

# CHORES AT WORK



1 Who puts out the call to claim the rotten food in the fridge or have it binned ahead of their big fridge clean-out at your work?

- a) One of the PAs/EAs
- b) Someone different every time, men and women
- c) No one, we just keep moving the rotting food to the back

2 The dishes/dishwasher roster at your work was set up by:

- a) One of the managers
- b) A female staff member
- c) I have no idea

3 When someone is off sick on their dishes/chore day who covers it?

- a) There is a swap with the next person on the list
- b) Usually a female staff member
- c) No one, it is left for the cleaner

4 There is lots of catering to be put out for a big meeting, who takes care of it?

- a) One of the women in the office
- b) The manager running the meeting
- c) The EA to the manager running the meeting

5 Who organises the farewell for a leaving staff member?

- a) Their manager
- b) They have to organise it themselves if they are a woman but if they are a guy, one of the EAs
- c) The team EA/PA

6 Who organises the Secret Santa at Christmas?

- a) No one, thank God
- b) The team EA/PA
- c) It is shared each year with whoever wants to

## FUN QUIZ

7 What does the sign say in your office kitchen?

- a) 'Please tidy up after yourself and don't forget to do your dishes on your roster day'
- b) 'Please tidy up after yourself and remember - YOUR MUM DOESN'T LIVE HERE'
- c) 'Stop stealing the teaspoons or there will be none for the rest of the year'

8 Of the senior roles in your organisation, who is more likely to stay behind and help clean up after a catered function?

- a) the men
- b) the women
- c) both equally, possibly neither!

Scores - add your score for each question as below

1	a)1	b)3	c)2
2	a)3	b)1	c)2
3	a)3	b)1	c)2
4	a)3	b)1	c)2
5	a)1	b)3	c)2
6	a)2	b)3	c)1
7	a)1	b)3	c)2
8	a)1	b)3	c)2

Results!

18 - 24 - Your organisation is medieval! If you are a woman working there you are rushed off your feet with your job and organising food for other people's meetings and if you are a guy you don't know what all the fuss is about, it seems to all work out fine to you. The chores are almost always completed by those in lower valued roles and always by women. It's time to put your collective cloths down!

9 - 17 - You might like to convince yourself that all staff are equal at your work but you're not quite there yet. There is some sharing of the chores but it still ends up falling mostly to the women unless they make a big deal about it. It may be that the chores are being done so seamlessly that you don't even notice. Time to talk about it as a team.

0 - 8 - Where do you work and are there any jobs going? It seems that you are pretty close to chore-equity at your work. There may be a few issues now and then but on the whole the importance of the chores is recognised and valued. Its probably still worth checking in with your female colleagues or team as a whole to see how they feel.

*an interview with*

# JESSIE MOSS

*Jessie Moss knows a bit about the role of women in New Zealand's music industry. She wrote about it for her Honours in Gender and Women's Studies, and has lived it as a musician for seven years. Jessie has two great recent accomplishments under her belt, her band Jessie James and The Outlaws have just released their debut album 'The Price of Gum', and she's a new mum. Rose Stewart talked to Jessie about what it's like to be a woman musician in New Zealand today.*



*What's your experience as a woman in the NZ music industry?*

Women have to work harder to be both seen and heard, and work against the grain. I definitely feel I've had to prove myself before anyone took notice of me and took me seriously.

Somehow its a surprise if a woman is a great drummer, bassist, guitarist, as if its by chance, rather than that they have worked to get there, as you would! If you go anywhere with musicians, whether or not you are playing with them or managing them etc, it is assumed you are someone's girlfriend.

Loneliness is a feeling I've often had, of sticking out and not being 'one of the boys'. Most bands are boy bands, but they're never labeled as such. Feeling stupid comes up a lot. I don't have much technical knowledge and subsequently lack confidence to set up gear, fix it, buy it, run it. Talking to other women and watching them operate leads me to believe this is a common experience for women in the popular music industry.

*What changes would you implement if you could?*

Two main things. For women, the main barriers to being able to fully participate in the industry as men do are the fact that young girls are socialised away from things like technology, and motherhood. Girls need to be encouraged at a young age to explore technology, taught that

it is a positive and normal thing for them to do. This would allow for more confidence in a wider variety of expertise, leading to more options in the music industry should they enter it. They could be sound technicians, guitarists who burn it up with 6 pedals, kick arse drummers who know their gear, or lighting experts, heck even producers. As for motherhood, women have different experiences as parents to men, and as in all male dominated industries, there are few allowances for the mother who breastfeeds, collects children from school and needs to go to bed at 9pm. The industry is created by and for men. If this can change it will be a new industry, and what an industry it could be!

