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Spring 2020

# Understandings of Sexual Consent Among Male and Female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu-Natal

Larkin Levine  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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**UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEXUAL CONSENT AMONG MALE AND  
FEMALE ZULU SOUTH AFRICANS IN MASXHA, KWAZULU-  
NATAL**

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Supervisor: Janine Hicks, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Spring 2020

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## **Abstract**

Though South Africa has an astonishingly high rate of rape and sexual violence, little research has been conducted on understandings of sexual consent outside of the context of rape and sexual violence in different South African communities. Instead, research has focused on understandings and perceptions of rape and sexual violence alone, ignoring the importance of understanding how individuals approach consent in healthy sexual relationships.

Through conducting semi-structured interviews with sixteen Zulu males and females of different ages, all of whom are residents of Masxha, I hoped to learn how these individuals understand sexual consent and how consent is requested, given, and received.

Through thematic analysis, I concluded that a majority of individuals felt that getting permission, the word I used in my interviews to convey the concept of consent, before engaging in sex, was important. I also concluded that the stage at which individuals ask for consent as well as the ways in which individuals ask for and give consent are varied. Furthermore, I gained a deeper understanding of how alcohol, gender, and relationship status influence consent. Additionally, I found that while many of my participants expressed detailed opinions and thoughts on the concept of permission, many of these same participants were not familiar with the term consent or its legal definition in South Africa. In examining my data and drawing the above conclusions, I came to a larger overarching conclusion; There is a discrepancy between individuals' understandings of consent, the research literature detailing these understandings, and the legal framework which defines consent and sexual violence in South Africa.

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## Frequently Used Terms

Many terms that are used to describe sexual violence are often used interchangeably, but each term has a nuanced definition. For the purposes of this ISP, please refer to the following definitions.

- ❖ Sexual Violence: is defined as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim” (Safer Spaces, n.d., n.p.).
- ❖ Sexual Assault: is an umbrella term that “refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim,” according to RAINN, the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network of the United States (RAINN, n.d., n.p.). This includes rape. In South Africa, sexual assault is legally defined as the unlawful and intentional sexual violation of “a complainant ('B'), without the consent of B” or the unlawful and intentional inspiration of the “belief in a complainant ('B') that B will be sexually violated” by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 12).
- ❖ Rape: falls under the umbrella of sexual assault. In South Africa, rape is defined by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. Under this law, “unlawfully and intentionally [committing] an act of sexual penetration with a complainant ('B'), without the consent of B” is considered rape (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11).
- ❖ Consent: is defined as “voluntary or uncoerced agreement” by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11). In a summary of Act 32, the Center for Applied Legal Studies and Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center expanded on this definition of consent, suggesting that the law requires individuals to “be able to understand what” they are consenting to and “freely, willingly and deliberately agree to the sexual act” (Center for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center, n.d., p. 3).
- ❖ Healthy Sexual Interactions: is a term that I have personally defined for the purpose of this ISP. I use this term to refer to sexual interactions where consent is present in one form or

another and where coercion, force, violence, etc. are not present. In other words, sexual interactions that cannot be considered any form of sexual violence. This term is not related to whether or not sex is protected, biological aspects of sexual interactions, or other measures of whether sex is 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' outside of the context of consent.

Other Frequently Used Terms:

- ❖ HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- ❖ AIDS: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

## Introduction

On one of my first days in South Africa, I sat in my hostel bedroom flipping through the pages of the Personal Safety Guidelines section of my Student Orientation Booklet when I came across the statement: “we strongly advise students to keep things simple and friendly. ‘No!’ after flirtation and/or cuddling, may not be respected as it should” (“Personal Safety,” Spring 2020, p. 13). I wasn’t aware in the moment, but I had found my ISP topic. I understood that sexual violence occurs everywhere. I knew that South Africa has some of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world (Maluleke, 2018, p. 8). I was well aware that even the most powerful and declarative enunciation of the word ‘no’ is often not respected in the U.S. and even on my college campus. Yet, the bluntness of this statement and the generalization of the sexual consent culture in South Africa led me to question notions of consent in the communities in which I would soon attempt to immerse myself.

I sought to answer the question, how is sexual consent understood by male and female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu-Natal. In the initial stages of my project, I conducted secondary source research, hoping to find studies that explained how Zulu individuals conceptualize sexual consent. While I found many studies that detailed some understandings of consent in the context of rape and violence, I found few sources that expanded upon the specific ways in which Zulu individuals approach consent during healthy sexual interactions. Through my research in Masxha, I hoped to identify not only how sexual consent is broadly understood, but also how sexual consent is commonly given, requested, and received during healthy sexual interactions, outside of the context of rape and violence. Interviewing both men and women of many different age groups, I hoped to identify demographic factors that might influence perceptions of consent.

Given the psychological and physical trauma inflicted on victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the connection between sexual violence and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in countries like South Africa, I felt that the lack of research on notions of consent alone left a gaping hole in the research literature. In my view, it is impossible to understand and prevent sexual violence in a community without first understanding notions of sexual consent. Though, as an undergraduate student, my ability to influence a whole field of research is obviously limited, I hoped and still hope that this ISP will serve to fill a small part of this gap in the literature.

## Context

The South African province KwaZulu-Natal is located on the southeastern coast of the country (Statistics South Africa, 2016, p. 1). According to the 2016 community survey conducted by Statistics South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal has the second largest population of South Africa's nine provinces, with a population of 11,065,240 people (Statistics South Africa, 2016., p. 8). The South African city, Durban, is located in KwaZulu-Natal. While South Africa is home to many ethnic and cultural groups, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "the Zulu are the single largest ethnic group in South Africa" ("Zulu," n.d., n.p.). The largest concentrations of Zulu people are in the Gauteng Province and in KwaZulu-Natal.

Masxha, or Cato Manor, is a township located "5km west of the Durban city centre" with a complex history of racial and ethnic conflict (South African History Online, 2019b, n.p.). In 1949, fighting and riots broke out between Indian and African residents of Masxha (South African History Online, 2019a, n.p.). In the 1950s, Masxha was declared a white area and forced evictions followed (South African History Online, 2019a, n.p.). Today, Masxha has been repopulated by black Africans and is a predominantly Zulu area. According to the 2011 census, Wiggins, a subarea of Durban that includes Masxha, had a population of 35,504 ("Wiggins Sub Place," n.d., n.p.). The same census data found that black Africans comprised 97.72% of the Wiggins population and individuals whose first language was isiZulu comprised 79.97% of the Wiggins population ("Wiggins Sub Place," n.d., n.p.).

As of 2019, South Africa had the largest HIV epidemic in the world with an estimated 7.97 million South Africans living with the virus (Statistics South Africa, 2019, p. v). With an 18 percent HIV prevalence, KwaZulu-Natal is the South African province with the highest prevalence of HIV (South African National AIDS Council, n.d., p. 7). According to data from The Fifth South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behavior, and Communication Survey, 2017, women bear the largest HIV burden in South Africa. While HIV prevalence is higher among women of all ages than among men of all ages, "this disparity in HIV prevalence by sex is most pronounced among young adults," specifically 20 to 24-year-olds where HIV prevalence is "three times higher among females (15.6 percent) than males (4.8 percent)" (Human Sciences Research Council, 2018, p. 1). According to South Africa's National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, and STIs 2017-2022, "young women in their 20s have a four-fold burden compared to their male peers, with approximately 2,000 new HIV infections occurring every

week, or 100,000 of the 270,000 new infections a year” (South African National AIDS Council, n.d., p. 7).

While there are many drivers of the HIV epidemic in South Africa, it is thought that gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, terms that encapsulate many different forms of violence, including sexual violence, are potential “reasons for this disparity in HIV prevalence” between men and women (Advert, 2020, n.p.). Sexual violence can be a driver of HIV due to women’s limited ability to negotiate condom use and biological vulnerability as a result of vaginal trauma, among other reasons (Watt et al., 2012, p. 1010; Kilonzo et al., 2009, p. 10). Based on data from the 2016/2017 Victims of Crime statistical release and the 2016/2017 South African Police Service statistics, Statistics South Africa estimated that the rate of women raped in South Africa in the 2016/2017 data collection period was 168 per 100,000, a rate that makes South Africa one of the countries with the highest rates of rape in the world (Maluleke, 2018, p. 8). Unfortunately, the number of rapes in South Africa is likely higher than reported given 2012 findings that “only one out of nine victims reports [their] rape to legal authorities” (Singleton, 2012, p. 64). In South Africa, studies have found that “a high proportion of young women describe forced sexual initiation,” suggesting that non-consensual sexual encounters could play a role in the early sexual debut of some young South African women (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, p. 1237). Furthermore, data suggests that “25% of girls” in South Africa are “likely to be raped before age 16,” suggesting that the HIV prevalence among young women could be in part due to sexual violence (Cox et al, 2007 in “Understanding Gender,” n.d., p.22). While my research in Masxha did not focus on HIV and the role of sexual violence in HIV prevalence, it is important to note the connection between the two as well as the high prevalence of HIV in KwaZulu-Natal to provide context for my research on sexual consent as well as the relevant research literature, which often frames the issue of consent as an issue of HIV prevention.

In South Africa both consent and different forms of sexual violence are defined by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. In this act, sexual assault is legally defined as the unlawful and intentional sexual violation of “a complainant ('B'), without the consent of B” or the unlawful and intentional inspiration of the “belief in a complainant ('B') that B will be sexually violated” (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 12). Under this same legislation, rape is defined as “unlawfully and

intentionally [committing] an act of sexual penetration with a complainant ('B'), without the consent of B" (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11). While consent is an integral part of any discussion of sexual violence, consent has many definitions that vary widely between cultures and societies (Heise et al., 1996). The aforementioned Act 32 of 2007 defines consent as a "voluntary or uncoerced agreement" (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 12). In a summary of Act 32, the Center for Applied Legal Studies and Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center expanded on this definition of consent, suggesting that the law requires individuals to "be able to understand what" they are consenting to and "freely, willingly and deliberately agree to the sexual act" (Center for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center, n.d., p. 3).

While 2007 legislation does not differentiate on the basis of sex or gender, instead using the gender-neutral terms "any person" to describe perpetrators and "complainant" to describe victims of rape, sexual assault, and other sexual crimes, legislation prior to 2007 stated that "rape was an act committed only by a man having intentional sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent" (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11; South African Law Commission 1999 in Singleton, 2012, p. 65). In other words, pre-2007 legislation made it "legally impossible to rape a man" (Artz & Smythe, 2008, p. 25). Though this change to the legislation completely redefines notions of rape as a gendered occurrence to an act of sexual violence that can affect anyone, it is important to note that much of the research literature genders rape, considering only female victims and male perpetrators. For the purpose of my research, rape, sexual assault, and consent were defined using the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. Definitions and further information on relevant terms can be found in the Frequently Used Terms section of this report.

## Literature Review

### Focus on Rape and Violence

The most consistent theme I found in the research literature surrounding sexual consent in South Africa was a focus on cultural understandings of instances where consent, by legal standards, is not present. In their 2008 article, Wood et al. touch on this phenomenon, suggesting that research on consent often “tends to ask about experiences of specific practices (hitting, kicking, etc.)” due in part to “definitional difficulties with, and the contestability of, terms associated with coercion and violence in any language” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 279). While it is difficult to research specific understandings and practices of consent due to the complex nature of these terms, understandings of consent are currently “under [-] researched in African settings” despite their clear importance (Wood et al., 2008, p. 279). In their 2002 article, Rachel Jewkes and Naeema Abrahams use available data to conclude “that women’s right to give or withhold consent to sexual intercourse is one of the most commonly violated of all human rights in South Africa” (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, p. 1240). I began my literature review by highlighting the overwhelming focus on violence in consent literature based in South Africa to give context to the themes and sources chosen for this literature review; The themes and sources highlighted herein primarily focus on instances of rape and sexual violence, sexual interactions where consent is lacking. This attention to sexual violence is not a reflection of the focus of my research, but rather an important theme in itself, suggesting that research is indeed required to better understand how individuals in South Africa conceptualize and understand sexual consent outside of the context of rape and sexual violence.

### Men as Victims of Rape and Violence

While the legal definition of rape in South Africa has been gender neutral since 2007, much of the research literature focuses solely on the role of men as perpetrators and women as victims. However, in her 2012 article “The South African Sexual Offenses Act and local meanings of coercion and consent in KwaZulu Natal: Universal human rights?,” Judith Singleton briefly comments on responses from research participants that highlight the potential victimization of men. According to Singleton, “some young men” told her “that women force men to have sex with them” in order to “become pregnant and have children to gain access to

social welfare grants that have been instituted by the democratic government” (Singleton, 2012, p. 68). Though available literature on sexual consent and assault in South Africa likely includes mentions of men as victims of rape and violence beyond the aforementioned quotations, the majority of the research literature that I came into contact with during the course of my secondary source research framed rape, sexual violence, and consent in gendered terms, highlighting men as perpetrators and women as victims.

### **Forced and Coercive Sex**

The concept of forced sex was a persistent theme throughout my research. In their 2008 article, “Showing roughness in a beautiful way’: Talk about love, coercion, and rape in South African youth sexual culture,” Wood, Lambert, and Jewkes discuss the distinctions between rape and forced sex in the Xhosa community studied. The study’s authors found that “most young men and women’s narratives described a continuum of ‘force’ within sexual encounters” with coercion at one end and violence at the other (Wood et al., 2008, p. 284). While many legal and gender violence scholars would define sex at either end of this spectrum of force as sexual assault or rape, Wood et al. found that participants differentiated between even “stark examples of physically coercive acts,” which they considered forced sex, and “ukudlwengula (rape)” which was “characterized as a violent act committed by men who were not in a prior sexual relationship with their targets” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 285). Wood et al. generalized this notion, suggesting that “even if sex was forced by violent means in relationships, it was invariably differentiated from rape by young men and women on the grounds that the two parties were ‘in love’ and had existing sexual relations” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 292). While Wood et al. highlighted the distinction between forced sex and rape among young people in a Xhosa community, Singleton discussed this distinction with Zulu individuals. Singleton found that “lobola,” or bride price, played a role in distinguishing forced sex from rape (Singleton, 2012, p. 67). In an interview with Singleton, one female participant explained the role of lobola in distinguishing between forced sex and rape, stating “I would never say ‘My husband raped me,’ because my husband paid lobola for me. My boyfriend paid nothing for me, so that is rape” (Singleton, 2012, p. 67).

