

## Liberation Network – Consent is for Everyone!

By [Evie Brill Paffard](#)

Tuesday 27 October 2015

There's a fabulous web comic that compares consent to tea; and like tea I can't get enough of it! The fact that York now has mandatory consent talks for freshers has been a long time coming and it's something that I couldn't be prouder of. Unfortunately, however, others are not as keen. Warwick student George Lawlor recently sparked controversy by writing an article for the Tab titled "Why I don't need consent lessons".

"I already know what is and what isn't consent," Lawlor writes, "Yes means yes, no means no."

The issue is that he clearly doesn't know what constitutes consent to boil it down to a black and white rejection of advances. His article casually mentions "nuance[s]" but does not explicitly take into account, for instance, the fact that consent cannot legally be given if the victim is intoxicated, drugged, asleep, unconscious or underage. It must also be enthusiastic on everyone's part (which is hardly a bad thing, since to me; there are few things sexier than a lover who growls in your ear for permission or one who begs you to keep going!). Whether you attend a Russell Group University or not, it's hardly patronising to state that there is so much more to consensual sex than a simple "yes".

Too many people seem to under the mistaken impression that consent classes are some kind of "feminist witch hunt" attempting to tarnish all men as potential rapists. Of course, it must be taken into account that gender plays a massive role in terms of structural power dynamics. Nothing exists outside of patriarchy and it is true that men are usually the aggressor in assaults against women. It is also true that men are more likely to be the aggressor in sexual assaults on other men. What is often not taken into account is the fact that not all relationships are between cisgender heterosexual couples. Consent applies as much to the LGBTQ community and this rarely touched upon by critics of Lawlor's ilk.

Not only does consent apply to everyone but it goes beyond the realms of sexual relationships and nightclub etiquette. People get very defensive every time it is suggested that we live in a "rape culture", but if you think about it, breaches of consent are normalised every day. How often do we see little children having their cheeks pinched or being forced to "give grandma a kiss" even when it's clear they'd rather be left well alone? What about the unfortunately termed concept of "fraping" which has become rampant with the explosion of social media? These may seem to be trivial examples but they show that as a society we could all do more to respect other people's boundaries. Is it not disturbing that a four-year-old taken to hospital over a boy hitting her was told, "he probably likes you"?

There needs to be a greater level of discussion and understanding of consent and these talks are just the tip of the iceberg.

*Evie Brill Paffard is co-LGBTQ officer for the University of York Students' Union.*



## 6 comments

Kyran

27 Oct '15 at 12:57 pm

This is a vaguely provocative but completely honest question. You've written that, legally, consent cannot be given by someone who is intoxicated. Does that mean that pretty much ALL one-night stands count as non-consensual sex?

[▲ Report](#)

Evie

27 Oct '15 at 1:40 pm

The law on this as it stands is far from perfect and something that I could not go into in the article. I know that as of 2007, consent cannot be given if the victim has consumed a "substantial" amount of alcohol. It's googleable if you want to look into it further.

What I will say that maybe focusing on the legality of consent is unhelpful since it is very flawed. What is more useful in my mind is ensuring that people know when another person is unable to make informed choices. Having, say, a beer or two and being a bit tipsy should not hinder a person's ability to consent. If, however, somebody is unable to stand and slurring their words then going home with and sleeping that person would clearly be taking advantage of them.

We as a society need to move away from the victim-blaming of "you were drunk so it's your own fault" and more towards "don't take advantage of people whose capacity to make informed choices is impaired".

[▲ Report](#)

Ryan

27 Oct '15 at 2:17 pm

The mantra "If in doubt, don't" seems as simple as tea. I was able to work it out without a mandatory class, does this make me a genius or simply a normal, decent person?

[▲ Report](#)

Marcia

27 Oct '15 at 6:55 pm

Relying on people to accurately notice when they /should/ be doubting is another matter. Consent classes help point out situations where you should doubt, where you may not otherwise, such as reluctance. Also situations such as when one act has been consented to but not another - people often forget to delineate them.

[▲ Report](#)

Beth

27 Oct '15 at 9:13 pm

It is pretty simple, but we can only assume that from the high frequency of sexual assault and rape that a lot of people internalise a lot of shitty attitudes towards sex and consent growing up, and thus feel that they're 'owed' sex in certain situations. (e.g. you've engaged in oral sex as foreplay, but your partner is reluctant to have penetrative sex. Sadly a lot of people in that circumstance see it as the partner's obligation to continue in that situation despite the fact that they don't want to).

Ideally this problem would be tackled earlier - i.e. in sex education in primary and secondary level. That is something people are working on, but also would involve jumping through a number of bureaucratic hoops involving Education policy - and in the meantime, people are still ignorant and a

lot of violence is being committed as a result of that.

In direct answer to your question, you're a normal, decent, person. There are sadly less of you in the world than most of us would like to believe.

On the up side, it does take relatively little to be a normal, decent, person, so I would hope if people take these talks seriously, and try and engage with them rather than dismissing them as 'sexist against men' (no, not all men are rapists, glad we cleared that up, but what else do you expect us to do when 1 in 5 people are sexually assaulted in their lifetime? how else are we going to challenge people's behaviour when they just assume their approach is normal and that they're 'decent?'), they'd be able to better figure out what category of person they're in, and change their behaviour if required.

[▲ Report](#)

Anonymous

23 Nov '15 at 7:35 pm

Would you like to see the law equalised so that women could be charged with rape as easily as men? What about the recent case of the lesbian equality officer at Oxford?

[▲ Report](#)

Most Read **Discussed**

1. [CLASH OF COMMENTS: Should those responsible for the Grenfell effigy bonfire be prosecuted?](#)
2. [The breakup beard](#)
3. [World AIDS day - how you can help wipe AIDS out](#)
4. [First, go fix your bad service](#)
5. [The world of Yorfess: An Ode to Shitposting](#)
6. [Why the #MeToo Campaign Must Include Men Too](#)

### Write for Nouse Comment

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

### More in Comment

[World AIDS day - how you can help wipe AIDS out](#)

[Why the #MeToo Campaign Must Include Men Too](#)

[CLASH OF COMMENTS: Should those responsible for the Grenfell effigy bonfire be prosecuted?](#)

[Indifference to JCRCs evident](#)

[Slurring champagne socialists is unfair](#)

[Don't dismiss the white poppy: it serves an important purpose](#)

- [About Nouse](#)
- [Who's Nouse](#)
- [Website Credits](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Student Discounts](#)
- [Print Editions](#)
- [Mini-Sites](#)
- [Nouse on Twitter](#)
- [Nouse on Facebook](#)
- [Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

