

7 Reasons So Many Guys Don't Understand Sexual Consent

 cracked.com/blog/how-men-are-trained-to-think-sexual-assault-no-big-deal/

- By  [David Wong](#) ·
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- ·
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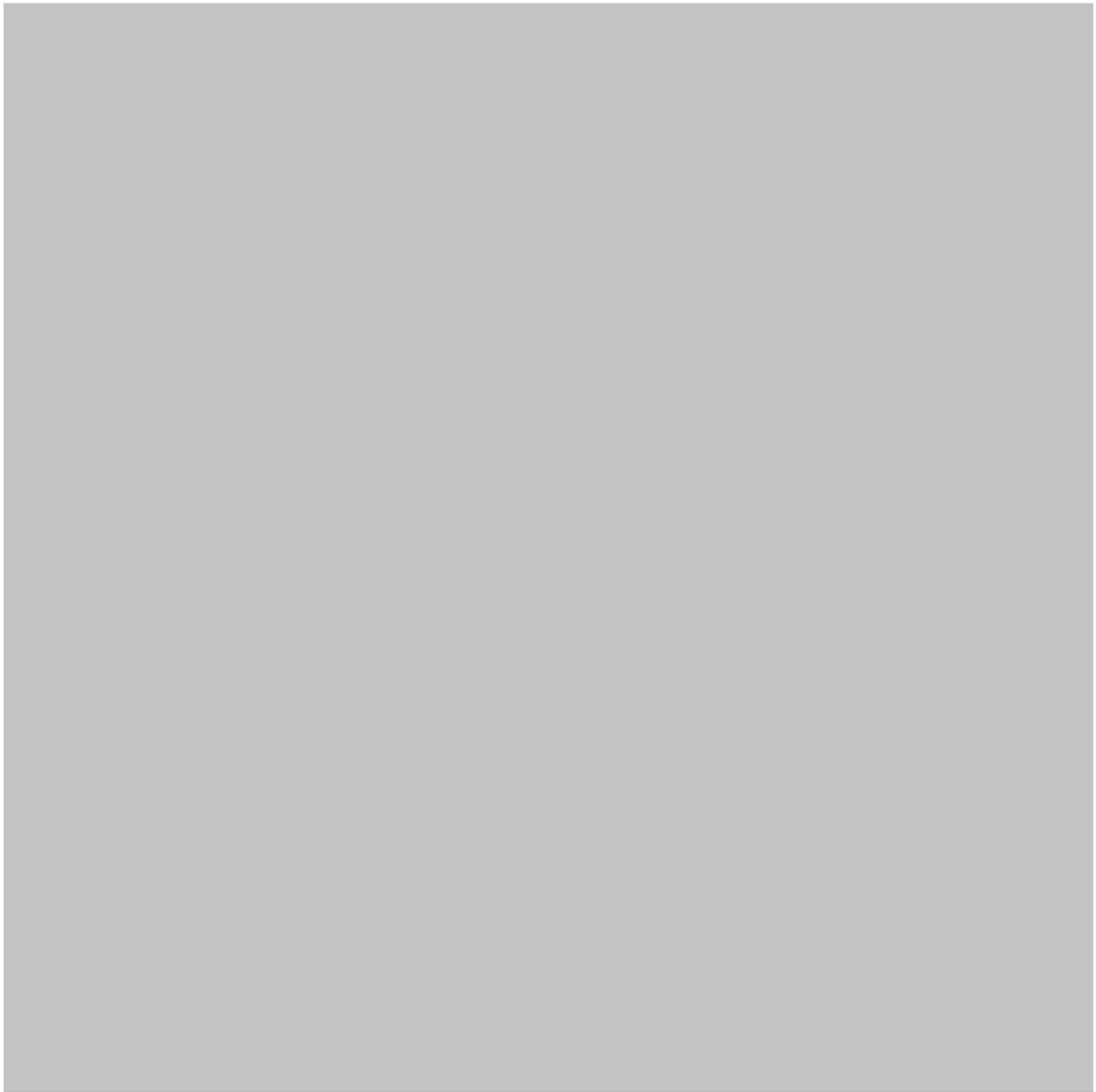
The following sentence applies regardless of when you read this: A famous man has recently been accused of doing sexual things to a woman (or many women) without consent. At the time of this writing, it was a politician's "groping" scandal but next time it'll be unwanted dick pics a powerful man sent to an intern, or the spreading of hacked photos of some actress, or a famous athlete getting sued by a woman whose accusations didn't get anywhere with the police. And, in fact, I bet there isn't a single female reading this who *hasn't* been the victim of that sort of thing.

Well, here's something you should know: I was taught from birth that this behavior is exactly what women want.

We're still teaching boys that, every day. Here's what the lesson plan looks like:

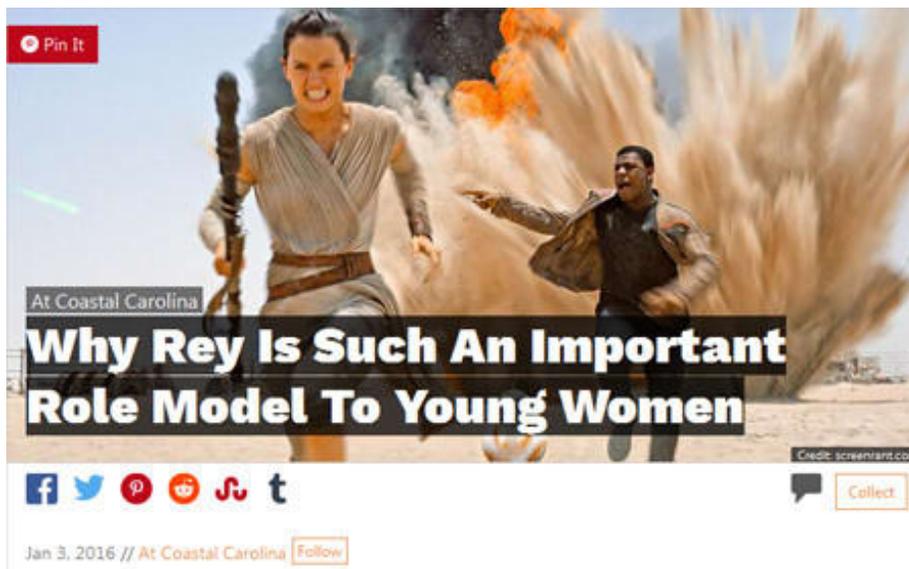
7

"Forcing Yourself On Women Makes Them Love You"



TriStar Pictures

Remember how everyone said it was great that they cast a female star in *The Force Awakens*, because it's good for little girls to have role models?