Wood et al. further expand upon the concept of a forced sex continuum by highlighting the role of coercion. Wood et al. found that many young men “often expressed the view that

some young women needed to be strongly encouraged to have sex through verbal ‘force’ or coercion (Wood et al., 2008, p. 285). In the community studied by Wood et al, young women were expected to delay the advances of men in order to protect their reputation, creating a culture where men are expected to continue pursuing and coercing a woman after she has initially declined (Wood et al., 2008, p. 286). Wood et al. suggest that this culture plays role in distinguishing coercive behavior from rape, finding that “male informants who openly admitted to forcing sex through the use of violence distanced themselves completely from rapists: ‘Real’ men, they said, had no need to rape, as they could talk someone into sex” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 291).

## **Obligation**

### *Relationships*

The concept of sexual obligations was also a consistent theme that appeared in my secondary source research. As discussed above, according to the available research literature, sex is expected and is not considered rape in the context of relationships where lobola has been paid (Singleton, 2012, p. 67). This was also true of less formal boyfriend-girlfriend relationships among the young people studied by Wood et al. Among the individuals studied, “forced sex in established relationships was not described as rape because young men tried to argue that sex was an obligation” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 292).

### *Alcohol*

In the available secondary source literature, exchanges of alcohol are also described as creating obligations to perform sexually. In their 2012 article, “‘Because he has bought for her, he wants to sleep with her’: Alcohol as a currency for sexual exchange in South African drinking venues” Watt et al. detail transactional sex, sexual violence, and HIV risk in drinking venues. According to Watt et al. both men and women agreed that “buying alcohol implied an agreement to have sex” (Watt et al., 2012, p. 1010). This implied agreement was further detailed in the 2002 article, “She drank his money”: survival sex and the problem of violence in taverns in Gauteng Province, South Africa” by Wojcicki. In this article, Wojcicki highlights the assumption that “if a woman accepts a beer or other gifts from a man in a tavern then it is understood that she has consented to a sexual relationship” (Wojcicki, 2002, p. 276). This notion of consent or

agreements made through the purchasing of alcohol is extremely relevant to my research on sexual consent. Additionally, both Wojcicki and Watt et al. highlight the potential for violence if “sex [is] not reciprocated” following the exchange of alcohol (Watt et al., 2012, p. 1010). While Watt argues that both men and women feel that a failure to reciprocate alcohol purchases makes violence “possible and in some cases justifiable,” Wojcicki argues that if a woman “unsuccessfully resists a sexual relationship after accepting beers, it is not considered rape (defined as sex without consent between partners) because it is understood that she consented to sex by accepting drinks ( Watt et al., 2012, p. 1010; Wojcicki, 2002, p. 276).

### **Phrases Used to Ask for or Convey Consent**

Just as accepting drinks was found to be an implicit form of consenting to sexual activity, other studies have found phrases or actions that correlate to a form of consent or agreement to sexual activity. Singleton’s 2012 article highlighted different phrases and actions that were equated to consent. For instance, Singleton found that “the phrase ‘I love you,’ [...] when enunciated as a declarative statement by a man to a woman also implies a question: ‘Do you want to have sex with me?’” (Singleton, 2012, p. 68). Wood et al. found that “young women rarely gave explicit voiced consent for sex: rather [they] would agree to accompany [a boy] to his room” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 287). Wood et al. found that if a girl refused to have sex after going to a boy’s room and he forced her, “this could not be classified as ‘rape’ because going at all implied consent” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 287). These findings, though few and far between, were extremely important in informing my research. Through my research, I hoped to learn the particulars of how sexual consent is understood, given, and received through specific phrases, gestures, and actions. I hoped to fill in the gap in research detailing these understandings of sexual consent outside of the context of rape and violence.

## Methodologies

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, eleven days prior to the original official start date of the ISP period, I was forced to leave South Africa as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Eight days after I left the country, South Africa was placed on a strict lockdown, preventing citizens from leaving their homes, even to take a walk (Chothia, 2020, n.p.). Though I was able to continue with my ISP from my home in the United States, conducting interviews remotely, many of my initial plans and ideas for sampling and data collection were rendered impossible by the circumstances of the pandemic. The methodology detailed below reflects sampling and data collection methods as dictated by the state of COVID-19 policy in South Africa in April 2020 as well as my own research goals.

### Sampling

My sample group was comprised of 16 participants, eight men and eight women, between the ages of 22 and 64. The breakdown of the demographics of these participants is shown in Figure One below. These participants are all Zulu South Africans who live in Masxha. While I had originally planned on using snowball recruitment and sampling methods, I was instead forced to use purposive sampling and work through a third party to recruit participants. Thando Mhlongo, an SIT employee and resident of Chesterville, a community that borders Masxha, used her connections in Masxha to recruit research participants who were willing to be interviewed over WhatsApp, an app that allows for instant messaging as well as voice and video calling. These participants agreed to be interviewed by myself as well as the three other students who were continuing on with interviews. Participants were chosen based on their ability to be contacted by Thando, whether or not their phone could be loaded with data by SIT, and their fluency in English. Thando also attempted to satisfy the requests for specific demographic groups made by all four students, including myself, who were conducting interviews, as all of us would be interviewing the same participants. Thando sent out lists of participants in two groups of ten. In the first group of ten, names and phone numbers alone were listed, while in the second group of ten, names, phone numbers, gender, and age (when known) were listed. I chose to interview all ten participants in the first group. After completing these first ten interviews, I counted the number of men and women of each age group (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s) that I had interviewed. When Thando sent the second group of ten possible participants, I chose my last six

participants based on their age and gender, doing my best to make my sample as even as possible in respect to these two demographic factors. Though participants would have previously articulated to Thando that they were interested in being interviewed, each introductory message that I sent to participants asked them if they would be comfortable and willing to participate in my research given a brief summary of my research topic.

**Figure One**

Age Group	Number of Female Participants	Number of Male Participants
20-30	3	5
30-40	1	1
40-50	2	1
50-60	1	0
60-65	1	1
Total	8	8

***Limitations to Sampling Procedure***

As a result of the circumstances of my research and sampling procedures, I was not able to interview individuals with a translator present. I was also unable to present informed consent procedures in isiZulu as well as English. My sample was therefore restricted to individuals who spoke very strong English. Additionally, my sample was not perfectly equal in terms of age and gender, as is shown in Figure One above.

Preventing bias among my participants was challenging for a few reasons related to our sampling procedures. First, each participant was compensated for their interviews, a practice that is not standard for ISP individual interviews, but was implemented given the current situation. Individuals were given 500 MB of data to use for WhatsApp and were given 50 rand after an interview was completed. I found that my participants often seemed eager to please me or give me answers that they felt would be the most helpful. At the end of my interviews, individuals often asked if their answers were good enough. While this could be a result of social desirability bias, it is also possible that the potential for financial gain contributed to this bias. I attempted to address this in the informed consent process, ensuring individuals that refusing to participate or answer a question would not lead to a loss of benefits for which they were otherwise entitled. However, it may have been impossible for me to completely eliminate bias in this area.

Additionally, I had pre-existing personal relationships with a few of my research participants. Though I anonymized the participants' contact names in my phone, it was impossible for me to remove WhatsApp photos and bios that are visible publicly. When I knew that I was interviewing someone with whom I had a pre-existing personal relationship, I attempted to acknowledge the relationship and assure the participant that they would be completely anonymous in the study and that they should still feel free to tell me anything. However, I cannot be sure to what extent this was successful.

## **Data Collection**

I initially contacted participants via WhatsApp messaging to communicate with them about the nature of my study and schedule a time for the interview. At scheduled interview times, participants were contacted via WhatsApp voice calling. With their permission, participants were recorded starting at the outset of the interview. This allowed me to record the informed consent process for accountability. All participants consented fully to participating in the study, having audio-recordings taken, the inclusion of quotes in my ISP and senior thesis, and the inclusion of data generally gleaned from their interview in my ISP and senior thesis.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, working with a set list of questions that I often altered slightly during interviews. To avoid redundancy, participants were not always asked each question and participants were often asked additional unique follow-up questions based on the content of their interview. The questions included in my interviews also changed slightly following my first few interviews. These changes included removing questions that were commonly difficult to understand or irrelevant and adding questions based on themes that emerged in my first interviews, such as the role of alcohol and gender in determining consent. A finalized interview script can be found in Appendix One. This script reflects changes that were made to the interview script following the first few interviews, but does not reflect unique follow-up questions or the specific ordering of questions in each interview. It is important to note that I used the word 'permission' in my questions as opposed to the word consent. I made this choice based on pilot interviews with isiZulu speaking individuals who emphasized that the word consent is not often understood in a sexual context among Zulu individuals and that using the word permission would be more understandable for my participants. Each interview lasted

approximately 20 to 40 minutes including the informed consent procedure, which is attached in Appendix Two.

All my interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interviews of participants one through eight were transcribed manually. The interviews of participants nine through 16 were transcribed using a website called Otter Ai, which transcribes interviews and allows you to edit these transcriptions while listening to the recording.

### ***Limitations to Data Collection***

Due to the complex nature of qualitative research as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many important limitations to my data collection process. My bias as a researcher was often a challenging aspect of my interviews. I am extremely passionate about sexual violence prevention, and I have received training in the past on how to correct individuals who ‘misunderstand’ definitions of sexual consent and other aspects of healthy sex. When interviewing over the phone, I found that it was extremely important to let participants know that you were hearing them clearly and understanding what they were saying through the intermittent use of non-verbal cues, such as ‘mmhm.’ However, at times my tone or the very use of these non-verbal cues may have indicated that I felt a certain way about what a participant was sharing or saying, leading to potential bias. Additionally, questions may have been asked in slightly different ways for different participants due to my own human error and instances where participants requested that I re-phrase questions. Participants’ answers may have been influenced by the way that I phrased a question. Lastly, technology was a persistent challenge throughout the interviewing process. I conducted each interview on speakerphone on my iPhone and recorded the conversation on my computer. As a result of poor recording and call quality, I was often unable to definitively capture and transcribe what a participant was saying. In these instances, I simply wrote ‘[inaudible].’

### **Data Analysis**

I found that given the number of interviews I was able to conduct, and therefore the amount of data I was able to collect, analyzing my data was a daunting and difficult task. In the first stages of data analysis, I found that there were few, if any, questions that yielded a consistent or unified answer from my participants. To manage the sheer amount conflicting data

that I collected, I took a variety of approaches to thematic analysis. I organized specific quotes from each interview into eight large themes: why permission is important, community norms, gender and permission, how people ask for and give permission, types of relationships, alcohol, legal aspects of permission, and awareness of consent. These eight themes were decided upon based on my notes during the interviewing process. I also collected responses to yes or no questions. As indicated in Appendix One, many of my interview questions consisted of yes or no questions that were followed with more open follow-up questions. I recorded participants' answers to each yes or no question in a table, which allowed me to compare participants' answers in a more simplistic manner. Though I did include simple yes or no responses in this table, for each question I also included more nuanced responses so as to accurately represent my data and my participants. Though participants often answered a question in their response to a different question, in these yes-no breakdowns, I only included answers to the specific question being analyzed. I analyzed each yes-no breakdown for patterns in gender and/or age. Each graph included in this report is derived from these yes-no question breakdowns. Lastly, overwhelmed by the amount of data in my eight thematic groups, I created idea maps for each theme. Branching out from the central idea, the original theme, were sub-themes and branching off of these sub themes were quotes or common ideas. These idea maps were crucial in allowing me to organize the data in a manner that was conducive to thematic analysis. Using these idea maps, I made lists of the most important or illustrative quotes from each sub-theme. I then analyzed the age and gender distribution present within each sub-theme, searching for any patterns in relationship to these two demographics.

### ***Limitations in Data Analysis***

In distilling my data into specific themes and responses to yes-no questions, I did my best to account for all outliers, highlighting both the majority and minority opinion in trends and themes that I identified. However, it is always possible that as a researcher, I did not connect a specific comment to a particular theme or misunderstood the meaning behind a statement made by a participant. In my analysis of yes-no questions specifically, I did not account for answers that were given in separate responses that may have answered the yes-no question. It is therefore possible that a participant may have answered a question indirectly, but that this answer is not listed in the yes-no question breakdown. I felt that this was the only way, though not ideal, to

standardize the yes-no question analysis and create accurate graphics for this report. It is also possible that because I phrased questions slightly differently between interviews, participant responses may have differed depending on my phrasing. Lastly, although I found almost every word of each and every interview fascinating, in order to distill my data into relevant themes, I had to leave out many quotes and statements from this report. While these are all limitations to my data analysis and are therefore important to note, they are also standard to any type of qualitative research using semi-structured interviews.

## **Ethics**

While ethics are always an integral part of any research study or ISP, my study demanded particularly close attention to ethical boundaries as a result of the sensitive nature of my research topic. In every step of my recruitment, data collection, and data analysis process I took steps to ensure the safety and well-being of my participants. This study was also approved by an SIT Local Review Board. The study upholds all human subjects policies of the SIT Local Review Board and all general ethical research guidelines.

