



Teeth



# TEETH

By  
Mallory Battista

“Ms. Harper, your critics have called into question whether your product should be allowed to be sold within the United States. Many are calling for it to at least be further regulated. This is a preliminary hearing to determine a course of action. Thank you for making yourself available for our questions.”

I nodded from my seat, a little shaky from adrenaline. “My product deters rape. It should absolutely be allowed. In fact, I believe there should be a government program that hands them out for free with condoms during sex education. Have you received my emails about that?”

There are a few polite chuckles, but a large portion of the committee looks angry.

“Heh, yes, I’m sure you would like that very much,” said the chairman for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. “The problem, of course, and the reason we are conducting this hearing, is that your product is being weaponized.”

It was my turn to politely chuckle. “The majority of US states allow the open carry of firearms without a license or permit, including my home state. Are you suggesting I should be able to wear a handgun on my hip, but that you have the right to tell me what I wear in my vagina? If there is a rash of crime where the perpetrators use pepper spray, are you going to outlaw the sale of mace for self defence? Most of the things we use to protect ourselves are weapons, and that has always been the case. My product is intended for protection, but yes, it could be weaponized. So can ballpoint pens.”

He looked like he was chewing on his tongue so I plowed on.

“Listen, I know male genitalia are sensitive... topics.” There were a few titters, but I managed to remain stern. “But there is no proof that these alleged attacks even took place. Many of the men don’t even remember the incidents, as I understand it, so they could have been attempting to rape one of my customers for all I know.”

“Are you being ironic, Ms. Harper?”

“Of course I am.”

“Because this is very serious.”

“Extremely serious,” I said. “And I’m glad it’s finally being treated that way. It’s just too bad we’re only now starting to take a closer look at the our country’s rape epidemic because some of the victims are men.”

We girls are conditioned from a young age that we will likely be raped. Sexual assaults against women in shows and movies, even ones for children, are so common as to be a cliché. A woman walking down a dark street alone on the big screen, you know she's going to be jumped by a bad man in the shadows. In defense against this apparent eventuality, we girls are inundated with instructions to dress a certain way, to act a certain way, to stick together, watch your drink, don't lead him on, etc., the implication being that if you slip up you may be raped. There are so many rules to follow (most of them as useful as a rabbit's foot) it seems like slipping up is inevitable. So when I was raped, I wasn't surprised. I was terrified, horrified, sickened, angry, violated, and hurting. But not surprised.

I was at university studying international business at the time. He was also a student, and an athlete, which apparently matters. He was drunk, it was argued, and he had no prior offenses. He got a light sentence so as not to rob him of his college experience, which apparently includes being able to rape co-eds, while my college experience was over.

In the aftermath, through the fog in my brain I remembered reading an article a few years earlier about a doctor in another country who had invented a condom for women that has teeth. It's curved hooks essentially bite the rapist's penis upon entry and medical help is required to remove it. A quick Google search revealed that that doctor was Dr. Sonnet Ehlers and the country was South Africa. I contacted her through her website about importing her device to the US. I didn't need a degree in international business to know this was my destiny.

"Can we produce it in a variety of colors?" I wanted to know. "And I want to market it with a different name."

Thank goodness we live in a world where you can start a business from your couch while wrapped in a Snuggie, because I was struggling with serious agoraphobia since the incident. But from my computer I was able to create a business plan and market Teeth direct to consumers online, and I connected with my target audience in a big way.

For \$5, women could buy Teeth in one of three colors (pink, turquoise, or clear) and another would be donated to a woman in Africa through a charity Dr. Ehlers had set up. I ran a sponsored T-shirt giveaway on Facebook that went viral. The first 100 people to order their Teeth off the link would also get a stylish shirt that read My Vagina Has Teeth. After hundreds of requests, I also made the shirt available to purchase.

It wasn't that women wanted to wear their Teeth and walk around waiting to be raped. All my customers seemed to be thinking the same as I do: it's not that we want to wear the Teeth, we just want men to be afraid that we might be.

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When I was a kid, I once found a silver ring at the park. It was far too big for me, but it seemed like an almost magical thing to find. I thought fleetingly of somehow returning it to its owner, but there was no one in sight. So I was left with the option of either leaving it there in the grass for the owner to come back and find or keeping it. If I left it, of course, someone else could find the ring and take it for themselves. It was a big park, and in my kid mind I figured it was unlikely that the one who lost it could find it again in all that grass. And if someone else was going to stumble across it, well, why not me?

