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Published since 2007, *Kate* is an annual magazine published by the Auckland University Students' Association's Women's Rights Officers. As a student-published and student-written magazine, *Kate* exists to raise awareness of women's issues, experiences and interests.

*Kate* pays tribute to Kate Sheppard, the most prominent member of New Zealand Women's Suffrage and the dashing face on New Zealand's \$10 note; 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.

# A note from the editors

We present to you the culmination of one of the most exciting, most challenging and most rewarding years of our uni lives! It has been such a pleasure being your Women's Rights Officers for 2017 - thank you for giving us the privilege of doing so when you elected us a lifetime ago. We hope *Kate* 2017 inspires and empowers all our readers!

♡ Noelle & Melissa  
2017 WROs



FEATURES



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# A MALE FEMINIST? IN 2017?

BY LOGAN WEBBER

Recently I applied for the role of treasurer for Auckland Pharmacy Students Association for 2018. As part of my application, I pointed out my financial credentials as treasurer for Campus Feminist Collective for 2017. Speaking with the APSA exec a few days after handing in my application, she admitted that at first she thought I was playing a prank and did not believe that I was vocally feminist until she had verified that I was indeed a member of CFC. Initially I was surprised that a guy being feminist should be so bizarre, but on further reflection I can see her point. From a literal rapist<sup>1</sup> being elected leader of the free world, to self-styled rational skeptics casting aspersions on the very existence of well-documented phenomena like patriarchy, rape culture, and the wage gap, to the fact that we even need to have a referendum to decide whether or not a group dedicated to opposing women's rights should remain affiliated to AUSA, it seems that being male and feminist is pretty uncommon. I suppose that begs the question: why am I, a hairy, red-blooded, steak-eating dude, a feminist?

Well, thinking about that question reminds me of Aziz Ansari's famous quote about feminism: "If you believe that men and women have equal rights, and then someone asks you if you're a feminist, you have to say yes, because that is how words work." If you went around and asked 100 people whether women and men (as well as people who don't identify with the gender binary; let's keep it intersectional here!) should have the same opportunities to grow and achieve, I'd say the overwhelming majority would reply in the affirmative. Pretty much everyone is a feminist, even if they don't acknowledge it. With that said, Aziz Ansari did get some criticism for not appreciating the difference between "have" and "should have". This is reminiscent of a common refrain I hear from the anti-feminist crowd, which is that feminism is obsolete. Women have the vote, they can choose whether they

want to be a stay-at-home mum or enter the workforce, shit, they don't even need to have kids to be a complete woman. Job done, right? If only that were so. There are still many reasons why men need to continue advocating for women, both internationally and in the West, and an acknowledgement of this reality is why I'm not content to just say I'm a feminist, but to be one too.

So what are these reasons? For starters, the wage gap. When I was writing this I was initially going to write a big paragraph discussing the evidence for why the wage gap exists, but I realise I'd probably be preaching to the choir. Instead, I think I should discuss my response to the wage gap issue. A



few years ago, even as I acknowledged that I was a feminist, I bought into that common anti-feminist argument that the wage gap exists because women choose to go into different jobs. Funnily enough, the effect of that belief was that I felt the people arguing for the wage gap's existence should focus their efforts on increasing female participation in better-paid jobs. As it turns out, I actually was kind of on the right track - we should be encouraging more women to be doctors or lawyers or engineers (but not CEOs, because they'll be obsolete once we eat the rich). However, participation is a two-way street, and women are bombarded with messages from the men in their life - from classmates to co-workers - that they are not capable of solving science problems, that they are not as competent as male coworkers, that they're too emotional to make significant business decisions, and so on. These messages are

a huge factor in why women end up in the careers that they do, and this is something I think the wage gap deniers do not (or will not) understand. Grasping the role that socialisation plays in determining one's career trajectory was what made me understand the feminist perspective and convinced me to show greater solidarity with other feminists.