Before scheduling an interview, each participant was advised of the nature of the study. During the informed consent process, which was conducted verbally over the phone (Appendix Two), each participant was again advised of the nature of the study and was asked if they were in a private place to talk. In addition, participants were made aware of the fact that talking about sex can often be difficult and that if they thought this interview topic may bring up difficult emotions, they should let me know and they could decline to participate. During the informed consent procedure, participants were also made aware that I would be frequently checking in with them throughout the course of the interview, asking them how they are feeling and if they are comfortable with the nature of my questions. Participants were told ahead of time that if they felt uncomfortable, they could tell me at any point, and, if they wished to, we could discuss their feelings. I was also prepared to provide numerous South African resources covering a range of topics, including emergency crisis counseling relating to sexual violence, in the case that a participant became emotionally distressed. Checking in with participants was particularly important given the virtual format of the interviews, which did not allow me to assess body language and facial expressions to gauge the comfort of my participants.

I also was extremely careful to avoid asking participants any personal questions about their sex life, their own experiences with permission, other personal questions, etc. Where possible, my questions were framed in such a way that elicited information about people or individuals in general. When participants did offer specific personal information, I did not include specific follow-up questions about the shared information. I also was careful to stray away from questions focused on rape and sexual violence, instead focusing my study on consent and permission. The last question in my interviews focused on the definition of consent given in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. In this instance I explained the definition of consent in relation to rape and sexual violence, doing my

best to accurately portray the act. Besides this question, the only other instance where I asked about rape and violence was when a participant brought up these issues and I sought clarification.

In addition to these specific ethical additions to my study based on the sensitive nature of my topic, standard ethical procedures were followed. My informed consent process was extremely thorough. At every stage of my research participants were identified using only their participant numbers, and the only identifying information that I recorded was participant age, gender, relationship status, employment, and how long they have lived in Masxha. In this ISP, I only make reference to the former two categories, age and gender, in an effort to protect the identities of my participants.

When participants asked questions of me as the researcher about my experience with permission and consent, I answered openly and honestly, creating a productive dialogue and acknowledging the cultural differences between some aspects and understandings of consent. I also did my best to answer participants' specific questions about consent in South Africa and acknowledged when I was unable to answer a question, referring the participant to a resource that might be better equipped to provide specific information.

As I analyzed my data, I was careful to limit my conclusions to the scope of my research. My research cannot and should not be generalized to all people of Masxha, all Zulu individuals, all women, all men, etc. Instead, the data is analyzed in relationship to its small sample size. I only make generalizations or draw conclusions about how individuals in this group responded during my interviews. While I hope that this ISP can contribute to the research literature on South African and Zulu understandings of sexual consent, its conclusions should not be taken alone or viewed outside of the limitations of this small study.

## **Findings**

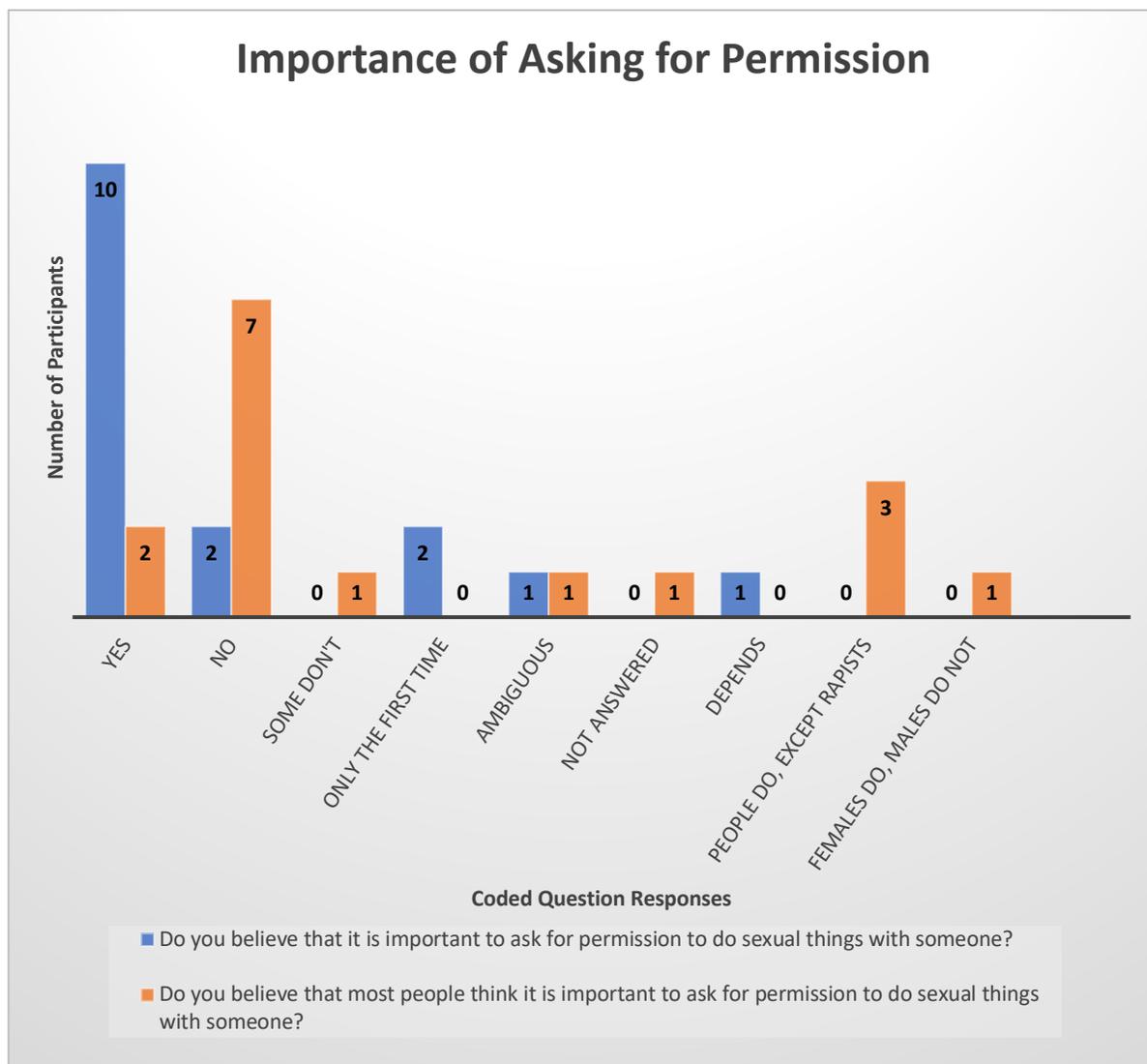
In my interviews, I asked a variety of questions about sexual encounters and consent. In these interviews, the word permission was used to convey the concept of sexual consent and the word permission will be used throughout this section. While many of my interview questions sought to elicit answers that spoke directly to my research question and highlight definitions of permission, other questions served to make participants more comfortable or help me to understand general notions of sex. Though these questions were helpful in creating a framework through which to analyze my data, I have chosen not to include the results of these questions in my findings and analysis. Instead, I will focus on findings that speak more directly to my research question.

### **The Importance of Permission**

Many of the questions included in my interviews asked participants to reflect on the importance of asking for permission. These questions included: do you believe that it is important to ask for permission, do you believe that most people think it is important to ask for permission, what makes people think that they should ask for permission, and what makes people think that they don't have to ask for permission.

As shown in Figure Two below, participants gave a wide variety of answers when asked about their understanding of the importance of permission as well as their thoughts on how other people understand the importance of permission.

Figure Two



***Personal Importance of Asking for Permission***

When asked if they personally felt that asking for permission is important, the majority of participants responded affirmatively in some form. While ten participants responded yes, two participants responded no, two responded only the first time, one responded ambiguously, and one responded by indicating that it depends. The two participants who responded no were the two oldest participants. These two participants, when asked about the importance of permission, emphasized that they don't believe asking for permission is common or necessary. When asked if she felt that asking for permission is important, Participant 2, a 64-year-old female, stated, "with my knowledge I don't think anybody asks for permission to have sex" (Participant 2 2020,

April 7). Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, discussed asking for permission as a turn off. Responding with a series of rhetorical questions, Participant 13 said, “I don't think so we are human right? Say like Larkin can I have sex with you? Can I say that? Can I say that way? You find it romantically when I say that way?” and eventually expressed that he felt permission is not sexy or romantic, stating “This kind of depriving. Like it’s a turn off” (Participant 13 2020, April 13).

Two participants responded that they believe asking for permission the first time you have sex is important, but unnecessary on following occasions. When asked if she felt asking for permission is important, Participant 9, a 53-year-old female, stated that “if it's your first time yes. If it's not your first time you don't really have to ask because you already know each other” (Participant 9 2020, April 8). Participant 3, a 22-year-old female, similarly stated that permission is important “when it’s your first-time having sex with that person” (Participant 3 2020, April 6). This is contrasted with the responses to the question, do you think people talk to their sexual partners before they begin to have sex, where only one participant, a man, responded that people only talk before their first-time having sex. Participants who responded yes, that permission is important, indicated a variety of reasons that permission is important which will be expanded upon further in the following sections.

While the majority of participants indicated that they personally feel that asking for permission is important, when asked if they believe that most people think that asking for permission is important, the majority of participants responded no or an answer that indicated that some individuals do not believe asking for permission is important. In response to this question, two participants responded yes, seven participants responded no, one participant responded that some people do not, one participant responded ambiguously, one participant did not answer, one participant responded that females do, but males do not, and three participants responded that most people do, but rapists do not. The two participants who responded yes evoked themes of comfort and respect, which will be discussed later in this section. Of the seven participants who responded no, five are female and two are male. Like many participants who responded no, Participant 2, a 64-year-old female, who also did not personally feel that permission is important, highlighted community norms, stating that “[she had] never heard of anybody asking permission to have sex. Never ever” (Participant 2 2020, April 7). Participant 3, a 22-year-old female, spoke about individuals’ reservations to speaking about sex, which inhibits

asking for permission. She said “people don’t like talking about it. They don’t [like] talking about it and they don’t think it’s important to talk about” (Participant 3 2020, April 6). Other participants alluded to the culture of asking for permission in long term relationships, suggesting that individuals don’t feel asking for permission in these relationships is important. Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, suggested that “most people believe that once you are in a relationship with a guy or a girl you guys should have sex all the time when you see each other” (Participant 6 2020, April 7). While many individuals who answered no also spoke about rape and sexual assault, three participants specifically indicated that the people who do not believe permission is important are rapists. All three of these participants are male. Participant 5, a 24-year-old male, stated that “besides rapist, I think most people know that, you know, permission is really really important because sex is just a two-way thing not a one-way thing” (Participant 5 2020, April 6). Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, similarly suggested that most people besides criminals understand the importance of permission, stating that “it’s only the criminal people who don’t ask first” (Participant 7 2020, April 8). Many participants also referenced rape and other sexual crimes in their responses to questions throughout their interviews.

### *Rape*

While the focus of my study was on how sexual consent is understood outside of the context of rape, some of my questions naturally elicited responses that were related to rape and sexual violence. Specifically, rape was a consistent theme in participants’ answers to the four questions: do you believe that it is important to ask for permission, do you believe that most people think it is important to ask for permission, what makes people think that they should ask for permission, and what makes people think that they don’t have to ask for permission. Though rape is not the central focus of my study, I believe it is important to illustrate the ways in which individuals conceptualize the importance of permission in relationship to rape and sexual violence.

As highlighted in the above chart and explanation, three participants suggested that they believe that most individuals, with the exception of rapists and criminals, understand the importance of permission. Other individuals also alluded to the importance of asking for permission in their answers to the question, do you believe it is important to ask for permission. Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, stated that he believes asking for permission is a “must,”

stating that “if you don’t ask it’s like it’s like a rape” (Participant 7 2020, April 8). Additionally, when asked to speak about what makes people think that they should ask for permission, some participants spoke about the prevalence of rape in their community and the fear of being accused of rape. When asked what she believes makes individuals think that they should ask for permission, Participant 1, a 44-year-old female, indicated that fear of rape accusations plays a role in making people believe that they should ask for permission, stating:

*People are scared of being accused of rape so you gotta make sure that your female partner agrees with you when you want to engage in love making cause some of the ladies [...] will sleep with guys and then the following day they will go to police station and arrest them for rape (Participant 1 2020, April 6).*

Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, similarly highlighted the risk of raping someone and therefore the reason that many people believe they should ask for permission, stating:

*in some cases like you will agree with the person but like next thing you find out they have a case against you. And say that [inaudible] and say like you didn’t even ask if they were okay with it, you just went on with it. I feel like asking leads the person to be like okay I can actually do it? Or like I’m still not ready? (Participant 8 2020, April 8).*

While rape and sexual violence came up at different times throughout my 16 interviews, rape was most commonly discussed in the context of the importance of permission and why individuals ask for permission.

### *Respect*

In addition to rape, respect was a common theme throughout my interviews. Of the 16 participants that I interviewed, seven participants spoke about respect in some form. Two of these seven participants are female, while the other five are male. Of these seven participants, many highlighted respect as a pillar in relationships, suggesting that respect is a reason that individuals should and do ask for permission. Participant 5, a 24-year-old male, conceptualized permission as a form of respect, saying:

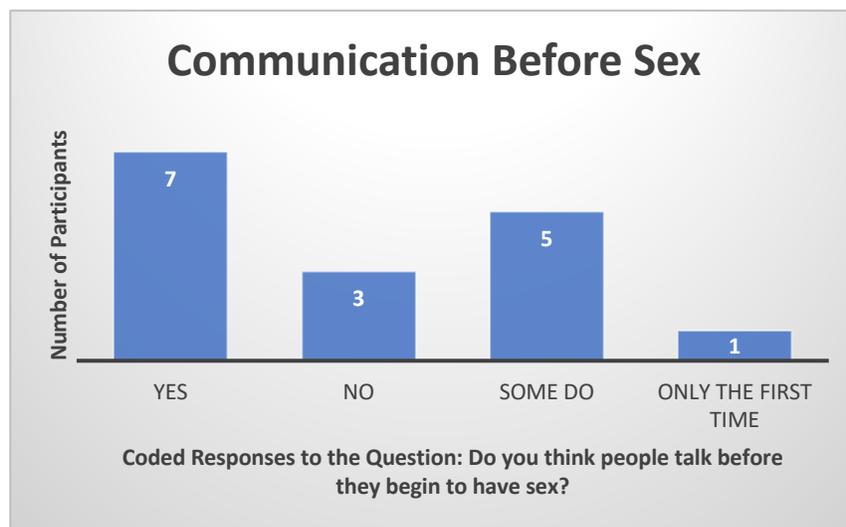
*asking for permission is really like, you know, you are not doing as you like with the person. You know. You are showing respect towards her, you know, even if she is your wife or your girlfriend or whatever, you are actually showing respect for her* (Participant 5 2020, April 6).