*What can men in the industry do to help a sister out? What actions can they take to help women empower themselves?*

Firstly men need to understand what makes it harder for women to make a career out of music. Only women can tell them this, so we need more organising, research and communication to make ourselves heard. Once they have an understanding, they need to just be quietly aware - to make allowances for women whose lives don't fit the current mould, and to actively change the mould as well. Simple things, explain how to do something technical instead of assuming a woman can't do it, and just doing it for her. Never say 'wow you're a good XXX for a



girl! We're not girls, we're woman, and we can be, and are, just as good as men. Technical skill has nothing to do with penises.

*What's it like being a mum and a muso?*

It's f-ing hard. I totally underestimated it. My baby is the most amazing thing, but the music industry is not set up for women. I didn't want to be just another woman who drops out of the industry because she's had kids. I believe the way our society is set up, it is hard for women to fit in any work and raise kids, let alone work in an industry as demanding, male-centred and time consuming as the music industry. Feeding and changing nappies in the wee hours doesn't work well with late night gigs.

I have a lot of knowledge about women and the music industry and now that I'm living it I know even more. Babies take up ALL your time. My partner is a fulltime musician, we are both juggling parenthood and music. As he is in a successful band, and I have to breastfeed, his music takes priority at the moment. We need money to live, and he makes the money at the moment. I thought I'd have so much time being pregnant and with a young baby, 'don't they just lie around anyway' – but I couldn't have been more wrong!

*Do you feel any pressure or expectations to be a sexual object from others but I guess also from yourself, based on what we see female musicians doing/being?*

Women are generally expected to be the singers, dancers or pretty side acts in bands. Watching other women in the industry, I would say there is a pressure to look a certain way. It is always noticed that Hollie Smith and Anika Moa have tattoos. So what? Heaps of people do. It's more that when a woman does or says something that is not considered 'feminine' in the industry, it is commented on.

I do know from my own research, and talking to friends, that when a woman is the only female in a band, her gender is noticed: "Whats it like being the ONLY woman in the band?" sort of questions.

*What advice would you give to young women considering this industry as their career?*

To be bold and ask when you don't know. Let people know you are keen to get involved. Point it out if anyone makes a comment that you are a woman, if gender wouldn't have been pointed out to a man. Find ways to be a mum, if you want to be, and enter the industry. Don't let it stop you. To make the industry work for you, it needs to change to work for women, not just reform to accommodate them in a man's world. James Brown couldn't have been more ignorant when he sang 'this is a man's world'. Move over Jimmys of the world!

[www.myspace.com/jessiejamesandtheoutlaws](http://www.myspace.com/jessiejamesandtheoutlaws)





# Control on a different level

by Karin Brown

Feminism is something that I believe in but feels a little mysterious to me because I never studied the theoretical underpinnings. I built my feminist knowledge by listening to my clever friends, reading and thinking. While I have a deep sense of what is right or wrong, I haven't always quite understood why things that feel wrong are wrong. I have relied heavily on my gut and have sometimes to bite my tongue because I haven't always known how to articulate my feelings, let alone back them up with facts.

So it was with great delight that I picked up and started reading 'Sex at Dawn'. It's one of the most feminist books I have ever read, although I doubt the authors planned it that way. The book examines prehistoric evidence to explain current human behaviour, particularly sexual behaviour. The authors start by unravelling some of the most fundamental early theories, which shape our current and most widely held beliefs about human behaviour. Standard narratives and assumptions in my head simply collapsed as I read this book. Standard narratives like 'women have a low libido', 'females reserve themselves for the male with the most resources' and 'monogamy is human nature'. While the book discussed many fascinating topics this article will focus on what I learned about the possible origins of patriarchy and cultural practices which have arisen for the purpose of controlling women and specifically, our fertility.

Imagine a small community, where everyone really does know your name and your business. A community of foraging nomads who easily find enough sustenance, leaving time for socialising, parenting and leisure activities. The women form strong bonds with each other and with the men in the group creating an environment of familiarity, trust and mutual accountability, free of jealousy and competition. Food is shared and children are collectively parented. Paternal identity is almost completely unnecessary as the children belong to everyone. There is practically no individual property and nothing is harboured because everything is plentiful. Sounds pretty good right? Well, this is how Bonobos, our closest primate cousins live, as well as some remote and happy communities of humans today. This might be how our own great-great grandparents lived.

