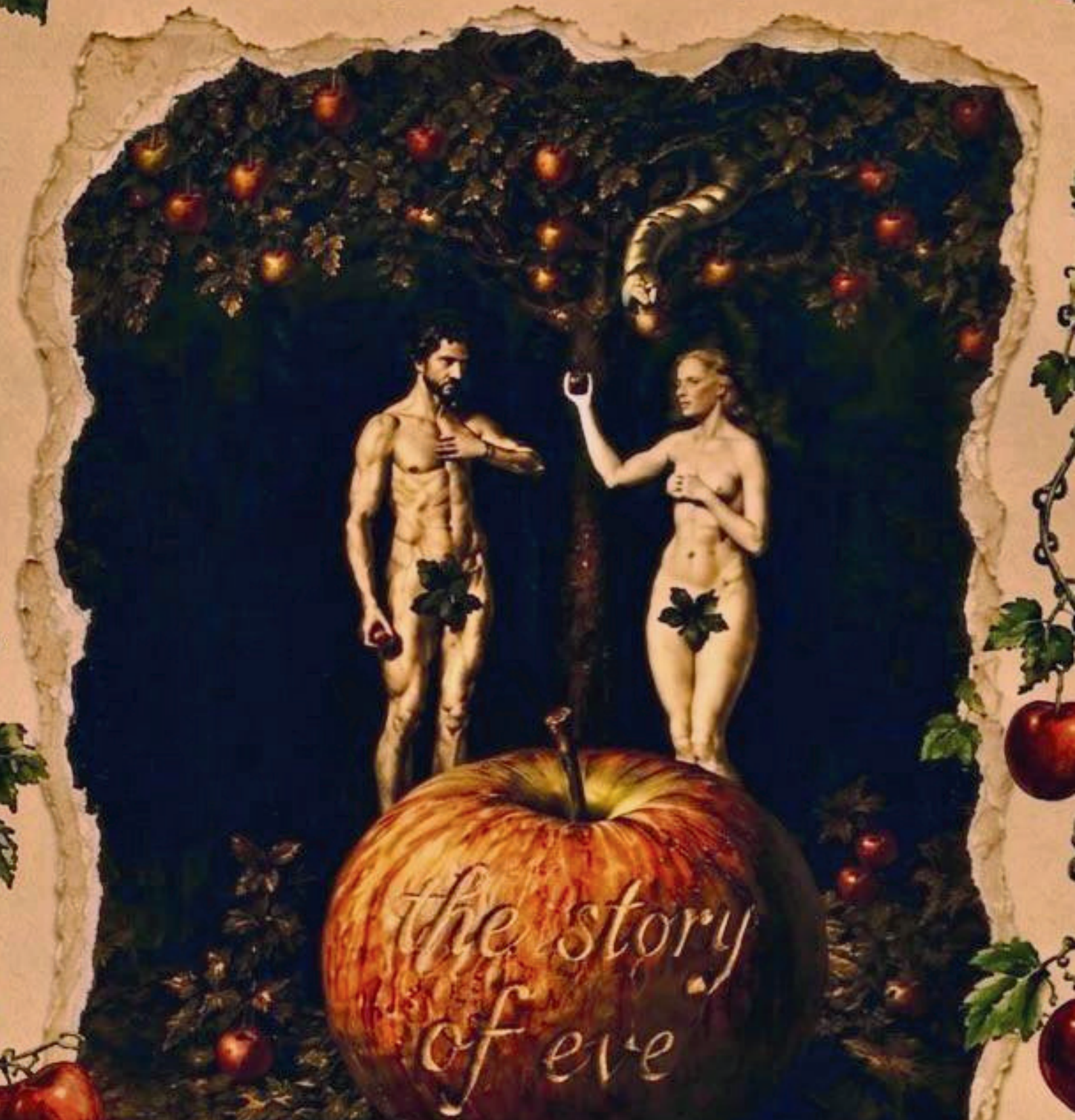
HER

From Awareness to Action:
Your Role in Ending Discrimination & Violence Against Women



FOR MOST OF HISTORY,
ANONYMOUS WAS A WOMAN.

—VIRGINIA WOOLF

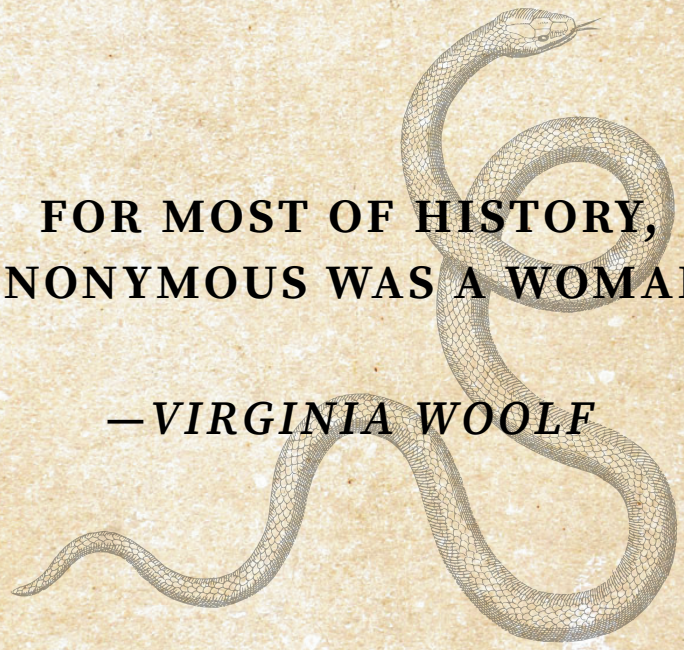


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Our Professor



Ivy N Josiah

Ivy N Josiah is a Malaysian women's human rights advocate and a gender consultant cum educator. Ivy is the former President and Executive Director of Women's Aid Organisation (WAO – www.wao.org.my), where over 20 years she developed WAO's shelter services and advocacy strategies for law and policy reform. WAO opened Malaysia's first shelter for survivors of domestic violence in 1982.

She has a strong background in women's human rights, addressing multiple forms of discrimination against women, and has conducted training in over 15 countries. She currently serves on four international boards on women's rights and remains active in civil society. Ivy is also a member of Five Arts Centre. She loves to advocate, dance, cook and create.

The Editors



Eman Anwar from Egypt

I feel grateful to be part of this project and to have the opportunity to create something that brings women's voices, stories, and experiences into one space. I love writing, creating, and turning ideas into something meaningful. Through this magazine, I hope to inspire conversations, challenge the things we often take for granted, and remind women that their voices deserve to be heard



Pooja Saxena from India

Younger me would be proud of me today. And perhaps that is why being a part of this magazine means so much to me. I am truly honoured to contribute to something that gives space to women's voices, stories, and experiences.

For me, this is more than just a magazine. It is a small step towards creating a world where women feel heard, valued, and never alone.

May this magazine encourage us to look beyond stereotypes, question injustice, and see every woman as more than just one story. Let's turn awareness into action.



Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam from Vietnam

Being part of the editorial team of HER has been a meaningful journey for me. Through the stories shared in this magazine, I have seen how discrimination against women can exist quietly in our workplaces, communities, language, and everyday expectations. Despite our different cultures and backgrounds, many of our experiences are deeply connected. As an editor, I hope HER becomes more than a collection of stories—it can be a space where women are heard, silence is questioned, and lived experiences inspire change. May these pages remind us that every woman deserves to speak, work, live, and dream with dignity, equality, and freedom.

The Editors



Phraewphan Philathong from Thailand

I'm really happy to be part of this magazine and to help bring the voices of women in our class together. As someone who works with gender justice, I know that having a space to speak and be truly heard is not something we should take for granted. I'm grateful to be part of a space where women can share our experiences, thoughts, and dreams in our own words—and where those voices can reach beyond the classroom.



Nurwidia Kasih from Indonesia

I am incredibly grateful to join this magazine and help unite the voices of women in our class. As a teacher and a student deeply invested in women's rights and social justice in Indonesia, I know firsthand that spaces where we can speak and truly be heard are rare and precious. This platform is a powerful opportunity for us to share our authentic experiences, thoughts, and dreams, allowing our voices to echo far beyond the walls of our classroom.

Breaking *the* Silence *in Industrial Zones*



During my work in Vietnam's industrial zones, I have witnessed male managers shouting at female workers in front of their colleagues. The women were expected to remain silent, lower their heads, and accept the humiliation. If they tried to explain themselves, they risked being labelled "emotional," "difficult," or "disrespectful."

