

## You Owe Something to Your Inner High School Girl

“Freshman year, a teacher told me and another student that women are solely motivated by looks whereas men are motivated by success and achievements. He shut down my friend's disagreement, saying that she would understand one day”. “I am always judged for the physical part of my relationship and my boyfriend is always applauded”. “I walked into an academic competition with two boys and they immediately high fived like they had won before it began because my team is two girls”. “Students constantly choose to go to the boys basketball games over the girls because ‘nobody else goes to the girls games’ or ‘the boys games are more entertaining than the girls games’ although it is the same sport”. “I’ll be made fun of and mocked for liking popular things, singled out for voicing my political opinions, told that I am pretending to like video games for attention. No matter what type of girl you are or what your interests are, you will *always* be criticized for it by your high school environment.”

About halfway through my sophomore year of high school I took it upon myself to conduct an experiment. I was always hearing comments like the ones you just read, but never hearing change. As girls we are judged, day in and day out, in an endless, deprecating cycle, criticized, told we are not enough, and presumed to be less than for no reason other than a lack of external reproductive systems. As many of us do, I felt trapped in an environment that has more of a hand in the way we approach the rest of our lives than we care to admit. High school is a brutal, never ending popularity contest and a self inflicted societal construct designed to weed out the weak links who crack under the all consuming pressure of social life, academic rigor, and athletic performance. Bottom line, it can make or break a person. I’ve learned that even after years of being out on our own, most people are still holding on to some aspect of their inner high

school self, which brings me to my experiment. I wanted real, raw, and personal anecdotes that shed light on what it actually means to be a girl in high school, so I conducted a survey. I asked girls between freshman and senior year at any high school in Connecticut to send me anonymous stories surrounding times when they've been treated as lesser in an educational environment. Just as I hypothesized, being a girl in high school means your woodshop teacher commenting "I'll make this demonstration simpler for the ladies trying to learn a man's skill". It means being forced to put on a used sweatshirt over a spaghetti strap tank top and being told "you can't wear that around the boys, sweetie, because they can't focus when you do". It means showing up every single day to a facility designed to commence the trajectory of our shining futures, yet every day we are told that our futures will not and cannot compare to the futures awaiting the boys of our classes.

My plan was always to direct this piece towards high school girls. I presumed they would benefit more from discussion surrounding this inequality, and perhaps the women who have since graduated are too far removed from the situation. Notwithstanding, I found my concerns lying with the victims of this system that can't be helped within the closed doors of high school. I'm writing to the women who believed they left that high school girl behind when they emerged from the doors of high school. I'm writing to the women who forgot that she couldn't be left behind and don't realize that she has never truly left. The fact of the matter is you owe something to your inner high school girl; the one you've held onto for all these years. Your subconscious mimics her insecurities, her habits, her doubts. Insecurities, habits, and doubts ingrained in her mind as a victim of the system have lingered over the years and manifested themselves into her everyday life, regardless of whether or not she has noticed it. In fact, you owe her a great deal. You owe it to her to acknowledge the ways that the system failed her, the ways that dress codes,

relationship judgements, and discrepancies in the way that different genders are perceived and treated academically took away from her chance at an untainted education. You owe it to her to let yourself *be*, always recognizing and remembering that she didn't deserve it any more than you deserve it now. And perhaps most importantly, not only do you owe it to her, but you owe it to yourself to change it for girls to come. How you choose to do this is up to you, but I hope I've reminded you to do it for her.