



***Diamonds in the Rough***  
***A Literary Magazine***

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Editor: Dr. Melissa Knox-Raab

Welcome to the second issue of Diamonds in the Rough. This issue showcases the talents of the following students: Ceylan Gül, Sabrina Schnücker, Leonie Lamm, Hadis Fallah, Josephine Grothoff, Helen-Sophie Krott, Nora Schulte-Zweckel, plus some recipes for getting published from Melissa Knox-Raab.

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## **The Reformation of Islam: A Response to Ayaan Hirsi Ali**

By Ceylan Gül

As children of a formerly Christian mother from Poland and a Muslim father from Turkey, living and growing up in Germany, we enjoyed more holidays and advantages than they did. We celebrated Easter and Christmas but also all Muslim holidays. We went on vacation in Poland and Turkey. We always had three countries to call home and three cultures to which we felt connected. We experienced and still experience the best of both worlds. Nevertheless, my nuclear family and I consider ourselves Muslims and believers in Islam. Not because we are forced to believe in something our paternal grandparents believe in or because we were not allowed to believe in something else, but because we ourselves believe in it. This is how religion works: it is something you believe in, a superpower, a magical, unexplainable force of strength that makes you do and go through everything, something you cannot see, feel, touch, hear and certainly cannot describe, but most important it is a personally very intimate thing. And the first rule that defines every religion, every faith, every belief is that you actually need to believe. There is no religion without believing, there is no God without believing, there is no hell or heaven without believing. There is no compulsion to have faith because faith remains a personal matter between you and your God.

So, I was very disturbed to read the description of Islam in *Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Nomad*. I had difficulties understanding how someone who believes that Islam is passed down through fear and anxiety, that Muslims only go through life with reverence and most Muslims are forced to believe in Islam anyway, so someone who does not even understand how religion “works” and what it actually means, claims that this religion needs a reformation. How can someone plead for a reinterpretation of the *Quran* without knowing the actual interpretation, only referring to the mere reading of the book? How can an atheist – which Ayaan Hirsi Ali claims to be – speak of an image of God and condemn it if he himself does not believe in any God? And how can someone who claims to be without any religion make a judgment about which religion you should best identify with? From my point of view not at all, but this is what Ayaan Hirsi Ali mainly – maybe unconsciously at some points, but very deliberately at other points – does in *Nomad*.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a formerly Muslim woman, who grew up in Somalia and is now known for her criticism of Islam and her activism in relation to women's rights along with her fight against genital mutilation. She is also a Dutch-American politician and political scientist. *Nomad* is a sequel to her book *Infidel* and describes her '*personal journey through the clash of civilizations*'.

In *Nomad* she describes Mohammed as an 'infallible Prophet' and of the 'oppressive dictates of the *Quran*' (Hirsi Ali 2010, xxi). She also claims that 'Islam is built on sexual inequality and on the surrender of individual responsibility and choice', and all of this is in her opinion 'not just ugly, [but] monstrous'. She asserts that 'many Muslims are instinctively appalled by the violence committed in the name of their faith' and that their 'concept of God' – a peaceful and compassionate God – only exists because they do not know any other concepts of God or do not know that their concept is 'wrong'. She criticizes the Muslim attitude towards credit and debt, the 'denial' of access to education and the notion that public education and public institutions present Islam as a 'peaceful religion' whereas the Muslim belief should be 'challenged' to indicate critical thinking, especially towards Islam. Several times she indicates a connection between honor killing, genital mutilation and child marriage with Islam. Several times she compares Islam to 'modern' Christianity and the Christian churches and calls the Christian community to action for 'the battle against Islamic fanaticism'. The Christian concept of God according to *Ayaan Hirsi Ali* is of a being who is 'synonymous' with love, who does not 'preach hatred, intolerance, and discord', who is 'merciful', who is uninterested in 'state power' and who 'sees no competition with science'. The Bible does not include direct commands that 'need to be obeyed', it is only 'a book full of parables'. Last but not least she calls Mohammed 'the founder of Islam' numerous times.

Throughout *Nomad* Ayaan Hirsi Ali openly propagandizes against Islam hidden behind personal experiences. She talks about her childhood and early adult life, about her parents and siblings, her grandmother and other situations that changed her life and her way of thinking. In the final chapters then she draws the conclusion that modern Christianity in comparison to Islam offers a 'better' alternative for everyone who needs faith or religion in their life. And in the very same breath, she says she is an atheist. I am not sure, how someone, who does not believe in any religion or any God at all, can make an assumption about which religion may be the best for me or anyone else. I think she is not aware of the fact that religion is much more than just a shadow that follows you around. For religious people, their faith is a very big

part of their life and also of their identity – you do not change your identity that easy, from one day to the next.

Her choice of words and her tone are inappropriate to the topic for religious readers, words like ‘monstrous’ and ‘merciless’ are disrespectful. She limits herself by examining only Somali Muslims in her own family – by referring only to her own reading and interpretation of the *Quran* and her own observations in the Netherlands and America. How much has she really talked to Imams and to people who could show her another version of Islam? Her only clues are two controversial Quran verses and Mohammed, who had more than one wife and presumably married a nine-year-old girl. How can I not feel offended, when she in reverse says that I believe in a God who preaches hatred, intolerance and discord? Because according to her this is exactly the Muslim concept of God. That I fear the God in whom I believe and for whom I must go to holy war. That this God is not gracious and does not forgive. That I cannot and have not adapted to Western life because of my faith. And that I cannot be a feminist either, because I am a Muslim and Islam and the Quran oppresses women. She definitely generalizes too much and does not state that her version of Islam is a cultic version, a version which is influenced by obsolete cultural value concepts. Therefore, her pleading for a reformation within Islam and that the West ‘urgently needs to compete with the jihads’ is misplaced on this foundation. Not only because of her flawed and stereotypical explanations – Mohammed is not the founder of Islam, he is a prophet, the prophet who was chosen by God to transmit God’s words to us and why was Amina, in the imagined conversation in *Nomad*, a Muslim girl who clearly could not explain her own faith and Jane someone who is highly educated and interested in other religions confronting Amina with the stereotypical, controversial verses of the Quran? – but also because of her blurred lines between radical Islamists who kill paradoxically in the name of God and those who practice religion as a faith and value it rather than abuse it for power. This essay’s aim is to show that Islam does not need a reformation or reinterpretation, that from a theological point of view Islam is the reformation of Christianity and that from a religious point of view a reinterpretation would be contradictory.

Islam does not need enlightenment and reformation in the western sense. It had these western achievements from the very beginning. Developments in the Islamic world cannot be equated with those in Central Europe. The Enlightenment did not arise out of Christianity, but in a hard struggle with this religion. In Islam this confrontation was not so necessary. Statements according to which Islam did not have a phase of Enlightenment like Europe and therefore did

not develop to the same extent can therefore only be made if one looks through very gloomy Christian occidental glasses without any background knowledge of Islamic studies. According to Immanuel Kant, the Enlightenment is 'man's exit from his self-inflicted immaturity'. In this sense Enlightenment is already contained in the Quran or at least does not contradict it. The Quran is always about people learning to be mature and to behave rationally, even if someone does them wrong: '*... And let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is forgiving and merciful.*' [Quran 24:22]. So, if God can forgive you, how could you not forgive someone else? The emancipation of mankind from the Church was a central event of the European Enlightenment. Martin Luther laid the foundation with his Bible translation. Meanwhile nobody had to translate the Quran, it was already written in the language of the people. The church positioned itself between God and man. In Islam there is no such mediator level. Every human being stands directly in front of God.

From a historical and theological perspective all three great world religions have the same origin and Islam came as the third and last of them. Islam and the Quran should be treated as the reformation of Christianity, just as Christianity was seen as the reformation of Judaism, but as already known, not everyone was willing to adapt another religion and so we have three – meanwhile many more – different religions and believers. From a religious perspective it would create conflict to say that the word of God, which the Quran is to Muslims, needs a reinterpretation and to believe that a human being could presumably 'translate' or reinterpret the word of God.

