

Shameless

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Dear you
who are told to be quiet and take up as little space as possible
who are not allowed to choose your friends, your education or your career
who will never really come of age and have ownership of your life
who are told that falling in love is a sin
who have to live a double life, in fear, constantly feeling bad for it
who are shamed for wearing, not wearing or stopping wearing the hijab
who are called fucking immigrant, nigger, shameless and faithless
who are told that racism and social control are non-existent problems
who have to carry the honour of your family
who are not allowed to make decisions regarding your own body
who have been sexually harassed or assaulted, and been told that it is your fault
whose worth are dictated by the state of your hymen

Dear you who are not allowed to be free.
This book is for you.

“My freedom: to be what they do not want me to be”
– Mahmoud Darwish

The first time we wrote about negative social control and shame culture, we finally managed put into words the things that we’ve experienced, but never really understood. Experiences of being restricted, both in regards to what we can do and who we can be.

For a long time we thought these restrictions were our own fault. That it was a punishment, a protection, that there was something wrong with us, that we were the ones who had to adjust. After all, that’s what we’ve been told.

It wasn’t until we realized that there is a term for this, realized that we’re not the only ones with such experiences, that we were able to recognize the mechanisms that limit us. We came to understand that there is an entire system which purpose is to control girls like us, girls who doesn’t conform, who wishes to do things their own way.

We started recognizing this kind of control everywhere. In the throwaway comments on how we should behave, coming both from people we know and people we don't know; in how "because you're a girl" is used as an argument for why we are to do certain things and under no circumstance do other things; in the reactions we get when not conforming to the many unwritten rules that dictate our lives. Negative social control is the sum of all these things, of everything that stops us from living our lives the way we want to.

We realized that the words "honour" and "shame" are systematically misused to suppress us, instead of being natural moral compasses.

"Shameless" is used as a slur against girls that don't comply to the norms in action. It's a serious accusation, and both your own honour and your family's honour is on the line. If you're shameless, there must be something wrong with your moral compass, something wrong with the way you're raised, something wrong with you. The word "shameless" makes your stomach churn uncomfortably.

We've used this word with a certain amount of irony in the ongoing debate. If you stop and examine it, however – taste it, analyze it and look at what it really means – it's liberating: shameless. With no shame.

Of course we're shameless, if that means we don't allow other people to shame us. Of course we're shameless if being shameless is synonymous with being free.

The first step was realizing this. The second step is doing something about it.

The battle against negative social control is not one we've started, but one that we are continuing. So many women have gone before us, clearing a path, contributing to opening up this space for us to express ourselves. They've cleared a stage, we've stepped on to it.

Talking out loud about the challenges we meet, makes it easier to break down taboos and reduce the shame connected to them. To hear someone else say "I've been there, I've experienced that as well, it's not you, there's nothing wrong with you", means a lot.

We've chosen not to stay quiet when injustice is committed. However, when we talk about social control and systematic shaming, we're often accused of exaggerating, of being subjective and lying about our lives and experiences. Often from people in our own communities, people who believe that we smear and vilify the community by talking about these challenges.

On the other hand, racists and right-wing extremists misuse our stories as proof for their prejudice, making us poster girls for a generalizing ideology that we couldn't possibly disagree more with.

Accusing those who share their stories of having bad intentions, or exploiting their stories to promote one's own agenda, does not help bringing new voices forth. Quite on the contrary, it sends a signal to young people, saying that their lives and experiences don't matter.

Having the power to define your own life and experiences is crucial. When other people want to define our truth, when they try to decide what activities we're allowed to be engaged in and what battles we are allowed to fight, they bereave us of the freedom to define ourselves. And that's the core of this battle: we fight to be free to be who we are.

Advice on how to behave honourably #256:

As a girl, you should try to be a little nicer. That aggression of yours isn't particularly attractive, you know.

What we talk about when we talk about social control

Sofia: The term 'social control' is so vague, yeah? It's all the small and big ways of controlling someone.

Amina: But like, we need social control, like, it's part of any society. It's really important to point out that we're talking about *negative* social control, those instances of ingrained, unfortunate habits that exist within a given frame. We need to be specific here, 'cause when people hear the words 'social control', they only think of the negative aspect, and they shouldn't.

