

# Illuminating the Shades of Grey in the Black and White World of Consent Education

Research conducted by Camille Grafton - Supervised by Dr. Bruce Ravelli  
March 20th 2023



University of Victoria

## Affiliations

This research was supported by the Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Awards and The University of Victoria, Department of Sociology

## Discussion

The data gathered from this survey show that within this audience there is a significant call for diverse, real-world consent education. Though quantitative data points to the majority of respondents believing they received a nuanced consent education, many qualitative responses from UVIC students argue the opposite:

*"My high school hired a different educator and they approached the consent conversation in an extremely triggering and unprofessional way"*

*"They were able to give me a base understanding of the physical reality but my sex-ed failed to demonstrate the emotional/mental reality of consent"*

*"I didn't really know how to separate my self-worth from my ability to have sex."*

*"My class did mention that gay people exist and have sex, but not much beyond that"*

*"Most of my education on the topic came from the Internet or my parents, rather than school"*

## Conclusion

As illuminated by the survey data and literature review, grey areas of consent do not disappear when research, education or legal systems ignore them. By perpetuating a black-and-white reality, institutions work to erase identities and issues that always have and will exist.

When we recognize nuance, no matter how complex or challenging it may be, individuals gain the opportunity to build skills that allow them to understand and learn from their experiences, as opposed to ignoring them.

This research shows how students at UVIC have been navigating issues of consent, and how for many, their voices have been ignored through much of their consent education history.

This is direct evidence that inquiry exists, and there is a need for more attention and investigation into how the topic of consent can be explored on a larger scale at UVIC.

## References

- Marg, L. Z. (2020). College Men's Conceptualization of Sexual Consent at a Large, Racially/Ethnically Diverse Southern California University. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 15(3), 371-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2020.1737291>
- Curtis, J. N., & Burnett, S. (2017). Affirmative Consent: What Do College Student Leaders Think About "Yes Means Yes" as the Standard for Sexual Behavior? *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 12(3), 201-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2017.1328322>

## How Do We Move Beyond "Yes means Yes" and "No means No?"

Current consent education provides a binary understanding of sexual relations, which revolves around a legal definition of a physical action (Marg, 2020).

Notions such as "yes means yes" and "no means no" are the bare minimum level of understanding required to have ethical relations, but it is often here where the conversation ends (Curtis & Burnett, 2017).

Although the discourse around consent has evolved significantly over time, this research project aims to highlight the lack of consideration regarding the emotional tribulations and realities that exist in this topic.

## Methodology

This research project was designed to investigate how UVIC students perceive gaps within their sexual education, and how their beliefs have been affected by greater societal conceptions of consent.

### Research was conducted through:

1. A comprehensive literature review of Western consent education practices and research
2. An anonymous online survey of UVIC students in a 100-level sociology course, consisting of 5 short and long-form questions (approved under Ethics protocol #23-0479).

## Objective

The goal of the survey was to illuminate how UVIC students feel their educational experiences have prepared them to give and receive well-informed consent, as compared to the experiences of other post-secondary students in North America.

- The results of the survey will inform how sexual education programming and further research within the UVIC community can target gaps and areas of student concern.

## Results

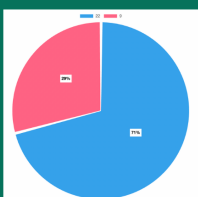
### Themes within current literature:

1. Misconceptions perpetuated through the current educational systems
2. Impact of binary frameworks (exclusion of identities)
3. Call for 2SLGBTQIA+ informed teaching
4. Disconnect between educational rhetoric and the nuances of reality

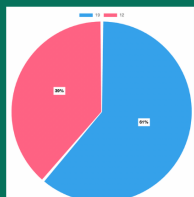
### UVIC survey themes:

31 respondents

1. Male, heterocentric focus of current systems
2. Call for diverse, trauma-informed consent education



% who received consent education



% of nuanced consent education

Blue = yes  
Red = no

