

Let's Talk About Sex:

A Starter Zine & Workshop on Consent

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Greetings!

Hi, I hope you will enjoy/did enjoy/are enjoying (please stop reading and pay attention) this workshop on consent.

The title and description in the program is "**Let's Talk About Sex": Consent, Coercion, Communication and Accountability** – *We will talk about what we mean by the terms consent and coercion in relation to intimacy. We look at options & techniques for practicing good consent and attempt to tackle issues with communication when it comes to sex. Finally we cover accountability and responsibility both individually and as a community.*

In hindsight if I had produced this workshop and done a good job of covering everything listed this would last us all day at best. I asked for 90 minutes and thought that was pushing it. The organising collective gave me 60 minutes so I'm just going to have to make do.

With this workshop I instead want to have a brief overview of what we mean by consent and why it is important. We will use some simple activities to look at how consent can, should and maybe even shouldn't work.

We will also share discussion points and ideas in a group so as to generate more ideas but also further discussion on consent, coercion, communication and accountability.

It is not possible to cover what I would like to have covered in this time period. This zine has extra bits and bobs in it but still doesn't really come close to encompassing the subject. There are some great zines out there, online, and if you are at the Bristol Bookfair right now Princess Pirata and Bristol Anarchist Federation both stock some good 'uns.

More importantly I want this workshop to be nothing more than a starting block. Go out and talk about consent with anybody and everybody, share and develop your thoughts and ideas, even host your own workshop near you.

If I see a consent workshop on the program for one of the other Bookfairs around the country I will be very happy indeed.

Background

I'm no expert, I'm no consent guru, and I'm certainly no saint. I'm not doing this because I want to preach about consent but because I want to know more. I'm here because I bought "Learning Good Consent" from my friend at Princess Pirata distro and it made me cry because I realised how much of a dick I'd been to people in the past.

Even after reading the zine, it wasn't as if things were fine now, I'd atoned for my sins and converted to the righteous path of consent. I still mess up a little from time to time, we all do, but now I know if I've crossed boundaries or had my boundaries crossed (yes it happens both ways, it's not just men who suck at consent), we talk about it and we improve. After all, consent IS communication!

So I read more about consent and spoke to everyone about it: at home, in pubs, at punk gigs, night club toilets, work, in the park, in the train, and I said that I would do a workshop, but then:

Them: "We were talking about how sexist men are."

Me: "Really, do you think I'm sexist?"

Them: "...Yeah."

Me: "Oh, in what ways?"

Them: "Oh... Like you are always going on about consent... like that time X was over and you were cuddling and you were talking about consent and you were clearly doing it just to get in her

pants.”

That conversation completely put me off the idea of doing the workshop. If people felt this way about me I shouldn't be doing this.

Then a few months later and after attending a talk on “Queering Anarchism” (which is also happening at the Bristol one) the Bristol Bookfair came along and fuck it, I applied, I knew what that person said wasn't true, and yeah I'm not perfect, I've been sexist, I've used male privilege (*and the others*), I've used verbal coercion in the past, it was shit, I was a shit, and that's exactly why I SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT CONSENT!

...and you should be talking about consent too.

About This Workshop

This workshop is based on two existing workshops. One from “How to put together your own participatory community-specific radical consent workshop” and another by the Down and Out Collective, taken from the “Learning Good Consent” zine. Really this should be two hours long and have another person as a “vibes watcher” to make sure everyone is ok.

We don't have that today, sorry, I don't know exactly where the discussions will go but some topics may be triggering, check in with yourself, feel free to leave at any time and only come back if you want to. If you need to talk to someone, do that.

Intro & Rules (10mins)

Them's the Rules – deal with it!:

- 1) Keep the route to the door completely clear so anyone can leave at any time.
- 2) It is important to recognise that we don't all identify with the gender assumed by our appearance. Please be respectful and use gender neutral pronouns.
- 3) Please address what's said, not the person saying it.
- 4) Be aware of your participation and identify how much you are talking in relation to others in the group.
- 5) Ask questions to clarify if you aren't sure about what someone is saying.
- 6) This is a confidential space. Anything personal shared stays within this space.
- 7) All of us have received conditioning through society ranging from body issues to imposed beauty standards to sexism and misogyny, to heterosexism to religious/sexual morality, etc. One result of this is that it can be really hard to speak openly about sex. Please don't judge anyone's consensual sexual behaviours or interests in this space.
- 8) Different people are into different things, please respect this and be open minded.
- 9) Try to be accessible as possible with language.

WANT TO GET LAID?

“No” Means No.

“Not now” means No.

“I have a boyfriend/girlfriend/partner” means No.

“Maybe later” means No.

“You’re not my type” means No.

“Fuck off!” means No.