Odyssey

So we all agree that pop culture heroes *do* influence young people, right? That's why diversity in casting is so important, all that?

All right, so here's the first lesson I got on sexual consent. I was six years old. My hero and lifelong role model, Han Solo, approaches a woman who has told him at every opportunity that she's not interested. Han comes up from behind and presses his body against hers. She's a strong woman, a fighter, so she physically shoves him off ...

Lucasfilm

Undeterred, Han moves back in, grabs her hands, and starts rubbing them. She says, "Stop that," and looks nervous. When he doesn't stop, she clearly says it again. He still doesn't stop. Romantic music plays ...

Lucasfilm

This exchange follows:

Han: What are you afraid of?

Leia: Afraid?

Han: You're trembling.

Leia: I'm not trembling.

Han: You like me because I'm a scoundrel. There aren't enough scoundrels in your life.

Leia: I happen to like nice men.

Han: I'm a nice man.

Leia: No you're not. You're ...

And he kisses her. Note: Her head is pressed up against a metal wall ...



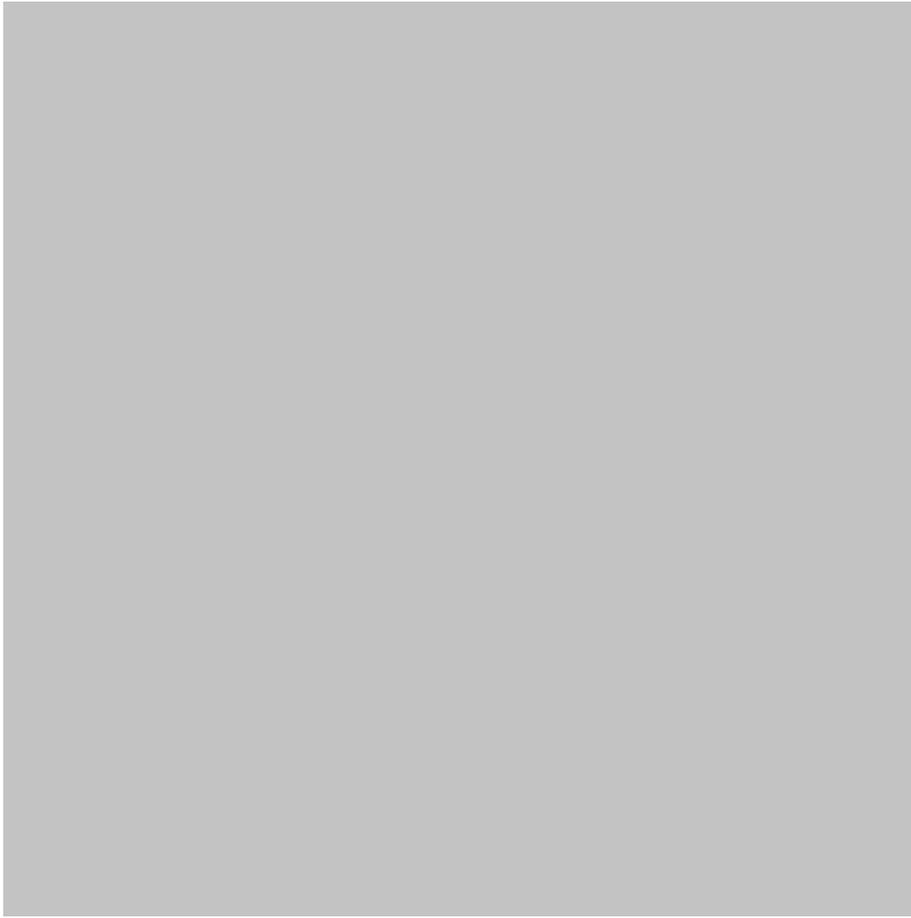
Lucasfilm

... and all of this occurs in a sealed spacecraft floating in the cold vacuum of outer space. Even if she wanted to leave, she couldn't (because of the implications). The result of this encounter is that she falls in love with this man and they spend the rest of their lives together.

Hi, I'm David Wong, and I've been conducting a 40-year experiment on men's toxic attitudes toward women, mainly by living my life with lots of them swishing around inside my skull.

Now, because I am so unspeakably old, the film I'm referencing above is from the ancient days of 1980. Society has advanced a great deal since then. Hey, did I mention that when I found that clip on YouTube, the ad below it was for the "Sexy Princess Leia Slave Costume"?





Google

Sexy.

Slave.

I mean, everybody gets this, right? The fantasy isn't that she's showing skin; the fantasy is that *she didn't choose to wear that*. She's a princess, she's regal, she's a noble warrior ... and now we're going to masturbate to her wearing a humiliating, skimpy costume that she was forced to put on, presumably under the threat of death by rancor.

But back to the groping thing. I'd estimate that 95 percent of the action movie cool guy role models of my youth molested women into loving them at least once. James Bond did it in ... every movie, I think? In *Goldfinger* (1964), he [rapes Pussy Galore](#) in a barn, which causes her to abandon her life of crime and join his side. In *The Mask Of Zorro* (1998), [a woman tries to kill Antonio Banderas, and in response, he strips her naked with his blade and forces a kiss](#). As a result, they fall in love.

Actually, rather than recount the thousands and thousands of examples of the "Assault Them Until They Love You" seduction method, I'm going to prove how prevalent this is by rattling off a list of examples *using only Harrison Ford's filmography*:

In *Blade Runner* (1982), he [slams a woman \(or female replicant\) against a wall](#) after she tries to leave, and then forces her to say "Kiss me." She acts terrified, right up until they start having sex.

In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), [Ford snatches a fleeing woman with his whip and yanks her back to him](#). They fall in love.

