

HR25 - 30/04/2025

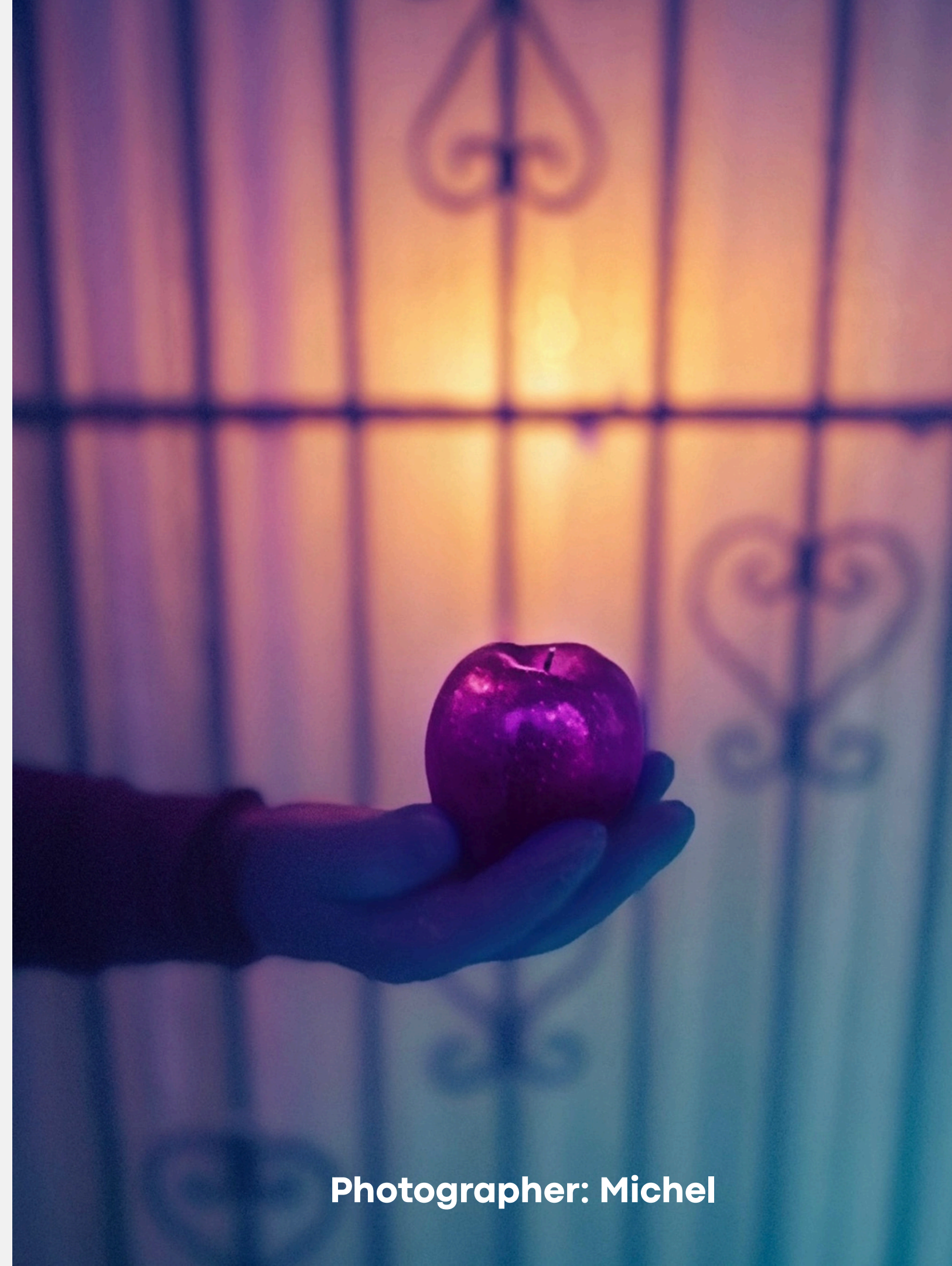
# **Sexual consent in the context of chemsex: Using photovoice to advocate for community-led understandings and responses**

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**Photographer: Michel**

# Positionality

- White
- Canadian
- Queer
- Gender queer
- Middle class
- Experiences of chemsex
- Experiences of sexual violence
- I live and work in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), unceded territory cared by Kanien'kehá:ka nation (Mohawk).
- Qualitative research
- Community engagement

→ My identities and experiences shape not only how I navigate the world  
→ My privilege identities facilitate navigating oppressed identities

CONTEXT

# Chemsex/PNP

## Subcultural practice

- Norms, codes & unwritten rules
- Situated in socio-historical context
  - GBQMSM (mostly) --> NB/T+
  - Specific drugs (T, G, K) + intention + sex
  - Group / sauna or private party / several hours to several days



