



On Butterfly Wings

Beautiful, Vibrant, Wonderful You



Fair Warning and Disclaimer

Hello Readers!

Empowering young women is a complex thing to undertake, especially given the myriad of issues that we, as women, have to deal with. Sometimes, they're wide-spread issues such as body image or debates around different friendships. But sometimes, educating and empowering young women involves controversial subjects that need to be addressed and discussed, and that can be unsuitable to some readers for a wide variety of different reasons.

This is one of those issues.

We here at OBW feel strongly and passionately that the subjects covered in this issue (one that I've been calling 'the sex issue' since I started working on it) need to be covered in a medium such as this. Moreover, we feel very passionately that they are issues that are often underrepresented in the way we're presenting them in this issue.

On that note: please be warned that this is not an issue that all of you readers are going to be comfortable with. So, we suggest you either choose not to read this issue at all, or you choose to read it with people you trust implicitly when it comes to these discussions.

This issue may not be suitable for all readers.

Thank you,

Emily Savage
Managing Editor



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As a teenage girl, I grew up in a home where I was sexually harassed and it was laughed off or considered normal. Then I was treated this way in my workplaces as a cashier, waitress, administrator and model. I believed I had to tolerate this treatment, not knowing that some comments and forms of touching were inappropriate. I believed that I had somehow deserved this, so I would just smile, laugh it off, and pretend it didn't bother me. And there was a part of me that felt special because the person found me attractive somehow. This is how low my self-esteem was. My parents weren't people I could turn to or get guidance and compassion from, as my stepfather was one of the culprits.

I didn't have any adults who intervened, nor were there anti-harassment or anti-bullying campaigns back then to inform me of what was or wasn't appropriate. Some of these men were older, and so it was essentially illegal what they were doing. So I just suffered in silence carrying shame, guilt and secrets well into my adulthood, believing I was a tease and somehow this was my fate to have to put up with this treatment. It was only later that I learned about the nature of sexual abuse and power dynamics, that I could give the responsibility to others for their poor and disrespectful treatment of me, and start giving myself a voice.

Even still, there's that inner voice that tries to tell me, "oh come on, Heather, it wasn't THAT BAD!" or "that's just guys being guys." This messaging led me into really unhealthy relationships in my life, allowing myself to be treated just as an object without feelings or to just please the man without having my own perspective. I learned this very well from the lineage of women in the family, where we'd rather be nice and passive than to hurt another's feelings. This approach is very dangerous to the well-being of a girl or woman. Yet it is how we are conditioned, still to this day. And many girls are trapped in this desire to be seen as beautiful, accepted and pleasant.

It doesn't help that most of the media and fashion industry likes to turn teenage girls into sexual objects – it's as old as humanity where many girls would be married off by the time they were 12 or 13 years old. Even though this may appear to be the cultural norm, it doesn't mean it is healthy or even right. This is why it's so important for teenage girls to be educated about these issues.

If I can help you understand the signs a little bit more and where you can go for help or how to approach the perpetrator while keeping your personal safety, I will rest more easily for all the young ladies out there who may be stuffing their truth and silencing their feelings. You are not alone and you deserve to be treated with care and respect.

So here's a little crash course that skims the surface of what is abusive treatment and where you can go for help:

- 1) If someone you don't know or don't have a trusting relationship with makes comments about your body and how attractive or unattractive it is, this is harassment. It is important that you don't internalize these messages and seek help from a friend or counsellor. This has more to do with that other person's mindset than it does about you. If it goes unchecked, your self-esteem could drop and you can start believing their criticisms.
- 2) If this sexual harassment, touching or attacking is coming from a parent, teacher, boss, stranger, or other family member who is over 18 years old, then this is considered to be someone who is abusing their power and it is illegal. You may be scared to tell anyone because of the chaos it might bring into your family or social life, and the negative attention that goes along with it. But this adult is unhealthy and chances are they doing this to others.



They need to be woken up to this inappropriate treatment for the sake of safety of young people and to preserve your dignity. They are adults – they can handle the consequences and must grow up as a person and not take advantage of young people. Going to a women's crisis centre to find out how to deal with the situation so it brings the least amount of harm to yourself would be the best. They have access to legal resources and counsellors who have been trained in understanding the nature of abuse.

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- 3) If you find yourself feeling guilty or ashamed because someone has “hit on you” and/or it went as far as sexual relations because you didn't know how to say “no” or you feel you went along with it out of fear, guilt or obligation, then chances are you have been sexually manipulated. It's not your fault – it's that you didn't know you had a voice or a choice. It's important to learn how to tune into your feelings and be comfortable with your voice so you don't get entangled in other people's agendas for you. Going to a counsellor or therapist would be ideal in this case, so you don't get involved in this kind of dynamic again and put yourself into a situation that harms you.
- 4) If someone minimizes your concerns about appropriate or inappropriate touch, laughs at you or tries to convince you otherwise, they are not respecting your boundaries and they are denying your feelings and your limits. You have a right and obligation to tell others, especially potential intimate partners, what is and isn't okay. Learning how to walk away from someone who isn't respecting you is a sign of strength and self-care. It is up to them to reach out and apologize. You can't reason with a verbal abuser.
- 5) If someone stalks you through persistent phone calls, obsessive emails, following you or intimidating your loved ones or pets, then you need to be firm and clear with one warning, maybe two, unless your personal safety is in danger. If it is or the person doesn't respect your request for no contact, then it is best to contact the Police and seek out a restraining order.

