

KIA

MAKING LIGHT OF DARK ISSUES

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SUPERWOMAN COMPLEX

Is our special brand of militant feminism emasculating the men in our lives?

“Forget breast enlargements, I’m thinking of having a very different part of my anatomy reduced... My balls.

In the past four years, I’ve dealt with the death of three family members, published two books, lived at eight different addresses, travelled to four continents, bought and sold a house, got married (twice) and then divorced (twice), and only now am I learning that it’s okay to come second. That it doesn’t make me weak to be wrong, to make mistakes, to lose an argument, to say sorry.

All through my youth, I fought so hard against my parents’ conservatism and my community’s ideals about what constitutes the perfect Asian wife – cooking, cleaning, chastity and all that crap – I became so scarred by the experience, I couldn’t stop fighting even when I gained my freedom.

In my efforts to maintain emotional and financial independence, I became distant towards the men in my life, cultivating a kind of ‘I’m with you but could easily be without you’ attitude that inevitably made them feel worthless to me. I indulged my adolescent need to constantly prove that I was smart, secure, strong and self-sufficient. I became fiercely competitive and exercised my relentless need to prove that I was always right, always first, always better than the man I was with.

I look around my circle of friends and acquaintances, and I see this same story repeated in varying degrees. The modern Asian woman has spent so much time running so hard and so fast from the picture perfect wife – she who is docile and subservient, unquestioningly loving and unfailingly kind – that she’s hit the other extreme; a superwoman who wants it all, knows it all, goes everywhere and does it all, but in doing so has become cold, distant, unflinching and unforgiving.

There are good things about her, of course. She’ll never rely on her man to support her financially or beg that he make her mind up for her. She’ll never stop him from seeing his friends, be they rambunctious male mates or gorgeous girl friends; she won’t call him every hour on the hour,

or expect him to do the same; she’ll give him space and time and privacy – but she’ll expect the same in return. Make the slightest mention that maybe she shouldn’t lunch with that guy from work who most certainly has a crush on her, or that she should stay away from that university friend she used to get caned with back in the day, and she’ll immediately begin to bristle.

And that’s where it all starts to go wrong. You see, compromise is an intrinsic part of being in a relationship, but when you’ve spent your entire life appeasing others, it’s the last thing you want to do when you finally earn the right to do whatever the hell you want. Most Asian girls *want* to be taken care of. We *want* security, comfort, love and warmth, and we’d love that in the shape of a man, but when we’ve fought patriarchy all our lives, it’s just not easy to allow a man to guide and support us.

This inability to relinquish the reins is one of the major reasons why my past relationships haven’t worked. I would spend every argument undermining my partner until he began to concede without a fight, and that’s usually when I lost interest – after all, who wants a doormat even when you’ve pummeled it into shape with your very own hands?

After taking the time to be single, I’ve started to see the pattern in my behavior. I’ve realised that this ‘superwoman complex’ that is so prevalent among my peers was the reason why I so quickly became unhappy in my relationships. I saw how unfair it was to use my man as a punchbag in order to prove my strength. A partner shouldn’t be a pedestal which we perch upon to prove our supremacy. Yes, we had to fight long and hard for our independence and, yes, prejudice and inequality still exist, but when we find a man who regards us as equal, then as truly secure women – shouldn’t we learn to reciprocate that respect?

Today, after the three deaths, two books, eight homes, three continents, two marriages and two divorces, I’ve finally learnt how to laugh at myself. I’ve finally started to accept that I can’t run faster, reach higher or bear more weight than every man I know. And I’ve learnt how to say I’m sorry. It’s a good first step in achieving a ceasefire.

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