“I’d rather be alone right now” means No.

“We shouldn’t be doing this” means No.

“I like you but...” means No.

“Let’s just go to sleep” means No.

“I’m not sure” means No.

“You’re/We’re/I’m wasted” means No.

Silence means No.

NO CONSENT, NO SEX – ANYTHING ELSE IS RAPE

ON THE PULL?

We believe that nobody has a right to treat you as a sexual object, a goal or a prize to be obtained as part of a good night out or bragging rights.

Consent is simply asking before making any kind of move on someone and then asking at each stage, whether you get to first base or hit a home run.

Consent is constant communication and responsible, safe love making, checking in with both your partner and yourself that you want this, that you want to continue and are not making a mistake that one or both of you may regret.

It doesn't matter if you've had sex before, or you were both drunk or they're your spouse, boy/girlfriend, partner, fuck buddy or whatever.

It doesn't matter if they got naked or they "seemed up for it" or "it would ruin the mood" or they were wearing revealing clothes, just ask. "*Would you like to have sex with me?*" It's easy, and trust us, there is nothing hotter than when your partner replies "*Oh Yes Please!*" so just do it. If you don't, it's rape!

If he or she says No, then it's no. If they say anything other than Yes then it's no. No persuasion, no complaining, no getting them more pissed, no coercion, no pressuring, no sulking, no forcing. Getting them to say yes through coercion is not consent, it's rape!

So next time you want to get it on, just ask, after all, it's polite.

BE GREAT IN BED – GET CONSENT

What is Consent? (for later group discussion - 15mins)

The above was an attempt at defining consent and tackling rape culture that I made for Bristol University freshers fair. The content is intentionally crude. In this space write down your personal definition of consent. Add to this definition during the workshop as new thoughts and ideas occur to you. (2-3mins)

A Definition of Consent. *(From Gen5 & Common Action)*

“Consent means everyone involved wants and agrees to be present at each step of the way. You can change your mind at any time before or during sex. Consent means that all parties say “Yes!” Just assuming someone wants to have sex is not enough, it's not safe. Further, it is a free, fluid ongoing discussion and negotiation about what our desires are, what we want for ourselves in our lives, and what we want for the people we're either intimate with or in relationships with at any level. Through free association, we have the ability to make choices about what we feel is best for ourselves, for our bodies, for our communities.

To complicate consent is to realize that we live within an oppressive society, so consent is always tenuous. We don't really get to consent to the country we live in; we don't really get to consent to live withon capitalism. Often times, even making a choice, Yes or No, has many other implications about the choices we were forced to make before that.”

Why is Consent important? *(for later group discussion)*

Write down. What does it feel like when boundaries of consent are broken? How does it feel when you violate others boundaries? *(2-3mins and 20mins discussion)*

Small groups exercise – (10mins – 15mins feed back)

- 1) How do you bring up the subject of consent with a partner? - When do you bring it up? How is this different from long-term partners vs a casual encounter?
- 2) What ways are there to give consent? How do you prefer to express consent? What signs, both verbal and non-verbal do you look out for to know someone is consenting?
- 3) What are ways to express non-consent? - What signs, both verbal and non-verbal do you look out for to know someone is not consenting?

Exercise 1 – Hand on Shoulder (10mins):

This exercise is about fending off an advance.

Each person will take a turn putting their hand on the shoulder of another person (hovering your hand above the shoulder is cool too). The person will use their words and tone to re-establish their boundaries. Be firm, gentle, polite, whatever you feel like. Play both roles and try no to say something someone else has said.

How easy was it to say no?

What did you think of other peoples approach?

How can content and tone be used to assert boundaries?

Exercise 2 – Hand holding consent (10mins):

This exercise uses the metaphor of holding hands to practice the process of consent. (note: you never actually hold hands)

Person one asks to hold the others hand. Think of a way of phrasing the question that is different from the others.

Person two either says yes or no. Think of a way of saying yes or no that is different from how others have phrased it.

Exercise 3 – The Picture Quiz Round! (10mins)

This one is about communication, artistic talent is not required.

In a pair one person privately draws a simple picture then describes the picture to the other person who has to try to recreate the image using just what the original artist tells them. How do the pictures compare? What was communication like between the two and how could it have been better?