One of the difficult things to discuss is the part of being young that feels exciting and can have heightened sexual feelings. Often times it can be confusing when someone is showing you sexual attention to not feel stimulated or attracted to them, as well. That is normal, natural and part of being alive in your body. The line is crossed when they are making you feel like you are only a sexual object, they don't ask you about your feelings or check in to see if you're comfortable, or they ask you to do humiliating things sexually. Or if they make sure you are trapped in a web of silence because they have power over you in some way. This is where it becomes sexual abuse or harassment.

If someone minimizes your concerns about appropriate or inappropriate touch, laughs at you or tries to convince you otherwise, they are not respecting your boundaries and they are denying your feelings and your limits.

There are many resources online and through women's centres where you can go to find out more information about your rights to your body, and how to deal with aggressive or intimidating men. There are way too many women who came before you who had to suffer in silence, and they were misjudged by their family or society and had to live and die with deep wounds because of it.

We now live in a time and country that is growing in more awareness and education about what healthy sexuality and relationships are and aren't, and women's and girls' rights. The more you learn and talk about it, the more you will be protected from getting hurt or confused.

In safety, love, connection and well-being, you are a beautiful person who deserves to feel happy to be alive.



My story about getting ‘The Sex Talk’ is kind of a little interesting, very not the norm and when I look back on it, more than a little hilarious.

I was six when I was first exposed to sex. My mom brought my brother and I these actually quite neat little books, built like comics, about anatomy, sexual intercourse, and how babies are made. Now, before you panic (*you were six?!*) it’s not like my mother left us to read those books on our own. I can vividly remember sitting on the couches, which we still have in our living room, flipping through those books for hours while my mother patiently read the words and answered the myriad of questions that kids have about this stuff.

Now, I was also brought up in a time where pedophiles weren’t my neighbours, I was allowed to hug my teacher and my parents made sure I knew the difference between a ‘good touch’ and a ‘bad touch’. Talking about sex has never been taboo in my house. Unless you count my dad, but that’s because he and I have an excellent, if stereotypical, understanding of ‘dad doesn’t want to know about daughter’s sex life’. It works for us.

A couple of years ago, a post showed up on my Tumblr dashboard that said: “Fanfiction.net gave me the sex talk.” Now, really quickly, yes I read fanfiction, yes I write fanfiction, and I have been exposed to a lot

lilypottar:

fanfiction.net gave me the sex talk

1 YEAR AGO

34,253 NOTES

of fanfiction that involves sex. All kinds of sex. It’s the internet. If you’re surprised, I’d like to know if you have parental controls that monitor your internet access.

But I digress.

I re-blogged that ‘Fanfiction.net gave me the sex talk’ post so fast I think I broke something. Because while my mother taught me the basics, the biology, I learned a lot more about different kinds of sex and, for me, the emotion involved in sex than I ever learned in sex ed class, or from my parents/friends/mentors, etc. I learned that sex can be angry, sad, lonely, happy, hilarious, strange, joyful and a whole bunch of other adjectives Stephen King would murder me for listing.

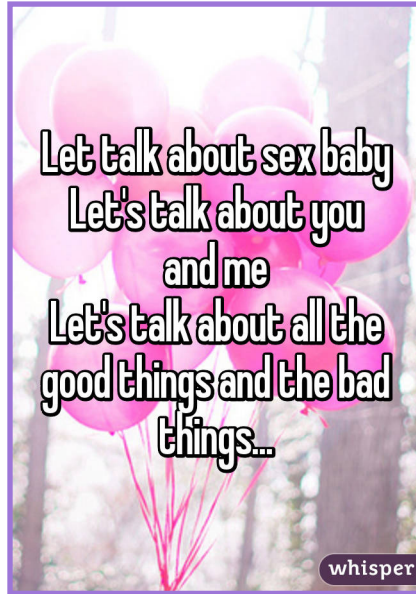
Then, one night, my mom caught me reading one. I can’t remember if I’d left it open on the computer or if I’d left my binder of printed fics (because I was totally that person and that was before AO3 and the iPad that now holds all of the fic I read on a constant basis) out on my bed, but regardless she caught me. And you know what she told me? She didn’t tell me to stop, she didn’t tell me not to have sex until I was married, she didn’t tell me it was terrible, horrible, scary, whatever else they’re teaching kids about sex these days.