This made me question why a woman's anger is often viewed as authority, while a woman's response is treated as an attitude problem.

Many female factory workers depend heavily on their monthly income. Some are migrant workers, mothers, or the main financial supporters of their families. They fear losing their jobs, bonuses, promotion opportunities, or overtime income. Their silence does not mean that the behaviour is acceptable. It often means that they do not feel safe enough to speak.

Verbal intimidation leaves no visible injuries, but it can cause anxiety, fear, and loss of confidence. No production target can justify humilitating another person.

My role begins with refusing to treat such behaviour as normal. I can listen to women's experiences without blaming them, help them understand their workplace rights, and encourage them to document and report verbal abuse through appropriate channels. I can also use social media and community activities to raise awareness about respectful communication and gender equality.

In the future, I hope to provide free English and Chinese communication classes for women working in industrial zones. Language skills can help them express their concerns, access better opportunities, and become more confident in protecting their rights.

A safe workplace is not only free from physical violence. It is a place where every woman can speak without fear. Change begins when we listen, stand beside one another, and refuse to remain silent.

> *"Change begins when we listen, stand beside one another, and refuse to remain silent."*



Nguyen Thi Thanh Tam
Vietnam

THE SILENT WOUNDS

How Gender Discrimination Affects Women's Mental Health?

"A woman can survive a physical wound and still carry an invisible one for years."



Mariam Omotayo Usman
Nigeria

"Ending discrimination against women is therefore also a mental-health responsibility."

Gender discrimination and violence against women are often discussed in terms of inequality, lost opportunities, or violations of rights. But behind these experiences are silent wounds that can deeply affect a woman's mental health. Constant discrimination, harassment, emotional abuse, violence, and unrealistic expectations can contribute to anxiety, depression, trauma, low self-esteem, and feelings of helplessness.

"Sometimes, the most painful part is not only what happens to women, but how society responds"

Women are often told to be strong, endure, forgive, or remain silent. Victims may be blamed for what happened to them, while their experiences are dismissed or minimized. Over time, silence can become another form of suffering.
We must begin to ask different questions.

Instead of asking a woman, "Why didn't you leave?" we should ask, "How can I support you?"

"Silence does not heal it hides the pain."

Instead of judging her, we should listen. Instead of telling her to simply be strong, we should help create an environment where she feels safe enough to seek help.

My role begins with me: challenging harmful stereotypes, speaking against discrimination, listening without judgment, supporting survivors, promoting mental-health awareness, and creating spaces where women can speak without fear or shame.

Every woman deserves more than survival. She deserves dignity, safety, respect, opportunity, and the freedom to live without fear.

"The wounds may be silent, but our commitment to ending them must never be."

Education: A Powerful Path to Prevent Violence Against Women



Leila Rezaii
Iran

Violence against women is not only a personal or family issue; it is a social and global concern that requires collective responsibility. As an educator and a specialist in Curriculum Planning, I strongly believe that education can play a transformative role in preventing violence and building more peaceful, inclusive, and equitable societies.

For more than 28 years, I have worked in different areas of education, including educational management, teacher education, curriculum development, and supporting children and vulnerable groups. These experiences have taught me that sustainable change begins with education and with the values we develop in children and young people.

Schools are not only places for academic learning. They are spaces where children learn how to communicate, respect differences, manage conflicts, understand human dignity, and build healthy relationships. Therefore, curricula should go beyond academic knowledge and intentionally address gender equality, respect, empathy, emotional and social skills, human rights, and non-violent conflict resolution.

We also need to empower teachers, parents, and educational leaders to recognize different forms of violence, including psychological, verbal, economic, and structural violence, and to respond to them appropriately.

I believe that preventing violence against women should begin long before violence occurs. It should begin with education, awareness, empowerment, and changing attitudes and social norms.

As educators, we have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to raise a generation that does not simply reject violence, but actively promotes respect, equality, dignity, and peace.

Education is not only a means of preventing violence; it is a pathway to creating a culture where violence is no longer accepted.



BETTER EDUCATION, A SAFER, MORE EQUAL TOMORROW.

NO.

When a woman's rejection becomes a death sentence.

Eman anwar
Egypt



No.
A simple two-letter word. One syllable.
A word we use every day without thinking twice.
But when a woman says it, sometimes it stops being treated like an answer.

Meet Naira Ashraf

Naira was a 21-year-old student at Mansoura University. She had rejected the proposal of a fellow student who refused to accept her decision. On June 20, 2022, she was murdered outside her university.

Her story shook Egypt. But even after her death, some people did not simply see her as a victim. Instead, they questioned her.

> ***What was she wearing?***
> ***Why was she talking to him?***
> ***What did she do?***

Her choices, her clothes, and her behavior became part of the conversation as if there had to be something she did to explain the violence committed against her.

Even after death, she was put on trial.



And Naira is not the only case.

Women have been killed, attacked, stalked, or kidnapped after rejecting men. Yet too often, the conversation shifts from "Why did he do this?" to "What did she do?"

Women are taught to soften rejection:

"I'm sorry."
"Maybe later."
"I'm just not ready."
"Please don't be upset."

We add explanations to a word that should need none.



Under Egypt's Penal Code, intentional murder with premeditation can carry the **death penalty**.

But legal protection cannot begin only after a woman has been killed.

We need stronger protection against stalking, harassment, kidnapping, and gender-based violence and a society that understands that rejection is not provocation.

A woman does not have to dress a certain way, behave a certain way, or be "effect" to deserve safety.

Her *no* is not an insult.

It is not a challenge.

It is not a negotiation.

It is an *answer.*

And an answer should never cost someone her life.

Every Woman Deserves

Dignity, Equality, and Safety



Addisalem Kefyalew
Ethiopia

Ending discrimination and violence against women matters because every woman and girl deserves to live without fear. Violence, harassment, child marriage, unequal treatment, and discrimination steal confidence, education, opportunities, and happiness.

Behind every case is a real person: a mother, daughter, sister, friend, and someone with dreams for her future. No woman should lose her future because of violence or unfair treatment.

When women are safe and empowered, we build a better future for families, communities, and generations to come.

Change begins in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. We must listen to women, believe survivors, speak out against harmful practices, and teach children that respect and equality matter.

Men and boys also have an important role. Laws and policies matter, but lasting change happens when society stops treating discrimination and violence as normal.

"Every woman deserves to live without fear."

Being Feminist is a Long-life Journey of Learning

Marindah Putri Indonesia

We live in a society shaped by socially constructed gender roles that perpetuate inequality and injustice against women and girls. Gender inequality manifests in several distinct forms:

Marginalization and Discrimination

When women experience exclusion and unfair treatment in essential aspects of life, such as education, political representation, and socio-economic opportunities.

Subordination

reflected in the suppression of women's voices and their severe underrepresentation in politics and policymaking.

Stereotyping, through persistent negative labels and assumptions attached to women's very existence.



Violence, including physical and verbal abuse directed towards women.

Multiple Work Burdens, when women perform unpaid reproductive work at home, engage in productive labour to generate income, and carry social responsibilities within their communities.

These injustices are constructed systematically and structurally and are perpetuated by specific power groups to serve their own interests.

The feminist movement emerged to dismantle the injustices produced by patriarchy and sexism, which perpetuate gender-based discrimination and oppression.

Like other social and revolutionary movements, feminism is not merely an emancipatory struggle against male dominance; it is also a direct resistance against the patriarchal system itself.

The emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement marked a historic turning point, as women began to detach themselves from sexist and patriarchal institutions and challenge male dominance across all spheres of life.

The feminist movement continues today, with new generations reclaiming the fundamental rights of women. Being a feminist means being ready for everyday resistance and struggle, while also remaining reflective and agentive in bringing about social change.



When the Door Closes on Half of the Workforce

Hana Mohamed
Egypt

In 2024, only 16.5% of Egyptian women were working or looking for work, compared with 71.3% of men (ILO, in OECD 2026). That gap of almost 55 points is wider than the MENA average, and it is growing. Panel data from the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey show women's participation slipping from 23% in 2012 to 18% in 2023 (Krafft and Assaad, ERF Policy Brief 135, 2024).

