



Issue Seven



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 or becoming a member, email muse.feminist.zine@gmail.com and we will send a copy of the Muse Profile, Role Description and the Contributors' Information. This information can also be downloaded from our website www.musemagazine.org.nz.

Deadline for Issue Nine is July 31st.

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The Muse Collective are deeply grateful to all the wonderful women who have helped make this issue a reality. In particular we would like to thank the women who have contributed their written work to this issue of Muse. Also to Lou Wallace for bringing her amazing talented touch and creative eye, to Catharine Byrne for lending her careful attention as a proofer and our own Liz and Brooke for completing the final touches on our website. Thank you all.

Donations

Muse is funded entirely on donations, and at a time when funds are stretched for everyone we are especially grateful to all the women who have dug deep and helped us out financially this year.

As always, we are in need of more funds to keep Muse alive. All donations are spent 100% on the printing and mailing out of Muse, so you can feel confident that your funds will be used directly in the creation of an ongoing space for women's voices in Aotearoa.

Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou katoa.

The Muses.



Kia ora and welcome to Issue 8 of Muse!

If you read our previous issue, *The Wellbeing Issue*, you might find this one a bit different. The theme for this issue is **'the new threats to women's rights'**. Packed with hard-hitting analysis, the various contributors discuss a range of threats such as the commodification of self, individualism, feminist in-fighting and even the hoax of the nuclear family.

While the threats to women's rights are multiple and diverse, the connecting thread – which is illustrated by many of these pieces – is a threat to feminism itself; namely forgetting why we need feminism in the first place. As Sue Bradford states poignantly in her interview with Muse Writer Natalie: 'If we are not alert to the possible erosion of what has been achieved, we could lose a lot, very quickly.'

There are many women who believe that feminism is no longer needed and so it is our hope that this issue will leave readers more convinced than ever of the need for feminism, feminists and feminist spaces like Muse where we can debate, connect and stoke the flames of feminism, keeping the home fires burning so to speak.

There have been a few changes since our last issue. Muse is thrilled to announce that our website is up and running and all our previous issues can be downloaded in pdf format. Check it out at

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.

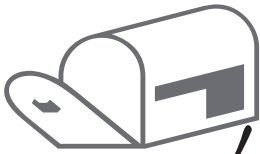
www.musemagazine.org.nz. In addition our Facebook group has over 160 members and counting! Facebook has been useful as another way to connect with our readership both in Aotearoa and overseas. We are also trying to get some interesting discussions started on the wall so check it out. We were recently able to organise a small social event which was a fantastic opportunity to meet with readers informally and make further connections. Amy Delahunty and Morgan Healy have newly joined Muse and sadly, we are wishing Melody Nixon a fond farewell as she departs Aotearoa for America. We wish her all the luck in the world as she embarks on her new adventure.

We welcome all feedback, ideas and contributions. Our next issue will be on concepts of power and control. We are interested in exploring women experiences and thoughts relating to personal empowerment and self-determination. Some of the Muses are planning to contribute pieces about violence, relationships and other topics. The actual title of the theme will emerge as the content takes shape.

As ever we are deeply grateful to all the women and those who support them, who have contributed their energy, time, money and words to make Muse happen. But we are especially grateful to you, the reader, who has picked up this little Magazine and brought it to life and invited it into your world.

Ka kite ano
The Muse Collective

Muse is produced by the Muse editorial collective; Karen Price, Karin Brown, Natalie Gousmett, Melody Nixon, Brooke Rae, Liz Robinson, Amy Delahunty and Morgan Healy.



Letters



I have been following your zine for the past few months and I have been really impressed.

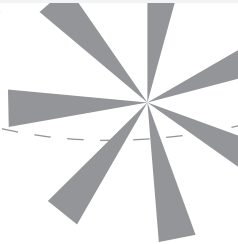
Muse is well-laid out, thought provoking and original. Its design and articles make it great for non- or yet-to-be-feminists looking to learn more about women's issues, as well as those who are already involved in working for women's rights.

Thanks for all of the hard work, and I hope to become more involved in the future!

Cheers!!

Vic Crockford

And she already has! Read Vic's contribution "Re-Membering Feminism" on pg 28.



Hello Muse!



First let me say how much I love your zine!! I have been getting copies gifted to me from my sister and it was because of an article a while back that discovered menstrual cups which just happens to be the best things ever! I have been using one every month for the last 3 years and it has more than paid for itself. Not just financially (by saving money on disposable menstrual products), but because of the satisfaction of being able to walk down the feminine hygiene aisle in the supermarket and thinking "I don't need to buy any of you!". Most of your readers have probably heard of menstrual cups from somewhere or someone by now and I'm hoping many already use one, but before I read the aforementioned Muse article I didn't even know there was an alternative to Tampons. It's a pity that only mainstream products have the ability to get their message out there to the masses. I'm sure most women know all the newest tampon improvements and products (wings anyone?) as they are advertised all the time, but environmentally friendly, re-useable products like menstrual cups aren't as profitable for corporations so we need to spread the information through word-of-mouth and through literature such as Muse.

Thanks for providing a voice for women in a world full of 'Womens Weeklys' and 'Cosmopolitans'. It's so refreshing to read something written for women that isn't filled with the latest make-up or "how to please your man".

Keep up the great work!

Anna Edwards

Thanks Anna! The article Anna is referring to is 'Life Without Tampons' in Issue One. You can download issue one from our website.

Warm greetings to the writers and readers of Muse

It is such a delight to receive Muse in the mail. I loved the wellbeing issue for its richness of creative story and poetry, strength of research and clear feminist perspective on issues like abortion, endometriosis and sleep; for the acknowledgment and open letter on the ACC sensitive claims nightmare; the grrrs and the purrs! I look forward to Muse's growth in support; to have national coverage and distribution – every town deserves a Muse.

Sue Berman

Dear Muses

It was with delight that I received Issue 7 of Muse Magazine. It was so very stimulating to be reading articles relevant to women in Aotearoa, written by women who are not afraid to use the word 'Feminist', or indeed align themselves with feminism. It revitalised my wairua and I remembered the distant past being in a lecture theatre with like minded women who want to keep agitating lest we forget those feminists past (who never did actually burn their brassieres!)

I will continue to support Muse as it is a ray of sunshine and aroha when sometimes I just don't want to see or hear the "news".

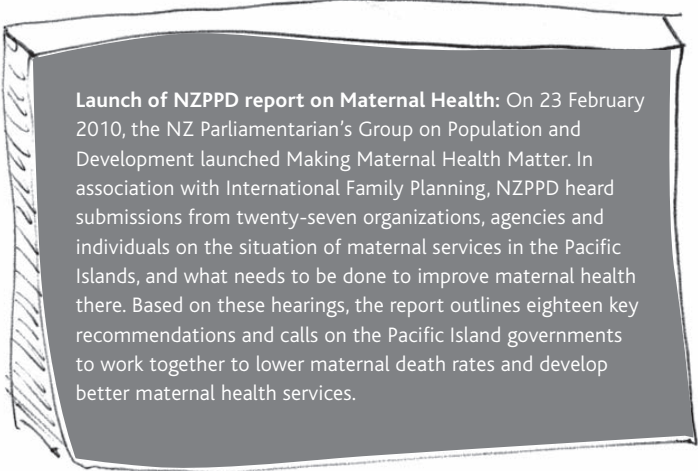
He mihi mahana

Nā Rachel Dibble

Nga mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. Thank you very much for all your letters. It's great to know people are enjoying Muse!



IN BRIEFS



Launch of NZPPD report on Maternal Health: On 23 February 2010, the NZ Parliamentarian's Group on Population and Development launched Making Maternal Health Matter. In association with International Family Planning, NZPPD heard submissions from twenty-seven organizations, agencies and individuals on the situation of maternal services in the Pacific Islands, and what needs to be done to improve maternal health there. Based on these hearings, the report outlines eighteen key recommendations and calls on the Pacific Island governments to work together to lower maternal death rates and develop better maternal health services.



New UN focus on women. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has told the world that the General Assembly will create a new entity that will work towards gender equality and women's empowerment. He has also committed to appoint more women in senior posts withing the UN.



Women Deliver Conference, Delivering Solutions for Women and Girls is to be held in Washington D.C from June 7-9 2010. The conference will focus on finding solutions to women's and girl's economic, political and socio-cultural inequalities. Dialogue will centre on the message that the Millennium Development Goals can still be reached if investments are made in women. Registration is now open for those who might be interested in attending. Visit www.womendeliver.org/conferences/-2010-conference/ for more information.

UNFPA and Climate Change: The United Nations Population Fund has recently published a resource kit for understanding the connections between gender, climate change and population. The human consequences of climate change will adversely affect those in developing countries and will be felt most acutely by women. This resources not only provides a gendered analysis of climate change, but suggests that it is women themselves who can effect change at the ground level. For an online version of the report, check out: www.unfpa.org/public/publications/pid/4028.

Housework responsibilities impact on working realities. A new report by the International Trade Union Confederation confirms that women are still doing disproportionately more housework and child care than their male counterparts. As a result women with children are more likely to work part-time, earn less and have worse career prospects. The report concludes that it is significantly harder for women to maintain a healthy work-life balance than it is for men.

Costa Rica Elects Women President: Costa Rica recently elected Laura Chinchilla as its first female President. However, there seems to be some confusion regarding her stance on abortion and homosexual marriage. President Chinchilla ran as an anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage candidate, yet she has also stated that she supports the current abortion law of Costa Rica, which allows for terminations in instances of rape. And while being opposed to homosexual 'marriage', Chinchilla does support special legal measures which allow homosexual couples the right of inheritance.

New legislation making violence against women a priority was introduced in February this year in America. If it is passed it will require the US government to intervene in cases of severe violence against women (such as the rape camps of Rwanda). US\$ One billion dollars US would be made available over five years to manage projects in other countries with significant gender-based violence. The proposed law would even go a step further by making it mandatory for all workers on international programmes to be trained in how to respond to, and prevent, violence against women and girls.

In-Briefs compiled by
Morgan Healey, Melody
Nixon and Karin Brown

Grrrs

Scare US Out of it

Earlier this year the Kentucky state senate passed a bill that would require all women planning to have an abortion to visit their doctor 24 hours prior to the procedure and endure having their ultrasound shown and described to them. This is blatant manipulation and scare tactics used by conservatives, who claim to be looking out for women's well-being, but instead are forcing them into a disturbingly cruel ordeal. I am saddened and appalled that this is happening in America. Lets hope these sneaky bills don't slip past us in New Zealand.

--BR

Mini for Men

Ads for the new Mini car were plastered around town in the middle of 2009, stating that even though the Mini was now 50 years old it was "still chasing curves." More like, 50 years on and "still getting away with sexist advertising."

--MN

Contributors:

MN – Melody Nixon
NG – Natalie Gousmett
AE – Anna Edwards
BR – Brooke Rae
KT – Kerry Tankard

T-Shirts

We are becoming all too familiar with sexist and offensive T-shirt slogans. One I saw recently that really made me sick was worn by a young girl (about 5 or 6 years old) and said, 'Your Boyfriend says Hi'. What message is this sending?

--NG

Infatuation Simulation

"Roxxy the first sex robot has been released this year by an American artificial intelligence engineer. The sex robot comes with flesh-like synthetic skin, a choice of one of five personalities, an orgasm simulator, and the ability to "converse" with her "owner." Douglas Hines, the robot's football-loving inventor, said the real aim was to make the doll someone the owner can talk to and relate to. "She can't vacuum, she can't cook but she can do almost anything else if you know what I mean," he said. Grrr.

