

Class of 2022 Winning Entry
Shouldn't You Be Skinnier?

“Shouldn't you be skinnier? You're a girl after all.”

I've been told this since I was the bright, bruised knees, smiley age of 10. I wanted to play with the boys, play soccer or shoot hoops or anything, *anything* so I can drop a few pounds and look like the models on the magazines I stuffed under my pillow and read under the dim light of my lamp at night. I remember going to the waterpark and feel the tight one piece on my flesh, the water hit my flabby thighs and my stomach filled with pool water and Minute Maid apple juice. My mother told me that it was baby fat, it would go away soon, just like the self hatred that has piled up on my back after the stares, the hushed comments and laughs of the girls who could fit in children's smalls while I struggled to put on a large. My mother expected to be perfect, to have everything fit neatly into little cabinets and shut with a lock and key. My self hatred was too loud, too rowdy, like the weird cousin at a family gathering that you just want to ignore. So, I got passed down to my father who decided to take on my self hatred in the worst way possible. “You're too fat.” “You're a girl, you can't be a pig.” “I don't want a pig daughter.” Those comments crawled under my skin into my head, squeezing every drop of self confidence out of me. I started to exercise, first 20 crunches, then 50, 100, 200 and so on. It worked, sure. I lost weight. I was in good shape. At 12 years old, my smile faded. I have become dull, my happiness went down the drain, my brain was filled with static and numbers, counting every calorie that went into my trembling body who would shiver in the 60 degree heat. I was hollow, unable to look in the mirror without seeing a pig, a pig that has been formed with clay by my own parents, who wouldn't accept a fat 10 year old, no matter how much she struggled to love herself with her chubby stomach and flabby arms. She was dead, and all that was left was a corpse. My parents thought that the self hatred was tamed, so they stuffed it into the cabinet and never looked back. I had to save myself, save myself from the demons that haunted my thoughts, the demons that wrapped around my throat at night, telling me not to eat. But most important, I had to save the 10 year old girl I killed, or at least get a part of her back. I don't want anyone to go through that. In a world with gender equality, I want girls to feel happy in their bodies, love every inch of their skin and flesh, kiss the mirror and smile, smile that beautiful, bright smile of theirs and realize that weight doesn't equal beauty, nor does it equal happiness. I want them to burn the magazines that burn and taunt them at every step they take, so they can finally breathe without having the world stare at anything they consider “imperfections”. No one, and I mean *no one* deserves to go through the suffocating feeling of self hatred. That's what I want in a world of gender equality.

Class of 2021 Winning Entry
Malaysia Watson, *Gender Inequality*

Gender is but a line
that we let define
who we are.

If we were to cross it,
what would we witness?
Is it *bliss*?

I cannot see clearly
where we are equal.
I see *it*.

In female, there is male.
Women contains men.
We are not.

Not of our own column,
of our own sum-
we are divided.

Yes, woe are the women.
Misfortune has men.
But, can we agree that,

without a doubt, a line
Is *infinitely*
continuing.

Unless, there is a point.
In which the line ends.
Where is it?

Class of 2020 Winning Entry
Me Too

I'm in fourth grade, and I'm nine years old
The seasons are changing, it starts to get cold

And the only dress code that I can see
Is that if I don't wear my gym uniform at the end of the week
I won't be allowed to play kickball

I'm in sixth grade, and things start to change
I'm eleven years old and it feels pretty strange
Gym class turns to health class, and they pull the girls aside
And there's a new rule that we'll have to abide by:
"You need to cover up so you don't distract the boys"

I remember wondering what it was that made my shoulders so alluring
But the teacher told us that our bodies were maturing
I laughed and thought she was just being dramatic
I'm in middle school now! Things should be fantastic!
But she was right

I'm in seventh grade, and I'm looking back
And I remember that day, the boys had to leave class
But nobody ever told them to keep their hands to themselves

I'm in eighth grade, thirteen, afraid to walk down the hall
Because the boys had decided they were sick of kickball
They thought of the rules for a new game to play
Just a harmless activity to get through the day
They kept score in a black marble notebook

Grab a girl's boobs for two points, grab her ass for one
I didn't realize that assault could be fun
Months went by and they thought they would win
Six girls went to the office before the principal stepped in
She didn't believe us the first time

The boys got in trouble, a couple suspensions
The girls, however, got a bit more attention
We stood outside the principal's office in line
And she told us that everything would be fine, it was just that
"Tight pants were too revealing," and we couldn't wear them anymore

I waited for hours to use the office phone

To call my mother and ask if she was home
“Hey Mom, can you stop by school with some clothes?
I think I need to get changed”