Agriculture emerged creating individual wealth, which in turn created inequality and jealousy. People give up the foraging and nomadic lifestyle and become farmers. Now people have something to store, collect, protect and fight over. Maternity was never in question but now because men have land to bequeath and armies to build, paternal identity becomes crucial. Sexual possessiveness emerges, as men want guaranteed and exclusive access to woman's fertility. Specific cultural rituals and norms are created to enforce that exclusivity. Marriage is one example, but in addition chastity belts are forged, clitorises are sliced and perhaps the most powerful tool of all, shame is used to control women sexuality. They are told 'good girls don't' so they shouldn't enjoy sex. Because if women enjoyed sex, then they might have more of it, with more people and that would interfere with a man's ability to be sure that his children are really his. In other words, it would be a direct threat to paternal certainty.

The truth is that women and perhaps more precisely, women's bodies are more in control of the reproductive process than men will ever be. With a complex cervix and various internal chemicals at our disposal, our bodies can fend off sperm with unsuitable DNA or conversely, can actually help sperm with DNA it deems suitable. So it would seem that on a deep level, a woman's body can influence the likelihood that a particular man becomes the biological father of her children.

Now here is the kicker: If you accept this theory then it means that women and their children were better off with lots of sperm donors. Some existing cultures even believe that a woman needs several sperm donors just to become pregnant. What? Say again? Yup, it would seem that biologically speaking, men are designed to compete with each other inside the woman's body rather than outside. (This is why men aren't twice the size of women, like Gorillas.) This and a range of other biological evidence points to the fact that early humans were, and I mean this in the most sex-positive way; promiscuous. They had a lot of sex with a lot of partners but they certainly weren't indiscriminate or uncaring in their behaviour.

I didn't read this book without feeling a little uncomfortable. After all, does this mean that men are biologically pre-programmed to cheat? No, cheating isn't predetermined, but a desire for sexual variety probably is. Sexual exclusivity and monogamy are probably recent, largely cultural inventions and pretty unrealistic ones at that. While many couples successfully and happily remain married and sexually monogamous, there are many relationships that break down and not infrequently due to infidelity. The reality is that when you look at the statistics, humans have a bad track record with regards to traditional marriage. Just recently I read an article in the paper about a booming internet-based business set up specifically to facilitate adultery.

So what does this all mean? I will be thinking about this book for a long time, but the main lesson that I draw from it is that women's sexuality has been a subject of patriarchal control for a long time and that this has wide ranging consequences on our current social and sexual dynamics. I'm not advocating that people should lie and cheat on their partners, but I do think that we need to think about our expectations of one another. As Dan Savage, a sex advice columnist in the United States says; "Getting married doesn't mean that you don't want to sleep with other people, it just means that you agree not to". Perhaps fewer children would be so negatively affected by divorce if we had a different attitude to relationships. Just because parents split up doesn't mean the relationship 'failed'. I don't believe our current society is open-minded enough yet to accept a fluid approach to relationships. (I know that while I accept these theories intellectually, emotionally I am in a whole different place.) Things are changing though. Polyamory is not an uncommon word these days. However it may prove challenging to evolve the existing models of adult relationships in a society that is still heavily influenced by conservative morals. Considering the rising conservative voice in the world today, women having absolute control over their sexuality may still be a long-term goal.

# Breastfeeding what a bitch!

*Just recently I met a woman about to have her first baby. We got chatting and I asked her if she was planning to breastfeed? "Of course!" she exclaimed, as though there isn't any viable alternative. I remember being that woman. Our baby is 4 months old today and has only been fed breast milk, but it has been one hell of a roller coaster ride. Here is our story.*

*The decision to breastfeed was an easy one. All the research indicates that breast milk is by far the best thing for our baby, designed especially for him and modified constantly to meet his needs. I needed no convincing.*

*Wanting to be as prepared as possible, we enrolled in Mama-licious classes - two Saturday mornings for two hours - focused on everything you needed to know to feed successfully. We took notes, actively engaged in class, and discussed what we'd learnt afterwards. We also attended antenatal classes, of which one whole evening was dedicated to breastfeeding. I read books. Talked to women about feeding. I was prepared to feed our baby. I knew what to do.*