--MN

Good Old Fashioned Family Values

Don't get me wrong, I am not opposed to family. I believe a strong, functional family can enable a more fulfilling and confident life. What I am opposed to, however, is the burgeoning of the conservative model of the nuclear family, with male as breadwinner and female as 'housewife.' The backlash to second wave feminism has brought with it the idea that, yes, I'm a woman, I can do anything I want but I still choose to be a housewife. Great – if that's really true. But what concerns me is that women 'choosing' to stay at home might be again becoming the norm, and once again the role model that some young girls see is a mum who picks up the kids from soccer after school, rushes home to cook dinner, and does all the housework, while her husband pursues his own interests. If parental roles that are segregated according to gender again become the norm, will our daughters still enjoy the same freedom of choice as ourselves?

--MN

'Modern Shmodern'

Having watched an episode of the show 'Modern Family', I was disappointed that the "modern" nuclear family it portrays could have been taken straight out of any other American family sitcom. In almost every scene the mum (Claire) is cooking, cleaning or doing laundry, while you never once see the dad (Phil) pick up a dish cloth or cook a meal. The writers seem to think that making the mum's character bossy will counteract the fact that she is effectively the cook and maid for the rest of the family. Why are sitcom writers so afraid to push the boundaries away from the so-called norm and show a heterosexual man actually pulling his weight with the domestic duties? I know that if I do watch another episode I will now be distracted from any comedy by counting how many times Claire has a laundry basket in her arms. Grrr!

--AE

Any Sane Women Out There?

Whilst out for a beer with a friend I overheard a conversation between two 20-something guys discussing women. The outspoken young man said to his friend in a confirmed 'wise' tone, "there are no sane women under the age of 25; they all have so many problems, you should just stay away from them – they're toxic." It is alarming that some men can generalise that all young women are categorically insane! I'm not entirely sure where this 'wise man' thought young men fit into this equation; I think that he must have some naive (deluded) ideal that men are innately 'sane' and do not suffer at all from the effects of puberty and all the challenges that come with young-adulthood.

--BR

No Size 16

I was recently killing time and wandered into a NZ designer store in Wellington. When looking through the sale rack I asked if they had any size 16 trousers and they said that they only make clothes in size 14 and under. Since when was size 16 'plus size' and who exactly is this store catering for in NZ?

--NG

Not a Feminist

I gave a friend a copy of Muse issue 7 and asked her what she thought of it a few weeks later. She said it was good but that she is not a feminist. I know we all have different definitions of feminism but to me this is like saying she doesn't believe women should have the same rights as men. This makes me sad, – patriarchy has succeeded in branding feminism in such a negative way that we have to convince our own sisters before we can fight the bigger problems.

--NG

Breeding a Civic Duty

Kevin Rudd has exposed himself as a sexist when he blamed women for failing to reproduce. Apparently women shouldn't be off doing their PH.Ds when they could be breeding instead. This is completely un-f*-ing believable bullying. When I think of how many women I know who are doing Ph.D's now that they are over 50, because they couldn't do one when they were in their 20s - *sigh* grrrrrr!

--KT

Purrrs

Lehman Sisters

The deputy leader of the British Labour Party, Harriet Harman, earned a big purr when she said mid-way through 2009 that the so-called Global Financial Crisis could have been averted if there were more women in the boardrooms of major financial institutions. "...If it had been Lehman Sisters, rather than Lehman Brothers," said Harman, "then there may have not been as much [of a meltdown]." Harman also pointed out that half the workforce of major banks and insurance companies is made up of women, yet women make up a tiny proportion of board members (just 5 of the 61 board positions in the "big four" banks of the UK). Good on Ms Harman for using her position of power to actually speak out.

--MN

It is Wrong to Retouch

A big purr goes to the French MP, Valerie Boyer, who tabled a Bill in the French parliament in September 2009 calling for 'health warnings' to be put on any photos of women and men that are digitally retouched and present an "erroneous representation of the human body." Female models are undoubtedly the most common subjects of retouching, and as Boyer said in the Times Online, these 'perfect' images can "drive people to despair and anorexia." Almost all images in magazines are now reworked to remove blemishes and 'improve' the proportions of the models. Boyer earned my purr of the year when she said "there is a form of indecency in making people believe that only a certain category of humanity can attain perfection, without yellow teeth or love handles."

--MN

Kids in Cafes

There are very few cafes and bars where it is made easy to take your children so I do love it when I see businesses making a special effort. Children are part of our community and so are parents and we need to do better at this – but well done Super and Southern Cross in Wellington with the children's play area and toys. Southern Cross even has child gates to keep them in the area you are in.

--NG

Contributors:

MN – Melody Nixon

NG – Natalie Gousmett

What makes you go GRRR? And what makes you go PURRR...

Email and tell us – muse.feminist.zine@gmail.com with Grrr/Purrr in the subject line.



The Death of Justice?

By Brooke Rae

In a society fixated on the sensational – pushing the entertainment value of every event – it may seem unrealistic to hope that New Zealand's judicial system could rise above this entertainment circus to deliver fair and just treatment for survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

The dramatisation of sexual violence towards women is splashed across all forms of media – TV shows, movies, advertising and news programming, all of which sensationalise violence, by focusing on drama and terror, and thus provoking the fascination that we perhaps naturally have with sex. This voyeuristic fascination society has with sexual violence inflames the media's already sensationalised reporting of sexual abuse cases, which in turn, creates stereotypical characterisations of how 'real' victims dress, act and behave. The media plays the crucial role of conductor in the entertainment circus when reporting on sexual abuse trials and has massive potential to influence public opinion.

Through the media's gaze, stories of sexual abuse are played out as a showdown – 'her word against his', and so the narrative progresses to question whether the complainant is a 'believable' and 'worthy' victim. Whether or not the complainant is a 'worthy' victim will be largely interpreted by the jury, and the greater public, in line with the characterisation that the media has projected – which is generally based on myths and gender stereotypes.

The Louise Nicholas rape trial is a superb example of the influential power the media has when reporting cases of sexual assault. The media influenced public perception of the trial and characters of the story, by spinning the angle of the story and framing news headlines favourably for the defendants, constantly putting Nicholas on the defence – accordingly Louise Nicholas became the person on trial. For instance: "Nicholas is lying, says Rickards", "Rickards has his say", "Top cop labels rape complaint a lie", "Nicholas lying top policeman tells court". These headlines worked as a constant reminder for the general public that Nicholas's credibility was being challenged and that the accused men were in positions of authority, hence they attained credibility by default.

Clayton Weatherston's trial for the brutal murder of his ex-girlfriend, Sophie Elliott, is another example of the entertainment circus that is bound to accompany major abuse cases in the media. The media continuously reported Clayton's sickening claims that he was "provoked" into killing Sophie, because (he claimed) he was physically and psychologically abused by her.

Sophie's behaviour, sexuality, actions and past were analysed to excess during the trial. The reports from Weatherston's parents were so deluded it was hard to read the newspaper without feeling some rage. For example, his mother stated that her son was "honest and sensitive" and that they were "sad that they did not know the psychological and physical abuse Clayton was suffering in his relationship with

Continued on next page...



*Sophie and the effect this was having on him ... he is honest, he tells the truth. This is why this is so hard." I do think that the unconditional love of parents for their children must be a powerful influence but how the f**k can they justify his behaviour, and go further still, by instilling blame on Sophie, the victim, the one who was murdered.*

Sophie was unable to defend herself against the invasive and insulting comments made about her during the trial and in the media coverage, but yet why should she need to? Absolutely no action or behaviour on her behalf could possibly justify the hideous death she suffered at his hands. To me it seems she was a fun-loving, sexually-forward, intelligent girl who should not have to defend herself to anyone. Her killer, a narcissistic, psychopath should have been the only 'character' judged by the jury and media in this trial.

Both of these cases left a very sour taste in the mouths of New Zealanders, and it is these pivotal examples that remind us that the media is a powerful tool that can be very dangerous indeed. It is crucial for us to approach the media with a critical eye: analyse everything the media throws at you, and do not take anything at face value!

The Possible Rebirth? Justice for victims of sexual assault?

New Zealand has shocking statistics of sexual abuse. A recent study looking at the response to sexual violence stated that "19 percent of women and 5 percent of men surveyed in the 2001 New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims (Morris et al., 2003), said they had experienced

sexual interference or assault at some time in their lives. Rates were higher still for young women and Māori women." Further, it has been claimed that only 9 percent of sexual offences are brought to the attention of police.

A possible reason as to why so few survivors of sexual assault come forward may be because of a lack of confidence in the judicial system, and the fear that the treatment they are likely to receive from defence lawyers and the media during the trial process would be too traumatic. The implications of the under-reporting of sexual violence are enormous, a major problem being that offenders are less likely to be held to account and may offend again, and that victims may not receive any of the support they need.

How can we change this? How can we encourage women to come forward for support and justice after they have been physically and sexually assaulted? Now that recent ACC cuts have deeply hurt victims of sexual abuse, this question becomes all the more pertinent.

Thankfully, there is currently a government study underway to investigate proposed changes to New Zealand's judicial system for sexual abuse cases. The Dom Post reported that "the Law Commission has been instructed to look into whether an inquisitorial system should be used in sexual abuse cases, amid concern the current adversarial system is defective, and that rapists are getting off scot-free". Many believe that the change from use of a jury in the adversarial system to use of a supervising judge in the inquisitorial system would lessen the harassment and stress on the survivors and witnesses during sexual abuse trials.



As it stands, the law states that sexual assault has to have three facts proven to secure a conviction. First, that sexual connection took place, second, that the complainant did not consent to the sexual connection in question, and third that the accused did not believe on reasonable grounds that the complainant consented to the sexual connection. Problems with this are obvious; the accused uses the justification of being provoked by the victim's dress, flirtatious attitude and so on, in order to qualify a reasonable belief that the complainant was consenting.

The law does not account for social preconditioned variations of consent, and as such, differing attitudes and preconceptions of the jury are not accounted for in the letter of the law. The law does not define what constitutes consent, instead it clarifies that consent must be "genuine" and "freely given". Consent then, is framed in the negative, meaning the law provides examples of what does not amount to consent, rather than what does, and in this way jurors' could be given the impression that consent always exists unless particular circumstances are present. So, it seems that the complainant has to fight the battle back to front from the very beginning of the trial.

An incredible example of the dangers of the vagueness of consent in sexual abuse cases came about in 1976, *R v Morgan*, known to women's groups as "the rapists charter". In that case, a husband brought friends home to rape his wife. He told his friends that she would resist and scream "no" to their advances but he advised them that this was just a game and really meant that she was enjoying the ordeal. The men were acquitted of the rape as the court stated that if the men honestly believed that the woman was consenting they could

not be convicted. Although this case is rather dated it is indicative of the importance of the definition of consent, and it is particularly significant as it became a precedent for many cases that followed.

The benefits of changing to an inquisitorial system for sexual abuse trials are salient when we consider the jurors' social preconditioning and perhaps their misunderstanding of the law itself, and further, the media's crusade when reporting the trials. If New Zealand was to move to an inquisitorial system for sexual assault cases, the victim may feel less threatened when coming forth with their stories and perhaps more confident that justice will be delivered with less damage to their dignity and pride.

I think it is fantastic that the judicial system for sexual abuse cases is being investigated, as the adversarial system is plagued by the politics of blame and controversy, which in turn is generally exploited by the media and twisted into a cruel show – a circus.

Sources:

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- Lois Cairns, Sunday Star Times, "Push to ease rape victims court ordeal" - visit www.stuff.co.nz/national/3218475/push-to-ease-rape-victims-court-ordeal
- www.justice.govt.nz/policy-and-consultation/legislation/sex-industry/improvements
- Catriona MacLennan, "Changing the law on rape", 2009 – visit www.scoop/stories-changingthelawonrape

The Silent Ones

In a noisy bar with friends,
I object to your stories;
You think I am a prude

But you don't understand
It's not the swearing
It's not the sex
It's the way you relegate them to such insignificance

They are being done to
They are being told
The silent ones

You don't even give them names
It's girl, chick, bitch
Yet over the beers it's your easiest laugh of the night

Still, they are there,

Waiting behind our chairs

Faint figures, sketches

Some just pencil scratches

Waiting for colour, light, a voice

VEILED DISCRIMINATION: Gender Neutrality in Contemporary Policy Making

By Louisa Jackson

Women, as a social group, have been marginalised throughout modern history.