Another reason to be a male feminist is to put an end to this myth that female privilege exists. How many times had you heard some bitter MRA bring up the so-called "pussy pass" every time a woman gets away with committing domestic violence or making a false rape allegation? They are right that this is sexist, of course, but not in the way that

those people argue. Rather, these "female privileges" are a reflection on how society views women. Men are aggressive, testosterone-fuelled savages who will burn your crops, but women are sweet and kind and nurturing and would never hurt a fly. Can you imagine how demeaning it must be for women to be put up on a pedestal like this? Simply put, female privilege does not exist, and the perception that it does is a reflection of how patriarchal attitudes don't accept that women

can have flaws too. Women are less likely to get charged with domestic violence because people don't believe that a woman could hurt a guy twice her size. Women are more likely to get custody because men don't apply for custody or the legal professionals involved simply believe that the woman must always be the more competent parent by virtue of her gender. Women are significantly more likely to not report being raped than they are to file a false rape allegation<sup>2</sup>. The concept of female privilege is a reflection of how society views gender, and it is imperative that we as men normalise behaviours and attitudes that don't restrict people within the confines of their gender.

<sup>1</sup> If your lawyer's argument for you not being a rapist rests upon the claim that marital rape is not a crime, you are probably a rapist.

<sup>2</sup> The lack of consensus on what defines a false rape allegation makes their prevalence hard to calculate, but evidence suggests it is as low as between 2% and 10% of all reported rapes. Around two-thirds of rapes go unreported.



Last, and perhaps most importantly of all, I truly believe that ensuring that women worldwide are empowered to achieve great things is one of the most important tasks humanity needs to accomplish if it is to survive the 21st century. In the West, ensuring that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated occupations like law and finance and politics is essential to make sure that society is led by the most competent people as it navigates issues like income inequality and climate change. However, there is another reason why feminism is so important, a reason that is maybe not as relevant in the West but more so in underdeveloped regions, where gender inequality is greater. In those regions, the fertility rate is higher - when women are less able to achieve than men, their value to society is dictated by their capacity to reproduce. Greater strain on environmental resources, higher levels of pollution, more humanitarian crises due to displacement caused by environmental disruption of food and land supplies are all obstacles we all will have to deal with in the years to come, and so long as women across the world are not free to pursue a life beyond breeding, things will only get worse. Women have an important role to play in helping the global society through the impending environmental cataclysm, but we also need to remember that with great privilege comes great responsibility. As a straight, cis-gendered, upper-middle class, white male (I'm neurodivergent too, in case you were starting to get jealous), society operates to give people of my background better opportunities than almost everyone else. Just as Spiderman must use his mutant-spider-human-privilege to fight crime, I must use my male privilege to speak up for women everywhere and elevate them to a position where they can do their best.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, of

I MUST  
USE MY MALE  
PRIVILEGE  
TO SPEAK UP FOR  
women

course. I'll leave you with suggestions about what a man can do to support feminism. You could take a page out of Colin Farrell from *True Detective's* book ("I support feminism, mostly by having body-image issues"), but that might not be the best idea for everyone.

- An important first step to take is to not be afraid of feminism. When it comes up in conversation, don't shy away from the "feminist" label. Accept it, normalise it.
- Participate in feminist groups, but don't dominate the conversation. I can't count the number of times I've

been in a CFC meeting or group chat and have had nothing to say because I can't relate to the discussion, and that's OK. Let women speak.

- Take the time to understand what feminists are getting at when they talk about concepts like the wage gap and rape culture, concepts that might be oblique to many men but are no less important to understand.
- Undergo introspection and think about your own subconscious biases.
- Be strong enough to speak up when your friends engage in so-called locker room talk: "Don't show everyone her nudes, that's fucked up"; "Why did you send an unsolicited dick pic you creep?"
- If a female colleague is being ignored at meetings, don't be afraid to fight in her corner and point out that she has something to say. Be proactive in showing your support for women, from joining a pro-choice rally to volunteering for a women's shelter.
- And remember, if you're not sure about what you can do, don't be afraid to ask women how you can help. Just remember to listen. ♦







# Q & ASEXUAL

BY SARAH TRIBBLE

I was 17 years old when I finally realised that  
I am asexual.

Seventeen years it took me to learn that I am  
not defective;

Seventeen years it took me to learn that I am  
not broken.

I am, however, different.

When I came out to my first boyfriend, he  
said, "Wow, that's weird!"