*Yet all the preparation seemed somewhat pointless once he arrived.*

*Soon after he was born we attempted the first feed to extract the most divine of all breast milk, the colostrum. He wouldn't latch. Or couldn't. He didn't know what he was doing. And, somewhat surprisingly, nor did I. Despite the reading, the classes, the research when faced with our own reality things didn't all fall into place.*

*I will always remember the midwife's hand expressing my breast to extract the precious few mils of colostrum with a needle-less syringe. "3 mils - that's fantastic!" she exclaimed.*

*The next weeks of feeding - every 3 hours during the day and every 4 hours at night (from the start of the first feed to the start of the next) with feeding taking at least an hour and attempting to latch him, sometimes successfully (and if not, feeding him expressed milk extracted with the aid of breast pump) - were exhausting. Thank goodness for our midwife Annie, Ann at the Plunket Family Centre, and a midwife friend. With their support, knowledge and encouragement, baby and I were learning the art of feeding. Not being able to latch baby and feed him "properly" was great self-flagellation fodder. But we did learn to latch and we survived that learning curve.*

*Unfortunately the next hurdle was just round the corner. In all my focusing on trying to latch baby, I hadn't been focusing on my own comfort... so while baby was learning to latch he wasn't doing so in a way which was pain free. But people say to expect "discomfort" so how was I to know that my discomfort was the beginning of a rather huge crack in my nipple?*

*The pain of a nipple crack is extreme. My toes would curl as I put baby to my breast. I began to fear feeding time. So it was back to see Ann at the Family Centre to help with my technique. Now I needed to take panadol in advance of the feeds (fearing feeding was bound to affect not just my body's ability to "let-down" the milk but also, perhaps more importantly, the bonding with my baby). I was prescribed antibacterial gel for my cracked nipple as the risk was that I would get an infection in the gaping fissure which bled as he fed.*

*The only way to fix the crack and keep feeding was to get the latch perfect every time. It was suggested that perhaps I could give that breast a break and express off it and feed baby the expressed milk. But I didn't want to - I just wanted to feed my baby "naturally".*

*After about ten days the crack healed (I think nipple shells really helped on that front, and the nipple shields probably did too, although I found them very hard to use as they seemed so slippery). Yay!*

*Our next hurdle was to become weight or rather the lack of it. We went to the regular weigh-ins with Plunket to ensure his growth. Worryingly he is small, bottom of the chart. I think perhaps it was during this hurdle that I came closest to stopping breastfeeding. Mainly out of worry and fear that my milk was not good enough for him, that my milk couldn't sustain him in the way that he needed to grow big and strong. Feeding my baby was feeling like too much responsibility. What if my milk, all he consumed, wasn't the perfect potion? If my milk wasn't good enough, perhaps I wasn't good enough to be his mother? It was at this stage that breastfeeding became a bit of a head fuck - those bloody charts. Our man is growing. He isn't a big boy, but he's our long man.*

*Then came the thrush. I never knew you could get thrush in your nipples. In my nipples and his mouth according to the private lactation consultant, which we deployed to assist in baby's inability to stay latched. He'd latch, suck, and pull off screaming. This cycle would continue until we were both sufficiently traumatised to realise that something wasn't right.*

*The lactation consultant was great - well worth the \$75 per hour, but why is such breastfeeding support not publicly available? With all the research clearly indicating that the "health outcomes" for breastfed babies are so much better, why is there not a gaggle of lactation consultants on magic carpets ready to come to your aid? Better funding is needed to support women in feeding their babies. It seems completely wrong to me that, in order to get the support that I needed, we were compelled to turn to a private consultant.*

*The thrush in my nipples is now under control after 9 delightful days of having to put gel in the dear boy's mouth after every feed (kind of like trying to medicate a cat) and, after vinegar rinsing my nipples, gel on those bad boys too.*

*Breastfeeding has been bloody hard and I can completely understand why women don't persevere. I want all women to feel supported in feeding their babies, whether that be with breast milk or formula.*

