

MUSE
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MOTORIST MAGAZINE

MUSE

BUMPER AUTUMN ISSUE

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FREE!



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

We are really keen to receive writing, images, art, etc, from women to be included in future issues. Muse reserves the right to select content based on the Muse Values and Profile, and on available space. For information on contributing, email muse@riseup.net and we will send a copy of the Muse Profile and Contributors Information.

Deadline for Issue 7 is 1 June 2009.

<<<< Issue Five

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We are a group of young women, living in Wellington, who have come together to provide a space for women's voices.

Muse is produced by the Muse editorial collective - Karen Price, Jenn Jones, Karin Brown, Teresa Buckthought, Natalie Gousmett and Melody Nixon.

Design and illustration by Jenn Jones.

Kicking woman image on Grrrs by Heather Jurewicz, from "Reproduce & Revolt", Soft skull press, Brooklyn.

Front and back cover photography and image for "I love by Body" by Melody Nixon.

Muse wishes to thank all those who have contributed to this issue.

Editorial

Kia Ora and Welcome to issue 6 of Muse!

Welcome to those who are picking up this zine for the first time and welcome back to those who have seen the zine before and have been awaiting this issue.

We would like to recognise all of those people out there who have been awaiting the publication of this issue for some time - in particular the authors whose work lies within its pages. Thank you for your patience.

We would also like to acknowledge that the period of time which has passed between issue five and issue six is greater than the collective would have liked. As Muse continues to be produced entirely on a voluntary basis, and the only funding we received is via donations, it is often a difficult and prolonged task preparing each issue for publication. We are therefore very grateful for the support and assistance of all our volunteers and supporters.

We have had some pretty significant changes within the collective since our last issue. Firstly, Keiller MacDuff has left our shores and is now living and working in Australia. We would like to say a big "thank you!" to Keiller for all her help and input. We have also had collective members who have returned to fulltime work, others who have changed their jobs and we've also had the arrival of a new baby in the Muse family, making it a very busy time for all which has lead to some delay in the publishing of this issue.

However, we would also like to say a big hello and welcome to Melody Nixon who has joined the Muse collective. We are very excited to have Melody in the collective and are looking forward to her fresh ideas for Muse. Natalie Gousmett,

recently returned from travelling the globe, has also rejoined the collective.

Those of you who have read our issue 5 will remember that it was an issue based around the theme of motherhood. However this issue is quite different. We have decided to make this issue a bumper issue - we have continued to receive contributions since the last issue and wanted to include as many as possible to make the wait worthwhile for you! We have also added a couple of new items to this issue which we have not had before - there is now a book review column called "Book Club Recommendations", and a column (as yet untitled) about women who we think are awesome and whose lives we want to celebrate. We also want to kick off a new column called "things that make you go Purrrrr" in the same - but opposite - vein as "things that make you go Grrrr". More details can be found on the letters page.

Contributions to Muse are always welcome - whether the contribution is a piece of writing, financial help or distribution. We have noted as time moves forward and Muse develops we are receiving more contributions and help in general from outside Wellington and we are delighted that we now have Muse distributed in not only Wellington but also Auckland, Hamilton, Christchurch, Dunedin and New Plymouth. Issue 7 will be focussed on women's wellbeing, so if you feel inspired on that topic, or anything else, drop us a line.

We hope that you all enjoy this issue of Muse. As always, it is a long road from beginning to end and whilst it may be a bit of a struggle, the final result is always worth it. We hope you enjoy this issue.

Aroha Muse xoxox

Muse is currently produced and distributed primarily in Wellington. We have received many requests for further copies, but due to our small budget we are not always able to provide them. To secure a copy of Issue 7, send in \$5 and we will add you to our mailing list.

Disclaimer

Muse is a forum for feminist voices and discussion. Our purpose is to provide space for expression and encourage a diversity of perspectives. These are not necessarily the perspectives or opinions of the Muse Collective. We do not represent all women or all feminists.

LETTERS

We would love to hear from you! Share your thoughts on issue six. Letters can be sent to muse@riseup.net or Muse Magazine, P.O Box 11731, Manners St, Wellington.

Please note: all letters here have been replied to directly but to clarify for readers - Muse accepts letters from men and women which we may print depending on space. However, as this is a feminist zine aiming to provide a space for young women's voices, we only publish content from women.

Kia ora,

Just received the latest Muse from a friend love it as all of your zines. Thanks for everything! Just wanted to check that you received a donation and email from me. I want to donate more since seeing your 'cry for help' but unsure that I have the right account so if you received it just give me a quick email. Thanx, oh and putting muse online would be awesome cause then anyone can download and copy, copy, copy at our own expense. Ka pai.