That is the crux of the problem with our rape culture. We see a woman walking down the street alone at night and think, "What is she doing? She could get raped." And the men who are capable of doing such a thing see her and think "why not me."

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The success of Teeth online started to get some attention from the media. I was invited to be interviewed on a popular morning show, so I had to pry myself from my house and wear something other than fleece. I was grateful for the healing that had taken place over the past few months, through connecting with other women, many of them survivors, over Teeth. Still, I was very nervous sitting opposite the two beautiful anchors with their perfectly white smiles, and I tried to recall what I had learned in that public speaking course back at university.

"Teeth have become quite the phenomenon. It has its critics though, to be sure. In fact, some have called the device medieval," said the blonde anchor.

"Well, to quote its inventor, a medieval deed deserves a medieval consequence. Anyone who thinks the punishment is worse than the crime hasn't given proper thought to the crime."

She smiled and nodded. "It's certainly a very edgy product, and your marketing campaigns are getting a lot of attention."

Here I knew they would be showing an image from our Only Yes Means Yes media campaign on screen, which featured gritty photos of impaired women being groped.

“Very provocative,” said the brunette anchor, with a squeamish expression.

“Yes, they are meant to make people uncomfortable. The situations depicted in the photos are very real, and we need to confront them as a society. Too often these kinds of assaults are treated like a gray area, with the focus being on the victim’s alcohol consumption instead of on the crime. If you saw someone incapacitated from alcohol, would it suddenly be okay to rob them? To stab them? Of course not. So why would it be okay to rape them? Our next campaign is very exciting too. It is in response to the sentiment that rape ‘is only sex.’ It’s called It’s Only a Dick.”

Our mockup of a full-page print ad showed up on screen, which depicted a college-age man in an emergency room getting Teeth removed by a doctor, two police officers waiting to the side.

“I’ll leave it up to your viewers whether it’s referring to the rapist or his penis.”

“Haha, scary...” said the blonde anchor.

“Speaking of scary,” said the brunette anchor, with a conspiratorial glance to her co-host. “Is it difficult for you to find dates these days? I imagine that men are a bit scared to ask you out.”

“They should be scared,” I said. “Why shouldn’t they be? Women are. Purportedly, a survey of online daters showed that women’s greatest fear is that their date will be a serial killer. Men’s greatest fear is that the woman will be fat. I’d like it if in the next survey, men’s number one fear is that the woman will be wearing Teeth.”

“You seem very passionate about it. Did the inspiration for Teeth come from some personal experience?”

“Well, Kathie, if you’re asking me if I was raped I’ll just say that, statistically, one of us probably has,” I said, looking from one anchor to the other. The brunette took a sip of her coffee.

All in all, I thought the interview went pretty well.

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The problem with problems is that most people don’t care until it’s their problem. The joke about abortion, another uncomfortable topic, is that if men could get pregnant then abortions would be freely available, and you could get one while watching football and eating chicken wings. There would probably be frequency cards like men get for haircuts, where the tenth one is free. In fact,

I bet they could get one while getting their hair cut. The point is, if one in four men were being raped, something would have been done about it by now.

It annoys me when interviewers are so amazed by the popularity of Teeth. That's not the amazing thing to me. What I can't believe is it's taken so long for something like this to hit the market. While I was encouraged by the buzz Teeth were generating, the media coverage was generally fluffy. Teeth were selling, but rape is a cancer and I was pedalling Band-Aids. I needed to do more.

I worked with a designer on a counter display and partnered with *Mr. Checkout* to get Teeth carried in convenience stores around the country. It was important to make Teeth as visible as possible so men would begin to think that every woman was wearing one. I worked with grocery chains to have them stocked in the same section as condoms, instead of with feminine products as they'd originally done.

But rape was still essentially seen as a woman's problem, and that had to change.

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Some statistics:

- One in four college women report surviving rape or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime. These are anonymous reports on multi-campus surveys sampling thousands of college students nationwide (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This rate has remained the same since studies in the 1980s (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewki, 1987).

- 28% of women in the military experienced rape during their military service (Sadler, Booth, & Doebbeling, 2005).

- 60% of rapes on college campuses occur with a perpetrator who is an acquaintance of the survivor. 32% are romantic partners, 8% are unknown/strangers. (Zinzow & Thompson, 2011).