Other participants compared relationships where individuals ask for permission and relationships where individuals do not ask for permission, implying that individuals who do not ask for permission do not respect each other. When asked if people talk to each other before they begin to have sex, Participant 4, a 25-year-old male, said that “some people respect each other so they’ll talk about it. Some people don’t” (Participant 4 2020, April 7). The knowledge of how individuals conceptualized the importance of permission and what makes permission important played a large role in allowing me to frame my overall data analysis.

### When Permission is Requested and Given

Towards the beginning of my interviews, participants were asked the question, do you think that people talk to their sexual partners before they begin to have sex with them. Though, at this point in the interviews I had only mentioned the concept of permission during the informed consent procedure, many individuals related their responses to permission. Responses to this question are shown below in Figure Three.

Figure Three



In response to this question, seven participants responded yes, three participants responded no, five participants responded that some people do, and one participant responded only the first time. It is therefore clear that a majority of participants believe that individuals talk with their partners before they begin to have sex at least some of the time, depending on the situation or the people involved. Many of the individuals who responded affirmatively highlighted aspects of permission in their responses. Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, for example, suggested that people do talk before they have sex “cause you can’t just do sex. Yeah I would say uhh communicating, you have to communicate and before you’re making love” (Participant 7 2020, April 8). Participant 10, a 23-year-old male, also connected talking before sex to aspects of permission, saying “if myself I want to sex with a girl we have like to first talk about it and see if we see eye to eye about the topic and if in any way that we talk about it to each other we feel this is the right thing to do” (Participant 10 2020, April 8). While I have not chosen to analyze responses to this question in full, as it is not directly related to my research question, it is important to note that many participants expressed that individuals do talk before sex and that this conversation is often times related to permission.

In order to understand how permission is requested and given, it is also important to understand how individuals think about when permission is asked for in sexual relationships. In many of my interviews, participants were asked the question, when do people ask for permission to do sexual things with someone. I used participants’ responses to this question as well as other questions asked throughout the interview to attempt to understand the context of when permission is asked for in sexual relationships in Masxha. Participants interpreted this question differently, responding by indicating both when in a relationship and when in a sexual encounter an individual might ask for permission.

### ***Relationships and Waiting Periods***

When asked about when individuals ask for permission to have sex, a handful of the participants who I spoke to indicated that people have waiting periods, such as certain amount of time or number of dates, before they will be comfortable having sex. These participants suggested that asking for permission occurs once this waiting period has passed and a couple is ready to have sex for the first time. Participant 1, a 44-year-old female, contrasted the waiting periods of the past and the current waiting periods, suggesting that waiting periods are not as

prevalent today. She said that “back then it used to be like you can engage in sex like after six months,” but “now it doesn’t work anymore, that six months doesn’t apply anymore” and that “sometimes people they do one-night stands” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Other participants however, suggested that waiting periods do still exist, but their duration or how they are defined depends on the person. Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, observed that:

*Actually, we don't have a time period. Nowhere it is written like you guys should take three dates or four dates. I think it is personal. We are all different. Some of us believe that you should wait. Some of us believe that you should wait for a certain period or for a certain time. Some of us say I wanna do it now or never. You know. Some people really don't believe in waiting. You know. They just do it now and there wherever they are. You start dating now and have sex now. Some say no, I will wait for a month. I don't care if he leaves me. But some are concerned that if I don't give him, he's gonna run away and find somebody else. So rather I would just have sex with him. There's no time period*  
(Participant 6 2020, April 7).

While I did not ask any of the participants who mentioned waiting periods if both men and women have waiting periods, Participant 16, a 25-year-old male, suggested that waiting periods may in fact be gendered. Speaking to when people ask for permission, Participant 16 said that “some ladies. Don’t just jump into that what you call? Their time? Or their waiting period?” (Participant 16 2020, April 15). These insights about when sex is requested during the course of a relationship illuminated aspects of permission in relationships, which is demonstrated further in the Relationships and Permission section of this section.

### ***Well Before the Sexual Encounter***

While some participants spoke about the timeline of asking for permission in a relationship, other participants spoke about how permission is requested before a specific sex act or each sex act occurs. Many participants indicated that they thought permission was or should be requested before the two people meet or are together in person. Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, suggested that sexual things “are the things that you should talk about before you meet a

guy” (Participant 6 2020, April 7). When speaking about permission and sexual activities, Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, similarly suggested that “before they even get to go visit each other, I think it's wise to speak about it first” (Participant 7 2020, April 8). Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, suggested that is wise to talk about sexual activities “before waiting for that time to be horny and be in the private space” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). Many participants who suggested that individuals should talk about permission before they are in person together indicated that this can be done over the phone via SMS, WhatsApp, and phone calls. For example, Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, suggested that “it could be over the phone right. Like you would ask the person like would you like to get intimate at some point?” (Participant 8 2020, April 8). Additionally, Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, suggested that asking for permission can take place “over WhatsApp or over phone call, however you guys are communicating” (Participant 6 2020, April 7).

In addition to the suggestion that one should ask for permission before they are together in person, some Participants also suggested that permission should be requested well before the sex act begins. Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, advised that:

*you have to ask uh early. Maybe in a day, you can ask for her like in the morning at night you say can we do it? Can we make love? So that the person that you are involved with gets ready. For afterwards it's will happen. It's not just ask now and do it now*

(Participant 7 2020, April 8).

There was no clear pattern between the age and/or gender of participants and the belief that permission should be requested well before a sexual encounter.

### ***Right Before the Sexual Encounter***

Other participants however, suggested that you can ask for permission immediately before the start of a sexual act between two people. Participant 10, a 23-year-old male, said that he believes the “right time” to ask for permission is “when you're about to do it” (Participant 10 2020, April 8). Participant 15, a 34-year-old male, hinted at a similar understanding of when individuals should ask for permission, stating that “[he thinks] that's when the people tend to ask for permission. When they are like chilling or spending time together. No one around. Only the two couple in that state” (Participant 15 2020, April 14). The knowledge that many participants

believe when permission is requested depends on the relationship and personal ideas about when permission should be requested both addressed my original research question and provided background information for questions that followed that specifically addressed how permission is requested and given.

## **How Permission is Requested**

Many of the questions included in my interviews focused the intricacies of how people ask for permission. In sorting through responses that I received to questions like how do people ask for permission, what do people talk about before they begin to have sex, how do people know if they feel comfortable having sex with someone, and do people ask permission to kiss or touch someone else, among others, I found that participants highlighted many different opinions about how individuals ask for permission and how they feel individuals should ask for permission.

### ***People Don't Ask for Permission***

While many of the participants who I spoke to highlighted the importance of asking for permission and many different ways that individuals do ask for permission, the older participants who I spoke to emphasized that not all individuals ask for permission and explained how sex might occur without permission. A common phrase that was used to describe how individuals might have sex without asking for permission was “it just happens” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 1, a 44-year-old female, explained that sexual interactions start “with kissing and romance and it goes on and on” and that individuals in these situations “don't ask for permission” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 1 also gave an example of how individuals might have sex without explicitly asking for permission, stating:

*with a couple when they are indoors together, they will be like playing games, talking, touching each other, saying things, eye contact, touching, romance and all the things, eventually that will lead to sexual intercourse without them asking each other if they can do it (Participant 1 2020, April 6).*

Participant 2, a 64-year-old woman, described another way that couples begin to have sex without asking. Participant 2 told me that she had “never heard of anybody asking permission to

have sex, never ever” and that to her knowledge, partners “just have sex and the partner just makes them do what they want to do” without “[discussing] it before having” sex (Participant 2 2020, April 7). Later on in our interview, Participant 2 also used the phrase “it just happens” (Participant 2 2020, April 7). Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, argued that permission is not related to sex, relating the word permission instead to the current situation with COVID-19, stating:

*to me permission is something else. It's like these days like we've got a lockdown. They say we must go to a certain place and get permission, a permit, that will allow you to go to a certain place or do certain things. You know. A permission is something that it's something else (Participant 13 2020, April 13).*

He also argued that asking for permission directly is not acceptable culturally, stating that “we cannot say directly okay. And look, I'm gonna have sex with you. I mean, it doesn't sound right with us. It's not in our culture” (Participant 13 2020, April 13). While these older participants often expressed that they felt that asking for permission was uncommon, I was able to ask these participants follow-up questions where they expanded upon ways that someone might ask for permission in a more acceptable way or in ways that were not verbal. These answers, as well as those of the other participants, are detailed below.

### ***Questions Used to Ask for Permission***

Many participants gave examples of questions that one may use to ask for permission. In discussing questions broadly, Participant 3, a 22-year-old female, stated:

*I think there's no magical special way to ask. But you just have to ask. I mean there's no harm in that. You don't have to go all the way romantic and stuff like that you just talk about it like just start a silly conversation and just talk about it. (Participant 3 2020, April 6).*

I believe the essence of this quote is important to bear in mind throughout this section of my findings and this ISP broadly. There is no one right way to ask for consent or in Participant 3's words, “no magical special way to ask” (Participant 3 2020, April 6).

That said, many participants did highlight specific questions that they felt individuals use or should use to ask for consent. Multiple participants referenced questions that included the concept of readiness. Participant 1, a 44-year-old female, suggested that “usually the man will ask the female partner if she is ready or what” and Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, suggested that individuals ask, “are you ready to have sex?” (Participant 1 2020, April 6; Participant 14 2020, April 14). Participant 11, a 32-year-old female, also suggested that individuals ask “Are you ready for it?” (Participant 11 2020, April 13). Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, also referenced the concept of readiness in multiple responses. However, when explaining how he believes people should ask for permission, he suggested that individuals ask ahead of time “so that the person that you are involved with gets ready” (Participant 7 2020, April 8).

Other participants highlighted many different questions that individuals can or do use to ask for permission. These questions included, but were not limited to: “how do you want it to be done during the intercourse and how often do you want it and how long do you want it?”, “which position do you prefer?” (Participant 1 2020, April 6), “can we repeat what we did on that day?”, “can we have sex?” (Participant 5 2020, April 7), “where do you want me to touch you?” (Participant 6 2020, April 6), “do you feel like doing it?”, “can we make love?” (Participant 7 2020, April 8), “can you take us to the next level? A sexual level” (Participant 9 2020, April 8) and “are you comfortable with us having to do sex together?” (Participant 11 2020, April 13). Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, explained that the questions he might use to ask for permission change based on the situation, stating:

*It kinda like depends on like the type of like vibe we're in like. So if the person is like if we haven't started doing anything, then like it could be over the phone right. Like you would ask the person like would you like to get intimate at some point? You know. Like kind of like flirtatious conversation that leads to that questions. Or like when you guys are like in an intimate situation whereby like you are both in the room, things start to get heated up, like I would ask the person if they want to go the extra mile into like you know. And if they say yes, then we continue (Participant 8 2020, April 8).*

As evidenced by the above quotations, participants expressed a variety of different specific questions that can be used to ask for permission that varied situationally.

### ***Phrases Used to Ask for Permission***

Many participants also spoke about things that an individual can say to ask for permission that are not necessarily questions. Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, specifically spoke about blunt comments that a person could make to ask for permission. She suggested that men often will “tell you, you know what, please come to my house. I just want to fuck you,” suggesting a manner in which men can ask for permission through a phrase as opposed to a question (Participant 6 2020, April 6). Participant 6 also suggested that women could ask for permission through these types of statements, stating that women ask for permission “by telling [their partners] that they're horny and they'd like to have sex” (Participant 6 2020, April 6). Other participants spoke about phrases that implied asking for permission. These phrases all surrounded a theme of going to a person’s room or home as an indication that sex would occur. Participant 2, a 64-year-old woman, stated:

*It's just sitting having drinks and then one thing leads to another and then I know that a guy will say to the girl 'let's go.' And obviously you know if he says leave your friends and let's go, obviously you are gonna have sex. He's gonna have sex with you whether it's at his house or somewhere or behind the house, but what I do know is the girl did agree because if she didn't agree she wouldn't have walked out of the place where they were (Participant 2 2020, April 7).*

Participant 12, a 45-year-old female, also spoke about the implication of sex in phrase related to location and someone’s home. Participant 12 said that guys will say:

*'tonight, I'll take you to my place and you will be coming back tomorrow morning, because I want you to spend the night at place.' So it will be clear to you that what's going on. What will take place there. (Participant 12 2020, April 14).*

It is therefore clear that the participants with whom who I spoke expressed that phrases that are both explicit, directly suggesting that someone is interested in sex, and implicit, implying that sex will occur, can be used for to ask for permission.

