who doesn't move during sex, or is focused on their pleasure and therefore less responsive or participative).

However, again the consideration of these rationalisations links back to the belief within the community that refusal or withdrawal of consent communicated through body language carries a risk that it could be misinterpreted.

"There's flight, flight freeze. When you're in that freeze thing, you can't really do anything besides dead fish, and that's pretty obvious, I feel like, yeah."
Woman, LGBTIQ+

"Because you normally, if the other person's into you and all of a sudden freezes, you normally would ask, 'What's the matter? What's wrong? Did I do something wrong?' Or, 'What's going on?'" Man, FN

"Well, you have the women that apparently just 'starfish' where they lay there and let the guy do all the work, could be that he's had women like this, that just lay there and don't do anything." Man, 30-39 yrs.

"I think it communicates that the person either isn't sure about what they want or they're just scared to say no in the situation. And then I think it depends on what situation you are in. Do you know the person well, are you really good friends with them, or are you dating them? Or if you just met them and then... How well they know you would also play into how they go forward with that, once they see that you're hesitating for whatever reason that might be."
Woman, 18-22yrs.



A spectrum of attitudes exists regarding how a delay in reporting sexual assault is interpreted, and its impact on perceptions of a woman's believability

At one end of the spectrum, some community members appear more trauma-informed and understood that it might take a person time to deal with what happened and then choose to report it.

For these community members, a delay in reporting does not impact the believability of a woman's sexual assault claim.

Some of these more trauma-informed community members often referred to high profile sexual assault cases, where victims came forward only after others had shared their allegations, as supporting points for a potential delay in reporting. Suggesting such media cases have played a role in informing their understanding of trauma.

However, some within the community struggle to understand why a woman may delay her reporting.

Delays in reporting also led some to be suspicious about whether a woman had ulterior motives motivating a sexual assault allegation.

These community members express a need to question:

- The timing of the sexual assault allegation. Some would explore whether there is a personal benefit to a woman reporting sexual assault allegations later, rather than earlier.
- The accuser's relationship with the accused. This is to assess if there are any ulterior motives such as 'revenge' that might be motivating the sexual assault allegation.
- The social status of the accused. This is to assess if the woman is motivated by fame or financially motivated by cash payments or 'hush money'.

However, these suspicions about sexual assault allegations are present no matter the timing of reporting. Both reporting soon after a sexual assault, or quite some time after an assault, is met with suspicion and can impact the woman's believability.

"Did she say it to the police? Did she say it to a friend? She accused him straight after doing that. It's very, it's very murky waters." Woman, 40-55 yrs.

"Statistics show that, however many percentage of women don't report sexual assault because of the fear or the stigma. So it doesn't surprise me when people come back years later. Because it can take that long to get the courage to say something." Man, 40-55 yrs.

"Then you get all these footballers, that the girls asked them back to their place and then next minute, they're up on rape charges." Woman, FN

"See, I question her credibility as well, because he's wealthy. We assume that he's wealthy and got money, and is she just gold digger? Well, what does she want out of it?" Man, 22-29 yrs.



Rape myths about women's sexual assault allegations being motivated by fame or financial benefit or regretful sexual encounters appear to be present within the community

When discussing sexual assault allegations, a common question raised by both men and women is whether the male accused of sexual assault is of a high profile within society.

The high social status of an accused male appears to cast suspicions on the truthfulness of a sexual assault allegation. It is thought possible that the woman's allegations are motivated by seeking fame or financial benefit through settlements and receiving 'hush money' rather than a genuine assault occurring.

Community members often cited high profile sexual assault cases with sports stars reported in the media as evidence of such occurrences. This suggests these media cases are informing this opinion and rape myth.

Another common suspicion raised among men and women is whether the alleged sexual assault is genuine sexual assault or the woman regretting a sexual act after the event.

Some thought embarrassment or shame about having had sex with someone might motivate some women to allege the sex wasn't consensual, when in fact, it was. In addition, social pressures of friends judging who someone is sexually active with, or sexual assault claims being used to cover up cheating, were thought to be influencing factors that might lead a woman to falsely claim sexual assault.

"Depends on the scenario; say if these were two people that worked together and she's let go for three months or whatever it might be in the meantime has that guy got a promotion at work that she wanted or is there some other mitigating factor in there, to cause her to say 'I'm going to fix this bastard'. There's things you don't know that could be going on behind the scenes." Man, 55+ yrs.

"Like just say you are a girl and out with group of friends or whatever and you're drinking. Whatever, you sleep with this guy and then afterwards like, 'She slept with a random at this club.' And then all of a sudden, she's labelled as a slut or she's labelled as she may regret it and then that gives her motive to say, 'It was a sexual assault'." Man 18-21 yrs.