- Approximately 11% of college women who experience rape report it to the police (Kilpatrick, et al., 2007).

- 7% of college women who experience drug, alcohol, or incapacitated rape report it to the police. (Kilpatrick, et al., 2007).

- Of those cases reported to the police, less than 10% of rape cases result in criminal charges against a defendant (Alderden & Ullman, 2012).

- Survivors are significantly more likely than women in the general



population to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (McFarlane, Malecha, Watson, Gist, Batten, Hall, & Smith, 2005); in fact, rape survivors are the largest population in the nation with PTSD (Campbell & Wasco, 2005).

- Rape is the least reported of all violent crimes (Rand, 2009).
- The most common person a female survivor tells about what happened to her is a friend (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Seff, 2007).
- Rapists are almost always (98%) men (Sedgwick, 2006).

<http://www.oneinfourusa.org/statistics.php>

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We always hear about the one in four women who have been raped, because the rape conversation always centers on women. As if rape is something that women let happen to them by not being careful enough, or having too much to drink, or dressing immodestly. But what about the men in the equation? Are one in four men rapists? One in eight? One in twenty? How many men do you know? How many of them have raped a woman?

The Internet has recently been applauding some college guys for developing a nail polish to prevent date rape. It supposedly changes color when it comes in contact with common rape drugs, so a woman can see if her drink has been spiked by stirring it with her finger. What I'd like to know is what happens after Prepared Nail Polish Girl sees that her drink has been tampered with? What kind of action will anyone take over the color of a girl's fingernail? I'll tell you: the worst that will happen to the offender is he may get a spiked drink thrown in his face.

The way to stop rape is to stop men from raping, and that's the solution that nobody ever seems to talk about. What deterrent does our country employ to stop men from raping? The statistics imply that only 1% of rapes result in criminal charges for the perpetrator. And even in high profile cases, such as that of swim star Brock Turner, the time served could be as little as 3 months. What message does that send to men? What message does that send to women?

I knew I had to find a way to make rape a men's issue. Maybe then they would care enough to make certain to truly have consent before penetrating a woman's body. Then an idea came to me, as ideas do. An awful idea. Like the Grinch, I had a wonderful, awful idea.

And that's when everything changed.

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Through a friend of a friend of a friend, I discreetly acquired a considerable amount of Rohypnol. I drove twelve hours on a Friday to a university far enough from my home town, paid cash for a hotel room, and hoofed it to Greek row just as the sun was setting.

I was armed with two sets of Teeth and hoped I'd only need the one that was in my handbag next to the roofies. I picked out a frat boy who had obviously already had a few drinks and I began to flirt. I was scared shitless, but managed to offer him another drink and spike it, then asked if there was somewhere we could go to be alone. It was actually easier than I thought it would be, and I was emboldened that all was going to plan.

We didn't have sex. I held him off and after he passed out I put on gloves and crammed his dick in my spare Teeth. Then I left.

I hit other college parties at other campuses. I didn't worry too much about disguising myself. None of them even asked my name, and I doubt they could recount much of my physical description. I was just some girl whose pants they were trying to get into. I'm not saying that made them guilty; I was the attacker here. But it made my task easier.

Unlike women who are raped, the men I attacked had to go to hospital to have the Teeth removed, unless they never wanted to pee again. I relished the idea of the tables having turned: the victims, male this time, getting interrogated about the details of their alleged attack and knowing that everyone thought that they had brought it upon themselves.

There would be the initial suspicion that they are a rapist, of course, but lack of DNA on the Teeth would prove otherwise. And what would happen then? Would there be a manhunt? Would guys be warned to keep safe when they go out to a party? Would nobody care?

After some research and a lot of practice, I ditched the roofies and switched to chokeholds because it knocked out my victims faster. I only needed about a minute of unconsciousness to apply the Teeth, so it was a good method. I branched out from college parties and hit bars in cities and small towns. I hit poorly lit, low traffic public bathrooms. There was even a runner I pulled into a bush during the early morning at a public park. I always attacked somewhere different, somewhere I had driven, always using cash to get there.

A conspiracy theory began to circulate about the attacks, that there was some deranged vigilante out there committing them all. A feminist blog published a Web comic featuring a superheroine that they dubbed Lady Fang. The caped

crime committer had billowing hair and wore a black scarf over her nose and mouth that had a frightening wolfish smile on it. Teeth became even more controversial, and ever more ubiquitous.