Thanks Again,

Cara Addison

Dear Jenn Jones,

As the female member of the Dissentors I read your column 'so women musicians are only half human' [issue 5 winter 6/07] with great interest. This was the first

I had heard of the radio interview had where I was described as a 'half member' of the band and unable to play guitar due to being female. I would like to thank you for writing about this; I was furious and I didn't even hear the interview! Thank you for caring and doing something about it. I would like you to know that I've written to Radio Active to let them know of my disappointment. And I'd also like to say that I love playing bass AND guitar; I feel a whole member of the band (!) and I know that my band-mates feel the same!

Thanks again,

Yours sincerely, Ann-Marie

Response to Em (letters page, issue 4)

I'm glad someone questioned me about this. You are absolutely correct. Armies have always been vicious and pride themselves on it. If I had my way they would all be entirely re-structured to do nothing but civil emergency work and medics and cooks would be more important than the Infantry. Unfortunately, I don't have my way because there's only one of me, and I get ridiculed and sometimes harassed for having such crazy views.

I'm in the Army because I will not be roped into an acceptable feminine role, and think that women should be represented in all institutions of power including the Military.

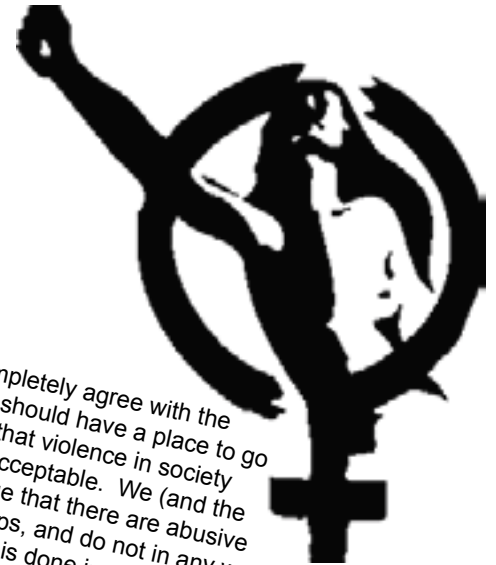
Joanna Salter

(Abridged)

Dear Editor(s),

I feel I must comment on something I read in the Summer '07 issue of Muse. The article "Things that make you go GRRR!!" had many complaints with which I could empathise completely. However, I was dismayed to read that it had made your writer go 'grrr' to hear the following comment, from a man, while collecting. "Keep up the good work, women's refuge does such great work. But where is the men's refuge?" I am at a loss as to why this comment would make your writer annoyed. The fact is, there ARE relationships in which men are physically and emotionally abused. There are very few places where these men can go to find safety and to get away from an abusive partner, not to mention how difficult it might be to seek out this help in a macho society. Women can be abusive and violent to their male partners, just as men can in same-sex relationships. I can only assume that this writer doesn't believe there is questionable for several reasons, but as you are a Feminist magazine I thought I'd point out that this attitude only promotes stereotypes of women - that we are all victims, that we only receive abuse but never give it, that we aren't actually strong enough or aggressive enough to be oppressors of other human beings. Regardless of whether they are male or female, every person in our society should have a place to go when they don't feel safe. That's why I think the comment in question was undeniably valid.

Thank you, Renata Johnston



Muse responds:

Thanks for your letter Renata. We completely agree with the sentiment that every person in society should have a place to go when they don't feel safe. We believe that violence in society towards anyone, male or female, is unacceptable. We (and the author of the "grrr") also do acknowledge that there are abusive female to male and same sex relationships, and do not in any way intend to devalue the important work that is done in assisting men who seek help for abusive relationships. The author's intention in writing this "grrr" was to highlight the problem that many people see the work of women's refuges as a form of reverse sexism, or special treatment of women over men and in doing so overlook the fact that the majority of violence is male against female. Unfortunately the wording of the "grrr" did not convey the meaning we intended and we apologise for any misunderstanding this has caused.

LETTERS

LETTERS

CONTINUED...

Hiya,

Cara here.

I recently had a conversation with a girlfriend of mine (recently discovered muse and is loving it!) and we discussed some things that might be good for the upcoming muse magazine. She works for Whitcoulls so has access to books to do book reviews, we thought maybe a book reviews regular feature and/or book list of suggested great womyn books. Recently I have read Fat is a Feminist Issue, The Pornography of Meat, Vagina Monologues, and a Wives Tales zine. I would suggest these books. Even a page where people can write in their top say 5 books at the mo, or what they are reading at the mo and a quick blurb on it. I am always interested in new books and movies that are inspiring and relevant to grrr.

I really enjoy things that make you go grrrr. What about a things that make you go purrr? Is this yuck? Likening labelled to cats? We already get womyn chicks! Anyway, it could be a positive page where you see things or do things that are positive in our lives or that we see that make us happy and pro-womyn. When I am reading or listening to music something pops out at me like a quote, and it can be inspiring or empowering or just plain interesting. Things that make you go purr could be an inspirational page.