Photographer: George

# Sexual violence

- Boundaries transgressed 47% (Bohn et al., 2020)
- Non-consensual sex experience 43% (Ward et al., 2017)
- Sexual assault (SA): 41% (Wilkerson et al., 2021)
  - 20 times more likely than cisgender-heterosexual men
- Important lack of scientific knowledge and community discussion
  - Does not contextualize/understand these statistics



**Photographer: BBM**

# PNP & Consent Project

Better understand experiences and  
perceptions of sexual consent in order to  
identify strategies to promote sexual health



Photographer: Marc

# METHODS

# PHOTOVOICE

# PNP & CONSENTEMENT

## PARTICIPANT-ES RECHERCHÉ-ES (18<sup>+</sup>)

- Tu baisses en consommant crystal meth, GHB/GBL ou kétamine ?
- Tu fais du PNP/chemsex à Montréal ?

Cette recherche t'invite à deux rencontres (en personne ou en ligne) et à prendre des photos qui reflètent tes opinions et tes expériences par rapport au consentement sexuel.

Participation confidentielle, anonyme  
et compensée (100\$)



Pour participer:  
[maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca](mailto:maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca)



Ce projet (#2023-4853) est  
approuvé par le Comité d'Éthique de  
la Recherche en Sciences et Santé

# PNP & CONSENT

## PARTICIPANTS NEEDED (18<sup>+</sup>)

- Do you have sex while using crystal meth, GHB/GBL or ketamine?
- Do you engage in PNP/chemsex in Montreal?

This study invites you to participate in two interviews (in person or online) and to take photos expressing your thoughts and your experiences about sexual consent.

Participation is confidential,  
anonymous, and compensated (\$100)



To participate:  
[maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca](mailto:maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca)



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# Participation: 3 steps



## Step 1: Intro discussion & guidelines (30 minutes)

- Prompts
  - What does sexual consent look like in PnP contexts?
  - How is it given, withdrawn, or negotiated during PnP?
  - Are there characteristics of PnP that affect consent?
  - What is your ideal experience of consent during PnP?
- Freedom to photograph experiences and emotions literally and figuratively
  - Not necessarily of “chem-sex”
  - landscapes, places, objects, themselves or others (with consent)
- Ethical issues
  - Chemsex, photography
  - Consent, anonymity, personal privacy vs risks

# Photovoice: 3 steps

## Step 2: Photo-taking: experiences and perceptions of consent

- Send 5-10 photos +title/description

## Step 3: Interview to discuss photos, contexts, meanings and consent (90 minutes)

### ***PNP & CONSENT*** Photography guidelines

At this stage, you're invited to express yourself through photography. Take photos that reflect your experiences, emotions, and perceptions related to sexual consent in the context of Party N' Play (PnP)/chemsex. You can draw inspiration from the following questions to take photos or follow your own artistic process.

- What does sexual consent look like in PnP contexts?
- How is it given, withdrawn, or negotiated during PnP?
- Are there characteristics of PnP that affect consent?
- What is your ideal experience of consent during PnP?



#### ***Let your creativity flow!***

- Even though the research topic revolves around sexual consent, the photographs don't necessarily need to be sexual or pornographic.
- You can take pictures of objects, landscapes, or people. However, consider ways to take photos that do not reveal your identity or that of others to reduce related risks.
- You can illustrate your experiences and emotions both literally and figuratively, using metaphors or visual symbols, etc.

#### ***Ethics guidelines***

- No photo will be shared without your consent.
- I can assist you in reviewing/modifying your photos to preserve anonymity.
- You must obtain free and informed consent to photograph others ([form available here](#)).
- You cannot take photos of minors.
- Resources are available [here](#). If you feel distressed during your participation, you can also contact the sexologist Patrice Bécotte, free of charge, by phone at (819) 350-4051 or via email at [patricesexologue@gmail.com](mailto:patricesexologue@gmail.com).

