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2021

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# FROM THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS OFFICER...

Since 2007, Kate Magazine has been published annually by AUSA (Auckland University Students' Association). The magazine invites students and staff to write and raise awareness of women's issues, experiences and interests within our university community. The name Kate pays tribute to Kate Sheppard, the leading light of the New Zealand women's suffrage movement; and Kate Edger, the first woman in New Zealand to gain a university degree and the first woman in the British Empire to earn a BA.

This means a great deal to me. As feminists and activists, we stand on the shoulders of many giants before us. Since the time of Kate Sheppard and Kate Edger the feminist agenda has come a long way — but still has an astronomical way to go. It is also important to remember that we stand together with our communities around us and it is in community that we find our strength. It was an absolute privilege to read the many articles and creative pieces submitted to Kate this year. They reveal the need for us to always be questioning the way things are, and how we've ended up here. They see the world in diverse and wonderful ways, and unpack the different ways in which we experience what it means to be living as a woman.



As a feminist this is always the ultimate question for me. Questioning how the patriarchy has affected how I live life, how others see me, and how I've internalised that. Questioning how this intersects with the many aspects of my identity. Questioning why our domestic violence statistics in Aotearoa are so horrendous. Why there are more men named Mark running companies than women — and where are our women of colour? The list goes on and on... With Kate I hope readers will take this questioning further, as we touch on topics which expand right into fourth wave feminism and critical feminist theory. And at the same time celebrate the creative output of our wāhine in the university community.

Undoubtedly 2021 has been tough. It's the second year we've spent in and out of lockdowns, disconnected from our friends and whānau, and left wondering if we can make it through with some sanity. Doubly, statistics show that women are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. It's been tough to stay resilient but I've learnt that a little caring goes a long way. In times like these, resilience can mean taking care of yourself and showing yourself some kindness. Banding with your communities and knowing who you can lean on for some support. Running with the feminist agenda is much like running a marathon, if we're going to go the distance then we've got to stop sprinting, hydrate, stretch, take rests and cheer each other on.

I cannot finish this editorial without saying thank you to the wāhine who got me through this year, and continue to inspire me each and every day. You know who you are ;)

Aroha nui

Vivien Whyte



*Amazing  
things happen  
when women  
uplift  
women*



*they try to take  
but they cannot*

*they try to break  
but they cannot*

*for we are the  
womxn to  
shake the world*

*-Hemin Lee*



# WE ARE RESILIENT

**This year's theme** is 'we are resilient'. The resilience of wāhine never ceases to blow me away, and this has only doubled in a year like 2021. Resilience is all around us — from massive activist movements to the cup of tea you pour yourself as a mental health treat. It can span generations of wāhine fighting for equity, decolonisation, and against homophobia, discrimination, racism etc. As well as encompass an individual trying to be kind to themselves in the face of a global pandemic.

As part of this, I've asked various rōpū to write a little statement on what resilience means to them and how they've shown resilience within their feminist mahi this year. In doing so, we also get to celebrate the wins and be proud of ourselves as we keep on going.



# CAMPUS FEMINIST COLLECTIVE



## Campus Feminist Collective (CFC)

is a grassroots organisation based in the University of Auckland. We are a group of intersectional feminists who are politically committed to the agenda of eradicating structural oppression for women and gender minorities. The core of our kaupapa is campaigning on issues involving gender and challenging the patriarchal status quo that prevails across all sectors of society. Our advocacy provides a platform for vulnerable voices to speak out against injustice, so we can collectively address the lived experiences of the most marginalised in our communities.

2021 is a busy year for feminism. CFC wrote and articulated compelling submissions to multiple select committees on various feminist issues, such as abortion clinic safe zones, image-based sexual abuse, and banning conversion therapy. We believe these Bills are necessary to legislatively safeguard fundamental human rights. Our contributions aim to introduce an intersectional feminist lens into the discourse. Alongside making our mark in the democratic decision-making process, we also host social events to foster a sense of community on campus. We kickstarted the first semester with a working bee, for the purpose of transforming womxn-space into a cosy safe space for women and gender minorities to congregate. Many hours were spent painting, decorating, and building a bookshelf. This metamorphosis welcomed waves of students into womxn-space, which quickly became an ideal study spot or great place to take a nap between lectures. Recently, we held a "Feminism 101" workshop, for the purpose of providing educational resources to anybody eager to learn more about the feminist movement. The opportunity to 'brunch and brainstorm' with fellow feminists offered an open invite for newcomers to join our club and we engaged them in enlightening conversations pertaining to feminist concepts.

In the wake of COVID-19, we struggled immensely to engage our audience to the fullest extent and carry out all of our planned events. Our AGM this academic year was delayed by lockdown, so we lacked the structural support to campaign until we could assemble on campus again. Since feminism is a social movement rooted in solidarity, being isolated from others during times when feminist activism is so necessary is a special type of powerlessness on top of pain. Social media becomes a double-edged sword. We all feel personally responsible for keeping up with the political happenings around the world, but the doom-scrolling through timelines of devastating news turns out to be extremely draining. The accumulation of tragedies is traumatizing for many of us, especially as we are already so overwhelmed. Mobilising others to join our pursuit for social justice was difficult as the inclination to stay in bed outweighed the importance of feminist organising – which is completely understandable. This sense of burnout prohibited the performance of our full agenda, but we forgive ourselves for our limited capacity, especially when a global pandemic is so unforgiving.

We are proud of our accomplishments, achieved in the face of adversity. Our resilience as a community is fostered by our extensive support system. Self-care is at the core of our kaupapa, because we cannot be effective activists to care for others if we do not invest the same energy into caring for ourselves. The CFC executive committee operates to ensure that the workload is distributed among everybody involved and we are compassionate when a member's ability to contribute towards the feminist cause becomes limited due to changing circumstances. Feminism is not about one girlboss smashing the glass ceiling, but all of us chipping away at the patriarchy. We function as a collective and leaving a fellow feminist behind is not an option. Fortunately, this is a sentiment shared by other feminist organisations in Tāmaki Makaurau and we managed to form fruitful collaborations with amazing activists around the city. Witnessing the cohesion developed within the feminist movement when confronted with crisis is incredibly empowering, as we are consolidating all our resources towards the common goal of gender equity. Perhaps the future feminist uprising is closer than we think.

# WOMEN IN ENGINEERING NETWORK

**Resilient is an adjective** that is often used to describe women. It is even more fundamental for women in a male-dominated field such as engineering. WEN (Women in Engineering Network) is a student-run club that strives to support women from all walks of life in their journey through engineering. Our club has a plethora of initiatives and programmes to maximise our reach. Some of the exciting initiatives we have introduced this year include: the Buddy Programme (high school to university student mentorship), WEN Allies (for non-WEN members to show their support) and a social media content team (WEN Tiktok).

One of our goals this year was to expand beyond Auckland and we've achieved this! Over the intersem break, we did Outreach trips around the South Island, visiting 14 schools and meeting over 400 students. Additionally, we have started the WEN Tiktok and gained over 14k likes! One of our core values is diversity and inclusion; we've created WEN Allies as a way to invite others into the conversation about gender inequalities.

A particular example of resilience being practiced in WEN is one of the Mentoring events we held earlier this year surrounding the idea of 'unspoken issues'. This provided a safe space that sparked conversations about issues between industry professionals and student mentees that may be taboo. Some of the issues discussed were about mental health and the gender pay gap.

## THURSDAYS IN BLACK

**Thursdays in Black** Aotearoa is a student led campaign responding to – and preventing – sexual violence in tertiary spaces. Doing this work has to come from a place of passion and wanting to make the world a better place – leaving your community better off than how it was when you were born into it. And that is 100% what this mahi is to me. This year, Thursdays in Black has seen greater engagement with the kaupapa and students really getting on board with supporting victim-survivors. It's these seemingly small (but actually big) things that encourage people like me working in a mentally draining field to persevere and see all this effort is done for a reason. That's what ensures resilience for me and the Thursdays in Black clubs around the country – solidarity. And for victim-survivors: I hope you can know TiB resilience is and will always be for you.



# UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND WOMEN IN BUSINESS

**University of Auckland Women in Business (UAWB)** was founded in July 2020 to champion female success and create environments that include, respect and celebrate women in business. UAWB has aspired to build a diverse community, in which all students are welcomed regardless of degree or gender.

We are inspired by women leaders that have gone before us and are committed to providing opportunities for students to learn, upskill and feel empowered within the business field. 2021 has been an awesome year for UAWB, we've welcomed over 300 registered members and held a number of innovative events from skills boot camps covering negotiation, feedback and leadership to panels focused on breaking down barriers.

Throughout the year, UAWB has made it a priority to be there for our members. When NZ went into lockdown in August, UAWB showed resilience by quickly pivoting and offering a three-part series consisting of Bollywood Dance, Boxing and Yoga and Cocktail/Mocktail classes. Further, UAWB donated to Wood For The Trees (a mental health charity) for every person who attended our boxing event. This series was open to everyone including members, their lockdown bubbles and the wider community.

If you'd like to join UAWB, we'd warmly welcome you. UAWB is more than a club, we are a community of like-minded students striving to challenge the status quo and promote empowerment. To find out more and sign up, visit us at [www.uoawomeninbusiness.com](http://www.uoawomeninbusiness.com).





 [www.dearem.nz](http://www.dearem.nz)  [dearem.nz](https://www.instagram.com/dearem.nz)

Dear Em was developed by Auckland Sexual Abuse Help Foundation in 2016 in response to young women expressing their want for a safe online space to share their experiences, connect with others, and learn about looking after themselves and their peers. We connect with people through our website and social media presence where we share real stories young women have shared with us, empathise with people's experiences, and provide information about wellbeing and support seeking. We aim to provide a space where we as a community can empathise with each others experiences, empower young women, and support people to embrace themselves.

Everything we do is by girls, for girls – we have always had a group of young women who drive Dear Em and work together to create content, define our Em voice, and speak to relevant issues. This year we have been able to provide a Leadership Program for these young women as well, that aims to empower them in becoming leaders in ending sexual violence in Aotearoa. You can connect with us at @dearem.nz on Instagram or go straight to our website [www.dearem.nz](http://www.dearem.nz) to find more.

Dear Em is all about supporting each other as young women to get through the good times, and the bad together. We know that sometimes it is hard being a girl, which is why we started back in 2016 to provide a safe online space for girls, young women, and young people to share their experiences, connect with others, and learn about wellbeing and sexual violence. Everything we do is by girls, for girls – we have always had a group of young women who drive Dear Em, who help us to know what is happening for young people and what we can be talking about to support them. When Covid came around, this became a huge part of all our lives, and we all had to adapt.

Luckily Dear Em is largely based online, through our website and Instagram page. This means no matter the level we are in, we are still here to provide support, talk about important things going on, share stories, and connect people to resources. What we did have to change though, was how we supported our own team. The stress of a global pandemic understandably impacts us all, so even when we technically can still get on with things, it can still feel challenging to be motivated and act like everything is fine. For a lot of people as well, the added stress of covid makes it that much harder to deal with other things going on for them, like mental health and trauma. The reality is, the situation we are in isn't normal, none of us were taught how to deal with it, so we shouldn't have to act like we normally would and pretend like everything is fine.

There is this idea that when you are resilient, you put on a brave face and make everything seem okay. But, at Dear Em we think resilience is more about feeling your feelings and letting yourself process them, than it is about constantly trying to be happy. Let's be real – acting happy all the time is exhausting! In reality, you don't always have to have everything together to be resilient. You are allowed to be vulnerable, you are allowed to have bad days, and you are allowed to not know what to do sometimes.

As a team we have grown to support each other and provide a space where we can share the things we are struggling with and explore them together. Sharing our experiences helps us to feel less alone and gives us new perspectives on how to handle things. And sometimes, you just need a good rant, and we are here for that! The most significant thing for our team has been having access to this space where we can just be ourselves. We know we are more resilient together, and we will continue to be there for each other, and for our amazing Dear Em community.