Such a 'translation' would rather result in something like taking out all 'misleading' verses and concentrating on personal preferences. If you believe in a religion, you believe in a certain God, you believe in a certain way of living and you adapt to certain 'rules'. Normally you neither pick between all the 'rules' and 'laws', nor choose which appeal to you the most and which you think are odd. There are things that are unchangeable, and for Muslims it is the word of God. Also, from a linguistic point of view a properly translation is nearly impossible. Even with a simple translation from German into English and vice versa, the linguistic and contextual semantic content gets often lost. Then how should the translation of a highly complex language like High Arabic – which is hardly spoken anymore – be correct and correspond to the actual meaning? Even with existing translations there are mistakes that lead to misunderstandings. For example, in sura 4 verse 34, to which Ayaan Hirsi Ali also refers: '*...As to those women on whose part ye fear 'Nushooz' disloyalty and ill-conduct,*

*admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) 'Idribuhun' beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)'. This verse's translation indicates that Muslim men are allowed to beat their unfaithful and misbehaving wives. But the truth is that the word 'nushuz' means 'get up' or 'rise up', something which is clarified in other verses [Quran 58:11], but in the verse above it is translated as 'disloyalty' and 'ill-conduct'. So, the case regarding sura 4 verse 34 has nothing to do with adultery or any other immoral behavior, but rather with a woman rebelling against her husband. In another verse where the man is rebelling against his wife, so in the case of the man's 'nushuz', the couple should settle the dispute or separate if the man has really shown himself to be rebellious towards the woman. The verse does not state that the woman should beat the man. Instead, they should talk and settle the argument, because this is one thing that requires the two to get along in respect and love [Quran 4:128]. If one then looks at the actual situation [4:34], we see that it concerns a woman who no longer tolerates her husband and therefore rebels against him. As in the example of the man who rebels, the sura is also about calming the situation and restoring a harmonious relationship. Beating the woman rebelling against the husband is not a measure that would serve the cause. The woman would only hate her husband even more. In addition, the word 'Idribuhun' which is translated as 'beat them' has a different meaning it is word stem, 'Idribuhun' means 'to put forth' and in every other verse it is translated as 'put forth' – [24:31], [2:273], [14:24] – and if one now looks at [4:34] again, then by means of the context (rejection of the woman in relation to her husband) we see that only the original meaning of the word 'to bring forth', makes sense: '... As for those women from whom you fear a desertion, then you shall 1) advise them, and 2) abandon them in the bedchamber, and 3) 'Idribuhun' let them go forth; if they obey you, then do not seek a way over them; God is High, Great' [4:34]. As a result, sura 4 verse 34 is nothing but a comprehensive list of measures the husband may take if his wife wants to leave him because she can no longer stand living with him, but an incorrect translation like the one used by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, transforms this verse into one of the most controversial verses in the Quran.*

Furthermore, Islam says for example: *'He who kills one man kills all mankind, he who saves one man saves all mankind'* [5:32]. This is meant to prevent the human nature from indiscriminate killing like back in time where women were accused of being witches and got killed even though there had already been the reformation of Christianity. But nevertheless, Islam does not say that you have to believe in everything blindly and without questioning. On the contrary the Quran is not ultimate and undoubtable, and Muslims are allowed to question,

allowed to think, allowed to doubt. Islam says that you should question everything and *Ayaan Hirsi Ali*'s belief that education is not compatible with Islam and not granted for Muslims, especially not for girls is a wrong assumption, an incorrect interpretation of Islam. A belief and misinterpretation that has been adapted to a whole culture in this way – a version of Islam accepted in Somalia, Kenya and maybe other countries but not in the actual Islam. In Islam it is said that you should seek for education everywhere and every time, you should travel to the end of the world just to find education. There is a little story my father always told me when I talked to him about cultures failing to understand that women should get access to education: The story begins with two men who are having a conversation. At some point one of the two men claims that he does not see the necessity to grant his daughter or any women access to education, for him, her only aim is to marry and bear children. The other man was clearly irritated by the statement of him and asked him a question: 'So then tell me, if your wife or daughter gets sick, would you bring her to a male or female doctor?' The other man confidently answered: 'Of course female. No other man can examine my wife or daughter.' Thereupon the man asked a second question: 'So, if you say that women should not have any access to education – how on earth would there be any female doctors that could examine your wife or daughter?'

There you can see the paradoxical manner of these kinds of cultures, of these kinds of men. These mistaken ideas have nothing to do with religion. You cannot compare a Muslim from Somalia with a Muslim from Turkey. You cannot compare a Muslim from Iraq with a Muslim from Kazakhstan. In the same way you cannot compare a Christian from Germany with a Christian from Poland or Russia. It may seem like all believe in the same God, but culture, education and tolerance have a core role in how we live that certain religion out.

According to a Hadith, Mohammed sharpens Muslims, both men and women, to acquire knowledge and he attached so much importance to it that he, according to another Hadith, said: '*Strive for knowledge, even if you would have to go as far as China for this purpose*' – regarding to former circumstances China was considered as the farthest country from Arabia. In another transmission from Mohammed it is said: '*According to the teachings of Islam, it is the duty of every Muslim to strive for knowledge*', a statement which includes men and women. And there is a further transmission which explicitly prescribes the education of women: '*The one who raises a daughter well and gives her a good education acquires paradise*' (Tirmidhi). You are promised to get a reward for every step and work you invest in your education, for every gain on an intellectual level and for being inquisitive. Islam is not

like in all the ‘horror stories’ of Muslim families where the daughters have to marry at sixteen and need to become a birthing machine.

Ever since the beginning of Islam there have been many misunderstandings and misleading statements or misinterpretations, Islam has always been seen as threat and as something dangerous, as the ‘Other’ compared to the Occident as amongst others Edward Said explains in his studies of *Orientalism*. Only a few really dare to openly get information and engage with the scriptures, as mass media creates only fear and superficial knowledge with its reports on the IS – reports which misrepresent the religion and where the IS adherents clearly dissociate themselves from – while there are only two aspects which need to be known about Islam.

First, the Quran is written in a metaphoric way; it should not be read literally. It tells stories and creates references. Every verse should be put in its historical context. There is a certain interpretation to every verse and unfortunately not everyone is able to interpret them correctly, but everyone could learn to. This is important regarding verses like ‘*kill all infidels*’ which *Ayaan Hirsi Ali* also uses in her imagined conversation between the two teenage girls. This verse in particular is telling a story, a story from thousands of years in the past. In the early years of Islam, the religion was always in battles because it was not accepted as a religion by everyone right away. And although there was this fight against Islam Mohammed did not defend himself or was counterattacking until God allowed him to defend himself and resist against the given circumstances in order to save his religion. And it is precisely this situation that the verse is related to. A story where Mohammed did nothing against other human beings who tried to harm him and his adherents until God gave him permission. No Muslim is walking around and killing humans of other cultures or religions because Islam says you cannot take a life God gave, including your own. Therefore, murder and suicide are deadly sins. There are even more verses in the Quran which say that you should respect other religions and the ‘*people of the book*’ who include Christians and Jews: ‘*God does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you in the religion or driven you from your homes, or from being just towards them. God loves those who are just*’ [Quran 60:8]. The Quran explicitly states that the existence of people from different faiths and opinions is something that should be acknowledged and welcomed, for this is how God created and predestined humankind in this world: ‘*We have appointed a law and a practice for every one of you. Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. So, compete with each other in doing good. Every one of*

*you will return to God and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed* [Quran 5:48]. Violence in general is against Islam; any harm against a living creature is a sin, that is why in Islam there are also certain rituals on how to slaughter an animal and which animal are allowed to be eaten and which are not.

Second, neither Islam nor the *Quran* oppress women or children. Any physical or psychological harm gets penalized in the hereafter. In Islam children are entrusted to your care by God, the commission of parents is to care for their children, to protect them, to grant them access to education, to love and respect them. They are not the property of their parents or anyone else. There is also no 'sexual inequality' in Islam or the Quran, everything that is considered to be fulfilled is regarded to men and women equally. Women even have a higher importance in Islam, it says among other things '*paradise lies underneath the feet of your mother*'. Most of the Islamic critics are claiming that children and women do not have any rights in Islam and this because they have this superficial knowledge of Mohammed marrying more than one woman and also marrying a nine-year old.