But I had no illusions about being a hero. What I was doing was evil. Who were these men I was attacking? Maybe they were really nice guys, maybe they were assholes, I don't know, it didn't matter. Maybe they had bright futures, or girlfriends, or drinking problems. They could have been virgins or sex addicts. One of them I almost killed, when his head hit the ground badly as I knocked him out. One of them couldn't have been more than fourteen. None of them deserved it, and that was the point.

I wasn't like Dexter or the guy from Breaking Bad, or like any other fictional white guy who gets cheered on for doing bad things for good reasons. I could feel myself becoming a monster, like a rapist. I didn't find pleasure in doing it, but when I'd see a guy walking alone at night, flaunting his male privilege, it made me want to put him in his place. I wanted to make him know what it was like to be a woman, to be afraid of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and having your human dignity stripped from you.

Unlike a rapist, I can admit that what I was doing is wrong. But it was difficult to stop because my plan was beginning to work. Rape had finally become a men's issue and a subject of mass discussion.

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Teeth ran a new campaign in response to the attacks and the ever growing popularity of the device. It was called Equality. On a plain black background was a calligraphic ambigram of the word RAPE, colored in a gradient of flesh tones. At the bottom in tiny writing was the line "Teeth are the equalizer" followed by our URL. Because Teeth don't prevent rape; in fact, when used as intended, they only work when a woman is raped. But they make the rape reciprocal, and their widespread presence, I believed, would deter would-be rapists.

Teeth had become a subject of national debate. The internet was abuzz and everyone from politicians to celebrities were weighing in. That's when the senate hearing was called to see if something could be done to prevent further attacks with Teeth and discuss whether they should be removed from shelves. None of this curbed the popularity of Teeth.

In response to demand, I started selling a variety of Teeth-related merchandise. We added a few more shirt styles that complimented our

campaigns, as well as buttons, stickers, and jewelry. From the beginning, I paid myself only a minimal wage and sent all profits to rape recovery centers and donated Teeth to women in Africa. People assumed I was getting rich off of Teeth, but who would want to profit from rape? Definitely not me. I just needed to make enough to stay alive and keep doing what I was doing, including a lot of driving.

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I'd be curious to take a poll and see which people think is worse: raping a woman or putting Teeth on a man. It's a cop-out to say that both are terrible; of course they are. Would the answers be split by gender? I wonder. Personally, I think rape is still worse, because the perpetrator is getting off on it. What a fucking selfish, evil thing to do to someone else for your own brief physical pleasure. Why don't you control your fucking baser urges, you sick fucking bastards, and stop fucking up other people's lives?

You realize, don't you, how fucked up it is? No matter how many excuses you make to yourself, you know it's wrong, but somehow that doesn't matter if you can get away with it. It's like me with a bag of potato chips: I know I should stop, but if the bag is within arm's reach I just can't help myself. Well, guess what! I'd stop if a chip bit back.

So, here's what I propose:

Imagine that every woman in the world has teeth in her vagina, real teeth, and she can bare them whenever she feels like it. That means, at any point in your rendezvous, if you become threatening... chomp! And if she's impaired or unconscious or too young, the teeth are definitely out.

Would that change how you approach sex?

Would that change how you think of rape?

Hopefully that image sticks with you, and when you think of sex, you think of teeth. When you imagine having sexy time with your new girlfriend or that woman you're hoping to hook up with, think of teeth. When you're checking out that lady across the room or catcalling to the group across the street, think of teeth.

As for me, I haven't been caught yet. I imagine that I will be someday, and I doubt any judge will be concerned for my once-bright future when sentencing me. There won't be any leniency for Lady Fang. I'll probably get the chair for all of the penises I've traumatized.

But until then, watch out, because I'm lurking in the shadows too, now. Rape is like cancer, it doesn't care who you are or what you've done. It doesn't care if you're a good person, if you're smart, or pretty, and neither do I. I'm all about equality. And while I'm nowhere near hitting one out of four men, I'm giving it my best shot.

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Teeth is a fictional story, but the device is not. Dr. Sonnet Ehlers has made it her life's work to create Rape-aXe, which is in the final stages of design. She lives and works in South Africa where they have one of the highest rape levels in the world. Find out more at [www.antirape.co.za](http://www.antirape.co.za)