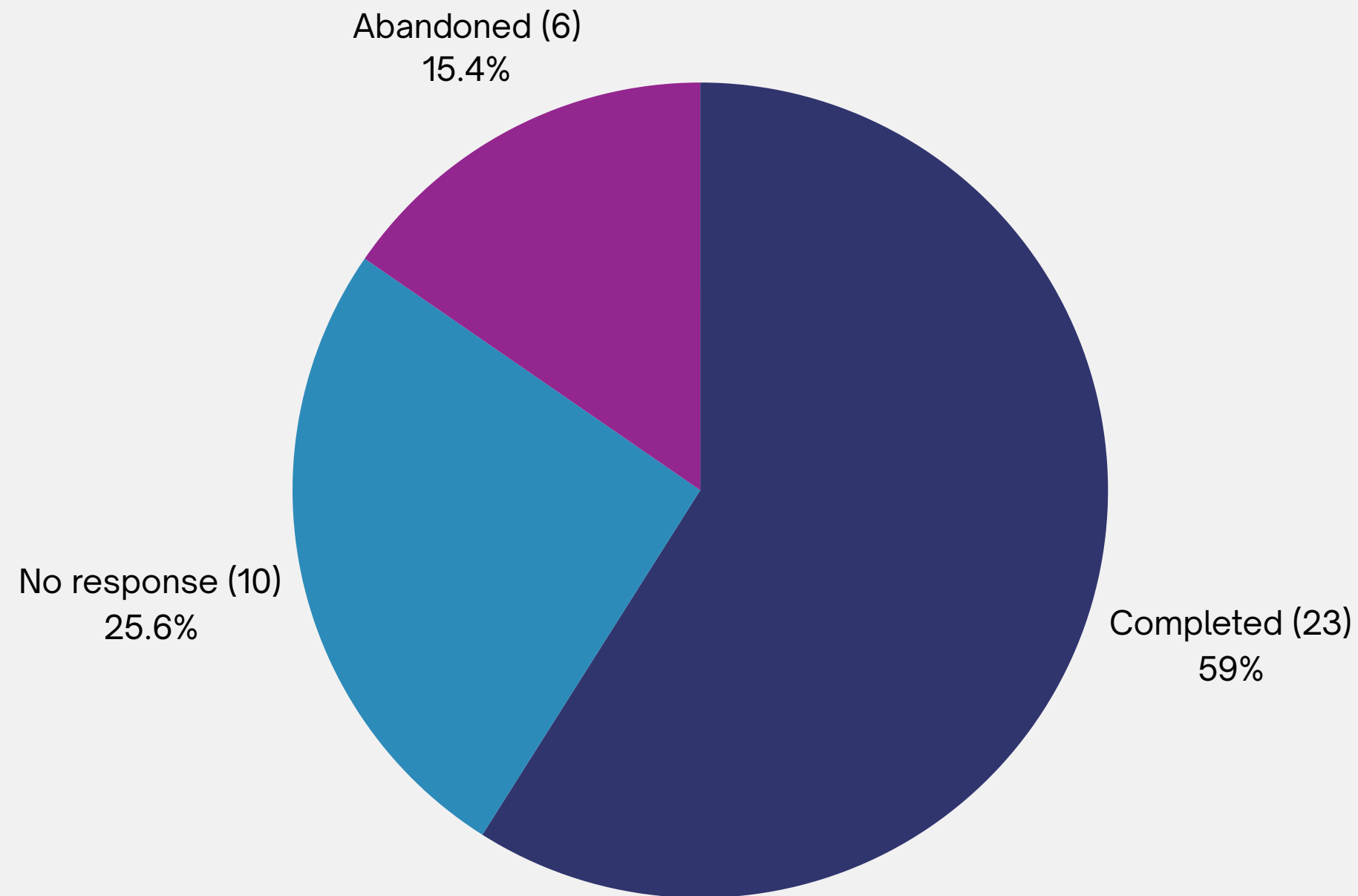


#### ***Deadlines and submission***

- Over the next 3 weeks, take about 5 to 10 photos (we will then meet to talk about them).
- Number each photo (1, 2, 3...) and write a title and a short description of what it means to you.
- [Upload your pictures by clicking here](#).

For any questions or concerns, reach out to me via email at [maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca](mailto:maxim.gaudette@umontreal.ca)

# Participants



## Thematic analysis

- **Photos + interview transcripts in Nvivo**

# FINDINGS

# 1 Intentional loss of control complicating consent negotiations

- Escaping (self and social) pressures
- Wanting to forget about it all
- Eroticization of risks
- Unclear consent for all parties

**The paradox: Consenting to no longer controlling anything**

**“There's a culture of risk in chemsex. How can I prevent this [SA] when I want to take the risk? I want to take the risk of surprise, [the] excitement of the unknown ... so how do you get consent in these situations, I don't know, because I wanted to blur the lines by going into that gray zone.”**

**-Théo (translated)**



**“[Dujring cruising there's something] more mysterious more risky too. Because there's a risk involved. It's like Russian roulette, you're going to have unprotected sex, and it kind of... (laughs) spices up the intercourse.”**  
-Ali (translated)



# 2 Sexual boundaries transgression and consent reconstruction

- Difficulties understanding and articulating limits while under the influence
- Transgressing their own limits
- Consent was often retroactively constructed as participants
  - Making sense of the experience, as (self-)violation or not only after the party