When I came out to my mom, she asked me  
how that functions: do I just lie there while  
boys do their work in me?

The thing about asexuality is that no one really  
gets it unless they are going through it.

I am constantly answering invasive personal  
questions, and I'm tired of it.

So I'm filling out a questionnaire.

What is asexuality?

Asexuality is characterised by a lack of sexual attraction and/or interest in sexual activity. It exists on a spectrum, and every asexual person's tastes and preferences are different. Some key terms under the asexual umbrella are 'demisexual', wherein you only develop sexual attraction to someone after a strong emotional connection is formed; and 'grey-asexual', which is asexuality with a grey area: you're not usually sexually attracted to people, but occasionally there will be someone to whom you are sexually attracted.

Isn't 'asexual' that thing plants do to reproduce?

Next question.

Can asexual people be in relationships?

Of course! Asexual people don't experience sexual attraction, but they can still experience romantic attraction (the desire to be in a romantic relationship with another person). A committed relationship is founded upon love, trust, and understanding, with sex being an optional intimacy -- relationships don't have to involve sex to be happy and functioning. Asexual relationships with non-asexual people are not unusual, so an honest and open line of communication about preferences, consent, and the fluidity of these things is compulsory at all times. It's the same as any other relationship: you have to figure out how you fit together, work together.

Can asexual people experience arousal?

Yes, they can. The thing to remember is the difference between sexual attraction and sexual arousal. Attraction is a mental state; arousal is a physical response. Being asexual does not mean you are unable to experience the **physical sensation** of arousal; it means that you aren't attracted to people on the basis of sexual desire.

Can asexual people have sex?

Some asexual people do engage in sexual activity, whether it be for their own enjoyment, the benefit of a non-asexual partner, to have children, among many other reasons. As with all sexual endeavours, consent is a must-have. Some asexual people choose not to have sex, perhaps finding the idea repulsive or uninteresting. It all comes down to preference, choice, and a consensual agreement between those involved.

Is asexuality part of the LGBT community?

Some argue against asexual inclusion in the **LGBT** community on the basis that asexual people "don't experience oppression". To be fair, the oppression the more prominent letters in the acronym experience is commonly more violent -- exclusion, active discrimination, and often literal violent acts -- and is generally escaped by the asexual community, largely due to how little is known of it. The oppression the asexual community faces is non-violent: erasure -- total, and intentional, under-representation in sex education and popular culture, which can be just as damaging and invalidating as the violent discrimination the rest of the community faces, particularly considering that saying asexual people don't face oppression is a form of erasure itself.



What lead you to realising your sexuality, and was it hard to come to terms with this conclusion?

I was fifteen years old when I first wondered if the reason why I had no interest in sex whatsoever was because something was wrong with me, but I just assumed I would like it when I got older. The first time I heard the word 'asexual' was when a friend accidentally outed herself to an entire Year 12 math class. Finally, here was something that could really explain the way I felt, but initially, I tried my hardest to ignore it. Sex is threaded into culture and society as far back as history can recall; to be asexual felt like a personal ostracisation. There was no representation for me, nothing to normalise who I was and help me come to terms with it. Of the thousands of hours of television I have watched and the hundreds of books I have read, I can think of only two *canonically* asexual characters: Todd Chavez from *BoJack Horseman*, and Jughead Jones from the *Archie* comics (even then, Jughead's asexuality has been erased in *Archie's* TV adaptation, *Riverdale*). I've come to terms with my sexuality now; I'm 20 years old and extremely happy with the way I am and the life I live. It's just shameful that it took me this long.

How important is asexual representation?

Asexual representation matters. It matters because I spent the majority of my life wondering what was broken inside me, because there was nothing to teach me that broken was the farthest thing from what I was. It matters because asexuality needs to be normalised, because 'different' and 'normal' should be able to coexist. It matters because asexuality is not a burden, but no one was there to tell me that. It matters because of all the people who will wrongly identify because they never knew asexuality was an option. It matters because people say to me, "you just haven't met the right guy yet!" and insist that my asexuality can be 'cured' if only I sleep with the right person. It matters because being told that you're weird by someone you really care about hurts, because being asked if you "just lie there" is an easily avoidable ignorance. It matters because all representation matters. It matters because no one should have to spend seventeen years feeling isolated and alienated and broken.

