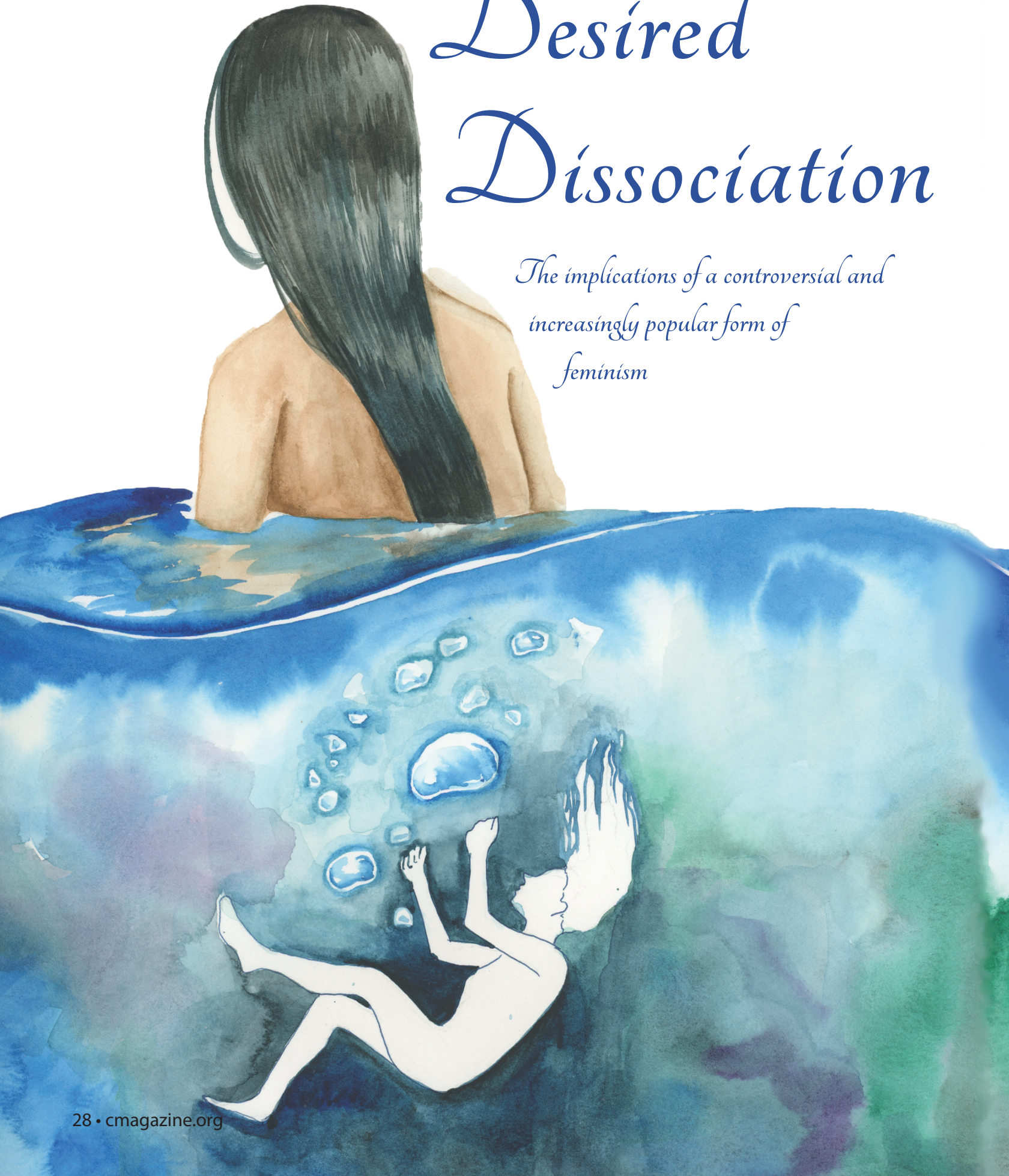


Desired Dissociation

*The implications of a controversial and
increasingly popular form of
feminism*



She is unfulfilled in her relationships, she reels over the accidental death of her best friend and she is constantly seeking male validation. These factors drive Fleabag, the main character in the television series of the same name, to visit her distant father and confess to him her shortcomings as a woman and feminist. In this pivotal moment, Fleabag iconically encapsulates the dissociated female experience.