The traditional roles of women as mothers, wives, housekeepers, food producers and caregivers have long been considered secondary to men's traditional roles in paid employment. Globally, women have been forced into dependency on male husbands or fathers through economic and legal systems that favour men over women. Discrimination against women is ingrained in the institutions of modern society, and contemporary policy-making continues to reflect the patriarchal paradigm in which we live. Gender neutral policy, that which does not account for women's institutionalised disadvantage, perpetuates discrimination against women by omitting consideration of established inequities. This discrimination is particularly evident in income, economic policy, the mainstream workplace and governmental structures which influence policy-making, explored below.

Assessing the disparity in income between men and women illustrates wider gender inequities. To a large extent income levels influence a person's quality of life, affect their access to food, education and health care, and influence their ability to participate in society. Income disparity is symptomatic of women's concentration in low paid sectors of the

economy and of their dependence on welfare as a primary source of income. Women's poverty, clearly linked to income levels, has been identified as a result of institutionalised low and insecure wages. Contemporary policy-making, which does not account for income discrepancies between men and women, exacerbates women's disadvantage and as such, negatively affects their quality of life and that of their children.

Employment, as a key source of income, provides a focal point for analysis of income disparity. Women experience discrimination in employment through unequal or inequitable pay rates and also as a result of child bearing and child raising. The necessity to take a 'career break' when a child is born puts women at a disadvantage through negative income implications, loss of wider social recognition of employment status and harm to career advancement. This disadvantage is evident in adoption rates of workplace parental leave policies, where, despite policy benefits being available to both male and female parents, they are overwhelmingly utilised by women alone. This indicates that men both recognise and respond to the implicit negative implications of taking such a break from professional careers, further entrenching the social norm of women working as unpaid mothers and not men as unpaid fathers. Women's roles in relation to housework and childcare are largely seen as part of their physiology and as such, the responsibility of men in parenting roles remains under-recognised. With modern society's misguided confidence in the "nuclear family" structure, motherhood continues to be treated as a woman's primary role and a role for which neither men, nor wider society, bears any duty to assist in. Such societal attitudes to motherhood are evident in the lack of workplace childcare facilities for working women and particularly in the lack of affordable childcare for solo mothers.

The cumulative impact of women's disadvantage in income also results in increased hardship and dependency for elderly women. As women are paid significantly less than men over the course of their working lives, they contribute less to superannuation packages and as a result, experience greater poverty in old age. Superannuation policy provides a good illustration of how gender neutral policy discriminates against women because it doesn't take into account income inequalities between genders. The result of gender neutral economic and superannuation policies mean that after a lifetime of work women are left in significantly reduced financial circumstances compared with their male counterparts. Evidently the role of women as 'dependents' is perpetuated even in their retirement.

New Zealand's student loan scheme is another example of gender neutral policy producing significantly gendered results. With the increase in women's participation in tertiary education a corresponding increase occurs in women's debt levels as student loans are taken out to pay escalating fees and living expenses. When these women graduate they generally enter professions with lower pay levels than those of their male counterparts and usually have their earnings interrupted as a result of mothering and childcare responsibilities. The combined effect of these inequities is that women's student loans take longer to repay than men's, accumulate higher levels of interest and impose a greater burden on women's finances.

Mainstream economic theory discriminates against women by marginalising their unpaid work as "non-productive" and discounting their national economic contribution.

In economic theory the 'labour force' is defined as including those who are employed and those who are looking for employment, but excludes those who work as housewives or volunteers. The unpaid roles of women in housekeeping, nurturing and educating

children, caring for the elderly, the disabled and infirm, volunteering in community organisations and in growing and processing food are unacknowledged in the national economic system. These important and skilled tasks undertaken by women without financial profit are unrecognised because they do not immediately generate money and are therefore labelled "non-productive". This is a significant disadvantage to women in terms of income and economic rights, for whilst their work is unrecognised it certainly provides a service to the national economy. If women in their unpaid roles were included as part of the labour force and the value of their unpaid work was included in national economic statistics, social policy would certainly be affected in terms of the extension of access to vocational training programmes and contribution based social security policies.

Corresponding with other gender disparities in society, and arguably the origin of those disparities, is the disproportionate representation of gender in two very significant public institutions: the judiciary and parliament. National policy is made in the form of laws by parliament and enforced the judiciary; such laws arguably representative of society's principles and rules. Exploring the demographics of these institutions reveals the gender bias setting our societal principles: in the top levels of the judiciary women make up only 20% or 10 out of 49 judges, and out of the 122 members of the New Zealand parliament, only 41 are women, a mere 33% of national representation. But even with a hypothetical increase in representation, the presence of women in parliament or the state bureaucracy will not guarantee that arguments from the female perspective will be presented, or heard. Women who work in influential institutions such as parliament or the judiciary function under structures that are created and controlled by men, and which maintain the male worldview as the dominant paradigm under which policy is made and implemented.

Not only do gender neutral policies discriminate against women through upholding systemic disadvantage, feminists would also argue that policies

for gender equality are similarly discriminatory in their nature. Equal opportunity and equal pay policies perpetuate the male experience as dominant and normative in society by requiring women to act in the same way as their male counterparts to achieve equal status or pay. Equal opportunity policy, for example, reflects the male paradigm by establishing traditionally male work patterns as the norm to which women are required to conform to achieve equal status;

Analysing the many aspects of gender inequity illustrates that gender neutral policy-making simply perpetuates current social inequality: if women start from a point of disadvantage, equal treatment only allows its continuation.

women are expected to labour for increasingly long hours in workplace cultures that require a partner at home to attend to domestic responsibilities such as childcare. Most women who achieve success in these cultures do so by emulating male behaviour through employing other women to carry out their care-giving and housekeeping duties in a manner similar to a man's reliance on his wife. Likewise, equal pay law interprets a definition of equality that sees women treated like men, having their employment conditions and remuneration assessed against the normative male experience. Women who achieve success in professional institutions, reaching managerial or senior positions, are not only restricted by excessive working hours, but also through the assumption of normative behaviour. "Power" in professional institutions is defined in masculine terms and women aspiring to fill powerful positions adopt stereotypically male behavioural qualities, such as being authoritarian or adversarial, Margaret Thatcher being the established example of such trends. These assumptions of "normal" workplace cultures and behaviours deny women the opportunity to fully live the experience of being female in their professional lives and as such, are a continuation of their discrimination in modern society.

In summary, lack of income parity disadvantages women in their ability to access goods and services and to fully participate in society. This disadvantage is then

carried through to retirement age as income affects the ability of women to contribute to superannuation schemes. Employment, as a key source of both income and social status, sees women discriminated against through parental leave and childcare assumptions. In education, women are discriminated against through their reduced ability to repay educational loans and later, their economic dependency is further entrenched through the lack of recognition of their unpaid work.

Male orientated economic definitions of "productive" and "non-productive" work results in the inequitable distribution of resources both within the state and within families. Women are underrepresented in significant governmental institutions and this may also lead to a lack of consideration for the female worldview in policy and law-making. Even policies which promote gender equality discriminate against women as they establish the male experience as the model from which a 'normal' experience is defined, providing women with the 'equality' and 'freedom' to act like men. This treatment of women, as financial and social dependents in a patriarchal world, denies women full citizenship because the social importance and productive value of their work goes unrecognised, which denies them the ability to participate in society from a truly female perspective. Analysing the many aspects of gender inequity illustrates that gender neutral policy-making simply perpetuates current social inequality: if women start from a point of disadvantage, equal treatment only allows its continuation.

I am indebted to feminist writers Marilyn Waring, Marilyn French, Margaret Wilson and Nicky Charles for the ideas in this article (originally written as an essay for public policy analysis).

We *IGNORE* *Whakapapa* to our Peril

by Sandra Dickson

Stopping male violence against women is what attracted me to feminism. Ending the epidemic numbers of rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment of women in Aotearoa.

Male violence against women continues to be supported through societal attitudes. We ask why she didn't leave that violent man, why she was wearing that low-cut top, rather than why he hit and ridiculed her, or why he didn't care that she did not want to have sex. We blame women through the nonsense of rape myths, founded on ideas that women lie about sex and men have inalienable rights to use our bodies whenever they wish.

Women's stories about the violence they have lived through form the foundations for my feminist activism to end male violence, including organising direct action, which is always contentious, just as the shifting power relations between women and men are contentious.

In the lead-in to Reclaim the Night 09, the organising group were criticised and labelled "second-wave ladies" for opening the march to women, intersex, trans* and genderqueer people and our children – but not men. Male critics said we were ignoring violence against men, and that they just wanted to support us, and could only do that by being on the march. Genderqueer critics told us we were alienating allies, creating an unsafe space for transpeople and genderqueers, and failing to recognise the fluidity of gender. Both argued the only way to rectify their issues was for the march to be open to men.

Like most feminists working to end violence against women, I passionately welcome men who are part of the fight: Australian researcher Michael Flood; New Zealand pro-feminist Garth Baker; Fati, George, Peter and Josh, the four beautiful men I work with running sexual violence prevention programmes with young people. Without men taking responsibility for the ways they perform gender – with all the power they gain from these performances – violence against women will not end.

But that doesn't necessarily mean everything we do should be open to men.

Reclaim the Night 09 was during White Ribbon week, when events all over Aotearoa cry out for male involvement. To my knowledge, our male critics failed to take up any of these opportunities, which looks awfully like they were more interested in disrupting our event than making a political statement of their own.

People identifying as intersex, trans* and genderqueer are often targeted for violence. Reclaim the Night 09 was not attempting to address these kinds of hate, but we did want to acknowledge people victimised while viewed as women or when breaking gender norms. Via support groups, posters and flyers we explicitly invited anyone from these communities who wanted to challenge these forms of male violence – and many did. The only criticisms we got were from unaffiliated individuals, not the groups we invited or consulted with beforehand.

Imagine a tino rangatiratanga protest organised by Māori for Māori, at which Pakeha anti-racist activists insist we should participate, because we cared about racism, and besides, hadn't we experienced discrimination when we've been to the UK and people had laughed at our accents? Nope, most progressives would laugh that one out of sight.

It seems it's only acceptable to ask women to make sure we consider every other kind of violence rather than just, for once, focusing on our own experiences.

The short message? Women should look after others if we want to be listened to, acceptable, valued.'

Criticising feminists who organise direct action to challenge male violence against women by accusing them of being rooted in some distant past with antiquated thinking about gender is unfair. This ignores the fact that the fundamental problem when it comes to male violence against women is how men perform their gender.

For example, what does performing male gender look like for young men when it comes to sex with women? Is it easy for them to say, "Hell, I'm nervous, what if

I can't work out how to use my tongue, can't get an erection, come too fast, or she doesn't like my body?"
Can men, even now, express a range of emotions?

If we're really serious about destabilising gender we need to make space for men to give up control, with all the positive and negative consequences that holds for them. We need to celebrate and acknowledge all genders. We need to make even more space for women to be active agents – sexually, economically, culturally, socially.

If we're really serious about ending male violence against women, we need to link gender destabilising activities to zero tolerance for victim blaming, zero tolerance for abuse, zero tolerance for sexist oppression and misogyny.

What we don't need is to sneer at our second wave feminist whakapapa for naming male violence against women as a problem. It still is – ask the families of any of the women: murdered last year by their male (ex-) partners; any of the women raped last year by men they knew or men they didn't; any of the women sexually harassed on the streets or at work or while out having a drink.

