

Consent Standards in the Kink Communities: A Comparative Study

Susan Wright, M.A., Russell J. Stambaugh, Ph.D., & Darrell Cox, M.A.

National Coalition for Sexual Freedom

INTRODUCTION

The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom gathered data through the first **Consent Counts Survey** in 2012 in order to gauge attitudes about consent and consent violations within a power exchange context.

The **Consent Violations Survey** was launched in 2014 to gather additional details about consent violations in a BDSM context including: the severity of the violations, who is being violated, where they were violated, the relationship and intent of those involved, the power dynamic at the time of the violation, as well as information about false accusations and from people who have committed consent violations.

Both surveys were conducted online using Survey Monkey, and participation was recruited through various electronic means, such as distribution through website posts and email list-serves belonging to the NCSF Coalition Partners and members.

SAMPLE SIZES

Consent Counts Survey in 2012

5,667 respondents with 3,932 (70.8%) responding to every question.

Consent Violations Survey in 2014

4,598 respondents with 4,388 (95.5%) responding to every question.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Disclosure Status

Q. Can you speak comfortably to your family and coworkers about your BDSM activities?

Consent Counts Survey – 75% said no

Consent Violations Survey – 71% said no

18% were not comfortable speaking to their primary partner about their BDSM activities.

Gender

Participants in the Consent Violations Survey were 55% female, 36% male, and nearly 10% identified as gender queer, transgender, gender fluid or agender.

Participants in the Consent Counts Survey were not asked their gender.

CONSENT VIOLATIONS

Q. Has your pre-negotiated limit ever been violated?

Consent Counts: 30.1% (n=4,115)

Consent Violations: 24.5% (n=4,503)

Q. Has your safeword or safesign ever been ignored?

Consent Counts: 14.9% (n=4,110)

Consent Violations: 13.1% (n=4,503)

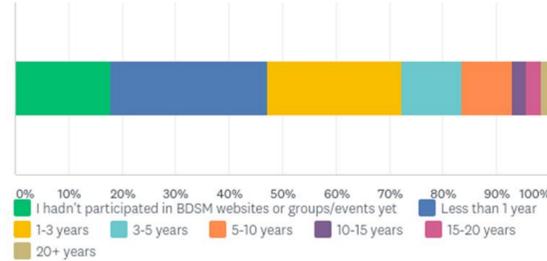
Aggregate total:

Consent Counts Survey – 33%

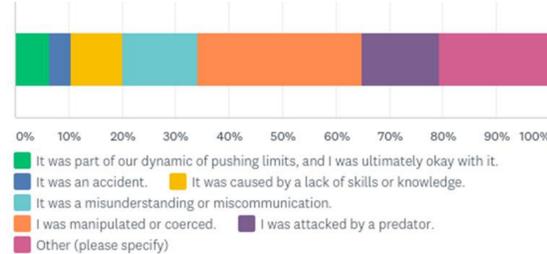
Consent Violations Survey – 29%

RESULTS of Consent Violations Survey

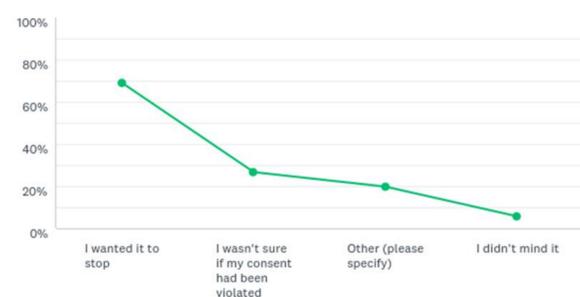
Q. When did the first consent violation happen to you? (n=1,077)



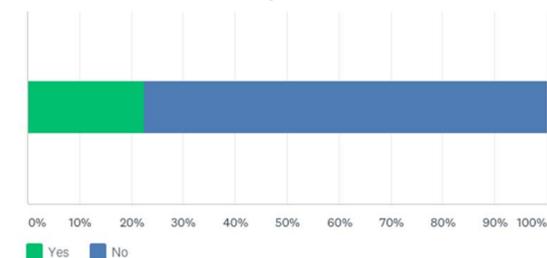
Q. Why do you think your consent was violated? (n=1,077)



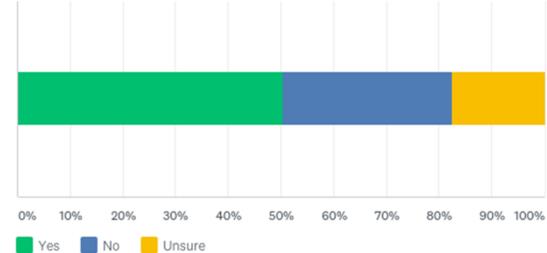
Q. What did you think about the violation when it happened? (n=1,059)



