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Social boundaries and self defense - 3 things to teach your kids

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Social boundaries are very important to our everyday lives. They're what stops somebody farting in front of his co-workers. They're what keeps Bad Guys from stealing your handbag. Oh, wait, I got that wrong. That's right – I got it now. Social boundaries do not exist. They are constructs.

Imaginary things that most people enforce on themselves. Bob over in the next cubicle holds in his fart. Why? Because social etiquette says he must? No. Because in his own head he's worried that it might affect him negatively. He's worried that someone may think less of him. So it's actually his own thoughts that keep him in line. We say that Bob *decides* to hold his fart.

Take a quick detour and watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waBkxg6QcHE>

Let's begin by ignoring the fact that she threw away any attempt at preclusion (i.e. getting the fuck out of there if at all possible – actually this could be a definition of *not* avoiding the situation. She was on a running motorbike for crying out loud and *she* pursued *them*. If this had gone physical she probably would've claimed self defense. See she was defending herself by tracking them down on her bike when they had gone away)

Let's skip to the part where she “figured they wouldn't hit a woman”. Let's just restate that: *she* figured they wouldn't hit her. *They* never figured any such thing. Maybe she forgot to tell them that they wouldn't hit her. Why didn't she get hit? The situation was resolved before anybody could get worked up enough to hit her. Or rape her.

That guy you pissed off in the bar didn't hit you. This is because of his self-control. Nothing else. Not social boundaries.

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SOCIAL BOUNDARIES DO NOT EXIST. They are in the mind of the other person. The only boundaries that exist are the ones you can physically enforce.

A Bad Guy chooses whether or not to hit you. There is nothing physically stopping him from attacking you. The only thing preventing the attack is if *he* chooses to leave you alone. Bob in the next cubicle didn't fart. He didn't have his sphincter physically squeezed shut by a proctologist named Dr Social Boundary. HE chose to hold it in. He could've farted, but his brain ran a risk vs reward analysis and came up with "Not worth the risk Bob, that cute girl will smell it and run away screaming." Likewise the Bad Guy who doesn't hit you also ran a similar analysis and decided that you'd be a screamer and draw attention, or that you'd be costly to fight.

This applies to women in date rape situations. A typical thought process when a rape situation is developing is to ignore/deny what's happening. Of the many possible reasons for doing this, one is because of complete faith in people respecting social boundaries (or at least defaulting to that belief). Let's face it, we've got a lifetime of everybody around us "obeying" social rules and conventions. There's nothing wrong with relying on social conventions to make people keep themselves in line, provided three things:

- 1 – you are aware that it's the person, not the convention, that keeps that person in check;
- 2 – you can tell when someone's ignoring social rules (i.e. you don't self-deceive/delude/gloss over/bullshit yourself);
- 3 – you can decisively end the situation using a suitable response when someone does go beyond what you consider acceptable behaviour (anywhere from ignoring it to walking away on one side of the spectrum to killing him where he stands on the other end of the spectrum).

Could you imagine if every girl had these three things instilled in her from childhood? What would that do to acquaintance rape? Not just date rape but any acquaintance rape (colleagues, relatives, friends).

My main issue with social boundaries is that, because they work so well so much of the time, we

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take them for granted. *We don't see what's really at work - the other guy's own inhibitions.* So because we don't consciously see or recognise how social boundaries really work we don't understand what's really at work. It's like eating KFC. We didn't see the chicken getting slaughtered to make our meal, so we don't think about it. We take it for granted that things just work. And again, that's fine most of the time. The problem comes in when things go differently to what we're used to. Because we've never seen how things really work, we have no idea how to fix them when they go wrong.

So what does a girl do when her colleague starts “pushing his luck”?

So what does a girl do when her colleague starts “pushing his luck” and pushing his hand off her leg doesn't stop him? She has no idea how these things actually work (i.e. he must want to not do them – for whatever reason), so she can't formulate an effective response. She drops hints. Maybe pushes him away ineffectually again (Hint: to a guy full of alcohol and self-entitlement, you struggling and trying to wriggle free can seem like you're writhing in the heat of passion). In other words, she tries to rely on those same “social boundaries” that's he *just demonstrated* he's willing to break.

But what if we change things up? What happens if she's aware that *he* has to *want* to not “push his luck”? Then she knows that she must convince him to stop (i.e. make him believe so *he* will stop himself). She can use social pressures (i.e. she'll tell everybody); she can escalate the stakes (she'll tell the cops); or she can physically stop him (not slapping. NEVER A SLAP. Crushing throats, breaking bones, biting off noses. All fine. But never a slap). Notice that none of these is done as a threat. It's not a threat that she'll tell everybody, it's a promise. Remember, people (especially guys) often react to threats by wanting to show you up (Monkey Dance).

And the absolute best way to convince a guy that he's crossed the line?