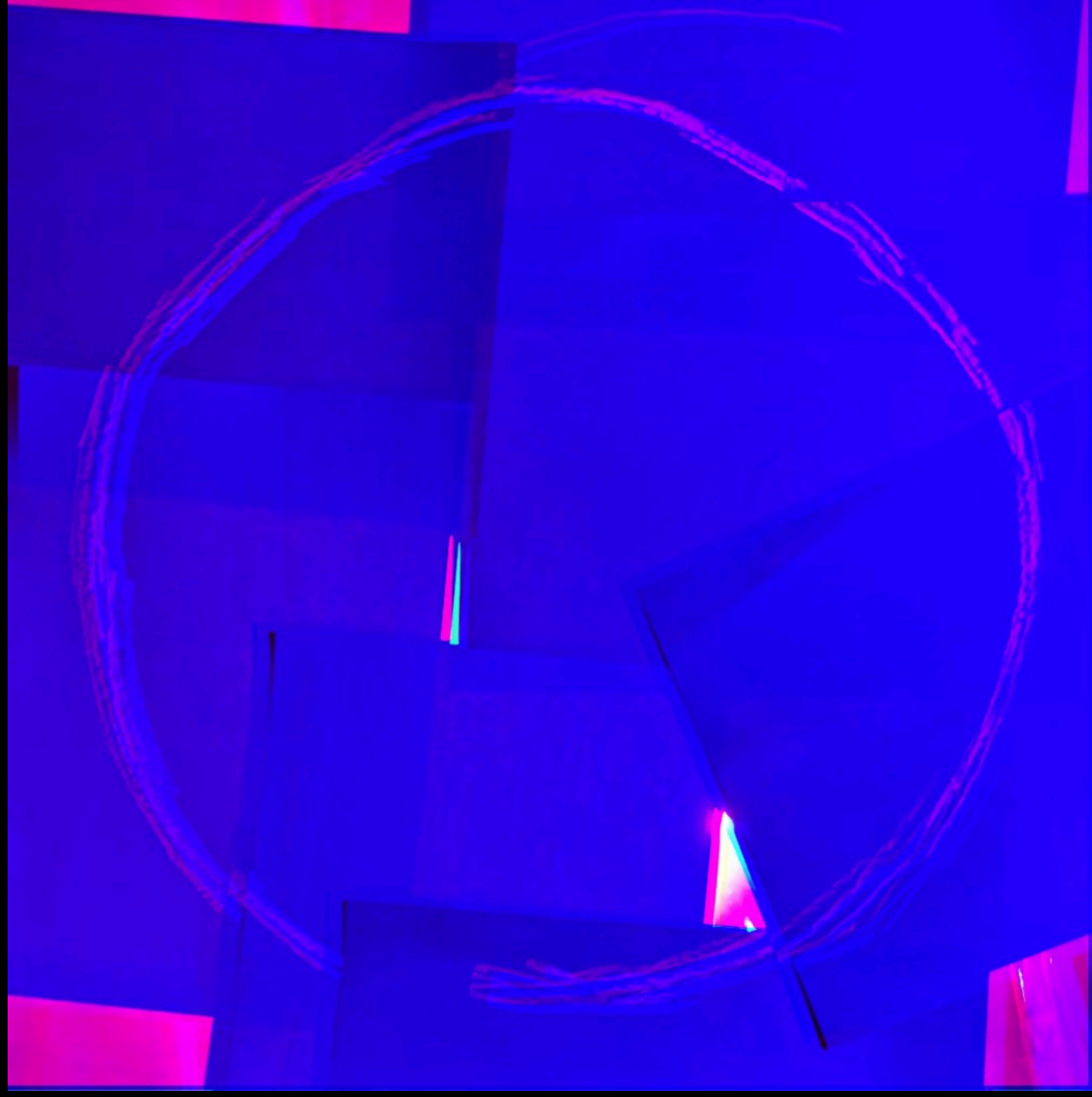
**“Anal fissure. Finally, it took a month to heal. Stabbing pain. Creams, laxatives... Yes, I [had] consented... then I didn't want to anymore, but the “no” remained stuck in my head without reaching my mouth. And did I really know what I wanted? Can you consent when you're not really there anymore?”**

**- Théo (translated)**



**“I think this image is the most telling of the three, in the sense that it conveys the idea that you can't really close the consent loop in a chemsex context, when you're altered. Then there's the idea of consent being recreated once everything has happened.”**

**- Gregory (translated)**



# 3 Pleasure, connection and care fostering consent

- A focus on mutual pleasure
- Knowing, trusting, loving your partner
  - Even more so for kinkers
- Practices of care
  - Caring for their partners' limit when they can't for themselves
  - Beyond sex