“I have a horrible feeling,” Fleabag said. “[That] I am a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can’t even call herself a feminist.”

Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s fictional character Fleabag maneuvers her life using self-destructive tendencies as a coping mechanism. Fleabag maintains her boldness despite the fact that she is indignant and grieving, attempting to recover from her trauma while rejecting everyone who tries to aid her healing process.

Like Fleabag, people socialized as girls implicitly learn that society judges them foremost on their desirability and likeability. Both of these qualities are based on women’s fulfillment of beauty standards and lifestyles that are designed to degrade

women and empower men.

Women’s internalization of this concept is a manifestation of the male gaze, a phenomenon in which women are pervasively perceived as objects of desire for the heterosexual male observer. In her novel “The Robber’s Bride,” Margaret Atwood describes the male gaze as “a woman with a man inside watching a woman.”

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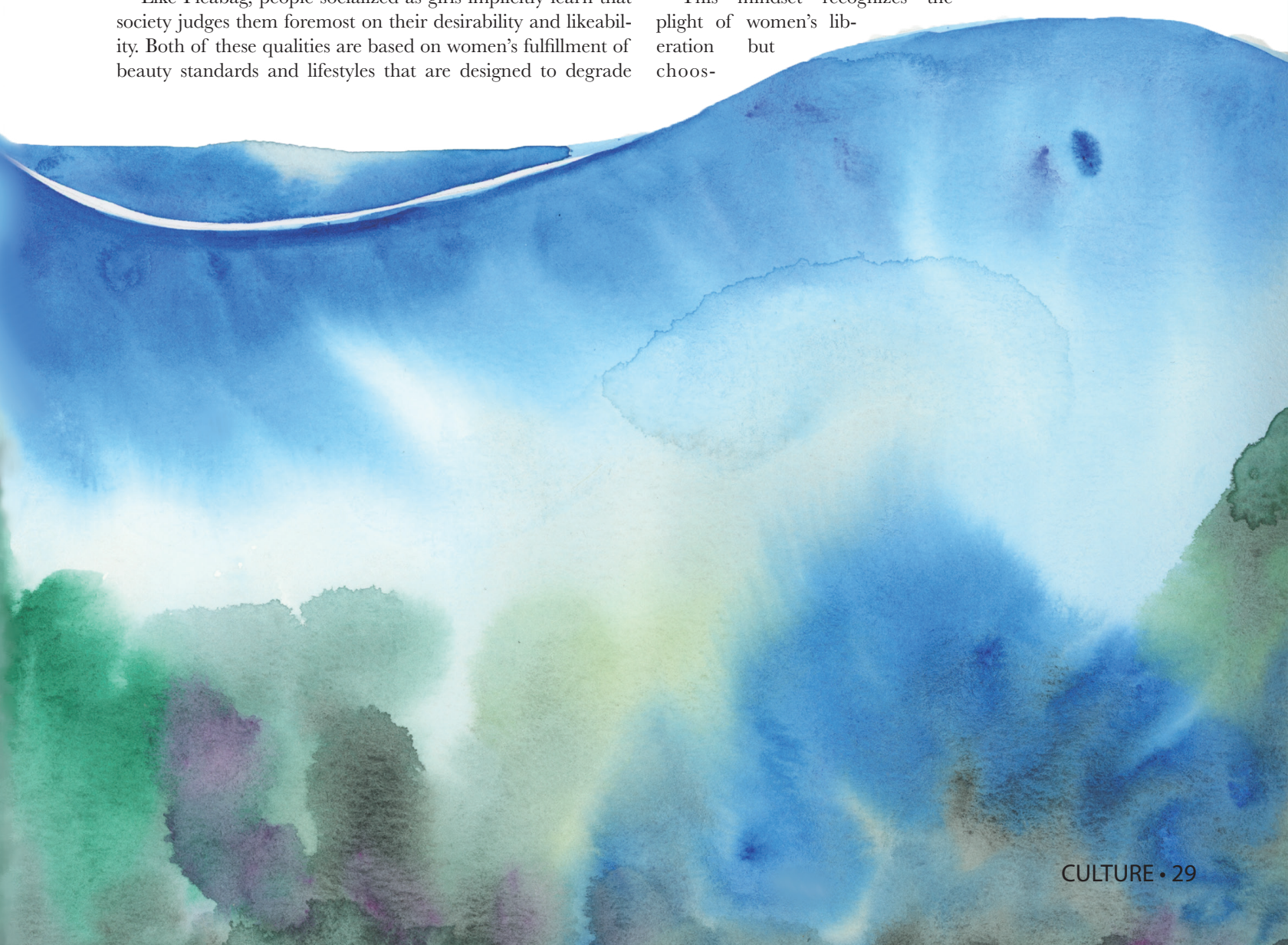
Dana Toussiekh, senior