Starter for 10 – Some questions to get a discussion and ideas flowing to bring up with your mates, partners, the person on the bus, imaginary friends, whoever! (Stolen from a range of sources)

1. What ways are there to ask for consent? Does wording/phrasing have an impact?
2. Do you still need to obtain consent from a partner when in a long term relationship? Why?
3. How do different types of relationships (say hook-ups compared to long term partner) impact how and when we talk about consent?
4. What are ways we can "check in" with a partner?
5. If you feel violated or if you feel like you violated someone, what should you do? What can you do to prevent this in the future?
6. Why can it be so hard for people to practice consent?
7. What should you do when you're unsure if your partner wants to continue? What should you do when you're unsure if YOU want to continue?
8. How can you become more comfortable talking about issues of sexuality and consent? How can you help your partner become more comfortable?
9. If you achieve consent once, does it mean you can stop asking for consent in the future?
10. What power dynamics might factor in to communication and consent?

11. Can non-verbal cues be used as consent?
12. How can you communicate about past abusive relationships/ sexual assault and how these may affect present relationships?
13. But isn't consent really boring?
14. What can we do to end sexual violence in our community?
15. How do we approach consent in Submissive/Dominant or BDSM sex play.
16. How does intoxication affect giving or asking for consent?
17. Whose responsibility is it to change the course of activity if your partner doesn't seem in to it?
18. Is consent hot? How can we incorporate clear consent into sexual activity and make it fun and erotic?
19. Do you think talking ruins the mood?
20. How might someone express that what is happening is not ok?
21. How can we communicate about consent when we feel uncomfortable talking directly about the subject?
22. How can you bring up your feelings about safe sex and STIs?
23. Do you check in as things progress or do you assume the original consent means everything is ok?
24. Do you think it is the other persons responsibility to say something if they aren't into what you're doing?
25. How do you give yourself or someone else space to figure out what you/they want?
26. How do people communicate their boundaries?

A Letter on Consent:

(I wrote this in September 2012)

*Dear F**kers,*

You may well be aware of the ongoing news story of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and allegations of a sexual assault in Sweden. It's big news right now as the case has been somewhat complicated by concerns that if he faces questioning over the case in Sweden he may then be sent on to the U.S.A. regarding his website leaking a load of really important shit that has pissed off America no end. On top of this Assange has attempted to prove his innocence by trying to run away to Ecuador.

It seems every one who has (but probably shouldn't be allowed) access to the internet has had their say on what should happen to Assange. This includes everyone's least favourite Saddam Hussein-stroking, cat impressionist, Big Brother evictee, M.P. George Galloway.

When referencing the situation, where allegedly Julian Assange had unprotected sex with a SLEEPING WOMAN, without her permission, he said this was not rape and instead referred to it as "bad sexual etiquette" saying "...even taken at its worst, if the allegations made by these two women were true, 100% true, and even if a camera in the room captured them, they don't constitute rape."

So I thought I would take this opportunity to speak to you all and say

penetrating someone with your penis without express verbal permission, is rape. From the Sexual Offences Act, 2003: "A is guilty of rape when A intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of B (the complainant) with his penis; B does not consent to the penetration; and A does not reasonably believe that B consents."

It doesn't matter if you have had sex before, or you were both drunk or they are your wife, girlfriend, partner, fuck buddy or whatever. It doesn't matter if they got naked or they "seemed up for it" or "it would ruin the mood", just fucking ask. "Would you like to have sex with me?" It's easy, and trust me, there is nothing hotter than when your partner replies "Oh Yes Please!" so just do it. If you don't it's rape!

And if she or he (yes it works both ways) say No, then it's no! In fact if they say anything other than Yes, then it's no. Silence means no, Maybe means no, I'm not sure means no, You've/I've been drinking means no. No persuasion, no complaining, no coercion, no sulking, no forcing. Getting them to say yes through coercion is not consent, it's rape.

So next time you want to have sex, just ask, after all, it's polite.

Sample Conversation 1 (from *Be a Blabbermouth*):

The Not-Just-Yet-Hookup: *You've hung out with someone once or twice with friends, and wound up spending time alone both times. Now you're hanging out alone in a private space for the first time, some enjoyable making out is afoot, and it seems pretty likely one or both of you are going to initiate something more sexual. That'd be just fine by you, but you want to be sure things don't get too heavy, too fast.*

You: Hey – this feels great, and I'd like to keep on doing it if you would, but I just want to press pause for a sec to make sure we're on the same page.

Them: Mmmm, mmmm...okay. What's up?

You: I'd like to keep making out, and I'm probably comfortable with some dry sex if you are, but I know I don't want to go further than that this soon.

Them: Yeah, I like this too, and if you want to have dry sex, I could be down with that, but that all by itself is great for me, too.

You: Awesome. Just keep me posted with any changes if you start to feel differently, and I'll do the same. Can I press play again?

Alternate Conversation:

You: Hey – this feels great, and I'd like to keep on doing it if you would, but I want to stop for a sec to make sure we're on the same page.

Them: Mmmm, mmmm...shhhh. (keeps kissing)

You: Whoah: it's really important to me that I take a minute now, so I need you to do that, too.