# GATEKEEP, GASLIGHT, GIRLBOSS

The problems with neoliberal feminism

**The girlboss** is the most cunning group project of the patriarchy and capitalism yet.

Rising from the “ruins” of (benevolent) sexism and (internalised) misogyny, she’s the hardworking CEO of a multi-million dollar company and the face of girl power. Sporting her millennial pink (sweatshop produced) merchandise, the girl boss unapologetically preaches her personal financial success as a universal win for all women.

Her gospel is simple. If she can do it, so can you.

However, in recent years the concept of the girlboss has become a bit of a laughing stock. And for good reason. Redefining and laughing at the girlboss archetype through memes takes back some of its authority, loosening neoliberal feminism’s menacing grip on contemporary feminism. It’s about time its true discriminatory and deceitful colours are exposed. We’re tired of being sold a power fantasy that only fetishises hustle culture and “empowers” a privileged few.

I was lucky enough to chat to two esteemed academics from our university about their perspective and insight on this topic. Their interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.

## Nancy Guo

*Nancy is a History and Sociology student who believes that feminism should always be uncomfortable. She hopes that this piece will encourage healthy critique of feminist discourse and neoliberalism more broadly, as well as illuminate the importance of intersectionality.*

# DR CARISA SHOWDEN

Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Auckland

## What's your perspective on neoliberal feminism?

[Neoliberal feminism] is very narrow, very unthreatening. It keeps us spending time and money looking inward, so that we don't have the time and money to look outward and act collectively. It is an individualised, competitive, let-me-get-ahead, without challenging broader ideas of gender, work etc kind of [movement]. It talks about empowerment, but it's not thinking about power.

## What are the implications of the "girlboss" archetype?

The [term] "girlboss" [shows] how language matters. It is infantilising. It's about that resistance to calling grown women "women" while tying ideals of masculinity to roles of power. It suggests "boss" still already assumes masculinity or men.

## How has neoliberal feminism become dominant in contemporary feminist discourse and movements?

We hear more about the kinds of feminism that pose less of a challenge to [certain] forms of power because it is in the interest of [that] power to accommodate critiques that are less rather than more threatening. Neoliberal feminism has become a dominant and popular voice, [influencing] how we see feminism being [represented]. But there are other kinds of feminism that are working their way into mainstream culture, eg intersectional feminism, POC feminism, queer feminism etc, are all becoming [increasingly] part of our mainstream conversation.



## What are the problems of neoliberal feminism?

Once we see more women and gender diverse people in positions of power and "getting ahead", people say "Well, clearly the system works" and [think] that the system is fine. Many feel that capitalism is a good thing and it only needs to be reformed to be less exclusionary. The danger is that the capitalist system is fundamentally designed so that only a few can rise to the top by exploiting others. These recursive moments of exploitation are [continuously] hidden by [neoliberal feminism's] glossy [image] of #Girlboss sweatshirts.

We need to do the hard work but also cut ourselves some slack if we don't get it right every time. It's that binary "all or nothing" that we need to get out of. [Just like] the same way that neoliberal feminism says "Hey! Equality is already here, you just need to embrace these opportunities" - what if we didn't think about equality as our goal, [and instead] equity? What if we focused on how we can equitably accommodate a range of human needs, desires and ways of being? That might be more complicated and harder, but it gets us out of that binary thinking.

## What are some ways we can reevaluate our neoliberal world?

We can [rethink] ways of harnessing our economic wellbeing to support different ways of taking care of each other and building community. [The idea that] all of your economic security has to come through a competitive work environment is a collective choice we have made. It is not natural. There are different ways of sharing the collective wealth that don't have to be [so] stark and extreme, or so tied to ideas about gender, race or ability. It could be differences in what brings us pleasure and the different ways that we support each other. We need to reevaluate ways of thinking about joy, community and family [also being] as valuable as making money and getting stuff. There needs to be a re-balance there.



## What's your view on neoliberal feminism?

Neoliberal feminism pits the problem and solution on the individual. It individualises collective and systemic issues. It's marketable, defanging the radical politics and potential of feminism. The 'goal' is framed as achieving 'equality' with (cis-het) men, without interrogating that their pedestal is contingent upon the oppression of women, BIPOC, and all those sitting outside the cisgender and heteronormative patriarchy. It becomes about subsuming oneself into capitalist ideals under the guise of 'choice' and 'empowerment'.

A lot of this [neoliberal feminist] logic has been absorbed by POC because it holds a lot of promise. Under the capitalist system, we're sold the dream that being rich means getting free. I see this a lot with many POC wanting to accumulate mass wealth, and that by doing so [they're] living out [their] ancestor's "wildest dreams". And that logic keeps circulating until, collectively, we interrogate it. As Angela David says, by getting historically marginalised people to occupy positions of power, sometimes you're only making them more efficient operators of those oppressive systems.

## Where should feminism be heading?

Feminism across generations has been rightfully criticised. It has always been critiqued from within and outside itself. It's always meant to be something uncomfortable and radical. Not something marketable, nice or palatable.

Feminism should inherently be intersectional. I'm very much about how we collectively imagine and organise outside of the current system. You have to sit in the contradiction. We work to realise that many truths can exist at once. [Unfortunately], we've set up a lot of harsh binaries that do us all a disservice. We have to collectively move in a new direction together.



## What questions can we ask of ourselves and each other?

Feminist discourse puts a microscope on the individual, rather than asking some of those harder questions of ourselves and each other. [Questions like] how can we redistribute wealth? How can we uphold rights of Tangata Whenua and Te Tiriti... conversations about land back - all of those are fundamental questions. Those naturally are intersectional questions, which are [also] feminist issues.

We also need to check ourselves and each other. As Audre Lorde says, how can I/we resist sites of domination? Do I really want to be in this position? Is this really emancipatory or is this just to fulfil certain parts of my ego... That is a hard conversation to have with yourself. We need to be brave enough to have those conversations. That's what keeps progress happening. But all that critique comes from a place of love.

Capitalism seems like an inescapable reality at times, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't criticise and interrogate the system, or how we live our lives. We have the power to unpack and deconstruct these systems.





# THE POWER OF MANA WAHINE

## WRITING NEW NARRATIVES OF MANA WAHINE

**Māori women** are powerful beyond measure. It is in their history and their creation. Atua Wahine (Māori female gods) embody the female elements that characterise mana wahine. Māori continue to uncover a deeper understanding of Atua Wahine narratives that have been omitted and marginalised from written literature during the process of colonisation. I say Wahine are powerful beyond measure, but I do not wish to encourage the notion that they are impermeable to the damage that has been placed upon them by colonisation and other means of oppression. To create space for our Wahine in a post-colonial Aotearoa, we need to acknowledge the monocultural narratives within Pākehā feminist movements and the effects of colonisation on Māori women. This will create space for biculturalism and Mana Wahine frameworks, which assert Māori women as critical actors for social change. By discussing female Māori leaders who have shaped contemporary New Zealand, we can acknowledge their mana and understand the differences between Māori feminist frameworks and white feminist movements.

### Omni Arona

*Omni Arona explores how Wahine narratives have been lost to colonisation. To replace these lost tales, he tells stories of contemporary Maori women who shaped Aotearoa's political landscape. These contemporary stories reveal the intersectionality and connection between Maori women, their culture, and issues that differentiate Mana Wahine discourse from pakeha feminism.*

Uncovering Atua wahine narratives allows Māori women to understand how they fit into their communities, what aspects of their life are due to Pākehā interference in their culture, and who they are. Instead of being side characters in the tales of Maui, Māori women can hear tales that place Mana wahine on the same level as Mana Tāne. Hearing stories of Atua wahine and prominent Maori women allows young Māori wahine to grow up in environments with their place in the world solidified. Representation, relatability and stories of Mana wahine can inspire young Māori and thus create new narratives of mana wahine.

Assertions that men exert power over women within Māori communities pervade society. This is not the case. Gender roles in Māori culture can only be understood from a Māori worldview in which men and women form a collective whole that links our past and present. Wahine have always been important in Māoridom. Pre-colonisation; Wahine featured in all aspects of life. They occupied important leadership positions and were key in the transference of

iwi history and knowledge. So much so that some iwi and hapu were named after predominant Wahine, such as Ngati Hine after Hineamaru. Colonisation placed Māori women in the intersections of oppression from expansionism, sexism, and poverty. Poverty and colonisation are apocalypses in slow motion, relentless and generational. The enforcement of western religious ideals also meant a power shift away from Māori women, even within their own culture.

Despite colonisation, contemporary Māori women have continued to shape the political landscape of Aotearoa and display the qualities of Atua wahine. These women whakapapa back to Atua wahine and carry the strength of their ancestors. In 1949, Iriaka Ratana became the first Māori woman elected to Parliament after her husband, who had held that labour seat, passed away. She was a powerful figure in her own right through her work in the Ratana movement. Such was her mana that when labour put forward a non-Ratana candidate, Iriaka threatened to run independently. Labour would later back down. Iriaka Ratana was an ardent advocate for the welfare of her people. She was pained by the powerlessness and poverty of many Māori, placing her at the intersections of a Pākehā power system and the needs of her people. She worked actively to put her people's needs first.

One cannot talk of Mana Wahine without mention of Dame Whina Cooper. Through her years of political and social engagement, Dame Whina Cooper was one of few women at the time that was recognised as a leader. Along with Titewhai Harawira and Tuaiwa "Eva" Rickard, they led the hikoi (protest march/long journey) for the Māori land match from Te Hapua to Wellington (Almost 1,100 km). The march combined the tactics of Nga Tamatoa (The Warriors) protest group and the traditions of elder Māori leaders. The importance of race, gender, language and culture displayed in this issue epitomises the difference between mana wahine and Pākehā feminism. Māori culture is an important aspect of mana wahine and differentiates Mana wahine frameworks from Pākehā feminism. It speaks to the need for bicultural approaches and partnerships between Māori and Pākehā rather than monocultural western strategies when trying to improve the situations of women in a New Zealand context.

In 1979, Māori and pacific women challenged the monocultural nature of women movements at the time. Donna Awatere and Mona Papali'i accused the movement of being focused solely on Pākehā feminist problems and ignored the issues that were the most important to Māori and pacific island women. Māori women at the time seemed to be the object of the conversations and not full participants because they were viewed as a problem to be solved rather than people in their own right. This highlights the monocultural nature of feminist movements and the lack of

acknowledgement towards the issues colonisation has brought on Māori culture. Frameworks, such as Mana wahine, are needed to focus on those whose needs are not met. Often, with western feminism, the focus is on increasing the privilege of those with most of their needs met. Donna and Mona sought a bicultural approach rather than the current Pākehā centric feminist movements at the time. It displayed the need to acknowledge the treaty of Waitangi and its recognition of a partnership between Māori and Pākehā. In 1984, Donna Awatere wrote *Māori sovereignty* which became a key text in Māori protest and wahine focused movements. It created a framework for Māori-identified politics and challenged Pākehā feminist theory. After reading Donnas work, some inside Pākehā feminist groups acknowledged that New Zealand feminism had lost its radical base and found that Māori women carried this energy.

Today, we can see new narratives being written. Pania Newton carries the weight of generations on her shoulders as she leads the Protect Ihumatao land movement. In 2020, Pania led the SOUL (Save our unique landscape) march towards parliament as she mourned her father's passing. The land had been stolen in 1865 and sold to European farmers. The movement sought the return of the land and the discontinuation of housing development plans by Fletchers building. The occupation at Ihumatao spoke to the power of Mana Wahine. That one woman could initiate a movement that created a brief moment of pacific harmony and solidarity on the land of her people. Pania gave up everything for her tupuna and the land she would die for. Panias' fight represents a contemporary example of Māori intersectionality, which places importance on our culture, land, and her mana as a wahine.

Nothing will kill the mana to which wahine whakapapa back to. Colonisation can never take away our whakapapa. Uncovering pre-colonial narratives of Atua wahine will allow us to make space for Māori women who will continue to write post-colonial narratives of mana wahine who act as role models, archetypes and guides.. From the first Atua wahine to Dame Whina Cooper to Pania Newton to every little Māori girl born in Aotearoa. Supporting our wahine in this journey helps our culture progress towards its decolonisation.

# ROULETTES AND ROMEDIES, A BRIEF UNPACKING JOURNEY. ■

**"Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies?"** Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. **You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur."**

- Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

**Being a feminist** means supporting equity across all intersections and facets of society. There's no other guideline. Although, lately, I've found it hard to ignore the division between feminists growing stronger as we cycle through trends in the media. And how, at the end of the day, we're our own voyeur anyway.

