

# -YALE COLLEGE- DEMOCRATS

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06511

In favor: H.B. 5376  
An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

My friends are scared. Across campus, someone hollers at them to smile; they try to keep their eyes forward as they hustle away. When they walk home at night, they press their thumb anxiously to the app they downloaded earlier that day, just for keeping the police on hand. As they get ready to go out, they rehearse a signal between them in case someone on the dancefloor touches them, won't take no for an answer, and they need to be rescued. They buy whistles and cans of pepper spray; they take self-defense courses, and they think that maybe they shouldn't wear that shirt after all, because it might be too dangerous. My friends are scared. I am scared. We are scared because there is good reason to be afraid. We live in a world that does not value our bodies. We live in a world that takes from us just because we're wearing tight jeans or a crop top. We live in a world that does not hear us – not only when we say no, but also when we don't say yes.

Our sexual culture is twisted. One in four women will be raped in her lifetime. This number is thrown around a lot, but let it sink in: one in four. Although women are disproportionately the victims of sexual violence, men also experience it, as well as trans\* and non-binary people. Indeed, this violence is so commonplace that I have had friends who did not even realize they were assaulted until much later, in a classroom or a therapist's office. Faced with this gruesome reality, we don't ask rapists to change. Instead, we blame their victims; we ask each other to change our clothes, our makeup, our drinks and our routes home instead of asking that we listen to each other, care about each other, and take on the apparently difficult task of not committing heinous acts of violence against each other. Worse still, when rape does happen, we make excuses. You know, boys will be boys. We let it go. And it keeps happening. Every day my friends and I must wonder if this is the day we become a part of the statistic.

Rape is a problem no matter who you are or what you do, but it has been brought into especially painful relief on college campuses. Yale has confronted it by instituting an affirmative consent policy, meaning that we teach students that both partners are required to voice enthusiastic and continuous consent during any sexual encounter. From the moment Yalies arrive on campus, we are placed in Communication and Consent workshops where we are asked to discuss what it looks like when your partner says no, what it looks like when they don't say yes, and what to do

in either of these situations – the answer is, by the way, to stop. In these workshops, we get the chance to think openly and honestly about our own sexual choices. We get to learn about ways to intervene and prevent rape as well as cultivate a positive sexual culture more generally on our campus. We get to consider how to treat each other respectfully, to listen to each other, to pay attention to what our partners want and don't want. These are things every person should know; these are things almost nobody teaches us.

All colleges should be required to have this policy because it begins the massive labor of undoing the insidious sexual culture that permeates our society. It does not solve every problem, but it does force us to talk about the problem, to recognize that many of us do not respect each other's autonomy enough to hear no when it is said, and the absence of yes when it is not. And it really does change campus climate. Because of affirmative consent, I can have conversations where I learn not only to be a better partner, but also to demand that others be better partners to me. I deserve it; we all do. Because of affirmative consent, I know that many of my friends, and even my acquaintances and people I do not even know, are on the lookout at parties, watching to see if someone is too drunk. They are ready to intervene; they want everyone to be safe. And because of affirmative consent, I know that rapists don't have an excuse; if she didn't say yes, she said no.

Our sexual culture won't change in a day. I am still afraid. But affirmative consent makes me hopeful that one day, I won't have to be.