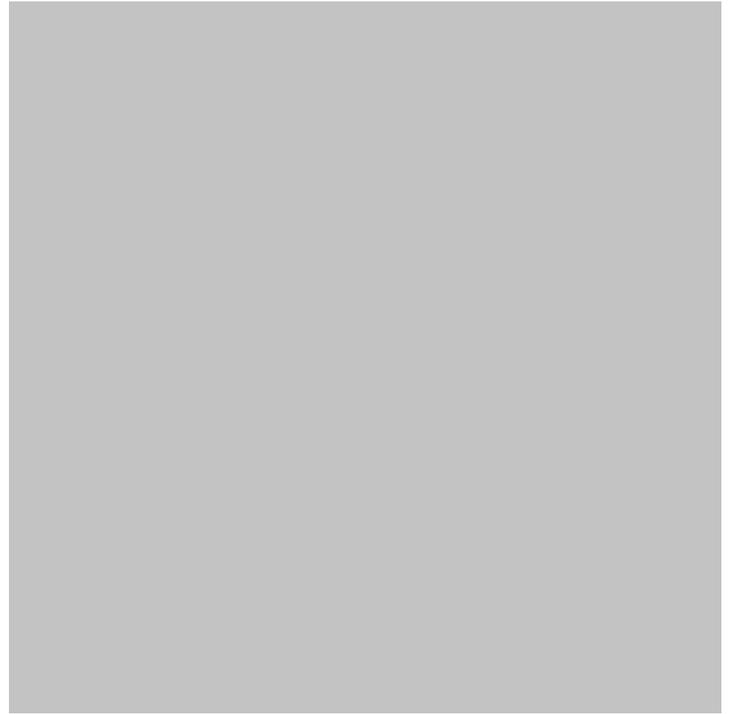
Lucasfilm How many previous fleeing women has Indy practiced this on to not leave her torso a bleeding mess?

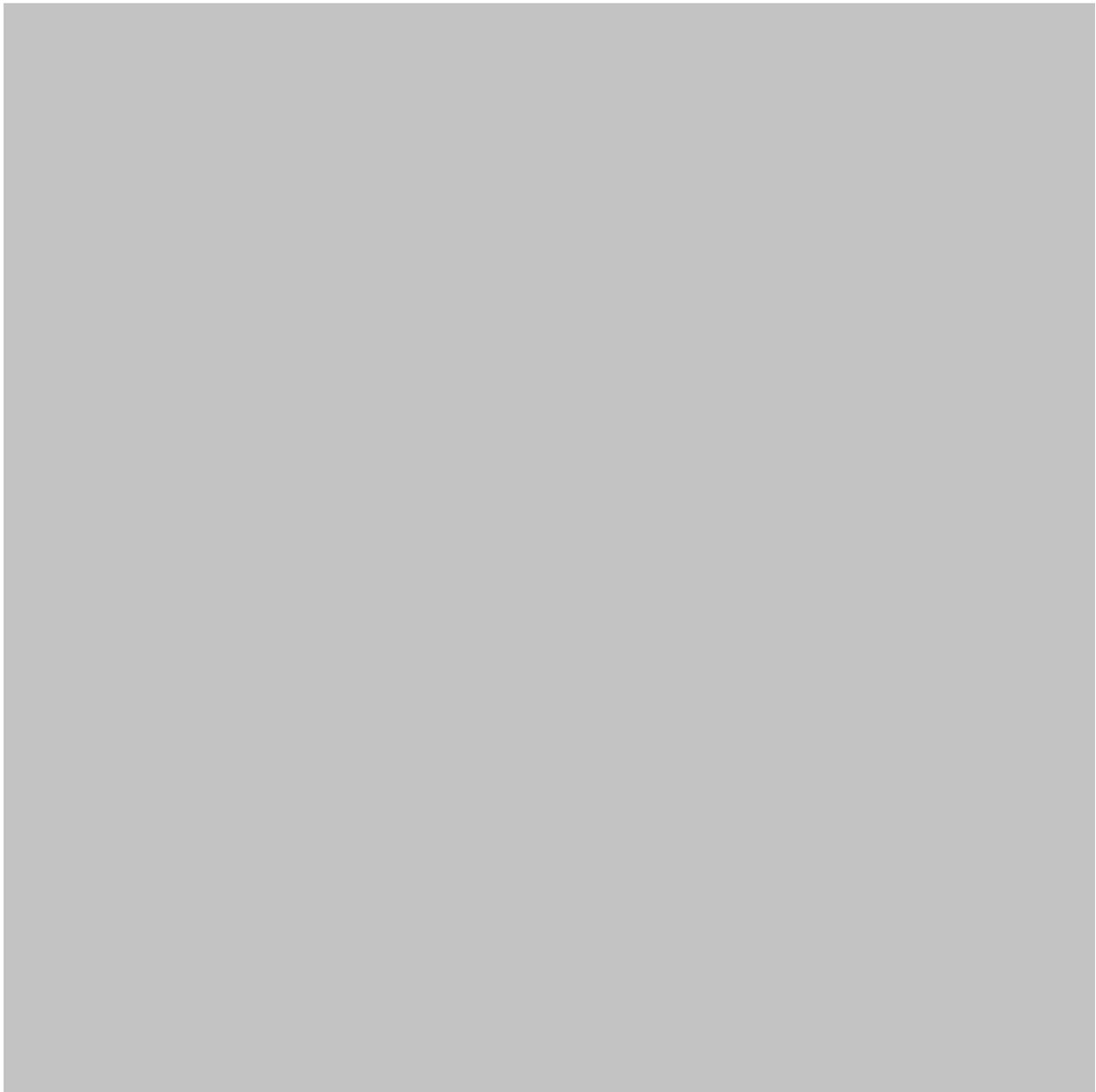
In *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* (1989), he forces a kiss, the woman pulls away and says, "How dare you kiss me?" [and then kisses him back, passionately.](#)

Long before I was old enough to date or even had female friends, it was made more than clear: In any relationship, men are the predators, women are the prey. Their expressions of fear and rejection -- *including defensive physical attacks* -- are a coy game to be overcome, like a tricky clasp on a bra.

6

"Asking Permission Is A Sign Of Weakness"





20th Television

If you're wondering, no, I've never in my life groped a woman who didn't grope me first. This is not because I was a gentleman who cared about consent. If you'd cornered me in high school and asked me why I hadn't just grabbed a girl at a party and made her kiss me, I'd have said it was because I wasn't cool enough, or hot enough. "I'd have to lose weight and make the football team to do something like that!" See, I was told that the ones who held back until they had permission were the pussies, the cowards, the nerds.

That was told to me both by people in my life and by lots of the movies and shows I saw back then. Here's a screencap from one sitcom from back in the day of *a girl* saying, "There's nothing less sexy than a dude asking if he can kiss you."



20th Television

And when I said that show aired "back in the day" I of course meant [fucking 2012](#). That's from an episode of *New Girl*. For every "No Means No" PSA I've come across, I'd say I've encountered, oh, about 10,000 messages saying/implying that nothing is sexier than a guy who doesn't wait for consent.

Sure, I get what the female actress voicing the words of [some male writers](#) was trying to say there: that girls like guys who are attentive enough to know what she wants before she says it. He shouldn't need to be told why she's mad at him, or what she'd like for her anniversary, or whether or not she's ready for the next step. Emotional intelligence is sexy, and there's nothing sexier than a guy who cares enough to pay attention to the subtle cues.

