

# Consent As a Felt Sense

Did you ever consent to something but still came away feeling violated? Have you ever said “yes” to someone and then wished you could take it back? Well, you can.

The table below summarizes points from a [blog article](#) critiquing some of the ways we commonly frame conversations about consent as a culture. The left hand column represents this tragically flawed model of consent, while the right hand column represents the desire for a better way to think about and to talk about consent—one that involves much more communication, understanding, empathy, compassion and integrity.

*Content warning: The following includes descriptions of sexual harassment and discussions of physical/sexual violence.*

Consent As Permission	Consent As a Felt Sense
The implied context for consent is behaving legally or contractually.	The implied context for consent is behaving ethically and with integrity.
Consent means giving permission.	Consent means feeling okay about something. Giving or not giving permission is not the only legitimate way to communicate about consent.
More concerned with not violating the law.	More concerned with not violating the person.
Consent is primarily concerned with the moment of the sexual encounter itself.	Consent includes all the moments preceding and following the sexual encounter.
Centers the interests of those “receiving” consent or the “would-be” perpetrators of sexual violence.	Centers the interest of the person who is or is not consenting.
Supports the avoidance of accountability.	Supports holding people accountable.
Our focus is only on whether a person expected to feel violated.	Our focus is on whether a person actually feels violated.

Consent is something that a person either expresses or doesn't (a commitment someone makes).	Consent is an <i>experience</i> people have.
Definition of consent is only concerned with whether a person said YES (gave permission).	Definition of consent is more nuanced and includes a person's experience after they say YES.
Asks questions like, "what counts as a yes?" and in the case of a dispute, "what kinds of documentation are required to prove the presence or absence of a yes?"	Asks questions like, "What were the conditions in which consent was given? Were they coercive?"
Ignores the broader cultural context (rape culture) in which people must navigate consent.	Acknowledges the broader cultural context (rape culture) in which people must navigate consent.
Disregards power dynamics of the people involved.	Considers power dynamics of the people involved.
Emphasis is on providing evidence of a broken contract.	Emphasis shifts to whether or not someone felt violated.
Rape and sexual violence are framed as a type of person ( i.e., "a rapist" or "an abuser", "an evil person").	Rape and sexual violence is framed as an act that is committed.
Creates a stark distinction between those that are "rapists" or "sexual predators" and those that aren't.	Recognizes the strong possibility that anyone could sexually violate someone else within rape culture.

What would you change about your behaviour towards others if you acknowledge that violating consent hinged not on what they said about how they felt, but on how they actually felt? What would you change about your behaviour? What does consent feel like to you?

### Work Cited

Maymay (2013). You can take it back: consent as a felt sense. Bandanablog. Retrieved 2017 from, <https://bandanablog.wordpress.com/2013/11/05/you-can-take-it-back-consent-as-a-felt-sense/>

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