Feminism, boiled down, is fluid and forgiving and functional. It acknowledges individual freedom and fights for our human-need to be included and respected. However, the increasing intellectualisation of feminism contradicts this very nature. The idea that feminism is solely an academic subject - opposed to a humanitarian one - only contributes to an exclusive culture that says that you must meet a *standard* to call yourself a feminist. Nowadays, there's an undeniable pressure to be politically correct; otherwise, you're cancelled. But at an individual level, how essential is jargon and buzzwords to equity? Why does reposting on Instagram mean you're better informed than others? What's the use of arbitrary and glib actions - all to prove you care? All nuanced questions with long answers. My point being, the speed we recycle through trending topics in feminism snowballs into gatekeeping in order to "protect" the intellectualised version of feminism. It shames people who don't know technical concepts and breeds cult-like behaviour in those tricked into a sort of tunnel-vision mindset on "how to feminist". It nips curiosity in the bud.

## Jennifer Kim

*Explores the intellectualisation and commodification of the 21st century's brand of feminism. This unpacking journey voyages through the trials and tribulations facing young women today as they try to explore and validate their feminism in a man's world.*

It would be unfair to ignore the necessity of intellectualisation. When we can communicate the vulnerability that systemic issues create and crunch it down to bite-sized information, we open new avenues of activism in our hyperconnected, fast-paced world. We need logic to describe the trickle-down consequences of injustice and exploitation. We need to analyse statistics and hear the voices that give substance and maturity to the causes we support.

History, anthropology, economics, and literature bring forward new perspectives and expertise to understand societal problems at their roots. Intellect transforms and empowers people. Yet, great minds think alike, but fools rarely differ.

Commodification is nothing new to capitalism and colonisation. Feminist trends are packaged into pretty typography and shiny girl boss branding, all so that we keep the man's wallet fat. From traditionalist virtues to choice feminism, being a woman is a brutal industry. It parallels our roulette of feminist trends — from tomboys to girl bosses, to bimbofication to cottage core. Everything and anything is at the risk of “entrepreneurship” and “empowerment”. An apocalypse of new age, new era, revised, more inclusive, more diverse, more liberating feminism — and now you can get it on a sticker or a mug! Throughout time and in feminism, the circling of opinions has been impossible to follow; thankfully, capitalism is supersonic. Consumerist society consoles us as we indulge in commodified feminism, which is in no way a crime but can sometimes be a dampener on our moral high ground as proud heralds of justice. There is a bitterness that's hard to escape when you know you're a poor uni student in a man's world.

Women in romantic comedies, above anything else, are usually the most naked example of a woman commodified by a man. I have always had a love-hate relationship with romedies and their repetitive plot lines. It probably reflects my deep desire to relax with mindless entertainment and the overbearing truth that there are other, more productive, and meaningful pastimes I could be doing instead. When watching a female character appease the manic pixie dream girl role or be objectified, many things are discomfoting. On the other hand, it's equally painful to watch a modern-day woman in a mid-life crisis only find happiness in romance with a cishet man archetype. And then, on occasion, there are good-for-her movies that always seem to strike a chord and leave you satiated, like *Gone Girl* and *Legally Blonde*. Regardless of why or what romedy you're watching, whether you despise it or find yourself enjoying it, never forget that you are, in fact, always being groomed by the *male gaze*. All the bad parts, but especially all the good parts.

The premise of romantic comedy implies that it's not an intellectual conversation but simply a feel-good hook. We have now done a 360 turn to battle out the paradox of intellectualisation — again. The requited nature of the male gaze and the trending feminist lens manifests into the newest female character tropes in pop culture. Take, for example, the rise and fall of the girl boss. Every time we discover new ways to gain agency against the current, it is publicised (usually with good intentions). Still, it winds up serving as a way to make women palatable to an audience who watches through the male gaze. Worse, we lie to ourselves. Telling ourselves that the audience's opinions are justifiable — their acceptance and criticism. The very essence of society and people is reciprocal; we are the product of our environment, and the environment is the product of us. It's impossible to escape the gaze. Nevertheless, the spirit of freedom triumphs and promotes intellectualised feminism and is what keeps us padlocked in its dangerous pattern.

Even in intersectional feminism, we are just making informed choices under the male gaze. We can't outsmart the implicit. The judgment of the man spills over and stains women's liberation. Existing in a gender binary patriarchy has taught me many lessons. The most rewarding one is that because life is reciprocal, everyone has the power to change and induce change. How you do that is truthfully not up for debate, and never was, because feminism is *fluid and forgiving and functional*. Progress is nothing but a singular thought at the end of the night, a fleeting “that movie was shit”. As I wrap up my hot take on the world around me, I hope you don't take my cynicism close to heart. It's probably just the man inside me talking.

# AS A FEMINIST, DATING MEN IS MY OWN PERSONAL PURGATORY.



TW: Toxic Relationships



## Lily Chen

*I'm Lily and I spend my spare time doing silly little tasks within my capacity as the chairwoman of Campus Feminist Collective. My taste in men can best be described as "hot in a pathetic way". Sometimes I forget to take my meds and overshare my life on the internet.*

**My litmus test** for dating men is outing myself as a feminist and asking whether they support feminism. Answering no is an instant red flag, and until recently, saying yes was a pathway into my pants. I kissed guys left and right as long as they believed in women's rights, and boy, was that a bad idea.

During early adolescence, I was a niche internet micro-celebrity. Not to brag, but a following of thousands on my social media account dedicated to feminism is the ultimate certification for any self-proclaimed feminist. For me, feminism reconciled the personal with the political, as my oppression as a woman of colour is ruled by sexism and racism. The politicisation of my own lived experiences fuelled my fight for feminism, and this logic applied to every aspect of my life, except for dating men.

When a kid in my middle school maths class agreed with the girlboss rhetoric preached by pastel pink tumblr textposts, I immediately developed a crush. While my tastes have matured since my prepubescent days, I must admit to still batting my eyelashes when a cute guy can quote Audre Lorde during my sociology lectures. Having a modicum of respect for women is honestly enough for me. My very low standards for men is not necessarily a crime, but I am a serial criminal when it comes to staying in relationships when my partners treat me like shit.

That begs the question: why did I not leave these shitty men if I am so in support of liberating myself from male oppression? How am I expected to empower women and destroy the patriarchy



when I continue to make bad decisions contrary to these ideological alignments I claim to have? My counterargument is that choices do not exist in a vacuum. This binaristic misconception that I can choose to leave or stay is reductive of the social structures in society influencing what I choose. Under the patriarchy, the capacity for women to make their choices completely on their own is constrained within patriarchal parameters.

At face value, making a choice, like putting on a push-up bra to showcase my cleavage, is just me exercising my autonomy. Beyond the surface would be the pressures pushing me towards making this particular choice, such as the demand to conform with the male gaze, the socially-imposed shame of having smaller breasts, the mentality that my intrinsic worth as a human being is determined by my body, and much more. Can we stop talking about my choices and start thinking about the institutions that underlie my decision-making process?

I must confess, I made some not-so-feminist choices pertaining to men. My worst decision yet was to stay in an emotionally abusive relationship with someone who did not deserve it. As our romance curdled into a cesspool of toxicity, my feminist praxis flew out the window. In the aftermath of the breakup, I blamed myself for being victimised. I convinced myself that my years of reading feminist theory should have taught me better. In retrospect, feminism does not make me immune to abuse or assault. Instead, feminism makes me aware of how my lived experiences are shaped by the patriarchy. I can acknowledge the power relations entangling my personal life with my political realities. I am sick of having survivor stories disregarded and dismissed because “as a feminist, you should know better” when feminism is not a shield that can protect me from harm.

A feminist awakening will not make the abusers around me go away. Despite being feminists who are resisting against male domination, we are still subordinate to the prevailing power of the patriarchy. Coming to the realisation that I was abused was a tough pill to swallow because I took immense pride in resisting the patriarchal status quo, in both public and private spheres. My victimisation resulted from the refusal to recognise how the patriarchy trickled down into my

life, and by extension, reproduced the oppressive power dynamics of society within the context of my romantic relationships.

I speak openly of my struggles pertaining to the patriarchy because exposing my wounds allow me to actualise my oppression. As someone who is directly affected by feminist issues, I do not have the liberty to advocate for feminism in the abstract. To divorce the personal from the political only exacerbates my marginality. To transform my anguish arising from male domination into empowerment, I must embrace the lifelong journey of actively unlearning patriarchal indoctrination and conceptualising feminism as a means of conveying the complexity of my subordination. Under feminism, vocalising how we need to remember how our personal lived experiences are politicised by the patriarchy, reminds us to recover from our collective struggle and renews our commitment to the feminist movement.

I became a feminist because after a lifetime of experiencing senseless structural oppression, I was desperate to find the language to articulate my socio-political situation and did not rest until I found my answer. Advocating for intersectional feminism allowed me to become self-aware about how my lived experiences of oppression correspond with the ideological and institutional apparatus shaping my social status as a woman of colour. I cannot heal from my hurt until the profound pain is translated into a feminist uprising against the very systems of oppression that produce and perpetuate this suffering.

# WHAT IS FEMINIST FASHION? HOW DO YOU DRESS LIKE A FEMINIST?

## Kate Harris

*Kate is an MA (Ethnomusicology) student researching fashion and popular music. Inspired by conversations with friends about feminism and fashion, they wrote this piece to spark further debate and discussion around women's agency, dress, and the intersections of race, culture, gender, and sexuality.*

**Feminism centralises** the fight for women's bodily autonomy, and clothing is often how 'feminist' femininities are performed. I want to explore how feminism itself, as political action aiming to dismantle patriarchal oppression, manifests in fashion that emphasises body autonomy and empowerment. Two recurring tropes are my touchpoints: appropriating masculine clothing's 'power', versus emphasising female sexuality. Throughout, I ask a group of people whose opinions and writing on gender I admire for their takes as well.

The history of 'feminist' dress has seen women ditching restricting corsets and skirts to gain the physical and social freedoms of men. 'Power dressing' – the #GirlBoss aesthetic – has been used to command respect in male-dominated environments, appropriating masculine forms of dress such as 'power suits'. Yet this poses some dilemmas. Mimicking masculine dress to deny the male sexualising gaze may simply reinstate the superiority of masculinity (and the necessity of complying with patriarchal corporate/capitalist culture to feel 'empowered'). A woman in a suit might stride into a boardroom past the glass ceiling in her well-cut trousers and shoulder pads, but she hasn't smashed it completely.

A second version of feminist dress is what a friend of mine, Lily, refers to as "full thot mode": sex-positive styles that seek to undo narratives of shame around feminine sexuality by celebrating women's sexual agency as empowering. Lily, who works as a stripper, tells me "there is definite power in using the very restrictive standards/ideals set for us by men against them" by "donning a pair of very ridiculous shoes and some lingerie and conning men out of their money with it". Lily sees that women's sexual power can subvert male capitalist

advantage, although questions the sense of actual feminist 'empowerment' – "because it's still a job and this is still capitalism", which profits from women's objectification.

The possible complicity of women's sexual empowerment within the male gaze makes these feminist choices tricky to parse out. Another friend mentions that she treats uni "like a runway" and wears heels and long skirts or dresses to elongate her body, exuding feminine power, self-assurance, and confidence. On the other hand, she expressed conflict about this: "I feel my dress sense has a lack of feminist intention, like sometimes I'm dressing *for* the male gaze. But then I get power from doing that when I feel satisfied by the response." Her complex feelings remind me of Joan Morgan's book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* (1999), which invites us to "fuck with the greys" by crafting a feminism which rejects how flaunting sexuality has been criticised by some traditional feminists, and embraces the contradictory messiness (including concerns of complicity with the male gaze) of dressing sexy and feeling powerful when looked at by men.