"See, I question her credibility as well, because he's wealthy. We assume that he's wealthy and got money, and is she just gold digger? Well, what does she want out of it? ..." Man, 22-29 yrs.



Women in the community appear more knowledgeable about potential barriers to reporting sexual assault than men

Women appear to be more mindful of why a woman might not report or not consider reporting a sexual assault than men. Potential barriers to reporting sexual assault were largely not raised at all by men in discussions.

The lack of discussion around potential barriers a woman might experience when reporting sexual assault suggests that barriers to reporting are not as top of mind for men, and education may be required.

Women commonly brought up the following potential barriers to reporting a sexual assault:

- Concerns about whether they'd be believed by their community or face social backlash for making a sexual assault allegation about a friend or community member.
 - For example, there are concerns of facing social stigma or isolation for accusing a friend or community member who is held in positive social regard, with other friends or the community having difficulty envisaging that person committing the offence.
 - Specific to First Nations people, women acknowledge that mob dynamics would be an additional social factor that would need to be navigated if reporting a sexual assault in their communities.
- Concerns about whether they'd be believed by police, as there is a perception that sensitivity to sexual assault can vary with law enforcement.
- Doubt about whether fault can be assigned and questioning whether they actually 'led them on' or were clear enough in communicating their refusal or withdrawal of consent, particularly among younger females.
- Shame about being sexually assaulted.
- Not comprehending what happened. For example, stories of women and girls not understanding they were sexually assaulted or even that a sexual act occurred (due to sexual inexperience) were shared within the focus groups.

"Just because of the way things were, where police would just be like, 'No, that didn't happen'." Woman, FN

"You also have all those people that aren't going to believe you. You could be in a group of friends and one of these guys has been the one to assault you and it's like, 'If I tell all of his friends, they're going to all shun me'. They're going to be like, 'Oh he didn't do that. He wouldn't do that. You're making that up.' And it's like, are you doing more harm than good by actually saying anything?" Woman 18-22 yrs.

"Yeah. And I think one of the first questions you're asked at the police station is, 'What were you wearing? Were you drinking?'" Woman, 22-29 yrs.

"... And I've been in that situation. I won't get personal, but I know that I've been in that situation, where I've been the one affected by alcohol and I've been taken advantage of. And, then I went home and slept it off and I never reported it, because you're too ashamed." Woman, 40-55 yrs.



SEXUAL CONSENT EDUCATION



Generally, the community believes understanding around consent is learnt through several sources

Parents and family role models are seen as key influencers and educators when teaching children about consent. How parents teach or role model respectful relationships is seen to inform children's perceptions and understanding of consent either positively or negatively.

Increasingly informed and typically younger community members often associate consent education for children to begin with teaching body autonomy to young children, such as asking permission for a hug and respecting the response. Parents are considered the key educators in body autonomy, but all adults who engage with children are thought to be role models for teaching body autonomy.

Some community members feel they learnt about sexual consent as they built **life and sexual experiences**. Likewise, there is a feeling that people learn about consent and gain confidence in communicating consent as they get older and become more experienced in life and sexual experiences.

Friends and peers are also seen to influence consent. However, it is understood that friends and peers can have either a positive or negative influence, depending on their understanding of or attitudes to consent.

News media reporting of sexual assault cases is thought to stimulate community discussion about sexual consent and consent in general. However, opinions are mixed on how educative news media is when reporting on sexual assault cases and consider it is only stimulating discussion rather than educating on the topic.

Crime TV shows such as *Law and Order* are also mentioned as sources that have influenced some community members' understanding of consent.

"The school I went to, it was kind of like it was talked about, but not in depth. Now, it was more talked to me by my parents." Man, 18-21 yrs.

"... My nieces and that, they tend to think they share things and I'm like, ah. The other thing too is podcasts. There are things on podcasts where they might pick up an article and they'll talk about it and digest it amongst themselves. I think sometimes that influences people." Woman, 30-39 yrs.

"... If you watch a Hollywood movie and two people start getting romantically entangled they don't stop and pause and say, 'Are you consenting to this'. It just seems to flow and I gather even in marriage it just flows. I mean years ago you couldn't get charged with rape of your spouse, now you can. It's been that way for many years now. So for most people that engage they're not asking permission and this is where the debate has been on the TV." Man, 55+ yrs.



Very few community members recall learning about sexual consent at school

People recall various degrees of sexual health education in school, but with limited focus on education around sexual consent specifically. Even amongst younger community members there is a view that education in school was more focused on preventing unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmissible infection (STI) prevention, rather than any specific focus on consent or respectful relationships.

Some younger community members recall consent education when at university, generally during orientation or onboarding activities.

Other community members recall workplaces providing consent education, including forms of sexual consent training within their HR onboarding and training. However, sexual consent education is acknowledged as part of broader education about respectful and appropriate relationships within the context of work. Some of this training is also considered somewhat disingenuous and is largely motivated by minimising any legal risk rather than playing a real educative role.

