

YOUR BODY YOUR CONCERN!

LET'S TALK ABOUT:

CONSENT CULTURE

IN

CONTEMPORARY
CIRCUS

A NO IS A NO

AND WILL **NOT** BE DISCUSSED,
NEGOTIATED, NOR IS IT AN INVITATION
TO CONVINCING SOMEONE.

A YES CAN CHANGE INTO
A NO AT ANY TIME.

A MAYBE IS **NOT** A YES

CONSENT CULTURE – TOOLBOX

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CODE OF CONDUCT:

- Judgmental behavior in any direction will not foster the process. Here is a space for making mistakes. We accept that we are all amateurs regarding consent culture.
- Changing opinions is totally okay; we are learning and growing together.
- If you are someone who likes to speak in public, please take a step back for those who have difficulties speaking in public. Give those people time to find their words. If you are someone who feels uncomfortable speaking in public, I would like to encourage you to be brave and step forward to raise your voice.
- Age-shaming, racist, homophobic, transphobic, as well as words of assault or harassment, are not accepted here because they don't contribute to a safer space and environment.
- Let people finish their sentences.
- If you want to agree with what someone said, please raise your hand or show agreement in a non-verbal way.
- If you disagree, make an X or gesture to show disagreement, if you feel comfortable doing so.
- If you want to speak and add something to the ongoing conversation, please raise one finger, then two fingers, and so on. So we queue in a homogeneous way and I don't need to judge who will speak next.
- Please use "I" sentences, speak only about yourself, and not about third parties.
- I want to underline that we are here to learn on an eye-to-eye level. No one is better or higher in a hierarchy here.
- If you need to take a break and scroll on your phone, that's completely legitimate. Take your time and join in again when you feel ready.
- All exercises are suggestions and not mandatory.

- If you feel triggered and need help, please let me know by raising your hand forming both hands like a handshake, and we will leave the space to see what you need. If you feel okay with just leaving the room alone, please do so, and come back when you feel safe again.
- Self-care is highly appreciated here.

How Consent Works

Consent applies to any kind of physical activity or any other engagement or interaction of two or more people involved.

I want to stress that mostly physical touch is the first thing that comes to one's mind when speaking about consent culture but that's just one tiny part of it.

These are some important aspects to remember about consent:

- Consent needs to be freely given: Consent needs to be freely given, without pressure, intimidation, or manipulation. Consent that is given under coercion, force, or duress, in a state lacking the mental capacity to consent, or by someone who is in a disadvantaged position is not valid.
- For example, a subordinate may feel forced to agree to participate due to their position of power over them, but that is not freely given consent.
- Consent has to be specific: Consent needs to be specific and cannot be assumed to include other things as well.
- Consent can be reversed at any time: Even if someone gave their consent and agreed to participate, they are entitled to change their mind at any time. At whatever point they want to stop, their partner must respect their wishes. Ignoring or disrespecting a "no" or request to stop is a violation of consent.
- Consent must be informed: If someone is consenting to something, they must be fully informed about what they are consenting to.
- Consent should be enthusiastic: It is important for all parties involved to be in a continuous state of enthusiastic consent. Enthusiastic consent means the presence of a strong "yes" instead

of a hesitant "okay" or the absence of a "no" and may be expressed verbally or via nonverbal cues and body language including smiling, nodding, maintaining eye contact, and receptive facial expressions. The purpose of enthusiastic consent is to ensure that all parties involved give genuine, voluntary consent to proceed during sexual activity.

Types of Consent

Consent can be verbal or non-verbal.

Verbal Consent

These are some examples of verbal consent:

- “Yes.”
- “I’d like that.”
- “That sounds good.”
- “That feels great.”
- “Don’t stop doing that.”
- “I’m enjoying this.”
- “I’m open to trying this.”
- “Keep going!”
- “Can you please...”

Verbal consent is the clearest form of consent and, therefore, the safest.

Non-Verbal Consent

Consent can also be non-verbal. These are some examples of non-verbal consent:

- Nodding your head
- Giving a thumbs up or "okay" sign
- Maintaining direct eye contact
- Relaxed, open, and receptive body language

However, it’s important to note that everyone’s body language is different and non-verbal consent can be misinterpreted. Therefore, it’s helpful to verbally check in every now and then to make sure they’re on the same page as you are.

What Is Not Consent

Like consent, non-consent can also be verbal or non-verbal.

These are some examples of verbal non-consent:6

- “No.”
- “Stop.”
- “I don’t want to do this.”
- “I’m not enjoying this.”
- “Don’t do that; I don’t like it.”
- “Don’t touch me.”
- "I'm not sure."
- "I don't think so."
- "I've never done that and I'm not sure I'm ready to try."
- "Um, maybe, I guess..."
- "Not cool."
- "Ouch, that hurts."
- "Get off of me/get out of here."
- "I need a break."

These are some examples of non-verbal non-consent:6

- Turning your head or body away from someone
- Pushing them away
- Avoiding their touch
- Avoiding touching them
- Staying silent and not saying anything
- Lying still and unresponsive
- Seeming distracted and not present
- Becoming rigid or tensing up
- Sudden changes like going from smiling to frowning, relaxed to tense, happy to upset
- Avoiding eye contact or looking away
- Looking sad or afraid
- Shaking head "no"

CONSENSDEMOCRACY:

The pursuit of consensus, which means going beyond the principle of

majority decision, is a deliberate effort in segmented societies. It's easier to reach a majority agreement than to achieve consensus. People are aware of this fact, but they reject the path of least resistance for the following reason: for them, the opinion of the majority alone is not sufficient for decision-making because it denies the minority the right to have their will reflected in the decision at hand.