I'm interested in how we end all of the inter-connected kinds of violence in Aotearoa. White people challenging racist and colonial violence; everyone standing up against trans* hatred and queer bashing, (and) men challenging other men's violence. But not at the expense of giving up our rights to determine how our activism targeting male violence against women should look. Though I am considering making a "Second Wave Lady" teeshirt ;-)).



Photos on this page from Wellington Reclaim the Night March 2009.



About the Author

At 39, Sandra Dickson is too young for the second wave, and too old for the third wave. She prefers to float her bogan Pakeha boat in an ever-changing sea of feminism, in and out of her depth, surrounded by pretty blues and greens.

- One in three New Zealand women will experience physical or sexual violence from a male partner during her lifetime (Fanslow and Robinson, 2004)
- 99% of incidents of sexual violence against an adult reported to the Police are perpetrated by men – 95% of them on (against) women (Police statistics)
- A woman is killed in a domestic violence incident every 3 1/2 weeks in Aotearoa New Zealand – think of the names this year (Police statistics)
- 92% of protection orders are taken out by women (Ministry of Justice statistics)
- One in four secondary school aged young women report unwanted sexual contact in the last year (Youth 2000)
- One in three women report sexual harassment in the workplace (Human Rights Commission)
- 70% of those reporting elder abuse are women (Age Concern)

Visit <http://roundtablevaw.org.nz/index.html> for more information on violence against women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

An interview with **SUE BRADFORD**

By Natalie Gousmett

Perhaps best known for her 10 years as a highly effective Green Party MP, Sue Bradford has been an activist on social justice, peace and women's issues since 1967 and continues to work in this area. Before becoming an MP, Sue was a community development worker and political activist in the unemployed and beneficiaries movement and helped set up and run the Auckland People's Centres. In Parliament she introduced the bill to amend Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961, which successfully abolished the defence of 'reasonable force' for parents prosecuted for assaulting their children. I believe she is one of the most inspiring political leaders in NZ, past or present, so I asked her a few questions on the theme of this issue 'the new threats to women's rights'.

1 As someone who has been involved in the women's rights movement in NZ (among many other movements) since before I was born, what do you think have been some of the major achievements for women's rights in the last 30–40 years?

- Gaining a lot more control over when and if we have children, and when and if we have sex – and who with.
- Much broader acceptance of the wide range of sexual identities we inhabit, including self acceptance.
- Access to the DPB.
Decriminalisation of prostitution.
- Equal pay for the same job, although there is still a long way to go in terms of equal pay for work of equal value.
- The acceptance of women's right to be in the workforce at all once we are married and/or have children, alongside the extensive provision of early childhood education.
- The existence of Rape Crisis and Women's Refuge groups, and the slow but steady change in state attitudes towards rape and violence against women
- Greatly increased women's participation in the political, economic and social life of our country.

2 What are the most important women's rights issues that you think have yet to be resolved?

- There are very few issues that have been fully resolved, and I think we need to remain alert, always, for undermining and attacks that can happen overtly and covertly at any time. Some key current issues include:
- Closing the income gap between women and men – glaring inequalities continue, and are likely to be accentuated by the ongoing impacts of global recession, resource depletion and climate change.
 - Continuing work on changing male attitudes, which still far too often see us as the objects of physical and psychological violence and abuse.
 - Women's own negative self-image, and a heap of mental health issues that go alongside this.
 - Addressing the rights and needs of women who have least in our society: women in low paid work and on benefits; Maori women; Pasifika, migrant and refugee women; and/or women who live with physical, mental and/or intellectual impairment.

3 The theme of this issue is 'the new threats to women's rights', do you see any new areas emerging that are threatening gender equality, new issues that we haven't had to fight before?



There is an old threat, renewed: the impact of recession and high unemployment: if it got really bad and the political Right dominated economically and politically, we could see women pushed back out of the paid workforce and into the home, cuts to the DPB and other welfare, and so on.

I also see a different kind of threat in the way in which many people take the huge gains we've made as a given, believing that these new freedoms will always exist. If we are not alert to the possible erosion of what has been achieved, we could lose a lot, very quickly. For example, a reversion to a first-past-the-post form of Government as a result of the MMP referendum (to be held next year), could pave the way for serious setbacks.

Yes, I have come across the idea that there is no 'feminist movement any more' many times in the last 15 years or so, but I've never believed it. I've always been aware that there are many younger women around Aotearoa picking up the flame in different ways at different times, and have done what I can to encourage communication and debate between women from different strands of feminism and of different generations.

However, I do think that as feminists we lack opportunities to debate issues and strategies across generations, and I am always open to being part of any move to close gaps or get things out in the open, even when we don't agree on things. Of course as each new generation of women come through you are going to bring new ideas and perceptions, but that's great – it's what we older ones did in our time, we should never put you down for doing the same thing in yours.

4 As young feminists, we are very aware of the backlash against feminism and the reluctance to use the word 'feminist' by many of our peers – what are your thoughts on this?

Language is always one of the tools of struggle, and we are up against many attempts to denigrate, deride and undermine the word 'feminist' by those who are threatened by this up-front word, or who simply think it is out of date and redolent of earlier generations, or who are blithely unaware of how much struggle and work has gone into achieving the gains that have so far been made.

I hope that young feminists, as well as older ones like me, will continue to use the word as and when we want, and to explain why we do so in a way that is clear and respectful to other women.

5 There is a perception from older generation feminists that there is no 'feminist movement' any more, despite many young women (who may or may not label themselves as feminist) who are doing feminist work. Have you come across this tension between generations and what do you think of it?

6 Can you share with us your vision for women and feminism in Aotearoa?

My vision is that more of us again find the courage to openly declare ourselves 'feminist', whatever that means to each of us; and that we do more to work together across ages and other boundaries to change the fundamental structures of society which continue to see many women oppressed, exploited, damaged and vulnerable.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that I think it's brilliant that you women have managed to get Muse up and running – and are keeping it going – as a beacon of creativity and inspiration for all of us. You are making a great effort to fill a glaring gap, with thanks and best wishes to all involved.

Sue Bradford

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a NEW Threat – inequity of RIGHTS

By Karin Brown

So what are the new threats to women's rights? It took me a while to unpack this question in my mind, but after I did, I felt more convinced of the need for feminism than ever. There are several ways that I examined this question. The first conclusion I reached was that some new threats are actually old threats which are still around today. In other words, issues from the past which still plague women in the present. An example of this would be violence against women. It's been around for aeons and arguably, it will continue to be around for a long time unfortunately. So, violence against women is not a new threat but certainly a current threat.

A second way to look at this theme is to examine new issues which affect women in greater proportions than men. Climate change is a good example of this. Climate change affects everything on this planet, however when we consider the impact on men and women, it disproportionately affects women. This is because women make up a greater proportion of the poor and as a result are more likely to live in vulnerable geographical areas. They are also more likely to be responsible for providing food for their families, and so, as food production is vulnerable to climate change, women and the role they play in their families and communities are more likely to be affected. Women are also less represented among the people who have decision-making power in relation to responding to or preventing the effects of climate change. So climate change is a new threat to human rights but one which affects women more than men.

Many of the root causes of threats to women's rights have remained the same, and persisted over time. These causes are familiar and deep-rooted; they are things like negative attitudes, false knowledge and socio-cultural practices. These underlying causes continue to manifest themselves in new ways, like harassment on the internet. Our mothers, aunts and grandmothers know harassment, but now it has new space to spread. So not a new threat, but a new way of experiencing those old threats.



But what are the new threats to women specifically, the threats which our foremothers didn't think of because these threats simply weren't around in their time.

In my opinion one of the greatest current problems that women face is the inequitable distribution of women's rights. Here in Aotearoa, thanks to many strong women who have gone before me, I have many rights which women in other places still don't have. I believe women who have rights have an obligation to use that power in support of other women achieving rights of their own. An example of this is vividly burned in my memory. I saw a film, depicting a young lesbian feminist speaking at an Aotearoa women's convention in the 70's. She was a guest speaker from the U.S.A. and she chose to give up her time on the stage so that a group of local feminist Māori women could speak. Her point was that someone had done the same thing for her once and it was time she surrendered some of her 'limelight' to shed light on another group of women whose struggles were facing far greater challenges.



So, I'm also aware that the more I advocate, the less the advocacy of other women is heard. I am not advocating that women should stop speaking their minds. If that happened the first people to occupy the newly created silence would most likely be men. I'm just saying that we must take care that exercising our rights doesn't come at the expense of other women. I don't believe that rights themselves should be considered a finite resource, but the stuff our rights provide us with access to (such as property, income, opportunity, voice, representation) are finite. There is only so much to go around and I believe that where possible it should be distributed equitably.

From my perspective this means that one of the greatest new threats to women is forgetting or dismissing the need for feminism in the first place. There are many people, particularly young women, who believe feminism has done its dash, that it has achieved its goals and that rowdy feminists should now quietly retire. This is why Muse selected this theme. Yes, much has been achieved. I can vote, make reproductive choices, own property and hold leadership positions in my community. But there are many places where these rights which I am so accustomed to are not part of women's realities. In some countries where women do have a voice, many are still fighting to have the same rights which we in New Zealand take for granted. In some countries women have little protection under the law as they are considered property of their husbands or fathers. In Syria and Pakistan women are still victims of honour killings. In Afghanistan if women don't have permission from their husbands, they are not legally allowed to have jobs. For crying out loud, just recently in Turkey a 16-year old girl was buried alive because she had been talking to boys. *

But it's not just the Middle East where women's rights are under threat. In the U.S.A. many states are reversing landmark legislation which provides women with legal access to safe abortions. In Aotearoa women continue to experience violence, discrimination and are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics.

The more women we can help empower and embolden, the stronger all women will become. The more women we can get on the stage, the louder all our voices will be and the bigger the stage will

WHAT are THE NEW THREATS to WOMEN'S rights?

become. As women with rights, I believe we have an obligation to display solidarity across all boundaries which exist between women, including cultural, ethnic, geographical, financial and those of mental and physical health and ability.

I believe that while women in other places are facing (and fighting) erosion of their rights, we are all experiencing threats to our rights. A familiar phrase reminds us that 'the personal is political' and it applies in this instance too. The personal experiences of other unknown women are my political campaign as well. What is happening to women elsewhere is also happening to me, and to us, collectively.

This is my call for a return to true collectivism and communalism. A call for us all to reach beyond what's convenient and to contribute to the achievement of rights for all women, in all places, at all times. Even though many battles have been won in our own lives, for many women the fight is not over by a long shot. If we forget the need for feminism, if we become complacent, we are abandoning those women who need us the most, those who are most vulnerable. So to my fellow feminists I say use those hard-won rights, and the benefits we enjoy as a result of those rights, to support the fight of other women, both locally and globally, so that they too can increase self-determination in their lives.

* Information sourced from Human Rights Watch and BBC World.

Don't Worry, it's Only Temporary

- By Melody Thomas -

When I was a teenager I was a demon-child. I snuck out and got wasted at an age that shocks me now. I cut myself, mostly because my friends were doing it. I hated my body, and treated it accordingly – stuffing myself with sugary junk food – which of course only led me to hate it more. I had careless sex with boys who, in retrospect, didn't deserve to be with me. I was expelled at 14 for hitting my principal in the head with a tennis ball as she took the podium during assembly (ok so I'm still kinda proud of that one...). I was helpless and hopeless. I couldn't see anything special about myself or my future. I just didn't see the point.

I was sent to dozens of counsellors, each one older and more out-of-touch than the one before. I spent those sessions counting the leg hairs that poked through their woollen stockings and making up elaborate stories just to see how much I could shock them.