S: True. We're supposed to be limited by positive social control, the kind that is regulated by the laws and by our court system, but negative social control is when the norms or unwritten rules in a certain community dictate your life, because that's viable in that community, that's accepted, but at the same time it violates people's rights. Human rights, Norwegian law, the CRC and stuff. In a broad sense it's about stopping a person from developing in a way that every person should be allowed to develop: through making one's own choices, through deciding over your own life, all those liberties. So yeah, it's a way of limiting people's liberty.

Nancy: You're kinda micromanaged on the individual level.

S: The way I see it, it's really collectivist.

N: Yeah, but then it affects individuals.

A: Uh-uh.

S: We have to try to expose it, make social control less vague. Show examples. All those little things.

N: I think that showing the nuances of social control is extremely important, in this book and in the debate. 'Cause, I mean ... even though forced marriage and genital mutilation are super serious and difficult themes, I feel like it's easier to acknowledge that *that* is wrong, than it is when we talk about the milder variations; that constant prodding, all those views on how you should be as a person, how you always feel obliged to be someone you're not. Both those variations, the extreme and the mild, are forms of negative social control. And both can be really destructive for the person enduring it.

A: Yeah, 'cause the big things and the small things are all connected! What they have in common is that you don't get to decide for yourself. When someone is constantly telling you who to be, there's no room for you figure out who you are for yourself. When someone tells you to go somewhere to be re-raised, for instance, you don't get to refuse to go.

S: It's not milder, really, it's just a different, less visible way of controlling someone. And quite often the extreme forms of control are simply sanctions for not following the rules you were expected to follow, not obliging by the mild control. In a way, it's a punishment for not living by the rules.

N: True!

A: I've experienced both the little things and the big things. What they have in common is that *me being me* is not good enough.

S: And it's important to point out that most of the time, we talk about negative social control in the perspective of honour. Most people recognize shaming in general, having an unhealthy shame shoved down your throat. Which really sucks in and of itself.

N: But then honour adds a whole new dimension.

S: The honour codex ... it's so much more systematic and complex and culturally determined. You carry honour, and when you bring shame upon that honour ... that honour isn't only yours, it's your family's, and then you've basically fucked up for your entire family. Because you made a certain choice. Or because you experienced something you didn't deserve. 'Cause it can be anything from cheating on your husband to being raped. Several people feel like using words like 'honour' and 'shame' stigmatize our communities. But these aren't terms specifically tied to the cultures we come from, these concepts exist everywhere. But we have to be able to talk about how some people in our culture misuse them to control others, specifically girls. And it's not that we –

N: We don't talk about these things to criticize or shed a bad light on our own culture. What we do is to try to confront what we see as a negative aspect within that culture. We talk about this because in our opinion, we shouldn't have to choose to be either-or. I think we can be several things at once. To me, it's important to be able to speak up about this, and still be proud of my multicultural background and the culture that my parents come from. I don't get why some people see that as a contradiction.

A: When speaking about ... we don't encourage people to break with their families or communities, that's really important to highlight. Because it seems like some people believe that we've rejected our communities, our religion.

N: But that's not the case.

A: No, not at all! We don't want people to break loose. We simply want to figure this stuff out. Fix it.

S: We need to challenge the perceptions that people bring with them from their home countries about how everyone is supposed to fit the same mould – perceptions that people kinda hesitate to let go of, because they are familiar, you know, that's the system they're used to. But it's important to underline that freedom is individual. Living conservatively isn't necessarily a result of negative social control. Many people who live strictly according to religious rules and norms, have chosen to do so themselves, and are perfectly happy about it. The point is that one should know of the different alternatives, and have the opportunity to choose one's own way without being condemned for it. We need to cut each other some slack.

A: We have to rebel. Against the system, the patriarchy, the structures. They're everywhere.

S: I'm just so sick and tired of the fact that things have been so unchanging in our culture, one has to admit that, that it's been like that, that we haven't come very far. Even though it's talked about more and more, even though there's more openness surrounding that fact, there will always be people who deny that this is an existing problem. I just can't accept that. It's provoking. It's so fucking provoking.

N: But I don't think that breaking away is the right solution. Then we're talking extremes again. There has to be a middle ground.

S: I think that in extreme situations it's necessary to get out, get away. But it's about the level of social control. There's quite a lot of stuff that in the end can lead to extreme control, and that's what we've got to work with. Preventing that. We need to work so that people don't end up in those situations where they're married off or suffer genital mutilation or have their virginity tested, or other serious things.