Or, in terms of the concept of representation: It deprives the minority of the right to representation in the decision in question. Being represented is considered a basic human right in consensus democracies. Therefore, every person has the right not only to be represented in the council but also in the process of deliberation itself regarding any matter relevant to their interests or those of their group. This is why the principle of consensus is so important. It is argued that repeated non-representation leads to dissatisfaction and thus endangers the balance of the community.

Decision-making with consent:

What is decision-making in informed consent?

The goal of the informed consent process is to provide patients with information that is necessary and relevant to their decision making (including the risks and benefits of accepting or declining recommended treatment) and to help participants in identifying the best course of action.

What are the principles of decision-making and consent?

- **Disclosure of Information:** This principle requires that individuals be provided with all relevant information necessary to make an informed decision. This includes details about the nature and purpose of the intervention or research, potential risks and benefits, alternatives available, and any other information that might influence a person's decision to consent. The information must be presented in a way that is understandable to the individual, considering language, literacy, and cultural context.

- **Competency to Make a Decision:** Consent must be obtained from someone who is legally and mentally capable of making the decision. This includes having the cognitive ability to understand the information provided and to appreciate the consequences of the decision.
- **Voluntary Nature of the Decision:** The decision to consent must be made freely, without coercion, undue influence, or pressure. This ensures that the person's consent is genuinely reflective of their own desires and understanding. Participants should also be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the intervention at any time without penalty.

Each of these principles plays a crucial role in ensuring that individuals can make informed decisions about their healthcare or participation in research, based on their own values, preferences, and circumstances.

Everyone has the right to be listened to and given information, time, and support.

Information should be adjusted, taking also some other factors into account like:

- Age
- Knowledge background
- Cultural background
- Educational background
- Lack of understanding / Lost in translation: often students do not study in their mother tongue.

Consent and communication in practice:

In practice, applying a consent culture in communication involves implementing specific strategies and approaches that prioritize respect, autonomy, and mutual agreement. I collected some mutual aspects to set up a consequential communication with a group setting.

1. **Setting Clear Expectations:** Begin by setting clear expectations for communication within the group. Establish guidelines that

emphasize active listening, respect for diverse perspectives, and the importance of seeking consent before engaging in discussions or activities.

2. **Establishing Consent Norms:** Encourage group members to actively seek consent before initiating conversations or actions that may impact others. This includes asking for permission before sharing personal information, discussing potentially triggering topics, or involving others in group activities.
3. **Active Listening and Validation:** Foster a culture of active listening, where group members attentively listen to each other without interruption or judgment. Encourage validation of others' experiences and perspectives, even if they differ from one's own, to create an inclusive and supportive environment.
4. **Empowering Consent-Based Decision Making:** Prioritize consent-based decision-making processes within the group. Ensure that all members have the opportunity to provide input, voice concerns, and reach consensus before making decisions that affect the group as a whole.
5. **Respecting Boundaries:** Respect personal boundaries and individual autonomy in communication interactions. Avoid pressuring or coercing others into participating beyond their comfort level and seek consent before discussing sensitive topics or engaging in activities that may trigger discomfort.
6. **Conflict Resolution with Consent:** Approach conflicts or disagreements with a focus on understanding and finding mutually agreeable solutions. Encourage open dialogue, active listening, and respectful communication to address differences while respecting each individual's autonomy and boundaries.
7. **Continuous Feedback and Reflection:** Foster a culture of continuous feedback and reflection on communication dynamics within the group. Regularly solicit input from members about their communication experiences, identify areas for improvement, and collectively learn from both successes and challenges.
8. **Promoting Consent in Language Use:** Pay attention to the language used within the group and strive to use inclusive, respectful, and

non-coercive language. Avoid language that may perpetuate power imbalances, marginalize certain group members, or pressure individuals into compliance.

By applying these principles of consent culture in communication, groups can create a more respectful, inclusive, and empowering environment where every member feels valued and heard.

Literature about consent-based leadership:

- "Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking" by David Bayles and Ted Orland: While not explicitly about consent culture, this book explores the challenges and fears artists face in their creative endeavors. Understanding these dynamics can inform leadership approaches that prioritize empathy, understanding, and collaboration.
- "The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters" by Priya Parker: Parker's book offers insights into the art of creating meaningful and inclusive gatherings. Leaders in art fields can learn from her perspectives on designing experiences that respect participants' autonomy, foster connection, and enable consensual participation.
- "The Artist's Guide: How to Make a Living Doing What You Love" by Jackie Battenfield: This practical guide for artists includes sections on communication, negotiation, and professional relationships. It provides valuable advice on navigating consent and boundaries in the context of creative collaborations and partnerships.
- "The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life" by Twyla Tharp: Tharp's book offers insights into cultivating creativity and discipline in artistic pursuits. While not specifically focused on consent culture, it provides valuable perspectives on leadership, collaboration, and the importance of mutual respect in creative endeavors.
- "The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups" by Daniel Coyle: Coyle explores the dynamics of successful group cultures and how leaders can create environments that foster trust,

collaboration, and innovation. This book offers practical insights applicable to leadership in art fields seeking to cultivate consent culture principles.

- "Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance" by Edgar Villanueva: While not specific to the arts, Villanueva's book addresses broader issues of power, privilege, and consent within philanthropy and social change movements. Leaders in art fields can draw inspiration from his perspectives on decolonizing leadership and centering marginalized voices.
- "The Intuitive Way: The Definitive Guide to Increasing Your Awareness" by Penney Peirce: Peirce's book explores intuition and personal growth, offering strategies for cultivating self-awareness and understanding interpersonal dynamics. Leaders in art fields can benefit from her insights into effective communication, empathy, and consent.