*Happy mama = happy baby.*

*I've thought a lot about why breast feeding is so hard and what could be done to make it easier. I think it all comes down to the way that society is now structured and the lack of exposure to breastfeeding. We don't see women feeding. And when we do it is seen as rude or impolite to really watch and see what's going on. Breasts are seen primarily as sexual objects not as feeding vessels and this is where I think a big part of the problem is. We need to see breasts as amazing milk creators. I love that my body can make milk for my baby - I love that my breasts are fulfilling their natural purpose. We need to watch women feed. We need to talk about feeding problems. We need to feed our babies around women who have fed theirs not so long ago, because our mothers fed us 20+ years ago and can't be expected to remember! But the very most important thing we must do is really share experiences and discuss breastfeeding. I am so grateful to all the wonderful women who have supported me.*

*Postscript*

*Having our darling boy hasn't all been hard. He is beautiful and my heart melts in a way I could never have imagined. I would do anything for one of his twinkly smiles and my heart has grown tenfold in love. Our breastfeeding experience has been hard, but having a him in our lives has been a delight.*

## Date Loaf - Yum!

- 1 cup chopped dates
  - $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of sugar
  - 1 small tsp of baking soda
  - 30g of butter
  - 1 egg
  - 1 good cup of flour (white or
  - 1 tsp baking powder wholemeal)
- 1) Soak dates and sugar in 1 cup of boiling water (for up to an hour)
  - 2) Add baking soda and butter (while still warm, to melt)
  - 3) Beat egg, flour and baking powder into the mixture  
(add a few sliced almonds or figs if you like)
  - 4) Pour into greased loaf tin and bake  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour at  $175^{\circ}$

Serve w butter and share with friends!





# Smile and Die

by Barbara Ehrenreich  
reviewed by Karin Brown

What a strange title for a book I thought. It turns out that it's not quite as pessimistic as the title suggests, although it is still sobering reading. The whole premise of the book is that the world, and particularly America, has been duped and manipulated by an overly unrealistic expectation that people should have an unwavering positive approach to everything in life, no matter what.

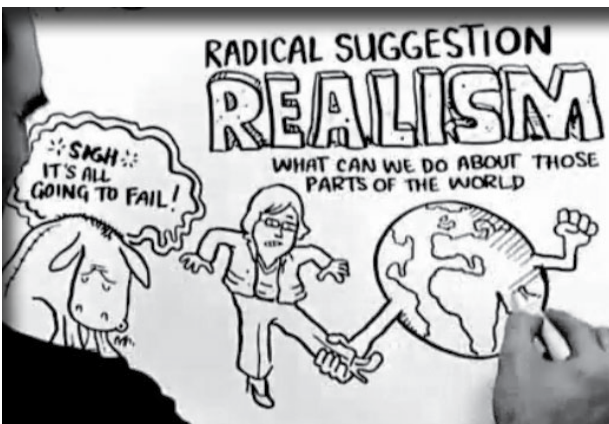
Despite what we have been told, positive thinking will never 'manifest' a better life for ourselves. She starts by describing her own experience as a breast cancer survivor and analyses the pink cult-like support networks. She then turns to focus on evangelical religious leaders, politics and even the recent financial crisis. We're talking about way more than optimism or a 'she'll be right' attitude. She describes an

expectation of mandatory extreme optimism which can border on delusion and lead to wilful ignorance when people ignore signs of bad things to come. She criticises the book 'The Secret' for claiming that if you put positive thoughts out to the universe

that you will attract good things and indeed, you'll 'change your physical world'. (So if you think about money, you'll attract money.)

It's a cutting commentary about the way a bloated industry of 'life coaches' reframed redundancies as 'change opportunities', how realism was recast as pessimism (and thus to be avoided), and how success and happiness was presented as 'self-

fulfilling prophecies'. She explains the unspoken but implied accusation that if you aren't happy or successful, it's your fault because you weren't 'positive' enough and because you didn't work hard enough to shape your thoughts. She illustrates this point by explaining how the cancer industry demonised a negative mindset to the point that people felt guilty for feeling 'down' about the fact that they have a life-threatening disease. As if patients just thinking about the very real possibility of dying would be enough to cause death. Positive thinking was presented as a way for people to control what was happening to them, as a way to influence events in the world. But actually it was a way for the elite bodies to control dissent amongst those who weren't experiencing the same success. It kept people from complaining and from holding the people in positions of power accountable for mass injustices.



I liked this book because she presents a well-researched and comprehensive analysis of the historical origins of this way of thinking and it is a timely reminder of how things don't just come right because we want them to. In the

current state of the world, we can't will our way into employment if we're unemployed, we can't manifest good fortune through visualisation. If we were able to 'think' our way to success wouldn't we all be successful already?

