

JANUARY 19, 2017

# Body SOVEREIGNTY

<http://rachelwcole.com/2017/01/19/body-sovereignty/>



*"What do you want to do for lunch?"* I heard a woman say to her friend.

*"Oh I'm skipping lunch today. I was a pig yesterday. Trying to make up for it,"* the friend responded.

---

This conversation snippet could be heard anywhere. At the gym, a coffee shop, a bus stop, or perhaps even in your own home. But I heard it from two women I was standing next to at the last major women's march.

In 2004 I, along with several of my college girlfriends, drove from Ohio to DC to attend the [March for Women's Lives](#). I can tell you that standing on The National Mall with nearly a million other humans making our voices heard on behalf of women's rights was deeply moving. I can tell you that hearing this conversation then and there was deflating and yet, not all that surprising.

For all of the progress women have made too many are still ensnared in an oppressive paradigm wherein women's bodies are viewed as untrustworthy, objects, dirty, "before" pictures, commodities, and available for the input of and control from others.

I call this part of patriarchy: *body submission*.

You likely know that I care a lot about women breaking free from dieting. I spend a lot of time [teaching](#) women to return to intuitive eating. I'm committed to body positivity and the liberation that all women deserve to feel from oppressive beauty standards.

But you know what's beneath all that?

Body sovereignty.

Body sovereignty is the opposite of body submission.

I am utterly devoted to contributing to the emergence of a world where women that have body sovereignty grab hold of it — and where those who don't yet have body sovereignty gain access to it.

Those of us who have it don't give it up in broad daylight through obvious acts of self-abandonment.

No—small holes are poked in the bottom of our power bucket and it drips out slowly.

No—body submission is dressed up, marketed, and sold as body sovereignty. It's a convincing fake-out.

No—some of our most beloved feminist icons, for all their wisdom, still peddle in body submission making body sovereignty something we often have to find without mainstream role models.

Body submission, the giving up of our physical sovereignty, is a sneaky thing.

Here are a few ways it manifests:

You're getting a massage and want the bodyworker to change the amount of pressure they're using but you stay silent so as not to be a "bother".

You're out to lunch and everyone you're with decides not to order dessert. You want dessert but forego so as not to draw attention to the fact you're eating more than others.

You go to the doctor and they ask you step on the scale. You don't want to. You know that every time you step on the scale it's triggering for you. You step on anyways so as not to be a "difficult" patient.

Your significant other wants sex. You really don't. You have it anyways to be a "good" partner.

You want to become a yoga teacher, or run a marathon, or climb a mountain but someone told you that people that look like you or weigh what you way can't do those things — so you don't pursue them.

You need to be seated at the front of the lecture hall so you can hear but you don't ask for this because that would be “special” treatment and you don't want to ruffle feathers.

You go on a diet, the most ubiquitous and violent act of compliance there is, because you've been brainwashed to believe that you can't trust yourself or your body. You've bought into one body submission's main messages: you're out of control.

Through small everyday acts of submission many women give up the power they have as the leader, decision-maker, advocate, and ally for their body.

What I want you to know is that your body is yours despite all the forces conspiring from the day you were born to teach, tell, and treat you otherwise.

Your body is yours.

Your body is good

Your body is sovereign.

What you wear, what you eat, when you sleep, and how and who you have sex with. This is all up to you.

The choices you make for your healthcare, whether to carry a pregnancy to term or not, whether to eat that cake or not, whether to stop eating, fucking, working out, or whatever right in the middle— it's up to you.

Body sovereignty is the clear inhabitation of your choices and domain of flesh.

It is the the protection and respect of your boundaries and your body.

It is individuation. It's where you begin and everyone else ends. You are an adult. Grown, and thus free.

Body sovereignty is the advocacy of your needs, desires, and hungers. Especially in the face of disappointing others, ruffling feathers, and when your needs run contrary those around you.

Body sovereignty is the permission to choose, to err, to protect, to feel, to experience, to play, to refuse, to take up space, to be different, to be the same, to make noise, and to perform for no one.

It is to be beholden to no one but yourself.

Body sovereignty as I experience and know it is an allyship between oneself and one's body in pursuit of self-supportive actions. What is self-supportive for one body may not be self-supportive for another body and only the inhabitant of the sovereign flesh can know what is right, and good, and true.

No one else can make you take advantage of your sovereignty and a lot of industries and social structures stand to profit and persist if you don't.

My friend and colleague [Desiree Adaway](#) has a new daily practice in light of our current political landscape whereby she asks herself "Was I courageous, or complicit?"

This inspired me to ask: "Did I exercise my body sovereignty today, or did I submit?"

Those of us with the privilege to have our body sovereignty (or most of it) recognized by our culture, government, and society must advocate fiercely for this recognition to be given to all bodies.

"All bodies" means disabled bodies, bodies of people of color, aging bodies, bodies of the poor, bodies that love bodies of the same sex, transsexual bodies, trafficked bodies, sex worker bodies, and immigrant bodies.

Every time any of us reclaim our sovereignty we free not only ourselves but also the energy and attention needed to free others.

We must own, appreciate, protect and exercise our body sovereignty so that we can then use our bodies to bring this same sovereignty to everyone.

I ask you: What does this year look like for you if you were really inhabiting your sovereign body? What does body sovereignty look or feel like for you? Where are you not owning your sovereignty? How can you better respect and advocate for other people's body sovereignty?

I'll be asking myself these questions Saturday at the [Women's March on Washington](#) and for many days to come.

---

The other night after I'd turned off the lights and gone to sleep I woke up and quickly grabbed my phone (the modern pen and paper) to capture the following statement: *Reclaiming sovereignty begins with rewriting the body's story.*

In light of these words I was inspired to create a workbook to help you explore and just maybe shift your body story. This will be a fundraiser for organizations that promote body sovereignty. Be sure you're on the [newsletter](#) list to hear more.