



Consent Questions

Cindy Crabb & Andrea Golden

The project of this book started with a list of questions. We wondered, if most assaults happened within relationships, dates, and amongst people who knew each other, why we always talk about assault as if it was something “bad” people did, not something we and our friends did. Almost everyone I knew had been in sexual situations that lacked consent with people in our own community. Andrea came to me with the proposal that we write up a list of questions and hold a community-wide discussion with the hopes that it would help people to think deeply, and to help open up conversations about consent. The feedback we got was incredible. People used these questions to talk to their partners, their friends, in groups, in couples, alone. People were able to name their desires, name their problematic behaviors, define their boundaries, and think clearly, some of them for the first time. People took the list and translated it, changed it, added to it, reprinted it, created workshops inspired by it. This list of questions has proven to be an amazing place to start talking about the complexities of consent.

We know it’s a long list, but please read and think honestly about these questions, one at a time.

1. How do you define consent?
2. Have you ever talked about consent with your partners(s) or friends?
3. Do you know people, or have you been with people who define consent differently than you do?
4. Have you ever been unsure about whether or not the person you were being sexual with wanted to be doing what you were doing? Did you talk about it? Did you ignore it in hopes that it would change? Did you continue what you were doing because it was

pleasurable to you and you didn't want to deal with what the other person was experiencing? Did you continue because you felt it was your duty? How do you feel about the choice you made?

5. Do you think it is the other person's responsibility to say something if they aren't into what you are doing?
6. How might someone express that what is happening is not OK?
7. Do you look only for verbal signs or are there other signs?
8. Do you think it is possible to misinterpret silence for consent?
9. Have you ever asked someone what kinds of signs you should look for if they have a hard time verbalizing when something feels wrong?
10. Do you only ask about these kinds of things if you are in a serious relationship or do you feel able to talk in casual situations too?
11. Do you think talking ruins the mood?
12. Do you think consent can be erotic?
13. Do you think about people's abuse histories?
14. Do you check in as things progress or do you assume the original consent means everything is OK?
15. If you achieve consent once, do you assume it's always OK after that?
16. If someone consents to one thing, do you assume everything else is OK or do you ask before touching in different ways or taking things to more intense levels?
17. Are you resentful of people who need or want to talk about being abused? Why?

18. Are you usually attracted to people who fit the traditional standard of beauty as seen in the United States?
19. Do you pursue friendship with people because you want to be with them, and then give up on the friendship if that person isn't interested in you sexually?
20. Do you pursue someone sexually even after they have said they just want to be friends?
21. Do you assume that if someone is affectionate they are probably sexually interested in you?
22. Do you think about affection, sexuality, and boundaries? Do you talk about these issues with people? If so, do you talk about them only when you want to be sexual with someone or do you talk about them because you think it is important and you genuinely want to know?
23. Are you clear about your own intentions?
24. Have you ever tried to talk someone into doing something they showed hesitancy about?
25. Do you think hesitancy is a form of flirting?
26. If yes, are you aware that in some instances it is not?
27. Have you ever thought someone's actions were flirtatious when that wasn't actually the message they wanted to get across?
28. Do you think that if someone is promiscuous that makes it OK to objectify them or talk about them in ways you normally wouldn't?
29. If someone is promiscuous, do you think it's less important to get consent?
30. Do you think that if someone dresses in a certain way it makes it OK to objectify them?

31. If someone dresses a certain way do you think it means they want your sexual attention or approval?
32. Do you understand that there are many other reasons, that have nothing to do with you, that a person might want to dress or act in a way that you might find sexy?
33. Are you attracted to people with a certain kind of gender presentation?
34. Have you ever objectified someone's gender presentation?
35. Do you assume that each person who fits a certain perceived gender presentation will interact with you in the same way?
36. Do you think sex is a game?
37. Do you ever try to get yourself into situations that give you an excuse for touching someone you think would say "no" if you asked? i.e., dancing, getting really drunk around them, falling asleep next to them.
38. Do you make people feel "unfun" or "unliberated" if they don't want to try certain sexual things?
39. Do you think there are ways you act that might make someone feel that way even if it's not what you're trying to do?
40. Do you ever try and make bargains? i.e. "if you let me _____, I'll do _____ for you"?
41. Have you ever tried asking someone what they're feeling? If so, did you listen to them and respect them?
42. Have you used jealousy as a means of control?
43. Do you feel like being in a relationship with someone means that they have an obligation to have sex with you?