But marriages at that time had a different purpose. You did not marry someone because you fell in love, not even because your parents wanted you to, they married because of societal reasons, a practice which was strengthened by the fact that all of Mohammed's wives were divorcees or widows except his first wife. Back then in Mohammed's time women had no rights, were treated as inferiors and were only socially accepted when they were married. It took a measure where unmarried women were murdered and punished, Mohammed took care of those women who were left alone without any man who could take care of them, one Hadith even says: '*The best of you in character is he who is best to this wife*'. He did not marry more than once to be able to fully live out sexual needs since these multiple marriages were also bound to many rules which you could never observe in today's life – you had to love every woman equally, you were not allowed to prefer someone over another, you could only spend the day with one women, you could not kiss wife A in the morning and sleep with wife B at night. But multiple marriages are not an 'invention' of Islam, if one has a look at the bible, Abraham, who is a prophet of Islam too, had also two wives [Genesis 16:6]. Still, regarding this subject one needs to take into consideration the fact that it was a different time and place, women were considered to be mature much earlier than it is usual nowadays. So, naturally the age of being able to marry or the socially accepted age for getting married varies from time to time. Even in the United States the age for getting married legally still varies

from state to state. Nevertheless, Islam is the only religion that prohibits consummation of marriage with prepubescent persons [Quran 24:59; 4:6].

I just want to make clear that Ayaan Hirsi Ali's points about why Islam in her opinion needs a reformation have another origin – they are of cultural nature and not of a religious one. When you understand what the verses really mean, when the translation is accurate and the historic context clear, Islam does not oppress anyone, it does not force women to submit, it is against abuse of any kind and there is not such a thing like a holy war or a war in the name of God. There was not only one war that was proactively led by Islam. And the Quran does not dictate anything. At the end religion is a choice. You decide what and in whom you believe. No one can force you to believe anything. Belief happens in your heart, and if you only believe because of fear, you are lying to yourself. And I think it is disrespectful to give someone the feeling that the religion one is believing in is 'monstrous'. There is no need for a reformation, there is a need for tolerance, a need for enlightenment, but not the way Ayaan Hirsi Ali tried to do it, in a way of showing how cultural and personal attributes influence the practice of a religion and differ around the world and how superficial knowledge, the spread of lies, hatred and intolerance leads to incomprehension and human failure.

## **Female Sexuality in Hasidic Judaism – Through the example of Deborah Feldman’s *Unorthodox***

By Leonie Lamm

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of female sexuality. Especially in Western culture, it is now more widely accepted that female pleasure is just as important as male pleasure. However, there are still communities in which female sexuality is completely disregarded. This is especially common in highly religious communities, such as Hasidic Judaism. Deborah Feldman is one of many Hasidic women whose sexuality was completely suppressed during her upbringing in the Hasidic sect Satmar. In her memoir *Unorthodox*, she illustrates her life in that sect and gives an insight into the laws that the community lives by and the beliefs that its members share. Amongst these, the most striking are the ones concerning women. Feldman’s memoir makes it clear that none of these laws and beliefs focus on women’s needs or wishes, but rather on their purpose within the community, which is to produce and take care of children. Sexual intercourse is presented to Hasidic women merely as a means of procreation, thus disregarding every other aspect of female sexuality. The Hasidic view of the female body, the sexual education that women receive, and the rules and laws on sex that they have to live by, militate against a normal expression of sexuality.

Hasidic women are taught from a very young age that their life’s purpose is to bear children and rear them. Over and over, Deborah Feldman was told as a child: “[T]here is no greater curse than the curse of childlessness” (Feldman, *Unorthodox* 50). By teaching young girls that a woman without children must be cursed, women’s freedom of choice is completely taken away from them. This firm belief shows them that it is not even an option to live their lives without bringing children into the world, that there is no decision to be made. Furthermore, it implies that if a woman does not have children it must be because she is unable to procreate due to a higher power, and not because she chose not to. Presenting childlessness as a curse to young girls can be seen as a scare tactic, used to ensure that they would never dare to disobey this rule by deciding not to have children. Hasidic women go through their lives being reminded of the importance of procreation at every possible moment, for instance at their weddings: “[My grandfather] pronounces the blessing for me to be fruitful and multiply” (ibid. 165). This proves that the most important purpose of a married couple is procreation (cf. Feldman, *Exodus* 3).

What is more, the act of creating children entirely depends on the woman: “Childlessness is never blamed on the man” (De Balie, 00:26:06 - 00:26:12). Deborah Feldman states that this is the case because Hasidic Jews believe that “only a woman can be infertile” (ibid.). This mindset puts the entire responsibility of procreation onto the woman, making it all that she is supposed to concentrate on. Deborah Feldman also mentions that the inability to procreate is “seen as a punishment” (ibid., 00:26:29 - 00:26:40), and that, if a woman is unable to produce children, it is assumed that she has some sort of spiritual flaw (cf. ibid.). This belief corroborates that a woman’s worth is entirely defined through her ability of bearing children.

The information that women are able to produce children concludes everything positive that they are taught about their bodies and sexualities. Women’s bodies are only considered to be something holy when they are bearing children; in every other aspect they are seen as evil and sinful. In order to make sure that this perspective on the female body does not change, young girls are raised to be scared of their own bodies. This becomes obvious when Deborah Feldman describes one of the daily modesty lectures she received in elementary school. In this specific lecture, the teacher educates the girls on *ervah*, which “refers to any part of a woman’s body that must be covered” (Feldman, *Unorthodox* 36), specifically, she says, when men are present. The teacher warns the girls of breaking the rules of *ervah*, saying that to do so would make them “the worst sinner of all” (ibid.). Her choice of words underlines the danger that the female body allegedly entails. She is not just teaching these little girls a new rule, but she is teaching them to be fearful of their own bodies.

The teacher takes the indoctrination even further when she starts praising a woman called Rachel, whom she describes to have been “a truly righteous woman” (ibid.) and “an exceptionally modest person” (ibid.), emphasizing all the virtues that have already been ingrained into these young girls’ minds to be of utmost importance. The teacher explains that this woman “stuck pins into her calves to keep her skirt lifting in the breeze and exposing her kneecaps” (ibid.). Praising a person who would go to these extremes, and describing her as someone whom these little girls should admire, emphasizes that hiding a woman’s body and controlling her sexuality is regarded as more important than her well-being, as young girls are being taught that even hurting themselves would be better than accidentally showing any forbidden part of their bodies.

These types of stories, in which a woman who went to extremes to keep her modesty is praised, seem to be very common in Hasidic girls’ upbringing. In *Exodus*, Deborah Feldman

thinks back to another story she was told again and again as a child, in which a woman is described as so modest that she “never allowed the beams of her own house to see her nakedness” (175). This story adds another layer to the way the female body is seen in the Hasidic culture. The Hasidic idea of modesty not only requires that a woman may not show certain parts of her body in public, but also that she may not even be naked alone in her own house. Thus, Hasidic women are robbed of any agency over their bodies even when there is no actual other person present in order to ensure that women do not get to know their own bodies and sexuality.

Another piece of information which Feldman was given several times during her childhood is that if her skirt was too short, someone, somewhere in the world would suffer (cf. Koerber-Stiftung, 00:37:56 – 00:38:10). She sums up these stories by saying that her whole life in the Hasidic community, “nakedness, in all its forms, had always been made to seem offensive and shameful to [her].” (*Exodus* 175). The teachers and adults who are telling these stories to young girls are making sure that they are so scared of their own bodies that breaking the rules of modesty does not even become an option. Moreover, this code ensures that any curiosity that young girls might have about their own bodies is completely shut down, making sure that their knowledge about their bodies is completely limited to what they are told, rather than what they could find out themselves.

However, the alleged evilness that a woman entails does not end with her body. She also has to cover up her hair, because “uncovered hair is considered too provocative for everyday interactions” (Olitzky and Judson 46). Even a woman’s voice can lead to sinning, which is why women and men are often separated at religious events, as “a woman’s voice is a (sexual) distraction for men during prayer.” (ibid. 72). Due to this, women are also not allowed to sing in the presence of men (cf. Feldman, *Unorthodox* 140). Starting at age three, a girl’s body is deemed potentially sinful and thus in need of modest covering (cf. Auslander 22). Although girls might not explicitly grasp this sense of sin at a young age, they will pick up on these facts sooner or later, feeling more and more ashamed of what their mere presence can cause.