The question of agency, and the inescapability of the male gaze, remains. I believe personal choice, such as women's freedom to express sexuality and their bodies, should be central to feminist values – although my own personal style remains feminine but modest. Is my style an expression of agency, *my* version of feminism, or internalised misogyny from being sexualised for having a curvy body from a young age, a capitulation to the much-maligned Madonna/Whore complex? Will women ever have agency to clothe our bodies as we choose, to self-love in the way we want? The existing canon of feminist fashion hasn't escaped patriarchal scrutiny, and doesn't deconstruct the hierarchical gender binary. Both forms continue to see empowerment as an individual pursuit, rather than addressing the systemic oppression that nullifies the effectiveness of individual empowerment and agency in the fashion choices we make.

Part of the problem is that western feminism, built around the experiences of white women's oppression, often does not contend with the intersectional nature of patriarchal oppression. Racist gender oppression complicates the (white) canon of feminist dress. Clothing has historically (and continually) been weaponised as a colonial and racist tool against Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour, indoctrinating them into western gender

concepts including stereotypes which cast non-white women as the 'Othered' immoral opposite to white (Christian) femininity. Western feminism is thus a thorny, unsuitable concept outside of western women's experiences. For example, hijabs are often ignorantly dubbed by western feminism as a sign of the oppression of Muslim women, contrary to how women who wear them feel. A broader consideration of 'feminist' dress must take in these diverse experiences of patriarchal oppression.

So far the canon of feminist dress has centralised the dress forms of cis-gender women, who are oppressed under the patriarchy but hold a privileged position in other regards. While cis-women may stop shaving their legs and armpits and be celebrated for defying gender norms, trans-women are often held to binary standards of 'passing' to qualify as 'women'. Another friend Luka pushes back at my 'feminist' canon from their Indigiqueer ideological basis: what about non-binary AFAB people who utilise masculine dress as a version of masculinity and/or femininity (which is different to the intentions of the #GirlBoss cisgender perspective)? Or those who identify as femme, queer, or trans, who employ "full thot mode"? These embodiments contain different histories, meanings, and experiences of patriarchal oppression, and challenge the cis-normative, heteronormative, and perisexnormative gender binary in a more robust way than my 'feminist' canon.

Can dress bring about feminist change? I believe so. Fashion has a tremendous ability to enact social change, by creating spaces for anti-hegemonic action and embodying ideological unity amongst like-minded people (to paraphrase Luka). But for feminism to be defined predominantly by white cis-gender women means disregarding a much wider view of patriarchal oppression that takes in queer, non-binary, intersex, trans, Indigenous and non-white experiences to truly deconstruct patriarchal power. The fashion of these groups broadens the range of bodies who perform, and are part of, 'feminism', and redefines what counts as fashioned empowerment and 'feminist' dress.

# REALITY TV'S PROBLEM WITH WOMEN

*Dance Moms*, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, and more similar shows, are often advertised as a deep, unscripted, unedited look into these people's lives. The shows profit off anger, off catfights, and off women being edited to look like they're irrational, dramatic, and emotionally overwrought. Dramatics make good TV, and the cost of that, it seems, is to further exploit these women and girls.

Young girls are often portrayed as materialistic and superficial. This has *always* been to do with media portrayal and the stories of little girls in books. It just so happens that over the last 20 years, reality TV has profited off these young girls and their temper tantrums and, for example, their love for dance. This was the age of *Toddlers and Tiaras*, and just before the beginning of *Dance Moms*. In other words, it was in the middle of TLC's car crash TV golden era. Car crash tv *has* to be sensationalised, the subject matter would be otherwise mundane and unwatchable. The cost of this, though, is that it's pushing the narrative of women and girls being unnecessarily angry, hard to control, irrational and emotional. These women are made into caricatures of themselves, and even if we think we're smart enough, as consumers, to not take it too literally, it'll push this narrative and bias all the same.

TLC's shows about performing kids, often, didn't hail the kids as the centre of the drama. Instead, it was the parents, the mums who'd do anything to get their kids famous and by extension, them. Now that I'm a bit older, I can see the transactional nature of these feuds between the women and the producers of these shows. Women are there for entertainment alone, with apparently no intellectual value. I'd love to say that I haven't watched much TV like this since, that I'm better, more grown-up, with a sense of moralistic superiority, but I haven't. Like so many other people across the world, I've fallen into seeing the supposed *inside worlds* of these TV personalities and hoping to "get to know them" on an apparently personal level. I'm talking about the shows like *KUWTK*, *Love Island*, and even *The Bachelor* (on occasion).

Why, then, do we get so much out of these shows? Are they really as confessional as the media moguls behind them would have us believe? Why do the sensationalist parts of these shows more often than not focus on women? What are we supposed to make of this media we watch to get away from thinking about real-life stuff? Why is it *Dance Moms* and not *Dance Dads*? It comes down to the profitability of women's emotions and anger. If two people have a catfight, it makes for good television, if two women have a catfight, it's prime material for teaching kids what *not* to be. It also, however, means that these women, who're simply getting into arguments, as we all do, are being exploited for their anger and emotions. It pushes the narrative of women being hot-headed, fiery, and more often than not, irrational. It's reductive, but we all fall into watching it.

Reality TV is so often hailed as a personalised, insider look, a confessional. It's more than that, it's a way for producers to archetype people into What You Don't Want To Be, a way to exploit people's very natural responses to highly stressful situations, and villainise emotions. Women's emotions are once again, on the chopping block of consumerism, and women are time and time again reduced into being there purely for entertainment value.

## Victoria Nicoll

*Victoria is a third year student in History and English. She's passionate about feminism & making sure everyone gets a fair go, and KATE seemed like a pretty good way to go about it! Her instagram is @victoriacarolinenicoll*

# THE CARICATURE OF CARING

## Charlie Parker

*I believe to care for someone is the greatest gift you could give them; to care wholeheartedly, unconditionally, or even just for five seconds. It doesn't make you weak, or motherly, or overly emotional. It's okay to be feminine, it's okay to show that you care.*

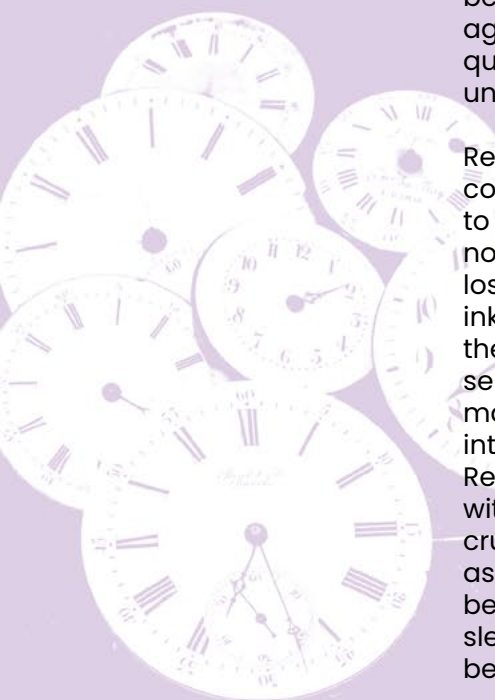
The clock hands tremble over vague shapes that mark the early hours of the morning. Faint ticking protrudes through my auditory cortex as the hands defy the laws that many physicists spent so long refining, as the noise breaks through every atom without laying a finger on my head. My temporal lobe throbs in distress as the tick-tock strikes a blow of actuality; my temporal space is consumed by others instead of myself. I scribble idealisations of my acquaintances onto pieces of parchment that would only be crumpled onto my floor seconds after my pen has left the page, none ever good enough to help the intended recipients. As the fresh ink seeps into the carpet, I begin sinking into the possibility that I will always be the lifeguard sent to rescue the next victim from their own ocean of tears, whilst I drown in my own.

If one was to call the attentiveness to others needs a 'maternal instinct', then the divine feminine who walk this earth and care for those who need it most are subdued to the highest form of falsification.

I do not believe there is anything overtly feminine about caring.

To care is to step into the worn-out shoes of whimsical wanderers, to receive life and all its shortcomings through glossy-coated eyes. You are not meant to fit the shoes, as you will leave creases in unfortunate places; you must merely stand in their shoes, step back from the shoes, and redefine what they believe to be the only perception of their life. It is kind, it is subtle, but most importantly it is human. If to care is to be human, yet to others caring is feminine, then consequently to be human is to be feminine. We have become merely a blended mural of the expectations society has pinned against us, and we have forgotten what it means to be human. It is not a quality, nor a trait, yet if it resembles as such, we drive those aspects six feet under and never attempt to resurrect it. We have buried femininity.

Reflecting upon myself in my vanity's mirror, I perceive a Pan's labyrinth, the consequence of which was the creation of societies three impossible tasks; to find, to accept, and to love thine self without being too feminine. Now, I am no longer the lifeguard. I am Moses. I part the sea of despair and guide my lost acquaintances down a dusty path towards the dawn of a new day. The ink stains left dotted on the carpet mark a Hansel and Gretel like trail down the pathway, leading them to all of life's sweetness ahead. I pave the way for serene self-love as Aphrodite has for leading warriors of the past. I am the man, I am the woman, I am every force of energy in one body that holds no intention of changing to fit the expectations that others have created. The Red Sea's waves now cascade down into the sunrise, painting the horizon with watercolour condolences to the ideas that entrap our way of being. I crumple into my soft-cream bedsheets, welcoming the newly found warmth as the goosebumps on my leg begin to dissipate whilst the clock sets the beat for a pan flute lullaby. I am soothed into a submission in which I will sleep comfortably, as I will never be anything less than feminine. I will never be anything less than human.





# FIVE LETTERS FOR FEMINISM...

## DEAR READER...

Feminism by definition; advocating women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. But this is more than some mere political ideology. Contrary to existing beliefs, feminism is not a weapon with which to tear down other women. What really constitutes feminism? It is the simplistic notion that women are human. It is not about man hating, but rather fixing the political, economical and social barriers women face daily. Unrealistic timestamps for women exist subconsciously, due to the toxic ideals that have entrenched our minds for centuries. One may ask, with this logic, shouldn't we all be feminists?

**Sanskruti  
Banerjee**

## DEAR MEN...

It is important to note, men and those who identify as male do not yet have the benefits of gender equality either. Society has conditioned them to think it 'weak' to depict emotion as they are commonly told to 'toughen up.' Should the expression of feelings not be universal? To all men. Fathers, brothers, sons and anyone who respects and uplifts the women around them. To those inadvertently supporting gender inequality by little actions. And to those who proudly claim to be feminists, I applaud you. We need far more of your kind in the world.

# DEAR SOCIETY...

Stereotypes. Expectations. Imprisoned. Haunted by double standards, forever facing the torments society has to bring. The life of a woman has always been a battlefield. Why are men making laws relating to a woman and her body? Her body, her choice. Why must we cower in fear as soon as it becomes dark or change what we wear? We should not be teaching our daughters to protect themselves, but rather our sons to behave and be held accountable.

She speaks too little, she doesn't fit the ideal of a 'successful, confident' woman. She speaks too much and has opinions, oh look at her being bossy and full of herself. She wears an outfit she feels confident in and is called names, sexualized or stared at. She covers up and she isn't considered beautiful or hot anymore.

Tomboy's aren't feminine enough and girls who wear makeup are pretentious freaks. Oh, how everyone's critic.

There is no real definition of beauty, because the truth is no matter who you are, society will find one darn way to tear you down. This is the same society which needs to be painted with equal opportunities for success, free of the darkness stereotypes and the toxic ideals bring.

To those women in society constantly serving as role-models, I thank you. From Jane Austen's strong female characters in the past to Emma Watson now, women have been fighting for far too long. Disney has also shown us to be brave like Mulan, strong-willed like Jasmine, independent like Moana and more. Wise words have also been brought to us by beloved characters and icons. "Women have ambition and talent as well as just beauty" as said by Jo March from Little Women. In our day and age, we have pop stars such as Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande and Doja Cat inadvertently addressing feminism and depicting female strength through music too. Whether it's "I'd be the man, God is a Woman or Let me be your Woman."