Well worth a read. Better yet, watch the video on YouTube. I recommend this one: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5um8QWWRvo>



# Who Decides?

## Ruminations of a Pro-choice Activist

by Morgan Healey

“Not the Church, not the State, women must decide their fate”, emanated from the fifty strong voices chanting outside the Appeals Court in Wellington on Tuesday, 5 October 2010. While the case of the Right to Life (RTL) versus the Abortion Supervisory Committee (ASC) waged within the four walls of the judiciary, representatives from Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand (ALRANZ), Women’s National Abortion Action Campaign (WONAAC), Mothers for Choice and Women’s Labour Caucus, joined Action for Abortion Rights, the new Victoria University group, for a day of protest against New Zealand’s antiquated abortion laws. Marching across the street to the steps of Parliament, the protesters were met by MP Steve Chadwick, whose recent attempt to reform abortion laws had been squashed by the Labour Party Caucus. She reminded us that it was our voices and experiences that needed to be heard. She could lead from the front in terms of drafting legislation, but change would only come when politicians saw and heard that this issue was important to their electorate.

In New Zealand, abortion is an often forgotten about or misrepresented concept. When I engage with people on this topic, both young and old, many appear unaware of what the law actually states, assuming that abortion is freely available and legal in this country. Unfortunately, these people would be wrong. Pro-choice activists

have agitated for the last thirty years to enable women to have the ability and freedom to make reproductive decisions about their own bodies.

When it comes to gender relations and questions of power and control, the fight for the right to an abortion and more broadly, reproductive justice, could not be more salient. Why is it the State, largely made up of men, that legislates for and governs women’s bodies, restricting reproductive choice and disavowing many women’s quotidian experiences? And what does it say about New Zealand culture and society when a woman is trusted to become a mother, but not deemed trustworthy enough to make decisions regarding her ability to have and care for that child?

So what are the laws and why must they change?

At the moment, abortion is covered under the Crimes Act (1961), outlining the ground for an abortion, and the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion (CS&A) Act (1977), establishing the Abortion Supervisory Committee (ASC), which oversees the implementation of this Act

Under the Crimes Act there are four main grounds for an abortion [under 20 week’s gestation]. These are: serious danger to the life or the physical or mental health of the mother; risk that the child would be severely handicapped, physically or mentally; pregnancy as a result of incest or unlawful sex with a guardian; and severe mental subnormality of the mother. Other factors that may be taken into account are sexual violation (previously termed rape) and the extremes of age. Outside of these factors, it is a CRIMINAL offense to procure an abortion.

The CS&A Act sets out the procedures for obtaining an abortion. A woman must first be assessed by her own doctor and then referred to an operating surgeon and two certifying consultants, one of whom must have experience in obstetrics or gynecology. These certifying consultants are currently paid \$87.50 for each consultation and provide the legal certificates certifying that the

woman meets the requirements for an abortion under the Crimes Act. If there is a disagreement between the consultants on whether the woman has legal grounds, then a third consultant is brought in for his/her opinion. This opinion is meant to be final.

The entire process is onerous and unnecessary. It means that New Zealand women tend to wait longer before having a termination. (Medical experts assert that abortions are safest when performed within the first 9 weeks of a pregnancy, while research has shown that 45.2% of New Zealand women had a termination at eleven weeks or later). It puts women who do not live in urban areas, where available services tend to be located, at a disadvantage, as they may be required to travel two or three separate times to a city for all the doctor appointments. Lastly, it takes away a woman's right to provide her informed consent for the procedure, ensuring that she must validate her need for an abortion to two certifying consultants.

Thus, the current abortion system is disingenuous to the lived experiences of many women and implicitly reduces women down to their embodied specificity: receptacles for life, but not worthy of respect beyond their reproductive capability. To take from ALRANZ, the reasons why these laws need to be changed are simply and clear:

- a. They are unrealistic. They ignore the importance of socio-economic factors in making a decision. It is hypocritical that most are carried out on the grounds of mental health.
- b. They are punitive, punishing women for contraceptive "mistakes". To err is human. Abortion is a health issue and not a crime.
- c. The procedures are unnecessarily complicated and erect barriers to good health care.
- d. The laws result in inequitable services. In part they are responsible for the geographical variation in abortion services throughout New Zealand. Some women have to travel overseas to obtain a late-term abortion.
- e. They are outdated. For example, there have been advances in early medication abortions but the laws are written primarily for surgical abortions. Women are required to take all medications in a licensed facility denying them the option of self-medication at home when this is appropriate.

f. They are disempowering for women. The decision about whether or not to continue a pregnancy should rest with the woman, not parliamentarians with a conscience vote and not state-funded doctors.

g. Lastly, they infringe upon women's human rights – to be afforded respect as a human being, to be trusted to make decisions relating to her bodily integrity, and to be provided with the services and means of making informed reproductive choices.

