

wanted to date me, I gave it a go, regardless of my own ambivalence. But this relationship is one where our first and second dates had years between them. I had backed away and let my feelings simmer for much longer than anyone else might call reasonable, so long that when I asked for a second date, my now-boyfriend was caught entirely off-guard. My therapist asked if I realized that this was my first partnership undertaken on my own terms.

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In the first episode of *Ally McBeal*, Ally is groped by one of the senior partners at the firm where she works, and instead of brushing it off, she quits, files a harassment lawsuit, and finds a job at a new firm where she will unfortunately have to work with the man who completely upended her life plan when he left her for another woman. The show is very much about a woman learning to move through the world on her own terms. Over time, Ally becomes the kind of person who loudly demands what she needs from the world, even when it causes her great discomfort to do so. In fact, most of the characters on the show experience story arcs centered on whether to abandon the self in the interest of conformist comforts, or to forge on as singular and somewhat misunderstood in service of a more authentic contentment.

One of the most controversial details of the show when it first aired was their mid-nineties gender neutral bathroom and the shenanigans that took place therein, but re-watching the show as an adult, the bathroom seemed to me like a place where people were more equal than anywhere else in the worlds they moved through. The show took great joy in reducing people to their urges and asking questions about what makes us ashamed and whether those things are truly shameful. Maybe this is why it was such a comfort to me when presenting my first book to an audience: there is something shameful, or at least guilt-inducing, about building a private world and then asking total strangers to spend time in it, especially when the world that's been built exposes you as flawed and uncertain. The book was about grieving my dad, but it was also about the rage I felt at being deprived of a real relationship with him until the very end of his life. He was someone to mourn, but also someone who harmed me repeatedly while he was still alive. My grief was messy and I felt ashamed of that, but was