Recently a friend of mine told me how her friend had been into a kebab store in Hamilton to buy a kebab. (No, duh?) The man behind the counter asked her for her phone number which she declined. He continued to harass her for it. For goodness sake she was trying to support their business! She told him she had a boyfriend. As if she should have to have a boyfriend to ward off unwanted attention and harassment. This was still no deterrent and the girl left feeling very upset at this behaviour.

My friend was then walking past the said kebab store a few days later and decided she could not just walk past without letting them know that this harassment was

unacceptable. She entered the store and asked who was working on that evening. The man (apparently) "wasn't working today." My friend then asked if they could pass on the message that unnecessary harassment of her friend was not ok and unacceptable. They said "ok, now leave." Couldn't have the other customers hearing this little indiscretion of sexual harassment now could we?

The fact that my friend took this step to have her say and thought "no I'm not just going to walk past" is inspiring to me. I don't know if I would have done the same thing. If I was there at the time sure, yet she asserted herself to go back in and let it be known this was NOT OK. PUUURRRR.

This type of asserting is inspirational as it allows womyn to take a stand and not just accept the type of crappy harassment we get as "normal" or "acceptable" based on men's needs/wants towards getting our phone numbers, names, friends names etc.

Another piece I thought could be good could be a "what feminism means to me" page. This could generate some interesting thoughts on the subject. When my friend and I discussed it I know "to me" it used to seem "historical" and she is still at this stage when we last talked. Thanks to muse I now see the relevance of feminism in my life today.

Cara

If you like the idea of "things that make you go purrr" email us through your contributions for the next issue. Also check out the book reviews on page 23.

CONTINUED...

Kia Ora Karin

I hope this finds you well, just to let you know I have passed on the magazines that you sent and there is now a group of women in Hamilton joining up to create a women's creation/craft group and we are looking forward to making submissions in the future.

Kia tau te rangimarie ki a koutou katoa e nga tuahine.

Nga Mihi Nui,
Daniella

New Zealand has seen a huge growth in women's involvement in the labour force over the last 30 years, according to Statistics New Zealand's Focusing on Women report 2008. The report shows the country's female workforce has increased by 30 percent in the last 30 years, to just over 70 per cent of all women aged 20-64 working in employed labour.

Statistics New Zealand says female employment has reached its highest level to date, hitting 1.015 million in September 2008. In the three months prior to September, 8000 women gained employment, while the number of men employed fell by 5000.

Statistics New Zealand has also revealed that a major factor in the shrinking of New Zealand's unemployment rate over the past decade has been the increase in part-time work, especially by women (two and a half times more women are employed part-time than men).

October 2007 saw the gender pay gap at its narrowest for eleven years - from 83.0 percent in the June 1997 quarter to 87.9 percent in the June 2007 quarter. The average weekly income rose for all people. Average weekly income from all sources for all people rose 9.4 percent. Statistics NZ said there were more males being represented at the higher wage and salary income levels, and more males in full-time employment. However, a greater gender gap occurred in the amount of income earned from investments such as bank interest, shares and managed funds. Men received \$64 a week on average, while women earned \$36, up 65.5 percent and 32.7 percent respectively.

Changes to the Employment Relations Act have introduced the right to request flexible working hours. Recent research by the Families Commission has showed that more than three quarters of the 1000 people it surveyed were allowed flexible work arrangements by their employers, and 4 out of 10 were able to work from home. Many people in the Families Commission survey only took on jobs to fit in with their responsibilities at home, and many at-home parents said they would take up a job if it gave them the flexibility their family needed.

The Feminist Bulletin
Board...

Email your notices to muse@riseup.net by 1 June 2009.

Muse reserves the right to select notices based on the Muse Values and Profile, and on available space.

Work and Pay

From the Statistics NZ website and Stuff

IN BRIEF

interesting local and global news....

... compiled by Jenn Jones

Sources: Feminist Majority Foundation, Feministing, Women's E-News, Stuff, BBC World News, Scoop, Statistics and NZPA



A new study presented in March at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists annual scientific meeting in Auckland, found memory and attention were compromised in the third trimester of pregnancy. Tests were carried out on 30 women in the first trimester, 30 women in the third trimester and 30 non-pregnant women, Dr Lenore Ellett said. "Compared to non-pregnant controls, women in the third trimester performed worse in measurements of auditory memory," she said. The mean index score for combined memory measurement was 10 points lower in pregnant women compared to the control group. While memory is shown here to be negatively affected, other research has suggested various other brain activities actually increase in pregnant women.



The Auckland District Health Board's six-month free emergency contraceptive pill pilot programme, ended on 31 March 2009 and is tentatively being hailed as a success. The pilot cost \$300,000, in which the Levonelle 1 pill was made available free at Auckland City pharmacies along with a free packet of condoms and a pamphlet on sexual health. A paper presented to the Board said that it was too early to know whether the scheme had an effect on the number of teen pregnancies, but initial statistics showed there had been a 13 percent reduction in the numbers of abortions in the October-December period at the board's Epsom Day Unit. 5334 people had used the scheme, with 19 percent aged under 20 years.