N: But you're not saying that it's the responsibility of young people not to end up in that situation, right?

S: No, it's up to us to avoid that, us as a society. The politicians need to come on board and ensure that preventive work is being done, we need specific measures.

A: But I also want kids and young people to go home and open that conversation, and just take it from there. I know that it's really important to talk with the older generations.

N: But to do that they need a secure framework, they need to know that they won't be subjected to anything for bringing it up. That's crucial. So I really hope that through this debate, we can ensure such safe frameworks for those who fight these battles, at home or in the society at large. And that we might inspire others to make some changes in their lives.

A: One of the things that really sucks about doing what we do, is that parents point at us and say: "Don't be like them". That makes it so much harder for the kids to have that conversation.

N: But it's not about them being just like us, them making my choices, in a way. What I wish to accomplish, is for young people to gradually be able to speak up more in their own lives, increase the headroom, as I've put it. It's not about turning everything upside-down overnight, it's about being 21 or 22 or 25 and actually be acknowledged as a grown up, be allowed to decide over your own life.

S: I also hope that we can break ground for better relationships between parents and kids, for more trust, more openness. More security for teenagers, for them to feel like home is a safe ground. If the kid has done something that is considered sinful, or ... I don't want all human mistakes to be synonymous with sin. That you walk around and feel sinful for just doing normal stuff. Normal mistakes. But yeah. I hope that instead, you can have that conversation, give your kids the advice you want to give them, and then afterwards your kids will feel like they have a network that supports them, in case something happens. That they don't have a family that'll push their kids away if they're victims to violence or assault, for instance.

A: And it's important to say that not all young people with minority background experience such things. Not at all. And that's not what we're trying to say. But those who do, I hope they find inspiration and hope in the fact that it's talked about, written about, by other people.

N: And I really hope this book can be an interesting read for grownups and majority youth as well. Both because we're all part of this society and it's important that everyone knows of these challenges, in order to fight them. That it concerns everyone. And also because not all of these challenges are challenges exclusive to minorities. Like, it feels weird to say that I hope that people recognises their own struggles in this book, 'cause I don't, I hope they haven't experienced social control. But I hope they'll recognise themselves in trying to find out who you are, in figuring out your identity.

A: Whoa, that's deep ...

N: Haha! Hey, don't kill my vibe.

#DearSister

In March 2017 the Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy received yet another email from a stranger who wished to lecture her on how to behave.

We've received hundreds of them ourselves – pieces of advice from people we know and people we don't know, about how to sit, eat, dress, talk and behave to be the perfect, honourable girl. Or we receive comments on what we do wrong. Suggestions that they claim to give with the best intentions, but that often carry an underlying corrective tone: "It's *you* who have to change. Who need to become someone you're not. It's *you* who's not good enough."

This criticism is often served with the opening phrase "Dear sister".

Frustrated, Eltahawy tweeted "Save your lectures, whether you're a total stranger or someone I know. 'Sister Mona' is not interested", and asked others to share their stories with the hashtag DearSister.

Within hours, thousands of girls had shared their experiences (check out [#dearsister](#) on Twitter!).

Here are some of the helpful pieces of advice we've received as we've grown up:

1. Don't share photos of yourself on social media. What will people think of a girl who shamelessly shows herself off to the world? Where's your hayaa?
2. You can travel alone when you're married. Then, your husband will decide for you.
3. Taking off the hijab is moral decay. It's sin. It's like eating pork. Actually it's the road to Jahannam.
4. Don't smile so much.
5. Hijab AND makeup? Astaghfirullah.
6. I really hope that your parents won't allow you to join the sleepover school trip. Who knows what may happen there.
7. Can't you find something else than women's rights to be engaged in? No-one will ever want to marry you if you carry on like that.
8. Keep your legs together! People might get the wrong idea of girls who aren't aware of how they sit.
9. Don't have too many Norwegian friends.
10. Remember: you can actually see whether a girl is a virgin or not. It's in the way she walks.
11. Don't use red lipstick. Red lipstick is for whores.