She told me three things: be safe, be respectful, be sure. So:

1. Always be safe. Condoms and birth control are a must. And I know for a fact that you’re all aware of STIs and HIV and all of the other wonderful acronyms that make up the myriad of diseases you can get from a very, very wide variety of sex. (Pssst: oral isn’t necessarily safe either!)
2. To quote Aretha Franklin, because that’s just what you do, the second thing my mother emphasized was R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Respect for your partner, sure, but first and foremost, respect for you. Remember, this is a decision you’re going to live with for the rest of your life. If there is even a piece of you that thinks you’re going to regret it in the morning, back out. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. Ever. No matter what someone else tells you. I’m not saying that to put some sort of premium on the idea or physical manifestation of virginity or abstinence, I’m telling you this because given the statistics, you’re going to make enough stupid decisions in your life. Don’t let sex be one of them. Sometimes there’s absolutely no coming back from less than stellar sex decisions. Ask Monica Lewinski (Google it. Trust me.).

3. Be sure you're making the decision for you and no one else. I know high school, college, or university are rough years. I know these are the years where, all of a sudden, each person has to make a lot of insanely difficult decisions on what they want to do with their lives and how they want those lives to look and no one tells you that going in. But to be honest? I don't think whether you pass grade eleven

functions and relations is near as important as the decisions you make about who you want to be as a person. Sex is a part of that. Sex, these days, is a huge part of that. So take your time. Honestly, there's no rush. None. Life is complicated enough; don't let someone else pressure you into making it even more complicated.



Now, I'd like to point out that I am in no way writing this to condone sexual intercourse, or sex of any kind. When to have sex and how to have sex is an incredibly complicated and intensely personal decision. I get that. I spent a lot of years being embarrassed by how long I held out for sex (for the record, I'm stupidly and ridiculously proud of that decision now for a myriad of different reasons). I was twenty-five when I had sex for the first time. I'm not proud of holding out, per se. I'm proud of waiting for someone I trusted and respected. I'm proud that I waited until I was ready, not for when society said I should be ready, or when my friends thought I should have already 'dealt with it'. To some of you, that could mean a boyfriend you've been dating for a while. To others, it's marriage. Personal and complicated.

I'd like to take a step back for a moment and emphasize a few things. One, I'm ridiculously lucky to have grown up in two households that didn't look at sex as a taboo. I've played Cards Against Humanity with my grandparents, for goodness sakes, and let me tell you, there is literally nothing in the world that will embarrass me after that. Especially about sex. Two, the pressure I felt

around having sex was largely of my own making. No one pressured me into it; no one pressured me out of it. I had a couple of insanely respectful significant others that were more than willing to "do the sex" on my timeline. I learned super early that sex was my decision and that someone who wasn't willing to wait for me to be ready, wasn't worth my acknowledgement, let alone my time.

And look, I get that even mentioning sex is a rough go. This is probably my fourth iteration of this article, at least two of which involved the phrase 'insert tab A into slot B' because this is not easy. But when I'm surfing the web and I find an anonymous post by a 13-year-old asking if dry humping her boyfriend with their pants on can lead to pregnancy, there's a problem. A big one.

And that's a true story.

Educate yourselves. Not because it's taboo or society doesn't want you to, but because you should. This stuff is about as basic as simple addition when you get older and being ignorant of it isn't doing yourself a favour. There are a million resources out there for sex ed outside of school and your parents. If you can't talk to them about it, find someone you can trust who can. I'm not talking about your friends, because sometimes they're the ones that can lead you astray (there's an article that talks about seven year olds who think spitting in someone else's mouth can cause pregnancy, so, you know). I'll add the obligatory cautionary tale about researching sex on the web because even in my research for this article, I came across some, well, interesting things.

Sex is something you need to know about and not just because it's pretty much everywhere. Learn everything from anatomy to what actually qualifies as consent. Especially consent, to be yet another adult harping on why this is such a super big deal. Know what you have the right to do or say and more importantly, what you deserve when it comes to sex. Hint: Cosmo probably isn't going to be much help here.

Be safe. Be respectful. Be sure.





Who We Are



Emily Savage

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Emily is a university graduate still looking for her place in the universe. She is also apparently a fan of dating cliches and romantic turns of phrase. She's been writing for more years than she'd like to count. You can follow her on Twitter (@esavage3) where she mostly posts about her love affair with books.

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Lisa Browning

Publisher

Lisa is the publisher of One Thousand Trees, a monthly online magazine devoted to facilitating wellness through connection, creativity and community service. She also offers writing, editing, and publishing/pre-press services, and has recently launched a children's book division called Saplings. She is inspired to make a difference in this world, and to help others realize their passion and their gifts. For more information visit www.onethousandtrees.com.





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Next Issue

New Year, New You

It's that time of year again: New Years' resolutions abound! We'd love to hear some of your stories about how you renew yourself.

Submit your stories to the e-mail in our submission guidelines (below)!

What Would You Do?

Is there something in your life that's been nagging you for a while but you're not quite sure who to talk to?

In each issue we'll be submitting your questions to our mother/daughter team to answer.

Submit your questions to:
butterflies@onethousandtrees.com or
@obwofficial



Submission Guidelines

Are you Artistic?

Do you have an interest in writing?

Do you want to make the most of your life?

"On Butterfly Wings" is a newsletter for girls. We are always looking for artistic submissions from our readers expressing the issues that girls go through. Our vision is to empower girls to become strong and confident, and to create a safe place where they feel free to express themselves.

Submit your art, your poetry, your writing by emailing your work to butterflies@onethousandtrees.com

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