The easy explanation is education, and it is wrong. Assaad, Hendy, Lassassi and Yassin (2020) named this the MENA paradox: girls' schooling rose steeply while women's employment stayed flat or fell. University-educated women withdrew fastest.

What changed was the kind of work available. The public sector was where educated women found protected, respectable jobs, and it shrank. In 2023, 38% of employed Egyptian women were in the public sector against 18% of men, and self-employment climbed from 12% to 18% of female employment between 2018 and 2023 (Assaad and Mahmoud, 2024). Fewer secure jobs, more precarious ones.

In 2024, only 16.5% of Egyptian women were working or looking for work, compared with 71.3% of men (ILO, in OECD 2026). That gap of almost 55 points is wider than the MENA average, and it is growing. Panel data from the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey show women's participation slipping from 23% in 2012 to

Then there is time. Globally, women perform 76.2% of all unpaid care work (ILO), and comparative time-use evidence from Egypt and Tunisia shows women absorbing housework and childcare regardless of whether they also hold a paid job. Unpaid hours do not appear in any labor statistic, but they decide which jobs a woman can accept.

The poverty link is direct. Egypt's national Multidimensional Poverty Index found 21% of the population multidimensionally poor in 2022, with deprivation profiles differing by the gender of the household head (CAPMAS, UNICEF, ESCWA and OPHI, 2024). Roughly one household in seven is headed by a woman.

Childcare, safe transport and enforced labor protections are not welfare. They are the price of using half the country's talent.

HOW TO BE A WOMAN

CHANDANA CHEA Cambodia



Lakhon Komnit performers rehearsing a play addressing domestic violence in Cambodia.

If you want to be a woman, first you must learn to be an obedient slave.

If you want to be a woman, first you must learn not to say no.

You must not reject all the societal norms, or else everybody will shame you.

Then you must follow all the rules that are readily made for you by the law of MAN kind.

Whetherever voice you learn to speak, you will meet somebody who does not like you because of it.

They will be wary or annoyed, or you will remind them of the witches.

Once you have learned to speak, you must learn not to speak unless you absolutely must.

This will depend on what kind of a woman you want to be.

And indeed, there are many kinds.

It may not feel as though you get to choose, and that too is a kind of woman.

Next, you must learn to relinquish all control over everything you might wish to control.

You must learn, once you have sampled the freedom of a life without a chain, that it is better to return and be chained again.

Or you must learn that it is not.

A fugitive is also a kind of woman.

Of course, you must learn to love, to love always and love entirely, and to be wounded by nothing as much as the violence of your own love.

You must learn to be confused but never disappointed by a mistreated love.

You must give up your children and not know why.
You must learn how to wait for a rescuer at the foot and hope silently that somebody is kind enough to step in and help.

If you want to be a woman, you must learn to believe that you are not, in fact, a human at all.

WHERE HER FOOTSTEPS FALL

BY KATIE YSABELLE REMIGIO
Philippines



She was not born beneath one sky alone;
the whole wide earth became her home.
In villages, cities, islands, and distant lands,
women rise with stories held within their hands—
some shaped by faith, some by ancient ways,
yet each carries a light that time cannot erase.
She walks through doors once closed to her,
not seeking vengeance, nor asking to be feared;
but leaving paths where others may follow,
so tomorrow's daughters may walk unafraid.
Her language may change, her customs
may differ,
her prayers may rise to heavens unknown;
yet dignity speaks without translation—
for no woman's worth is granted by
another's throne.
And when her footsteps meet another's,
across oceans, borders, and histories apart,
their stories become one resounding truth:
a woman empowered does not merely
change her life—
she changes the world she leaves behind.

THE WEIGHT OF "JUST"

HAFIZA ANANTHANOER FROM INDONESIA



No worries, she's just being emotional
Girl, I think you just need to chill
Why mad? It's just a joke anyway

Look closer at what just is actually doing. It becomes something more sinister than a filler word. It transform into a tool of justification that wielded to shrink a woman on every front at once.

It shrinks her competence. A brilliant idea becomes just the moment it leaves her mouth. Only to be repeated by a man minutes later and suddenly treated as insight. A just is all it takes to strip away the credibility she spent years earning.

It shrinks her ambition. A woman who wants more is often told, in one form or another, that she's just being difficult, just too much, just not realistic. Her dreams get reframed as excess as if wanting something bigger than what she's been handed is itself the problem. Men are told to dream big, while women are told to dream reasonably.

It shrinks her dignity. Most cruelly of all when it's used to excuse harassment. The comment about her body, the hand that lingers too long, the joke about what she "must be like in bed". All of it gets wrapped in the same disguise that "I was just joking" or "It's just banter." "Don't be so sensitive, it's just a compliment".

Thus, I don't want a world where women are given permission to be equal. I want a world where the question of permission never comes up. Where a woman's ambition, anger, intelligence, and ordinary human contradictions are simply hers. Unapologetically. With no a single just attached.

That is just fairness, right?
I mean, just the way it is always supposed to be.

DON'T LOOK AWAY: SPEAK UP

MONTHA — THAILAND

I travelled to Tokyo, Japan, and was fortunate not to experience sexual harassment on public transport myself. But at Shinjuku Station, where around 3.5 million people pass through each day, none of us should remain a bystander who does nothing.

I feel deeply for survivors. One woman shared that she was touched for almost 50 minutes. No one should have to endure that alone.

I want to be the bystander who stands with the victim—who speaks up, checks in, and seeks help. Together, we make public transport safer.

Your intervention can make someone feel less alone.



"A woman should have the right and freedom to live without hiding in anyone's shadow."

The Good Girl I Was Supposed to Be



Pooja Saxena, India

I **grew up learning how to be a "good girl."**
A good girl listens to her parents. She does as she is told. She helps her mother in the kitchen, washes the dishes, finishes her work without complaining, dresses "appropriately," and never asks too many questions. I loved being called a good girl. I did not realise then that sometimes, "good" simply meant obedient.



Then I went to college.

Somewhere between feminist writings, classroom conversations, and professors who encouraged us to question the ordinary, I discovered a new word: patriarchy. Suddenly, the things I had accepted as normal began to look different.

Why was I expected to help at home simply because I was a girl? Why could my brother rest while I was expected to finish everything? Why was travelling alone perfectly normal for him but a threat to my "character" for me?

When I wanted to travel like my brother, I was told, "No one will marry a girl who goes around alone." When I questioned what I was expected to wear, think, or do, I was called difficult, stubborn, even mad.



And perhaps I was becoming "bad." But I was also becoming myself.

I chose myself again and again. I questioned. I travelled. I dreamed bigger. I worked hard. I became unapologetically ambitious. I entered an institution that gave me wings and taught me that being educated is not merely about earning a degree, it is about learning to recognise your own worth.

I am proud of the woman I am becoming.

So, to every girl who has been told she is "too much": dream anyway. Question anyway. Go anyway.

Education is your power. Your voice is your strength.

Let them call you a bad girl.



Maybe being a "good girl" was never the goal.
Maybe being yourself was.

Maybe being a bad girl was the goal.

Alone

Ruth Bamugalagiire
Uganda

Life work balance women are efficient too

It is a pity you aren't a man

I thank God am a woman and alive

Beards are for men shave your beard you are a woman

Am not a man why should I shave my beard

Let me be

Men have no period not reason enough to under pay

I too can marry who I want

Ending discrimination against women starts with me

Dear Wonder, Blossom

Haruna Kereng Jedidah
Nigeria

A girl grows up in many traditional settings with a message that often seems to point towards one destination: marriage. From learning to cook and clean to how she is expected to talk, sit and dress, there can be an underlying expectation that these skills will make her a good wife.

Even play can reinforce this. Girls may be given dolls, baby-care kits and miniature kitchens, while boys are encouraged to build, explore and experiment. There is nothing wrong with girls enjoying these things. The problem begins when marriage and caring for others become the centre of what a girl is taught to prepare for.

"Statistics in Nigeria and around the world continue to show how common domestic violence is inside marriage. But the number is not the story. The reason women stay is the story. They stay because they were never taught how to exist outside of marriage, even if they experience all sorts of violence that may be life-threatening. Staying becomes the only option and this is because a woman's identity and how she was raised revolves around marriage and making it work by all means."

When a woman has been taught to see marriage as the centre of her identity, leaving an unhappy or abusive relationship can feel like losing more than a partner. It can feel like losing herself.