12. If you absolutely have to wear pants, at least wear sweatpants. That way, no-one can make out the shape of your legs.
13. What do you mean by wearing a T-shirt? You're grown up now, cover up!
14. You're a girl, you don't need privacy.
15. Don't be so outgoing.
16. You've hit puberty now, you're growing up, you need to look after yourself (i.e. your virginity)
17. Heheh, just so you know, I can spot a little bit of your hair under your hijab!
18. Girls don't sit in the same room as men, go be with your mum in the kitchen.
19. Domestic violence? Be patient, it will pass. You're a woman, you can endure it.
20. Don't eat lollipops when you're out and about.
21. You're a pearl in a shell. Keep the shell closed.
22. Where do you think you're going? The women's entrance to the mosque is on the backside. You know, the smallest room we have.
23. Sure, working out is fine, but not in the same room as men. They can't control their desires. You're making it difficult for them.
24. Don't be too westernized. People in your home country will think that your parents can't control you.
25. Don't you realize that so-called selfies are haram? Respect yourself and your hijab.
26. All honourable women bleed on their wedding night.
27. But you *are* free! You attend school, you have a job, you get food and clothes at home. What more do you want?
28. If you don't cover up your neck more properly, this doesn't really classify as a hijab, does it?
29. What do you mean, "I'm not going to have children"? That's the purpose of us women. That's what we live for. It's half our deen!
30. Don't drink straight from the bottle.
31. Just ignore it. Boys will be boys.
32. Your body is fitna. Cover it, and you'll cover the desires of men as well.
33. I think there might be gelatine in that.
34. Where's your hayaa? Talking freely about your body and sexuality shows a lack of hayaa, sister.
35. Don't eat bananas in public.

36. It's only natural to ask your father for your hand in marriage, not you. After all, men are the ones responsible to make big decisions.
37. You women are so sensitive and irrational. You don't think straight.
38. Girls lose their chastity if they fall in love and act on it before they marry. Falling in love is haram.
39. Girls like you go straight to Jahannam.
40. Congratulations on graduating from higher education and getting a good degree! But when are you getting married, again? 'Cause you are getting married, right? Heheh, that's the most important thing in life, you know.
41. Remember, you're not a boy.
42. Don't sit down while biking across a speed bump, you might harm yourself (i.e. your hymen).
43. Don't dance with boys in your PE class.
44. If you absolutely have to see a doctor, make sure it's a woman.
45. Your hijab will protect you against assaults.

Fill in yourself:

46. _____ [#dearsister](#)
47. _____ [#dearsister](#)
48. _____ [#dearsister](#)

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Shamefulness vs. age: Nancy

10 years old:

Primary school is fine until it turns out that I'm the first in class to hit puberty, the first one to get boobs. Shameful.

14 years old:

I'm not gonna lie, I'm not the coolest 14-year-old ever. I never attend parties, and I feel genuinely sorry for my friends who have just discovered Bacardi Breezers. I stay in, do my homework. The reason I give everyone is that I'm just not into the same kind of things as most of the people I go to

secondary school with. The underlying reason is a little more complex: Being like them would take a bigger toll than being different. Not being like everyone else makes me an outsider, but trying to be like everyone else has far worse consequences: I risk falling out with my family, being excluded from my own community, having the “proper girls” that I know look down on me, and worst of all – no-one, absolutely no-one, would ever want to marry me. So what am I to do here? Be too Norwegian, or not be Norwegian enough? I feel ashamed about being so out of place. I’m a 14-year-old who has hit a premature mid-life crisis, I’m at conflict with myself and the world, and I have an overwhelming need of feeling a sense of belonging. To anything, really. In my search for a place to belong, I’m willing to accept a lot. Sacrifice a lot.

15 years old:

After doing a quick impact assessment, I decide on becoming “not Norwegian enough”. Religion is one of my strategies. Not just faith, but big-scale submission. My Muslim identity is amped up by my sense of alienation from the Norwegian society, the sense that I’m not allowed to be properly part of it. I try navigating my identity, and as I fail to find a sort of balance, I pick an extremity instead. I decide to nail being an outsider. I want to be the perfect Muslim girl, a guardian of morals. In my search for identity and belonging, I choose to amplify my exclusion. I think: “Just you wait, I’ll show you what it means not to fit in!” It seems like the easiest way out. It’s way more difficult to find a compromise than to pick an extremity and stick with it. Instead of fighting a multitude of battles, I take a clear stand, choosing sides once and for all. After a while, I really want to use the hijab as an identity marker. The last couple of years I’ve prayed and kept my fast, and to me, the hijab seems like the obvious next step. Not just the headscarf, I want the entire package. Like properly seemly clothes, an entirely new wardrobe of long, loose-fitting dresses and conservative headwear. But my parents won’t let me. They sense that something is up. Even though I’ve been raised in the Muslim faith, to believe in God, they realize that something’s not right. Instead, they force a reluctant teenager out of the house to socialize. #goparents

