



THE LINE

Sex. Consent. Power. Pleasure.

a documentary film by Nancy Schwartzman

www.thelinemovie.org

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The Line: A New Doc About Consent

Text by Audacia Ray

I met Nancy Schwartzman, the director of and a principal in the new short documentary *The Line*, last year when she was looking for resources about consent in the sex industry as possibilities for inclusion in her documentary. I was really taken with her project, which is not just a documentary about sexual boundaries and the line of consent, but also an autobiographical project about a date rape she experienced, the reactions of her friends, and the eventual (on hidden camera and included in the film) confrontation of her rapist. When I taught my intro to human sexuality course at Rutgers University at Newark last fall, I asked her to be a guest, screen her film, and talk with my students about consent. It was pretty amazing and intense, in a way that I wasn't entirely equipped to deal with (as an aside, the biggest thing I've learned about teaching a sexuality course at the college level is that it is crucial to provide resources and potential avenues of support for students for whom difficult stuff comes up).

My classes at Rutgers tend to be pretty gender balanced, racially and ethnically very mixed, and not at all the gender studies crowd – my students take the class because it fulfills an undergraduate science requirement. This means that the class is generally heterosexual and cisgendered (and has a lot of trouble tangling with the concept of cis), but they're also eager to discuss sexuality in depth, in ways that most of them have never had the opportunity and invitation to do.

Nancy handled the screening and conversation afterwards with grace and aplomb, and we really dug into the idea of consent and crossing the line, and we especially talked about men and responsibility. We talked about the idea of enthusiastic consent, which Heather Corinna writes about so well in her piece on *Scarleteen*, **How You Guys Can Prevent Rape**. Here's my most favorite snippet from Heather's piece:

When someone wants to, really wants to, have sex with us, we'll know because that person will be taking a very active role, will be saying — if not yelling! — “Yes!” or “Please!” or “Do me NOW!” We may know because that person is the one initiating sex, at least as often as we are. (If you're going to say that

younger women just aren't like that yet, know that isn't always true. Some are, but those who aren't likely aren't because things are either moving too fast, or they really just aren't ready for or that interested in sex with you yet.) We'll know because it will feel like something we are absolutely doing together, that couldn't happen if the other person wasn't just as engaged as we are (imagine trying to dance with someone else when they're just standing there or not really paying attention: same goes with sex). We'll know because our partners will absolutely not “just be lying there.”

I was really interested in what the conversation and film brought up for men, and several of the men in the class spoke articulately and honestly about how it made them feel and what it made them question. However, the really great stuff came in the form of response papers. Here is a snippet from a response paper that one of my straight cismale students wrote:

I found this documentary to be interesting because of the way it made me think about all of my past sexual experiences. Did I ever cross that line? Was I ever too pushy with a girl? Did a girl ever do something she didn't want to with me, just to get it over with? Have I ever made a girl feel uncomfortable being alone with me? Questions like this will make a man rethink everything he has done with a woman. This documentary touches on a subject that today still hasn't clearly been established. There are so many unanswered questions regarding that line, and these types of questions make it difficult for a woman to come forward and allow our judicial system to do what it was created for. Regardless of what the situation may be, I believe the man is more responsible for knowing where exactly that line begins, and where it ends.

If you want to have Nancy bring *The Line* to your school or community center, you should check out her website and drop her a note. It is a really great tool for moving conversations about consent forward, and Nancy is just amazing – and brave for sharing her own story in such an intense way. She's working on a curriculum to teach with the film and has lots of thoughts provoking activities that she's created with high school and college students in mind. You can also be a fan of the film on Facebook and find out where she's screening it next.