Concerning Consent

Within Higher Education recent concerns have been raised around issues of sexual consent; ranging from the harassment of students both on and off campus to allegations of sexual violence. Until recently this was an area largely neglected by universities, primarily because of an assumption, that as all participants were adults, such information would be largely redundant. As part of an academic discussion with criminology undergraduates around a reading which focused on sexual behaviours in prison, it became increasingly clear that the students had no real understanding around issues of consent. The original focus of the academic debate was intended to be around the theoretical and methodological concerns as stipulated in the paper, yet this became, by necessity, a discussion centred on the parameters of sexual consent and ownership of the body. Through this interaction it became very apparent that although students believed they had some understanding around consent, this tended toward a media-driven, impressionistic discourse rather than any academically driven awareness. As a team, we were challenged to develop a framework for university students that would allow them to explore the issue in a deductive and inductive format adopting a feminist standpoint.