16 years old:

Eventually I give up on becoming the perfect Muslim girl. I realize that she’s perfect simply because she doesn’t exist. She’s an idea. An illusion. I get a chance to choose again. The teenage Nancy goes through a phase, and ends up on the other side with no serious harm done, other than the fact that she has to start over in the process of figuring out who she is. The sense of shamefulness decreases a little. I start wondering whether I might not be the problem, after all, whether it’s not me there’s something wrong with. I make new friends, good friends, of different faiths and ethnicities, but with the same core values. I find a passion in volunteering for Amnesty International. Things look up.

19 years old:

I put my religion aside. Scary, but liberating. A lot of the shame I’ve felt dissolves as I start being honest with myself and dare to stand up for who I am.

20 years old:

My letter is published in Aftenposten, and I meet hundreds of other shameless girls. It’s great, but also difficult at times. The debate climate is rough.

21 years old:

Life, huh? It can be such a rollercoaster, but most of the time it’s pretty decent. Nevertheless, I keep catching myself feeling ashamed over the same things that I was ashamed about when I was ten. It’s kinda weird.

Hijab pros

- + It looks good.
- + You've taken a visible religious stand, people don't have to wonder.
- + The hijab is really spiritual. Many people feel closer to God, it reminds you of God's love and of your faith.
- + The hijab feels liberating for those who have made a clear choice. It's something you wear for your own sake, not for the sake of (or because of) men or other people in general.
- + Other Muslims greet you and say 'Salaam'.
- + It's a great conversation starter.
- + For some, it's a way of flipping off the society's enforced beauty ideals (to many, wearing the hijab is more of a political stand than a religious one).
- + You receive plenty of hijabs as presents from your home country family squad.
- + You wake up in the morning and find your hair to be in a state of chaos. But you wear the hijab! Bad hair days are never a problem. **#likeaboss**
- + Hijab=place to put your phone! Cheap hands-free. **#hijabhack**
- + You can change colours and styles daily. There are so many ways to style your hijab. Not everyone wears it tight, covering the neck. Heard of the turban style hijab?
- + It covers up spots on your forehead and neck.
- + You're part of a big community. **#hijabsquad**
- + You feel like a total boss when you ace your outfit AND finds the perfect hijab to go with it. **#OOTD**
- + Your hair feels super silky when you take the hijab off after a long day!
- + Ok ok ... it's kinda nice (as in: awesome) to get an invite to exclusive all-girl parties where Hijabis can take their hijabs off, wear short party dresses, style their hair and have a blast with other girls.

Hijab cons

- When girls you go to school with are like, "I look forward to seeing your hair in the locker rooms after PE, you're soo pretty without the hijab!"
- When **#muslimfuckboys** use Islam as an excuse to chat you up on Facebook, like, "simple frandship plz, dear sister in islam".
- You might not have a problem with bad hair days, but ever heard of bad hijab days? The struggle is real.
- SUMMER. SUN. HOTTT.
- Nosy kids asking why you wear a tent on your head.

- The fact that few people choose to sit beside you on the metro.
- Hijab pins pricking your scalp and destroying your lovely hijabs.
- Teachers who ask you if your dad forced you to wear it.
- Having popcorn at the cinema and realizing, when the film is over and the lights turn on, that your hijab is full of popcorn crumbs.
- In-ear headphones! It's a struggle to dig through several layers of the hijab and like, locate the ears. **#hijabproblems**
- People who ask: "Are you bald or what?? Do you wear it in the shower? Do you sleep in it?"
- When all questions about Islam in religion class are reserved for you. You're the key.
- When your brother's friends turn up unexpectedly and you have you use sofa cushions or a newspaper or something as a hijab. Or just say 'hi' and pretend like everything is ok. **#emergencyhijab**
- Attributes and skills are often underestimated, in PE, at work and other places.
- When you've got some sick earrings and jewellery, but it doesn't show.
- You're like a magnet, attracting opinions from Muslims and non-Muslims (i. e. the moral police) who think they can lecture you on what a hijab really is.
- Visible religious stand. It's at its worst on days following terror attacks, you walk about like a scapegoat. Some stay at home on such days, because they're scared.
- Job interviews are the absolute worst, 'cause you wonder whether the possibility of a job offer comes down to the hijab.