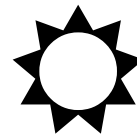
The proportion of women elected to New Zealand's House of Representatives increased slightly following the general election in November 2008, and is a record in women's participation at this level. There are now 41 women members of Parliament, or 34%, up from 32% in 2005. The new National-led government isn't doing quite so well within in its' own ranks though, with only 6 female Cabinet Ministers, or 30%.



A group of Saudi Arabian women have launched a campaign to boycott lingerie stores until they employ women. With the country's strict rules relating to segregation of the sexes, only men are employed as sales staff to keep women from having to deal with male customers or work around men. The boycott was launched by about 50 women who gathered in the Red Sea port of Jiddah at the Al-Bidaya Breast-feeding Resource and Women's Awareness Centre. The aim is to push for implementation of a law that has been on the books since 2006 which says only female staff can be employed in women's apparel stores. The law has never been put into effect, partly due to hard-liners in the religious establishment who oppose employing women in mixed environments like malls. The campaign calls on women to shop at the country's few women-only lingerie stores. A Facebook petition in support has almost 1,700 signatures already.



The debate around section 59 of the Crimes Act looks like it will heat up again over the next four months, under the dual pressures of the August referendum and the announcement of a proposed Private Member's Bill from ACT MP John Boscawen. The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that National won't reverse the s59 amendment unless there is evidence of the police prosecuting parents for trivial or inconsequential assaults. The three police reviews so far show no sign of this happening, despite the cases used as part of Family First's hugely expensive newspaper advertising campaign. Barnardos New Zealand, Save the Children, Plunket, Jigsaw, National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges Inc, Te Kahui Mana Ririki, and EPOCH New Zealand all say the new law is fair, sensible, and working well.



Anti-violence advocates in the US are taking a stand against a video game in which players stalk and rape a mother and her two daughters. Amazon and eBay have already banned the sale of the game, called Rapelay, but the game is still available on other Web sites. The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault has called on all video game distributors in the US to refrain from selling Rapelay. Rapelay is made by a company called Illusion, based in Yokohama, Japan. The company's Web site says its products are not available for sale outside of Japan.



Russian police have arrested and charged a man in Saint Petersburg with hiring hit men to kill his daughter for wearing a mini-skirt. The 21-year-old medical student was murdered in early March by two men who confessed to the murder and who say they were paid 100,000 rubles (approx NZ\$5,000) to abduct and shoot the woman. The men said that the father wanted to punish his daughter for "flouting national traditions and wearing a mini-skirt".

Three Days, Two Apsara, One Gold Ring

by Michalla Arathimos

I

They are gentle with each other.

The first bad thing has happened and they treat each other like cut glass; they treat each other like there's something cupped in the air between them that might break. In the tuk tuk he looks over at her straw hair that's frizzled and vague with the heat and touches it. On the dirt lane by the backpacker's hotel she puts out an arm and snakes it behind his back, pulling him away from a dark and sudden gutter. They hire bikes on the first day and give themselves sunstroke, and for the rest of their stay the fuzziness hangs between them like the dust kicked up by their wheels. They hold hands through it as if willing each other to be solid objects. Everywhere they go people tell them they're beautiful.

They find the temple in the jungle, eaten through by trees and grown over with vines. They wander in its cool collapsed halls for hours. They see few others. He wanders off to take photos of fallen buildings and hewn stone. She loses him.

'Jim!' she calls. There are echoes. 'Jim!' She remembers what the guidebook said about the landmines, about not going off the path. The hot still air folds around her. There is the faint vegetable sound of the jungle breathing, of life too small to see. A dense quiet. 'Jim!'

She starts to run.

She finds him in a clearing bent over a rough stone. He's tracing letters on its worn surface. She grabs his shoulder, seeing the sweat darkening his shirt, his hair poking out under his green cap. His eyes are a mad blue in his tanned face.

'Robyn, look!' he says. 'An Apsara, a dancing goddess.' She breathes out fast, too winded to speak. 'This must be The Hall of the Dancing Apsara,' he says, looking down, away from her, at the guidebook. The camera is at his side. He looks up. 'What's wrong?'

There's an embrace that starts with her sinking to her knees, in that stone place. Him touching her hair, dropping the guidebook in the white heat of the courtyard, them leaning together in the baking sun despite their need for a shower and a drink of water and his damp shirt and her ruined hair and just leaning in, the smell of them in this hot place, together. She has her hand on the warm part at the back of his neck and he starts to kiss her face and finds it wet, she's flushed and dusty and her eyes are too bright, but it doesn't matter, not any of it, this moment.

They stay that way till they hear the tour bus arrive.