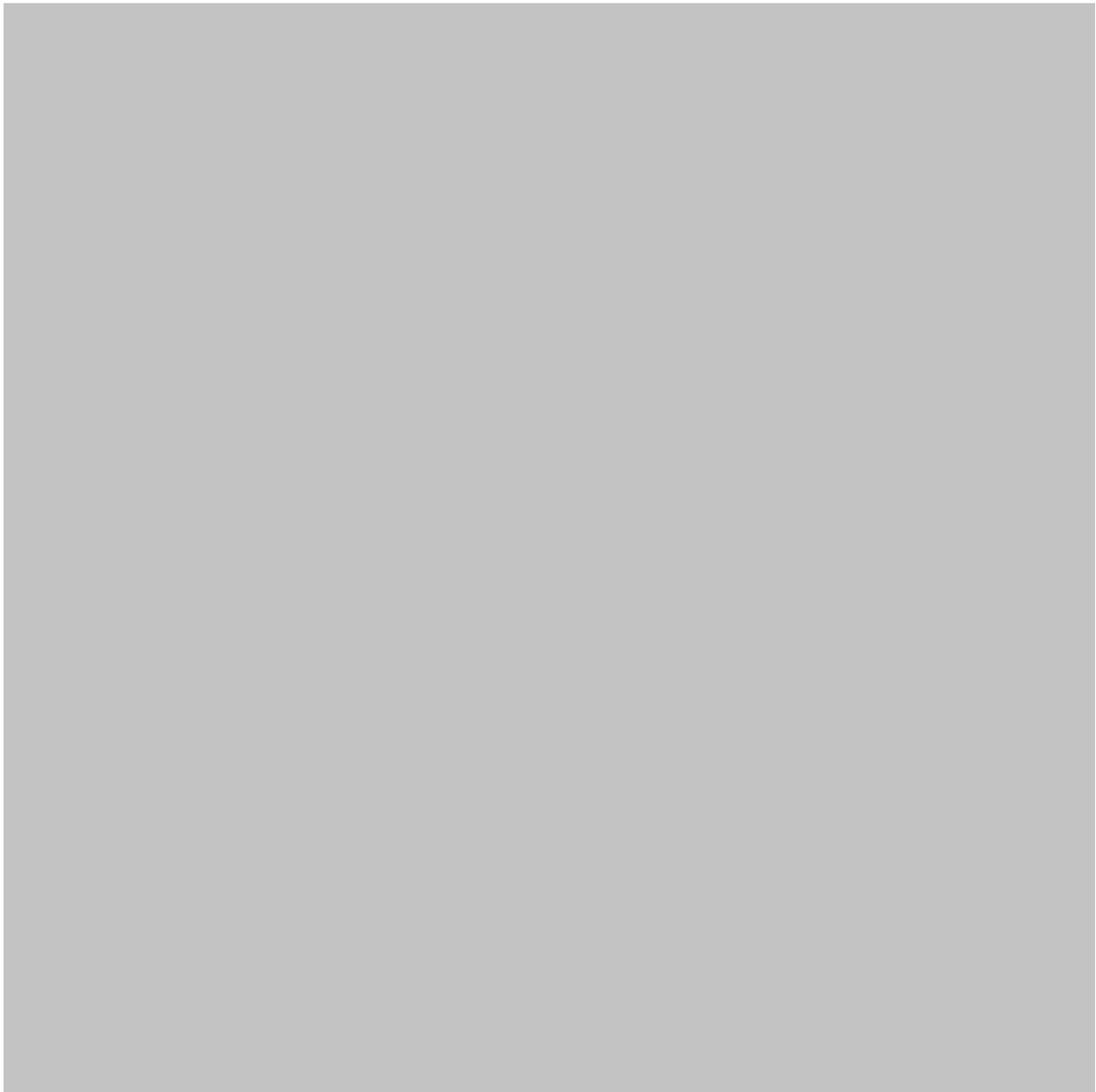
You know, the way Han Solo knew that Leia secretly wanted him to back her into a corner and force himself on her. The way he was able to detect that all of her many prior rejections and coldness was all a test to find out if he could see past the facade.

Right?

↓ **Continue Reading Below**

5

"Women Like To Be Pursued, And Thus Always Play 'Hard To Get'"



JackF/iStock

If you went back and found me at the age when I realized I knew absolutely everything -- 20 -- and asked me to explain gender roles, here's what I'd have told you:

In this modern world, the quality of a woman's life is overwhelmingly dependent on what kind of man she can attract -- a woman married to a capable man is simply going to have a higher standard of living, period. Her self-worth is thus based largely on how desirable she is to men, and on how many men are pursuing her at any given moment. The need for more suitors is due to the law of supply and demand. It is to her advantage to create competition by tempting as many men as possible, then making it difficult for any single one to gain her attention.

Thus, women gain power through rejecting men, and those rejections have nothing to do with how they truly feel.

bernardbodo/iStock "Hmm, you're right. My disinterest in you emotionally, physically, and mentally has been an excuse. Make sex to me. Make sex to me right now!"

This, I'd have said, is also the reason most "slut shaming" comes from other women. If a female hops in bed with any guy who comes along, it lowers the value of female attention/sex for all women. The price of gasoline would drop pretty fast if one supplier started giving it away. So, much like OPEC, women culturally collude to keep the value of sex and female companionship high by making it artificially difficult to acquire it. This is why Princess Leia's wealthy, royal peers would disapprove of her spreading her legs for a "scoundrel."

Conversely, Han Solo is a hero precisely because he sees through this artifice, and knows exactly how to confidently stride past those barriers. The primary attractive traits in males are physical strength and aggressiveness, and he knows that Leia's feigned resistance is a test of those attributes. You can see the full sequence in each of the clips I linked earlier: The female fights, the male demonstrates his physical superiority, and the female acknowledges his suitability as a mate and willingly gives in. "You have proven you are strong enough to have me."

And dammit, this is how it really worked back in the good old days, when men were men and women were women! Like in that famous photo from V-E day, in which the heroic fighting man celebrates the end of the war by kissing the first beautiful broad he sees!

Alfred Eisenstaedt/Life Magazine U-S-A! U-S-A!