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Double life, double morals

Told to Sofia

Everyone around her is drinking, laughing. ██████ isn't that used to alcohol, but she's just had her second shot. Everyone is taking pictures and sending snaps. She tries her best to turn her head away when the cameras pan across the room. Eventually she asks people not to include her in any photos.

She's constantly checking her phone, making sure her mom hasn't texted.

"Are you ok?" her boyfriend, who is sitting beside her, asks.

"Yeah, sure," she replies, smiling.

"Btw, aren't those guys friends with your brother?" he asks, looking towards the main entrance.

She follows his gaze, and feels her stomach fall. *Fuck*, she thinks, *what the heck are they doing here?* According to ██████ they weren't supposed to attend this party, they were going downtown.

Her brother is not there. His two pals don't know her, but they know who she is, know what family she belongs to.

She looks at the empty shot glasses in front of her, at her boyfriend, who's sitting a bit too close; at her clothes and at everyone around her, at all the boys in the room. She can feel her pulse quicken as the guys at the entrance throw glances in her direction.

"Sorry, I have to bail," she says abruptly, getting up to find her jacket and handbag.

Her boyfriend asks her if she wants him to see her home, she says that she's fine, she'll grab a cab. There's no time for him to ask any more questions, she's already halfway out the door. After all, it's not the first time that she has suddenly upped and left when they're at a party.

Outside she has to wait quite a while for the next bus. It doesn't run all that often, but she'll rather wait than find a cab. She has learned that the hard way, last time the cab driver recognized her.

Her mom is observing her from the sofa when she gets home. She stops as soon as she's across the threshold, afraid that her mom will notice the smell of alcohol that she's just tried to drown in perfume.

"How was the film?" her mom asks.

"It was ok, I s'pose," she replies. "██████'s older sister drove us home. Is dad home from work yet?"

"Yeah, he's taking a shower".

"Ok, I'll just go to my room and change clothes," she says quickly.

"Hey, that red lipstick? You can't go out in public like that. You know dad will be upset."

She nods, her eyes lowered. She forgot to wipe it off.

"Go wash your face before your father sees you like that. And leave your phone here."

She does as she's told. She's not worried about them seeing anything incriminating on her phone, she goes through it every day, deleting stuff, turning off notifications. She has told her boyfriend strictly not to text her in the evenings.

From her room she overhears the conversation in the living room, as usual.

"How can you let her stay out this late? How are you supposed to know what she's up to?" It's her dad, asking the same questions as he does every weekend.

"She was simply at the cinema with her cousin," her mom replies.

"And ██████, where's he?"

"He just texted that he won't come home tonight", her mom says, "I'm not quite sure what his plans were".

██████ wipes her lipstick off and silently prays that her brother's friends didn't see her. That she wasn't caught red-handed. Not this time, either.

Nancy: It's so, so common that different rules apply to boys and girls within the same family.

Sofia: You notice that kind of differential treatment quite early on, and more so the older you get. As boys grow older, they get more freedom, but as girls grow older they get more restrictions, like, what to wear and how late you can stay out and stuff. How many birthday parties you can attend.

N: Yeah, you kinda have to choose.

S: Because when you grow older, when you hit puberty, many people are like "you're a grown woman now, you're bleeding, you're getting curves, your breasts are growing, you need to tone things down. Don't wear tank tops, don't wear t-shirts, don't wear shorts, don't wear short skirts, or anything else that might draw people's attention ... that's not ok. And don't talk to boys, don't go near boys," things like that. Everything that might lead to moral decay. That's not a problem if you're a boy.

Amina: Girls become hyper-aware of their own gender from a really young age. I don't know if boys are aware that they are *boys* to the same extent. As a girl, you're so aware of your limitations, and you have been since you were little. It's quite mind-blowing.

S: That might be why not everyone recognizes themselves in Sana in *Skam*.¹ Because, like, she attends the same parties as her brother. And that's like ... It's totally unrealistic. No-one's partying with their brothers! Certainly not if you're a Muslim.

A: And a girl.

S: Yeah, and a girl.

A: You're not supposed to be partying, you're not even supposed to stay out late.

S: But she's kinda covering it up a bit, she doesn't tell her mother that she's going to a party.

A: But she shares party pictures on Instagram.