Needless to say the principal at my second High School was not a fan of mine. When, in seventh form, it began to look like I might be getting the grades for "Dux" she set out on a full-on mission to prevent it. I reacted in my usual way: cutting classes, smoking weed in the bathrooms and really just going out of my way to prove her right in my unworthiness for the academic title. Then one day, as I was deciding whether or not to head in to school for the day, I found an unmarked envelope in my letterbox bearing nothing other than my name on the front. The letter inside changed my life forever, and it went like this:

Dear Melody,

I need you to listen up. I mean really listen. You're a bloody tricky person to get through to, but you're going to have to trust me on this one. One day, soon enough, you will LOVE your body. One day, soon enough, you will be proud of who you are. One day, soon enough, you

will look in the mirror and see yourself as others do, and you will smile. Don't ask me how I know this, I just do.

*There are better ways to rebel than to get wasted, sleep around and wag school. When you do these things not only do you end up damaging yourself, but you make yourself an easy target for the authority figures you're striking out against. Authority figures know how to deal with people who openly stand up and yell a great big "F**K YOU!!" against all they stand for, they get it all the time. What they aren't so good at dealing with is quiet, intelligent rebellion. If you really wanna piss them off, prove them wrong! Study in secret and pass all your exams with seemingly no effort! Pash as many foxy boys as you want, but don't give them everything until they prove they deserve it! Go out, drink a couple of beers, enjoy a live band and stay up til the wee hours dancing and chatting to DJs, instead of passing out and vomiting on yourself in a corner!*

There are big fights to be fought in this world, and not nearly enough strong women to do the fighting. Most companies are run by impenetrable and frustrating wanky old-boys-clubs, our planet is being run into the ground and innocent nations are being destroyed by imposed warfare. This world needs more onto-it, grounded, sassy and confident women because God knows the boys aren't doing the best job. It's not an easy fight. Quiet, well thought out rebellion is much more difficult than the out-and-proud rebellion most of us adopt in adolescence. But when you're down and

out and feeling blue, like there's not a lot of point continuing, remind yourself that it's only temporary. Everyone who ever did anything important at some time felt overwhelmed by what was at stake... you'll only ever be stress and sadness-free if you're doing something that doesn't really matter to you. And things have a tendency of coming right in the end anyway.

Before I go there's a couple more things I need to mention - because there are always going to be people who take pleasure in telling you you can't, especially when they're nervous that you can.

First, Ignore the Hype. Television, magazines, big shiny advertisements on billboards and the sides of buses - they'd like to have you believe you're not sexy if you're not thin, blonde and big breasted. You're sexy if you think you're sexy. As Sophia Loren once said, "Sex appeal is fifty percent what you've got and fifty percent what people think you've got." And secondly, Ignore the Bitches. Avoid false friendships from the get go and surround yourself only with truly loving, caring and beautiful girls. These girls are the only ones that will stick around, so the others just don't matter. Tell your friends they're beautiful, be there for them when they need you and avoid gossip - with strong and loyal sisters surrounding you you'll be invincible.

I'd wish you luck Melody, but I happen to know already that you're going to be just fine. I know that because I am you - and right now you're a kick-arse 25-year-old woman with big successes under her belt and even bigger plans for the future. Get out there and grab life by the throat - because whether you think you can or think you can't, you're bound to be right.

*Take care,
Lots and lots of love,
Melody*

And so I did it. I practised a different kind of rebellion that involved a convincing outward show of "I don't give a shit" with something quite different going on below the surface. On waking in the mornings I went running at the beach, stripping off for a skinny-dip in the surf to cool my skin at the end. I still cut some classes because I was determined to look like I wasn't trying, but every day when I got home, I studied. I studied my arse off. And in the end I got Dux. The principal refused to shake my hand when I accepted the award, but my friends and the other teaching staff gave me a standing ovation.

Now I am a believer in the uncanny, but even I wouldn't believe it possible to really receive a letter from your future self. However there's no doubt that it's an apt comparison. One day something just changed, and who's to say the voice I followed on that day almost a decade ago wasn't the voice of this stronger, more grounded me, calling back.

We need to wake up to this inner monologue, and we need to talk to today's young women so they can start to hear their own voices.

Because in a sea of voices screaming "you can't do that!" "you're worth it (but only if you buy this lipstick)" and the ever-alluring Courtenay Place chant of "get your tits out for the boys," it's getting harder and harder to sort the real stuff from the nonsense. We need to learn to strip back the white noise and mute those channels whose only motive is to keep us quiet and hopeless, and then we can really begin to live our lives according to our own desires and on our own terms. Until we can well and truly rid our lives of the junk mail, it's a guarantee that the life-changing letter from your kick-arse future self will remain eternally lost in transit.



Individualism

– a New Threat to Women's Rights?

By Melody Nixon

Historically there have been a variety of methods used to subjugate women. In the twentieth century the 'nuclear family' is an example of this. Within the prescribed confines of this social structure, women and men have been assigned particular roles. For women, these roles have often resulted in domestic servitude, where personal worth is created through the serving of others' needs, rather than one's own. Coupled with the arrival of suburbia and capitalism, women have become ever more isolated, alienated from the public communities and networks generally afforded to men.

In the twenty-first century there may be a few more women working outside the home and generally living more fulfilling lives, but are women any less isolated? The threat may not, in this case, be the nuclear model of the family so much as a culture of individualism, where, in the struggle to attain equal status in society with men, women are captured by the success-driven and dog-eat-dog world of male modernity, which includes the belief in the power of the individual. That is, notions that one person alone can change history – that the glory of achievement lies in one person's heroism, not in the results of their work or the work of their peers.

For example, as LT Louie discussed in Issue 2 of Muse, in her article "The Myth of One: Some Thoughts on the Media Coverage of Rosa Parks," in the New Zealand school system we have been imbued with the idea that one person, and one person alone, can change history. Rosa Parks was touted as a heroine who one day just happened to decide she'd had enough, and her choice to sit down on a particular seat on a bus was enough to change history. The fact that Rosa Parks was part of a group of black women and men who had been meeting and planning protest action for some time seems to have been filtered out. This demonstrates that consciously or not, New Zealand school children are taught ideas that 'fit' with their own culture with the intention of turning school children into productive, working adults.

It's the 'divide and conquer' rule of leadership on a grand scale – affecting not just communities, but entire Western, liberal countries. Encouraging people to be individuals is one way that to date has served the organs of state well. We see this individual ideology repeated in the current control of climate change protest and the pandering to individual selfishness (why should I give up anything?) to shift the focus away from our collective fate.

In resistance, let's shift the discourse away from individualism, and from stories about one person changing history, and from everyone being 'different.' Herstory from now on could be shaped by groups of women, who want to work together to make connections and to strengthen one another, and whose sole purpose is not to out-shine the others around her. Working together may be portrayed as less 'glamorous', but it's a hell of a lot more fun, effective, and sustainable than striving alone for one's own ideals.

Let's talk about making connections between women. Let's discuss the work that we're all doing, collectively and as a united group, rather than our own individual successes and failures. And let's be friends with the women around us, not their competitors. Let's give the next woman we see a smile, rather than a critical stare. She might just be our next friend and conspirator in the making.

Little Red

Holding lies in your mouth
Like stones
They settle to your belly

You wolf
Lying in your bed
Spreading it on thick
Buttered bread
Milk puddles

You lie
You lie
But I see through
Your slips and cracks

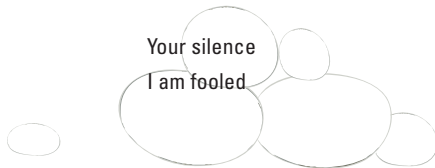
This is the last time
I promise

Making no more new lies
Old weary words
Tripping out my mouth
Not the skipping fresh lies
Of yesterday

Holding stones in your mouth
Lies in your belly

You wolf

Your silence
I am fooled



~ Ann-Marie Keating

Self as Commodity

– a Postmodern Threat to Womankind

By Brooke Rae

We live in an ominous time! Like our foremothers, we continue to face age-old threats of violence and discrimination, yet in addition to these threats, I see new dangers that women are faced with. These new threats are seemingly more subtle and wrapped in glossy exteriors to confuse and seduce us into joining the latest craze.

Society's validation of the commoditisation of self is one example which illustrates the new threats faced by women in the twenty-first century. Although the concept has been discussed for some time in economic theory*, it is evident that in recent years, the hype of 'self as commodity' is infesting our everyday lives on a very personal level.

An example of the seriousness of this cultural phenomenon can be seen in the actions of the young New Zealand student who recently auctioned off her virginity to the highest bidder in the hope of funding her university degree. The personal sale of a woman's virginity certainly gives an ethically-questionable new spin to the excessively used paradigm 'sex sells'. This young woman was not the first to endeavour such a public sale of her body: Sarah Di Muno, a 29 year old virgin from the USA, went public asking for assistance in losing her virginity before her 30th birthday. Needless to say, this story was picked up by the glossy gossip mags, who began to act as Miss Di Muno's pimp, trying to pawn her off to some 'deserving' bachelor.

Women are being force-fed so much crap about theories of self-preservation and maintenance of beauty and youth. This cultivates serious health issues such as eating disorders and suicides for

those who are particularly vulnerable to such ideology. Pop and fan culture are so dominant in our society that it is apparent some females are beginning to lose their own sense of self to the jungle of product-identities fighting for their attention and money.

We must, then, articulate and spread a healthy discourse to counter this threatening ideology. We must work to educate women that strength of spirit, intelligence, pride and compassion are the true means of self-preservation and maintenance. We must work as a constant counter-force to the seriously dangerous, stereotypical images of the airbrushed women that we are exposed to on a daily basis. Megan Fox is illustrative of this point: in a recent interview she stated that, "all women in Hollywood are known as sex symbols. You're sold, and it's based on sex. The interviewer added that with Fox, "it's not a conversation but a presentation. Megan Fox, according to Megan Fox, is all an act made for Hollywood that reinforces stereotypes and prejudices."

As a society we are sold the notion of freedom through consumption, hence we focus on materialistic desire. We gorge ourselves on this incessant need to 'sell' ourselves for the best possible price. In turn we have lost the awareness of the intrinsic worth of humanity and nature that goes beyond monetary value. The case of Susan Boyle symbolises the excess of an industry built on the exploitation of what critics call 'disposable people'. An influential Hollywood website, the wrap.com, published an investigation into what headline-writers are calling the "Truman Show-syndrome". It revealed that, "at least 11 participants on real-life TV shows have recently

committed suicide." The seriousness of the dangers of the commodity self are everywhere around us.

Women, like these, need our help. Being saturated by ideology of self as commodity erodes the essence of the feminist struggle for women's collective dignity, strength and pride. This is a serious threat to all women! We must now move towards an age of collectivism – an era of collective strength, pride and purpose. We must educate ourselves and others on how to critically evaluate the media and the various damaging ideologies we are engulfed by, in order to create

a healthier ideology that we wish to portray. We must live together in mutual respect and admiration. We must learn from each other, grow together and build harmonious communities where women feel comfortable and confident in expressing their true selves.

***Marxist theory states that** *"commodity fetishism is a state of social relations, said to arise in capitalist market-based societies, in which social relationships are transformed into apparently objective relationships between commodities or money."* – (en.wikipedia.com)



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Re-Membering feminism

By Vic Crockford

The F-WORD It's a little bit scary (and a little bit hairy). Most women won't admit to having tried it. Nor will many men. We have grown up with it in the water, but we try to deny its existence. It is stereotyped, put-down, belittled and sneered at. It is misrepresented; its death has been heralded by mainstream media more times than is possible to count. But it is surviving (just): Feminism.

Feminism is arguably in its Third Wave, so why is the old girl still mistreated and misunderstood?

Writing as a middle-class, heterosexual, Pakeha young woman I can obviously only offer a limited answer to that question. However, I do believe the principal issue is that politics and culture are disconnected.