Not only do women get nothing but negative information about their own bodies, they also receive no form of sexual education that would ever lead them to believe that sex can be more than just procreation. There is not just a lack of sexual education; any possible curiosity is also highly discouraged. Deborah Feldman states that the Yiddish that was spoken within her community was highly censored and did not contain words like *love*, much less any words that

have anything to do with sex (cf. De Balie, 00:17:20 - 00:17:40), making it impossible to ever talk about either of these feelings. She also mentions that, since there was never any talk about sexual feelings, girls remained completely unaware of their existence altogether (cf. Stewart). As a result, she says that “[she] can look back at [her] 17-year-old self and [she] can say with absolute clarity that [she] had absolutely no sexuality. That it’s completely stamped out of you.” (De Balie, 00:34:50 - 00:35:01). Another former Hasidic Jew agrees, saying that they were never curious about anything concerning sex because of the complete lack of sexual education and biology classes (cf. Rock Center, 00:06:35 - 00:17:01).

If any curiosity on the topic does somehow ever come up, it is completely shut down right away. Deborah Feldman makes this obvious when she describes a moment in her childhood in which she reads the word *virgin* on a bottle of olive oil and asks her grandmother what it means, having no clue that the word is related to something concerning sex. Her grandmother reacts with shock, and immediately tells Deborah that “it’s not a word for little girls to know” (Feldman, *Unorthodox*24). Her grandmother’s reaction makes Deborah feel anxious and ashamed, knowing that she said something bad but not knowing why (cf. *ibid.*). Moments like this completely discourage young girls from acting out their natural curiosity, which, again, ensures that they will not gain more information about their bodies and sexualities than what is allowed and wanted.

The complete ignorance about the existence of sexuality suddenly changes right before a woman gets married. This is when women go to marriage classes and are taught about sexual intercourse by their *kalla* teacher. However, the knowledge that they receive there is entirely limited to the part of sex that leads to procreation; topics that regard female pleasure, like foreplay, are completely disregarded. This becomes obvious when looking at the marriage class in which Deborah Feldman gets educated on sexual intercourse. Her *kallah* teacher never directly mentions any of the female’s private parts; instead, she talks about them using euphemisms and metaphors (“I hear her describe a hallway with walls, leading to a little door, which opens to a womb” Feldman, *Unorthodox*152). Through this kind of partial and misinformation, women’s bodies and the act of sex are turned into something completely abstract, making it hard for the woman to connect to them. The teacher describes the uterus as “a holy place inside each woman” (*ibid.*), turning it into something that is related to god rather than to the woman herself. The way in which she describes the reproductive tract and sexual organs, making it sound like a house rather than something inside of a woman, is so entirely vague and abstract that it does not tell the woman anything about her actual body.

Furthermore, all that this description entails are the few details that actually lead to making a baby, but not once does the teacher mention how a woman might feel during this process, or what she can do to make it comfortable for her. On top of this, she never teaches the woman that sexual intercourse could be something enjoyable for her, something that could lead to more than just babies. Deborah underlines this when she states that sexual intercourse is merely seen as “a holy act that you do with the goal of producing children” (De Balie, 00:46:14 - 00:46:20.). Hence, this lesson on sexual education just turns sexual intercourse into yet another rule that women have to obey, yet another thing that they have to do, and they get taught just enough to make sure that it stays that way.

The lack of sexual education is also seen in organizations like *Footsteps*, which aim to help acclimate former members of ultraorthodox communities to the secular world. This organization has several programs designed to help its members with different aspects of every-day life, one of which is called “Dating, Relationship and Sexuality Group” (cf. *Footsteps*). The fact that there is a need for programs like that shows just how little Hasidic Jews get taught about this topic, and how important it is that they can extend their knowledge.

At this point, one might wonder how keeping women from knowing anything about their sexualities contributes to their producing more children. At first glance, it might make more sense to teach women to enjoy sex, as this would ensure frequent sexual intercourse with their partners, which would then result in more pregnancies. However, this is not the case, as more sexual education could actually lead to the exact opposite. Sex therapist Ann-Marlen Henning claims that, if women would be raised knowing more about their own sexualities, it would be easier and much more likely for them to actually break out of these structures and start disobeying the rules that are imposed on them (cf. X Verleih AG, 00:42:55 – 00:43:40). Hence, it is safer to ensure that couples are having enough sex to produce babies by making sure that women know little enough so that they will follow all the rules that they are taught, than by teaching them to enjoy the act of sex itself.

In Hasidic communities, there are many laws and rules concerning sex, all of which seem to be in place only to ensure that married couples are having enough sex, and at the right time, in order to make babies. One of these is the concept of *niddah* which refers to the time in which women are menstruating, and are thus “considered impure according to Judaic law” (Feldman, *Unorthodox*139). During the time of menstruation, and for seven days

afterwards, in which women have to assure that they are, in fact, clean and not bleeding anymore, a woman and a husband are not allowed any physical contact (cf. *ibid.*140). This process usually lasts about 14 days and is completed by the immersion in the *mikvah*.

Deborah Feldman's marriage teacher claims that this whole process is important for the bond between the married couple, as it serves as "a renewal of the bond between a husband and a wife" (*ibid.*). She also suggests that it is something that serves the woman, as every immersion in the *mikvah* would make her feel "like a bride all over again" (*ibid.*). Nowadays, many *mikvahs* also resemble spas, making the ritual something very appealing for the woman (cf. Klein). However, the entire purpose of the *mikvah* as a ritual cleansing just seems to be something to make sure that women do not break these rules. Instead, the laws of *niddah* are yet another way to guarantee that a woman will get pregnant: "Since it is linked to a woman's monthly cycle, *mikvah* is strongly tied to fertility and sexuality." (Olitzky and Judson 98). This is because, right when this whole process is over and the couple is expected to have sex again, is the time when the woman starts ovulating. The abstinence in the two weeks before this serves to ensure that the couple will definitely have sex at that specific time. The sexual intercourse is only allowed when there is a chance that it might lead to pregnancy.

Furthermore, the process of going to the *mikvah* every month seems to serve another purpose: Deborah Feldman describes it as a way to "keep tabs on every woman's reproductive life" (De Balie, 00:37:51 – 00:38:03), making sure that they are getting pregnant often enough. It is clear that the *mikvah* only masquerades as a pleasant religious experience while actually establishing tight control over women and their bodies.

The rules that are in place for the time in which the couple is allowed physical intimacy only focus on procreation as well. Deborah Feldman states that there are laws in the Talmud which say when exactly each person has to have sex: "In the Talmud it says a traveling merchant must have intercourse with his wife once every six months, a laborer three times a week, but a Torah scholar has intercourse on Friday nights" (Feldman, *Unorthodox* 226). According to these laws, the frequency of sexual intercourse is established by the male exclusively, depending on his occupation. Deborah Feldman explains that these rules are in place to assure that everyone fulfills their duty of having children. The reason why Torah scholars have to have sex on Friday nights is because those are the holiest nights, which would thus produce holy children (cf. De Balie, 00:46:14 – 00:46:55).

Another rule that indirectly tells women when to have sex is the one that forbids Hasidic men from masturbating (cf. Feldman, *Unorthodox* 194). Male desires and sexual needs, unlike

those of women, seem to be accepted. Thus, whenever a man wants to have sex, it is the woman's responsibility to satisfy him, since, otherwise, she would be "forcing him to sin" (ibid.), i.e. to masturbate. This makes women obligated to have sex with their husbands whether they want to or not, because otherwise, they would have to "carry the burden of [their] wrongdoing" (ibid.). Even this rule leads back to the producing of children. Since Hasidic Jews believe that the sins of the father are transmitted to his son (cf. Feldman, *Exodus* 231), they want to keep the father from sinning in order to have holy babies. Again, the responsibility for producing said holy babies rests almost entirely with the woman. Having all these rules in place keep women from thinking about sex as something enjoyable; on the contrary, it turns sexual intercourse into a duty, rather than a pleasure. Deborah Feldman underlines said state of affairs when she states that she herself never thought of sex as anything other than an obligation (cf. De Balie, 00:46:49 – 00:46:52).

The concept of arranged marriages is yet another rule that takes women's freedom of choice away from them. Because of these marriages, women are not only unable to choose when to have sex, but they are also unable to choose with whom to have it. It appears to be a matter of luck whether or not the woman is actually attracted to the person with whom she is forced into marriage. The partner is picked out by the family, and they do not choose according to the daughter's personal preferences but according to the social and financial needs of the entire family (cf. Feldman, *Unorthodox* 120). When Deborah Feldman's family starts talking to a matchmaker in order to find a husband for her, she already knows that she has no say in the process: "I understand that knowledge cannot possibly matter (...). What is meant to happen will happen regardless; what my family wants will come to pass" (ibid. 120). This set of customs demonstrates how powerless a woman is in this situation and how little she can influence it. When Deborah Feldman meets her husband for the first time, her family gives her a moment in which she has to give her confirmation. However, it is obvious that the only choice a woman has in this situation is to say yes: "It is a nod and a smile that I must give, and I do it" (ibid. 132).