S: Uh-uh, but her mom's probably not on Instagram.

N: But on their way to the metro when they're going to that birthday party, she first tells her mom that they're just hanging out, and then admits that they're going to a party.

S: Yeah, that's true, she actually mentions it. But she's really careful about what she tells her mom. And I think that's tied to how you constantly have a bad conscience, that you feel like you're doing something you shouldn't all the time.

¹ *Skam* (English: *Shame*) is a hit teen series produced by the Norwegian broadcasting company NRK, which aired between 2015 and 2017. The character Sana, played by Hijabi actress Iman Meskini, is a Muslim 17-year-old girl, and was the main character in the fourth and final season of the series. The series, whose target audience is 16-year-old girls, gained wide audiences within and without the target group, nationally and internationally (illegally subbed and distributed by fans), and is sold to be re-made in the US, as well as a number of European countries.

N: One of the biggest differences must be the fact that boys can have girlfriends.

A: I wouldn't put it like that, they can't really have girlfriends, it's more like it's not the end of the world if they do.

N: I suppose it's because they don't have a hymen that can break.

S: However, it can be quite problematic for a guy to have a girlfriend as well. It's haram, you bring shame over the honour of your family, because you can't kinda ... It depends on whether she's got the same background. If she's Norwegian, then it's kinda shame. But boys can be praised when they get a girlfriend, like, congrats, that's great. And if they're like, can I bring my girlfriend home, that might be totally fine. But if a girl mentions a boy there'll be a lot of questions, like, "now you've gotta come clean".

A: But boys experience being monitored as well.

N: In totally different ways, though.

S: It's not about their bodies.

N: They're rather being accused for spending time with the wrong people, have the "wrong friends" who probably do drugs, or not watching over their sisters and stuff.

S: If you have the wrong friends, then you're an addict. And if you hang out with the wrong crew, then you're a criminal.

A: Nah ...

N: That's what the boys are told. It's a really tough macho-culture. No room for feelings and such. And on the other hand they're accused of being Islamist if they grow a beard, or of being gang members if they sag. It's not easy for the guys either, social control affects everyone. And everyone gets monitored.

A: OK, it's actually a really big deal if a boy is caught drinking, for example. But they still have an easier time than we do.

S: A way easier time.

A: They get like: "you're a drug addict", and we get like: "you're a whore". It's more aggressive when directed at girls.

N: Guys get corrected as well, though. Like, "dear brother". But it's a totally different tone.

S: It depends on the community, but yeah, there's quite a bit of "dear brother" as well. Dear brother, watch your language, dear brother, think of God, now. Such things. But you don't fall out with that brother. Even if he's smoked or had non-marital sex. He's still included, he won't be excluded for that. When it comes to girls, it's way more normalized to bully, to slut-shame.

A: I feel like boys definitely get reactions, but not on minor things. Only big things, if they do stuff that people are kinda supposed to react to anyway. Like knocking a girl up or being out drinking. But with girls it's like, the tiniest of things, like, "where are your socks, dear sister?" I mean, you might actually hear that.

N: And then there's the consequences afterwards.

S: Yeah, it's not like they get the strictest sanctions.

N: They're sanctioned all right, but not in the same way.

S: They receive warnings. And if we talk about physical violence, it's often accepted to hit boys, more so than girls. Which sucks. It's not like it's very common. But when it comes to physical violence I think boys have a harder time.

A: Breaking those gender role patterns is so, so hard, though.

S: Then you have to do what Nancy talks about, start making room for asking the difficult questions, clearing a sort of space for it.

N: I've talked about that as increasing the headroom in your life. I think that image fits quite well.

S: Yeah, it's great. 'Cause that's what it's all about, right, not just to compromise, but to challenge those ideas.

N: I think brothers are the most important backers in that aspect. If you have a brother who realizes that you have the exact same worth as him, he can be so important. Brothers can be the ones to say to the parents, like, "why shouldn't she be allowed to do that?" or "why do I get to do that, but not her?" I think that's way more effective than ... I've got a younger brother who is like that. He backs me up. I think having that kind of relation is so important, brothers have a really big responsibility there. They can help normalizing the fact that girls are an equal part of society, so that the older generations get it.

A: Yeah, agreed.

S: But the thing is, that really depends on how sons and daughters have been raised, 'cause in my family there was never much of a divide in our upbringing. Like, my brothers wouldn't even consider lecturing me on how to live my life. They don't interfere at all, they have their lives, I have mine.