Afterwards they will find they've taken hundreds of photos of nothing, light falling across a fallen rock, a root snaking through a wall, two feet disembodied on a pillar.

II

The second night they get hungry in the hotel room and go out into the street.

The hot street at night is something else, the street with people on it even though it's eleven o'clock, people teeming on the road that has no streetlights, only lanterns, workers finally finished their days eating at stalls in the semi-darkness, calling to each other, laughing. There's traffic and a wonderful tooting of horns, as if each bike passing is a celebration. But the street has edges they can't see and people who try to touch them as they walk, Jim and Robyn, arms around each other, their money belts under their clothes. She stumbles into a pothole and the liquid oozes around her foot into her sandal, surprisingly warm, the temperature of blood.

It's mainly pointing and gestures at the stall as they've only been here a week. It's smiling mostly that gets them the sandwich, which turns out to be a French-style baguette with sharp spicy leaves inside it, some kind of chilli.

'Cheese you want? Cambodia cheese?' the lady asks. She's big, heavy, sulky with tourists. They look at it. It doesn't seem overtly cheese-like in a way they recognise.

'Not like foreigner cheese,' the lady says, and she brings it out from behind the glass of the stall and waves it under Jim's nose. 'You not like?'

Jim bends and inhales dramatically, then leaps back, miming shock. Robyn can smell the cheese from where she stands, it doesn't smell like cheese at all. It smells like off fish. Jim waves his arms in front of his nose like he's trying to clear the smell and the lady screams with laughter. Three women sitting to one side with their baguettes look over.

'You try?' the lady asks. 'You try, you like?'

she gestures with the cheese at him again. He has his hands to his throat now and everybody's laughing. Robyn looks at Jim, thinking who would have guessed when we were at home, thinking something about how you find out about people, you really find out, when there's no language, as he mimes choking, beaming wildly, on the hot street.

Suddenly hands grip Robyn's. She jumps, they're hot and dry and thin and small. She backs off, trying to pull her hands free, but there's a little boy still grabbing at them. He's tiny, the size of an eight-year-old, but his face looks much older in the half-light, his head too big for his body.

'Madame please, Madame,' he says, holding her hands. Her breath catches in her throat. Next to her Jim turns, sensing her step back onto the perilous road. The motorcycles bleat and roar.

'Madame, I am hungry, Madame,' the boy says. She can't speak, it's like she's choking on dust. 'Madame,' the boy's voice turns to a sob and he's there, unbelievably against her now, gripping the cloth of her t-shirt in his hands and twisting into it, his little body pressing into hers, his arms tight around her waist. A motorcycle toots and swerves as she backs further onto the rough road. She's raising up her hands, not pushing him off, he's so small she could hurt him but there's the cracks around his mouth filled with dust and his dark eyes, looking up, and the smell.

'Get off!' Jim is there and pulling at the boy, taking the little dry heat against her chest away, flinging him back towards the stall where the stall lady's voice is rising in a shriek, screaming at the boy for scaring her customers. 'Come on,' says Jim to Robyn roughly, she thinks, and then a few steps down the road she looks into his face and sees he had been afraid.

'Check your money belt,' he says, in a low voice. She does, but nothing's gone.

'Funny how they say Madame,' Jim says on the way up the stairs at the hostel. They are holding hands. 'Must be a left-over from the French, Madame. Are you Ok?' he says then, turning to look at her in the hall.

'He was good, wasn't he?' Robyn says, toughly she thinks. 'He totally had me going.' She thinks of his heat against her chest and the

smell and the rag he was wearing, an old ripped shirt, many sizes too big. She starts to say something, stops.

‘What?’ asks Jim.

‘I didn’t know what to do,’ Robyn says. ‘You’re not meant to give them money, we decided that, didn’t we, Jim? Not to give them money?’ Her voice rises up the giant staircase, in the musky hall.

They eat their sandwich on the bed under the air conditioner they’d splashed out on for the night. It’s sharp-tasting, it’s different, it’s delicious.

‘The thing is,’ Robyn says thoughtfully, as they finish their meal. ‘The thing is, I don’t think he was acting at all.’



The last day they go to the Royal baths. The sun blares down. A stone fountain stands crumbling in the centre of a stagnant pool, green and furzed with heat. Slaves had carved the stone into fantastic shapes. Jim takes photos of Robyn. Robyn is in the business of looking. She pays particular attention to the elephant’s trunks, the dragon with three eyes, the lion spouting water from his open mouth.

Robyn has a headache all afternoon. When they get back she wants to stay in, sleep off the heat-exhaustion. The traffic squawks in through the window like the sound of gulls fighting. Jim wants to go for dinner. It’s the kind of day where she looks at him as if he is the enemy, as if he is what he had done.

‘Just go without me,’ she says. ‘For God’s sake, I can’t be fucked going out, don’t you get it? I don’t want to go with you.’