We are so often told that we are living in the age of the post-modern, and meta-narratives such as feminism are irrelevant, even dangerous. This post-society provides us with a veritable delicatessen of culture from which women can pick and choose their identities: queer; straight; I-like-boys-and-sometimes-girls; white; black; tattooed; frilly-dress-and-combat-boots; kimono-wrapped-and-eating-burgers; big-guns-with-pink-streaks; and pins-on-heels, to name just a few.

While I don't debate the importance of questioning 'universal truths', this shift to the idea of identity selection has contributed to an

assumption that choice and privilege are social commodities which can be gained if sought. Women and men look to the so-called sisterhood wielding power from the top echelons of legal and political institutions in NZ, and many are led to ask 'what can feminism do for me when equality seems to be visibly attained?' Does feminism not challenge my right to wear lipstick? Does it not dictate that I throw out the razor and the tampon and embrace menstrual ceremonies? Does it not point to my heterosexuality as a form of oppression? Does it not castigate me for reading Vogue? These commonly-voiced perceptions are symptomatic of a society in which political movements are de-valued and the cultural deli has been heralded as the provider of choice and, that much-vaunted concept, empowerment.

I argue that the everyday politics pushed to the surface and into the mainstream by Second Wave feminists has been obscured and that a rebalancing of politics and culture is necessary. I do not argue that we need to return to some mythical 'good old days' of feminism. Feminism has diversified into many different colourful parts, and we should embrace this. I am emphasising the need to collect those fragmented parts and bind them using the glue that has always held feminism together: women's lives.

So does that mean that someone with a Sex and the Cityesque 'women on top in the bed (with a pink duvet on it) and the boardroom (while wearing nail polish)' approach is a legitimate contender for an 'I am a feminist' badge? Yes, if the politics of feminism are a part of her cultural discourse.

Feminist political analysis suggests that the 'glass ceiling' is a reality in both the private and public sectors; that women's reproductive rights are by no means a given in NZ and are in fact totally absent in many countries around the world; that the virgin/whore dichotomy is not an outdated notion but the tool of a society which still devalues women; that pink-collar industries are at risk in the global recession, as are women's welfare programmes. These facts should not be feared, they should be embraced and used as tools for continuing to reform the status quo. And you can wear six inch heels or plait your armpit hair while consciousness-raising, if those are choices you make.

Disparate values do not mean that a common goal is unattainable. While gender is a choice, society's expectations around gender roles are not. Let's "re-member"^[1] the movement and reclaim our sense of personal politics.

[1] hooks, b 'In our glory: photography and black life' in Wells, L 2003 The Photography Reader, p 265



Interview with Jordan Reyne

Melody Nixon, one of our Muse writers, catches up with Kiwi musician and writer, Jordan Reyne, to talk about her latest project. Jordan Reyne is most well known for her dark alternative folk music that has been described as "a jewel of industrial folk," "fascinating and intense" and "a soundtrack to the cinema of unease." Her fifth and potentially final album, *How the Dead Live*, was released in June 2009.



You grew up near Westport on the west coast of Te Wai Pōnamu, and for your latest album 'How the Dead Live' you returned to the area to live and work in Karamea. I understand you even spent six weeks living at a DOC site. What drew you back to the West Coast?

I think I was looking to re-ground myself at the time. I remember having a very strong bond with the land

and the sea as a child, and there is really nothing like the raw beauty of the west coast surf and wilderness. It is so energizing, but at the same time it confronts you with yourself. I think I wanted to see if I could handle that sort of confrontation.

Can you tell us about your experiences there, working on 'How the Dead Live'?

It was nothing like anything I had experienced before. It's hard to describe why, in terms of the feelings involved, but in practical terms, I had a DOC hut with a bed and desk, and my studio (a laptop, keyboard and some microphones) was in an old building where they stored farm machinery. I had an internet connection, but there was no phone coverage and time really did seem to slow down. There were no distractions either, which meant I could spend ages banging old agricultural implements together to see if they made a nice sound. There was a fantastic museum there with letters from some of the early settlers, ships' logs, and diaries from the people that would go over to Collingwood to get food. So it really was a very immersive experience.

When I found some of Susannah Hawes's letters, [the woman settler who is the subject of Jordan's latest album] I was struck with the idea of how it would have been to have come to a far-off country when it was still forested, having been promised a new life in a land of plenty, and how harsh it would have been to do all that work only to be isolated from everyone you ever knew. It struck me as incredibly brave, but also a very lonely experience. Somehow that resonated with me.

How has the feeling of this area – its landscape, sounds and people – affected or impacted your music?

It affected it in every way! The idea of the project was to capture the feel of the West Coast at the time when the pioneers arrived – which was the 1870s. Karamea is one of those rare places that

has not changed such a great deal since the land was cleared. I always try and keep any characters I write about, or invent, within a sort of 'sonic context', and this was more than easy in Karamea because I felt so immersed in the sounds and sights and smells of the place. All that old farm technology and the sounds of booming surf and the sort of things Susannah would have heard around her, were fairly easy to find. I wanted them to be ever-present in the music too, because they are inescapable when you are there. They are the backdrop to (and probably foundation of) your life.

What brought you to Susannah's story?

I was in the Karamea museum reading and came across a book which reproduced some of her letters. Her writing style drew me in. There were other people who wrote about their experiences, but generally they did it in an emotionally detached 'stiff upper lip' kind of way. So I didn't get anything really tangibly human or personal from it. Susannah wrote well and gave an incredible impression of what it was like to arrive in such a desolate place, with no certainty that one would survive.

What was it that inspired you to create music about Susannah?

Her quiet bravery. The fact that she was overlooked like so many remarkable women are. She wasn't all about glory or heroic deeds from the perspective of onlookers. She was staunch and did what most of us do – she got on with it, even though it was a hard, sometimes bitter existence out there.

Do you seek specifically to tell stories about women in your music? If so, why?

Quite likely! Though I think I just follow what seems remarkable to me – or what resonates with me somehow. In terms of the pioneers, there are enough stories of guys on horses trekking through the hills to get supplies that it's not really so interesting to me anymore. Susannah was interesting on her own merits – she took risks. She was actually from a fairly privileged background, and rather than simply being satisfied with a comfy,

middleclass existence, she went to the other side of the world on little more than a promise, and knowing she would possibly never see her family again.

Whether that was her idea or not, she did it, and she wrote eloquently enough about it to make it real for the reader. She was quietly brave – staunchly brave. I could have chosen a 'bold deeds on horses' type of thing, but it just seemed a bit naff. Most people are quietly brave, and it is more relatable to me for that reason.

Can you tell us about other women's stories or female themes that you have threaded throughout your past work, or that you intend to explore in the future?

In The Ironman there is the theme of order imposing itself on 'chaos'. It's all pretty metaphysical there for the most part, but it is more obvious on tracks like 'The Washing Machine Song' – especially in the video. The main character is a woman just trying to get on with her life, and this washing machine follows her about reminding everyone around her that she is a woman and that this fact should mean certain things. In the interview scene, for example, there is a guy interviewing her who dismisses her because of the washing machine (i.e. her gender).

In my opinion, gender is socially constructed and socially enforced/reinforced. It is a learned thing, and a performance. When you do the performance as per the script, you get applause, if not you are met with looks of confusion, or even hostility. In the song there is the idea that the main character's gender is a social expectation that she herself is bewildered by. She doesn't really get why the washing machine is shadowing her, and is perplexed by people's reaction to it.

Do you see your use of herstory in music as a political statement? As something else?

Yes, though not purely from the angle of it being herstory. 'Bold Deeds' thing has traditionally been used to make sense of our pasts and make the human experience seem logical and causative – a good narrative somehow. It's a misrepresentation. There are many things that are chaotic, arbitrary,

or a matter of good/bad luck – in life as well as in history. Even if we DO partake in bold deeds, the representation of those deeds is subject to political agenda. Being a woman, as we all know makes it far less likely that you will be seen as causative, or seen at all (particularly when you do something considered atypical for your gender assignment).

In the end, most of us live ordinary lives, but who is to say that someone won't come along a hundred years later and randomly declare your life interesting (or, as the character History does in the album, uninteresting).

It's now 13 years since you released your first solo album, Birds of Prey. You are a very accomplished musician. Yet you said in a past interview (with Brannavan Gnanaligam of The Lumiere Reader) that your latest album is to be your last – that making it as a musician here in Aotearoa is too hard and thankless a task. Can you tell us what the challenges have been?

Most of the challenges have come from being in New Zealand itself. It is a small place with a small market, so if you aren't aiming at the mainstream, you aren't likely enough to sell records, pull advertisers, get much support from radio, press, record companies (even the smaller ones) or the sort of organisations syndicated to them (like some of the record store chains, and NZ on Air). It is an industry riddled with gatekeepers too, because it is such a small country. If those gatekeepers don't like you (and several don't like me) then it's quite easy to end up feeling overlooked and powerless. The good news is that there is the entire rest of the world to be in. And the importance of this is emphasised by many of the musicians who get out of here early enough for it to be an enabling thing. My advice to anyone wanting to do non-mainstream music in this country is to leave as soon as possible. Really.

Do you think your experiences of the music scene in Aotearoa have been affected by your gender? If so, how?

Oh yes. I remember being 19 and walking out of a meeting with Festival Records, having said I didn't want to be marketed like a girly girl, or be on the covers of my CD (as seems to be mandatory for female artists). We had talked about leaving the

emphasis on mood and music, and projecting a stronger image than the usual fawning thing. Anyway, I thought they seemed totally ok with it, until half an hour later when I got a call from the Indie label I was actually signed to saying I had 'completely fucked that one up' and that they thought I was mad and awful. It hurt me for years, but I learned fairly quickly what counted in the (small) world of NZ record labels. They don't want to take risks. They want to repeat a marketing process that has worked in the past – again because the market is so small. They use the lowest common denominator formulas that were proven to work in the States or the UK, because it is a much more sure bet. What's ridiculous though is that they then pat themselves on the back for having shown everyone they can 'do it just as well as the internationals' when essentially what they have done is worse than uninteresting. It's lazy, usually reinforces disempowering gender stereotypes, and is very very counter to innovation.

Where to from here?

I don't know!

Do you intend to continue to explore and interweave women's stories into the works you produce?

In the writing, most certainly!! Both books have female protagonists. The first is about a gravedigger who works for History (History being a female but in the employ of various 'shareholders') who must listen to the tales of the undead. In the second book, the main character is a grouchy old woman who, in old age, decides she has had enough of society and how it works, and goes time-travelling to find an old friend.

Muse looks forward to seeing more of Jordan's work. We would like to thank Jordan and we wish her the very best in what ever amazing adventure she decides to pursue next.



MY KIND OF ALICE

~
Alice in Wonderland

Reviewed by Karin Brown

~
[Warning, contains spoilers]

The first thing you should know if you are going to watch this film is that it is not the classic Alice-the-little-girl-in-Wonderland tale. It's actually the tale of Alice-the-young-adult-in-Underland. It starts out regularly enough. She chases a rabbit and falls down a hole, drinks and shrinks, eats and grows. But this time she is escaping a wimpy suitor with delicate digestion and soon after she lands, the Underland characters (who don't really believe that she is Alice) are captured by the Red Queen (a fabulously petulant brat with a speech impediment: 'That's my CWOWN!' she shrieks.) Alice is a bit of a wet rag for a large portion of the film but she goes through typical pubescent self-questioning: prompted by the scornful caterpillar asking the famous question, "who are you?" and she finds her inner steel. I like that she doesn't end up in the arms of a man and that the movie ends with her life an unwritten book full of promise of adventure. The movie is, of course, fantastical and whimsical and colourful, hence very, very typical Tim Burton, complete with darkness and a Hatter who is almost dangerously mad and an eyeball-skewering Dormouse.