# DEAR WOMEN...

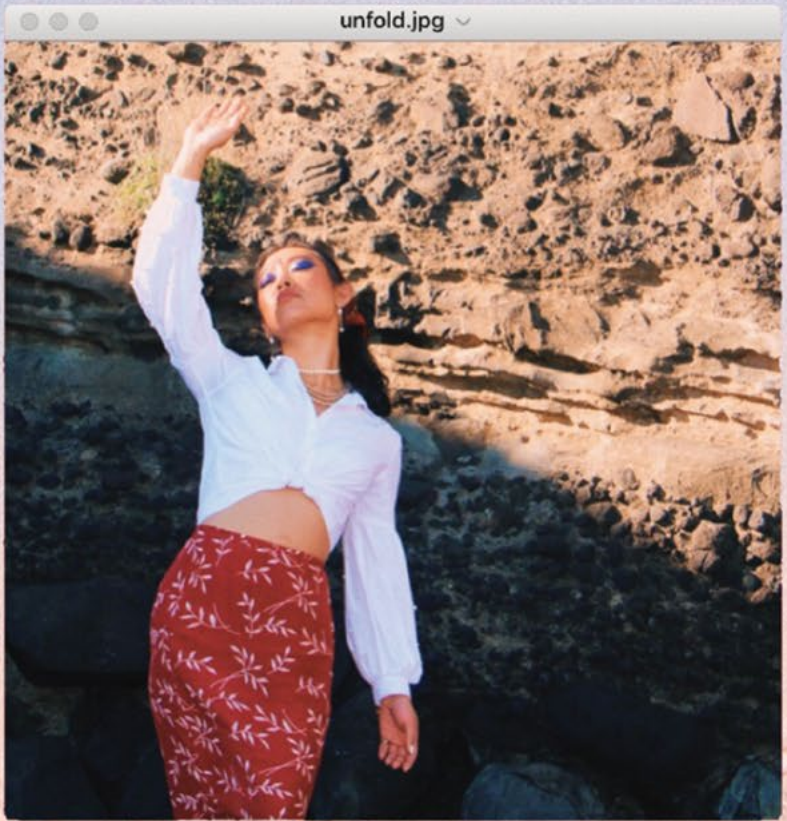
To all the women and those who identify as female, I am sorry. If prejudice was not taught, we would be oblivious. Upon speaking to a wide range of women and females in my own life, I have come to the harsh realisation, we have much work left to do. There is still a large difference in the gender pay gap when women have the same aptitudes and skill sets. It should not be rare to see women in positions of power. More diversity is needed. Health professionals and women in STEM are not 'quite smart for a girl,' they are just incredibly smart. Hundreds of young girls still face education based barriers and are being married at a young age. Unspoken labels and harassment are still directed to women. These 'little things' are not so little once they become normalised. So to all women, go out and break the shackles society has tried to constrain you with. Defy them and do not be silenced. After all, the Queen is the most important piece in chess, is she not?

And lastly...

# TO ALL THE LITTLE GIRLS...

You do not need a prince charming.  
Be loud, be bold, be dramatic.  
and be powerful, my darling.  
Aspire to be politicians or scientists,  
Writers or CEO's.  
Let courage serve as your sword,  
intellect as your strength,  
you're capable of more than you know.  
Don't be defined by what you are not,  
but by everything you have the potential to be.  
Women are so much more than beauty,  
this, I hope you will see.  
A wise person once said;  
If not me, who?  
If not now, when?  
Oh and if anyone says you cannot,  
say; "Indeed I can. I am a woman."





And I know, you'll come crawling back  
to me.







# FRIDAY

## Ruby-Rose Whitcher

Her lunch expels itself over her bathroom floor. It is a missile, a misstep. It clings to her teeth like bad bacteria, sour and rancid in the back of her throat. Burns as she throws back mouth wash, even though she read this morning in an outdated fashion magazine that all chemicals should be avoided after bile empties itself through your throat. Toothpaste, mouthwash, floss. A tremor, a thrill at breaking the law of beauty. Her eyelash clings to the counter, curling like caterpillars as she fixes them to her face. A traitor, a treason as she follows the rules. It splinters and spits and splits, falling flat into an open palm. A curious black smudge that crumbles as she closes a fist. Her lips are smudged, a rosy red now blossoming across her face in an angry mark. The image in the mirror almost smiles, she almost laughs. Her shoulders slump, drawing in on themselves, hands shake as she pushes the eyelash back on, moving around the bathroom as if it is a careful dance. It's all pretend; all guesswork. Her mum had pulled her out of ballet the moment she had started staring in the mirror for too long.

The smell of vomit lifts and lingers. Hot, violent pumpkin laying in chunks. She draws a black pencil to her lids as she leans against the counter, eyes attuned to the mess on the floor. Bruising beetroots and sloppy wet tomatoes. He had said he would pick her up at seven. The eyes get drawn on hastily, the debris of mascara falling into the pits of her sockets as she blinks; blinks and the mascara drown on over the fake eyelash falls straight into the whites of her eye, a sharp sting. Fingers that can carefully pluck it out, nails that narrowly miss the soft white flesh, the harsh blue, the bleeding pinks of the corner. Ten minutes. Her phone trills with an incoming text, an onslaught of time captured in a chain: *I'm half an hour away, twenty minutes, fifteen, ten, almost almost almost*. She slams the phone back onto the counter, face-down. Poses in front of the mirror, practicing her looks of shock and surprise, amusement and glee. Practices for a revelation, for a bombshell. For the best orgasm of her life. Fixes her arms like they are puppets on a string, a marionette she has possessed control of. Holds her hips, an awkward junction that sits out. Presses them against her chest, limp. Pouts. Pushes her legs apart, in again. Brushes her hair with an old comb tangled with peroxide bleach. He won't like her anyway. He'll say he's had fun, pay for her drinks, take her back home. She will smile through gritted teeth, cry in the Uber home. He won't call, or meet her eye on the street. He will slot into a shelf with the rest of them.

and up, and up- her palms hit the counter of the sink, hard. Hard enough she will see red when she peels away, her wrist inflicted with the damage. The metal pushes through her lips, the ooze of swallowed back blood hits the sink, washes in with her lipstick. She had bought new underwear for this, had rearranged her entire week. She stabs a nail into the space over her wrist, pressing until the skin splits open into a crescent moon.

*I'm here.*

*Hereherehereoutsideoutsideoutside.*

She glances once more at the mirror, meets a heavy red scowl. Throws a mint in her mouth as she leaves. He sits in a nondescript car, a nondescript man of moderate interest. She tries to gauge who he wants before she opens the door: housewife, whore, the girl next door. She can be anyone. Beauty queen, stone cold bitch, damsel in distress. Her stomach lurches forward as her fingers curl around the handle. The best she can hope for is a kiss that is sweet, languid in her mouth. Her teeth curl softly around the sounds of a girlish hi as she slides into his passenger seat, batting her eyelashes like this is unusual for a Friday night. *I'm not the type of girl who does this thing*, twirls her hair in her fingers, consumes him in the backseat. She bites down on the mint, misses and draws blood from her tongue. The taste of rotten copper sloshes around her mouth, gurgles down the back of her neck.

Her oesophagus scratches. A slight tear. It comes up slowly, she feels as it claws. On his lap she throws up an old tube of lipstick. It remains unscathed in its gold case, no sign of its forced entry out of her. Then: a mascara wand, a stolen brow brush, horrid pink blush, a case of concealer, a whole bottle of foundation, a perfume bottle, a beauty blender. The cosmetic items gather up, mounting on his lap. The sum of four hundred and ninety dollars resting on his jeans. She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, a dribble of blood catching on her nail. *Oh*, she smiles like she's on a television screen. Glamorous, gleaming kind of mean. *I'm sorry.*

She parts her hair with her fingers, teasing her scalp open. Hastily plaits two twin loose braids, unplaits with quick fingers. Kicks the vomit with the tip of her Mary Jane, her nerves displayed on a platter: she rearranges the spoiled vegetables as an art show. Feels the bile rise again, from the pits of her stomach, through her digestive tract, up,



# BARBIE IN A MAGICAL, SPARKLE, PRINCESS, CASTLE, RAINBOW ADVENTURE

**Jennifer Bishop**

**In this short film** I explore my experience with Barbie movies and how I feel this has shaped the way I express myself in my adult life.

I always admired Barbie for being a 'perfect woman': she was loved by everyone, she was kind, friendly, confident, and beautiful, she could do nothing wrong! This is something I wanted to be: I wanted to never be annoying or bring about conflict, I wanted to help people and be everyone's best friend. I was a big advocate that the "good" parts of Barbie overshadowed the "bad" parts of her; like her unrealistic beauty standards and the conservative-ness of it all.

Until recently I truly believed that I had successfully built myself around being this perfect, caring, and always happy person, I was finally living my true and best life! All I really did was build a hard shell around my inner self which I never questioned... until it started to crack.

I totally believe that the animated female role models I chose as a child were a huge part of why I felt that I had to choose between being a woman and being my true self. They instilled in me the idea that a woman's job was to make everyone around her feel good, and to never show her real "ugly" emotions, and this is what my film is about.



In it a girl (myself) will do anything to become a princess! Along her journey she is confronted with three characters: Unperfectness, Sadness, and Anger, which the girl deems "unprincess-like" and must be eliminated for her to be able to reach her dreams. She holds a tea party where she is so embarrassed by Unperfectness's lack of poise and manners that she verbally lashes out, making them leave. Anger challenges her to a fight which she wins. Then on a walk in the forest Sadness suddenly pounces on her, trying to take over, but the girl escapes, running away. Now that she has finally defeated all the unprincess-like parts of herself, the transformation begins: her dress magically becomes a ballgown, a beautiful tiara appears on her head, gloves emerge on her arms. But at this moment, when she feels most safe, her repressed emotions come back, telling her that she can't run away forever and that this happy ending is not all she thinks it is.

The whole film is lip-synced to actual audio from Barbie movies, which I feel brings new relevance to the words, using the chains that held me down to express these new emotions which do not usually belong in Barbie's world. I find a lot of comedy in creating different contexts for the scenes of Barbie movies and believe that it symbolises the way that these "ugly" emotions can start to fit into my real life again.





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# TIPTOE ALONG THE LINES OF TOGETHERNESS

**Lara Brownie**

*For A & N. When tiptoeing around who we are for so long can feel so lonely; like the world is caving in.  
Thank God we have each other.*

Cigarette ashes grow  
Real-life-girl-Sims-kissing  
Mothers day; a preamble to  
Farewells and  
Because  
Z Energy has Kit-Kat duo's  
Because Z Energy has 2-for-\$6 Red Bulls  
Because Z Energy has ClearBlue 10-in-one tests  
(not that pregnancy tests matter for us)  
When margaritas cost \$15 why not share?

The sign says  
[KITTENS— FREE TO A GOOD HOME]  
What will happen if they don't find a home?

That's what it feels like  
Especially when they figure it out  
An autopsy    Of closing tabs  
                    Of clearing histories  
                    Of the unutterable  
Every breath is formidable.  
You tend to breathe quieter when people are watching.  
You tend to breathe quieter when people can hear.  
& then they ask How?  
                    When?  
                    Who?  
                    Why?

Queer enquiries feel both safe & scary.  
Queer enquiries feel both safe & sorry.

But togetherness will bring  
Expansion packs  
Timed respiration  
                    & 2am Z Energy deals.



# FIGS AND PERSIMMONS

Lauren Connolly

*Figs and Persimmons is about gift-giving as a way of communication in my relationship with my mother. Her ability to care for her garden mirrors the way that she cares for her children.*

In early autumn  
My mother will give me  
A fig  
The first one of the season  
A plump heart  
Green as the grass caught  
Beneath her fingernails  
Rolling around on my palms  
Resting against my  
Life line

She'll show me the tree  
Growing against the fence  
My father built  
It used to stink  
Of sweet rot, sunbaked death  
Sticky and inescapable  
Stroking  
The soft skin of our throats  
Until she brought it back to life Now  
Our throats taste of figs

I break one open  
Peel the fondant skin  
Back  
With my pink fingernail  
Suck out the pink guts  
Through my pink lips



Count them  
As I lick fig blood and honeyed organs From my fingers  
One two three four five six seven And I farewell Perspehone

In late autumn  
My mother will buy me a  
Persimmon  
A love letter  
To tear into chunks  
With hot coffee teeth  
Try not to  
Choke  
On other dead autumn days

They smack of supermarkets Cold skeleton trolleys  
With squeaky wheels  
A fluorescent  
Hades  
Plastic bag scavenging and  
Aching abundance

I love them

Persphone has been gone for a while Empty stomach  
Embroidered with pomegranate Seeds  
Her pink stained fingertips  
Smudging pink pomegranate Grease  
Around her pink lips  
The fruits of her emotional labour

You don't count persimmon Seeds  
You eat them whole



# LAST YEAR'S GHOST

**Loredana P. Kint**

*A poem written after lockdown 2020, about my 2019 self.*

This route is one which last year's self once trekked  
Without much thought, nor reason to expect  
Life would divert us—now to intersect  
Beyond arms' length. Bubbles disconnect  
Like gauzy galleons, from a soundless shore,  
Their captains, shades of what they were before.