He kneels on the bed, takes her hands, kisses her.

‘Please come out,’ he says, eyes wide. ‘Robyn. Please come with me.’

They go to a fancy place down an alley near the centre of town. It has actual menus, in English and Khmer. It has western and Cambodian food. It has waiters. They never could have afforded it at home. They sit in their loose green travel pants and sandals. Robyn wears a red singlet. Her skin blushes under the fairy lights strung along the lane. She has a piece of puaa around her neck and she’s brushed out her blonde hair, it’s curling around her face. She’s beginning to feel better. Jim has her favourite green t-shirt on, the one that says Wildlands Trust. There are wooden beads at his wrist, pounamu at his throat. The waiter comes and goes. They feel waited on. People pass, selling photocopied guidebooks, Angkor trinkets, t-shirts. They ignore them politely.

The first course comes and it’s Fish Amok, lush with a papaya salad on the side. They pick appreciatively. They’re not the sort of people to feed each other, but if they were, they’d be doing it now.

‘I’m glad you’re here with me,’ Jim says. They look out at the fairy lights in the lane, the dirt footpath. ‘I’m glad you’re here, Robyn.’

She picks up her fork with a little clink. They have forks at this restaurant, she’s using hers for the novelty factor. The little clink is new; it makes her look, see again the bright new gold on her finger. It’s a contract, a new contract they have made with each other. But it’s also like a deal, like he’s paying her not to think of it. The bad thing.

‘More wine?’ Jim is on his best behaviour. He pours her wine and she sips too fast, choking on the tamin at the back of her throat. As she covers her mouth she sees the ring again, cutting a band across the fleshy part of her finger. She can’t stop coughing.

‘Robyn! I’ll get some water. Goddamn waiters.’ Jim gets up.

As soon as he’s gone the coughing stops.

Inside the ring is her finger. Inside the ring is a question she hadn’t thought to ask. If he hadn’t offered, then, would she still—

‘Here, darling, here.’ Jim has come with water and she looks at him quietly, not coughing. It’s

funny, she feels the joke of it rise up in her face.

They laugh. Jim sits down.

‘God, who would have thought we’d be here?’ Robyn asks. Suddenly it’s all so easy, her body in the chair, her throat relaxed after the choking, the warm air. ‘I mean, who would have thought we’d come this far?’ An old man rides past on a bike, bells jingling, a baguette in a paper bag on his back.

‘I know.’ Jim’s face opens out at her and she feels spoiled, to have him look at her like this, like she’s the only thing in the world.

They are holding hands under the table when the man comes.

‘Sir, Madame, please to give me something,’ the man says. ‘Please to give me something for this pretty-pretty, this dancing Apsara.’

In the moment before they look at him they look into each other’s eyes. They are so close in this moment that it almost hurts. They both know they shouldn’t look, that they don’t intend to buy anything or give alms and that to look at him would be false encouragement. But he’s standing there, waiting. Robyn will remember later Jim’s hand in hers under the table, his blue eyes bright in his face. How they knew exactly what the other was thinking. How they tried not to look.

They look at the man in the same second.

He has no hands.

He is waving his stumps at them, roughly rounded stumps, healed over like nothing, like nothing in the world but arms with no hands. Over one stump hangs an Apsara, dancing on a chain.

He doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t repeat the offer. He stands, truncated arms held up, smiling broadly, as if he’d made a joke.

‘I, we, we’re sorry,’ Jim says over his rich fish sauce, the remains of their salad. ‘We’re sorry, we —’

‘No thank you,’ says Robyn firmly. ‘No thank you.’

She looks at the fish. It seems suddenly congealed, revolting.

The man is still there, grinning, waving. As they try to look elsewhere he laughs out loud, advances towards their table.

Robyn looks at Jim. He’s getting the look that he gets.

The man is laughing louder, stepping forward. Robyn flinches. In two steps he will be touching her face.

‘Hey, just wait a minute—’ Jim is on his feet in front of the man, his hand clenched in a fist.

Robyn will say afterwards that she didn’t know what she was doing. She had no money in her pockets, Jim had the money belt, she didn’t have any change of her own. Her only thought was to make the man go away, to get him safely away from Jim.

Robyn stands and snatches the Apsara from the man’s arm. His stump brushes her skin. It’s soft, horribly boneless. She thinks of sudden force, a jolt, a landmine going off in the jungle. Heat and blood.

But where to put the payment? Jim’s hand is still raised but he doesn’t move as Robyn steps firmly forward, as she places the ring delicately, gently even, into the man’s mouth.

The man walks away, laughing through his teeth.

In the empty street, on the dirt path, beside their lukewarm meal, Jim takes her hand. He looks at her empty finger.

‘Do you think you can forgive me?’ he says.

things that
make you go
GRRRR!!