attempting to change this narrative. Writer Emmeline Clein coined this phenomenon “dissociation feminism” in her article “The Smartest Women I Know are All Dissociating.”

This mindset recognizes the plight of women’s liberation but chooses-

Many women can, figuratively speaking, step outside of their body and view themselves from the third-person perspective of a prospective viewer, aligning themselves with the male gaze’s desires.

As some women come to this awareness, many adopt a passive approach to their daily encounters with misogyny and sexism rather than



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*Fleabag (Phoebe Waller-Bridge)
in "Fleabag"*



es to abide by a lifestyle that makes a woman's existence in society more manageable or, in other words, more numb.

Senior Samantha Yamashita sees dissociated feminists as a collection of women who understand the systemic barriers of misogyny and sexism but feel that attempting to break down those barriers is futile.

"Some people have taken a more cynical angle on [dissociation feminism] and take that to mean we can't make any more progress, we've reached the limit and that we shouldn't pretend or put up this facade of true equality," Yamashita said.

While Yamashita agrees that a dissociated feminist can be destructive, she empathizes with the place of helplessness from which their mindset is derived.

"I started to identify more with the roots or the common sentiment of [dissociation feminism], but I've also understood the viewpoint that being cynical and giving up could be disruptive and unproductive in the long run," Yamashita said.

Yamashita finds a connection, not necessarily a contradiction, between dissociation feminism and Girlboss feminism, a term popularized by entrepreneur Sophia Amoruso that encourages women to climb the ladder of capitalism and patriarchy for individual success.

"When you first think about feminism, a lot of the more positive 'We can do this,' 'Girl Power' [and] 'Girlboss' attitude first comes to mind," Yamashita said. "Dissociation feminism is not a counter argument [to that] but pushes back on it because it acknowledges more of the structural barriers that exist for women in today's day and age."

A core belief of Girlboss feminism is that gender equality can be achieved if women attain high-power positions within already-existing, inequitable social structures. The term "Girlboss" is widely used amongst people to commemorate a woman who has claimed power or success, throwing other women under the bus to claw her way onto Forbes' 30 under 30 list, Cady Heron style.

"It's almost as if that's the only content you're feeding the mainstream," Yamashita said. "That could make people complacent or make people think that we've finished the job, but that's not really the case."

Another form of feminism that is often connoted with dissociation feminism is white feminism, an approach to achieve gender equality that emphasizes obtainment of power without analysis of its redistribution. This concept is defined by Koa Beck in Marie Solis' article "Koa Beck on dismantling the persistence of white feminism" and lacks the intersectional approach necessary for women's liberation.