Justice System vs Weatherston

By Portia

It disgusted me. But, it was like a train wreck, a car crash, I couldn't look away. In this case, I couldn't stop reading. I wanted to know what would happen. It's a shameful part of NZ's criminal history – worse than Bain or Lundy or Burton. It's the murder of Sophie Elliot. Young, smart, positive and with a successful career ahead of her. Very pretty. Had lots of friends. Just like me, or my friends, or people I know. A normal, outgoing 20-something, brutally murdered by her boyfriend. For me, the worst part was this: "Weatherston, 33, admits killing his ex-girlfriend Elliott, 22, in a bedroom attack at her Dunedin home on January 9 last year. He denies it was murder, however, saying he was provoked." Provocation? She made you do this? She acted in a way to seriously provoke you into KILLING HER?

Ok then, so what did she do?


She was beautiful. She was smart. She was sexually forward, she knew what she wanted and she told him what she thought, she talked about her ex-boyfriends and she got a job that was better than his. And for this, he stabbed and cut and sliced her 216 times? 216 times? Because she deserved it? Because she provoked him somehow? It wasn't premeditated your Honour, I just had the knife in my bag for my own protection... That makes me sick. Seriously. And what is his explanation, his response? The media told me: Weatherston was a "very controlled person" and "didn't wear his heart on his sleeve". He complained about Elliott's attention-seeking "behaviour" that he claimed was to "try and make him jealous." "Sophie was the type of person who would say what was on her mind." Weatherston's relationship with Elliott seemed to be "exciting and dramatic." What else did the media say? "She was very forward. More forward than I had ever encountered before. In terms of....flirtation, in terms of her interest in me,"

Weatherston said. "She said I could call her at any stage." "I was very flattered by it of course. She was very engaging. She had a lot energy.....a lot of zest." Since when did a woman being forward, saying what was on her mind, and wanting the attention of her partner equate to provocation to murder her? Since when did flirting equate to a justification to kill and mutilate?

From what I could tell from his testimony, it was my opinion that Weatherston was a megalomaniac. Wikipedia defines this as a term for behaviour characterised by an obsession or preoccupation with wealth, power, genius, or omnipotence— often generally termed as having delusions of grandeur. "Megalomania denotes an obsession with having and/or obtaining, grandiosity and extravagance (especially in the form of great fame and popularity, material wealth, social influence or political power, or more than one or even all of the aforesaid)." You can certainly say that Mr Weatherston had an obsession or preoccupation with genius – his own, that is. And his fame, once his story was told in the papers.

I could imagine him agonising what parts of his career to highlight on the stand first, which parts of his personality he should accentuate. He probably loved being on the stand, because he could tell everyone, the nation – the world even – how smart, intelligent, tortured he was... what a poor individual he was, with an overbearing girlfriend who treated him badly and who not only embarrassed him but made his poor little penis shrink when she said mean things and made him feel like he wasn't as smart as her.

Constable Cunningham asked him "What have you done?" The male replied "I killed her." That was said in a calm, normal tone and the male appeared



calm and reserved. He did not appear shaken and looked in control of himself. After ordering the man to lie on the floor and handcuffing him, Constable Cunningham asked "Why did you kill her?" The man replied "The emotional pain she has caused me over the past year."

It was embarrassing really, if you think of all the women who are actually, genuinely provoked into attacking their partners every year because of actual emotional and physical abuse – but who didn't succeed because the defence of provocation did not accept a "slow burning" provocation. And if you think of the women who deal with the cycle of abuse, who survive battered women syndrome, who struggle to have the courts acknowledge their condition. If Clayton Weatherston had succeeded with this feeble attempt at using the "provocation" defence, I don't know what that would have done to society or the justice system.

What's worse, from my perspective, is that this trial was actually not the "Clayton Weatherston trial" (although he would have loved that): it was the "Trial of Sophie Elliot". While Clayton Weatherston appeared to have planned the whole thing to the last detail, Sophie was the one on trial.

Her behaviour, her sexuality, her actions, the way she interacted with Clayton were all spread out for the judge and jury to cast aspersions and their judgement on.

But the problem was she was not here to defend herself – she was, and is, dead. Stabbed by the person she probably trusted most, mutilated in the areas that made her most beautiful. How could he really explain that?

Whereas Louise Nicholas was able to take the stand and say "this is what happened," Sophie couldn't do that from beyond the grave. All we had were witnesses pushing a particular theory that the defence wanted credit given to, one that said "Sophie was asking for it... the slut..."

While watching the trial I hoped to God that the Prosecution had strong evidence to counteract Clayton's emotional pleas of some twisted form of battered man syndrome. I'm not saying that this doesn't exist, of course, or that women cannot emotionally abuse their partners (male or female). I just don't think that Clayton is one of those men. I hoped, more than anything, that the judge and jury would see through his sham defence, and see him for the cold blooded murderer he is. Most of all, I hoped that they would lay to bed, once and for all, the myth that women deserve what they get when they are abused, yelled at, beaten, bruised and killed, for being forthright and forward. For speaking their mind, for being sexually active, and knowing what they want. It was with such relief that I heard the guilty verdict. Although I can't help wondering that this could happen again.

R.I.P. Sophie Elliot, you didn't die in vain. We will remember you.

Clayton Weatherston was found guilty of murder and sentenced to a minimum of 18 years imprisonment. Largely as a result of Clayton Weatherston's trial, the partial defence of provocation was abolished after the Crimes (Provocation Repeal) Amendment Act was passed on 26 November 2009. The Act repealed sections 169 and 170 of the Crimes Act 1961 relating to the statutory partial defence of provocation, and repealed the defence insofar as it had any effect at common law.

The Hoax/Trap of the NUCLEAR FAMILY

By Wendy Jackson and Karin Brown

The other day I challenged my friend to think of one woman she knows, who successfully and happily balances her relationship, household, career and responsibilities to her young children. Try as she might, she couldn't think of an example of one single woman, known to her, who hadn't made significant unwanted compromises along the way. This got us thinking and talking about why this might be, and we began questioning the role that social systems play in making these compromises necessary.

The isolated nuclear family is the primary household unit of our social system, and is a relatively recent societal development. It is argued that the nuclear family is encouraged and sanctioned by society because it acts as an effective economic unit. It not only sells us an unrealistic, unobtainable existence, but helps to fuel a consumerist society where small groups of people consume more of the earth's resources than they otherwise would if they were living in extended family groups and shared their possessions, their skills and time.

The goals of those living in an isolated nuclear family in a consumerist society are usually to own a home, have a relationship and have children.^[1] If you do not meet these three things simultaneously, the subtle question in people's minds may be 'What's wrong with her?' or assumptions like, 'She must not be into her career/kids/family'. Alternative adult female models are deemed to be 'eccentric', 'deviant', 'hippie' or given other derogatory labels. The all-important 'favourite (but childless) aunt' is not a model young girls aspire to be.

One of the reasons that women who are part of an isolated nuclear family feel that this happy, career/family balanced life is difficult to achieve is because they often don't have back-up or support systems in place – such as extended families – who can help when kids get sick, the partner goes away, they travel for work or they just plain need a break. For many women, following one's career path may require relocating away from the geographic base of the family of origin. Without the support of such people, all the responsibility sits on the primary caregivers or parents, and in many relationships this means the bulk of the burden sits on one person, often

the woman. This is, of course, particularly true for 'western' cultures, where the isolated nuclear family is the most commonly pushed model.

Another problem is that – in the context of the isolated nuclear family as the household unit – we are sold a model of 'adult woman' that is unrealistic and arguably, dangerous. We are expected to be all things to all people and not to need anyone else. The high value placed on privacy – the "isolated" part of the nuclear family – and the illusion of constant, impenetrable strength only make things harder. Moreover, it has become normal for work to encroach on family life since the introduction of remote computer access and cell phones; however, family life impinging on work is much less acceptable.

At the same time, women shouldn't be considered selfish because they "want it all." Indeed, this "all" is something men have had for decades (though surely some would argue that trying to have it all is not recommended or is untenable for anyone). What is different is that while women have conventionally made the necessary compromises to support men and to ensure that the isolated nuclear family remains somewhat intact, the reverse tends not to be the case. Some even argue that women's supporting role has not been seen as a compromise or sacrifice; rather it is a foregone conclusion, only to be expected. Indeed, neither men nor women would have to make unwanted compromises if society – and in particular, our economic system – were designed to be more supportive of and conducive to the establishment of other family models and formulations.

Ultimately this means that society's emphasis on the isolated nuclear family as the primary household unit is not only a threat to women's rights, but in fact a threat to women's wellbeing, as in the end something has to give.

[1] We suggest that increasingly there are additional expectations on women to be good neighbours and certainly there is not-so-subtle pressure on some of us to be good feminists, which brings with it a whole other set of expectations. (Advocacy, protest, etc).

Alexandra's Project

DVD, 2003, Palace Films Australia

This controversial film is described as an "adult thriller" which explores the "sexual politics" of an unhappy Australian couple.

Perhaps the publicists knew that writing "feminist" on the blurb would lose them many potential viewers. But *Alexandra's Project* could be construed as a feminist film, and it certainly traces the edge of conventional feminist voice in the words of the disenfranchised housewife Alexandra (Helen Budday), who prepares to leave her husband, the beer drinking, womanising office manager Steve (Gary Sweet). "Sorry Steve," Alexandra says to herself in the mirror in the opening sequence, as she prepares to face him – and then vehemently spits at her own reflection. "Don't say sorry, ever. You are not sorry."

The film is thoroughly gripping and at several points challenging. The line between seduction and abuse is ridden carefully. We are encouraged to egg Alexandra on as she performs a strip-tease for her husband, for example, and then empathise with Steve's exasperation when she stops half way through. But then... Alexandra sits down carefully and begins to explain why she doesn't wear skirts or dresses around the house anymore, because Steve's probing hands have sought to grab her, to poke her and enter her relentlessly; she has had to change her behaviour, to restrict herself, in order to avoid his molestations. As the film progresses the many potentially 'sexy' images are subverted in this way, and we are shown their sinister undertow.

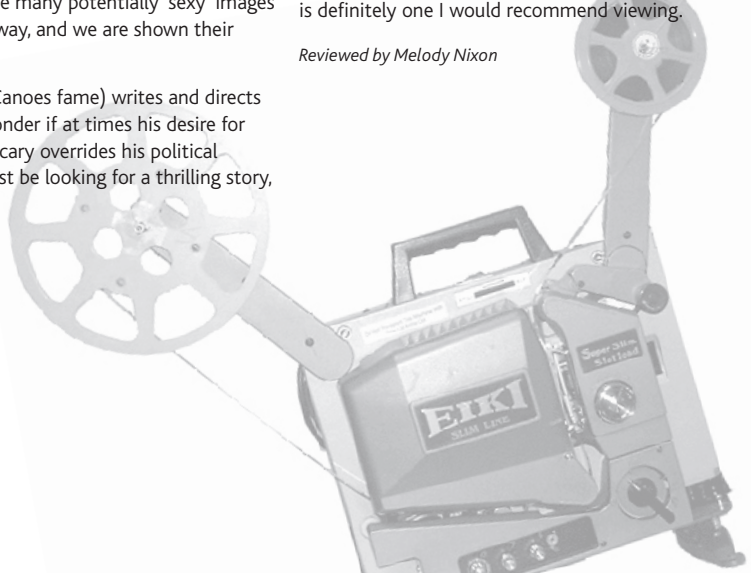
Rolf de Heer (of *Ten Canoes* fame) writes and directs *Alexandra's...* and I wonder if at times his desire for something sexy and scary overrides his political intentions. He may just be looking for a thrilling story,

and reflecting an issue that is eternal – the unhappy, trapped housewife – in a way that is somewhat new (her empowerment, and her escape). Nonetheless, the film has a powerful effect as it rebels against restricting notions of women as motherly, homely, caring, submissive. It is a delight to see a vicious, bolshy, determined woman tell her husband exactly what she thinks and feels and, after years of oppression, take control of her own life path, and even do it cruelly.