Domestic skills are valuable life skills. Girls should learn how to cook, clean, care for children and manage a home. But they should also learn how to care for themselves, pursue education, develop their talents, understand their rights and build a life with meaning beyond marriage.

Marriage can be part of her story. It should not be the entire story.

A girl should not only be raised to become someone's wife. She should be given the freedom to discover who she is, what she can become and what kind of life she wants to build.

And still, I choose myself

For a long time, I have openly declared that I do not like doing housework. If my home gets dirty, I simply hire someone to clean it. I have never cared whether that person is a woman or a man. But in the society I grew up in, housework was considered a woman's responsibility.

My older sister is good at housework. She cooks, cleans, and does the dishes every day without questioning it much. I, on the other hand, have always been criticised. Even though I am allergic to dust, I am still expected to do it myself—not because there is any real reason, but simply because I am a woman.
Whenever my aunt finds out that I have hired someone, she complains and asks how much I paid. I usually pay more than the standard rate because I know how exhausting and demanding housework can be. Sometimes, it is difficult to believe how easily even women themselves can undervalue the work that women do.

I have spent years trying to step outside the idea of what a *proper woman* should be in my family. I do not do housework. I do not pursue a conventional career. I choose to live for myself and for what I believe in. Eventually, my family stopped questioning my choices. They became my normal. But there are always new expectations waiting behind the old ones. It sometimes feels as though, **if I tried to satisfy everyone in my family, I would be running forever without ever reaching the finish line**.

Perhaps that is what makes being a woman who chooses to be herself so difficult. But after all these years, I have learned that it is difficult—and worth it.

Phraewphan Philathong
Thailand

Mongolian customary norms have quietly evolved into one of the most insidious drivers of domestic violence today.

B.Uranzaya_Mongolia (Lawyer Mommy)



An old Mongolian proverb says: “Both the gazelle and the bride have no home to return to.” Historically, once a young woman left her family to join her husband’s kin, she had no legal rights left to protect her. Even when faced with abuse, she was expected to swallow her pain, endure the violence in silence, and carry the trauma alone in an unfamiliar land, with nowhere to turn. This was the reality of the society my grandmother grew up in—a form of structural violence that existed merely six to seven decades ago.

Some traditionalists might accuse me of abandoning my cultural identity or turning my back on heritage. But that does not deter me. Becoming a mother to a daughter fundamentally shifted my perspective: the world I want to build for her is not constrained by outdated customs, but grounded in universal human dignity. While customs may have once served as a cultural anchor, our duty today is to shape a just future, not cling to harmful remnants of the past. Speaking out for our children, challenging systemic injustice, and driving accountability is my deepest calling as both an advocate and a mother.

Consider this: if your own daughter were trapped in an abusive home—her ambitions crushed, her self-worth dismantled, living each day in fear—what would all your sacrifices have been for? The nine months of carrying her, the sleepless nights, the relentless care to help her stand on her own feet?

If anyone dares to harm or demean the child I sheltered from every hardship, I will not hesitate to demand accountability. Above all, I want my daughter to grow up knowing she is fiercely protected—and that her family, her community, and the legal system itself exist to defend her. That conviction is precisely why I am here.



“MONGOLIAN CUSTOMARY NORMS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE”



Unlearning Silence: Claiming My Space

Maria Novena A. Sarmiento, Philippines

I have had that exact moment standing frozen, taking a deep breath, and asking myself…

Why does simply existing as a woman feel so endlessly exhausting?

I know the heart-pounding routine all too well: white-knuckling my keys like a makeshift weapon on a dark walk home, my pulse spiking at every footstep echoing behind me. I have sat in conference tables and gatherings, pitching an idea only to meet a wall of dead silence, only to watch a man repeat my exact words five minutes later to a round of enthusiastic applause. Worst, hearing a nauseating sting of an inappropriate comment from a random guy, then watching myself flash a trained, fake smile while my brain frantically calculates how to protect my safety, my dignity, or my paycheck.

Across every culture and corner of the world, I've seen how these chains take on different forms, yet the heavy weight feels painfully identical.

In many traditional households of my friends and acquaintances, I've watched ambition quietly get framed as a betrayal. If a woman works late, she's neglecting her family. While if she stays home, she's "wasting her potential. This happens from the deep corners of far-flung areas to the shanties of cities, women are taught that our primary job is to keep the peace, swallow our rage, and place everyone else's comfort above our own basic rights.

I've felt the quiet hyper-vigilance of crossing public spaces. It is whether that's dodging unwanted catcalls on a bustling bus, avoiding eye contact on a crowded train in East Asia, or dressing down just to avoid staring eyes in the West. Women everywhere are forced to constantly alter our routes, our outfits, and our mindsets just to make it through the day unscathed.

When I was in my 20s, I sat through focused job interviews, where I was subtly probed about my future family plans, while male candidates were asked about their grand strategic visions. I have felt the sting of being labeled emotional or bossy for speaking up firmly, while a man doing the exact same thing was praised as a passionate, decisive leader.

Society convinces us that this is just a part of life. That an unwanted touch was a compliment, or that feeling unsafe meant that women particularly teenage girls shouldn't have been out so late. We were conditioned to shrink ourselves, quiet our voices, and carefully dance around the problem.

Along the way, I have realized that real freedom isn't about learning how to dodge bad behavior or becoming better at surviving systemic cruelty. It's about destroying the expectation that we should have to endure it in the first place, which is women just stay silent and

Hence, snapping those chains starts the second we stop staying silent just to keep other people comfortable. It's standing up when a sister is talked over, refusing to swallow creepy comments, and dismantling the double standards that try to dictate our worth.

I constantly imagine walking through this world without second-guessing my outfit, over analyzing my tone, or scanning every dark street for danger. That's the dream I hold onto, which is to finally drop this invisible weight, step into the light, and just live.

BEING A MILLENNIAL WOMAN LEADER

BANILINE JONE VILLANUEVA ABANTAO, PHILIPPINES

Being a millennial woman leader in Philippine education today requires bridging traditional institutional structures with modern digital delivery, all while navigating deeply rooted gender dynamics.

Born into an era of rapid technological shift, millennial women administrators face the dual demand of driving digital transformation—integrating blended learning models and educational technology—and resolving systemic challenges like resource allocation, budget constraints, and bureaucratic inertia.

In a culture where female educators predominate in teaching roles but often encounter glass ceilings or traditional expectations regarding administrative authority, success demands a blend of high emotional intelligence, collaborative decision-making, and firm boundary setting to balance heavy workloads with personal well-being.

Leadership in this context means advocating for equitable, student-centered policies while mentorship-driven strategies build resilience among faculty.



Leadership in this context means advocating for equitable, student-centered policies while mentorship-driven strategies build resilience among faculty.

Ultimately, thriving as a millennial female educational leader in the Philippines hinges on leveraging adaptability, empathy, and technological literacy to transform historical institutional barriers into modern opportunities for academic reform.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!

ELIZABETH WACEKE, KENYA

Every time I step into a crowded street, my arms cross my chest. Not to guard my phone, but to guard my body. Because I have seen how men "accidentally" brush against women's breasts, then smile as if a stolen second of satisfaction is their prize.

"Not all men are bad, but enough men are bad."

Just days ago, while buying vegetables, a man brushed his fingers against my vagina. He turned back, smiling the kind of smile that says, I know what I did, and you can't stop me. The shopkeeper excused him: "He's high on bhang." That silence, that dismissal, is violence too.
How many more women have been touched, stared at, commented on, and forced into silence? How many more must protect themselves in spaces that should be safe?

Ending discrimination and gender-based violence is everyone's duty. Boys must be taught respect, not excused with "boys will be boys." Girls must be taught to love themselves, to speak out, to recognize abuse. Men, too, must stand with women, challenging peers who normalize harassment and choosing respect over silence. Communities must stop normalizing harassment and start holding perpetrators accountable.



"*ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!*"

I am still learning, still finding my voice. I grew up believing men should be worshipped. Now I know better. My role is to refuse disrespect, to speak out, and to fight for a world where women walk freely without fear. It may take time, but I will get there. And I will NOT be silent.

BEYOND THE VEIL OF TRADITION:

WOMEN MUST PURSUE DREAMS OVER A MARRIAGE



DEWI SUSILAWATI
INDONESIA

In today's era of rising living costs, many families pressure their daughters to marry financially stable men right after university, treating marriage as a shortcut to security. This outdated mindset buries women's ambitions, forcing them into domestic roles and forcing them to abandon the careers they worked so hard to build.