### ***Actions and Non-Verbal Cues Used to Ask for Permission***

Many participants also spoke about different ways that permission can be requested and given through specific actions, body language, and non-verbal cues. Some participants focused on specific physical actions that imply someone is asking for permission. Participant 16, a 25-year-old male, suggested that touching can be used to ask for permission, stating:

*By touching you in that kind of way that you will know, sexual there is a sexual attraction between you. Uh I should say by touching, touching. There are certain areas of the body that you touch. And that could tell the other person that you know you have you want to have intimacy with them (Participant 16 2020, April 15).*

Participant 1, a 44-year-old female, also alluded to the role of touching and other physical actions. She said that “when you allow a man to touch you and kiss you, eventually the man will think at the end of today you will sleep with him because you started by kissing, touching each other, foreplay, romance and everything,” suggesting that these physical actions may be a way of asking for permission or initiating sex with the man or the other party (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, focused on many actions that did not involve physical contact. She suggested that taking off your clothes can be a way of asking for permission, saying “some of us just take off our clothes. It’s a sign” and that it is possible to “say you know fuck me without even saying anything” (Participant 6 2020, April 6). Participant 6 also spoke about how women can ask for permission by wearing lingerie, stating:

*then for a girl, you’ll start wearing your best lingerie. You know. And you’ll be all sexy or something. You know. You have a way. Don’t just say oh babe I want to have sex with you. For me it’s a turn off. It’s a turn off. Or let it just be how let’s say the guy has to fetch you somewhere, you’ll wear your lingerie underneath and maybe wear a dress on top. When you go to a guy’s house, you can take it off. So that they guy will see that okay*

*this girl is asking me to have sex with her indirectly but directly* (Participant 6 2020, April 6).

Lastly, Participant 6 also alluded to ways in which individuals can ask for permission digitally, stating that some men:

*just try to send you pictures, nude pictures, without telling you directly. They just ask you to send maybe your vjay jay or send me your boobs. They don't tell you directly that you know what I want to have sex with you. They just tell you like send me nude pictures. I'll send yours or you just see on your phone the guy send you his penis then obviously in your head it's so clear that you know what he's after something. He's not after maybe love or friendship or anything* (Participant 6 2020, April 6).

Just as many participants spoke about a variety of ways that individuals can ask for permission, participants also spoke in depth about how individuals can indicate that they give another person permission.

## **How Individuals Give Permission**

### *Actions and Non-Verbal Cues Used to Give Permission*

Non-verbal cues and actions that indicate someone has given permission were implied in many participants' responses to questions about how individuals ask for permission. For example, many participants spoke about an individual asking a sexual partner to come to their home or room as a form of asking for permission. Implied in this form of asking for permission is that individuals who agree to go to the home or room or whatever the action may be, give permission to have sex.

Other actions and non-verbal cues that participants referenced as ways that one might give someone permission included reactions to movements, eye contact, expression, body reaction, sounds, etc. While some participants spoke about non-verbal ways of giving permission unprompted, other participants spoke about non-verbal cues when asked the question: in your opinion, is it possible for someone to give permission to do something sexually without telling them with words. Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, stated that "once you just go with the flow,

start kissing, and like take of your clothes then that shows that you are comfortable with anything that comes um with anything you guys are gonna do,” highlighting how different actions can be used to indicate that someone is giving permission (Participant 6 2020, April 6). Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, confirmed this sentiment, suggesting that women “will give you body language signals to show you that they want sex” (Participant 7 2020, April 8). Participant 10, a 23-year-old male, highlighted the role of physical reactions to sexual actions and body language, saying:

*Yeah because like if whilst maybe we are kissing and whatever that we are doing the person is reactive to part of whatever you are also doing its synchronized. It's not like a one-party thing. It's both persons like uh leading each other towards the same thing then you can also read body language yeah* (Participant 10 2020, April 8)

A few other participants also referred to reactions in their responses. Participant 15, a 34-year-old male, suggested that he thinks “the reaction tells everything. Cause even if like two people are connected like they intimate or something, only the reaction can tell that these guys are enjoying themselves” (Participant 15 2020, April 14). Participant 16, a 25-year-old male, said something very similar, suggesting that at the beginning of sexual encounters “you see the reaction between [you two], that you are comfortable with each other” (Participant 16 2020, April 15). While many participants responded that non-verbal cues such as reactions or body movements could be used to indicate that someone is giving permission, other participants spoke of verbal responses that indicate that an individual is giving permission.

### ***Giving Permission Verbally***

A few participants spoke of and even emphasized the importance of giving verbal permission and agreement. Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, suggested that even when individuals with whom he has sexual contact express non-verbal forms of permission, he prefers to get verbal consent, saying, “like me as an individual I still want like the words to come out. Yeah like I make sure” (Participant 8 2020, April 8). He continued to express that he “[wants] the word [yes] to come out of your [his sexual partner’s] mouth” (Participant 8 2020, April 8). Other participants expressed similar sentiments. After he spoke about turning on your partner, I asked Participant 10, a 23-year-old male, if he believes that turning someone on is a part of

getting their permission. He responded, “I would say partially yes, but they also have to agree and say yes they about to do this and we are doing this” (Participant 10 2020, April 8).

Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, expanded upon this concept of needing to get verbal permission, suggesting that other forms of permission can be misunderstood. She said, “I like verbally because you can just say no and then it's loud and clear. But with sexual communication sometimes it can be misleading. Somebody enjoying it and still saying no” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). When I asked her to expand upon what she meant by misleading she explained, stating:

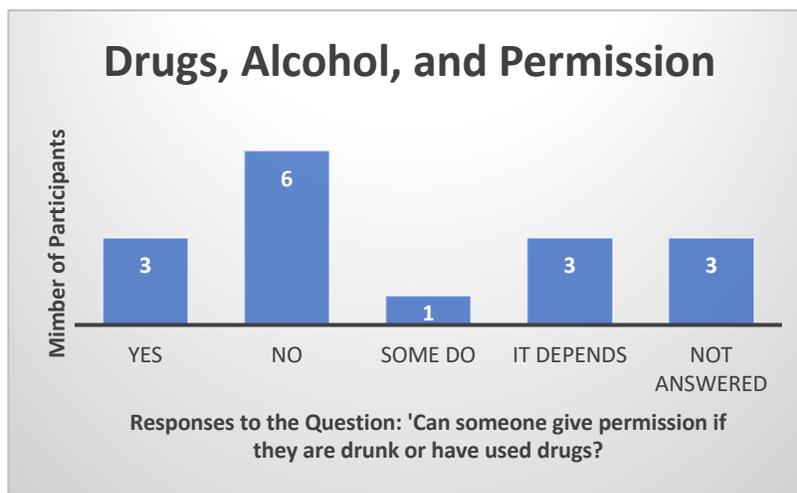
*let's say through foreplay and maybe you're kissing, and the guy may be horny, and the girl is getting to that stage, but yet the girl doesn't want to have sex. In that way, maybe the girl is saying all those sounds and but still enjoying it. But still doesn't want to have sex. That way maybe the boy would think no, no, no, no, no, she do want to have sex. But saying it loud and clear saying that no. I'm not ready. It is loud and clear. Through sexual communication sometimes it can mislead (Participant 14 2020, April 14).*

Just as there is no perfect way to ask for permission, there is also no perfect way to give permission. This notion is reflected in the participants’ answers throughout their interviews as different participants cited different ways that they believe permission is or should be given.

### **Alcohol and Permission**

In the course of my interviews, alcohol was also a consistent theme. Participants often referenced the role of alcohol in giving and asking for permission throughout their interviews. I also asked the question: Can someone give permission if they are drunk or have used drugs. The responses to this question are depicted in the graph below, Figure Four.

Figure Four



In response to the question, can someone give permission if they are drunk or have used drugs, As shown in Figure Four above, three participants responded yes, six participants responded no, one participant responded some do, three participants responded it depends, and three participants did not answer. Of the six participants who responded no, three were female and three were male. These participants highlighted various different reasons that it is not possible for someone to give permission when they are under the influence, most notably the person’s state of mind and the possibility that the person might black out. Many of the participants used the phrase “not thinking clearly” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). When speaking about how alcohol makes people unable to think clearly, Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, suggested that “it’s a drug that is in control. So it’s [having sex is] like taking advantage of that person” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). Participant 11, a 32-year-old female, echoed this sentiment, saying “cause they drunk. I don't think they're in a good state of mind at that time” (Participant 11 2020, April 13). Other participants who responded no also referenced blacking out and/or suggested that the alcohol is in control of the person. Participant 16, a 25-year-old male, said:

*we Zulus we don't take advantage of people under the influence of drugs or alcohol. So I wouldn't, I wouldn't take as no she gave me permission because she was under the influence of alcohol. Some people black out when drunk. So it's the alcohol that's talking not the actual person (Participant 16 2020, April 15).*

While Participant 4, a 25-year-old male, indicated that a person cannot give permission while drunk because “they are not in their state of mind,” he also spoke about how alcohol is used to ask for and give permission, an interesting contradiction (Participant 4 2020, April 7). When I asked Participant 4 how people might ask for permission, he responded:

*Buy alcohol. Um you know. The next thing is to have sex mostly most of the time. You would just buy alcohol you know just the know the ladies love alcohol they know they love to have a good time. Some of them they take them out. You know. And they after that um they don't have to just say anything most of the time. Since I bought you alcohol then you have to pay me with you know sexually [inaudible] sexual something like that*  
(Participant 4 2020, April 7).

Other participants also highlighted the role of alcohol in sexual exchanges. Participant 12, a 45-year-old female, told me about how alcohol and transportation are exchanged for sex, stating:

*It's happening a lot with a young ladies between the ages of 18 to 25. They went to the club to enjoy the themselves only to find that maybe they running out of cash. They'll meet these guys. Then the guys will offer them some drinks, they'll offer them some transport, they end up sleeping to those guys please. Then they, they have to agree on having sex with those guys even if they don't know those guys* (Participant 12 2020, April 14).

It is clear that some individuals believe intoxication inhibits permission, some individuals believe permission is possible when someone is under the influence, and other individuals, like participant 4, believe that though it is not possible to give permission when drunk, alcohol-sex transactions do occur.

Three of the oldest female participants, Participants 1, 2, and 12, age 44, 64, and 45 respectively, were also the three participants who expressed that they felt it is possible to give permission when drunk. These three women all explained that women are more likely to give permission when drunk and that it is therefore possible to give permission when drunk. Participant 12, the 45-year-old female, expressed that “the young ladies when they are drunk will

agree to everything” (Participant 12 2020, April 14). In a similar light, Participant 1, the 44-year-old woman, explained that though she does not “think it’s wise enough to engage in sexual intercourse when you have drunk cause you need to be in sober senses so you know what you did,” she still believes that when people “are drunk it makes them give permission” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 2, the 64-year-old woman, expressed that she believes people usually have sex with a partner for the first time when they are drunk, suggesting that “it’s very rare that you find somebody having sex with the first time they’ve met each other without having something to drink” (Participant 2 2020, April 7).

The participants who responded some do and it depends often spoke about levels of intoxication. Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, suggested that whether or not a person can give permission depends on how drunk they are, saying:

*cause like that’s kind of 50-50. Cause like there is like a drunk person that still has like verbal mentality like they can still say shit and they can still understand what’s going on and like no still means no. But you be like most of them who are under the substance abuse like they can get overpowered like you know* (Participant 8 2020, April 8).

Participant 6, a 26-year-old woman, expressed a similar notion, suggesting that people can give permission when drunk but that it varies based on their level of intoxication, stating:

*it depends as to how high or how drunk they are because some of them can be drunk but can be aware of what they’re doing, some of them can be drunk but they can never be aware, they won’t even remember what happened the last night. Or the last two hours.*

(Participant 6 2020, April 6).

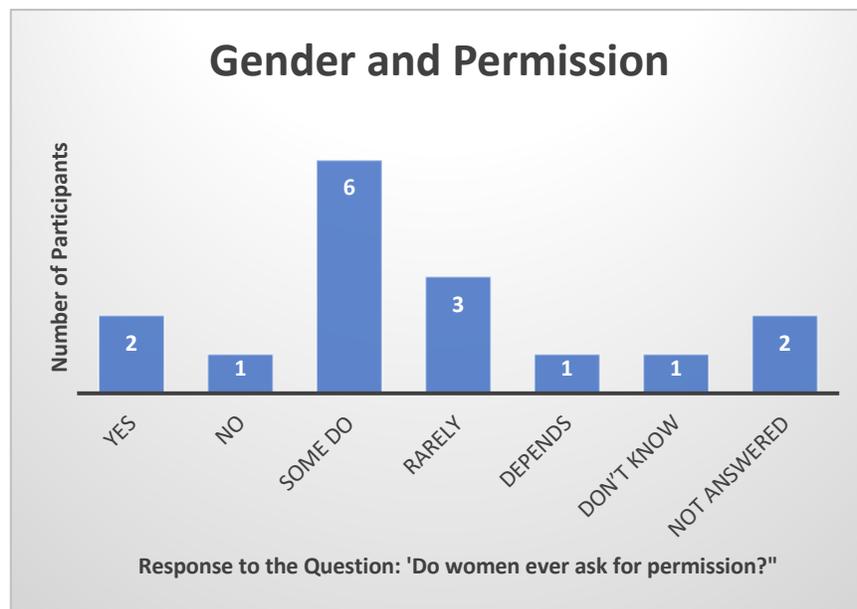
Given the diversity of opinions on how intoxication influences permission as expressed by my participants, it is clear that the interplay between alcohol and sex is complex.

## **Gender and Permission**

The interplay between gender and permission is similarly complex. In many of my initial interviews, permission was discussed in a very gendered light, indicating that the onus of asking for permission falls on men. To explore this further, I added the question, do women ever give

permission, as well as other gender focused follow-up questions on a case by case basis. These questions yielded a variety of responses and many interesting themes emerged including women’s fear of asking for permission, women’s obligation to say yes to men, how women do occasionally ask for permission, and how men respond to women who ask for permission. As shown below in Figure Five, the responses to the question, do women ever ask for permission, were varied.

**Figure Five**



While only two participants responded yes, six participants responded that some do. Similarly, while only one participant responded no, three participants responded that women rarely ask for permission. One participant answered that whether or not women ask for permission depends, one participant did not know, and two participants were not asked or did not answer the question.