44. What if they want to abstain from sex for a week? A month? A year?
45. Do you whine or threaten if you're not having the amount of sex or the kind of sex that you want?
46. Do you think it's OK to initiate something sexual with someone who's sleeping?
47. What if the person is your partner?
48. Do you think it's important to talk with them about it when they're awake first?
49. Do you ever look at how you interact with people or how to treat people, positive or negative, and where that comes from or where you learned it?
50. Do you behave differently when you've been drinking?
51. What are positive aspects of drinking for you? What are negative aspects?
52. Have you been sexual with people when you were drunk or when they were drunk? Have you ever felt uncomfortable or embarrassed about it the next day? Has the person you were with ever acted weird to you afterward?
53. Do you seek consent the same way when you are drunk as when you're sober?
54. Do you think it is important to talk the next day with the person you've been sexual with if there has been drinking involved? If not, is it because it's uncomfortable or because you think something might have happened that shouldn't have? Or is it because you think that's just the way things go?
55. Do you think people need to take things more lightly?

56. Do you think these questions are repressive and people who look critically at their sexual histories and their current behavior are uptight and should be more "liberated"?
57. Do you think liberation might be different for different people?
58. Do you find yourself repeating binary gender behaviors, even within queer relationships and friendships? How might you doing this make others feel?
59. Do you view sexuality and gender presentation as part of a whole person, or do you consider those to be exclusively sexual aspects of people?
60. If someone is dressed in drag, do you take it as an invitation to make sexual comments?
61. Do you fetishize people because of their gender presentation?
62. Do you think only men abuse?
63. Do you think that in a relationship between people of the same gender, only the one who is more "manly" abuses?
64. How do you react if someone becomes uncomfortable with what you're doing or if they don't want to do something? Do you get defensive? Do you feel guilty? Does the other person end up having to take care of you and reassure you? Or are you able to step back and listen and hear them and support them and take responsibility for your actions?
65. Do you tell your side of the story and try and change the way they experienced the situation?
66. Do you do things to show your partner that you're listening and that you're interested in their ideas about consent or their ideas about what you did?
67. Do you ever talk about sex and consent when you're not in bed?

68. Have you ever raped or sexually abused or sexually manipulated someone? Are you able to think about your behavior? Have you made changes? What kinds of changes?
69. Are you uncomfortable with your body or your sexuality?
70. Have you been sexually abused?
71. Has your own discomfort or your own abuse history caused you to act in abusive ways? If so, have you ever been able to talk to anyone about it? Do you think talking about it is or could be helpful?
72. Do you avoid talking about consent or abuse because you aren't ready to or don't want to talk about your own sexual abuse history?
73. Do you ever feel obligated to have sex?
74. Do you ever feel obligated to initiate sex?
75. What if days, months, or years later someone tells you they were uncomfortable with what you did? Do you grill them?
76. Do you initiate conversations about safe sex and birth control (if applicable)?
77. Do you think that saying something as vague as "I've been tested recently" is enough?
78. Do you take your partners concerns about safe sex and/or birth control seriously?
79. Do you think that if one person wants to have safe sex and the other person doesn't really care, it is the responsibility of the person who has concerns to provide safe sex supplies?
80. Do you think if a person has a body that can get pregnant and they don't want to get pregnant, it is up to them to provide birth control?

81. Do you complain or refuse safe sex or the type of birth control your partner want to use because it reduces your pleasure?
82. Do you try and manipulate your partner about these issues?
83. Do you think there is ongoing work that we can do to end sexual violence in our communities?