Them: Ugh, FINE!

You: You know, if we can't do things like just take a minute to check in and lay down some boundaries and ground rules – and that's all I needed to do – while this felt really good, I don't want to keep going with it. So, I'm going to go home for now. If you're ready to talk about this another time, you can call me.

Sample Conversation 2 (from *Be a Blabbermouth*):

The Silent Partner: *You can tell that your partner is trying pretty hard to have things feel good to you, but your indirect (or nonexistent) communication about what feels best to you and where has got them clueless and you perpetually dissatisfied. You have a disability which limits your mobility, and which you also aren't yet totally comfortable talking about when it comes to sex. Fact is, you just have a tough time talking about what you like.*

Them: How about this, do you like this? Do you want that instead?

You: You know what, let's stop for a minute and talk. I've been having the hardest time talking about what I like and what I don't. Maybe I'm afraid of hurting your feelings, or of embarrassing myself. It's also still not easy for me to voice when my disability keeps me from doing things I wish I could do, but I know just don't work for me.

Them: Well, I embarrass myself in front of you almost every day and you still like me. And my feelings shouldn't be hurt about what you like and you don't: if they are, that's my thing to deal with, not yours. I don't have a disability, but there are plenty of things I can't do or which don't feel comfortable for me, too. How about we start with the good stuff: that's easy, right? Later on we can get to the stuff that's going to make me feel like a dope.

You: Okay. Well, I like it when you do . But it's often painful for me to do it in the position you keep wanting to do it in.

Them: I like that, too. So, what can I do to make that even better, and how can we do it so you're comfortable?

You: Ummm... maybe we could try it like .

Them: You got it! See, not so hard.

Sample Conversation 3 (from *Be a Blabbermouth*):

They Do, You Don't: *Your partner wants to have sex for the first time, right now. You don't.*

Them: Can we move this to the bedroom? I think it's time to take things to the next level.

You: I'm cool going to the bedroom if you want to, but I don't feel like it's time for me to step things up yet. Sorry, I just need some more time.

Them: But we've been going out for a while now, it just feels right, and you're so sexy right now. I want you, and you've got me all worked up.

You: Hey, I'm glad you think I'm sexy: I think you're hot, too. And while I also really care about you, it doesn't feel right for *me* yet. I'm worked up right now, too, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea for me to go farther before I'm ready, or that it's fair to suggest that I should do more than I'm comfortable with because you're excited. Plus, we haven't even talked about this before, and I feel like there's a lot to talk about. We can stop and start talking about it now if you want – so long as you understand I'm still not going to do it tonight – or we can keep doing what we were doing, or even just call it a night, but that's it.

Them: I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to be so pushy. That wasn't cool of me. Let me calm down for a minute, and then what do you say we just cuddle up and talk about this – no pressure, just seems like it'd be a good idea to figure out where we both stand and what we need.

You: That'd be great, thanks.

Alternate Conversation:

Them: Can we move this to the bedroom? I think it's time to take things to the next level.

You: I'm cool going to the bedroom if you want to, but I don't feel like it's time for me to step things up yet. Sorry.

Them: No problem. You want to keep doing what we are, then, or want to just chill out? We can talk about this, too, if you want.

You: You know, I liked what we were doing, so if you're cool, and we can keep it at that level, I'd like to keep doing that. Thanks for being so understanding.

More examples available from

http://www.scarleteen.com/be_a_blabbermouth_some_sample_sexual_conversations

Check Out – Any Questions? (10mins)

Fin

Consent is more than just what is contained within this zine and this workshop, that's why I've been encouraging you to talk about it and also to get hold of some other zines and resources.

We haven't really even touched on how we can deal with situations where people have been assaulted or abused. I've consciously left it out here as I don't feel like I could do a good job, the Bookfair is a day away as I'm writing this and I've got so fucking much to think about I just won't bother. Instead check out "Thoughts about Community Support around Intimate Violence" by Sallydarity or via Zabalaza Books with improved formatting online at www.anarcha.org/sallydarity or www.zinelibrary.info

Take consent out of the bedroom. Pro-active consent is not confined to sex, let's take the premise of consent out of the bedroom and into our communities, into our everyday lives. Imagine a world where everyone practise consent in every aspect of their lives. This would be a big step forward on the road to anarchism.

Take Care, and put simply:

“Be Excellent to Each Other and Party on!”

Here are some people to call for if you ever need them:

- **Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre:** 0808 802 9999

Open 12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm every day of the year, providing support for female survivors, partners, family and friends

- **24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline:** 0808 2000 247

- **Victim Supportline:** 0845 30 30 900. Open 9am to 9pm weekdays, 9am to 7pm weekends and 9am to 5pm on bank holidays.