***Women Rarely or Never Ask for Permission***

Participant 2, a 64-year-old female, and the only participant to say that women never ask for permission, spoke about the fear and shame that prevents women from asking for permission. After saying that she had “never heard of a girl asking a guy,” Participant 2 explained that “the girls are always ashamed or they believe we are not allowed to ask or say what we want from a guy” (Participant 2 2020, April 7). While Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, who responded that women rarely ask for permission suggested that women would only ask “if maybe they

haven't been like having sex for a long time and then maybe they have been fighting or something," the other two participants who responded that women rarely ask both spoke about shame and fear (Participant 14 2020, April 14). Participant 12, a 45-year-old female, suggested that women asking for permission is "very rare" because "it's a shame" (Participant 12 2020, April 14). Explaining further, she said that women "are not raised up like this. You can never ask a man to have sexual activity with you. We are not raised up like this. It's only the male who is supposed to ask" (Participant 12 2020, April 14). Many participants, even those who suggested that women do ask for permission, touched on the societal norms that prevent women from asking for permission.

### ***Community Norms Surrounding Women Asking for Permission***

In response to my gender specific question as well as throughout the interview, many participants spoke about how women are expected to comply with and say yes to men. When asked why she felt that women are afraid to ask men for permission, Participant 9, a 53-year-old woman, said that "the way we [women] were raised is that a woman should never have sex with a man. That the mentality should be scared of a man" (Participant 9 2020, April 8). Participant 12, a 45-year-old female, expressed a similar sentiment, suggesting that "when you are a lady, you don't disagree with a guy on anything else" (Participant 12 2020, April 14). She went onto say that "we [women] grew up knowing that when the male [inaudible] wants to spend some time with you, we have to agree. [inaudible] whether you like it or not, but you have to agree" (Participant 12 2020, April 14). While these women clearly expressed the cultural pressure on women to agree to sex, male participants also highlighted the role of men in this culture. Participant 4, a 25-year-old male, stated that "mostly men most of these days" believe that women "should just bow down to them" (Participant 4 2020, April 7). Speaking about older couples in the black community, Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, suggested that "men do believe that whenever they want to have sex, they can have sex, whether the woman doesn't want to have sex, but she is supposed to have sex because they are a couple" (Participant 14 2020, April 14). This quote from Participant 14 reflects how many participants thought about permission in relationships.

### *Women Do Ask for Permission*

Though two participants, one female participant and one male participant, responded yes, that women do ask for permission, both of these participants later qualified their answers, referencing societal barriers to women asking for permission. Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, suggested that women do ask for permission, responding “oh yeah for sure” (Participant 8 2020, April 8). He went on to explain that women should ask for permission because “sometimes as much as guys are seen as like living for that [sex] forever, sometimes we get tired bruh like, we get to the stage whereby we don’t want to do it like at all,” indicating that despite stereotypes that men always want sex, men in fact do not always want to have sex (Participant 8 2020, April 8). He went on to explain that he “[doubts] a lot of people would agree” because “most people would be like a woman shouldn’t even ask,” explaining that people think “as a guy you’re supposed to be ready” (Participant 8 2020, April 8). Participant 9, a 53-year-old female, expressed a similar sentiment. Though she responded yes and suggested that women can ask for permission by “telling them [their partner] that they’re horny and they’d like to have sex,” she also explained that “a lot of females are scared of asking the man for sex” and suggested that “if they [men] can have sex with you [women] without asking, why can’t you [women] ask to have sex?” (Participant 9 2020, April 8). This quote is an extremely interesting one. Participant 9 seems to suggest that if non-consensual sexual interactions are perpetrated by men, who she earlier suggested do not think it is important to ask for permission, women should be able to ask for sex. It is also extremely telling that both participants who responded yes, women do ask for permission, qualified their answers, pointing out how this may still be uncommon and potentially frowned upon in Masxha.

Of the six participants who responded that some women do ask for permission, four were male and two were female. Even among the six participants who responded that some do, a variety of different reasons that a woman might ask for permission were given. Though she believed that, “in most cases, out of 100 percent, 90 percent are men asking for permission,” Participant 1, a 44-year-old woman, gave an example of when a woman might ask for permission. She suggested that women might ask for permission when their “man is sick” because they will “want to find out if he can do it” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). She explained that a woman might ask “baby can I do it? Are you feeling well today?” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 7, a 43-year-old male, explained that while some women do ask for

permission, “they just make it with action that they want because most of them are scared of asking,” echoing the sentiment that other participants also expressed (Participant 7 2020, April 8). However, Participant 7 went on to explain that he feels it is important for women to ask for permission. He related the reasons that men should ask women for permission to the reasons that he feels women should ask men for permission, saying:

*Cause they're not always in a mood. As I was saying as the man you have to ask for permission so so that you can get ready. Like in myself too, I want to be ready before I do it. It's not that where I'm always thinking about it. There are other things that I'm thinking about. So if she wants it she must ask for it. So that I can be ready for her*

(Participant 7 2020, April 8).

This statement also relates to Participant 8's suggestion that men are not always in the mood for sex and that women should therefore ask for permission. While many participants, including men, suggested that fear prevents women from asking for permission, Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, approached the topic of women asking for permission from a different lens, as is highlighted below.

### ***Men's Responses to Women Asking for Permission***

Participant 13 gave a particularly impassioned response to my question, do women ever ask for permission. After expressing that women “hardly” ask men for permission, Participant 13 explained in depth how a man would respond to a woman asking for permission (Participant 13 2020, April 13). He said “if you do that, if you approach it a man, as a woman, as you approach a man, it might think you are not all there. He might think there is something wrong with you, because in our culture, you woo a woman” (Participant 13 2020, April 13). Using a hunting metaphor, he continued to explain why men would be concerned if a woman asked for their permission. He said that “usually men is the hunter and the woman [...] a buck” and further explained, saying:

*Because usually it always chase the buck. But if the buck is coming to it, obviously it will get mixed up as to what's going on. I'm trying to say, when the woman is approaching us? We don't feel comfortable with it. Yeah, it was. My part is I'm a hunter. My part is to*

*confront a woman. I know what you're saying. It's happened to me several times, many times. But like I said to you, we don't feel comfort. Even if I feel okay. I've fallen in love with your words, as you said, as a woman if you approach me, but that was last. There was the feeling that you must have did the same thing with another man before maybe yesterday or the other day. It doesn't make us feel comfort being approached by a female.*

(Participant 13 2020, April 13).

Though this impassioned response by Participant 13 was reflected in the way that other male and female participant's spoke about women's fear of asking for permission, other male participants suggested that they would feel comfortable with a woman asking for permission and even welcome it. Participant 10, a 23-year-old male who responded that some women do ask for permission, suggested that he doesn't "feel like there's anything bad about it [women asking for permission] because she's still doing sex and still doing what needs to be done: asking for permission" (Participant 10 2020, April 8). Participant 11, a 32-year-old male who responded that he didn't know if women ask for permission, did suggest that he believes women should ask for permission. He said "cause same thing that the males ask them just to make sure that they comfortable. So why shouldn't woman ask, just to make sure the male is also comfortable?" (Participant 11 2020, April 13). In addition to the impact of gender on permission, the impact of relationship status on permission was a consistent theme throughout my research.

## **Relationships and Permission**

Many participants highlighted how permission changes depending on the type of relationship. Participants specifically highlighted how permission functions between individuals who are having sex for the first time, individuals who are engaging in one-night stands or are using alcohol, and individuals who are dating or married.

### ***First-Time***

As discussed earlier in the section *When Permission is Requested and Given*, many participants discussed the importance of asking for permission when individuals are having sex for the first time. Participant 10, a 23-year-old male, explained how permission might function in

different types of relationships where individuals are having sex for the first time ever or the first time with each other, saying:

*um I think in a relationship, um because there is different types of relationships. So you might have a relationship where maybe both the girl and the boy have never done sex. Okay? So whenever in their relationship where, they feel like they are ready to like do sex. They will talk to each other and during that talking out they will ask to each other if they are cool about doing it. And the same goes to relationship where maybe one of the maybe has never done sex before. So maybe like, I can say, I have done sex before and I'm in a relationship with a lady that has never done sex before. So when whenever that maybe, we do talk about it, and maybe she says that she's ready. And we can even set a date out that okay, on this day, we're gonna be trying, and I still need to, like ask, if she's sure and she's ready. She's willing to do this. There's no turning back. You just do this once, you understand? (Participant 10 2020, April 8).*

Though Participant 10 expressed that he felt permission is important beyond the first-time individuals are having sex, other participants felt that permission is most necessary the first-time.

### ***One-Night Stands and Alcohol***

While only Participant 5 specifically addressed permission in one-night stands, other participants indirectly spoke about one-night stands when discussing alcohol and sex. Participant 5, a 24-year-old male, initially stated that he does not “think you need permission when it comes to one-night stands” (Participant 5 2020, April 6). However, when I asked him a follow-up question about how individuals engaging in one-night stands know if their partner is comfortable, he said “you should not use your force” on a one-night stand, suggesting that individuals should not force people to have sex, and that “even the one-night stands somehow somewhere you need permission” (Participant 5 2020, April 6). Other participants addressed how permission is often lacking in encounters where one or both parties have been drinking. When asked if people talk before they begin to have sex, Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, suggested

that permission does not occur in situations where individuals have been drinking. He said that people not talking before sex is caused by alcohol, saying:

*Usually that is caused by when they want to do things and they are drunk. I just kicked you in, throw you in the bed and, you know, without playing with you a little and stuff like that, and see how you are how you feel, and I just don't care. Just do whatever I feel like. And you engage with me later on and then you know, depending on how do I do it and then and then you find yourself accepting it as last but first, there was no agreement as such (Participant 13 2020, April 13).*

These comments about how permission functions within one-nights stands illustrate contrasts between these types of sexual encounters and those in relationships, where participants frequently suggested permission occurs.

### ***Relationships: Dating and Marriage***

Participants expressed many different beliefs about how permission functions within relationships both throughout their interviews and when asked the question, do people ask for permission if they are in a relationship. The three themes that were the most prominent in these responses were the notion that sex is a requirement of relationships, the idea that couples stop asking for permission once they are comfortable with each other, and the contrary idea that asking for permission is important in relationships each time a couple has sex.

Many participants spoke about obligatory sex in relationships. Participant 3, a 22-year-old female, suggested that many people get the idea that “because I am dating this person, I have to have sex with them” (Participant 3 2020, April 6). Participant 3 also suggested that despite this notion, it is possible for “a boyfriend to rape his partner” (Participant 3 2020, April 6).

Participant 4, a 25-year-old male, suggested that men believe being in a relationship means that they own their partner. He said that many men believe that “oh yeah she is my girl. I own her. I can do anything I want” (Participant 4 2020, April 7). Participant 6, a 26-year-old female, spoke to the culture of obligation in dating relationships and marriage, saying:

*Most people believe that once you are in a relationship with a guy or a girl you guys should have sex all the time when you see each other have sex. If you stay together, sex.*

*Cause some people say even when they get married, I don't know with you guys but with Africans, we know when people are getting married and then it's time for people to talk like um there is like a program like somebody must talk wada wada wada and somebody will stand up and say you know what, 'you should give him your uh cake. Give it to him in the morning, during the day, and the night, midnight' all that. People believe that it is important for a guy or for a girl to have sex all the time. Every day (Participant 6 2020, April 7).*

Additionally, Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, suggested that permission is not necessary in relationships because the individuals love each other. Participant 13 suggested that even if he did not say yes to a woman who he was in a relationship with, she would not have forced him “because we [they] love each other” (Participant 13 2020, April 13).

Many participants discussed how permission changes once individuals in a relationship become comfortable with each other, suggesting that couples do not always need to ask for permission. Participant 1, a 44-year-old woman, suggested that once “you get used to each other, you no longer ask for permission” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). Participant 15, a 34-year-old male, suggested that some people in relationships don't feel that asking for permission is important. He said that people say that they have been “for five or six years in the same relationship so what's the point of asking for permission?” (Participant 15 2020, April 14). Other participants suggested that they themselves believe asking for permission each time a couple has sex is unreasonable. Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, suggested that individuals cannot ask every time they have sex. He said, “I cannot be asking you today and tomorrow. You know after two or three days, I must have sex with you” (Participant 13 2020, April 13).

Other participants however, emphasized the importance of asking for permission even between dating or married couples. Many young male participants who expressed that permission is important in relationships, evoked notions of respect. Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, suggested that even married couples ask for permission “if they respect each other enough” and Participant 5, a 24-year-old male, said that “at the end of the day, you know she's your wife or girlfriend, but that's the human being too so she has have right also so you must have permission” (Participant 5 2020, April 6). Other participants emphasized the importance of

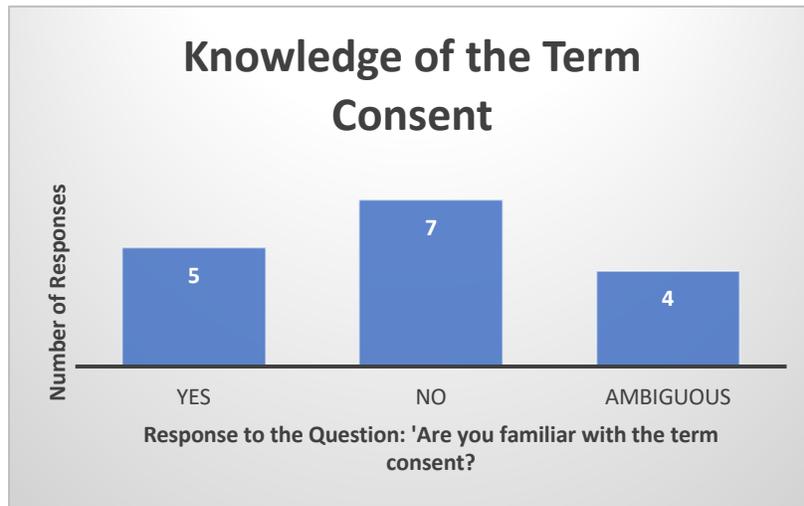
asking for permission in relationships to avoid rape. Participant 14, a 28-year-old female, stated that even with her partner, who she has “been dating for five years” they “do ask permission because of this case of rape. It is very high and it's very scary” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). She explained that the case she is referencing here is with “Java,” a “famous singer, here in South Africa,” whose “girlfriend, [who] is also celebrity, just accused him of rape” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). She used this case of alleged rape to explain why it is “important to ask” for permission in relationships, suggesting that “sometimes you may do something to someone and not mean to so better ask” (Participant 14 2020, April 14). It is clear that participants hold many different opinions regarding how relationship status influences the importance of, and dynamics involved in asking for permission.