Women are born equal to men

and deserve the same right to pursue their aspirations. Being highly educated and successful does not make a woman a bad mother; rather, an intellectual woman is better equipped to raise a stronger next generation. Unfortunately, insecurity leads some men to spread the myth that independent, educated women are unapproachable or "uncontrollable," when in reality, these men simply lack the value and integrity to match such women.



Do not surrender

To every woman who has fought through hardship to earn her degree: do not surrender your goals for a marriage that diminishes you. Marrying early or marrying for money does not guarantee happiness, and sacrificing your independence often leads to regret, mistreatment, or domestic servitude.

A worthy partner will celebrate your success and support your ambitions. Do not let cultural or social stigmas convince you that a woman's place is strictly at home. Be selective with whom you share your life. It is far better to remain single and continue growing than to settle for someone who limits your potential. Keep striving for your dreams, and wait for a partner who truly respects your worth.

WHEN SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN



DINAH SIMI PAM
NIGERIA

WE *go all out to condemn drug abuse. Obviously, its effects can blind our eyes, but with very weak energy, we talk about violence and discrimination against women, especially within the context of marriage, and undermine the subtle yet more dangerous effects.*

What do you tell a woman who is mentally, psychologically, emotionally, financially, sexually or physically abused?

"PRAY, PRAY SOME MORE. FORGIVE. STAY BECAUSE OF THE CHILDREN. YI HAKURI. DIDN'T YOU SEE THE RED FLAGS? WHAT DID YOU DO TO PROVOKE HIM?"

Physical abuse may attract some concern because the bruises are visible. But what about the wounds that leave no bruises? Constant insults, humiliation, threats, manipulation and control can slowly destroy a woman's confidence, mental health and sense of worth. Must she be physically injured before we recognize that she is hurting?

"It rains everywhere," some say. Yes, but some rains are showers and others are thunderstorms. Not every marital challenge is abuse, and abuse should never be normalized.



DEAR WOMAN,

*be **AUDACIOUS**, stand for yourself! Your virtuousness is not in your ability to tolerate any form of abuse. YOUR PAIN IS **VALID**. Someone's threshold of pain is not the same as yours. Seek help!*

Abuse thrives when there are no consequences. It's weird to see glaring indiscipline spiritualised with the devil blamed. Worst is the victim asked to keep praying for the abuser. That is another round of abuse.

Dear men, challenge the men within your circles who excuse or perpetrate abuse. Being a man should never mean protecting another man's wrongdoing. Women, support the women who are victims of abuse. The fact that one woman endured violence and discrimination does not mean another woman should endure same.

I see parents labour and sacrifice to raise precious and responsible daughters just to seem helpless due to tradition and religion leaving their jewels in the hands of abusers who disguise themselves under marriage.

Do not be silent. Speak. Listen. Support. No one should suffer violence or discrimination for any reason, not because of his or her gender.

"It is not just a woman's issue, it is a human issue."

WHAT WAS SHE WEARING?



Myat Thet Mon, Myanmar



THIS is one of the first questions people sometimes ask when a woman is raped.

But I keep wondering. **Why do we ask about her clothes before we ask why someone chose to violate her?**

A woman can wear a **short dress, a T-shirt, jeans, traditional clothes, or anything else she chooses.** None of these choices gives another person permission to touch her body or force her into a sexual act. Sexual violence is a choice made by the perpetrator, not something caused by a woman's clothes.

Research on victim-blaming has shown how rape myths and traditional gender expectations can influence the way people judge survivors. Some studies have even found that people may assign more responsibility to victims based on how they are dressed.

Not only a question

For me, this is not only a question about rape. It is a question about discrimination.

When we tell women to dress differently so they will not be attacked, we can unintentionally place the responsibility for men's violence on women. We teach women how to avoid being victims instead of teaching everyone about consent, respect, and responsibility.

My role begins with the way I speak. I want to stop victim-blaming conversations, listen to survivors without judging them, and challenge the idea that a woman's appearance determines her worth or the respect she deserves.

Every woman deserves safety

Maybe the question we should ask is not, "What was she wearing?"

Maybe we should ask

"Why did someone think they had the right to violate her and what can we do to make sure it never happens again?"

Every woman deserves safety and respect, regardless of what she wears.

WHO *Taught Us This?*



I have seen men become monsters when they are angry.

A In those moments, it feels like they forget who is standing in front of them. Their voice gets louder, kindness disappears, and everyone around them becomes afraid. You learn to be careful—how you dress, where you go, how loudly you laugh, what you say, and even what you choose.
Sometimes the reason is simply, **"Because you are a girl."**

Don't

You are told the world is unsafe for girls. So, instead of making the world safer, our freedom is taken away. **Don't** go there. **Don't** come home late. **Don't** wear that. **Don't** talk to him.

> ***But I keep wondering who makes this world unsafe for girls? Why should someone else's possible violence become the reason for controlling our lives?***

Sometimes, even home doesn't feel completely safe. You may have seen domestic violence, heard shouting, felt your body shake with fear, or learned that saying "no" can make someone angry.

You are given a good education, good clothes, good food, and everything you needbut where is the freedom? Where is the trust? Where is the safe space to say, "Something is happening to me"?

A girl should never be afraid to tell her father that she is hurting.

And then I started asking myself something different.

"Where did they learn this?

Who taught boys that anger makes them strong?

Who taught them that controlling someone is protecting them?

Who taught them that girls need restrictions instead of respect?

Maybe they learned it by watching. At home. In friendships. In films. In jokes. In the small things we call "normal."

They were told boys don't cry, boys have to be strong, boys have to control, boys have to provide. And when these lessons are repeated enough, they can become beliefs. But if these behaviours are learned, they can also be unlearned.

SANJANA KUMARI
INDIA

"Be a man!"

Maybe we need to stop teaching boys how to "be a man" and start teaching them how to be human to feel, to listen, to respect, to communicate, and to understand that strength never needs to make someone else afraid.

Because gender equality is not only about giving girls freedom.
It is also about changing what we teach boys before they grow into men.

And maybe the question we should leave with is not just, "Why are men like this?"

Being Feminist:

Equity over Equality

Yasmeen Aiyari
Nigeria



Feminist, feminism, the words echo in my mind. Let me ask then, when you hear the word "feminist" what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

Being feminist: equity over equality , pursues fairness in dealing with both genders. We should not tell one gender it's okay to shed tears while saying no to the other. Promoting weakness for one gender and strength to the other is what feminism seeks to abolish.

Cultural and societal norms have clipped the wings of women from access to certain professions. A woman should not aspire beyond being a classroom teacher, cook or a cleaner (no disrespect to the mentioned professions).

When a man provides and maintains the home he is referred to as the "head of the house" but when it is a woman, she is not referred to as the "head of the house".

There is a popular saying " behind every successful man is a woman" I enquire, why behind? Why not beside him? Was she not created from his ribs? Should she only remain a supporter to a man's goal and dream only to the alignment of her man's dreams and goals. When she decides that she's had enough and wants to soar like a bird you clip her wings and cut her vocal cord.

A man's success is rated by what he has achieved career wise but a woman's success is measured by the number of kids she has.

Being feminist seeks that both gender are recognized for their intellectual productivity and ability and not physical attributes.

Being feminist: equity over equality, is seeking fairness in the professional, political, economical and educational sectors for both genders. What is good for the goose should be good for the gander and vice versa.

The Daughter Of Dawn



BY KATIE YSABELLE REMIGIO

PHILIPPINES

They bade her kneel-yet knew not what was born when she rose.

From every shore, beneath every sky,

through every culture, faith, and tongue,

she carries one undying flame:

the right to dream, to speak, to become.

Different her roots, yet equal her worth;

different her stories, yet one her light.

She is no shadow beneath another's crown-

she is the dawn that conquers night.

And when women rise.

from every land and every creed.

the world rises with them-

united in dignity, courage, and freedom.

WE GIRLS ARE JUST LIKE WILD DUCKS

When we're little, we're a burden, and when. we grow up, we fly away to get married.

Hien Nguyen
Vietnam

Those words came to my mind when I was very young, although I no longer remember where I first heard them. At first, I thought they were just a joke.