In her memoir *Exodus*, Deborah Feldman describes the repercussions of the suppression of her sexuality through all these rules and laws. After leaving the Hasidic community, she has to deal with physical and psychological health issues concerning her vagina, and seeks out several gynecologists in hope that they can help her. None of them can pinpoint where those issues came from, nor do they know how to help her (cf. 210). Eventually, she comes to the conclusion that the reason might be rooted in her upbringing, and that she has to "establish

friendlier communications with [her] nether regions” (ibid. 211). Even after having left the community and after having learned more about sex and her body, even after she had “really enjoyed sex for its own sake” (ibid. 198) for the first time, over a year after having left the community, she still has to deal with the consequences of the way she was raised concerning her sexuality. Her experience of almost total lack of erotic feelings typifies that of many if not most Hasidic women and shows the extent of the suppression of female sexuality in Hasidic Judaism.

Deborah Feldman is one in many, and her experience may differ entirely from that of other Hasidic women. Of course, there are also many women that live with the same laws and rules and claim to be completely happy with them (cf. OWN). What is noticeable about these women’s claims is that their wording sounds exactly like the things that Deborah Feldman has been taught her entire life. That is, they appear not to select their own words to describe feelings and opinions, but to parrot back what they have been told all their lives. This makes it questionable if these women actually believe what they say or if they have been brainwashed into thinking that way. For example, one Hasidic woman uses a vague phrase to describe the time of *niddah* as “just coming together through our minds and our souls” (OWN, 00:01:34 – 00:01:36), and yet another one illustrates it as “two halves of the soul (...) coming together in an absolute godly union” (ibid. 00:00:43 - 00:00:50). This type of wording strongly resembles what Deborah Feldman has been told by her teachers and other adults throughout her whole life. Hence, the Hasidic women who like living by the laws mentioned above seem to have completely internalized what they were told when getting to know about these laws, rather than developed an own opinion on them.

To conclude, all laws concerning sex in Hasidic communities only serve to guarantee procreation, without paying any attention to women’s needs. Therefore, it can be said that female sexual feelings do not have any importance in Hasidic Judaism. By looking at Deborah Feldman’s experience, it becomes obvious how little women actually get to know about their own bodies and sexualities, and how difficult it would be for them to change their perception of themselves. However, since all these rules are presented either in an appealing way, or in a way that makes the women afraid to break them, it is more than likely that they obey them without questioning any of it. On top of that, it seems that the complete disregard of female sexuality is not only a consequence that comes from the women’s responsibility to produce children, but is also used as a way to ensure that women will do just that. Keeping women from finding out more about their sexualities assures that they stay completely unaware of its

existence, thus ensuring that women will stay part of their communities and fulfill their purpose of producing many children.

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## What I Believe

By Josephine Grothoff

When I dwell on the word “belief”, my mind brings up all sorts of religious images and concepts. I think of so-called holy books and holy people. I think of churches, of mosques, of other buildings of worship. I think of rules, of sins and of prayers. However, to me, this is not what belief should ever be limited to. My own belief rests outside of the borders of any religion or institution or type of worship, for I merely believe in connectedness, as rooted in the following observations and perspectives I have of this world.

I do not believe in religion, I believe in spirituality. The two are not one and the same to me, because as writer Brene Brown describes, spirituality means “recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion.” I agree with this notion, believing that all of us, no matter of what gender, nationality, class or other randomly constructed category, and even no matter of what species, are inextricably connected through nature. To specify, this does not mean that I believe in any wild conspiracy or magic, but simply that I see what we have in common as ever more powerful, lasting and beautiful than what we think separates us. Every earthling, no matter whether they be human or not, is dependent on the same things on this planet. All beings breathe the same oxygen, take nutrients from the same Earth and are dependent on nature providing them with surroundings that allow them to live rather than die. All animals, human or not, need the rain, the water this Earth provides. They need the moon and the sun for their life to continue moving in the cycles that it has followed for as long as we have been on this planet. We share our basic needs and our basic capabilities, such as feeling pain and communicating in some way, with not just all other humans, but also all other animals on this Earth. On top of this, we are biologically connected more than we often recognise just by having common ancestors. To claim that these traits do not connect us all in some very basic yet relevant way does not seem logically sound. Our common origins are simply so obvious, and I believe that much power lies in that reality. To me, recognising and exploring these connections defines spirituality, and this kind of spirituality does not require belonging to a religion at all.

I do not believe in Gods, I believe in nature’s wisdom. From my point of view, it makes little sense to pray to some white old man who supposedly once lived, or to attribute all our

triumphs and tragedies to some holy supernatural being floating above us and presumably deciding upon them. Believing in and trusting in Gods makes especially little sense to me now in this time where we are seeing everything that is natural around us die, triggered by the climate crisis we ourselves are responsible for. We have been destroying our very home while worshipping imaginary beings in the sky who apparently know and govern everything. To me, this behaviour is the perfect example of disconnection, and I believe that if we had stayed in touch with nature instead of being occupied with our self-created religious institutions, the Earth would most likely be in a better place right now. Untouched and left to follow its course, nature appears to always be in some state of equilibrium. While we humans have put everything wildly out of balance in our time on this planet, Mother Earth never really deviates from her natural cycles and is always in tune with the other planets and stars (such as sun and moon) moving through the universe. Therefore, I do not believe that any supernatural being humans pray to could ever come close to nature's wisdom.

I also do not believe in praying, I believe in doing and being. I see little reason to close our eyes, fold our hands and think of some religious figure into whose hands we place our fates, rather than to take full responsibility ourselves. I believe in acting out of kindness and empathy, out of a feeling of caring and community – not because a religious scripture demanded us to do so, but rather because it is in our nature. I believe in being who we authentically are and who we trust we can be if we do our best, rather than praying to some God to release us of our sins because we are apparently not good enough. When things are not going well, we can do all we can to make the situation better instead of praying for it to become better. Especially during this very critical time on Earth where we are in the middle of a mass extinction caused by the climate crisis, it is inevitable that we recognise our autonomy and thereby our responsibility in all of this. Instead of praying that bad things will not happen, we should reflect on our role on this planet and stop making bad things happen.

I understand that religion, if practised diligently, can relieve many people of unhappy feelings and guilt. This relief comes from religion often giving people the feeling that someone or something that is above us all has final control, that they can pray to and trust this great power to make everything okay. However, I see this religious naivety as a very negative and unproductive way to look at the world as it tends to make people omit the connection they naturally have to everyone and everything that is around them. Delving into our connection with nature, with each other, and with all other beings on this planet would surely be more useful. It would likely restore our sense of responsibility for all that happens around us as well

as giving us a sense of obligation to handle this Earth softly, contrary to what we have been practising for a long now time now.

In conclusion, belief does not need to be linked to institutional religion. In fact, this Earth might do better if it were not. Instead of following human-made rules and systems to guide my spirituality, I believe only in our inherent connection to all that is around us, and in the compassion, kindness, creativity and love that are born from this connection. Finally, however, I know that people do not all perceive the world in the exact same way. I do not think that there is even any strictly right or wrong belief, as long as said belief does not do harm to others or the planet. This is the important bit to reflect upon.

## **My Boss's Hugs**

By Hadis Fallah

People today tend to believe that standing up for yourself as a woman has become easy through the recent discussion of the “#MeToo” movement. Many women from different industries have come forward about their own experiences of sexual assault and harassment. Especially women in public industries have used their voices to raise awareness through social media platforms. Actresses like Tarana Burke, Uma Thurman, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Lawrence and Alyssa Milano opened up about men like Harvey Weinstein and Billy Cosby who had abused many women in different ways. These were all forced into sex or kissing and threatening them to damage their career if they refuse to participate. It's the misuse of power or other higher social status which leads to sexual assault and harassment in such workplaces like the movie industry. I have heard people saying this issue gets annoying or is too unrelatable than the experience those actresses had. It seems to be too far from “our” reality. But what does the misuse of power look like in “our” ordinary lives?

