

narrative feminism

ART

to the men who (claim to) love us:

by Dina El-Rifai

what are you searching for
between her legs?
you convince yourself that you do not hate women
that you are not the man
who uses women for his own profit
that you are not
her uncle.
or her ex.
that you respect her more.
that you've read enough books
studied enough feminist literature
to know.
to not become them.

but you did anyway.

you became the man you claim to fight against
as you slid your way into multiple women
hurting their insides
as you searched with desperation
twisting your way out
leaving scars where there were once stars.

you are not allowed to steal the water from my lips
because you are thirsty.
you are not allowed to be the colonizer.

our bodies are not to be consumed
for you to experiment
to find yourself
to break us into pieces as you try to make yourself whole
our bodies are sacred and holy
our bodies are not your getaway
or your rest-stop on your way home
our bodies are home.
again i say,
our bodies
are home.

EDITORIAL

Feminism in Action – Musings From the Gym

by Elizabeth Solomon

This morning after a 45 minute sweat session on the treadmill I picked up my fussing 3 week-old baby (child care is available for 6+ week babies at the gym) in his car carrier and made a beeline for the locker room. After placing a substrate on the floor and changing baby's diaper, I hiked up my shirt and sports bra and proceeded to nurse him right there on the locker room floor. I was not alone in the locker room. Two women ignored me, one gave me a wide berth, and several women made comments to me, "Oh, a new baby," "Sweet boy," "Cute!"

Rounded back, hunched shoulders, leaky breasts, sweaty, frumpy, smelly, and all the other adjectives you can use to describe a three week postpartum woman on the floor of a gym locker room nursing her baby—that was me. One woman looked past all of this (including my adorable child) to smile at me and to ask, "Hey girl! What do you need, can I get you anything?"

My head exploded with a hundred responses ranging from, "No, I'm Super Mom!" to "Yes, will you hold my baby while I pee." However, my response was, "Oh, how kind. No thank you." She replied, "I remember nursing my children and the minute I sat down something was always out of reach. I'm right over here if you think of something."

This woman, this stranger, shared her experience with me and offered to make my situation easier. To me, a stay-at-home mother of two boys, this is feminism in action. How much easier could we make it on ourselves if we accepted help when it was offered or better yet, sincerely offered to help when we have the opportunity?

SATIRE

Those Who Can't Do

by Ms. Matriculation

We all know what college is for: dabbling in feminism, wearing all black, and—if you attend a liberal arts school—dating a girl. During my undergraduate career I had the opportunity to check all of these milestones off my list, but I always knew that this phase was temporary, and my bisexuality would inevitably expire upon graduation. I would leave the world of activism and tattoos behind to join the sisterhood of teachers. Ms. Matriculation was my new name, and when I was gifted that title, I had to renounce my dark past.

Initiation into the world of early childhood educators was rough, but it was worth the sacrifice. I began the sacred ritual by removing all piercings (except those cute silver studs my grandmother gave me for Christmas) and putting on a bra. I fished out my pastel pink lipstick, broke up with my girlfriend, and revved up my Pinterest page—filling it with inspo quotes that would propel me through the toughest of days. Summer came to a close, and I couldn't wait to enter the classroom—so quaint and quiet. Little ones hand-in-hand dancing without a care in the world. I had already been in the first grade twice before as a student, so I knew it couldn't be that hard at the front of the classroom.

Teaching is totally my superpower, and this job is going to be all a girl could ever want—until the joyful day when a man will bestow unto me little ones of his own. Of course at that time another ritual will begin, and I'll have to leave my career of glitter glue and popsicle sticks behind. Yet again, I know it will all be worth the sacrifice. The title "Mrs." requires complete devotion to a man, a role I will happily receive—once I get all of this out of my system.

A CASE FOR

What You Want

by Sean M. Della Croce

As a fledgling queer woman at my small Catholic school in Nashville, Tennessee, I was a big fan of abstinence—like, a really big fan. It made a lot of practical sense to me, but, most importantly, it provided the perfect cover for my lack of desire for my male classmates. What better way to throw a church community off the scent of one's burgeoning homosexuality than to adopt an entirely spiritual, moralistic stance on this most universal matter of the body? My tactic worked like a charm until I went to college and found a girlfriend. I quickly came out and became the president of the campus LGBTQ+ group. The first few years of my involvement were an uphill battle for queer students at our formerly-Baptist university—characterized by scandal, subjugation, and bureaucratic, provostial nonsense.

I chose a politics of respectability as the path forward for our cause in this space, and with that came another set of moral bargains into which I gladly entered. Imagine here a folksy, white-haired gentleman slapping a young Ellen Page on the back, "She might be a lesbian, but fellas, you can trust her word." In my public life, I had adopted the misguided perspective that queer people and our conservative opponents were merely mutual victims of a grave failure to communicate. At the center of this conversation, again, was the hallmark of marriage. "You see, Dr. SoAndSo, we want the same things you want."

I would later discover that the problem with my overall approach was that it was rooted in a lie—not so much a matter of wanting the same or opposite things as the people and structures that surrounded me, but not knowing what I wanted in the first place. At some crucial point in my development I decided that I would appear to desire whatever was most appropriate for a given situation—this works in campus politics, but proves corrosive on a personal level. In this way I could avoid asking for, doing, or seeming to want the wrong things and thus avoid the consequences others faced. This type of personality thrives in hierarchical structures like the Catholic Church, and, over a period of about 10 years, I grew all too comfortable with the feeling of external approval over authenticity. At 25 I think I've turned a corner.

Recently I lost my scapular somewhere in the sheets of a woman's bed—this woman is neither my wife nor my girlfriend. A scapular is essentially a necklace worn beneath the clothes of some Catholics that allows the wearer to bypass purgatory and go straight to heaven upon, well...death. The whole thing sounds silly, but the object and its corresponding daily prayer have always held some sort of mystical appeal for me. I've worn my scapular for over five years now, seldom spending a day without it, but in the weeks since it's illicit disappearance, my conscience pulls me toward the conclusion that I probably have no business with this item anymore.

I opened my eyes one Thursday morning to see a picturesque shoulder permanently bearing the image of a face I don't recognize. The scene was illuminated by the glow of a 6AM sun tangled in charcoal sheets and a mess of blonde hair. The last thing on my mind was the fate of my soul—that ship had sailed, and, for once in my life, outside the bounds of love or commitment, I wasn't worried. After spending countless hours of my short life concerned with seeming to desire this or that appropriate thing, I reflect on a long car ride I took with the same woman a few days prior in which we discussed this existential question, "Why are we so afraid to just ask for the things we want?" Because then we would have to uncover and admit exactly what it is we want—and what would that say about us?