

HETERONORMATIVITY: SEX, DESIRE, AND CONSENT



COMMITTEE FOR MANAGING GENDER ISSUES



For this month's newsletter, we take to the ideas discussed in our second session in the seminar series, **Con-Sensuality: The Interaction Between Consent and Sensuality**. The idea of con-sensuality is premised on the idea that one cannot speak of consent without speaking of the sensual, of desire, and of pleasure. We are sensual beings and speaking of just consent is not enough- we have to ask what the consent is for? Consent by definition implies that there is one side asking for it and the other side permitting/accepting/agreeing to it. What consent does not imply is a pleasurable experience and if the pleasure is compromised all the time, and when one does not know what this consent is supposed to end at or mean, how can talking about just one of the processes of sexual encounters, i.e., consent, be enough?

The problem as seen by Paromita Vohra begins with our conceptualisations of what normal is resulting in a normativity that shapes people's beliefs, values, behaviour, attitudes, etc.. In our society, this is heteronormativity, the guiding principle of love, marriage, reproduction, gender roles, etc.. In this sense, it is a patriarchal model which organises the society and its actions including sex and desire. Who should or can one desire? What are the 'normal' practices of sex? Anything outside of these brackets are considered a deviation and are resisted, criticised, stigmatised, etc.. In this sense, a woman seeking pleasure or configuring herself as a sensual being who has desires she would want to act on, falls outside of heteronormativity and hence, frowned upon. Heteronormativity places marriage as the end goal of all relationships and the end goal of marriage is reproduction. Sex is only sanctioned for married heterosexual couples for the purpose of reproduction and anything else that does not have the goal of reproduction or that is centred around pleasure or that is outside marriage is again seen as a criminal act. Consent and consensual practices too then are informed by heteronormative practices, which should be challenged for us to go beyond consent and prioritise pleasure. Agents of Ishq has a great illustrated piece titled **"What Is Heteronormativity And How Does It Decide What's Normal? An Explainer"** which can be read [here](#).



Agents of Ishq also draws our attention to the practices of flirting as moulded by culture and society, i.e., why flirting is indulged in, it's goals, etc. depend on if people are looked at as sexual beings who grant access to their bodies at their discretion. The idea that flirting does not have to end in a relationship or in a sexual encounter but is indulged in for just play and pleasure is an important idea that extends to sex in general. You can read more about it in [this](#) article titled ***"Why Flirting Without Agenda Matters: Lessons from the Caribbean"*** where the different practices of flirting in the U.S. and in Caribbean leads to some great revelations for the author.

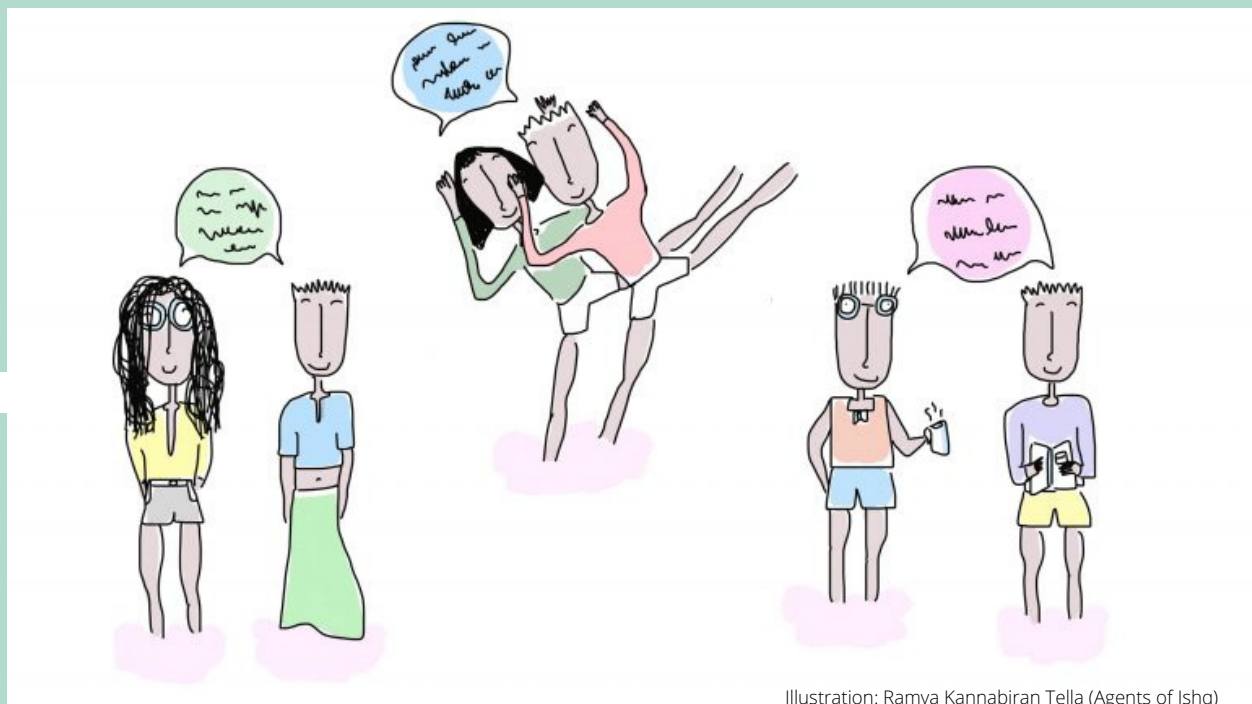


Illustration: Ramya Kannabiran Tella (Agents of Ishq)

Here, the concepts of flirting, pursuing a romantic interest, etc. without indulging in 'creepy' acts become vital to understand boundaries well. Movies, daily soaps, etc. have corrupted our ideas of romance, of love, of relationships, of sex, wherein behaviours that are inappropriate, uncomfortable, and criminal are often sanctioned under the disguise of romance and perseverance. Consent is not a joy kill, no one wants to deprive people of joys and pleasures of the chase and romance, but there is a line which if crossed can be toxic and fatal. ***"How To Make An Ishq Move Without Being A Creep"*** and ***"The AOI Guide For Lady-People To Be Sure Your Ishq Moves Aren't Creepy"*** put down some great points and act as reflective guides of our behaviour. There is a lot to unlearn and learn if we want to be better and treat others better!

P.S. Here are some ***"Online Dating Tips for Queer Ladies from Queer Ladies"***

Another strongly rooted idea within heteronormativity is that one should already know what they want, know what their sexuality is, which is organised in binaries of yes or no, of this or that. There is no space for fluidity, no space for a may be, no space for confusion, no space for exploring, which restricts so many identities and actions. It adds a lot of pressure on people and their sexualities. This needs to be contested if one were ever to talk about consent that actually benefits and results in an experience that is pleasurable and positive for both parties. One cannot possibly always know what they want and most often than not, it is a maybe that hovers. What is one to do in that case? Communicate, share, listen, and then act. Let there be space to be confused, space for a may be, space to exist in the grey that is yet to go black or white. These beautiful videos through song and dance portray these intricate, delicate ideas while shifting the narrative to women: "*Love in the Garden of Consent / Ishq ke Garden Mein Marzi Hai Minimum*" and "*A Lavni About Consent: The Amorous Adventures of Megha and Shakku*".



Still from A Lavni About Consent

Find the previous issues of our newsletters [here](#).

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