→ Negotiating consent in ways adapted to their realities

**“ I'm the one who's going to do the fisting or insert the toys. Again, it's discussed, then. You know, it's all discussed before we start: ‘What do you want us to do? Where do you want to go?’ Then you get to know your partner. ... You have to pay attention ... [to] his breathing, his eyes, to see if his pupils are too dilated, is he too high? Is he really able to understand what I'm saying to him? ... Sometimes he says ‘no, no again, don't stop don't stop’ [So, I’ll say] ‘No, no, we'll stop, you need to drink, you need to rest, Whoa!’ ”**

**- Gilles (translated)**



## **In bed with my lover: offering myself**

**“Letting go, even more. It might be artificial, but I want to intensify my desire for my lover. With him, I'm in good hands... between beautiful legs. I feel comfortable and I'm having a blast. So yes, he can do whatever he wants. I consent to give everything, to live wildly. To push my limits. To reach an even deeper intimacy...”**

**-Théo (translated)**



# DISCUSSION REFLEXIONS

# Discussion

- Photovoice helped participants reflect on their experiences
  - providing critical insights into the complexities of consent, boundaries, and agency in chemsex settings
- Intentional loss of control and blurred boundaries challenge conventional consent understandings
  - Need for more context-specific sexual harm reduction strategies.
- Starting point for culturally sensitive strategies: community strengths
- Transformative impacts (at various stages of the participation)

# In-depth Introspection

- Never having seriously reflected before

**“I mean, that exercise [photovoice] made me think a lot overall because... I think I never talked about consent.”**

**- Michel (translated)**

- Enriched reflections
  - Discovery of new meanings
  - Weaving other connections with their experiences



# **(Self) awarness**

**"Well, I'm happy... I'm happy I did this because it allowed me to reflect a bit more on what consent is. I found the idea difficult... but it resonated with me because it raises questions about the freedom of others, and it raises questions about respecting others—a lot. ... When you're on meth, well, it's not clear. One of the photos... it's just frozen water... it makes me think about consent on meth."**