But she was at work

You see, my mother works from nine to five
And stays up until two in the morning most nights
She works a full time job and she has three kids
And I’ll never understand how difficult that is
But I know it’s not easy earning 81 cents to her male colleagues’ dollar

But that’s another story

My dad brought me clothes instead, it was okay
But by then I’d already missed most of the school day
There weren’t any problems for the rest of that year
But it didn’t matter-- the message was clear:

My bra strap or midriff or the fit of my jeans
Are much more important than my education could ever be
Simply because I’m a girl

I’m seventeen now, and, well-- there’s this guy
He’s smart, and he’s cute, and he knows how to drive
And I’ve got, like, the biggest crush on him

He invites me over one day, his parents aren’t home
And we’re sitting in his room, and it’s just us alone
And, well... you know how these things tend to go (sorry, Mom)

He kisses me, and things start to progress
And a moment before he begins to undress

He stops and he asks me, “Is this okay?”
And my first thought was, “Isn’t he sweet?”

And he is-- don’t get me wrong, he’s great
But asking for consent should never be praised

It should be the standard, and not the exception
Whenever a person is showing affection

And I shouldn't feel grateful, but it served as a reminder
That not every girl gets as lucky as I did
One in four women shares a similar story
From Gaga to Olympians to Jennifer Lawrence

Gabrielle Union, and Kesha, the list is unending
If you think there isn't a problem, just stop pretending
Please think of your mother, your sister, your friends
#MeToo is the beginning, but we are far from the end

It isn't over until those at fault are blamed for their actions
Until "boys will be boys" is a thing of the past
Until women can wear what they want, carefree
Until my body belongs only to me

My little sister is nine, she's in fourth grade
And I remember how I felt when I was her age
I know that the world doesn't change overnight
All we can do is continue to fight

So please, think of your mother, your sister, your friends
If not for yourself, then do it for them
Fight for the girls who grew up far too young
There are too many battles that need to be won
Fight for a world that is equal and new
Fight even if it hasn't happened to you
Please, fight so no one has to say "me too"

Class of 2019 Winning Entry
Lizmary Ortiz, *Put on Some Pants*

There are two freedoms available in this world: the freedom to do, and the freedom not to do. One cannot exist without the other, and both hold an equal amount of importance. However, each person has their own singular preference as to which they would like to have. That is the most essential element of true equality: to be able to abstain, and to be able to participate. This

not only applies to the treatment of women as compared to men, which holds prejudices and misconceptions that remain true to this day; rather, it provides a frank insight into the treatment of women, as compared to other women. Gender equality should not be sought after solely through the cooperation of the opposite gender, as it must sincerely stem from its own demographic. What good is it to preach for equality, whilst putting down others for not being your mirror-image, your equals? People are too hasty in passing judgement onto others for not being as passionate, as assertive, as secure as they are. A stay at home mother seemingly cannot be a feminist, as she has conformed to the societal expectations that are being so heavily fought against. A young girl that maintains a traditionally feminine wardrobe, and gives significant thought to her appearance, is dictated as being too girly to be a true revolutionary. Revolutions, after all, must be fought in uniforms; uniforms, have always consisted of wearing pants. That is the first sign of a true advocate for equality, after all- to shed the makeup, dresses, and cultural morals instilled into you since birth. In order for a woman to be seen as a feminist icon, she must decidedly be exercising the freedom to do what other women are not brave enough to, correct? Take off the skirt, put on a pair of pants. Who wears the pants in your family, or in your relationship? They must obviously be the one in true control, the more powerful person. Baggy pants, ripped pants, bleached pants, army pants. Choose one, and wear it religiously; without it, you are going against the movement. But, why is that so? If one woman has the freedom to wear pants, then the other must have the same amount of liberty to say, "I want to wear a nice skirt today." Both women can be advocates for gender equality, no matter what they choose to, or not to, do. A woman can trim her hair down to her scalp, just as another can grow it out down to her hips. She can wear a full face of makeup, or leave the house fresh and bare-faced. She can put on a pair of 6-inch heels, or a pair of tattered converses. She can wear dresses to work, or a pantsuit. If the same intolerance that we struggle against are the very ones we place onto ourselves, then we are our own true enemies. Freedom is choice, and in craving a choice, you must acknowledge the fact that someone will always choose the other option. The trick is not to put another down for lack of zeal, or commitment, to the cause. After all, if you fight for freedom of judgement on the basis of outward appearance and personality, then who are you to pass this judgement onto another, simply because they are another woman? The true way to achieve gender equality is by starting with yourself. Once women can achieve unity with each other, then the necessary steps can be taken to endeavor for the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. But, first, we have to learn to love ourselves, as well as others, just the same.