"My first thought was that white feminists would be able to [dissociate] without suffering as much harm," Yamashita said. "But my second thought was that I also associate white feminism very much with the Girlboss movement. Non-white feminists would be more aware of the reality of the situation, so that would make them more so dissociated feminists."

Senior Dana Toussieh believes a distinction exists between awareness of the patriarchy's effects and the consequent actions taken from women who have different levels of privilege. In many situations, women may adopt a compliant approach that is necessary for the preservation of their credibility, energy and safety. However, when women take a stance of passivity and indulge in self-destructive tendencies in situations where they have access to a support system, social capital and a higher level of privilege, they reinforce the oppressive systems that subjugate marginalized people and other women.

"One form of complacency is forced, and the other one is complacency by choice," Toussieh said. "For one side, you are literally unsafe in a situation if you stand up for yourself or speak out. For the other side, you no longer face the frustration and the responsibility to try to make a change for yourself or for other women because you've adopted this idea of inevitability and nihilism."

Women who fit into the adapting prototype of a socially acceptable woman can rid themselves of their responsibility to challenge or reevaluate the power dynamics from which they benefit and from which less privileged women do not benefit.

"They're at a disadvantage in the sense that they are subject to feminist issues as a woman, but they're at an advantage within the female population," Toussieh said. "So they're doing themselves and other women a disservice in a way that tangibly impacts [other women's] lives."

Many women can entirely and willingly conform to the structures that subjugate marginalized people and other women because their stance of passivity will not fundamentally alter their life circumstances or social standing. Instead, they can simultaneously numb themselves to and smirk at the ubiquitous existence of the patriarchy and other oppressive systems.

"[A woman's] mindset and the way that they act accordingly are impacted by their dissociation feminism," Toussieh said. "It's going to shift their attitude and consequently their actions, but the grounds that they stand on are not going to be moved by their complacency or acceptance."

This reaction to institutionalized oppression, in which women detach their consciousness from their responsibility of action, is an essential part of the white woman experience.

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Dissociation feminism and its adjacent behaviors are most displayed on social media apps such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. Toussieh has noticed that social media allows dissociated feminists to find community and common understanding that does not always create a positive effect.

"There's this entire web platform of people who bond over how they cope with these issues in self-destructive ways," Toussieh said.

When social media creates an echo chamber of women feeling hopeless and detached from the mainstream feminist movement, many women latch onto this sentiment.

"Some people on the internet are particularly susceptible to the influence of other people," Toussieh said. "[They] might start to think that those circumstances are not just desirable but almost necessary to their womanhood, that the essence of being a woman is to sit through these circumstances and face them with a bottle of wine."

Dissociation feminism is portrayed and referenced in the television series "Fleabag." Many dissociated feminists have

referred to their state of hopelessness and cynicism as their "Fleabag era," relating to Fleabag's self-destructive behavior.

"Dissociation feminism shows women's more negative view on things and expression that things aren't perfect," Yamashita said. "So I see the connection to Fleabag because dissociation feminism does the same thing but with the feminist movement in general."

However, Yamashita generally disagrees with the sentiment that the series "Fleabag" glorifies dissociation feminism, and as an avid fan of the show, she finds that it presents an alternatively powerful feminist message.

"I think what makes 'Fleabag' so empowering and feminist in and of itself is that it shows all these traditionally non-feminine qualities that aren't typically portrayed," Yamashita said.

The show's portrayal of the titular character as a well-rounded person who experiences a complex range of emotions can be empowering to those watching, but when combined with the influence of social media platforms like TikTok, the messages present in the show can be skewed and misconstrued to romanticize learned helplessness.

"I think that it is really validating to see those complex female emotions that you don't normally see on TV in ['Fleabag'] and in such a real light," Yamashita said. "I wouldn't say it's necessarily damaging to the viewer, but I feel like there definitely should be a limit to how cynical or how negative we get."

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