**- BBM (translated)**

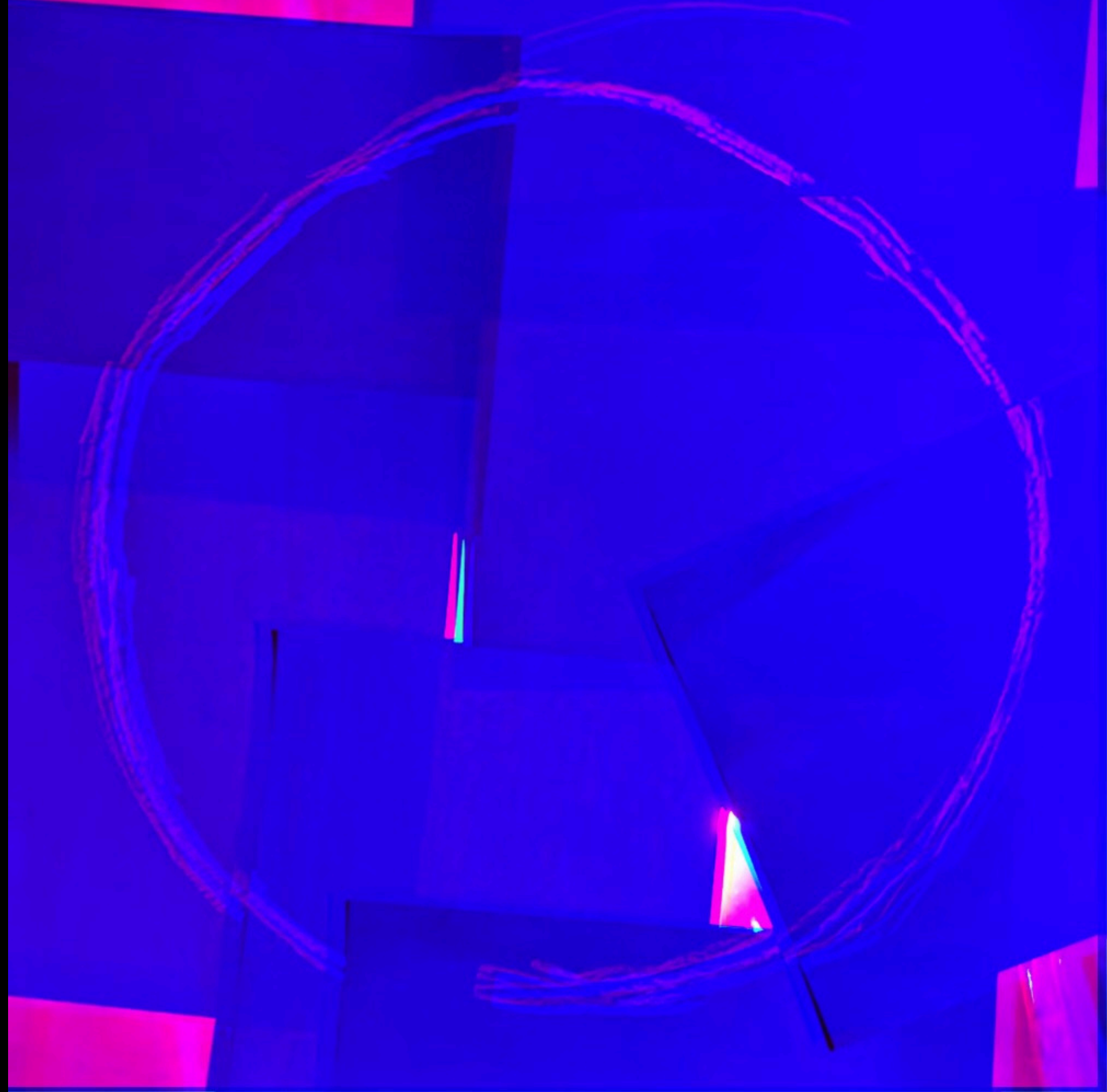


# Reflective Re-Enactment

- The process leading to the photos taken reflected their experience of consent itself
- Recreating scenes represented consent that only made sense in hindsight

"The reason I used a medium that shifted and couldn't be put back together correctly was really to convey the idea of piecing together an image after the fact—and in this case, consent. That is, even though I numbered the papers, I couldn't, every single time, recreate the image as I had drawn it initially... I originally drew the circle as a complete one, but when piecing it back together, that is when I picked up the papers and reinstalled them on the plastic, it wasn't possible to recreate the correct intertwining of the papers or the proper arrangement to bring the drawing's pieces back together."

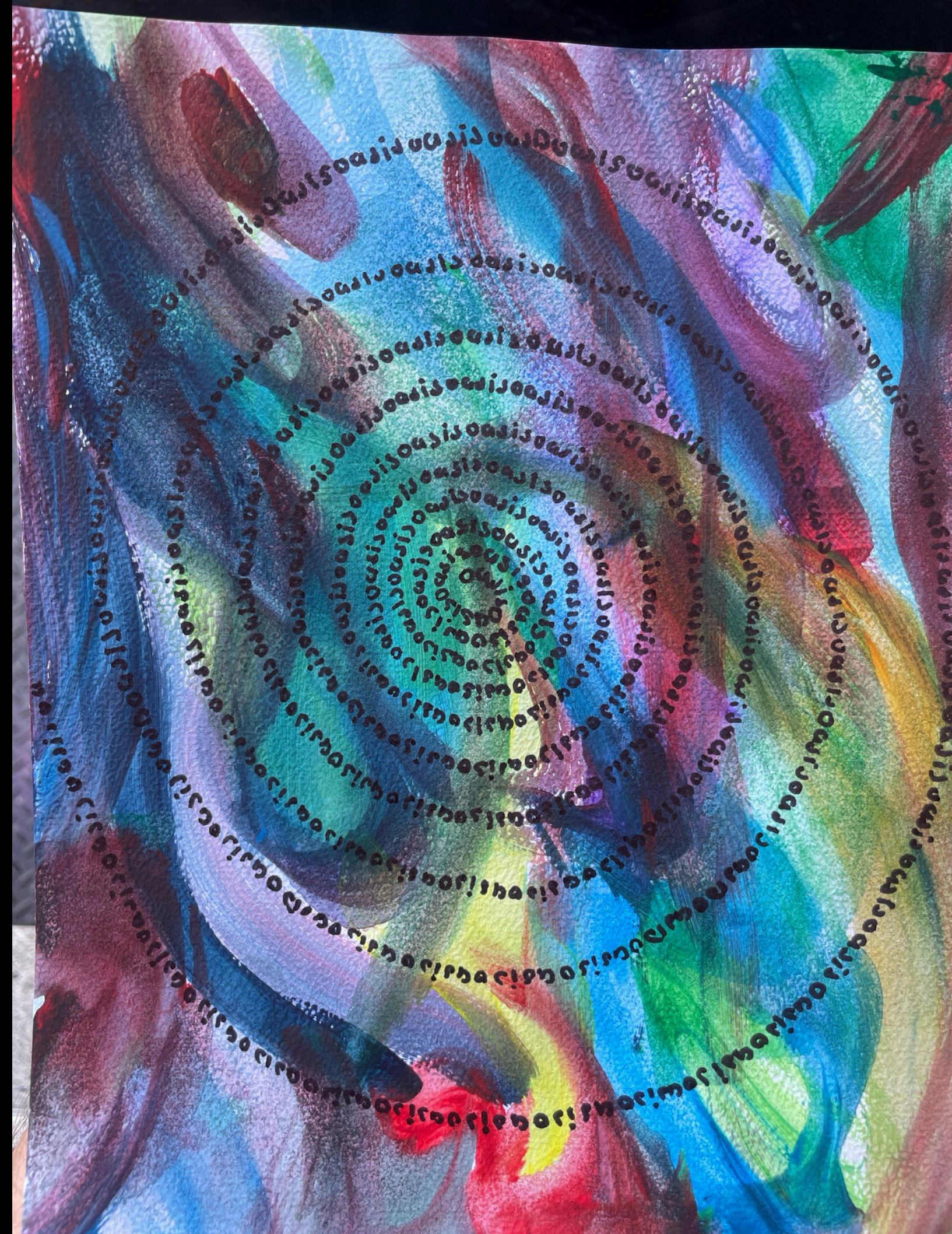
– Grégory (translated)