With body anchored to one floor, my days  
Were passed in layering the window-glaze,  
While last year's ghost must much have summoned ways  
To reminisce on walled-off seas, and gaze  
With desert-eyes, upon the roads which once  
Were hemmed with ivy—wilted in these months.

I turn once more, where last year's ghost once trod  
With half-combed hair, shoelaces rashly shod,  
Or mindlessly, in afternoons would plod.  
I cross this spirit-self each day; we nod  
In recognition of the pasts we pass,  
And overlie dewed footprints on the grass.

*I am* the ghost of last year's self, alas,  
Whose anchor is reality; a mass  
Upon my wingtips. Dreams dissolve as gas,  
To little more than clouds do they amass,  
Unless we catch them—share with them our shield,  
And flourish, in the fragrance which they yield.

I breathe again, join hands unto the ghost,  
We've learnt to savour from each year the most,  
And, braving seas which last year I'd have feared,  
My living self is unto me endeared;  
A brighter ghost, less pale for all the pain,  
No pawn of storms, should dare they strike again.  
The best of last year's self survives, and lives,  
And even—but next year will show—forgives.

# WOMB

**Lauren Connolly**

*Womb relates to one of the first conversations with my mother about birth control and acknowledging that I was growing up.*

Sipping rose  
its pink blending with my insides  
sour sweet  
like a kiss

She sits across from me her face is mirrored  
in mine  
but I am only the sun fractured in a pond

of broken glass  
touch me and I  
bleed  
my mother's blood

I want to ask her  
how to find protection but I am stuck  
in my own throat  
Honesty's baby teeth bite at my tongue

I want to say  
I have grown  
I have changed  
I am different than when we shared a body

But instead I smile  
like a  
picked seam  
like the  
Final Girl



# WOMAN- HOOD

**Isabel Bloomfield**

*I originally wrote this poem for International Women's Day 2021 – sometimes I work and rework poems for days, but this one came to me fully-formed. I was inspired in particular by my mother and sister, and the special sense of shared womanhood which proves elusive to describe in words.*

Heaving, breathing, pulsing,  
I feel it flow within me.  
The fight of a thousand wars  
The tears of a hundred generations  
And the power of all my sisters.  
It builds to an infinity of strength  
For who can stand against  
The might of the female struggle?  
The blood we spill  
Saturating as one red pool  
Into the earth from which we spring.

# I SEE THE PLIGHT OF AFGHAN WOMEN ON THE TV SCREEN.

**Naya Nakamura Todd**

*This poem is dedicated to the women in Afghanistan in hopes that it will help to foster thoughts and discussions regarding their current situation.*

*Note: The situation is actively unfolding so the details conveyed are uncertain and could be politically incorrect in the future.*

I see the plight of Afghan women on the TV screen.

*What would they do if they could be anything they wanted to be?*

Bodies that have bent from one regime to the next. Back to being constrained to the restrictions of thousands of men.

Tears swallowed. Guns shot. Scrambling to any possible place that can keep them safe.

To be disrespected. Unseen. Torn apart.

Just for having a certain genital entrusted upon their heart.

And suddenly a high voice cracks

only to be reminded of and fallen back into s i l e n c e.

*Why do they need a man to make a move?*

*What is the point of defeating women?*

*How long will they have to live this way?*

From where we stand, it sounds like an issue that is a few decades too late.

~~School for women. Jobs for women. Women.~~

Yet, it continues to be interwoven in the world's day to day.

Steps into p r o g r e s s

Access to books. Pens to use. Burqas an option. Freedom - something to believe.

Only to be (potentially) erased.

*Do the Taliban fear us?*

*Is it worth the fight when it leads to the same fight all over again?*

I see the Afghan women on the TV screen.

Protesting. Hands tall. Seemingly unafraid.

They are strong. They are equipped. They are the light in a future of uncertain waits.

And we must not stop honoring their rights till the very day they have a choice to take flight.

# A JOB WHICH MEANS EVERYTHING

**Maha Fier**

She sits there, hands fumbling  
She sits there, breath weakening,  
She sits there, eyes watering,

The day is slow,  
The day is long,  
Night begins to creep  
She mustn't go.

She sits there, sweat dropping  
She sits there, cracks growing  
She sits there, women yawning

The river weeps,  
The sky coughs,  
The fabric then tears,  
He mustn't know.

She sits there, sighing  
She sits there, hoping  
She sits there, fearing

For a job which means everything,  
Yet she receives nothing.

# DAY DREAMS

**Jodi Yeats**

*Jodi Yeats currently works as equity communications and marketing adviser at this University, where some time ago, she graduated with a masters in English. She has written poetry alongside a career in publishing and journalism. Despite more near misses than accolades, Jodi is looking to self-publish a collection of poems. She is editing poems from the past, including Day Dreams, and writing new ones, with lockdown emerging as a theme. Jodi finds writing enhances living, which is reason enough to keep going.*

And while day dreams  
to double violins,  
how often thoughts turn,  
to memories of you.

Drowsy evening sun  
touches the pillow.  
You have a family.  
I live as an adult now.

What was it that passed  
between us? It was only  
the sound of the wind  
around the house

wounding the trees  
bruising their leaves,  
their leaves  
falling.

# GOLDEN LINING

**Loredana P. Kint**

When silver linings aren't enough,  
When skies are seas, and seas are rough,  
Remember that the moon is pale,  
But sunlight's warmth shall never fail,  
The clouds are bubbles, just more gray,  
And, like our troubles, float away,  
Or if they won't, their prisms shift  
To show new hues as spirits lift,  
And soon enough, the sun resumes shining,  
Then we all see the golden lining.





# CHRISTMAS IN THE CHATHAM ISLANDS

**Kristan Horne**

BRACHYGLOTTIS HUNTII / CHATHAM LAND CHRISTMAS TREE / TE RĀKAU KIRIHIMETE O RĒKOHU

*Brachyglottis* in the aster family, *Asteraceae*.

sounds like a rare

respiratory illness

you might find in an Intensive Care Unit;

the name derived

from *brachus* [short]

glottis [the vocal apparatus of the larynx].

Trevor says

a reference to the size of the florets, presumably.

I shrug.

Living with a writer

it is no picnic, editing is the season

I like least

watching him slave & stumble over

malignant malapropisms

manky mixed metaphors

the ebbs and flows: ecstasy | exasperation

in service to the word.

After our daily COVID-walk, weary whippet in tow

it seems to us an irrefutable truth---

everyone now has a dog to walk:

every dainty Dalmation, all the irascible Irish terriers:

Schnauzers, Barbets, Vizlas, and Labradors

the yappy Collie, the wobbling Daschund

every pampered Papallions, and frou-frou Pekinese

promenadeing down Tukapa St

now perambulation is the prized civic duty

the ambulatory imperative every citoxen must seize.

Now, he mutters something about Christmas

and the Chatham Islands---bit left field, darling;

last time we talked about yuletide plans

Aaron & Elena got an honourable mention

a roadtrip to Whangarei

Now he is talking about Christmas trees

in Rēkohu, land of the misty sun

and is much as I fancy Christmas in the Chathams

this is not the right time

& I will not condone chopping down trees for this.

# UNTITLED

**Sophie Gibson**

You made yourself bigger  
while you made me smaller  
and smaller  
don't you know that  
the bigger you are the  
easier it is  
to slip through  
your  
fingers

# TUG OF WAR

**Talitha Patrick**

*Trigger Warning: mental illness*

*'Tug of war' summarises my experience with mental illness which I have chosen to be transparent about. I hope people can appreciate my vulnerability and even relate to it.*

My mind plays tug of war with itself  
The rational and the irrational  
The logic and the emotion  
The fear and the hope  
The anxiety and the normalcy  
Will I self-sabotage or self-destruct?  
Will I rationalise and remain calm?  
Who will win today?

# DRAGONS LIVE FOREVER

**Sue Nelson**

A tsunami  
Rises behind my eyes  
A slow mountainous crest  
Of stormy, gun-metal sea

Volume builds  
Lost things drop  
From its cruel collection  
Of memories cascading  
At break-neck speeds  
Falling stories  
Into greedy graves  
The silence is deafening  
Like trying to shout above the wind  
Silent words, screaming mouth

'Sorry can't hear you', he said.

I secured all I could  
Tied things down  
Clung to masts  
Stuff went overboard  
A billion bubbles burst  
I went below deck  
To wait it out  
A vulnerable vessel, tossing  
On oceans of moments  
All swimming together  
In an undulating  
Merciless  
Body

I focused on breathing  
In  
Out  
Tried to calm a salty mind  
Ugly brows unfurled  
Open palms kissed  
But it was futile  
Waves crashed upon the shore  
Dragging footholds out to sea  
All the day's battles won...  
are water soluble

I surrender  
Abandon ship  
Embody the mightiness  
Become the beast  
I am a dragon  
Raising up her scaly neck  
Snapping chains in sweet  
release  
Pile and pillar plucked like  
toothpicks  
I can see your smallness  
Way down there, below  
Do you see me now?  
Loyalty, integrity, bone and spirit  
Discarded wrappers of your  
candy soul  
You utter fool  
Breath sucks a low, slow rattle  
Flames lick my dragon heart  
The universe is set alight  
Constellations burn brighter  
Oceans evaporate  
Ash begets ash, it's nature  
And by the way,  
Dragons live forever

# TO ALL THE GIRLS I LOVED BEFORE, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER.

LP

*Girls are great. like seriously, wow. this piece is a short homage to a few that have blessed my life: former (and current) friends, crushes, strangers, acquaintances.*

i.  
you were a friend of a friend.  
i watched you over the dancing  
flames of the campfire,  
and dreamt of holding your hands  
under the stars for weeks after.

ii.  
to this day i still can't tell  
if i loved you or hated you,  
admired you or resented that i  
couldn't be you.

iii.  
went to the art gallery to meet a  
friend, and there you were.  
you outshone any piece of art.  
your curls, your eyes - brown girl  
magic. truly.

iv.  
your gentle laugh,  
the way you wove us into a trance  
when a mic was in your hands - you  
made me feel unbearably seen.

v.  
the epitome of wahine toa.  
fiercely protective and generous  
with your time and love,  
i loved your passion and fire.

vi.  
you were tall and soft with the  
sweetest dimpled smile.  
we planned a day where i'd make  
bread and you'd bring along your  
homemade jam. we never got the  
chance to, but now every time i  
make bread, i think of you.



vii, viii, ix, x, countless  
when you handed me your  
items to scan,  
i hope you didn't notice the way  
i stuttered on my words,  
the way i averted my eyes.

xi.  
the best teacher i'd ever had.  
kind, understanding, firm, a  
friend.  
you pushed me and supported  
me, and under your gaze i  
flourished.

xii.  
you're the person i wish i could  
be.  
dyed blunt bob and sharp  
eyeliner,  
authentic, pulling no punches,  
effortlessly cool.

xiii, xiv, xv, and more.  
i haven't met you yet  
but i will,  
and i'm looking forward to it.

