



# DR CHARLOTTE MCIVOR

## ACTIVE\* CONSENT PROJECT

### Past Research

From as far back as I can remember, I've been interested in the relationship between performance, identity and social change. I grew up with an Irish immigrant father and a German-American mother in Philadelphia, an incredibly diverse city. The widening of my social circle outside my very white Irish-Catholic neighbourhood happened through a city of Philadelphia publicly accessible (i.e. subsidised) summer drama camp where I was bused to centre city and not only allowed to do plays and musicals, but write my own with a group of diverse peers. This changed the course of my life- my BA in Theatre and English at Muhlenberg College was followed by a PhD in Performance Studies at UC Berkeley where I taught acting, directed plays, and wrote my PhD on the impact of unprecedented inward-migration post-1990s on Irish performance, culture, and society. Through my research, I looked at the relationship between performance and social policy, and how interculturalism as a social policy ideal was used as an attempted playbook for attempts to integrate new communities into Ireland through theatre and to integrate the creative arts industries from 1996 to the present. At the heart of this strand of my research are some tricky themes regarding how performance can empower people but should not be used as a substitute *for* social empowerment and the kind of slow, accumulative and sustained work still necessary for our stages and other areas of the creative industries to truly demographically resemble the Ireland we're living in today.

### Current Research

When I first came to overt activism in my late teens and early 20s, it was at that time largely focused on sexual violence and reproductive rights. Because of my interest in performance and social change, I was always interested in finding a way to work on themes of gender and sexuality but a lot of the work I was seeing in the U.S. at the time was too didactic. After coming to NUI Galway, I got a phone call from my colleague Padraig MacNeela in Psychology in 2014 asking if I might help turn his research report on consent, alcohol and sexual violence into a play. That phone call has spurred a six year collaboration now known as the Active\* Consent programme (co-led by MacNeela, myself and Siobhán O'Higgins) which has grown to be a national programme aimed at young people 16-24 across higher education, secondary schools, and sports organisations and aims to increase their positive sexual health and well-being. Active\* Consent uses workshops, drama, video, and research to engage with our stakeholders and partners. I lead the Creative Arts and Communications Unit of the programme, meaning that my day job ranges from making theatre and films, to helping run our social media campaigns, to coordinating communications, messaging and brand across all our programmes. My broad background in Performance Studies and hustling skills from theatre definitely all come in handy, and we're delighted to have just launched our [toolkit](#) which gives higher education student leaders, staff and university management practical steps to embed consent and

sexual violence education on campuses and an in-depth look at Active\* Consent's vision, programming and research.

## Future Research

My unconventional journey with Active\* Consent where my skills and knowledge have been pushed far beyond what I thought was the job of a performance scholar-practitioner/Drama and Theatre Studies lecturer has opened up a lot of exciting and unexpected avenues including policy consultation and social entrepreneurship as we think about how to make our work sustainable with the programme. That has felt like a detour some times, but as the long term ripple effects of my first book [\*Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards A New Interculturalism\*](#) have also settled with more and more contact coming my way from theatre companies and artists in Ireland and beyond interested in interculturalism and diversity as a mission of their work, I'm realising that the interculturalism/migration/diversity and the Active\* Consent/sexual violence strands of my research do join up. These two branches both attempt to work through my core belief in performance as not just a tool to achieve social change in a simplistic way, but rather a diagnostic *process* that we need to keep re-engaging with if we are to seriously work on eradicating racism and sexual violence among other social problems. This has led me to develop the concept of effort as the evaluative measure we need to think into in order to understand not only what performance can do to make social change, but what performance can tell about the many kinds of work we need to do to craft and sustain social change over time. To really think into effort, I've been looking at theatrical and activist case studies from around the world, as well as the ongoing work of the Active\* Consent programme. My current work on effort really is my passion project as I feel after 15 years in the field, I've gotten to an earnest and exciting theoretical distillation of my core beliefs, and I'm excited to see what final form the writing (and practice) takes!