# Healing & Reclaiming

"This piece carries such raw emotion and depth—visually, symbolically, and emotionally. The spiral of the word “Oasis” works like a vortex, drawing the viewer into an unsettling swirl of color and motion. That spiral, once a joyful symbol of connection and community, now becomes a haunting echo of something taken from me—my agency, my safety, my consent. Through this piece, I’ve begun to liberate that word from the weight it took on. The colors in the background, melted into one another, mirror the confusion and emotional disintegration I felt in that moment. Even when there are no words, color speaks—like the expression on a face that shifts with emotion. This spiral works both ways: it draws out what was trapped inside me, while also pulling me inward to confront it. It’s a reclaiming of space within myself. If someone who’s lived something similar sees this painting, I want them to feel liberation, expansion, and an awakened sense of self-care. Reclaiming this moment through art means I have the power to decide. I am not what happened to me—I am what I create from it. This is not just expression—it is resistance."

– Carlos



# Sexual empowerment

- Better understand....
  - their desires and limits
  - change in the context of PNP
  - Realization of transgressing others' limits

“Yes, or exceeded the limits of several people. It got me thinking and I don't know if I would have thought about and become aware of those things.”

- A

- More confident...
  - to assert their sexual desires and limits
  - respect those of others
- Healing journey
- Transformative effects for researcher

# Limitations

- Risk of negative effects
  - Revival of painful experience
  - Relapse (for those in recovery)
- Demanding participation
  - Emotional and time investment
    - 6 abandoned
    - 10 no response
- Limits to the impact of a single study
  - Impacts only for participants
  - Limited impact on systemic issues
  - Little effect on social norms and structures

# Conclusion

- In the context of high SA rates, ambiguity and complex consent
  - Transformative impacts even more important
  - Thinking about them as part of research development (methods)
- A starting point...
  - Raising awareness, but impact remains at the individual level to date
- Towards transformative community effects
  - Community involvement
  - Discussion and collective awareness
  - Photo exhibition
  - Awareness-raising strategies

**Photographer: Michel**

# Photo exhibit

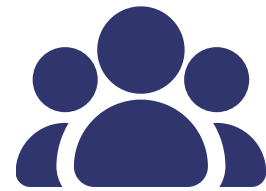


July 31-Aug 6, 2025



Sept 25, 2025

# THANK YOU



**CAB**



**CRSH SSHRC**  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council



**Fonds de recherche  
Société et culture  
Québec**  
Réseau de recherche  
en santé des populations  
du Québec

**Questions?  
Comments?**



**Maxi Gaudette**

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🌐 [qollab.ca/pnp-consent-ement](https://qollab.ca/pnp-consent-ement)



# What Do I want?

“Consent was about so much more than an agreement between two partners. There were so many parts at play within me, I started to realize how powerless I was over sex. I couldn’t give myself permission to leave, regardless how dry and sore my body was, or how cold and cruel the person I was having sex with was. I was trapped by my own desire for intimacy, trapped by this endless need to use others and let myself be used.”

