



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI SOUTH AFRICAN EXCHANGE PROGRAMME (UMSAEP)

2022 REPORT

Submitted by:

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INTRODUCTION

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This report will focus on the collaboration and exchange visit between myself, Ronél Koch, from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and Prof. Stephen Whitney from the University of Missouri (UM) (Columbia campus).

BACKGROUND

For the 2019 and 2020 academic year I was privileged to be nominated to participate in the “University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP)”, specifically in the “Community Development and Community Education Mentorship Programme” run under the auspices of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, Prof. José Frantz. This project is a collaboration between four universities: University of the Western Cape, University of Pretoria, University of Missouri and Rutgers University-Newark. As a selected participant I received fully funded support towards the completion of my doctoral degree, namely: 1) Mentorship by South African and American university academic staff oriented towards degree completion and developing a publication agenda; 2) Professional and academic workshops at Cape Town in January 2019 and Newark, New Jersey in July 2019. During the visit to the University of Rutgers (Newark, New Jersey), Prof. Kyle Farmbry learnt more about my research interest and the focus of my PhD proposal in order to be able to match me with a relevant mentor. The national and international mentor was subsequently identified and, in that way, I was introduced to Prof. Anna Strebel (SA) and Prof. Stephen Whitney (UM). Prof. Whitney and myself met without exception on a bi-monthly basis for more than two years where he provided support in the writing of my PhD proposal, the completion of my PhD thesis and academic articles. During this time Prof. Whitney and his Masters student, Ms. Shannise Jones, also included me in a research study on sexual consent. Apart from data collected in the United States, Prof. Whitney also collaborated with a university in Greece, and I was responsible for data gathering in South Africa.

OBJECTIVES FOR VISIT

When the call came for proposals to be submitted to participate in the 2022 exchange programme, I decided to grab hold of the opportunity to be able to meet Prof. Whitney and Ms. Jones in person and to further strengthen our collaboration. By that time the sexual consent project already received ethical clearance and 22 individual interviews were concluded (Please refer to Appendix A for more information on this project). The main objective of my proposed visit to the University of Missouri was thus to plan the next steps for the sexual consent project



and to spend time writing up my thesis that was due in July 2022. On 2 September 2021 I received the welcome news that my application was successful.

VISIT: 9-16 JULY 2022

Thanks to the organization and support from Prof. Uphoff, I arrived in St. Louis on 9 July 2022 where Prof. Whitney and his spouse waited for me at the airport. Thereafter I was invited to a Mexican lunch where I also met some of their friends and family members. The family made me feel right at home and took me to the hotel thereafter to unpack and rest.

The next day, on 10 July, the Whitney family fetched me from my hotel to explore the campus grounds.



Figure 1: A walk around the campus.



Figure 2: Prof. Whitney gets me acquainted with the campus grounds.

As we walked the grounds, the Whitney family shared astonishing and interesting facts about the history of the campus, such as the fire at the academic hall in 1892. Of course, a picture had to be taken in front of the iconic still standing six stone columns.



Figure 3: A truly iconic picture with the columns in the background.

They furthermore pointed out the beautiful botanic gardens, the "white" and "red" campus, the breathtaking tower of Memorial Union, and even shared anecdotes (such as a place under a bridge where no one is supposed to talk due to a historic conversation that was overheard in that exact space that caused havoc). The bronze sculpture of Thomas Jefferson, as well as the original tombstone which once sat next to Jefferson's grave, were pointed out in the garden. Many more interesting facts were shared of American history that I have heard of, but never really understood, such as the Virginia Purchase. Of course, a visit to the Mizzou tiger, The University of Missouri's mascot, was not overlooked. I will also never look at Beetle Bailey the same way, with the cartoonist, Mort Walker, the creator of the comic strip Beetle Bailey, being a Mizzou alumnus.