And the absolute best way to convince a guy that he's crossed the line? Leave. A guy will go through all kinds of mental gymnastics to convince himself that you're into him. But you leaving is very hard to put a spin on. A guy asks for your number and you tell him you've got a boyfriend, so he realises that this means you *do* like him, and if you didn't have a boyfriend that you'd give him the number (“I can't come to the party, I'm sick” means that you being sick is the only reason you can't come to the party, otherwise you'd be there. This is what we want the other person to believe when we're lying to them about being sick – so don't complain when some idiot uses the same logic to convince himself that you're actually into him. And women wonder how they end up with so

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many guys trying to be their “friends” while having ulterior motives. Ok, rant over). Remember, a woman looks in the mirror and wonders if she sexy. A guy looks in the mirror and knows he is. The short of this long is that if you leave (a decisive action to end it) he can't delude himself about what you're doing, and if he continues (e.g. tries to stop you), it's harder for him to delude himself about what's he's actually building up to do, and a whole lot easier for you to identify what he's got planned for you.

The social script test

But then how do you know if he's violating social boundaries, or is merely innocent? Fairly simple, give him a social script test. Drop a hint; move away from next to him; push his hand off; leave. If he responds correctly (i.e. let's it happen, realises that it's a brush off) then great, he's acting like a rational, thinking, human being. Consider putting a tick in the trust column (only one tick, and only tentatively. Trust is a process and an ongoing living organism). If he doesn't get the hint. If he responds incorrectly (grabs your arm; moves next to you again) then he just failed to respond to your social script with another social script. He has identified himself as someone you cannot trust to behave acceptably (i.e. not rape you). Is this harsh? Yes. But shame, what if he just doesn't get hints? Well then you don't want to take the chance that he'll suddenly start getting your hints when you screaming at him to stop pulling your pants off.

Let's look at it from another angle. Relationships are ongoing processes. They're not cast in stone, forever one way. They evolve. So knowing this, part of relationships (and arguments, dating and a whole lot else) is letting the other person know what you consider an acceptable way to be treated (hence why you get in a fight with your significant other when they use *that* tone of voice with you). Do you really want to let this person know that you consider it ok for him to treat you like that? Setting a precedent that it's ok to immediately put his hand back on your thigh after you brushed it off is not the way to begin a successful long term relationship (romantic or friend).

- So from a mutually satisfying two-way-street relationship point of view, DO NOT let him get away with bullshit behaviour.
- From a safety point of view, the guy who does not understand (or understands and chooses to ignore) social scripts needs to be demonstrated to that you WILL NOT accept shitty behaviour (again, leaving is a great way to do this).

Verbally telling someone that what they did is unacceptable is a social way of informing them. It's a message that, although he violated social conventions, you're still trying to deal with the situation in a social way. This is a clear signal to predators that if he attacks you, there's a very good chance that you'll try to stop him with more social tools (e.g. verbal communication; pleading; crying;

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promising not to tell anyone) and that you either won't, or can't, get past your life-long social programming to use asocial tools to end the situation (e.g. calling in higher levels of consequences – such as cops/his mom; or breaking his nose and running away screaming; or not saying a single word while you turn on your heels and walk straight out).

In other words, if you don't enforce your own boundaries, the only reason for him obey social boundaries is if he wants to. Let that sink in a moment. If you don't physically enforce your boundaries, you're leaving the decision of whether or not to rape you up to him.

This is fine almost all of the time (hence why we don't enforce boundaries all day long). People are generally great at keeping themselves in line. Nobody behaves because the government threatens to kill them if they don't. People behave because people tend to be good. And those threats don't work on Bad Guys anyway. But because we've had a life-time of not having to enforce boundaries, we need to consciously practice seeing them. Make a mental note every-time you obey a social boundary (hold in a burp, say “please”). And start noticing it in other people too. Make social boundaries something you're consciously aware of (as opposed to the fish who isn't aware of the water). Maybe this will help you to notice when somebody *doesn't* obey the social “rules”. Usually we just get this uncomfortable feeling. Well screw that, you want to be fully aware of what's happening.

So what do we want women to learn from a young age?

1. That social rules are only enforced by the other person, not you. Relying on social boundaries leaves all the power in the other person's hands. So you cannot count on them.
2. You are consciously aware when somebody violates a social “rule”. i.e. when somebody fails the social script test (e.g. doesn't get the hint)
3. That, because social boundaries are imaginary, YOU have to take responsibility to end any situation that makes you uncomfortable. The other person will not end it. Nobody else will end it for you. It is up to YOU to end what you don't like.
4. That people are generally pretty good, and that the above 3 points are the exception, rather than the rule, so you don't need to walk around in fear all day. FEAR – False Evidence Appearing Real.

So, say it with me: Walking out of a bad situation is a great idea. And if somebody reveals their true

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intentions by trying to stop you. Well, that's an articulable fact to add to the list of reasons why you did what you did to stop him