However, as I grew older, I began to understand the meaning behind them and realized that they reflected a way of thinking that can hurt girls. And this was not simply a joke, but a reflection of a traditional belief that still exists in some families in my country.

In my country, there are still some families that pressure women to keep having children until they have a baby boy. Otherwise, women may have to face harsh words or criticism from their husband's family. This happens because some people believe that sons can carry on the family name and lineage, while daughters, after getting married, become part of another family. As a result, some parents think that investing in a son's education is more worthwhile than investing in a daughter's education. I think this way of thinking is unfair because daughters can also achieve great things and contribute to their families and society.

From my point of view, these beliefs can have a real impact on girls' education and opportunities. For example, some families may give boys more freedom or opportunities to study, while girls are expected to stay at home and take care of the family. In my own family, for instance, my uncle does not want my cousin to study at a good university. He thinks she should attend a college near home because she is a girl and does not need to go to a good university. Sometimes, girls are also told that certain jobs or activities are "not suitable" for them simply because they are girls.

However, I believe girls are not weak. They can be strong, brave, intelligent, and independent. Being kind and caring does not make them weak either. These are valuable qualities that everyone can have.

I think we should start changing these ideas from a young age. Boys and girls should learn to respect each other and understand that they have equal value. Parents should change their opinions. Girls should not be seen as burdens when they are young or as people who will simply "fly away" when they grow up. They are more than that. They have their own dreams, abilities, and choices. Most importantly, they deserve to be loved, respected, and given the freedom to choose their own path without fear of discrimination or violence.

RECLAIMING THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK

Unlearning compliance to find my authentic self.

Nurwidia Kasih
Indonesia

Once, I believed that being the "perfect woman" was the only way to be loved and accepted. Those expectations echoed constantly in my mind, and I erased who I was just to keep the peace.

I built my entire life around pleasing others striving to be quiet, compliant, and untroublesome, exactly as my family and society taught me to be.



On the outside, I wore the mask of the ideal daughter and wife. I swallowed every complaint, buried every desire, and served everyone around me. But beneath the surface, the crushing weight of societal roles felt like a quiet prison.

I thought if I was just "good" enough, it would bring harmony. But the more I edited myself for others, the more hollow I became. One day, I looked in the mirror and realized I had no face of my ownI had become a total stranger to myself.

The pressure to fulfill the "invisible checklist" of marriage and family expectations grew heavier every day. The emotions I wasn't allowed to express turned inward, suffocating my spirit until I felt entirely invisible.

I lost faith and wondered if I would ever be permitted to exist as my authentic self, or if my life was destined to be nothing more than a performance for the comfort of others.

Then came the confrontation with the truth: I was my own captor. By suffocating my voice and erasing my boundaries to please everyone else, I hadn't saved anyone—I had simply killed my own identity.

Today, I know that saying "No" and choosing my own path is not a crime—it is self-preservation. I am taking off the mask, reclaiming my face, and soaring out of the cage I was kept in.

KÍ LÓ BÍ?

When society decides a child's worth by gender, we inherit silence, bias, and inequality.

It was on a quiet Sunday morning, cries echoed through the city hospital; Abeni's pain, it's her new born's first breath, the opening of her first chapter, inked not in words but in cries and hope, and Ayinla's restless footsteps in the waiting room, pacing up and down rushed towards the nurse as he saw her emerged from the delivery room, wearing a mixture of hope and a worrisome expression. He queried, uttering just three syllables, yet heavy with centuries of expectation: "KÍ LÓ BÍ?" not just a question, but a measure of existential worth, meaning: "is it a boy or girl."
(Communicatively translated).

The Nurse smiled and announced: *"Congratulations Mr Ayinla, your wife delivered a bouncing baby girl."* Ayinla's shoulders fell; a murdered hope. One would wonder why, perhaps, a baby girl doesn't bounce.

A girl's worth is questioned right from birth, to childhood, marriage, motherhood, even in leadership.

- "Is it a boy or girl"
- "Why invest in her education if she'll marry anyway?"
- "Why hasn't she conceived yet? Is something wrong with her?" blame placed squarely on her body, while the man escapes scrutiny.
- "Can she raise children properly?" respectively.



El-Mutolsamat

Nigeria

My point is gender discrimination begins in our homes, accepted by our societies and ending it requires a change which begins from our homes. Equality is enhanced when we see, hear and experience fairness everyday, and the values learned within the family can influence how we treat others; at school, workplace and the society at large.

I will leave you with a quote from my favorite poet: "If bias begins at home, so must change. When families teach fairness, societies learn equality."

SMALL CHANGES STILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Mariana Reis, Brazil



ONCE

a teacher told me: "When you change someone's life, you change the whole world." Those words were powerful to me. They kept echoing in my mind, and I wanted to change the world. I based my life on that idea by becoming a teacher for young learners, always inspired by people who had made a difference in the lives of others.

On the other hand, life showed me how difficult it can be, with all the struggles and prejudice we may face throughout our lives. But somehow, I kept the faith burning inside me because I wanted to make a difference.

"When you change someone's life, you change the whole world."

I helped many students learn how to read and write. I saw the sparkle in my students' eyes, but sometimes it still felt like it wasn't enough. My dream was to change the world.

The more I learned about the struggles faced by my community and by women around the world, the bigger and more complex the problems seemed—they felt far beyond my reach.

And I stumbled many times. I lost faith and wondered if anything would ever change, or if my work was in vain. I read stories of remarkable people who had overcome struggles and created change, but everything seemed so great and beyond what I could achieve.

THEN I REMEMBERED

my teacher's words: "When you change someone's life, you change the whole world."

Today, I know I have changed some people's lives. There are others I may never know about. But that cannot stop me from continuing to teach, inspire, and be part of the change.

HOW TRADITIONAL SAYINGS ARE DESTROYING US

When words intended for survival begin to kill our youth



Manokoana Thejane
Lesotho

In the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, many sayings derived from the past were meant to teach strength and survival. Today, those same words intended for a positive outcome are destroying our youth.

To boys, we say: “Monna ke nku ha lle”a man is a sheep, he does not cry. From a young age, men are taught that expressing feelings is a sign of weakness. They learn to swallow pain, heartbreak, job loss, shame, and anger to prove they are capable of being providers. With no room to show hurt or fear, unspoken anger turns into rage, gender-based violence, homicides, and rising suicide rates. Men were taught to be strong, and they die in silence.

To girls, we say: “Mosali o ngalla mots’eo” a woman belongs to the hearth. Women are taught to submit and stay in toxic marriages no matter what, enduring insults, beatings, and control for the sake of family or children.

When a woman is brave enough to leave and speak up, she is often blamed: “O entseng hore ao otle?” what did you do to make him hit you? That single question teaches her that violence is her fault. The cycle continues, making pain normal and fear her home.

These sayings are slowly destroying our nation: women suffer victimization, and men suffer depression.

“Men were taught to be strong and they die quiet. Women were taught to endure, and pain became their home.”

KÍ NI AṢỌ RẸ NÍ ṢE PẸLÚ RẸ?



What does her clothing have to do with it?

Don-Emmanuel Gift Ayomide, Nigeria

It is a question I wish we asked more often not when judging a woman, but when challenging the culture that teaches us to blame her. We often say we respect women, yet that respect comes with conditions. We put women on a pedestal, expecting them to be modest, careful, pure, and "respectable." But the moment a woman steps outside those expectations, that same pedestal becomes a cage. We don't have to be placed on a pedestal to deserve respect; we deserve respect simply because we are human beings.

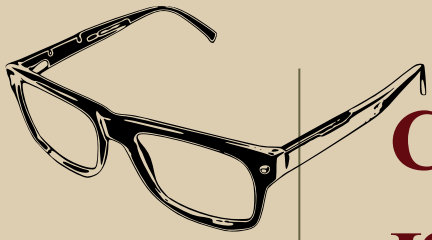
Clothing does not define one's character, and it certainly does not permit anyone to touch a woman. A woman wearing a short dress deserves the same respect as a woman wearing a long one. When I see someone blaming a woman for what she was wearing during a terrible situation, it makes me sick. In this day and age, when consent is a fundamental part of how we interact, why are we still looking for reasons to blame women?

As we say in Yoruba: "Aṣọ kì í ṣe ìwé àṣẹ"clothing is not a permission slip.