When de Heer introduces Alexandra as a sex worker, a whole new layer is added. This particular aspect of the film is hard to analyse from a feminist perspective, as it presents a woman who is sexually liberated but risks playing into misogynist attitudes about women being untrustworthy, cheating and sexually deviant. It also undermines Alexandra's credibility as a woman with talent and more to offer than her body. It certainly complicates the feelings I had for both characters.

While watching *Alexandra's...* I was torn between reactions of cynicism and complete enthralment. At times I felt the protagonist's cause was overstated and predictable, and even fell into cliché. After a few days had passed however, I realised that I had found it a very powerful film. It presents a story of revenge, and of justice, with a female character at the centre and a female character who comes out on top. Even with its contradictions and inconsistencies *Alexandra's Project* is definitely one I would recommend viewing.

Reviewed by Melody Nixon





Cranberry & Mandarin Loaf

Submitted by Jenn Jones

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups standard flour

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

50g butter

1/2 cup sugar

1 cup dried cranberries

1-2 teaspoons finely grated mandarin zest (or more if you like)

1 egg, beaten

1 cup milk

METHOD:

Sift flour, salt and baking powder in to bowl. Cut in butter until it resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Add sugar, cranberries and zest. Make into a soft dough with egg and milk. Pour into a greased 22 cm loaf tin. Bake at 180 degrees for 1 hour or until loaf springs back when lightly touched. Leave in tin for 10 minutes before turning out onto a wire rack.

A Woman I Dig: Rachel McAlpine

RACHEL MCALPINE is a New Zealand born author still living and writing here. I first came across her when I picked up a second hand copy of 'Farewell Speech'. This is a novel about the Suffragette movement in NZ and two of its pioneers: Kate Sheppard and Ada Wells (McAlpine's great-grandmother). It led me to other more fantastical novels such as 'The Limits of Green', 'Running Away from Home' and 'Humming', all set in NZ with feminist and environmental messages woven into warm tales. I found I connected with her novels because they dealt with important issues concerning the NZ environment (for example; saving Powelliphanta snails in Humming) and held on to feminist values, while remaining humorous.

Rachel McAlpine continues to be a strong female force in NZ literature. She has published 10 poetry books, 4 fiction novels, 2 children's books, 14 non-fiction books and numerous plays and radio shows. She now runs writing workshops and writes for the web, as well as writing about what it's like to grow old on her blog 'Old Lady Laughing'. I can't wait to read her latest book 'Scarlet Heels: 26 Stories About Sex' in which 'twenty-six women, young and old, talk about moments when sex (or abstaining from sex) changed their lives somehow, bringing clarity, change, or love'. Rachel McAlpine is also a member of the Crows Feet, a dance group for women over 35. I don't know Rachel McAlpine but I admire her for being a successful author while still writing with her values and herstory in mind.

References: www.writing.co.nz/index.htm

Have you ever been a feminist?

By Anna Hudson

"Of course I am dear," Mum said, when I asked if she was a feminist.

We were in her bedroom. Technically it was Dad's bedroom too. Technically it was Dad's house. But we all knew Mum had final say on pretty much everything that happened within its borders, right up to the garage where thick layers of grease and dust provided Dad with a shady sanctuary in which to build model airplanes and tinker on the car.

She was in front of the dresser skillfully flicking mascara over her lashes. Mum never left the house without doing her face, not even to prune the rose bushes or go next door for a cup of tea.

Tonight she was going on a march, a protest. Dad had told me and my brothers all about it. "You should be very proud of your mother," he'd said and he meant it. "She's taking a stand against a great injustice. It's not right women should be paid less than men. How would you feel if we gave you less pocket money just because you were a girl?" he'd asked. It was the wrong thing to say though because then my oldest brother said, "She should get less, she's the youngest."

And I said, "You should get less cos you're the stupidest." Then my oldest brother flicked a spoonful of green jelly over at me and I threw a piece of tinned peach at him

and things could have gotten pretty messy if Mum hadn't come home just then and sent us all upstairs to put our pyjamas on.

"Are you going to burn your bra?" I asked Mum. I was lying on the bed watching her. I loved watching Mum get ready to go out. My Mum was very fashionable. She had long black hair which she coiled and piled up into a bun, big dangly earrings, an orange mini dress, black knee high boots and a fur-trimmed green suede jacket. I thought my Mum was the most beautiful woman in the world. "No dear. I'm not going to burn my bra." Mum rubbed her lips together to smooth the bright red lipstick she had just applied.

"Why not?"

"You'll understand one day darling, when you've had four children."

I'd seen the feminists burning their bras on telly. They'd looked really angry, wild red-faced angry, not at all like Mum's angry which was cold and controlled.

"Are you going to leave Daddy?" I asked.

Mum stepped back from the mirror and turned to look at me.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"That's what happens when your Mum becomes a feminist. That's what happened to Tommy Prescott. His Mum became a



feminist and she ran off to join a commune and Tommy's father couldn't cope and now Tommy and his brothers have to live with their grandmother. And I don't want to live with Grandma. Her house smells and she has whiskers."

I sat up as I spoke and my eyes had started to tear up at the thought of poor motherless Tommy Prescott having to live with his grandmother. Mum sat down next to me and held my hands.

"Not all feminists leave their husbands," she said. "Mrs Williams is a feminist and so's Mrs Harcourt and Mrs Robson. They're all coming on the march and none of them are going to leave their husbands are they?"

I must have still looked unconvinced because Mum put an arm around me and kissed my forehead.

"I promise I am not going to leave you or your father. You know he's my Prince Charming and we're going to live happily ever after," she said, "if it kills us."

I gave her a hug and she smiled deep into my eyes. My Mum had a special smile for me that was like waking up on a Saturday morning and knowing you didn't have to go to school. She brushed her fingers through my hair and gently wiped the smudge of lipstick off my brow.

Then she stood up, straightening her coat and fixing a bright scarf over her hair so it wouldn't get too blown about on her way to the bus stop.

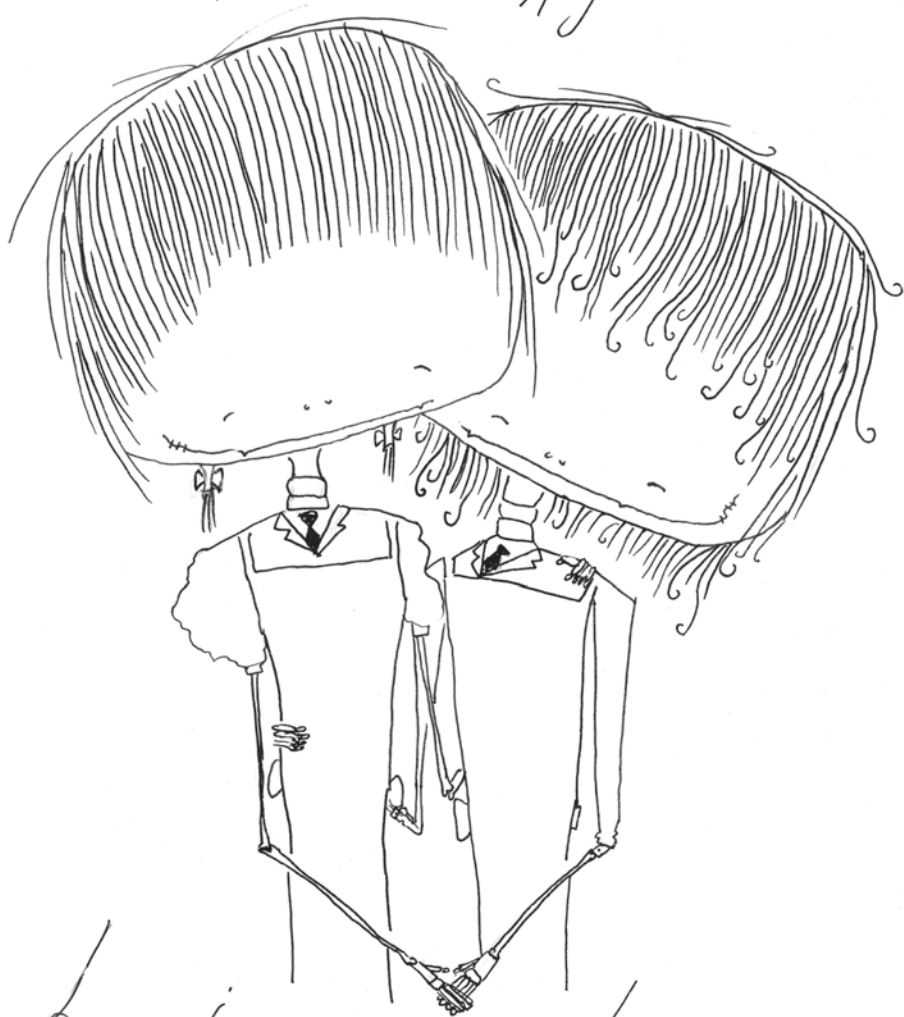
"Mum?"

"Yes dear."

"You know feminists wear jeans." My Mum didn't approve of jeans. I'd been nagging her to buy me a pair ever since Chloe next door had started wearing them. "Don't you think ... if we're going to be feminists ..."

"No dear." Mum waved me off the bed and ushered me out the door. "Nice girls don't wear jeans."

Alice & Angela



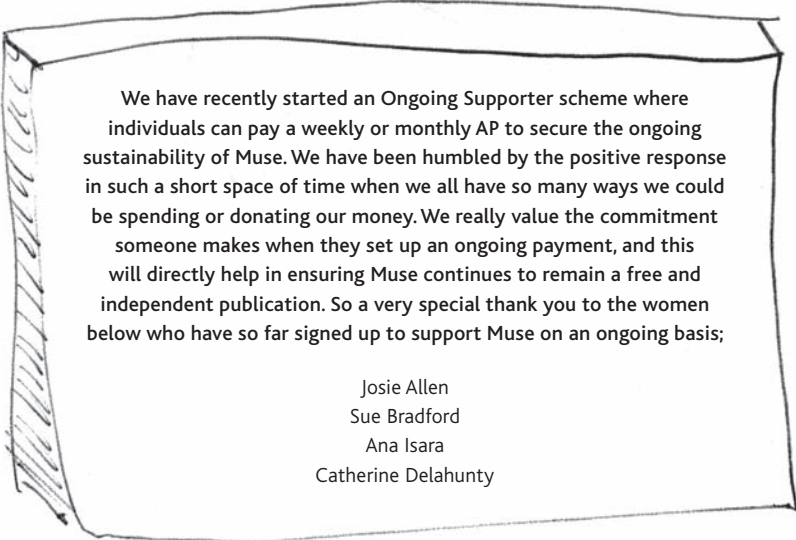
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Love

No matter who you are

Sketch 10.00

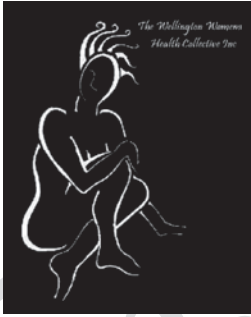
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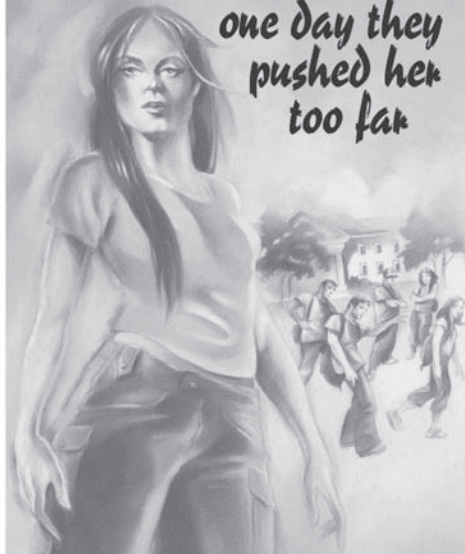
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