Every day there are so many frustrating, sexist, ridiculous or unacceptable images and comments that we see or hear and that make us go grrrr! Often there is no-one around to vent to - or for self-preservation you just walk away. This column is for you to express your anger and sheer disbelief at the things that happen to women in every day life.

The male condition

Menshealth.com had an online eyechart which has you look at naked women while 'diagnosing' your visual disturbances, such as 'glaucoma' (covering the naked woman), 'floaters' (showing scattered patches over the women) and last, but not least; 'beer' by turning the young woman into an unflattering picture of an older woman with garish makeup. This was done to imply that if your 'condition' is 'beer' it will make the older woman look like the naked young woman. (KB)

Things are going pear shaped

Walking through the Warehouse the other day I spied a T-shirt for young girls which said: 'I've got a nice pear' on the front. Just further evidence of the inappropriate sexualisation of young children. Why would anyone want their 10-year old to wear a shirt that that encourages a sexual appetite of young children? (KB)

Is not the paycheck they're after...

In mid 2007 there was an expo on in Wellington with the goal of attracting workers to Western Australia. Recruiters from dozens of companies and government departments gathered at the Wellington Convention Centre to let people know what they could expect if they came to work for them. The expo organiser said "Most of the people we are talking with are already keen to move to Australia and we are just letting them know what's on offer in the west." However, the Dominion Post reported that what was "on offer" was actually "big pay packets, warm weather and 'beautiful women'." What the? If that's not blatant sexism I don't know what is. (W)

Not so handy

Household appliances that order you around - I hate them! My microwave beeps at me incessantly to let me know what is in there is 'done'. I also recently invested in a new fridge that also beeps at me loudly and insistently whenever the door is open for more than a few moments. Have we reached the stage in modern life when we can't be trusted to remember/do anything for ourselves and we have to be constantly reminded by technology - whatever happened to free thought?? (F)

STHL more sexist advertising

On the front page of a STIHL advertising leaflet, is a pic of a blonde holding a chainsaw, the ad says 'Less work, more play' the model is smiling a cheeky little smile. Arrrrggghhhh! (SW)

Fitting in

As a new parent with a baby in a buggy trying to be independent - WHY do shops have tiny, narrow aisles? I found myself trapped in my local dairy as I got in (goodness only knows how) and I couldn't get out again (the shame!). Luckily a very nice woman took pity on me and helped me out. (F)

Additionally as a new parent WHY do other new mothers insist on telling me that they can fit into their pre-baby clothes and have done since they gave birth <sigh> (F)

And finally clothes sizes - WHY are tops that are size 'large' either narrow and long or wide and short?? And WHY do the makers of trousers think that if you are a size 14-16 then you are also about 7 feet tall?? (F)

Congratulations you have successfully sexualised a bunch of wild animals

The recent advertising campaign by Orangina in Europe can only be described as disgusting. Since being in Europe, Orangina has become my soft drink of choice but I have been horrified by the posters and now the images on the cans of sexualised and half naked wild animals (if there can be such a thing).

The campaign includes illustrations of a deer, octopus, giraffe, zebra, penguin, hyena and more all skantilly clad, in sexual poses, holding or drinking Orangina. They all have breasts for pity's sake - really it is that degrading.

The 'idea' behind the campaign, from what I can gather, is that Orangina is naturally juicy. So the animals provide the 'naturally' and the sexual way in which they are depicted provides the 'juicy'. Not much of an idea really. (NG)

Faux pas, faux rights

The way the presidential race in the USA used faux women's rights as an election tool makes me go grrr. First the Republicans said things like: "white women are a problem, that's, you know -- we all live with that," (Bill Kristol) during Hilary's stymied campaign. Then Senator McCain chose patently anti-feminist Sarah Palin as his Vice President, in an act of gender tokenism at its worst. It's a tragic day when news commentators descend to new levels of idiocy to say: "Looks like the glass ceiling hasn't been broken by Hilary Clinton, but by Senator McCain" and nobody bats an eye-lid. (MN)

Searchlight misleads

The movie Juno. It's no coincidence this film was engineered by ideology-driven FOX, under their pseudo-indie banner of 'Searchlight' productions. It's incredible that the romanticising of teenage pregnancy, and the glorification of the anti-abortion movement, can be covered up with cutesy tunes and glossy cinematography and most of us buy into it. I wonder how many teenagers out there are now thinking how cool it is to get pregnant and how easy it is to just adopt out to a wealthy family down the street? (MN)



Key:

- JJ - Jenn Jones
- KB - Karin Brown
- F = Fiona
- SW = Sashimukti Watson
- NG = Natalie Gousmett
- MN - Melody Nixon

What makes you go GRRRR? Email and tell us - muse@riseup.net with "grrrr" in the subject line.