Recent events in Rwanda have made this question even more real to me. Women have been confronted and subjected to humiliating treatment over what they were wearing, raising serious questions about how these rules are enforced and whether women's dignity is protected. When the people enforcing rules are also the ones making women feel unsafe, where do we draw the line between enforcing standards and dehumanizing someone?

Perhaps the question should no longer be, "What was she wearing?" but "Why do we think what she was wearing gives us the right to disrespect her?"

I Can See You



CONSENT IS NOT OPTIONAL

ONLINE OR OFFLINE

An Open Letter to Creeps Who Wear Spy Glasses and Mark Zuckerberg

By *Laura P. Duman*
Ireland

I I'm not going to let you pretend that you don't know what you are doing. You are disempowering women on purpose. You are wearing those creepy glasses because you want to record women without their knowledge. You will post it online to humiliate them. You don't want her consent, you want her frightened, you want the power!

You are turning every public space where women are present into a place where she must be ever vigilant about her body and her safety. This is unacceptable. Women are entitled to feel safe in public spaces. Recording someone without their consent strips the person of their right to control their own body, privacy and digital self. Creeps, you know this and, NO, I do not consent!

Deep fakes make it possible for images of real people to be turned into pornographic material in minutes. What are you doing with my image? What right do you have to do this? I do not agree to have my image or likeness put online on any platform and shared without the request for my consent beforehand and I reserve the right to say NO!

I am calling on Mark Zuckerberg to be held accountable for the misuse of Meta Spy-glasses. I want to see more measures in place to protect victims from the harms of this technology. Namely: built-in safety features, super strict privacy controls, and automatic blurring of faces of those who are not asked for their consent. These measures will help to protect women from tech-enabled harassment online.

My role in this issue lies in raising my voice to effect change.
I refuse to just sit in fear and let men reclaim the public spaces for themselves!

Who Gets to Decide

What a Woman Wears?



Tayebeh Ansari
Afghanistan

Historically, women's clothing has been more than clothing. It is where power, culture, religion, family, law, and society meet and where women's freedom is questioned.

Women have fought for the right to study, vote, work, and participate equally. Yet the struggle over what women wear remains. In some places, such as Afghanistan, women are forced to cover their bodies. In others, they are judged for covering too much, showing too much, or dressing differently from what society expects. A woman can be called "improper," "indecent," or "immoral" because of her clothes, while men are often judged by different standards.

Why is a woman's clothing treated as a measure of her character?

I am not advocating nudity. I am advocating choice. No father, brother, religious authority, tradition, government, or social expectation should have the final word on what a woman wears. Freedom should not mean forcing women to cover, and it should not mean forcing them to uncover. Freedom means having the right to choose.

I am an Afghan woman, and at twenty-four, I still dream of something that seems ordinary to many: wearing a short skirt and a T-shirt, with my hair flowing freely in the wind. For some women, this is ordinary. For me, it represents a freedom I have not always experienced.

But this is not only my story. Somewhere, another woman is being told that she wears too much, too little, or simply the wrong thing.

Real change begins when we stop teaching girls to fear judgment and start teaching everyone especially boys from childhood that women are free human beings, not bodies to control, judge, or police.

A woman should not have to earn the right to choose what she wears. Choice is a right.

TWO CHALLENGES, ONE STRONG VOICE



Tshering Dema
Bhutan

I start my day with courage

I take more time to prepare myself.
The stairs I walk feel never-ending.
A short walk feels like a drain on my strength.
But I am a woman, and I must rise.

I am expected to care for everyone,
to manage the home,
to be patient, understanding and strong,
even when I am tired myself.

Being a woman and having a disability
Makes my day harder.
Often my voice isn't heard as loudly as others.
At times I must work double
to show I am capable.

I stand tall in front of my students,
and all the while my tired body begs me to stop.
But I smile when I see my little students blinking at me.

At night the truth comes out.
Once I make it home,
my legs feel like they weigh a thousand pounds
My body feels empty with no energy to move.
Yet every day I face the challenges life throws at me.

But I also teach them to be fair,
to respect every woman,
to see ability before disability,
and to never judge someone by gender.
If my voice can change one mind,
if my courage can inspire one person,
then I know I have a role to play
in making the world more equal.



SHE GETS TO DECIDE, BUT WHO SHAPED THE CHOICE?



By Titilayomi A. Otenaike | Brazil-Nigeria

There is a girl I have never met. She lives somewhere close to you. She is fifteen, maybe sixteen. Her phone is loud with music. She is offered or sold pills, "just pills," they said. Her hand fits perfectly around a slim, glossy device that smells like cotton candy, mint, or watermelon. Someone told her it was safer than a cigarette. Someone told her it was her choice, her freedom, her body, her life.

These choices do not happen in isolation, do they?

Perhaps she later goes to a party. She drinks. Someone offers her another substance. She becomes increasingly intoxicated. Her judgment changes. Her ability to recognize danger, communicate clearly, leave, or seek help may become impaired.

Now that substance use has entered the environment, where someone is willing to exploit her vulnerability, what happens next?

A perpetrator exploits her, maybe she is already is intoxicated, or they administer a substance without her knowledge, or use an already vulnerable situation to cross boundaries she would never give permission to cross, increasing the risk of sexual violence by impairing judgment, reducing awareness of danger, limiting the ability to resist or seek help, and making it harder to communicate or give meaningful consent.

But the story did not begin at the party. It began much earlier with exposure, social pressure, curiosity, coping, advertising, inequality, or the desire to belong.

The effect of substance abuse can also go the other way. After the violence against her,the discrimination, harassment, trauma or violence may make her more vulnerable to substance use as a way of coping. So we are looking at a cycle:

Exposure → substance use → vulnerability → exploitation → violence → further harm.

For us to breaking that cycle requires more than telling girls what not to do. It requires giving them accurate information, safer environments, supportive peers and a voice in the decisions that affect them.

I write this as a research scientist. I also write this as a woman, asking "Whose freedom is this, really?" Because when we say, "She gets to decide," we should also ask, was she informed? Was she safe? Was she free from coercion? And when her vulnerability was exploited, who was responsible?

Her vulnerability is not permission.
Her intoxication is not consent.
And violence is NEVER her fault.

Her choice. Her voice. Her safety is hers, and it is YOURS.

GIVING GIRLS THE COURAGE TO SPEAK



Rizwana Rafi (An Educator) | Pakistan

As a teacher, I have come to believe that education is not only about books, examinations, and academic success. Sometimes, the most important lesson I want to give a girl is the confidence to understand her own worth, protect her boundaries, and speak when something does not feel right.

I work with teenage girls, and one of my responsibilities is to help them become more aware of their physical, emotional, and personal well-being. I believe that a girl who understands herself is better prepared to recognize situations that may put her at risk.

We talk about safe and unsafe touch, personal boundaries, consent, harassment, and the importance of speaking up. These conversations should not be surrounded by shame or fear. Girls need age-appropriate information presented with care, dignity, and sensitivity. They also need to understand that inappropriate behaviour can come from someone they know or someone they do not know, and that a person's gender does not automatically make behaviour safe or unsafe.

One message I repeatedly try to give my students is:

"Your discomfort matters. Your boundaries matter. Your voice matters."

If someone touches you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, says something inappropriate, pressures you, harasses you, or makes you feel unsafe, you should know that you have the right to say "No," move away, seek help, and tell a trusted adult.

I want my students to leave my classroom with more than knowledge. I want them to carry confidence.

Confidence to identify inappropriate behaviour.

Confidence to seek help what are the right way and where.

Confidence to support another girl.

For me, this is what moving from awareness to action means.

Educate her. Listen to her. Believe her. Empower her.Because when a girl learns that her voice matters, she does not only protect herself

She can become a voice of awareness and courage for others.