### **Knowledge of Consent and Legal Definitions of Rape**

Though, throughout my informed consent procedure I used the term consent, during my interviews I only used the term permission to refer to sexual consent. In my last two questions of each interview, I asked participants if they were familiar with the word consent and to explain it if possible. I also talked through the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 with participants, focusing on the definition of consent, “voluntary or uncoerced agreement” (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11). I asked participants to tell me what they thought about this law. While it is possible that my use of the term consent in my informed consent procedure may have influenced responses to these questions, I have chosen to include these findings here as I believe they are important.

I found that participants had a wide variety of understandings of the term consent. The breakdown of participant’s answers to the question, are you familiar with the word consent, is shown in the graph, Figure Six, below.

**Figure Six**



Five participants responded that they were familiar with the term consent. When asked to tell me what the word consent meant to them, some participants related the term to permission. Participant 5 for example, stated that “consent is like uhh more like permission like you cannot use something that is mine without my consent” (Participant 5 2020, April 6). Many participants who responded that they knew what the word consent meant also used the word agreement to explain the term. Participant 1, 44-year-old female, expressed that she felt that consent is “like an agreement” and that it is used when you want to know how the other person feels about whatever you are doing at that time” (Participant 1 2020, April 6). While five participants were familiar with the term consent, a majority of participants either expressed that they did not know the term or had answers that were too ambiguous for me to determine whether or not they were familiar with the word.

When I explained the definition of consent as defined by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, many participants expressed that they had never heard of the law before. Participant 8, a 23-year-old male, said that he “actually [hadn’t] heard like that [the law] before” and Participant 14, a 28-year-old woman, expressed that she was “confused” by the law as it was her “first time hearing it” (Participant 8 2020, April 8; Participant 14 2020, April 14). A few participants expressed approval of the law, suggesting that “it’s good” or “a good thing” and other similar phrases (Participant 16 2020, April 15; Participant 9 2020, April 8). The two oldest participants, Participant 2 and Participant 13, however, rejected the law. Participant 2, a 64-year-old female, differentiated between voluntary sex and agreement. She said, “I don’t think you have to have sex voluntarily. I don’t think so. It’s

between the two people. If I want to have, I will agree with the guy. Because if I don't agree I would say that is rape" (Participant 2 2020, April 7). Participant 13, a 64-year-old male, on the other hand, suggested that the law ignores other ways that consent can function, beyond getting a yes from your partner, even suggesting that legal officials are guilty of rape under the law's definition, stating:

*Even the a judge, magistrate. If we can all stick to that law, it was so wrong he may be arrested his life or say wife or girlfriend can sue him or charge for rape every day because sometimes it doesn't wait for her to say give him a yes word. You just go on and then oh, it's my husband what can I do. It's like you just jump on to me. So she's my girlfriend, what am I going to do, I have to do whatever she want me to do? Without before without me saying yes. So she did not force this to me, because we love each other. So some of the things are being ignored (Participant 13 2020, April 13).*

While my research was primarily focused on notions of consent within sexual encounters and less concerned with participant's understandings of the legal frameworks of consent, the degree to which participants had knowledge of consent and the law governing sexual crimes provides an interesting background to my other findings.

## **Analysis**

Throughout this section I analyze my findings as they relate to the available research literature. Through this research, I sought to answer the question, how is sexual consent understood by male and female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu-Natal, and to highlight how consent is commonly given, requested, and received during healthy sexual interactions, outside of the context of rape and sexual violence. While some aspects of my data directly support or contradict findings present in the available research literature, much of the data that I was able to collect serves to contribute to a body of research literature where a focus on consent in healthy sexual interactions is underrepresented. In addition, while I did focus on age and gender during the process of analyzing my data, few patterns emerged. In this section, mentions of age and gender will be shared for relevant findings and omitted where significant patterns in these two demographics are not present.

### **The Importance of Permission**

A majority of my participants indicated that they personally felt that asking for permission to do sexual things with someone is important. The only participants who denied the overall importance of asking for permission were the two oldest participants, both aged 64-years-old, suggesting that there is a potential relationship between age and perceived importance of permission. However, given the scope of my study, I cannot confidently generalize the relationship between age and perceived value of permission. Additionally, of the participants who acknowledged the importance of asking for permission, many highlighted the relationship between permission and respect and between permission and rape. While many participants suggested that asking for permission is a matter of respecting your partner, other participants suggested that asking for permission is important in order to avoid rape.

Rachel Jewkes and Kate Woods, two scholars whose work I consistently found using a variety of key word searches, highlight the lack of specific research on consent in healthy sexual relationships. In their 2008 article, Wood et al. state that research on consent “tends to ask about experiences of specific practices (hitting, kicking, etc.)” (Wood et al., 2008, p. 279). Yet, in their many articles, both Wood and Jewkes focus on notions of forced sex, coercive sex, and other non-consensual sex practices. These articles paint a picture that suggests that the research participants in these studies do not value or understand the importance of consent. Though I was

limited to a small sample size and focused only on Zulu individuals from Masxha, I was able to conclude that a majority of the individuals with whom I spoke believe that permission is important. This finding is at odds with studies that emphasize non-consensual practices in South African communities.

### **When Permission is Requested and Given**

Again, much of the research literature focuses on non-consensual sexual activity, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. In my secondary source research, I did not find any information on when individuals from different communities in South Africa believe they should ask for permission or when they personally ask for permission. In my study however, I found that when individuals felt one should ask for permission varied significantly. While I found that a majority of participants believe that individuals talk to their sexual partners before they begin to have sex with them, I found that many participants' views varied on when someone should specifically ask for permission to do sexual things with someone. While some participants expressed that they believe permission should be requested at a certain point in a relationship, others suggested that permission should be requested either well before or immediately prior to a sexual encounter. This finding does not contradict findings presented in the available research literature, but rather serves to fill one small part of the gap in research literature detailing understandings of consent within healthy sexual interactions.

### **How Permission is Requested**

Though my study did not reveal how individuals receive consent, or in other words how people respond when consent is withheld or given, my study did reveal many different ways that consent is both requested and given. The two oldest participants, both aged 64-years-old, provided responses that were consistent with much of the secondary source literature. In their responses to questions that asked them to reflect on how individuals might ask for permission, these two participants indicated that individuals do not ask for permission. Participant 2, a 64-year-old woman, suggested that when engaging in a sexual interaction, one partner just "just makes them do what they want to do," a statement that reflects the research literature which focuses on forced sex and coercion (Participant 2 2020, April 7).

However, many other participants, including some participants in their 40s and 50s, suggested that there are ways of asking for permission without using force and/or coercion. My research revealed a variety of questions, phrases, actions, and other non-verbal cues that participants suggested could be used to ask for permission. This finding serves to expand upon the research literature which only details non-consensual sexual encounters, adding an awareness of how consent is requested during healthy sexual interactions.

### **How Permission is Given**

In my research I was able to find many different ways that individuals might give permission to engage in a sexual encounter, ranging from verbal permission to body language and other non-verbal cues. In my secondary source research, I found few instances where authors detailed how one might give consent to engage in a sexual encounter. However, one of the descriptions of how one might give consent that I did find in my secondary source research reflected aspects of my own findings in this area. I found that asking a person to come to your home or room was a form of asking for consent and that agreeing to go to a person's home or room suggested that consent had been given. This finding was explicitly referenced by Wood et al. in their 2008 article, where they suggested that "young women rarely gave explicit voiced consent for sex: rather [they] would agree to accompany [a boy] to his room" (Wood et al., 2008, p. 287). Though this one similarity between the research literature and my own findings exists, my findings in this area largely suggest that the multitude of ways in which my participants suggested consent could be given are not reflected in the available research literature. It therefore stands that this finding also contributes to filling the gap in the research literature when it comes to ways that sexual consent is given in healthy sexual interactions.

As my research was broadly focused on many different aspects of sexual consent – seeking to understand both how it is understood and ways that it is requested, given, and received – I was not able to make more specific conclusions about each of these aspects of consent. For example, while I am able to conclude that there are many ways that participants believe consent can be given, I am not able to use my data to illuminate one predominate way in which individuals give consent. Instead, I am able to conclude that participants expressed a variety of different ways that an individual could give consent.

## **Alcohol and Permission**

The relationship between alcohol and permission that I found in my own research was extremely similar to that of the secondary source research. Many secondary sources that I read suggested that the purchase of alcohol for a woman constitutes a transaction wherein the woman is obligated to perform sexually in order to pay for the alcohol. Though not all of my participants discussed this aspect of alcohol and permission, a few participants did. Similar to the secondary source research, these participants suggested that accepting alcohol from a man implied consent to participate sexually with him.

While my research in this area underscored findings in the available secondary source material, my findings also added to an understanding of how individuals perceive the role of alcohol on an individual's ability to consent, a finding that was not present in the research literature. While participants' responses to the question, can someone give permission when they are drunk or they have used drugs, were varied, many individuals suggested that mental impairment or lack of decision-making ability while drunk made it wrong to accept permission from someone who is drunk or who has used drugs. This finding adds to the body of research surrounding alcohol for sex transactions, suggesting that while some individuals do believe these transactions constitute consent, other individuals believe that the use of substances blurs the lines of consent.

## **Gender and Permission**

Much of the available research literature on sexual consent focuses on the role of men as perpetrators and women as victims of sexual violence. In my secondary source research, I rarely found studies that explored the role of men as victims of violence or any mention of how women might ask for consent from men. In my study, I found that participants had a wide variety of views on this subject. Many participants believed that women do ask for consent or should ask for consent. Many of these participants were male. A few of these male participants even spoke about why it is important for women to respect men by asking them for permission, suggesting that, despite popular belief, men are not always in the mood for sex and also need to be asked if they want to have sex. However, some participants rejected the idea of women asking for permission, outright rejecting the idea or speaking to the barriers that prevent women from asking for consent, such as fear or societal norms. My findings regarding the role of gender in

individuals' perception of permission are important as they contradict the dominant narrative presented in the research literature and suggest that women also play a role in asking for consent.

### **Relationships and Permission**

Much of the research literature is focused on how consent functions within established relationships. In their article, Wood et al. suggest that forced sex between an established couple is not considered rape and that only a “violent act committed by men who were not in a prior sexual relationship with their targets” is considered rape in the community they studied (Wood et al., 2008, p. 285). While it is certainly possible that this is true in the Xhosa community studied by Wood et al., I found that many of my participants suggested that rape and sexual violence can occur between established partners. Although some of my participants suggested that permission becomes less important as a sexual relationship continues over time, other participants suggested that asking for permission in a defined relationship is important to prevent rape. In her 2012 article focused on a Zulu community, Judith Singleton suggested that lobola plays a role in determining whether or not rape is possible in a relationship. She suggested that individuals feel that rape within a dating relationship is possible, but that rape is not possible within a marriage because the husband has paid lobola (Singleton, 2012, p. 67). My findings contradicted this aspect of Singleton's findings. Multiple participants whom I interviewed suggested that it is possible for rape to occur between individuals who are dating or married, and many participants even emphasized the importance of permission between individuals who are in an established relationship.

### **Consent and the Law**

As I was hoping to study how the individuals I interviewed understand how sexual consent is requested, given, and received, the major focus of my secondary source research, as well as my primary source research, focused on how consent is understood within sexual interactions. I therefore did not focus my secondary source research on perceptions or violations of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. However, throughout my interviews participants often described sexual encounters and permission in ways that might violate Act 32. For instance, participants often suggested that asking for permission may become less necessary as a relationship continues, a statement that

contradicts the law, which requires consent for every sexual interaction between two parties (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 11). However, due to the nature of my study, I cannot confidently conclude that participants' understandings of permission contradict Act 32. While a participant may have said that asking for permission in a relationship becomes less important overtime, I did not ask and therefore cannot know if permission simply stops or if the way that individuals engage in asking for or giving permission changes. While I cannot confidently draw conclusions about the ways in which participants might violate Act 32, I can conclude that many participants were not familiar with the language of consent used in the law or the law itself. Though many of the individuals whom I interviewed were familiar with the term permission, many of these individuals did not know the word consent, nor were they familiar with the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. I am therefore able to conclude that a barrier between the wording of this Amendment and the understandings of sexual consent, or the language used to describe sexual consent, exists among many of the participants.

## Conclusion

When I first began my secondary source research in the early stages of my ISP topic formulation, I was shocked. The high rate of sexual violence and rape is an extremely pressing public health issue in South Africa. Not only is sexual violence psychologically and physically harmful, it is possible that sexual violence contributes to high rates of HIV among young women in South Africa (Advert, 2020, n.p.). When I began my research, I understandably expected there to be an unending supply of research on understandings of sexual consent among South Africans in different communities given the rates of rape in the country and the connection between sexual violence and HIV. Instead, I found that much of the research literature surrounding sexual consent in South Africa focuses on non-consensual sexual interactions, ignoring how sexual consent is understood in the context of healthy sexual interactions. In my view, it is impossible to approach violence prevention without an understanding of how people perceive healthy sexual interactions. Through this ISP, I hoped to reveal how individuals understand sexual consent and how it is requested, given, and received in order to contribute to this gap in the research literature and potentially inform future research and interventions.

