

What it's like being a teen girl

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The violations started small. I was 12, fairly tall with brand new boobs. My mother wouldn't let me buy "real bras" for a long time. It didn't occur to me that was weird until boys in my class started advising me to "stop wearing sports bras" because I was looking a little "saggy."

It was a boy who told me I had to start shaving my legs if I wanted anyone to ever like me. I said that wasn't true. He laughed in my face and called me a dyke.

That night after shaving, my mother asked me why I was so vain.

They started finding reasons to touch me, pinching my butt, snapping my new "real bras," ("They look a lot better. Did you stuff?") or straight-up grabbing my breasts. Dropped pencils with awkward leanovers. Staged run-ins.

One time, a popular boy I knew who lived on my street forced his way into my living room while my parents were still working and fought with me over a remote control so that he could cop a feel. I didn't say anything. Speaking up was not an option—rather, an easy road to being even more ostracized and labelled "crazy." Besides, who would believe that he'd wanted to touch *me*?

They named girls one by one, by the flaws of our bodies. What they considered theirs. They would write them on chalkboards to taunt us. Draw crude pictures.

If we showed it hurt us, it only got worse. I would cry in the bathroom and hope for some serious illness to keep me out of school, if only for a day.

When I kissed one boy, he encouraged me to do the same with his friends. Not because he thought I might want to, but because I was a toy he wanted to share. An experience he wanted to give his less "successful" friends. For them, a celebration. For me, certain social suicide.

Even if I wanted it, there was never any winning.

I will never forget how excited I was to be invited to watch a movie with the popular boy I liked. I primed for hours. (I was, after all, a teenager grappling with my own new sexuality.) When I got there, he did not put on the movie we agreed to watch, but a porn film. I had never seen one before. He unzipped his pants, pushed and pulled at me. I cried the whole walk home.

They could pinpoint weaknesses. Worse, they knew they were wrong but there were just never any consequences. They knew this—treating us like objects there for them—was what was expected of them.

I want to say that they stop. But the truth is that some never do.

I have never stopped being reminded of my there-for-men status. I am reminded when I am violated in my sleep, or groped in a bar, or held down by a longtime friend. I am reminded when I refuse conversation with a strange man and he spits in my direction, or calls me a "bitch." I am reminded when I am asked why I wore such a pretty dress if I wasn't trying to "pick up." I am reminded when I am told to be less angry and more agreeable. I am reminded when I talk about my lived experience and am told to "stop being so negative about everything." I am reminded when [young girls are bullied so severely by men who wanted to see their bodies](#) that they commit suicide.

We don't talk honestly enough about what it's like being a teen girl. If we did talk about it, what it was like for us, perhaps we wouldn't be so harsh on them. Perhaps we wouldn't throw our hands up in the air and exclaim "oh, teen girls, they're so difficult!" Perhaps [they wouldn't be so scary](#). Perhaps we'd see their lives for the small and large violations they're often made up of; and what those violations do.

Perhaps we would have been less surprised today when we learned that [a fifteen-year-old boy was arrested](#) on the scene of a sexual assault, in connection with a series of sexual assaults occurring in the Bloor and Christie area of Toronto. Perhaps we would be less shocked by the fact that it's 12-17 year old

boys who are the most likely to commit sexual assault (Statistics Canada, [pg. 13](#)). That is, after all, what they were doing to me.

My stories are not uncommon. They're more common than we want to think. As my friend Panic said: "Ask anyone who is or has been a teenaged girl. 15-yr-old boys assaulting women is common. It's 'normal.'" It's so normal, in fact, that we don't talk about it until we're women and we know it doesn't have to be.

Pretty much everything in North American culture tells men and boys that women and girls are there for them. So please, do us some favours. Stop telling us that we have to take self defence. Stop telling us we shouldn't drink or go out at night or on dates. Stop telling us that we need to be prepared for whatever "boys-be-boys" violations come our ways, because it's bullshit. We don't have to accept this or carry it around in silence.

Start talking with men and boys about the messages they're getting about women and girls. Tell them that they are not entitled to our bodies, no matter what. Talk to them honestly and comprehensively about sexualization and objectification. Stop being afraid to talk about boundaries, sex, and pleasure—leaving that to schools, the Internet, and peers is simply not cutting it. Show them what consent really looks like.

And this sounds basic, but remind them that we're, you know, people? We deserve at least that much.