



Not having had first kiss by 17 years old causes embarrassment and anxiety

turn my attention back to the circle and count. One, two, three, four. Four people until it will be my turn. Four more people until I will embarrass myself. One, two, three. It's OK, I tell myself. The semi-mute kid, with the long bangs and a goatee whose name I can't remember probably hasn't had his either. I won't be alone. One, two. Frick, I was wrong about goatee kid. I will be the only one. One. I could lie and make up a story, but that seems kind of wrong to do on a mission trip. Jesus doesn't really approve of lying right? There is no one left to count. It is my turn and everyone's eyes are focused on me. Probably anticipating a juicy story. But I have none to give.

"Um, I actually haven't had my first kiss yet."

As soon as the words leave my lips, I see their faces change. They're all giving me "the look." The look of surprise and pity. The one I always get when people find out. The one that's always followed by cliché, reassuring small talk: it's OK, boys are dumb, it will happen soon.

That was almost three years ago and yet here I still am, 17-years-old, a relationship-virgin and president of the Never-Been-Kissed Club.

And unless you've been 17 and kiss-less you won't understand. You can't know what it's like to tell yourself year after year that it will finally be your year. You won't

comprehend the pain of spending New Year's Eve watching couples kiss in celebration, while the only thing you're kissing is a bottle of Martinelli's. You won't understand that not having a first kiss is about so much more than just a kiss, that by the time you're 17 it represents something bigger.

Not having your first kiss by the end of middle school is disappointing. Not having it by 17 feels like rejection.

Rejection from all the boys I've ever met. The absence of any relationship seems to tell me that they all must have passed on me.

My mom tries to be reassuring by telling me that there must have been boys who have liked me, they've just been too shy to say anything. But whether zero or 132 guys have had secret crushes on me, it still adds up to zero kisses. Zero dates. Zero flirtatious texts that almost turned into something. Zero tangible proof that someone thought of me as more than just some girl.

After 17 years I have learned not to tell my friends about crushes, because when it inevitably doesn't work, it's easier to pretend it never happened if no one knows. It's better if no one can remind me that, yet again, I wasn't good enough.

There is a part of me that wants to be objectified, wants to be catcalled, wants so desperately to be noticed. The other half is telling me I should be glad that I've never been degraded or harassed, that my value extends far beyond what I look like.

Telling me that I should be the one determining my worth. Telling me that loving myself should be enough.

But that is so much easier said than done. How can I love who I am, when it seems that no one else can? When it seems that the current me isn't good enough?

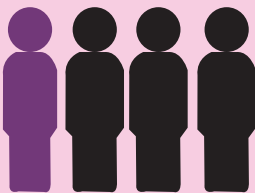
photo by KAITLYN STRATMAN
written by MORGAN BILES

Maybe it's because I was too lazy to forward a couple chain emails in 6th grade that I've been cursed with such bad luck. All joking aside, I can't help but think to myself, maybe if I had a flatter stomach, or smaller thighs or blonde hair or less obtrusive eyes or a cuter laugh. If I could be more outgoing and less opinionated. If I was better at sports or had the ability to make witty, flirty banter.

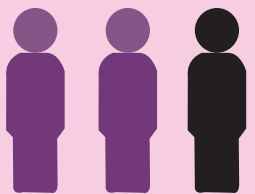
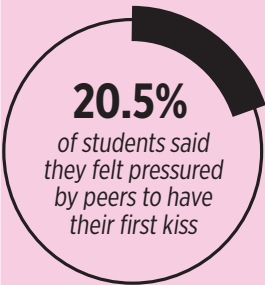
If I could fit in this mold, maybe I stood a chance. A chance at finally having that definitive life moment that is the first kiss. A chance at feeling wanted and worthy and pretty and having a heart emoji next to my name in a special someone's phone.

I try to look for the silver lining in all of this, the reason why it hasn't happened to me yet. But I can't. I wish I could say that at the end of the day it doesn't matter or that I learned to find validation within myself, but I would just be lying and perpetuating the rom-com stereotype that everything works out in the end. Real life doesn't end with the rolling of the credits. My life won't suddenly be perfect after I've had my first kiss, but it's hard to believe that I won't enjoy checking it off my bucket list.

A BREAKDOWN
OF KISSING AT
EAST



One in four
east students
felt pressured
by society
to have their
first kiss



Two in three
East students
have had
their first kiss