Though the size of my sample makes it impossible to generalize my findings beyond the individual members of the Masxha community whom I interviewed, I believe these findings are a starting point for future research and interventions based on understandings of consent in the context of healthy sexual interactions. Through my ISP research, I was able to conclude that a majority of my participants believe asking for permission is important. I was also able to highlight a multitude of phrases, questions, actions, and non-verbal cues that participants suggested could be used to ask for or give permission. In addition, I was able to make connections between these ways of asking for and giving consent and different types of sexual encounters, including those facilitated by alcohol and those between individuals in established relationships. Lastly, I was able to compare my participants' understanding of permission and their understanding of the term consent as used in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, concluding that there is inconsistency between participants' understanding of permission and the law defining rape and sexual assault. Together, these conclusions work to create a more comprehensive understanding of how participants in this study understand sexual consent.

While my study was successful in illuminating how participants understand sexual consent, my research also led me to form an additional conclusion that I did not anticipate or set out to discover. My ISP highlights a broader discrepancy between different aspects of the research literature as well as the sexual violence prevention field in South Africa. Just as my ISP suggests that individuals do understand consent outside of the context of rape and violence, contradicting the dominant view projected in the research literature, my ISP also highlights barriers between individuals' understandings of consent and the laws that dictate what constitutes consent. I believe that in order to prevent sexual violence, interventions must be targeted at building upon understandings of consent that communities are already comfortable and familiar with. This includes reflecting the language and terminology used to describe consent and its importance, such as the use of the term permission as a substitute for the word consent. More research in this field must be conducted in order to design these interventions. If the research community is able to build a comprehensive body of research that effectively and accurately details the existing understandings of consent among different South African communities, I believe that successful intervention strategies could be designed and implemented, reducing the rate of rape in South Africa. Additionally, I believe that interventions should focus on communities' existing understandings of consent as opposed to focusing on rape in communities. While I believe that it is important to educate individuals on what constitutes rape and sexual violence, it is also extremely important to educate individuals about what consent should look like in healthy sexual interactions. This education could be integrated into the schooling system, educating children and young adults on consent and how to navigate asking for and giving consent.

Sexual consent is interpersonal, flexible, culturally determined, and exists in a multitude of forms. Consent is not an easy topic to research nor is it a topic that lends itself easily to simple interventions aimed at preventing sexual violence. However, researching consent and designing educational interventions is of the utmost importance. Individuals in South Africa and globally deserve to be educated on how they can ask for consent and make their wants known to their sexual partners.

## Recommendations for Further Study

At the end of my time working on my ISP, I have just as many, if not more questions, than I did at the outset of my project. Although I feel confident that I have shed a light on how individuals in Masxha understand sexual consent beyond what is portrayed in the research literature, I am now more confident than ever that further and more extensive research must be done to create a picture of how many South Africans understand consent in the context of healthy sexual interactions. Only after this research is completed, do I believe that one can begin to design interventions that will successfully decrease the incidence of rape and sexual violence in South Africa. While there are many areas for further study in this field, among them are:

- How consent or lack thereof is received by sexual patterns?
  - i.e. How do people respond after their partner gives or withholds consent?
    - This was an area of research that I set out to explore, but I ultimately did not collect substantial data on this question.
- How does awareness of safe sex and HIV prevention relate to how people understand sexual consent?
- What are the predominant or most common ways in which individuals ask for consent?
- What are the predominant or most common ways in which individuals give consent?
- How does the official language of consent, as dictated by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, relate to the language that individuals use to describe consent and non-consensual interactions?
- Where do individuals' definitions of consent differ from that of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007?
- What interventions aimed at reducing rates of rape in South Africa are currently most successful and how do these interventions work from individuals' existing understandings of consent?

I am happy to be contacted by any future SIT student or researcher seeking to answer these questions or others relating to sexual consent at my email: [larkinlevine@gmail.com](mailto:larkinlevine@gmail.com)

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## Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What do you do for a living?
4. How long have you lived in Masxha?
5. Are you currently in a committed or intimate relationship?
  - a. *If yes*, how long have you been in this relationship?
  - b. *If no*, have you ever been in a committed or intimate relationship?
6. What activities do you consider to be sex?
7. In your opinion, are there other sexual activities that someone can do with a partner that you do not consider sex?
8. How do people know if they feel comfortable having sex with someone?
9. Do you think that people talk with sexual partners before they begin to have sex with them?
  - a. *If yes*, what do you believe they talk about before they start to have sex?
  - b. *If yes*, who do you think starts this conversation?
10. Are you still okay with the questions I am asking?
11. Do you believe that it is important to ask for permission to do sexual things with someone?
12. Do you believe that most people think it is important to ask for permission to do sexual things with someone?
  - a. *If yes*, why?
  - b. *If no*, why not?
13. How do people ask for permission to do sexual things with someone?
  - a. What is something that someone might say to ask for someone's permission?
14. When do people ask for permission to do sexual things with someone?
15. Do people ask for permission to kiss or touch someone else?
16. What makes people think that that they should ask for permission?
17. What makes people think that they don't have to ask for permission?
18. Do women ever ask for permission?
19. Do people ask for permission if they are in a relationship?

- a. Is it important to ask for permission in a relationship?
20. How are you doing?
21. In your opinion, is it possible for someone to give permission to do something sexually without telling them with words?
  - a. *If yes*, how might someone give permission without telling them with words?
22. Can someone give permission if they are drunk or have used drugs?
23. Do people talk about giving permission before having sex in your schools or community?
24. Are you familiar with the term consent?
25. The legal definition of consent in South Africa is “voluntary or uncoerced agreement” (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2007, p. 12). What does this definition mean to you?
26. Do you have any questions for me about sex, consent, or anything that we spoke about today?
  - a. *If yes, appropriate, and time allows*, talk through examples as below taken from Center for Applied Legal Studies, & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center’s “A summary of the criminal law sexual offences amendment act 32 of 2007”
    - i. “Sexual acts are offences (crimes) if they are committed without the consent
    - ii. (permission) of one of the people involved in the sexual act. The court must
    - iii. decide if Mpho gave consent to the sexual act.
    - iv. ‘Consent’ means voluntary or unforced agreement. This means that Mpho
    - v. must freely, willingly and deliberately agree to the sexual act; and Mpho must be able to understand what she is consenting to.
    - vi. The Act gives examples of when Mpho could not consent (agree) to a sexual act:
      1. When Mpho submits (gives in) to a sexual act because Lee forced, intimidated or threatened Mpho or Jabu or threatened to damage Mpho or Jabu’s property
        - a. Example: Lee says he will kill Mpho’s baby if she does not have sex with him. Mpho, therefore, is scared and does not resist the sex as a result of this threat.
    - vii. When Lee abuses his power or authority and Mpho is not able to show that she does not consent to the sexual act
      1. Let’s say that: Lee is Mpho’s teacher. Lee says Mpho must have sex with him. Mpho is afraid of what will happen at school if she refuses to have sex with Lee, perhaps he might fail her.

- viii. When Mpho is deceived into agreeing to the sexual act
  - 1. Let's say that: Lee is Mpho's doctor. Lee informs Mpho that he needs to massage her genital area as part of a medical procedure. Mpho agrees but she does not know that Lee is actually massaging her for his own sexual pleasure.
- ix. Where Mpho is not able to think properly or understand the nature of the sexual act at the time because Mpho is –
  - 1. asleep,
  - 2. unconscious,
  - 3. unable to think properly because of drugs or alcohol
  - 4. a child below 12, or
  - 5. a person with a mental disability.
- x. This means that even if Mpho agreed to the sexual act, she could not give proper consent because of the above circumstances” (Center For Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Center, n.d., p. 3 -4).

## Appendix 2 – Consent Script

Hi. My name is Larkin Levine. In order to keep this interview confidential, please don't tell me your name. I am a student with the SIT Community Health and Social Policy Program. Thank you so much for speaking with me today. Can I record?

Before we can begin the interview, I need to talk with you and get your permission. If you have any questions, please stop me. Are you older than 18 years old? The title of my study is Understandings of Sexual Consent Among Male and Female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu Natal

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Please listen to this permission process before deciding whether to participate. Because we are talking over the phone, you won't have to sign any documents. Instead you will tell me if you consent by saying yes or no to some questions.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how people in Masxha think about how individuals give, ask for, and get permission to have sex or do sexual things with another person. I will ask you about how people in general understand how they get permission to have sex, when people know someone wants to have sex, and other similar questions.

Your participation in the study will be a thirty-minute interview with me over the phone. The interview will be recorded, but if you do not wish to be recorded, then you can still be interviewed, and I won't record you at all. The interview will take place wherever is most comfortable for you.

Are you in a private place to talk? *If no*, are you comfortable with others hearing your answers to my questions? Do you have any questions so far?

At no point in the interview will you have to share personal experiences about sexual encounters, rape, or sexual violence. However, for some people, talking about sex can bring up difficult emotions or memories. If you think that talking about sex and permission to have sex may be difficult for you, please let me know and you do not have to be interviewed.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will not be forced to answer any questions. Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to stop answering my questions at any time. You can also skip any questions. I will ask you how you are feeling throughout the interview. If you are upset, we will stop the interview and we can talk about your feelings.

Besides potentially negative emotional responses to questions, there are no other potential risks to being interviewed today and you do not have to participate. Do you have any questions?

This interview will be used in my ISP paper and my senior thesis. If you consent to take part in this research, you agree to have your interview included in both the ISP paper and senior thesis. The ISP will be published online through SIT and a physical copy will be available in Masxha. The senior thesis may be published online as well. If you change your mind about being included in either the ISP or senior thesis, you can tell me, and I will remove your interview up until the time I hand in my reports.

All notes and recordings taken during this interview will be kept in a password protected document. No information that could identify you will be included in my notes. I will refer to you using a participant number and only age, gender, and relationship status will be recorded. No information that may identify you will be in the final ISP or senior thesis. The recording I take will be deleted after I finish my senior thesis in the spring of 2021.

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no punishment or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

Please respond yes or no to the following questions. Have you heard and do you understand the consent form I read? Do you agree to participate in the study?

With your consent, I will record audio of your interview to refer back to later. No audio will be distributed or published, and all audio-recordings will be deleted in the spring of 2021. Do you agree to be audio-recorded?

In addition to use in my ISP, with your consent, I will use what I learn from your interview in my senior thesis which I will write in fall 2020 and spring 2021. Do you agree to have what you say in the interview included in the senior thesis?

I may want to quote from your interview in my ISP and senior thesis. I will use your participant number as identification in this writing and information that could potentially identify you will not be included. Do you agree to be quoted from the interview?

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at [larkinlevine@gmail.com](mailto:larkinlevine@gmail.com) or my advisor at [hicksJ@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hicksJ@ukzn.ac.za). I will send these emails to you over WhatsApp. You can also WhatsApp me.

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact me please contact the Institutional Review Board. I will send you this information as well.

School for International Training

Institutional Review Board

1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676

Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676 USA

[irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu)

802-258-3132

# Ethical Clearance Form



Human Subjects Review  
LRB/IRB ACTION FORM

<p>Name of Student: Larkin Levine</p> <p>ISP/Internship Title: Understandings of Sexual Consent Among Male and Female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu-Natal</p> <p>Date Submitted: 30 March 2020</p> <p>Program: SFH Durban Community Health &amp; Social Policy</p> <p>Type of review:</p> <p>Exempt <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Expedited <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Full <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Institution: World Learning Inc. IRB organization number: IORG0004408 IRB registration number: IRB00005219 Expires: 5 January 2021</p> <p>LRB members (print names): Robin Joubert PhD Clive Bruzas PhD John McGladdery</p> <p><b>LRB REVIEW BOARD ACTION:</b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved as submitted  <input type="checkbox"/> Approved pending changes  <input type="checkbox"/> Requires full IRB review in Vermont  <input type="checkbox"/> Disapproved</p> <p>LRB Chair Signature: </p> <p>Date: 30 March 2020</p>
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**Form below for IRB Vermont use only:**

**Research requiring full IRB review. ACTION TAKEN:**

\_\_\_ approved as submitted \_\_\_ approved pending submission or revisions \_\_\_ disapproved

\_\_\_\_\_  
IRB Chairperson's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Consent to Use Form



### Access, Use, and Publication of ISP/FSP

Student Name: Larkin Levine

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Email Address: larkinlevine@gmail.com

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Title of ISP/FSP: Understandings of Sexual Consent Among Male and Female Zulu South Africans in Masxha, KwaZulu-Natal

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Program and Term/Year: Community Health and Social Policy Spring 2020

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Student research (Independent Study Project, Field Study Project) is a product of field work and as such students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical field work, as stipulated in the SIT Policy on Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore copies of ISP/FSPs are returned to the sponsoring institutions and the host communities, at the discretion of the institution(s) and/or community involved.

By signing this form, I certify my understanding that:

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  - World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives my ISP/FSP in the permanent collection at the SIT Study Abroad local country program office and/or at any World Learning office.
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April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

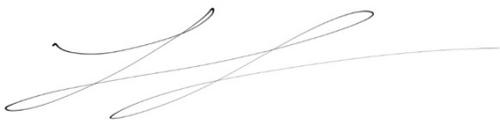
Student Signature

Date

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- I hereby withdraw permission for World Learning/SIT Study Abroad to release my ISP/FSP in any format to individuals, organizations, or libraries in the host country for educational purposes as determined by World Learning/SIT Study Abroad. Reason:
  
- I hereby withdraw permission for World Learning/SIT Study Abroad to publish my ISP/FSP on its websites and in any of its digital/electronic collections, or to reproduce and transmit my ISP/FSP electronically. Reason:



April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Student Signature

Date

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