I LOVE MY BODY

That's right,
I love my body from head to toe.
I love my slightly hairy toes,
I love my tum, my freckles, even my achey hips,
I love it all.
Of course I have never been able to say this to anyone.
I hate the fact that we live in a society where we criticise women for being too fat, for being too thin but most of all for self-love.
God forbid actually being happy with yourself, against all odds. Well I am, and although it has taken me blimin' ages to feel like this and I have felt guilty about it and unable to say it in front of anyone,
I thought - let's have some alternative discourse about our bodies.
Let it be OK to love yourself.

Words by Natalie Gousmett

Image by Melody Nixon

Pink Equals Girl, Apparently

By Karin Brown

This is about kiddie clothes. Our daughter has just turned one and on her birthday I was amazed at the amount of pink clothes that were given to her. I have repeatedly stated to my friends and family that we don't want tons of pink clothes. I don't have a problem with pink (after all, it's just a colour) what I have a problem with is EVERYTHING being pink. It's overwhelming. My mother simply 'can't resist' the cute pink dresses. (Never mind that our daughter can't walk yet and so a dress is clearly a nightmare to crawl in). I also believe that there are some people who are worried that my partner and I will never dress her in pink and so they give us pink clothes just to make sure that she will own pink clothes and that we will have to dress her in them at some point. Like I said, I don't have a problem with pink, but when someone gives you six items of clothing and only one piece isn't pink, that, I have a problem with. But apparently identifying the gender of an infant is really important to people. Some people are mortified when we say our child is a girl after they have referred to her as 'he'. 'Once her hair grows long enough to be put in a ponytail, everyone will know she is a girl,' someone said to me reassuringly, (as if I was worried). I chuckle when people think our daughter is a boy. It doesn't



bother me -- what amuses me is when we correct them and they still refer to her as 'he', so powerful is the psyche. We just smile politely and save our breath.

And why; I ask myself? What's wrong with dressing my daughter from head to toe in pink? Would I react the same way towards blue if I had a son? I would like to think I would. What bothers me is what I dub as the gender 'branding' of children. Start 'em early, train 'em young. You are a boy so you will wear blue. That message soon becomes interchangeable with 'you are a boy because you wear blue.' Once that simple message has been integrated you can start adding more layers. Girls are 'princesses', 'popstars', 'angels', 'cute' and 'daddies little girl' with pictures of sparkly fairies, Barbie and *shudder* Bratz on their strappy tops. Boys are 'astronauts', 'rockstars', 'pirates', with pictures of motor vehicles and Bob the Builder on their T-shirts. See the pattern? Girls are 'pretty and delicate' and boys are 'tough and adventurous'. And the polarisation between the two is stark. This concerns me as I believe gender (and certainly sexuality) can be very fluid concepts and creating an artificial divide like this might contribute to issues in later life for many children and young people, who for whatever reason don't fit neatly



into one of the two boxes society has approved for them.

I have seen research where little girls have (apparently naturally and spontaneously) indicated their preference for purple/frilly toys and the boys have gravitated towards the tanks/trucks, and I am curious to see if in a couple of years time our daughter is asking for traditionally girly toys. If that happens, so be it and I will certainly accept that. However what I refuse to accept is the gender branding of 6 week old infants. Even newborn nappies have boy/girl oriented imagery on them. I remember purchasing reusable nappies and telling the merchant that I didn't want any pink ones. He looked at me and said; 'she's a girl mate, get over it'. Need I say more? Clearly, as a friend pointed out to me, some people think as her parent I am not qualified to make decisions about what our daughter wears.

Someone gave our newborn an item which said; 'does this diaper make my butt look big?' and recently I spied little clothing items for girls which said 'I love Hooters' and for boys 'lock up your daughters'. What does this say about us as adults? Some people might say; 'Aw c'mon, it's just funny. Lighten up.' But I encourage you to ask yourself, why is it funny? Has paranoia

about our bodies become so acceptable that six month olds displaying early unhealthy body image are funny? Have we become so passive about the image of the aggressive male hunting for females that we think it is funny to need to protect our daughters with lock and key? 'It's just a bit of fun' was the response I received when I complained about a radio station host facilitating conversations about naming a women's sports team 'the silver tits'. Yes, it might be fun to you, but at whose expense? At what cost?

And so our resistance continues. It's hard to find clothes which aren't strictly pink or blue. As soon as one walks into most shops selling baby clothes one is greeted with an evenly divided sea of blue and pink. Green and yellow clothes seem to disappear off the racks very quickly. And the rest is white, which as any parent knows, is not a very practical colour for little ankle biters. There are some companies which make affordable, gender neutral clothing and of course if you are willing to spend a small fortune on something that is invariably going to get puke, food and other unidentified stains on it then all sorts of colours are available. Perhaps I am no different to those kind people who present our daughter with so much pink. After all, I am projecting my values of 'gender neutrality' on her. Somehow, I just don't think that is as potentially damaging as 'branding' her with pink might be.