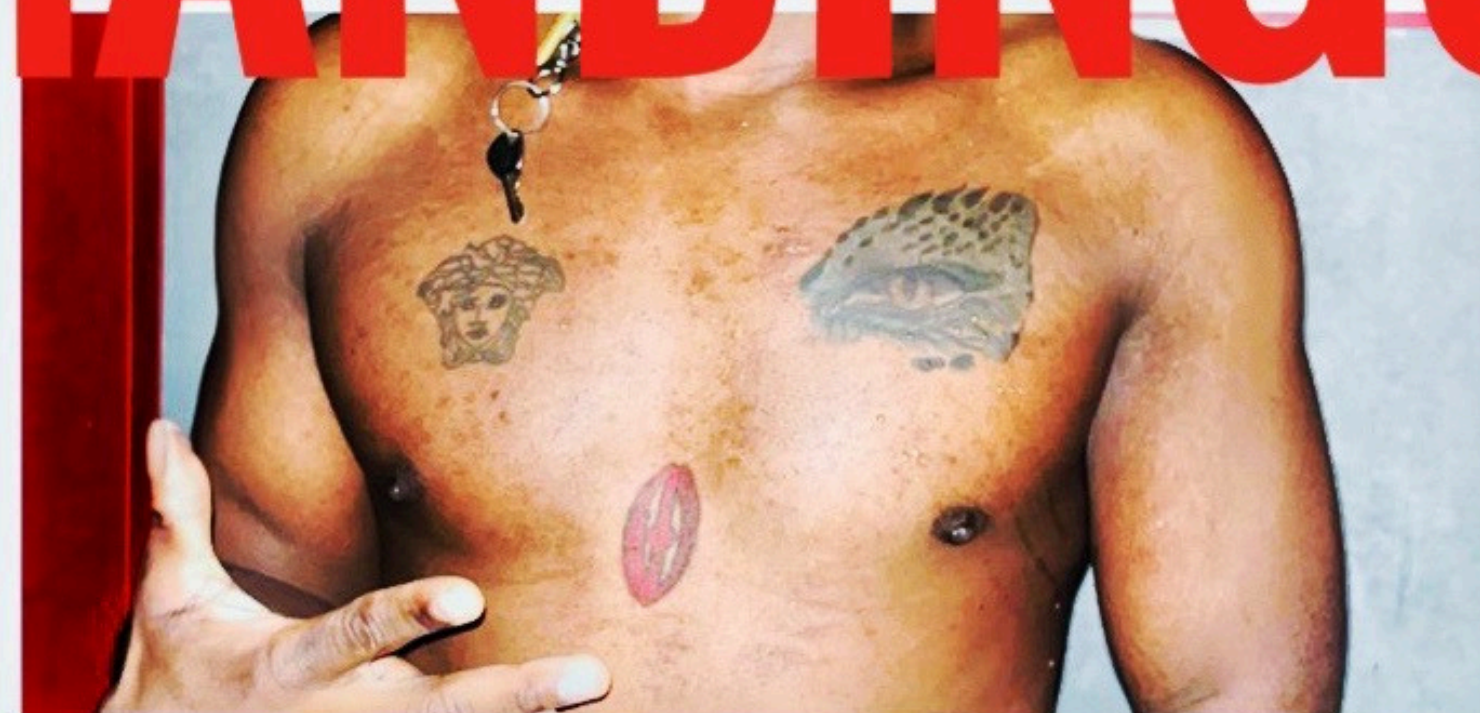
-Jake



**MANDINGO.**  
**Big black cock.**

-George

**MANDINGO.**



**BIG BLACK COCK.**

# Poppers

- Gilles



-Eric



# Night money

- Diego (translated)



**Consenting during  
chemsex?  
Good luck!**

-BBM (translated)



# Gender confusion

-Ali (translated)



## Non-stop

“A barber's light is interesting when you look at it. What goes round and round has no end and no beginning. You look at it with a kind of pleasure. In PNP, when you do it, you always want more, more pleasure, more euphoria, and you don't want it to end. However, nothing can stop it other than the closing of the store, which is like the end of the substance, or someone helping you because you're letting yourself go without there being an agreement.”

-Félix (translated)



-#Vnonyne



# Group fun

-Marc (translated)



-Michel



# EYES

“EYES” is a collage composed of photographs I took throughout Montreal’s Gay Village, capturing every eye I found in street art, graffiti, posters, and murals. What began as an exploration of the gaze turned into a deeper personal journey—a reclaiming of power. For me, consent starts in the eyes. Before a word is spoken, there is a silent dialogue that unfolds in the way two people look at each other. In the queer spaces this project was born from, that gaze holds weight: it can be an invitation, a boundary, or a question. Originally, I wanted to capture real people's eyes, but the need for consent forms made it unfeasible. Ironically, that limitation led me to a more poetic solution—eyes in art. These depictions are intentional; they carry emotion, narrative, and drama that sometimes surpass the candid gaze of a real person. The process of taking these pictures was almost cathartic. At first, I felt exposed, watched—but gradually, that feeling shifted. I stopped caring about who was looking at me and instead focused on capturing the feeling of being seen. This piece isn't just about observation—it's about reclaiming the power of that gaze, transforming it into something expressive, emotional, and affirming.”

- Carlos