“Maybe in uni, they sat us all down and taught us what consent was for people that apparently didn't know, but it seemed that all the talk about consent seems to be the guy must seek consent from the woman. It seems to all be focused on the man. It's the man's responsibility.” Man, 30-39 yrs.

“And I think there's a heavy focus on STDs, and how to use a condom, and how to not get pregnant. I remember when I was in year eight. But nothing about consent. And so it's all just, ‘Don't get an STD and don't get pregnant’, like kind of skip the whole having sex, initially, anyway.” Woman 22-29 yrs.

“...and at my high school, it was quite... like, there was a lot of stuff that happened that went on between students and I think there was even an incident with a teacher getting fired for that because of inappropriate behaviour, but everyone would just kind of push it under the rug and not talk about it and not address it with the students...” Woman 18-22 yrs.



Educative metaphors of sexual consent are being consumed within the community; however, to varying degrees

Several younger community members have been indirectly or directly consuming sexual consent media, often in sexual consent metaphors. Examples given include the *Tea and Consent* video and the traffic light metaphor of sexual consent.

Some younger females and LGBTIQ+ community members report that they specifically seek out and consume media around the topic of consent through online articles and podcasts.

Those consuming specific sexual consent media, such as articles and podcasts, reflect that it has been key in informing their understanding and opinions of sexual consent. They consider that those not consuming this media would likely have differing opinions about sexual consent. This notion is commonly projected onto older generations.

"There's a good podcast called 'Consent and Consequences'. I don't remember who hosts, but one of them is an ex-cop from the New South Wales police, and he goes through all of this extensively, and does these little examples, and explains his thinking from a police perspective really well."
Woman, LGBTIQ

"Then also you see it in the media a lot. You see like, 'Oh this sport player is being accused of this.' And then you're like, 'Oh, what's that?' And then you kind of learn about it through the media and talking about it with peers." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"What I think is interesting, one from my podcasts talked about it the other day, as in porn there's never a clear indicator of consent and it's scary. Because I think that's a lot of, I don't want to assume, but for males, it might be their point of reference. That's where they're going to learn stuff." Woman, 22-29 yrs.



Pornography and media depictions of sex are considered influential in shaping an understanding of consent and sexual behaviour if the person viewing them is sexually inexperienced

While not considered relevant for their learning about consent, pornography is thought to influence younger and sexually inexperienced people's understanding of consent in negative ways.

Community members typically consider porn as a form of entertainment that largely does not reflect real-life sexual encounters or healthy sexual relationships. It is generally thought that if someone doesn't understand that porn isn't reflective of real life, and is inexperienced sexually, then it's likely to influence the person's understanding of sexual consent negatively.

More broadly, several community members mentioned how sex scenes in entertainment media (TV shows and movies) are also likely to negatively influence people's understandings of sexual consent if they are sexually inexperienced.

It is acknowledged that sex scenes in movies and TV shows rarely portray consent and offer unrealistic depictions of sex. Therefore, it is thought that if someone didn't know any better, either due to age, life experience or sexual inexperience, they might pick up a poor understanding of consent from the media.

"A lot of people that I know who have had bad experiences with people who literally just watched a lot of porn thinking that's how sex is and that's how it works. And yeah.... I know it happens for girls and boys, but I feel like it's a lot more for boys and that's just my personal experience that they kind of develop these really aggressive tendencies. And they think it's attractive to be pushy." Woman, 18-22 yrs.

"Like kids are getting raised on stuff and then these websites just pump out really vulgar stuff. And I think I've even seen studies linking pornography to sexual assault. It is pretty serious." Man, 18-21 yrs.

"You don't even have to go to pornography to get the warped perception. You just watch any movie on Netflix and they're throwing each other all over the bedroom and kissing and getting rough. Easily, everywhere you can see a lot of different types of sexual interaction, a lot of them aren't so savoury." Woman 55+ yrs.

"I'd say for us in here, we would know, we can watch all the porn and all the negative and the positive and the soft and the hardcore and all that stuff. We would know the difference and still be able to realise that wouldn't necessarily be a real-life scenario. Whereas they (younger generations) may only watch this particular type of porn and say this is consent. She smiled this way, boom." Man, 40-55 yrs.



Community members identify four key sources that hold a responsibility to inform the community about consent

Parents and role models are considered responsible for educating their children about sexual consent. However, it is acknowledged that not all parents or households are equipped to teach their children about the topic. It is also recognised that parents and role models may have varying perceptions or understanding of consent, and therefore teaching through parents would not deliver standardised messaging.

If the content is age-appropriate, the community is largely supportive of schools teaching sexual consent to students at both primary and secondary levels. A key strength of schools educating children about sexual consent is that the education system provides the opportunity to standardise sexual consent messaging and education.