The following day Prof. Whitney took me to meet Ms. Jones. The two of us worked together on the coding of the transcribed data that was gathered from the 22 South African participants for the sexual consent study. It was a wonderful opportunity to iron out uncertainties, especially concerning the differences between the South African and American accent that made transcription and coding difficult without interpretation and explanation from my side.



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I spent some days in the library where I had time to complete my PhD thesis that was due for submission right after the exchange visit. What a wonderful privilege and exhilarating experience it was for me to end my PhD journey at such an established institution and in such a beautiful space as the Elmer Ellis library. The Mizzou students were on vacation so the campus was quiet and created the perfect space to be able to focus to write.



Figure 4: The library where I wrote the final pages of my PhD thesis.

Another special occasion was where Prof. Whitney invited some of his friends, colleagues and family members for a barbeque at his home. It was a privilege to experience such generosity, hospitality and a welcoming spirit from all of them.



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On my second last day in Missouri the Whitney's took me on an outing to Hannibal, the birthplace of Mark Twain, where we visited the museum and the boyhood home of Samuel Clemens. I also saw the "Big Muddy", the majestic Mississippi river, that I only ever heard of in songs, and again learnt many interesting facts about American history, especially regarding slavery, becoming aware of, from my point of view, many similarities between South African and USA. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and on the last evening I was invited for a celebratory farewell dinner. The next day the Whitney's took me to the train station in St. Louis where we said our farewells.

POST-VISIT

Many students describe the PhD journey as a lonely and a long one. Thanks to the support offered in this programme, it was certainly not the case for me. In September 2022 I received a phone call from my supervisor/promotor, Prof. Christa Beyers (from the University of the Free State in South Africa where I was registered as a PhD student) where the joyous news was shared that I would graduate with my PhD in December 2022.

I ascribe most of my successes and the relatively short time in which my PhD had been completed (2020-2022) to the support I received from Prof. Whitney and owe much of my successes to him. All questions or uncertainties that I had could be discussed during these regular meetings and invaluable solutions were offered which helped the process along. I would like to thank him, especially, for his relentless support and for being one of the most altruistic human beings I have ever come across.

FUTURE

At the moment Prof. Whitney, Ms. Jones and myself is busy with the writing up of an article on the sexual consent project that we propose to publish in 2023. I believe that this is the start of years of collaboration to follow and that the relationships that have been established that will last for a very long time to come.

I would furthermore like to extend my sincere appreciation towards the USDP and UMSAEP programmes, and especially Prof. José Frantz, Dr Thabile Sokupa, Ms. Jacqui Manuels, Prof Anna Strebel, Prof. Kyle Farmbry and Prof. Rod Uphoff, for the significant impact it had and



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will continue to have on my life. Not only in terms of my professional career, but also in terms of my personal growth. Words will never be enough to express my gratitude.





APPENDIX A: SEXUAL CONSENT PROJECT INFORMATION

SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL/EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PROTOCOL IN COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

Project Title: Exploring the Nuances of Sexual Consent Communication and Interpretation

IRB (University of Missouri Institutional Review Board) Number: 2019209. Approved Date 10/20/2020

UWC HSSREC Reference Number: HS21/5/16. Approved Date: 14/07/2021

Version Number: 2 (submission for South African collaboration)

Version Date: 28-04-2021

Principal Investigator from University of Missouri: Shannise Jones

Supervisor from University of Missouri: Professor Stephen Whitney

Investigator from University of Western Cape: Ronél Koch

Funding Source: N/A

I. Research Objectives/Background

1. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which young adults communicate and interpret consent to sexual activities and to establish a model/theory surrounding the communication of sexual consent.
2. Many studies center on the prevention of sexual assault and violence – the definitions of which hinge on the term ‘consent’ – though limited research on what consent *is* has been conducted. Understanding how consent occurs could glean insight into how to better prevent assaults.