# “ON UR OWN”

Marianne Leigh

Link: <https://soundcloud.com/user-483208051/on-ur-own-marianne-leigh-submission-1/s-FJd2nedKz8a>

*I write my music from personal experiences, and my lyrics are often based on what I'm going through at that time. I wrote "on your own" during a time when I realised that I didn't have to be a 'shoulder to cry on' for everybody, and that it was ok for me to prioritise myself.*

*I think often women, especially young women and girls, feel they must be polite and take on other people's worries, otherwise they're deemed rude or self-conceited. This song is really about saying, "you know what, I'm allowed to worry about me, and you can worry about yourself".*

## VERSE 1

baby ur not who i thought u were  
and i'm not sure if i like what i see

baby we got so much between us  
and i'm not sure what u want from me

but i can say that

## CHORUS

i'm not here to make u laugh  
when everything else going bad  
pick it up on ur own

i'm not there to fix it all  
go find somebody else to call  
make it on ur own

## VERSE 2

they warned me all about ur words  
how you'd never put a woman first, well i said they were wrong

then i let myself fall right into, somebody I knew I would lose  
i dont know why i didnt make u treat me right

## OUTRO

i'll be fine, be alright, on my own.





i am

staring blindly  
at my  
breasts

poised  
in the mirror

hair out,  
shoulders back

i am  
green skin, fat fingers  
aphrodite, seasick

i am  
plucking steel-string,

thinking

what horrible oyster spat this one out?  
there is no pearl in this girl

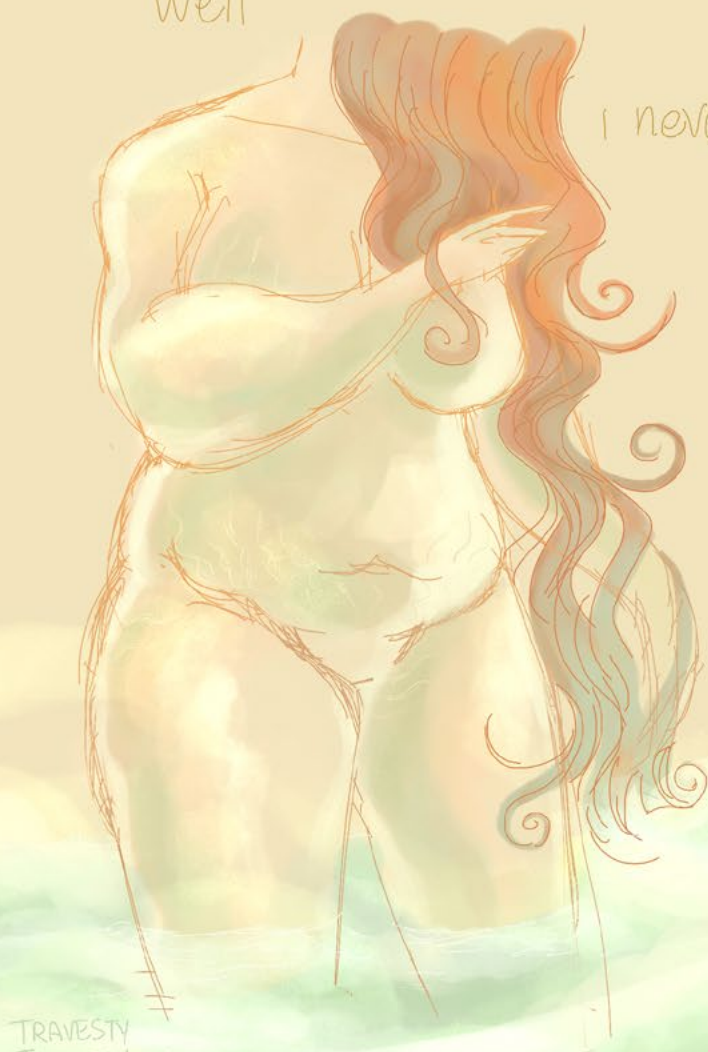
well

i never wanted to be a woman.

no, i wish i were an albatross

skimming the ocean

like cream from milk





*Growing up as a woman in Paris, I felt like I was under constant judgment. Being stared at by the curious eyes of Parisians who thought my body didn't fit the beauty standards of the perfect French girl made me feel uncomfortable and awkward in my own body. When I moved to NZ, I discovered a new world where no body type determined the 'norm'. Finally, no one cared, no one stared, and no one judged. My body belonged to me. These artworks represent this small step of self-understanding, loving and empowerment.*

ARTWORK BY BONNIE WHITE

## EMILY TALBOT INTERVIEWS

## OLIE BODY

## FOUNDER OF WĀ COLLECTIVE

**Firstly, why “Wā”?**

Wā means ‘time, season or period’. It’s the first syllable of wāhine (woman) too. We wanted a name that spoke to the intimacy and connection of periods but didn’t yell it. Not everyone directly wants to talk about periods because there’s a taboo around them! At the time, we were inspired by the works of Ngāhuia Murphy, particularly her thesis, which is about reconnecting back to the womb space as a link to Papatūānuku and your whakapapa. Dale-Maree Morgan, who was the Māori Cultural Representative at Massey University, (where we were studying), gifted the name ‘Wā’ to us. She said she’d love for us to use the name, and that the work we were doing was of high importance, and we were really touched by that. Then we had to think about what to put with ‘Wā’! We were working in a community of people, so we thought, *Wā Collective*!

**Where did the taboo around periods come from?**

Within a New Zealand context, Pākehā bought the taboo with them. In Te Ao Māori, periods were seen as a sacred connection through your genealogy all the way back to Papatūānuku. When on your period, you were seen as being in a sacred space, and you were respected as such. If we rewind back to medieval Europe, periods were considered to be the result of Eve’s first sin and were ‘dirty’ because of this. Because there was no scientific knowledge on periods, they were surrounded by myth. [One was] if women go outside naked on their periods, it will prevent thunderstorms from destroying crops!.. So periods were seen as powerful, but people were scared of them. They were also seen as something to be ashamed of, which unfortunately has rippled through and come to land in our society today.

**For a period (haha), you worked in rural Indian communities to teach menstrual health and distribute sustainable period products. Was this the first time you saw period poverty?**

Yes! Period poverty is a silent issue. If you combine the taboo around periods and the taboo around poverty, it becomes a real space for shame to play out. I first heard of period poverty when I attended a talk by two women from Days For Girls before I left for India. Days for Girls is an international organisation that has a New Zealand chapter run by a beautiful person called Helen. What Helen said stuck with me: “If a girl gets her period and she doesn’t have access to period products, she drops out of school or work and can’t participate in society”. (Obviously, not everyone who has a period identifies as a girl and not everyone who is a woman will have a period). When women have no access, the cycle of poverty continues. I thought if there’s one thing I can do, I can take these pads over to India! It was really difficult to get them through customs [laughs]... in the end, the customs officials were so embarrassed by the whole thing that they let me through!



## Tell us about your experience in India!

I got plonked in this little village called Gumbadara in the foothills of the Himalayas- a beautiful forested place in the middle of nowhere. There, I became great friends with the local nurse. One day when she was tending to her plants, she asked if I could water them for her. I asked why. She said, "because I'm dirty". "If I touch the plants when I'm like this they'll die". At that point, I realised how difficult it was going to be to deliver these products in a culturally safe and respectful way, and in a way that can also deliver relevant health education. After getting to know each other even better, we came up with a way to gift the kits to girls. She [the nurse] held the cultural side and I held the body function and 'how to use the product' side. What this became was something special: a beautiful meeting of cultures.

## Wa collective is a "social enterprise ending period poverty & period taboo". How bad really is period poverty in Aotearoa and what's Wā's role in combatting it?

That's been really hard to gauge because it's not something people want to talk about... and that's no one's fault, it's just what we've been taught! In 2016, the year that Wā was conceived, there was no research on period poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand, just an understanding that something was up. I launched a survey into the wider population of Wellington, which got 1000 student responses. We found that 1 out of 3 menstruating students had skipped class at some point because they didn't have access to menstrual products. People were talking about how whakamā (embarrassed/shy) they felt about their periods... not being able to go to school... using toilet paper. That's when we realised we needed to do something.

## You want to demonetise periods and reconnect people to their bodies and land. Does this vision draw on ecofeminism or any other ideology?

In the past, I've tried to reduce what we are doing into models. But the kaupapa of Wā Collective has come from what's alive. It started in an almost 'sanitised' way... The first iteration of Wā Collective was a shoebox on the wall of Massey University where people could put tampons and pads in and take them out. But something just wasn't sitting right with me. Just because someone can't afford a product doesn't mean they should be given a budget version that is potentially harmful to their body! The other thing [we thought] was, what's happening to all these period products? If we're going to be really responsible, we need to take

into account everything in this value chain... If we're trying to help people who have periods by causing damage to the planet in another sense, how is that helping?

## Have you weaved Māori concepts and principles into your kaupapa?

Right at the start, we were really nervous that what we were building was going to be a Pākehā-only solution. By the time we'd realised the interconnectedness of this issue- between the environment and period products, the financial system and women- and landed on menstrual cups potentially being a solution, we were worried it wouldn't be inclusive enough. But those period surveys showed us we were on the right track because, from that, only 40% of our audience were Pākehā. The rest were this beautiful mix of Asian, Pasifika, Māori and everybody else, which has been really beautiful to see. So we thought, clueing ourselves up as well as we can and providing space for people to do their own learning feels like the right way to orientate.

## Are there any period cup myths you'd like to debunk?

I think the one people get scared to ask is, "will it stretch me" because cups can look big! This is actually a misconception, as the vagina is like an elastic band and bounces back into shape after something has been inside it. We've been sold a lie! What can happen instead is cups can actually strengthen the pelvic floor. They are held in place by our muscles, and at the top, they also form a seal. Because of this, it's kind of like doing Kegels once a month without even realising it (which is a pretty cool side effect!!) [laughs].



# SHEREEN LEE INTERVIEWS DR CAROLINE BLYTH

**Personally, I have not had wide exposure to the intersection between religious studies, gender-based violence and rape culture. What drew you to this specific field of study?**

Before I became a lecturer, I was a mental health nurse for twelve years. I studied religious studies out of interest, but I wanted my research to be practical and make a difference. This drew me to critical religious studies, where I explored the role of ancient biblical texts in shaping our understanding of gender and gender-based violence today. In particular, I focus on the Hebrew Bible because it provides multiple perspectives on different issues around gender and sexuality. When I first started studying the Bible, I had this naïve mindset that attitudes towards women had progressed significantly since biblical times, but I quickly realised that not much has changed.

**Why is it important to study religious texts? Can you provide some examples of how religious texts have informed contemporary understandings of gender, sexuality, and gender-based violence?**

In the Bible, the body of a woman is portrayed as male property – establishing the idea of male authority, supplemented by female subordination. For example, a marriage metaphor is adopted by some of the prophets to express displeasure at Israel pursuing other religions and faiths. With God as the husband and Israel as the wife, the Bible presents the wife as being unfaithful for following other religions. To punish her, the husband threatens to inflict horrific physical and sexual violence.

While this is a metaphor, feminist scholars have underscored that the marriage metaphor accurately captures the dynamics of domestic violence. It does not explicitly state that husbands today can punish their wives, but it creates the idea that husbands have a right to keep their wives in a subordinate position. Thus, the deeply patriarchal perspectives from the Bible still pervade our lives today, planting the seeds for gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and coercive control to flourish. In effect, the Bible provides a powerful mandate for male authority and dominance in contemporary society.

Personally, I understand that the Bible and other religious texts hold a great deal of authority for many people. However, if interpretations of religious texts are reinforcing problematic ideas around gender, I think we need to draw attention to these issues and critically evaluate how and why these interpretations need to be challenged. I do not criticise religion itself, rather, I draw attention to how religion is used and misused to promote unjust ideologies.

**How have representations of gender, sexuality and the body evolved through various interpretations of the Bible? Why is that?**

The interpretations of biblical texts can be very subjective, used to scaffold certain ideologies which are popular at any given time. For example, many Bible readers can read the same biblical text but extract completely different interpretations from it, depending on their own beliefs, ideologies and worldviews. Thus, the original intent of the text may be obscured by the subjectivity of its readers. The representations of gender, sexuality and the body constantly evolve in the Bible, in accordance with cultural norms of the day. They aren't fixed or timeless.

There are multiple interpretations of biblical texts and so the Bible can reinforce **and** subvert gender stereotypes. The recent application of queer theory to biblical texts reveals alternative understandings of gender roles in these texts. So, while many male characters in the Bible exemplify hegemonic masculinity, other characters provide different conceptions of masculinity. For example, Jacob is regarded as the forefather of the Israelites, but in his childhood, he seemed to prefer assisting his mother at home rather than doing more 'manly' pursuits like hunting. David is also a biblical hero but recites a beautiful eulogy where he expresses that his love for his friend Jonathan was greater than his love for any woman. These were not the typical characteristics of biblical masculinity, but it shows that the Bible captured multiple ways of 'being a man'.