Q. Did the person who violated your consent renegotiate after the BDSM activities were underway? (n=1,044)



Q. Were you of sound mind when the renegotiation occurred? (n=234)

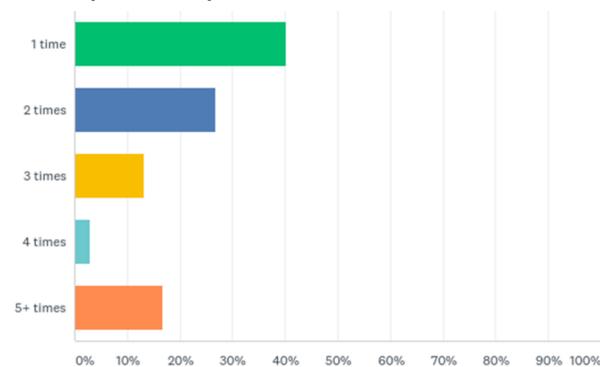


RESULTS of Consent Violations Survey

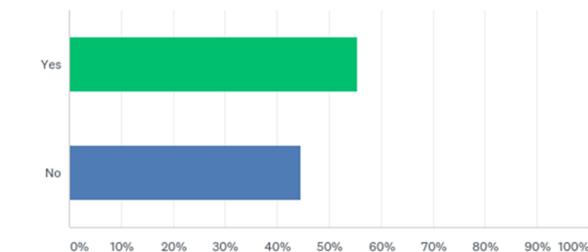
Q. How was your consent violated? (n=991)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Penetration in the vagina by a penis, finger or dildo | 29% |
| Touching | 26% |
| Penetration in the ass by a penis/finger or dildo | 21% |
| Punching/hitting | 21% |
| Touch on the genitals or breasts | 20% |
| Humiliation | 20% |
| Slapping | 16% |
| Forced to give or receive oral sex | 16% |
| Choking | 15% |
| Bondage | 11% |
| Spanking | 11% |
| Flogging | 7% |
| Knifeplay or bloodplay | 5% |
| Gag | 5% |
| Watersports | 4% |
| Blindfold | 4% |
| No protection during sex | 3% |
| Biting | 1% |

Q. How many times has your consent been violated? (n=1,098)



Q. Respondents who reported their consent was violated within a BDSM context were also asked: Were you ever sexually assaulted when you were an adult outside of a BDSM context? (n=1,098)



Q. Have you ever been falsely accused of violating someone's pre-negotiated limits during play? (n=4,432) Yes – 3%

Q. Have you ever been falsely reported of violating someone's pre-negotiated limits to the police? (n=4,432) Yes – .0015%

DISCUSSION

In the Consent Violations Survey, 747 females (31%), 213 males (13%) and 37 transgender people (32%) reported their limits/safeword were violated. For sexual assault: 8.9% (400/4511) reported nonconsensual oral, anal or vaginal acts while engaged in BDSM. The gender break down is: 12.5% women (314/2511), 3% men (52/1651), 10.6% gender queer (24/226), and 8.7% transgender (10/115). By comparison, several surveys of the general population have found approximately 11-18% of women and 1-3% of men report experiencing forcible sexual assault in their lifetime, with even more (45% of women and 22% of men) encountering other forms of sexual violence.¹

As for the severity of the violations, half of the respondents said it wasn't bad enough to report to the police or to community organizers. In all, 96 people (2% of total sample) reported an injury that required some kind of medical attention. Of those, 23 people (.5%) reported receiving a serious physical injury that was life-threatening or serious enough to cause dysfunction in an organ or limb.

Only 29 people reported the violation to the police. This is much worse than traditional reporting rates: according to the Justice Department's National Crime Victimization Survey: 2008-2012, sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes, with 68% of sexual assaults not reported.

Only 14% (144/1,039) accessed victim services, with 75% of those people seeing a mental health care provider. In all, 90% said the service providers were helpful.

One in five people reported that the person who violated their consent held a leadership role in a BDSM-leather-fetish group or event at the time it happened. Serial predators are an issue that involves potential civil liability for group and events: nearly 1 in 3 people know of someone else who was violated by the same person who violated their safeword or pre-negotiated limits. The results of this survey have led to education that has heightened self-policing efforts to remove serial violators from kink events and as volunteer organizers and presenters.

¹ Basile, Chen, Black, & Saltzman, 2007; Black, Basile, Breidling, Smith, Walters, Marrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011; Tjaden, & Thoennes, 1998.

IRB

This project was reviewed and endorsed by a community advisory board of the Community-Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities (CARAS), a community-based research support organization which includes members of alternative sexualities communities. This project has scientific merit, follows ethical guidelines for research, and avoids community harm in its design and methods. <https://www.carasresearch.org/>

CONTACT

Susan Wright - Susan@ncsfreedom.org

Russell J. Stambaugh - russell.stambaugh@gmail.com

To get a copy of the surveys, go to Resources, BDSM Surveys on: www.ncsfreedom.org