Obvious points perhaps, but instituting legal change will not be easy. Abortion is a difficult and controversial topic, but one that must be tackled. Ignoring it does not make the 17,750 women who had abortions last year disappear, or diminish the need for improved abortion services. It only increases the stigma and silence of these women, constraining their choices and infringing on their dignities.

What October's rally showed was that a younger generation has taken up the torch of fighting for women's reproductive rights. The group of women and men who came and chanted; who stood outside the Court with their signs and literally jumped through hoops to represent the inane certifying consultant process; and who are both outraged and motivated will not be silenced. These younger, newer activists have rejuvenated an aging movement. As a pro-choice activist, it is heartening to see this happening here in New Zealand. Watching international trends and seeing a shift to the right in terms of social issues like abortion, makes the rally all the more important. For control and power over women's bodies will only be changed by challenging the status quo and insisting that women are more than the sum of their parts.



# A bad decision: why I was v

Five years ago I was the editor of a student magazine, and I published an issue that was so offensive – (particularly to women) – that it was deemed “objectionable” by the Office of Film and Literature Classification and banned. To this day it is an illegal offence to possess a copy of that issue. The article was a fictional diary of a drug rapist, written in the first person in what is best described as the style of Brett Easton Ellis in *American Psycho*. It contained graphic descriptions of the rapist’s plans, thoughts, and actions, and depicted a disturbed individual with an incredibly derogatory and violent attitude towards women. It was condemned as a ‘how to’ guide for rape and was the subject of widespread criticism in the mainstream media.

At the time, I staunchly defended my decision to publish that article. I experienced a baptism of fire in the New Zealand news media as I fronted up to defend my position on *Nine to Noon*, *Close Up*, both TV1 and TV3 news, and in numerous print publications. I protected the anonymity of the author of the article, and I argued that, while undoubtedly extremely offensive, it had done more good than harm because of its educational value illustrating the dangers of drug rape and drink spiking.

I was wrong.

I recently addressed the annual conference of the Aotearoa Student Press Association (ASPA) – a gathering of student media editors and news editors – on the topic of ‘Student media controversies: how to pick ‘em and how to deal with ‘em.’ Student media has a long and sometimes great tradition of pushing the boundaries of acceptability and attracting mainstream media controversy. Editors are aware of this, and I suspect sometimes secretly aspire to join the ranks of editors who’ve had their 15 minutes of fame for perpetuating this reputation. So far this year Salient’s editor has been in trouble for publishing a cartoon depicting a

young women sleeping with an entire rugby team, while the editor of my alma mater, *Otago’s Critic*, has been in the gun for printing a feature article that made fun of some of Dunedin’s recognisable homeless residents. Neither were able to mount particularly strong arguments to defend these decisions, though to his credit, *Critic* editor, Ben Thomson recently printed a full retraction and apology for the homelessness article.

I continue to believe it is part of the job of student journalists to push boundaries and challenge conventions, but this must be done with a clear idea of why it is necessary and for what purpose. Being offensive for the sake of being offensive is not good enough. This was the message I attempted to convey to my audience at the ASPA conference, offering my own experience as an example of what not to do. I was dismayed to find it was not especially well-received.

Perhaps it is a maturity thing: at 22 I certainly lacked the maturity to understand the harm I was causing to victims of sexual abuse who picked up and read that issue of *Critic*. I understood in theory, but not in practice, the responsibility I had as an editor to make properly considered decisions, I had the power to affect people who would read the magazine. I was thinking of my legal obligations (not hard enough as it turned out) but not my moral and social ones.

For a long time after I left *Critic*, I maintained (including in job and scholarship interviews) that my argument about the educational value of that article was valid, but that I had trivialised it by printing it in an issue called ‘The Offensive Issue’ containing other borderline and revolting content. I would print the article again today, I said, but if I were to do anything differently, I would have printed it in a normal, non-themed issue of the magazine, so as not to trivialise it.