A: But you're an older sister, right?

S: Yeah, but they don't interfere with how our younger sister lives her life, either. They're not brought up to feel like they're responsible for my actions. We've all been raised to be independent. So that means a lot. They couldn't care less about honour and shame, they don't really have any relation to those concepts. There's a new generation of men growing up right now.

A: Definitely.

N: But we need to be aware of the opposite: There are also young people who are more conservative than people in their parents' generation. That can be quite dangerous. A lot of the reason for that is to be found in a sense of exclusion, of not belonging. You know, the fact that you're either too Norwegian or never Norwegian enough. It's important to underline that this is a question of integration as well.

S: We're really lucky to have really tolerant parents. That being said, it's not like there hasn't been any differences between boys and girls in my family at all, 'cause there has. And I actually think that's common in a lot of homes, not just amongst minorities or in closed communities. Girls are treated differently from boys in general. But at home, at least we had room for challenging the norms. We had room for being pissed and speaking up and discussing stuff. Speaking about things is crucial.

A: Yeah. Anyone can relate to differential treatment, you don't have to have minority background to recognize that. From a strictly feminist perspective, that happens everywhere, all the time. You

know, those little things, like keeping the house clean, practical things. It's so typical: Dad comes home from work and sits down. Mom comes home from work and starts tidying. And then those habits are adopted by brothers and sisters, we inherit them.

N: Yeah, one has to repeat oneself like, every single time.

A: *It's so annoying. I make sure my brother tidy every day.*

S: That's great! Like, siblings have so much power when it comes to changing patterns of how things are done at home. When I started baking like, every Sunday, my family thought that was super chill. So when I stopped, my brother was like "Hey, aren't you gonna bake?", and I was like, "why don't you try? You can learn to bake yourself, you know". To begin with he was like "Nah, I can't be bothered". But now he actually cooks quite a bit.

A: Mash'Allah, Mash'Allah!

S: You just have to break those patterns. I didn't bake because I'm a woman, I baked because I craved cinnamon buns, and I know that my family enjoy them, too.

Advice on how to behave honourably #476:

What are you doing out this late? You should probably be home by now, don't you think? Who are your parents?

O' holy penis

Amina

I hate the patriarchy.

An institutionalized system characterized by the supremacy it bestows on the male sex and everything associated with the male sex or masculinity. It offers a 'natural' dominance – socially, economically, politically. To put it simply: Men rule the world. Why all this power, you ask, and the answer is: Because they've got a penis between their legs. Just a vulnerable body part, that nevertheless gives them access to all manners of benefits.

In our communities, the imbalance between the sexes is often explained with "this is the way we've always done it", as if doing something wrong enough times will make it right.

Negative social control grows out of this, things are a certain way *because they've always been that way*, and then that is the way it's supposed to be. However, when the patriarchal standard is the baseline of our society, only half of us get to participate on an equal footing. And that isn't an ideal situation for either half.

When a brother strictly guards on his sister, he does so with a heavy heart. The knowledge that he, too, will be punished if he doesn't meet the expectations, frightens him. So he lives in fear, as much as she does. I know this, because I know this brother.

And when a father controls the lives of his sons and daughters, until individuality, self-authority and independency are concepts they don't even grasp, he doesn't necessarily do it with an easy heart. He, too, is afraid.

The thought of how the community around them can make the lives of his family members difficult, frightens him. So the father lives in fear, too, and must meet the expectations. The good reputation, the honour of the family, must be maintained. I know this father.

We're welcome to see men as the enemy, to exclude the male sex from our battle, but then we undermine that entire battle. The boys, too, suffer from inequality and social control. I know those boys.

Being a pioneer is to declare war on the traditions that are so deep-rooted, that seem so natural, that they've "always been that way". The battle against negative social control needs to include everyone.

I can't wait to get to know the shameless boys.

Advice on how to act honourably #413:

What do you mean by saying that you're a feminist? You're brainwashed! In our culture we answer to our men, no matter what.

"It doesn't take much, really. If you've held hands with someone, then you're a whore. If you've grabbed a coffee with someone, then you're a whore. And that's what I find so ... Like, if you've lost your virginity on top of that, then you've kinda lost what's most valuable about you. Like, straight up. Pointing out that the hymen is a myth, doesn't help jack shit."