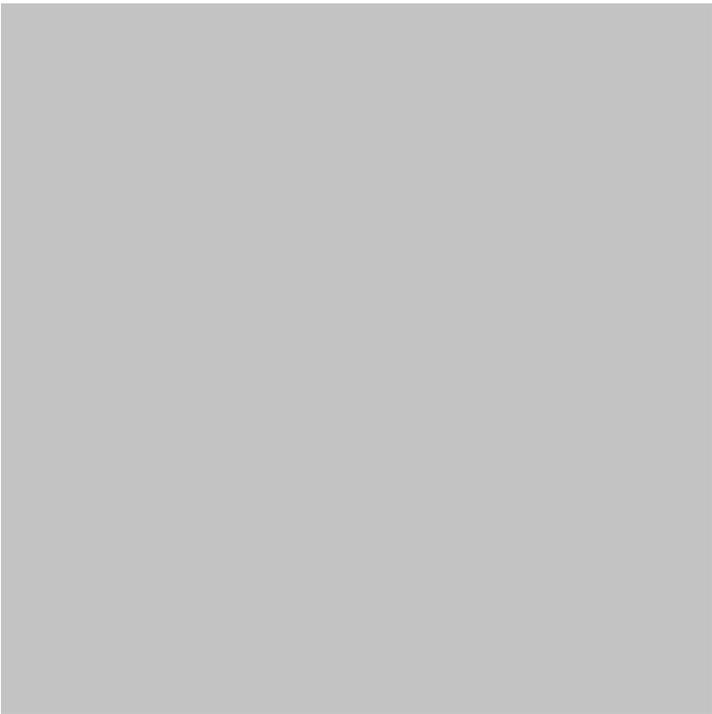
Wait, you knew they were strangers, right? Now look at this photo taken a split second before. See how she playfully pretends she's not into it? Wow, what a good actress!

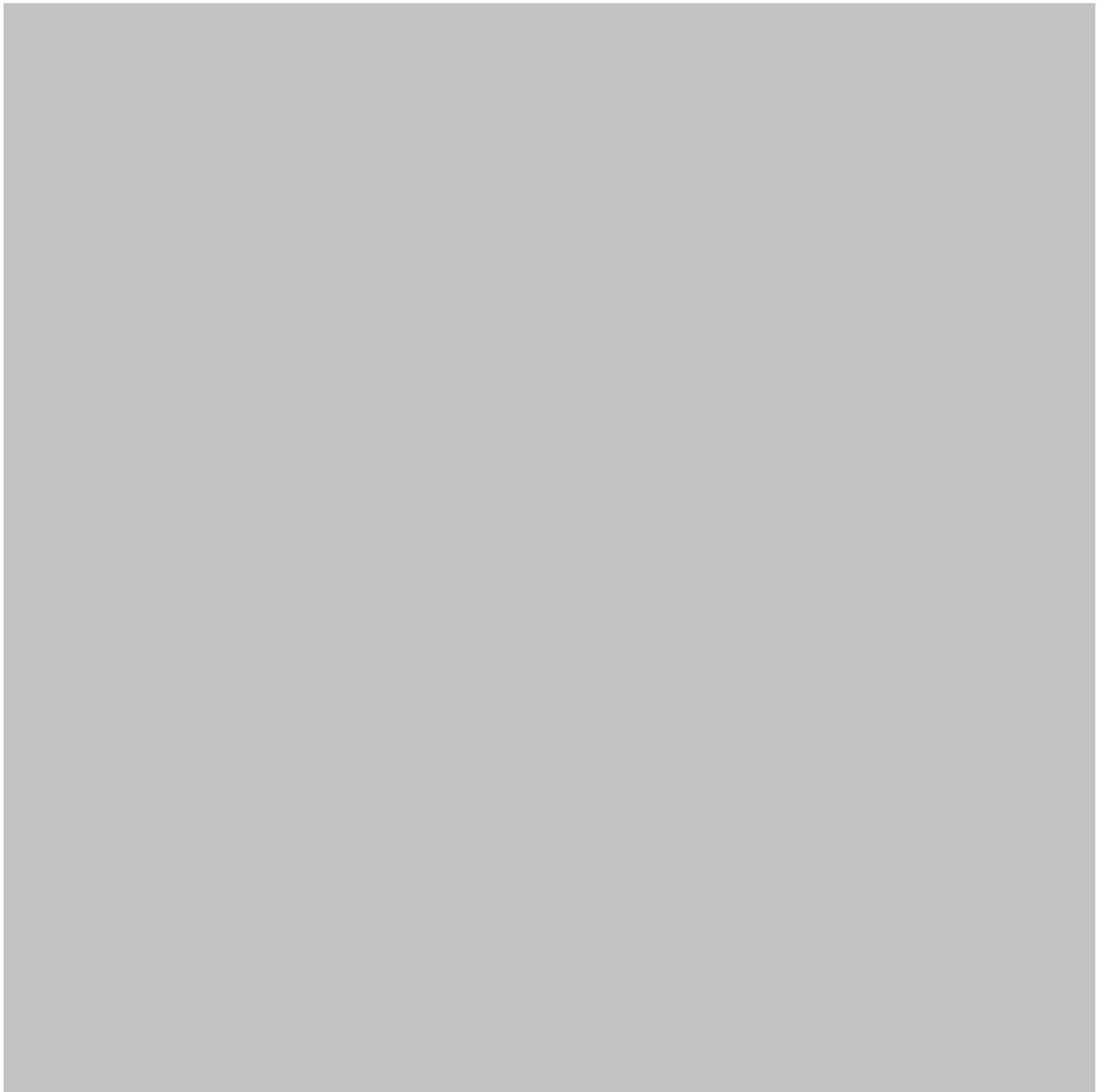
Alfred Eisenstaedt/Life Magazine

Ha, her little clenched fist is adorable! And look at all the approving smiles of the crowd behind them -- men and women alike, agreeing this is wholesome fun.

4

"Everything Women Do Is Intended To Stoke Male Hunger"





FremantleMedia

Here's the first porn magazine I ever owned:

Sports Illustrated It was that exact issue. That's Kathy Ireland. Jesus, those eyes.

There was no internet in the 1980s, and actual porn was risky to own if you were a kid in the Midwest. That was the genius of the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue: It gave Middle America something to masturbate to under the cover of reading about sports. Everybody knew what was going on, obviously. In many of the photos, at least part of the swimsuit was missing, the woman cupping her naked breasts with her hands, pouting coyly at the camera. Maybe a thumb hooked around her bikini bottom, like she's about to pull it off.

Likewise, when women in bikinis turned up in movies, they existed purely as titillating jerk-off material for the teenage boys in the audience. Literally *every single image* of a woman in a bikini I saw outside of a swimwear catalog was presented in this way, as something for us to drool over.