So all in all, the Bible does not adopt a black and white perspective on conceptions of gender and sexuality. As such, queer theory is a crucial tool for unveiling contrasting perspectives on gender stereotypes in these ancient texts.

**Your deconstruction of rape myths in your book *The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence* is particularly interesting. Can you briefly expand on how rape myths are linked to traditional gender stereotypes?**

Recently, I completed some research on the use of the Bible to reinforce purity culture – the belief that girls must remain chaste and virginal until they are married. This research demonstrated that the Bible can be used as an instrument to reinforce the idea that the social value of women and girls is entirely dependent on their sexual chastity. In turn, this reinforces rape culture by contributing to the conceptualisation of women as being sexually passive, and who must do everything to protect their chastity, while men are ‘naturally’ sexually aggressive and ‘just can’t help themselves’ when faced with the ‘temptation’ of the female body. Rape then becomes little more than a normal part of heterosexual relationships. These gender stereotypes also bolster the idea that anyone who is raped ‘loses’ their sexual purity and is therefore damaged in some way – less worthy. Biblical interpretations perpetuate certain ideas like these about women’s bodies, and male sexuality, which can underpin rape myths and misconceptions.

**Why is it important to understand Dinah’s character in the Bible? In particular, what is the symbolic significance of Dinah’s character, and why is it still relevant today?**

The Story of Dinah was the topic of my PhD thesis. I realised that Dinah’s character symbolises the experience of rape victims. Throughout the text she is utterly silent despite the whole story evolving around her – the story is about her family and her rapist wrangling over possession of her. The focus is not on her rape itself, but on the way male honour was besmirched as a result of her rape. The Story of Dinah emulates multiple rape myths; it mentions that she has been defiled which presents victims as damaged goods; it notes that Dinah went out by herself which hints at victim blaming; it conveys that Shechem offered to marry her which erases the violence of the rape itself. For me, the character of Dinah symbolises that often, rape victims are silenced and blamed. Unfortunately, these rape myths still pervade our society today.

**Your recent book *The Lost Seduction: Delilah’s Afterlives as Femme Fatale* explores the various ways that Delilah’s character has been recast in contemporary society. What do you mean when you describe the femme fatale as a social construct? How does portraying Delilah as a femme fatale influence our understanding of her character?**

The femme fatale construct is premised on the fear of women having agency and refusing to comply with male authority and domination. Often, women in stories and myths who exercise agency are viewed as a threat to patriarchy and so they’re presented as a dangerous femme fatale. In the context of Delilah, this is achieved by illustrating that even a man as strong as Samson cannot escape the seductive charms of Delilah. Yet, Delilah’s story is filled with ambiguity. There is no proper description of her motives or intentions, but her character is *still* framed as a treacherous temptress by biblical interpreters. It seems that the gaps and ambiguities in Delilah’s story have been coloured by gender stereotypes to present her as a femme fatale, even when the text doesn’t really say that

It is unusual for biblical women to exercise agency, so those who do are portrayed in a negative light. A parallel can be drawn with Eve, who is cast as a femme fatale character who tricks Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. I am really fascinated by the femme fatale character because of the way she challenges the patriarchal order.

**Lastly, how does critical religious studies enrich our understanding of feminism in its current form?**

These religious stories and myths discuss gender, sexuality and gender-based violence in ways that is still relevant today. It is important to delve into religious studies because it attempts to search for the underlying ideologies which underpin contemporary misconceptions about gender. By revising ancient texts, we are reminded that there is still so much work to be done within the feminist movement. There is more to feminism than gender. We need a greater focus on intersectionality, which accommodates markers of identity such as ethnicity, race, class, spirituality, and faith amongst many other factors.

For me, I have realised how powerful religious beliefs can be in influencing our understanding of gender.

## SHEREEN LEE INTERVIEWS

## DR CIARA CEMIN

**Why is it important to engage with gender studies? How does it critique and deconstruct the production of knowledge within academia?**

Gender comes into everything. We're all gendered one way or another. We need to contend with the entrenched effects of this gendering. We impose all sorts of norms, values and attribute simply on the basis of anatomical (sex) difference. Rejecting the gender they were designated at birth, trans people are often described as gender dysphoric. But when we consider that everyone has a gender imposed on them that constrains us in many different ways, aren't we all in a manner of speaking gender dysphoric?

Gender affects us in multiple ways, ways that we are never entirely cognizant of. It shapes and structures our personalities, passions and interpersonal relationships: from the jobs we do to the roles that we take up in the home, the entire life course is affected. Nobody is immune. This is why it is vital to study and interrogate gender.

**Your book 'The Future is Feminine: Capitalism and the masculine disorder' looks at the role of masculinity in underpinning capitalism. Can you briefly elaborate on this?**

We can all reflect on how gendering has affected us but coming out trans puts this in a more unforgiving light. Trans people, I argue, gain a unique and holistic perspective on gendering. I've experienced and bear many of the symptoms of being masculinised. Living for the most part of my life as a man, my perspective on masculinity is deeply personal, a perspective that is not afforded to cis women. Now that I live as a woman and dress in an overtly feminine style, I also experience how attitudes, perspectives and interpersonal relationships change accordingly. It puts my own masculinisation in sharper relief. It's in this sense that trans people have a more holistic perspective on gender.

Had I not undergone this change, it's unlikely I would've had the measure of quite how stunting the effect of masculinisation is and, speaking of course as a trans woman, how liberating it is no longer having or being under pressure to do masculinity. The premise of my book is that masculinity has the characteristics of a psychological disorder. When I discuss masculinity, it is not just toxic masculinity, as this tends to focus on the openly aggressive, rigid, sexist and misogynist male. I wanted to shift

the focus on the ordinary and everyday effects of masculinity, those that are so normalised they pass under the radar. By focusing on the most toxic aspects of masculinity, which most men can reasonably say do not reflect how they are, the difficult questions of the more general effects of masculinisation are not asked.

But to be clear, I'm not suggesting that all aspects of what we think of as masculinity are necessarily bad. Context matters. Aggression is sometimes necessary, such as intervening when a cop is choking your brother to death. There's also nothing inherently wrong with being competitive. It's when we're so invested in winning that losing is intolerable. Many men have difficulty admitting weakness. Associated with weakness under patriarchy, they disavow and distance themselves from qualities, characteristics, behaviours and styles that are thought of as feminine. This not only stunts personal growth and wellbeing. It affects the wellbeing of others.

It's those qualities associated with the word femininity that any good parent would want to nurture in their children however they are sexed. Here I am thinking of caring for others, compassion, kindness, sensitivity, not being afraid to display a broad repertoire of emotions and, most of all, of revealing one's frailties. When I say then that the future is feminine, I mean that if we are ever to live in a healthy society, these qualities must be general to everyone. It is not a question of dress. However, in this topsy turvy world, the opposite is rewarded. To succeed in this world – in a capitalist society – we're under compulsion to aggressively pursue our own interests and learn to crave status, power and authority. Capitalism and the various institutions that aid and abet it, demands our dehumanisation. It demands a masculinisation that even women are under pressure to ape. The 'strong' woman under capitalism, the one who rises to the top of corporate and university hierarchies, including those who hold positions of high office, are simply good at being men.

I describe a masculine ego-formation that is specifically capitalist. One that is libidinally invested in getting ahead in the workplace, in the status accorded to certain consumer products, an ego that in its most toxic formation is perfectly suited to the repressive occupations, namely the police, prison service and military. If, in these ways, masculinity can be described as capitalistic, then repressed and feared, femininity is communistic. Not communism in the authoritarian sense, a tendency symptomatic of the masculine disorder, but a joyous and life affirming society, one, as the philosopher Herbert Marcuse said, dedicated to beauty and

contemplation, poetry and play. It's a utopian prospectus that will never be realised in our lifetimes but to which I believe we ought to be striving for. It's not enough, as Jacinda Ardern says, to 'be kind', a femininity that functions to mask the egregious policies of a government that aggressively pursues a neoliberal agenda. Yes, be kind but marshal every possible means, theoretical and practical, to smash the capitalist patriarchy.

### Can you describe the phrase 'hegemonic masculinity' and how it manifests itself in contemporary society? How does this undermine a society which favours equality?

Raewyn Connell coined the term hegemonic masculinity to describe the normative ideal that males aspire to. It posits hegemonic masculinity as what for the male is considered the most 'honourable' way of being a man. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with characteristics such as violence, aggression, stoicism, competitiveness and homophobia. Yet, these are characteristics we tend to think of as toxic and not therefore normative, certainly not ones that a majority of men would take pride in.

The problem with hegemonic masculinity is that it establishes a negative ideal that men do not realistically aspire to become, or at least to take pride in. In effect, Connell establishes a straw man, where most men distinguish themselves as distinct from hegemonic masculinity. They may deplore such behaviours in men and will say, with good reason, that's not me! As I see it, the common baseline for all masculinities in the relative degree to which femininity, as described above, is repudiated and frailties masked by what psychoanalysis describes as 'phallic' (status) supplements.

On one hand, we have what I describe as reactive / aggressive masculinity (RAMS) – the most sociopathic and indeed toxic of men. We typically think of figures such as Donald Trump. But it has to be stressed that such masculinities exist on the political left too. Such men do incredible damage to movements for liberation and, taking on leadership roles, such movements, parties and so forth become authoritarian and repressive.

On the other hand, we have reflective / experimental masculinities (REMS) – those who in their embrace and affirmation of feminine affects and signifiers stretch the definition of masculinity. When in the ascendancy, they afford men to do masculinity differently. These two types are at the two opposing poles of the masculinities spectrum. Like the gravitational effect of the moon, depending on which type is in the ascendancy, they narrow (RAMS) or stretch the meaning of what it means to be a man. Avoidant / restrictive masculinities (ARMS) lie between these two types which is where the

majority of men are situated. The normative ideal is situated within this category and is constantly being recalibrated according to those push and pull effects of RAMS and REMS. Hence why I call this ideal a calibrated masculinity. Not the ideal that I think we all ought to aspire but which represents the 'best of men' under this constellation but nonetheless repudiating in relative degrees of the feminine. Much admired for his apparent sophistication, tenderness, kindness towards women and tolerance of LGBTQI+, Barack Obama approximates this calibrated masculinity. But if these can be described as feminine characteristics, like the 'be kind' exhortation, it masks the toxicity that lies underneath.

### Your book 'Man-Made Woman: The Dialectics of Cross-Dressing' outlines your personal experience with gender dysphoria. How does clothing influence our perception of gender and sexuality?

Prince had a major influence on me – the way he dressed showed me that I did not have to be like everybody else, that I could trace a different path in life. For my own embodiment, clothing does factor heavily into how people perceive and relate to me. I get to experience what it is to live as a trans woman, a woman who does not pass as cis and is therefore constantly subject to the gaze of others. This can give courage to those questioning the gender assigned to them to come out too but also stokes the fears and resentments of those who hold dearly to an erroneous binary concept. And in this regard, cis women, especially the 'baby boomers', are sometimes more hostile than men. We see this in a certain strand of feminism, those described as TERFS (trans-exclusionary radical feminists). Under the veneer of free speech and reason, their public interventions give license to the inner transphobe, including some on the left, to express their prejudices.

As a tenured academic, I acknowledge that I am in a privileged position to speak to these issues. This is why, with the security of tenure and in a position of influence, it is essential that I do.

### Lastly, how does critical gender studies contribute to the feminist movement?

For me, critical doesn't mean gender critical, the preferred term of TERFs, but the interrogation of norms that have been naturalised. It is a field that, certainly as I approach it, interrogates the structural and psychic formations that reproduces masculine domination and privileges those who bear the symptoms. Gender cannot be studied in isolation or without consideration of class and race. There is only one politics of feminism or indeed of being trans as far as I'm concerned. It is one aligned to class and anti-colonial struggles whose aim is to dismantle the institutions and arrangements of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy





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