GREY

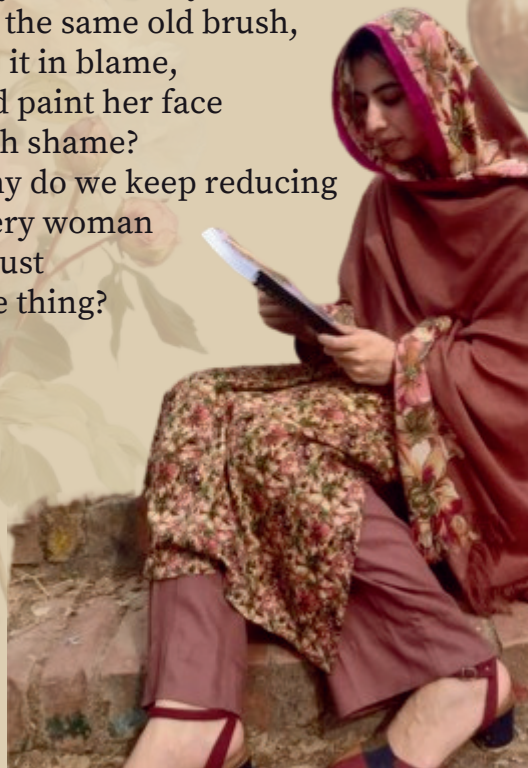


Maryam Riasat
Pakistan

A strange thing happened.
A man was killed
By his stepson.
The son of the woman he married.
And the world.....
wept for the slain,
for the slayer,
but not for her.
They say she caused it, right?
She's the reason.
Poor men.....
just caught
in her little web.
The seductress.
With her ambitions.
Same old story, isn't it?
A woman blamed
for a man's betrayal.
And we nod,
"Yeah, it's her fault."
But wait.....
Wasn't he playing too?
It takes two to tango.
So why is she the Medusa,
and he the silent hero?
The hypocrisy.
She's the destroyer,
the vixen,
the home-wrecker.
But aren't you the same
who said she can't decide,
can't drive,
should submit,
must serve?
She's just a tool,
a body to barter,
a thing to tame.
Now flip the view.
A man.....figure of power and command.
He leads, he rules.
He is wise, he is resolute
He is the ruler, the unchallenged.

Strange, isn't it—
how quickly did the tale turn?
now she's the master of minds?
She made your ruler kneel?
That "brainless" woman
outplayed your king?
So which story will you tell today?
How does a "brainless" woman
outwit your wise leader?
How does someone so "weak"
bend a world that claims to control her?
She raises your bloodline,
teaches your children,
bears your burdens.
Silent,
strong.
And still.....
you call her too much,
Not obedient.
Not soft.
Not woman enough.
Never just right
Maybe she's not the ruin.
Maybe she's the mirror.
Maybe what you fear
isn't her,
but your reflection in her defiance.
She's not wicked.
She's not perfect.
She's not a saint or a siren.
She's just... human.
Flawed. Fierce. Feeling.
And fully alive.

I know.....
the world isn't black and white.
It's grey skies and grey choices.
It's shadows in daylight,
truth tangled with lies.
But still.....
why do we always reach
for the same old brush,
dip it in blame,
and paint her face
with shame?
Why do we keep reducing
every woman
to just
one thing?





THE WORD WE WROTE

Ayisha Nahla
India

With pain, I realized that I had become a mother to a baby girl. Kochammini, who had come to help with the delivery, became mysterious and frightening. I feared that my child would be taken away from me. After the baby was born, I held her tightly. When Keshavan kutty and his family saw that the child was a girl, their faces became dark with disappointment.

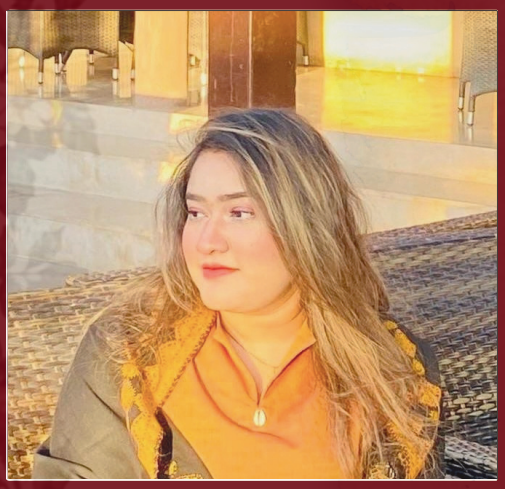
I understood that my daughter was not safe in that house. Keshavan kutty's indifference and his mother's harsh words made my life miserable for ninety days. Every night, while holding my daughter, I dreamed of a place where girls were not considered a curse. Finally, I decided to leave the house with my baby.

On a stormy night, we secretly stepped out and began our journey. We crossed unfamiliar roads, Nariman Kunnu and Pulimadam, carrying nothing except my baby and my determination to protect her. On the third day, we reached a land where women could live freely. Seeing my daughter smile gave me hope. As she grew, I gave her a name, an education, and most importantly a life of freedom.

I taught her to think independently, question unfair rules, and believe in herself. She grew brave and adventurous, climbing mountains, walking through forests, and exploring rivers. Life was not always easy; there were days of hunger and poverty. Sometimes I wondered whether leaving had been the right decision. But whenever I saw her face, my doubts disappeared.

Years later, my daughter asked why I had taken her away. I told her that I had two choices: accept the fate others had planned for us or create our path. I chose the second. She understood that my greatest decision was not simply saving her, but giving her the freedom to decide her life.

SHE IS A SOUL



Neha Ishaq
Pakistan

She carries beauty not just in her face, but in her fire,
A quiet strength that turns every wound into desire.
She walks through traditions that once held her down,
And wears **her** courage like a **queen** wears her crown.
Her voice is a melody the world tried to silence,
Her talent is the answer to every act of violence.
She breaks every wall built to limit her dreams,
And rises beyond what the world says she seems.
With every step, she chooses her own destiny,
With every fall, she rebuilds her identity.
She does not ask the world for permission to shine
She becomes her own freedom, her own design.

Find the Apple

Look closer. The most powerful women are often the ones we overlook.

Can you find all the women hidden in this scene?



THE WOMEN TO FIND:

- Cleopatra (Ancient Egypt)
- Hypatia (Ancient Greece)
- Joan of Arc (Medieval France)
- Rumi (13th century)
- Frida Kahlo (20th century)
- Marie Curie (Science)
- Amelia Earhart (Aviation)
- Malala Yousafzai (Education)
- Virginia Woolf (Literature)
- Rosa Parks (Civil Rights)
- Maya Angelou (Writing)
- Ada Lovelace (Technology)
- Sonia Sotomayor (Judiciary)
- Nawal El Saadawi (Activism)
- Serena Williams (Sports)
- J.K. Rowling (Books)

Different times.
Different places.
Same strength.

SOME WOMEN AREN'T JUST PART OF HISTORY...
THEY ARE HISTORY.



Find the Words

Empowering language.
A stronger tomorrow.

Some words are more than just words. They are power, identity, and change.

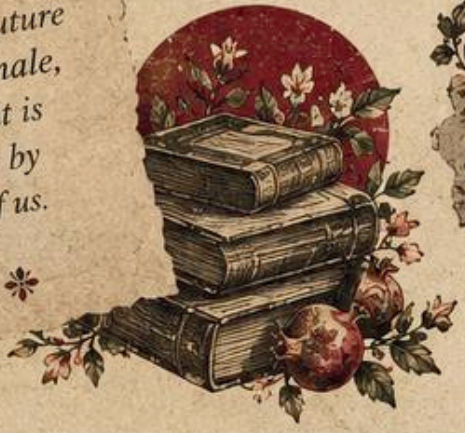


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FIND THESE WORDS:

- EQUALITY
- FREEDOM
- STRENGTH
- POWER
- RESPECT
- JUSTICE
- SISTERHOOD
- DIGNITY
- COURAGE
- CHANGE
- WOMEN
- FEMINISM
- VOICES
- EMPOWERMENT
- LOVE
- RIGHTS
- DIVERSITY
- SOLIDARITY
- HOPE
- BRAVERY
- DREAMS
- CONFIDENCE
- HEALTH
- SAFETY
- PEACE
- LIBERTY
- EQUALPAY

The future is female, and it is built by all of us.





MORE WOMEN. MORE STORIES. A BRIGHTER FUTURE.

Spot the Differences

Two scenes. Same world. Look closer.

Not everything that looks the same is the same.



Small changes make a big difference.

A



B



FIND THE DIFFERENCES

Look closely at the two pictures. Can you find all the differences?

1. *10 differences in total*
2. *Look at the details — clothes, objects, colors, and more*
3. *Take your time*
4. *No zooming (challenge accepted!)*
5. *Enjoy the journey and the amazing women in both scenes*

Same women.
Same dreams.
Different details.

Because change is in the details. ♡





Disclaimer

The content of the magazine articles has not been audited or checked for grammatical errors.

Please also note that some of the designs in this magazine were created using AI tools.

Thank you for reading!