Something we couldn't have.

Stoking our appetites, advertising a product.

And by now, you know what the product is, right?

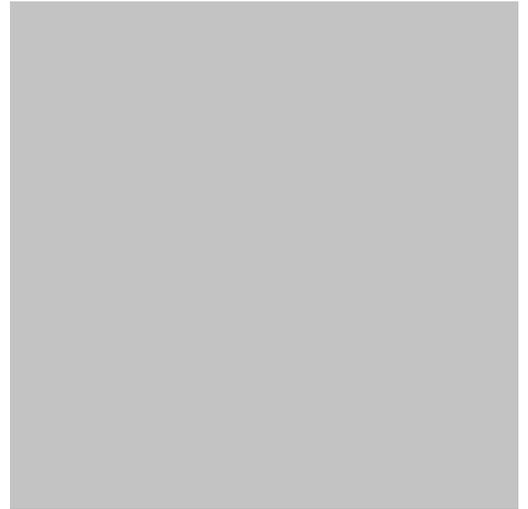
Universal Studios You can keep watching this GIF loop, it's not going to happen.

So after having lived my entire life with the clear understanding that this is an outfit women wear to make men want to ejaculate, what thoughts do you think went through my dumb young mind when I went to the beach and saw real women wearing the same? Do you think I was able to see them as humans instead of coy manipulators?

The completely rational reaction from any of those women at the beach would be, "I'm not wearing it for *you*, perv, I'm wearing it because I'm swimming, and this is swimwear! What do you want me to wear, a burka?"

There is no good answer. Everyone should be able to wear what they want, but acting confused by the ravenous thoughts that pound through the brains of nearby males is to ignore the cultural context they grew up in. She says her outfit makes one statement, while virtually 100 percent of posters, magazines, movies, TV shows, songs, music videos, billboards, video games, poems, novels, etc say it makes another.

Sure, the guys can control how they *act* at the sight of the outfit, but they cannot control how they *feel* -- it's been programmed in as an involuntary physical reaction, a hormonal trigger. Thanks to a lifetime of cultural training, a bikini is the bell that makes the dog salivate.





Playboy, Sports Illustrated If you couldn't see the name of the publication, which would you guess is porn?

Now tie this in to the pervasive belief that women are always simultaneously attracting us while pretending they don't want us. Wouldn't it stand to reason that the "I'm only wearing this as swimwear" line is nothing but one more bit of strategic playacting?

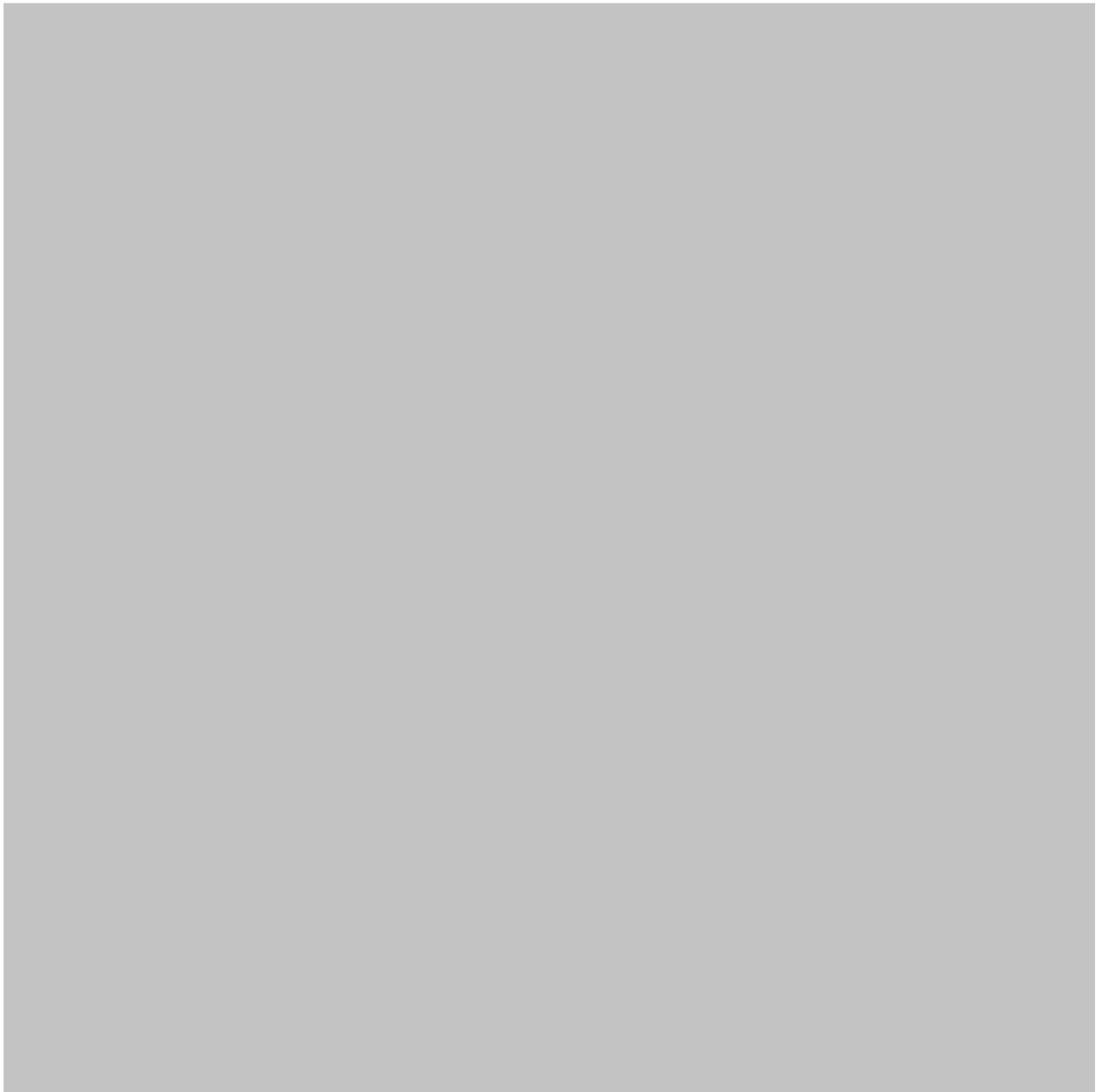
Now realize that it's not just bikinis that have been turned into a fetish. There's an entire porn subreddit that's nothing but [girls in yoga pants](#). Here's one that's [girls with glasses](#). Go do a google image search for the word "schoolgirl" -- you'll be looking at a bunch of fetish pics and, sprinkled throughout, photos of actual children.