It probably happens everywhere in every workplace like in schools, in hospitals or in usual offices like in my workplace. It might not exactly look like the experiences those actresses had but it's somehow still the same thing. When I finally decided to tell my boss that I do not like to be hugged after he made several inappropriate jokes about women and how they should look or behave like “I like seeing women bended on their knees” I came to a strange realization. I realized how uncomfortable I felt knocking on his office door and it almost felt like I was about to throw up after he hugged me before. Although his hug was not meant to be sexual and I guess it sure did not look like it, I still felt very uncomfortable and felt like a line was about to be crossed. This led me to ask myself why I was so nervous before notifying my boss about his wrong behavior? I could not answer the question except I wanted to stop acting like I do not have a voice and I wanted to stop thinking that I was afraid to speak up for myself. Women should not feel the pressure to stay silent just because they are afraid of their boss's reaction in such situations. Men in general have the freedom to behave however they want to behave and society claims their behavior as completely legitimate. They can urinate wherever they want and they can say whatever they want without thinking about the consequences. Especially men in higher positions think they have the right to tell others what

they are doing is wrong and get along with it. They themselves can not take it when somebody else gives them a little nudge.

While it is true that it is a boss's job to talk to his employees about their behavior at work or about their work methods, it does not necessarily follow that they are able to be told about their own flaws and failures. In truth they usually get very nervous and one can see that their pride is somehow scratched. While looking at my reflection in the dark computer screen I thought to myself "I was raised to have the courage to speak up for myself. So there it went, all my courage and pride. On the way to his office my fear level went up to hundred. I knocked on his door, stepped in and said "I just wanted to say, I actually don't like hugs." He looked up from his printer and suddenly turned red as a tomato and I could see in his eyes that he knew exactly what I meant. He knew that his hand before went little bit too far "downstairs". While I was staring at his red tomato face, trying to read his facial expressions, I thought "dear God, please don't act like you don't know what I am talking about!" But he said "it's good that you told me" and then started to talk about my attendance at work to change the topic. After I reflected on the situation later, I felt so "dumb" about my feelings. I actually should not fear his reaction. Instead, he should fear my reaction! His behavior was inappropriate and unprofessional so why did I felt sick while knocking on his office door? I blame our current society for that. Obviously, it is hard to change how people thought and still think over decades but one should be able change his own way of thinking and to step up for others and for him- or herself.

To put it in a nutshell, stepping up for yourself is never easy. Still, it should not be that way. Instead women (and men) should be able to encourage each other to talk about this, to confront people with their wrong or unprofessional behavior. Nobody should be afraid of the boss's reaction—for example mine, who is now ignoring me completely. I see the point that he might feel uncomfortable and wants to be careful of what he says or does around me but I do not get why he has not the decency to even say "Hello." Probably because he is ashamed and afraid now. Maybe that is the reason why this discussion might be annoying for some people because they cannot relate or can relate and feel guilty.

## **The Friendzone and Toxic Masculinity**

By Helen-Sophie Krott

Young men today believe that being friend zoned by the girl they like is the worst that could ever happen to them. I think the reason for this fear of the friendzone is the assumption that being “just friends” with a girl minimalizes their masculinity. Not being able to seduce or convince her that they are boyfriend-material is equated with not being manly enough for her. But still these men continue to hang out with the girl that has no romantic feelings towards them with the intention that she somehow reconsiders her decision. They try to be the best friends possible in hope of being rewarded with a relationship or sex. Often they buy expensive gifts or do very nice things for her she never asked for in the hope that they can make her feel obligated to enter a physical relationship with them.

A friend of mine had this problem when she met a guy in university. They had the same taste in music and films and started to hang out. However, after a few weeks he tried to get more physical with her; he touched her more often. At first, he just hugged her sometimes but then he would sit very close to her and often tried to lay his arms around her. When she confronted him and told him that this made her uncomfortable he talked it down and said that he just wanted to be close to her, that he loved her. But my friend did not feel this way about him and explained to him very carefully that she was not interested. He did not take that very well. The following months were very hard for her because he who claimed to love her went to all her friends to badmouth her and even tried to get me to stop talking to her. His friends would come up to her and tell her what a horrible person she was for not wanting to be in a relationship with this guy.

This shows how men antagonize the girls that reject them even though they still want to be friends with these men. This seems a little unfair, right? Being in the Friendzone is generally conceived as negative but why is having a good friend, regardless of gender, something bad? Is not friendship one of the greatest bonds human beings can share with each other? This is the paradox I see with the friendzone. Friendship turned into something negative because the other cannot respect the boundaries of their friend.

In school I had mostly male friends and therefore I often heard them complain about being friend zoned. A former friend of mine – let us say his name was Fred – had a crush on one girl – I will address her with Ann – I have never met. Because I heard only his side of the story I antagonized this girl as well until I realized the problematic with the friendzone. Fred met Ann through his best friend who was at this time Ann’s boyfriend. They realized that they had the same interests and played videogames together almost every day. Ann lived a few hours away which was for me and my friends at that time really far away (we were 14 years old). Therefore, they spend time together online, but he would also meet her on weekends. He started buying her the videogames she liked to play before she could even ask her parents.

After some time, he started to gossip about his best friends. He told me, that his friend was the worst boyfriend possible and would not even love Ann at all. From his point of view, he was the better choice for Ann if she would only break up with his friend. Not knowing any better, I agreed with him. After some years Fred finally found the opportunity to tell Ann about his feelings and since Ann only saw him as a friend she told him how she felt about that. Instead of accepting her feelings he began to argue about it. He told her that he loved her since the day they met and that everything nice he did to her was because he loved her so much. She on the other hand felt betrayed because she realized that Fred never was her friend to the begin with. The next day Fred called me crying. Ann had blocked him from every social media platform and even changed her phone number. Other friends and I told Fred to move on, but he continued to pursue Ann. For us he was the poor misunderstood who was deeply in love with this girl.

A few years later I realized how terribly mistaken we were. Fred had started to create fake profiles on social media and even found out Ann’s new accounts when she changed them. He contacted her friends and convinced them to pressure Ann to talk to him. He finally stopped when Ann entered a new relationship. This is how I experienced that the concept of “being in the friendzone” destroys a relationship. It is a sad story, because due to Fred’s aggressive pursuit Ann lost the friendship with Fred but also lost many other friends that took his side. I can imagine how lonely she felt. She probably asked herself if it was her fault that Fred fell in love with her. What if she really had been leading him on without realizing it? After all, this is what Fred claimed. It is generally assumed that the girl in this scenario did certain things that “make” the guy fall in love with her. Such things include: wearing make up or revealing clothes, laughing at his jokes, touching him somewhere (like hugs) and making him compliments. I do all these things with my friends, with people I feel safe and comfortable

around. The loss of this friendship was not Ann's fault because she could have done nothing, except maybe ignoring Fred, that would have prevented his desire for her. It was Fred's fault: He could not deal with his emotions and felt entitled to know what was best for Ann. However, this would be the easy way out and the truth is not that simple.

The true fault lies in our society. There are hundreds of similar stories and the friendzone has even become a meme. Yet, the girl is always the villain in those jokes or stories. The man is the one we are supposed to sympathise with whereas the woman is the cruel one that just would not give him a chance. We shame girls for being just friends with boys and at the same time we shame them for wanting a boyfriend. Because, when a girl posts something in the internet, like "Why can't I have a nice boyfriend", you can be sure that there is at least one comment stating: "You could have, but you already friend zoned him." As a result, women feel guilty when they are with male friends. Women feel guilty when they get presents or compliments from male friends, because they assume due to this social pressure that they must repay them with a physical relationship. And if they do not, they put him in the friendzone which seems to be a new version of purgatory.

However, the friendzone is not a new phenomenon created by social media but rather a product of toxic masculinity and the suppression of female autonomy. Even Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote in his famous *The Sorrows of Young Werther* about the heartache of Werther because he could not be together with Charlotte who was already married to another man. The inability to be with Charlotte in a platonic relationship eventually leads to the suicide of Werther and since this is written from Werther's perspective (and a male author) we are supposed to feel sorry for him. I say "no" to that. We must teach the value of friendship to create a healthy environment for boys and girls. Otherwise a friendship between male and female will not be possible anymore. Although I grant that you cannot choose with whom you fall in love with, I still maintain that you should never force and/or manipulate the other person to love you as well. If they do not feel the same about you it is your job to accept that and if you cannot stay friends after that, then maybe your friendship did not mean that much to you after all.