II. Recruitment Process

1. Students from UWC will be recruited by the researcher via an official UWC communication announcement email explaining the nature of the study. Snowball sampling techniques will be used if initial recruitment measures are not successful. The UWC communication email will include information pertaining to the study such as the researcher's name and email address, the interview nature of the study and the content (please refer to Appendix V).
2. Given the current COVID-19 crisis, adaptations to the process of this study have been made to provide flexibility surrounding the current situation. Data collection will occur through Zoom interviews only. No in-person data collection will occur.
3. After ethical clearance has been granted, permission will be asked from the deputy registrar to do research with students from UWC. The deputy registrar has already been informed, but ethical clearance first needs to be granted before the application could be submitted via the online platform:
<https://sites.google.com/uwc.ac.za/permissionresearch/home>

III. Consent Process

1. Consent forms (please refer to Appendix I) will be presented to each of the participants prior to their initial interviews. Consent forms will be provided via encrypted email. Participants will be able to ask questions concerning the consent process and study via encrypted email and will be presented with the option to meet with the researcher via Zoom for more detailed questions concerning the study or consent process prior to consenting to participate in the study/prior to data collection.
2. During this process, participants will be informed that the information they disclose in the interviews is confidential and not subjected to mandated reporting; they will also be informed that some topics may be uncomfortable, that there may be points where they experience unpleasant emotions/memories, or other uncomfortable, unpleasant events. Participants will be advised that they can share information with the researcher freely with as much or little detail as they are comfortable, but also advised that more detailed information will allow for richer data collection for the research project.
3. It will be emphasised during the recruitment phase that victims of sexual abuse are discouraged to participate in order to prevent distress that could be caused by the interview process.

IV. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants who are victims of sexual abuse will be discouraged to participate.
2. All participants must be age 19 or older to avoid discussions of sexual experiences that may have occurred prior to age 18. The age of 19 was selected with care to ensure that any sexual information disclosed during the interviews is pertaining to experiences of adults only.

V. Number of Subjects

1. The anticipated number of participants for this study is 15, however if data saturation is not reached, more participants could be included.
2. The number of participants anticipated is within the expected number of participants needed to have a saturated data sample within the guidelines of the qualitative method of Grounded Theory, the guiding methodological framework for this study.

VI. Study Procedures/Study Design

1. Interviews will take place online by utilising the university's protected Zoom account.
2. Prior to the start of the interviews and scenario readings, participants will be advised that the researcher is not a mandated reporter and that all information disclosed in the interview is confidential. A brief introductory paragraph explaining the nature of the study will be read prior to the interview and scenario readings.
3. Participants will each receive a vignette depicting a sexual scenario (please refer to Appendix II) where the component of consent is intentionally ambiguous. Participants will be asked to think aloud as they read to explain how they are interpreting the scenario. They will then be asked to indicate whether or not the encounter depicted in the scenario was consensual. Participants will be asked to justify their reasoning and explain how/where/why they believe the encounter was/was not consensual. After that, participants will move into the interview phase, where they are asked to describe a recent sexual encounter of their choosing. Interview questions (please refer to Appendix III) will guide participants to explain the encounter in as much detail as possible with

specific emphasis on understanding the nature of consent – how they communicated consent to their partner(s), how they interpreted consent from their partner(s), if consent was continuous throughout the encounter or if it occurred in one instance, if consent was withdrawn, how that was communicated/interpreted, etc.

4. The discussion of scenarios and interview combined is expected to take approximately 2 hours. Activities in this study are research-only.
5. Immediately after the interview, participants will also be asked if they would like to review their interview – participants can review their interview immediately or can schedule a separate time to review their interview recording with the researcher present. Participants will be advised that this is confidential and should remain secure, and that any additional recording of information in the interview is prohibited.
6. The researcher will reach out immediately after the interview, and again within two weeks post participation for a check-in to ensure participants' wellbeing has not been negatively impacted by participation in this study, as well as to provide additional resources as appropriate.

