

Disability & Consent Documentary Transcript

Tia (She/Her) 0:02

What disability has really impacted in terms of my sexuality is the importance of like boundaries... and like consent. It's like so much more important because of my disability and because like consent is such a, now is such a big part of like everyday life... of like, please don't touch me like, like, no matter what, like, do not touch my back, like no, I'm really serious. Do not touch my back. No is a full sentence. I think that some celebrity said that on TV. [Laughter]

Sonny (They/Them) 0:44

But there's a lot of assumed consent in life. Like if someone comes up and starts talking to you, and starts telling you, you know, emotionally wrought details of their life or just details of their life, there's an assumed idea that that is something you can take on in that moment or have space for

Tia (She/Her) 1:01

like most people don't want to be hurtful. Like most people don't understand like, that they are hurting you. And so, like that comes down to I guess communication of like really outlining that. But it also comes down to like, it's hard on you to really like put yourself out there to like really say and be vulnerable and say, "you are hurting me right now"

Sonny (They/Them) 1:24

It's just recognizing that people have limitations, whether it be on their time, their capacity, their ability, their emotional bandwidth

Tia (She/Her) 1:33

I feel like my disability has given me more reason and more courage to really stand my ground. And like in certain situations and really say no.

Sonny (They/Them) 1:40

having nonverbal cues set up I think is really important. Especially talking in the context of like partners or sexual situations, um like having established ways to communicate things that might be important or withdraw consent. Having systems for that, especially nonverbal systems, I think are really important.

Em (They/She) 2:02

If I go nonverbal... I mean, generally, I tend to avoid, obviously, physical relationships, uh but if I were to be in a physical relationship with somebody, like, I know for a fact that I would need to have that conversation beforehand of if I go nonverbal... this is like the quote unquote, protocol.

Sonny (They/Them) 2:21

One of the things I figured out way back when with anxiety attacks is how I'd let my mom know that I was having an anxiety attack, because I do like this kind of motion...um, and so I've been

using that lately to communicate what I'm nonverbal and it's, it works pretty well. Except it's a little close to stimming.

Sonny (They/Them) 2:41

Being able to negotiate, like how do we meet each other's needs, when that doesn't necessarily fall within our capacity. And I think it's a really good exercise in boundaries. Specifically in thinking about boundaries, not as being something like "you can't do this," like I, you know, or "I need you to do this," it's not about the other person's behavior. Boundaries are about what you are willing to do, or what you're willing for what you're not willing to do. So boundaries, like I can set a boundary like I... you know, will remove myself from an environment I find overstimulating, but I can't set a boundary that's, I need you to leave an environment I find overstimulating with me, because I don't want to dictate someone else's behavior.

Em (They/She) 3:27

One day, I could be very much like touch inclined because like that day, apparently, my senses are like, really craving that type of touch. And then another day, I could be completely against touch and be like, absolutely don't touch me,

Sonny (They/Them) 3:43

Your needs, don't like usurp someone's consent, and figuring out how to navigate that in a healthy and constructive way, it can be really hard because you can have really intense needs that relate to another person and that affects someone else's life and that that will happen... and that is okay. But trying to respect each other's like capacity, each other's like, ability to give and withdraw consent is incredibly important.

Tia (She/Her) 4:19

It's very common that when, when certain types of demographics of people move through crowds, they'll like touch the backs and like lower waists of like feminine people as they like go by. Very similarly, I found that like when I was using my walker and my wheelchair, as people walked by, or as they're standing near me, they would like lean on my wheelchair or they like, they'd like set a box down on like the handle near me, or in like, hover over me or like, like, like walk like touch it as they go by.

Like when people were setting you know, the box down on the corner of my wheelchair. It felt like they're setting it on my shoulder.

Sonny (They/Them) 4:56

With ADHD, I can be very in the mood in one moment and very not in the mood next. Because it's difficult to keep my mind engaged with something entirely, unless I'm fixated on it.

[Laughter] In which case, it's very easy. That has its own challenges. But it can be really difficult to like stay in the moment. And that means that sometimes I'll be in the moment one moment, and the next I'm like, I'm actually not enjoying this anymore, which I mean, goes back to the conversation of consent in that you can give consent at the beginning of something, but consent needs to be like, continuous. There needs to be continuous consent, and there needs to be a system for withdrawing consent, in my opinion,

Tia (She/Her) 5:40

If you do this to me, you're gonna cause me pain. And sometimes I have to really lay that out. And like, look them in the eye and say, like, "if you continue this behavior, you are going to cause me pain, like, do you want to be the reason why you are hurting me." And that can go for anybody, anybody can, can say that or feel that way, no matter their gender, sex, race, ability, anything,

Sonny (They/Them) 6:01

There's a lot of shame around being like, hey, I want to stop. I don't want to do this, or I want to do something else. Or being like, actually, this isn't working for me anymore... but this might, can we try this instead? And being able to, like, communicate those things without having like, shame or awkwardness or, you know, over, you know, compensating for feeling, yeah, insecure, or anything like that, and having like, an open communication about like, "hey, like, sometimes I just stop being engaged with something. And that doesn't mean it was bad. That doesn't mean, you were doing something that I was, it just means that like, I want to switch it up, and I need a different kind of stimulus."

Em (They/She) 6:39

If like somebody is telling me that not to do something one time, it could be very easy for me to just assume that they want me to never do it again. And I may just never do it again, assuming that they just didn't want that if they're not specific enough with their words,

Sonny (They/Them) 6:53

I guess yeah, there's a lot of guilt around withdrawing consent. Because it makes you feel like you're you're taking something away from someone or they're not like you know, that you might disappoint them or make them feel bad. And that's just like, not healthy. And that in itself is a bit like coercive, even if it's not intending to be coercive on anyone's part. Even if it's something just going on in your head. It's almost like, like you're being societally coerced.

Em (They/She) 7:18

I definitely think for like, access, like access needs, like, often it's not as complicated as people think it is... um, and for me, mainly, it's all about just knowing what the boundaries are, and being aware of how I'm doing because often I'll show signs beforehand, and then I'll remove myself. And it's just not taking it personally,

Sonny (They/Them) 7:43

Especially, especially, for people who are raised as girls or women, there's an idea that sex is not necessarily for you. And I think that's incredibly harmful... um, and I don't think it's unreasonable to expect to enjoy everything you do in a sexual situation. And if you're not enjoying it, not if you're tolerating it, tolerating it is not enough, you should want to do something you should enjoy doing something. Consent is not like, oh, I'll take consent away when it gets to a point where I'm, you know, so uncomfortable or so unhappy. Like you should, like it should be enthusiastic.

Megan Ingram (They/She) 8:23

Yeah.