We need to become aware of the problematic regarding the friendzone. I believe that something like a friendzone does not exist but is rather a construct such as the distinction between the colours blue for men and pink for female. Men are not put in the friendzone by the woman they like because that implies that they would put these men there with

calculation. Men are not the victims in this scenario. To clarify, men are not passively victimized by being “friend zoned” because they are the ones actively pursuing the woman. I think it is the other way around. Women are “f\*ck zoned”. Befriending someone with the calculation of getting them to bed or into a relationship has nothing to do with being a gentleman or a white knight as such men tend to think. It is a cruel practise of tricking the woman to trust this person. Therefore, if you want to be in a relationship with a woman you need to know that nothing is more attractive than honesty. Be honest about your feelings and respect hers. Treat her equal. And if she just wants to be friends with you be happy about the new friendship rather than being one of those men that cannot respect women.

## Daniel Smith's *Monkey Mind* and the Symptoms of Anxiety in Male Rape Victims

By Sabrina Schnüchel

The #MeToo movement has created a public platform for discussing the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. While numerous celebrities have come forward to unveil sex offenders within the film industry, many non-famous women have also followed their example and told the stories of how men took advantage of them. The current movement has enabled people to talk about their traumatic experiences that under different circumstances might have never reached the public at large. Through this exchange, victims of sexual assault could not only support one another but were also given the chance to warn about red flags in a relationship. The #MeToo movement has undoubtedly helped spread awareness about the frequency of rape. Still, the overall discourse appears to be limited to female victims only. Even the male inversion of the hashtag, #HimToo, is not primarily concerned with the sexual abuse of men. Instead, most of its entries discuss the repercussions a man will have to face once a woman has accused him of sexual harassment. In 2017, actor Terry Crews was one of the first men to publicly address the genuine issues surrounding male sexual assault. While most celebrities praised him for his bravery, others told Crews that a sturdy man like him should have easily been able to defend himself. Unfortunately, the issue is not limited to male celebrities of age alone. When a 27-year-old model posted inappropriate comments about child actor Finn Wolfhard, many commentators online reacted by telling him that he should feel honored by her remarks. The concept of men being the *target* of sexual assault thus remains a heavily stigmatized subject.

In his autobiographical treatise *Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety* (2012), American writer Daniel Smith addresses the issue of male rape by recounting the story of how he lost his virginity to an older woman for whom he harbored no sexual interest. Even though he himself rejects the idea of having been *raped* (cp. Smith 2012: 62), he still discusses the traumatic effects of nonconsensual sexual encounters on the human psyche. Since he refers to the incident as the primary cause for his anxiety (cp. Smith: 14, 26, 41), I argue that he in fact *has* been raped but refuses to recognize it as such because of the stigma surrounding the crime. I have compared several studies concerned with the issue to discuss the connection between symptoms of anxiety and having been raped. I will use Daniel Smith's case in order

to answer the question as to why men like him would avoid correctly labeling the crime.

Daniel's reluctance to report the crime seems to stem from the question of whether his unpleasant first sexual encounter could even be considered a classical rape situation. In a survey conducted by Cindy and David Struckman-Johnson, rape is defined as referring to "the use of physical force, use of weapons, threat of harm, blackmail, unfair use of authority, or use of drugs/alcohol to obtain sex" (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 1992: 91). Since the female offender, Esther, did *not* use any physical force or weapons during the assault, Daniel is led to believe that he had not been raped. The second half of the definition, however, demonstrates that abusive behavior is not limited to violence alone and can in fact assume many different forms. Esther can thus be pronounced guilty of both taking advantage of her authority as well as relying on alcoholic beverages and drugs during the incident.

Since Daniel had been only sixteen when the undesired sexual encounter happened, whereas Esther was already in her twenties, she can be described as an adult preying on a minor (cp. Smith: 38ff.). Due to her cunning behavior, she was able to gain his trust even though Daniel was wary of her from the beginning (cp. Smith: 42). She repeatedly tells him that he is much more mature than the other boys his age and as a result he could not help but feeling flattered (cp. Smith: 48). In order to blur the lines between their differences in age, Esther thus managed to create a false sense of equality between the two. During their time at the bookstore, she would often "waylay" (*ibid.*) him and entrust him with very personal information about her private sex life. Despite his uneasiness about the topic, she would then force him to keep completely quiet about it (cp. Smith: 50). Esther would also be the one to suggest going to the party where Daniel and his friends would be "by far the youngest people" (Smith: 56) around. There, after consuming quite a huge amount of alcohol and marijuana, Esther would continue harassing him with overly sexual comments such as "I can come just by someone licking my neck" (Smith: 57). Daniel remarks that he had felt petrified in her presence and at that point in time believed that he never could have prevented the script that "had already been written" (Smith: 59) from unfolding. Esther had quite positively raped him.

Like many male rape victims, Daniel displays symptoms that are among the criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. In fact, one of the most persistent reactions following rape appears to be "general diffuse anxiety" (Rothbaum. et. al.: 456). Daniel, who jokingly calls

himself “anxiety personified” (Smith: 7), correctly identifies Esther as the one who “set [his] anxiety off” (Smith: 14). Even decades after she took his virginity against his will, he still often complains that he was not certain whether or not he had a free will anymore (cp. Smith: 71). On top of this, he is frequently plagued by the feeling of having an “icicle” (Smith: 41) lodged inside his chest. He also describes his predicament as if “someone had injected a poison into [his] blood” (Smith: 62). Interestingly, these complaints are more reminiscent of stereotypically female reactions to having been raped. In an attempt to free himself from the lingering guilt inside of him, he takes after Lady Macbeth and furiously tries to “scrub [himself] raw with a fingernail brush and antibacterial soap” (Smith: 61). Daniel eventually realizes, that these feelings of anxiety cannot be disposed of, as they have become an integral part of his life. Like many rape victims, Daniel is also easily triggered by women that bear resemblance to Esther. When his mother introduces him to a therapist called Sandra, the similarities unsettle him (cf. Smith: 77). As it is common in men who have been sexually assaulted, Daniel also displays long-term problems with relationships in general (cp. Struckman-Johnson: 87). He admits that he has developed a form of “sex phobia” (Smith: 162) and thus spends years of his life without ever engaging in a serious relationship with a woman. When he first starts dating Joanna years after the incident, the relationship quickly crumbles because Daniel says that he feels “too nervous to love anyone” (Smith: 181). Yet, despite all evidence suggesting the opposite, he is reluctant to accept his fate as a male rape victim.

Daniel’s judgement could have been influenced by the common myth that being molested by a woman should never upset a man as much as the possibility of being raped by another man. As it was the case with child actor Finn Wolfhard, people tend to uphold the idea that a woman’s interest in a man should never be considered a problem. In general, men are even less likely than women to press charges against their assaulters (cp. Pino and Meier 1999: 986). This misconception is connected to the belief that heterosexual men would never not want to have sex with women (cp. Struckman-Johnson: 97). This stereotype primes boys to believe that there is always something to be gained from the experience and that the act itself can never pose any genuine harm to them. Daniel even addresses the social pressure he perceives himself to be under when he says that what he had been offered by Esther “was every boy’s dream” (Smith: 12). Despite his discomfort with the entire situation, he agreed to perform sex with Esther and the female stranger that Esther brought along. Still, he cannot deny that the episode was far from being a marvelous experience. Right from the beginning, he is “struggling to keep [his] erection” (*ibid.*) and even compares it to a “phantom limb”

(*ibid.*). In order to fulfil his mission of manhood, Daniel feels compelled to completely dissociate himself from the situation. As he cannot enjoy the act by himself, he decides to “dedicate” (*ibid.*) the vagina in front of him to all the “groin-sore boys of the eleventh grade” (*ibid.*) instead. Ideals of toxic masculinity have led Daniel to believe that men should appreciate sexual encounters with women at any time, regardless of the circumstances.