This is why no statistic about the prevalence of sexual assault could ever surprise me. And note that I'm using the definition of the term that includes things like groping. But when I was growing up, I was told ...

↓ **Continue Reading Below**

3

"Sexual Assault = Guy In An Alley With A Knife"



innovatedcaptures/iStock

Let's be clear: During my formative years, I was absolutely taught that rape was wrong, many times. But "rape" was defined as a man with a ski mask in an alley forcing himself on a stranger under the threat of violence. "Date rape" was a term I'd heard, sure, but it was either when a guy drugged a woman or got rough with her -- situations wherein she's left with a bloody lip and torn clothes. If you'd asked me to define date rape at the time, I'd have said, "It's like what James Bond did to Pussy Galore, only if the guy wasn't handsome."

If someone had come in and told teenage me that "groping" a woman or forcing kisses was a form of sexual assault, I'd have been very, very confused. You just called most of the action heroes of my childhood serial rapists! "And what if it makes her fall in love with him?"

Eon Productions In real life, he gets put [on her majesty's sex offender list](#).

I never, in any of my public school years, had a lesson saying you needed to wait for verbal consent before touching a woman. I saw the quarterback of the football team slap girls on the butt, I saw guys reach around and grab girls' boobs as a prank, I saw mistletoe hung over doorways and was told if you and a girl stood under it, she *had* to kiss you. One time when we were playing volleyball at the beach, Dr. Dre ran up and unhooked a girl's bikini top.

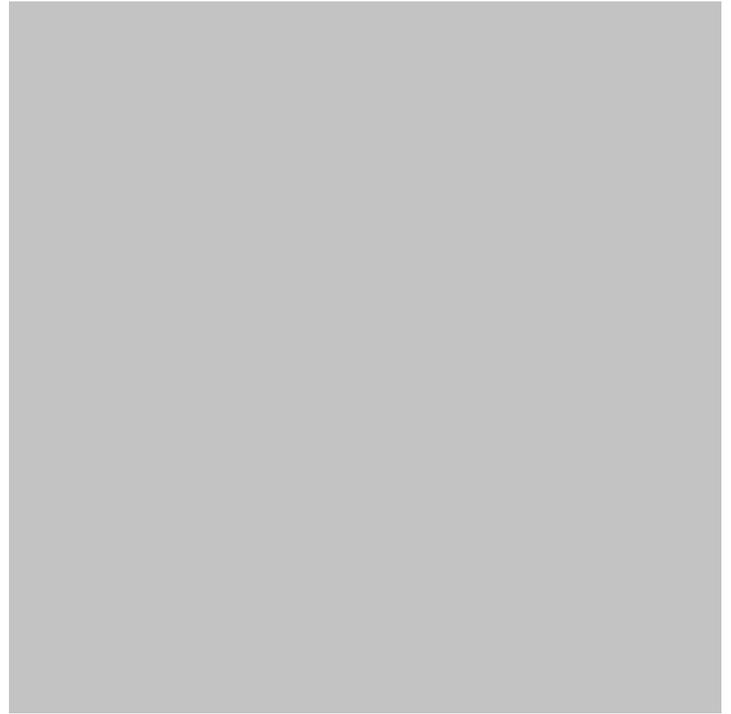
Again, *I* never did any of those things. Not because I thought they were wrong, but because I was too nervous.

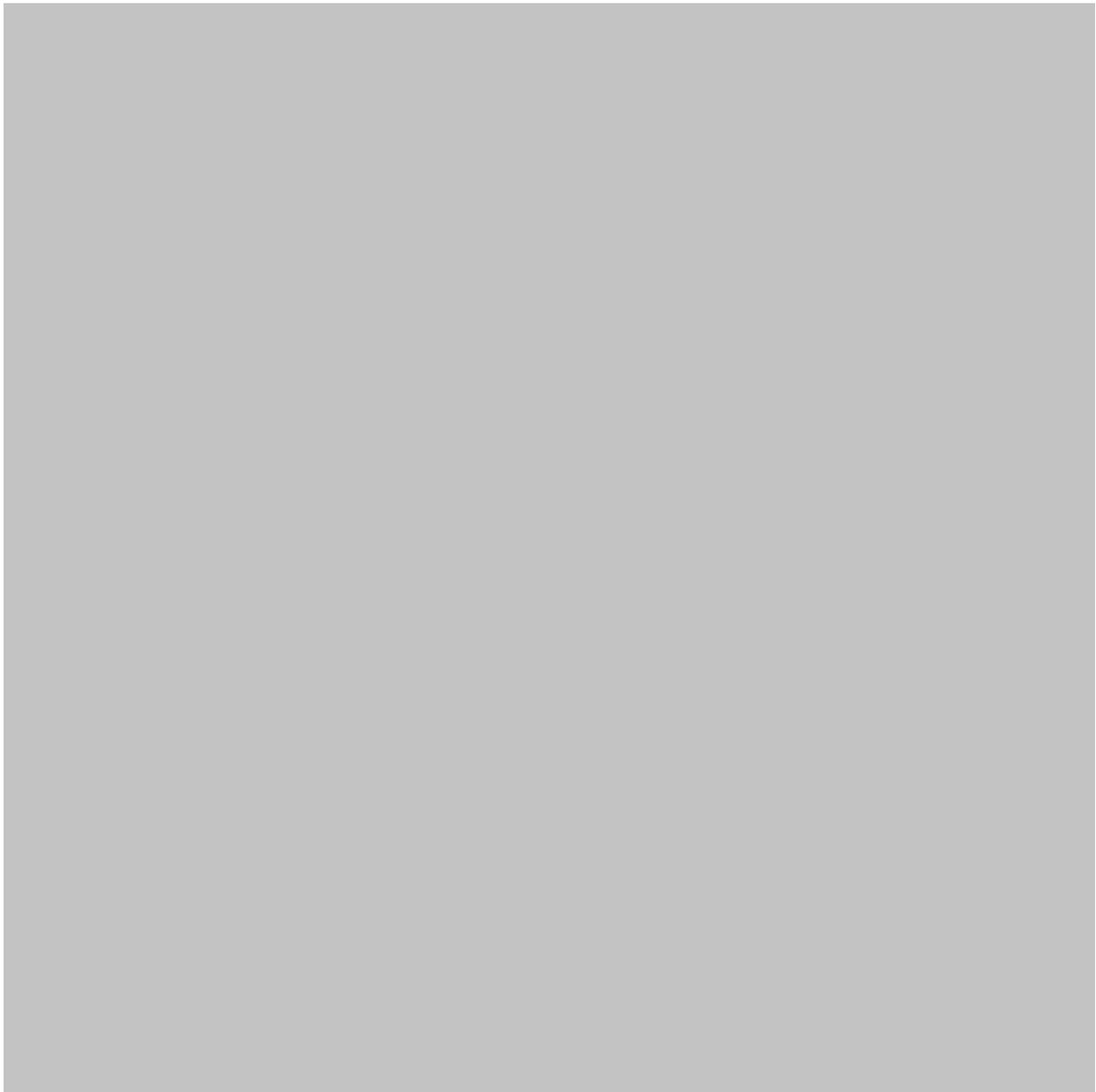
And I fucking hated myself for it.

