

CONSENT:

SEXUAL AGENCY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

GNDR_ST 321/HISTORY 392



“Consent” is the standard used both by ordinary people and by legal institutions to distinguish between sexual activity that is harmful and non-harmful, freely chosen and coerced, allowable and prohibited. Yet as all of the scholars we will be reading this quarter all point out, consent is also an imperfect way of measuring sexual harm. Even if a person technically says “yes” to sex, they might not actually be in a position to assert their autonomy and say “no”—for example in the case of some women who are economically dependent on a male partner. What is more, the law stigmatizes many kinds of non-normative sexual conduct—such as sex work, sex in public, the sexual conduct of HIV-positive people, and underage sex—as always and necessarily harmful and inherently non-consensual. We will examine the history of how we got to our present-day definition of consent and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages that that construct entails, with the hope that studying this history can help us to envision a more just erotic future.

Scott De Orio

MW 3:30–4:50pm
Kresge 2-425