Toxic masculinity had Daniel most likely also believe that a man simply “cannot be raped by a woman due to the average male advantage in size and strength” (Struckman-Johnson: 88). This reasoning reminds of the criticism Terry Crews had to face, albeit he had been molested by another man and not by a woman. Both examples show that the quintessence of the problem revolves around traditional gender role expectations according to which a man should be able to assert himself over anyone under any given circumstances. Since Daniel did not defend himself although he, as a man, should have possessed the power to do so, he jeopardized his masculinity. His predicament is complicated by the fact that he never had the chance to resort to violence, as Esther herself never threatened to physically harm him. By refusing to accept that he had been raped by her, however, he can retain the illusion of a stable masculine identity. This way, he can still uphold the illusion that he had been the one “initiating and controlling” (Struckman-Johnson: 86) the sexual activity, although it was exactly the other way around. Daniel goes even farther and creates a false sense of agency by claiming that he himself, if anyone, had “committed rape against [himself]” (Smith: 66). Since he is unable to admit that he had not been in control of the situation and had therefore not fulfilled his role as a man, Daniel starts to imagine himself as the aggressor. By blaming *himself* instead of the actual perpetrator, Esther, he attempts to erase some of the guilt that comes with being raped. In conclusion, Daniel Smith was indeed raped as a teenager. His efforts to reject the idea express even more clearly his sense of helplessness at being overpowered. He displays the typical symptoms of a male rape victim, such as anxiety, guilt sex avoidance, difficulty with maintaining relationships in general and a fractured masculine identity. Since male rape is considered a relatively rare phenomenon that is seldomly talked about in public, he probably felt compelled to downplay the importance Esther had played in his life. People need to be aware that rape can take on different forms and that men should not be ashamed to admit that they might be uncomfortable with certain sexual activities at times. When silence is maintained, even more people might believe that male rape could never even happen. Thus, I am thankful for men like Terry Crews who publicly address the existence of male sexual assault and thereby spread the message that men should not feel pressured to keep quiet about having been abused. Although Daniel Smith was

mainly concerned with informing people about anxiety, he also managed to issue a warning against the dangers of abusive relationships. I hope that more people will follow their lead in order to raise awareness about sexual abuse.

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## **What I Believe**

By Nora Schulte-Zweckel

When it comes to taking action, most people excuse themselves by saying that they would not make a difference on their own. Their claim is that one person alone is not able to bring change to this world. But I believe in the power of the individual and there are several famous examples proving my point. The individual who takes action can set off a chain reaction.

To start with an older example of a powerful individual, there was Martin Luther. He lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century under the Roman Catholic church. Luther was not content with the church's government and actions. Instead of allowing the situation to continue and waiting for somebody else to change the rules, he took action himself by stating his prepositions in the 95 theses, also called Disputation on the Power of Indulgences. The 95 theses were intended to begin a debate among academics but he actually set off a historically important chain reaction. Eventually he not only translated the Bible so that every-day people could read it, but also with his theses, initiated the Reformation and created the basis for the Lutheran-Protestant Christianity.

Like Luther, Greta Thunberg effected significant change in society today. As a 14-year-old pupil, she decided to strike during school hours and protest in front of her country's parliament in August 2018. She could not know how big the impact of her actions would be. She started the protest against climate change because nobody else had done so. But soon after, she was joined by other pupils and students. The school strike, now called Fridays-For-Future, started to expand to other countries. Until now, thousands of pupils around the world have protested, so much so that the governments are finally starting to take action against climate change. On May 24th 2019, there was even going to be a global protest. Greta Thunberg started off completely on her own but she became the role model and lead figure for a world-wide movement. Her name and her actions are known around the globe and she also appeared on TV to hold speeches. Already at the current European election, the influence of the FridaysForFuture movements becomes very clear in Germany: 'Die Grünen', the German party fighting climate change, have strongly increased their share of the vote and especially first-time voters and young adults voted for them. Greta started the movement almost a year ago, but the chain reaction she set off is still not over. The chain has not ended yet. Greta's protest has already caused change for young people all over the world in half a year's time

and also strongly influenced the European election, so her impact on the future of our planet will probably be world-changing too. If Greta had not started her protest, we probably would not be fighting climate change as strongly and stubbornly as we do now.

I have also experienced the power of the individual myself. At the age of 16, there was only one girl in my school who ate a vegan diet. At first glance, that seems quite small in comparison to all the other children who were still eating animal products. However, a few weeks later her twin sister became vegan too. At the same time, my best friend and I became friends with the twins. With time we got to know the twin's reasons for going vegan and what actually changed in their lifestyle without animal products. Half a year after the first sister became vegan, my friend and I decided to eat a vegetarian diet. And both of us again influenced and inspired others to consume fewer animal products and even turn their back to the whole meat industry. The first vegan girl started off alone at our school but influenced many others to join her cause.

All the previous examples have a rather positive connotation. But powerful individuals in history have not always been a good thing. The most notorious one is Adolf Hitler. His concept of Aryans and his ideal image of the world has spread so widely and influenced so many that Hitler was able to lead a whole country to death and kill millions of people. Especially bullies in every-day life start off as an individual. All that is possible because of the bandwagon effect: Most people just take the easy path and go with the flow sometimes without regard to their own beliefs. But every flow starts off with individuals. Regardless of whether the individual's influence is negative or positive, it can lead the flow. And that is why you should never underestimate the power of an individual. People are suggestible and we should keep in mind that that suggestibility can lead to both helpful and harmful circumstances.

At the beginning the individual may seem small but because we are a community and therefore cannot help but influence each other; the individual can set off a chain reaction. Individual actions can be contagious. In order to actually bring a change to a society, a country or the world you need a community and some sort of collective identity that the community shares. But every community starts with a single person. Many people need courage to take action and hope that their actions will actually have an impact. In short, every movement needs a leading figure. Somebody must take the first step and there lies the power of the individual. However, you should not wait now for others, Greta Thunberg or Martin

Luther, to take that first step and lead you. Especially now, in an age of social media and worldwide web, it is easier than ever to spread information and propaganda and reach people around the globe. You do not necessarily need money, fame or special competence: If you want change and somebody to take action, that somebody always begins with you. You are somebody and you are entitled and able to take that first step.

## Ascension

By Helen-Sophie Krott

Master of the Unknown Realm,  
Grant me your elder knowledge.  
My determination won't underwhelm  
And neither will my courage.

I seek wisdom beyond comprehension  
That whispers without voice in my head,  
I want to await the horrific ascension,  
When Cthulhu awakens in his deep sea bed.

How did you find the ancient truth?  
Or did it choose you as their speaker?  
For mankind alone cannot gather sooth  
The Necronomicon holds the final answer.

I stood at the mountains of madness,  
I searched under the pyramids,  
I fought the beast in the cave,  
And I listened to the call of Cthulhu

But still I cannot understand.  
My mind is twitching.  
Eyes inside my brain.  
The waking world fades.

I feel.  
The world shivers.  
Dead but dreaming.  
*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.*

## Easy-Peasy Recipes for Getting Published

By Melissa Knox-Raab

If you're interested in writing essays (narrative nonfiction, for example, reporting and interpreting cultural, political or historic events) or personal essays, fiction, poems, flash fiction or experimental forms, there are a number of magazines looking for such work. I highly recommend reading some of them (many may be found free online) and then writing to fit their needs, or seeing whether what you've written might work for them. Here are a few of the sites listing and evaluating literary magazines:

<http://www.erikakrousewriter.com/erika-krouses-ocd-ranking-of-483-literary-magazines-for-short-fiction>

(This ranks magazines according to a number of criteria: circulation, number of writers who appear in the "Best American Series" and other factors.

A similar site: <https://thejohnfox.com/best-magazines/>

The Clifford Garstang site: <https://cliffordgarstang.com/2019-literary-magazine-rankings/>

Information about places to submit narrative nonfiction, fiction, flash fiction, poetry, and writing that fits no particular category:

<https://www.newpages.com/classifieds/calls-for-submissions>

<https://publishedtodeath.blogspot.com/p/calls-for-submissions.html>

Also useful is this list:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_literary\\_magazines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_literary_magazines)

There are various services for which one can pay, like this one: <https://duotrope.com/>

But I think they're not really worth it—most of what they have you can find just by Googling around.

Most of the 4-5,000 literary magazines allow electronic submissions as well as simultaneous ones, and most submissions take place through the “submittable” platform, which tracks pieces for free: <https://www.submittable.com/>

A few places want emailed submissions and a very few (but some of the more prestigious journals) still insist on snail mail or have their own submission platforms. Very few (but some, like *The Hudson Review* and *The Threepenny Review* emphatically refuse to consider simultaneous submissions. They hold on to things for six months and then may say “no.” I prefer to send essays to five or ten journals at once and then withdraw them electronically if necessary.