Have I mentioned that yet? How much shame I felt at the time for not being a "real man"?

2

"All Sex Outside Of (Heterosexual) Marriage Is Wrong"





KatarzynaBialasiewicz/iStock

Wait, what does this one have to do with groping or consent? Glad you asked, because I think everyone misses this.

Talk radio shithead Rush Limbaugh [made headlines after the infamous Donald Trump groping accusations](#) by saying this:

"You know what the magic word, the only thing that matters in American sexual mores today is? One thing. You can do anything, the left will promote and understand and tolerate anything, as long as there is one element. Do you know what it is? Consent. If there is consent on both or all three or all four, however many are involved in the sex act, it's perfectly fine. Whatever it is. But if the left ever senses and smells that there's no consent in part of the equation, then here come the rape police."

IPGGutenbergUKLtd/iStock Also known as "the police".

I'm curious to know how many of you kind of agree with him, versus how many of you got a chill down your spine. I switched from the former to the latter exactly half way through my life. To a large part of the nation's Christian population, what he's saying still makes perfect sense.

See, it wasn't up to Hollywood or public schools to teach me morality. For me -- and virtually everyone I knew -- that came on Sundays at church. And I never got one sermon or Sunday School lesson on sexual consent.

"What, so they taught the congregation to be rapists?"

No! They taught that *all* sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage was equally wrong. So yes, rape was punishable by eternal hellfire. But you know what the punishment was for having consensual intercourse before marriage? Also eternal hellfire. Premarital handjob in the back of a car? Eternal hellfire. Oral sex at any time? Eternal hellfire. Homosexual sex? Eternal hellfire. Masturbation? Eternal hellfire. There was no gradient to the sins or punishments -- everything was black and white, and virtually everything in the black category *was totally consensual*. Two people "consenting" to perform a sinful sexual act was no different from two people conspiring to rob a bank.

Yuk Ching Lee/iStock It doesn't matter which act you wore the mask for, you're still going to hell.

Either the act was pure in the eyes of God or it wasn't, and the only pure sex act was married intercourse (and note that many of the married women in the Bible had been [bought like livestock](#)). Thus, there was no reason to talk about anything else. If they taught a lesson about how forcing a woman to kiss you is wrong, that'd have been implying that consensual kissing was okay (and premarital kissing = eternal hellfire).

This is why so many of you are confused by the Christian criticism of gay marriage, the ["They'll be marrying children and animals next"](#) bit. They genuinely don't understand the difference -- that a homosexual partner can consent, but animals and children cannot -- because to them, all of those acts are equally impure. Remember when people implied it was hypocritical for Jennifer Lawrence [to complain about stolen nude photos while also posing nude for a magazine](#)? Same deal -- if you grew up hearing that all naked photos are sinful, what difference does it make if the woman consented to the sin?

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"Boys Will Be Boys"



Sarah Rice/Getty Images

Explaining someone's actions is obviously not the same as excusing them. Saying that the behavior is shockingly common doesn't excuse it either. The point of this isn't to defend [insert subject of most recent scandal here], but to prevent people from insisting that guys like him are rare, incomprehensible monsters.

They're not. Lots of guys grope. Lots of guys who don't will masturbate to rape porn. Lots of guys who don't do that, still happily masturbated to the stolen "Fappening" pics. Lots of guys who didn't do that still see James Bond movies as wish fulfillment. Lots of guys who don't, still didn't see any problem with that Han Solo scene until I pointed it out.

Lucasfilm These waters run deep.

The writers of all these movies and ad campaigns would say they didn't invent a damned thing, that males have testosterone and will have certain urges at a certain age, even if they are raised on a desert island. And because the urges are natural, anything that appeals to those urges must also be -- boys, after all, will be boys. Those boys will then grow up and write movies and ads which portray their sexually frustrated adolescent fantasies as if they are everyday reality.



But what's the alternative? Censorship? To force women to cover themselves, like in Saudi Arabia?

No, the alternative is to recognize that ridding guys of toxic attitudes toward women is a monumental task. I've spent two solid decades trying to deprogram myself, to get on board with something that, in retrospect, should be patently obvious to any decent person. Changing actions is the easy part; changing urges takes years and years. It's the difference between going on a diet and training your body to not get hungry at all.

In the meantime, to act like it's crazy that a particular guy doesn't see the clear line between consent and assault is misguided. The culture has intentionally blurred those lines and trained that man to feel shame for erring on either side. You have to start teaching kids that consent matters from Day One. Now let's put this depressing subject aside and enjoy this scene from *Ratatouille*. In it, the hero forces a kiss with a girl, she pulls out pepper spray to fight him off, then realizes that she loves it:

Pixar

We have a long, long way to go.

David Wong is executive editor of Cracked.com, his most recent novel is now in development as a TV series, and you can get the paperback [here](#). Thanks to everyone in [this thread](#) for suggesting all of our many disturbing examples of this phenomenon from film and television.

You know all those facts you've learned about psychology from movies and that one guy at the party who says, "Actually ..." a lot? Please forget them. Chances are none of them are true. Take the Stanford Prison Experiment, the one famous psychology study people can name. It was complete bullshit. Funny story actually, it turns out that when you post flyers that say, "Hey, do you wanna be a prison guard for the weekend? Free food and nightsticks," you might not get the most stable group of young men. So join Jack O'Brien, Cracked staff members Dan O'Brien and Michael Swaim, and Psychology Professor Martie G. Haselton of UCLA as they debunk Rorschach tests, the Mozart effect and middle child syndrome, so soon you can be that person at the party who says, "Actually ..." Get your tickets [here!](#)

For more from David Wong, check out [5 Ways Modern Men Are Trained To Hate Women](#) and [5 Subtle Ways](#)

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