VII. Potential Risks

1. VICTIMS OF ABUSE

The topic is of sensitive nature, so the interview process might cause distress. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which young adults communicate and interpret consent to sexual activities, and not on sexual activities that was not consensual. Therefore, victims of sexual abuse are discouraged to participate. It is acknowledged that even though it is not anticipated nor encouraged, victims of abuse may still choose to participate and discussions *may* trigger emotional responses from participants with histories of experiences with sexual violence/assault/trauma. Should any non-consensual sexual experiences, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or adverse (but anticipated) sexual events be disclosed, the participant will be advised that disclosures will be kept confidential, the interview will be stopped, and the participant will be referred to the UWC Centre for Student Support services (CSSS) where effective intervention will be planned. The researcher (a trained counsellor herself who has a longstanding relationship with CSSS after having referred

many of her students to the center) will notify CSSS as soon as the study commences in order for them to be prepared to assist participants if and when necessary.

2. DISCOMFORT

Although participants will partake on a voluntary basis and will be made aware of the content of discussion prior to the interview, the interview process might at times cause participants to experience discomfort, embarrassment, unpleasant emotions/memories, and/or other uncomfortable, unpleasant events. Participants will be informed that they can share freely according to their level of comfort and will not be forced to share or elaborate on any experiences that they are not comfortable with. Participants are furthermore free to refuse to answer any question(s) that they are not comfortable with and still remain in the study. They can withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

3. POST INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

If the researcher is provided information that any participants experience or has experienced any of the abovementioned events after their participation in the study or as a direct result of their participation in this study, the UWC Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) will be contacted immediately to plan intervention. The researcher will again reach out to the participant within two weeks after the interview took place for a check-in to ensure participants' wellbeing has not been negatively impacted by participation in this study, and if necessary, to provide resources/services as applicable.

4. AGE OF CONSENT

During interviews participants will be asked to share information pertaining to a sexual encounter that has occurred within the last 12 months. To avoid discussions of sexual experiences that may have occurred prior to age 18, all participants must be age 19 or older. The age of 19 was selected with care to ensure that any sexual information disclosed during the interviews is pertaining to experiences of adults only.

5. ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All information collected will be kept confidential, and identities of participants will be obscured from the final analysis by means of the use of pseudonyms.

6. DATA BREACHES

Additional risks may include data breaches since participants are participating electronically. Information about these risks will be provided in the consent form. The researcher will take stringent measures to ensure data breaches do not occur – for

additional information on data security protocols for this study, please refer to section X.

VIII. Anticipated Benefits

Direct benefits: Hopefully, a clearer understanding of how consent is communicated is derived from this study. Another benefit may be the societal benefits pertaining to discussing consent with more openness, and understanding what consent is. Furthermore, understanding how consent occurs could glean insight into how to better prevent sexual assaults.

IX. Compensation

Participants will not receive any incentives or financial compensation for participating in this study.

X. Data Safety Monitoring Plan

All collected data, which consists of the participants' recorded Zoom interview and scenario read aloud, will be stored locally on the researcher's password protected computer in encrypted files. Access to the folders will be restricted, only the researchers will have access to the files. Consent forms from the participants will be stored in participant-specific folders. All participant interview recordings will be stored locally on the researcher's private computer in encrypted files.

All email-based communications will be sent via encrypted emails through university email addresses only. Material will be shared with Missouri by means of a password protected Google Drive that only the researchers will have access to.

Interviews will take place remotely and will be conducted via the university's protected Zoom account, will be recorded, and stored locally to the researcher's private computer rather than saved to a cloud server. The only person with access to the researcher's private computer is the researcher, and the computer is password protected. Zoom settings will be monitored carefully by the researcher to ensure that there are no "Zoom-bombings" or other interruptions to data



security. For instance, the researcher will utilize Zoom’s “Waiting Room” feature and only admit users into the meeting who are authorized as participants scheduled for that specific meeting time. Should any known data breaches occur, the researcher will notify any other relevant parties of the breach.

The researcher will keep the research material for a minimum of 5 years and destroy the data according to the policy of UWC.

XI. Research Site

Remote interviews will be conducted via the University’s protected Zoom account.