While most community members are supportive of sexual consent being taught in schools, some express concern about 'your everyday teacher' teaching the subject matter. These community members reflected on their varied experiences with sex education at school and felt that independent teaching professionals would be better suited for such an important but sensitive topic.

Beyond school years, consent education is largely thought up to the individual, and further education would likely vary based on the individual's media consumption and life experiences. However, some interest is expressed in education about the current or updated laws about sexual consent.

However, an appetite is expressed for social marketing and messaging around consent within the community. Consent is considered a legitimate social issue that warrants communication. Several community members compared this to other social marketing campaigns, such as drink driving and road safety campaigns. **A role for the government is often seen in sexual consent social messaging in either an ownership or supportive capacity.**

"But it comes down to the parents too, because if we talk just about guys, teenage boys going to start watching porn it's the time that parents should sit down and say, look, this is what you see there. It's not what it really is." Man, 30-39 yrs.

"So, I really think the education department, which someone has already said, the curriculum is already crowded. However, that's the place where we have all these children until they're at least 15. That's the perfect audience, the captive audience." Woman, 55+ yrs.

"And with the government thing, it would be nice because it would be like a consistent message instead of teachers having their own personal opinions and swivelling that in there. You could have one consistent, across the board: 'This is not okay if it's not okay. This is okay if it is okay.' Instead of it being like, 'This is what I'm being told to tell you, but this is my own personal opinion on it.'" Woman, 18-22 yrs.



CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS



CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS (1)

Based on this research, the Queensland community shows an interest and desire for public education on the topic of sexual consent. Community members themselves acknowledge that while consent should be a 'black and white' concept, in real life their experience is that it is 'grey' and further education would benefit the community.

When it comes to sexual consent education, community members generally believe in their own firm grasp of the concept of sexual consent, acknowledging that it:

- Can be communicated verbally or through body language
- Needs to be monitored throughout a sexual activity
- Cannot be assumed based on prior behaviour and can be withdrawn at any time during a sexual act
- Involves all parties having a responsibility to ensure sexual activity is consensual
- Is impacted by alcohol consumption (acknowledging that being drunk is not a valid excuse for sexual assault and that a person can be too drunk to consent to sexual activity).

Where community members appear to struggle is in the real-life navigation of sexual consent, as situational factors can sometimes appear to challenge and contradict their conceptual understanding of consent. **This disconnect between the community's conceptual and practical understanding of consent suggests a need for education on the practical application and navigation of consent.** Scenario based education and tools that help guide how to navigate sexual consent would likely be beneficial and help bridge the gap between conceptual and practical knowledge and understanding.

Additional areas where community attitudes appear particularly mixed in regard to sexual consent are as follows.

Body language is considered a legitimate but contentious form of communication for sexual consent. It is considered contentious due to the individualistic and subjective interpretation of body language, suggesting the community would find education around navigating consent in this way as beneficial.

Community attitudes to delayed reporting of a sexual assault and implications of believability of the woman appear mixed, suggesting a need exists for trauma education within the community. While some community members appear trauma-informed, others struggle to comprehend why a woman might delay reporting a sexual assault.

Social conventions and stereotypes were identified in this research, which place greater onus on women in society to give or refuse consent, suggesting more education is required to address gender inequality and female agency in the community.

Rape myths around women falsely alleging sexual assault for financial gain, or motivated by regret, were also identified as present within the community through this research. The presence of these rape myths suggests additional education in this area as well.



CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS (2)

Gender-based gaps exist in the knowledge and understanding of some of the complexities of sexual consent.

In particular, it appears some men in the community lack top of mind knowledge and understanding of how confidence levels, agency and power dynamics can influence one's ability to give, withdraw or refuse sexual consent beyond domestic violence relationships. Based on the finding that some in the community find it challenging in their application of sexual consent knowledge, it is likely education tools on how to identify and navigate confidence levels, agency and power dynamics in sexual consent situations would be beneficial.

Furthermore, it also appears in contrast to women, men are generally less likely to immediately acknowledge an understanding and awareness of barriers to reporting a sexual assault for women, identifying another potential area for sexual consent education to inform the community about.

Regarding education about sexual consent, many community members are open to sexual consent being taught in schools to children. When it comes to the education of adults about sexual consent, community members appear to have an appetite for social marketing and messaging around the topic of sexual consent.

In addition, community members expressed some appetite for an increased level of social awareness and education about sexual consent laws and future changes to the law.

FURTHER RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

Participants acknowledge a difference between how sexual consent is likely communicated by parties in a relationship and parties that don't know each other as well, such as new relationships and strangers. Due to this perceived difference within the community, it is suggested that any future research should include a deliberate focus on understanding and contrasting of single and relationship levels within the research, to further explore differences in expectations and experiences.