Do you still feel alienated?

Yes. A lot of the time, yes.

But then, other times, no.

When I came out to my best friend, she said, "Yeah, I know."

When I came out to my current boyfriend, he said, "Yeah, me too."

I will never stop answering questions from people who will never understand.

All we can do is bring awareness, educate people, and speak up.



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# THIS IS WHAT A FEMINIST LOOKS LIKE

Daphne

What is feminism to you?

Feminism is an essential network. Being part of multiple minority groups, I have to know when I'm facing systemic oppression and fight back against that. Other people who are in similar oppressive situations should receive similar support.



Why are you a feminist?

I'm a feminist because when you care about other people and want them to have basic human rights, it's the only thing that makes sense.

What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminism isn't a fun label to parade around; it's hard work! Every second is a second to understand your and others' problematic behaviours and correct them. But that shouldn't put people off, it's what's essential to be a conscientious, thoughtful human being.

Anuja

What is feminism to you?

Believing in the liberation of all women from gender constraints, so that they are free to live how they want to live and can reach their full potential.



Why are you a feminist?

Because it's time to rethink our attitudes towards women and other marginalised groups, and start appreciating what they bring to our society.

What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminism isn't a threat to peaceful society or a cause of division. It's a challenge to the system in the hope of creating a better world for everyone.

Ngairé

What is feminism to you?

Feminism has grown so far beyond equality for women. It has become synonymous with egalitarianism – a strong feminist message supports equality in all areas regardless of gender, race, creed, religion, sexual orientation, anything! All those things that stand to divide us, with a little effort and understanding can bring us together. To be truly equal, we must be united.



Why are you a feminist?

I am a feminist simply because there is still work to be done! Yes, much has changed. Yes, we are more free than ever before. But just because something is less terrible than it was, does not mean we should stop striving to be better. I long for a day when feminism is no longer required! When there is no pay gap, when there are no girl sections and boy sections, when there is no shame in doing things you love to do regardless of who you are! If there are no feminists, that day will never come. I am a feminist because I believe humanity can do better.

What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminism is not a dirty word! Feminism does not require women to burn their bras and never have babies. Feminism does not mean you can't be a housewife or a stay at home mum. It doesn't mean you have to believe in "free the nipple". It doesn't mean you can't show off your body, wear makeup, and flirt at a bar. It is not feminism that created toxic masculinity! Feminism is about freedom, not control. Freedom to live as you choose without hurting others and without being hurt for your choices. Feminism is about love, acceptance, autonomy, being yourself, and allowing others to do the same.

## Cameron

### What is feminism to you?

Listening to, engaging with, and giving a damn about the women in my life; speaking and standing with them against misogyny.



### Why are you a feminist?

Just about every woman I know has suffered, in big or small ways, from simply being a woman. Enough said, really.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

I'm not a 'male feminist' any more than I'm a 'heterosexual supporter of gay rights' or 'white anti-racist'. Feminism is a set of beliefs and actions - men don't need their own special category.

## Tim

### What is feminism to you?

For me, feminism is standing up against gender stereotypes that negatively affect and restrict people's rights to be accepted for who they are.



### Why are you a feminist?

I don't want to live in a world where the women I love are made to feel that they are less significant or capable than men, or where they have to abide by unfair standards.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

It is often misrepresented and misunderstood. Feminism is not about women hating men, it is about everyone standing up against gender stereotypes that negatively impact all genders.

## Alex

### What is feminism to you?

Feminism is the principle of equality of the sexes, plain and simple. It is the recognition that unbalanced power dynamics based on sex and gender are unjust, and the embracing of efforts to tackle those at a personal and structural level.



### Why are you a feminist?

I'm a feminist because I believe that each person has immense value, and should be able to live in a way that respects that. A world that dismantles inbuilt prejudices, biases and patriarchal systems that put women at a disadvantage is a better world for all of us.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

It's awesome! We should all be feminists.

## Vidya

### What is feminism to you?

Feminism to me is simply equality. It's a movement striving towards a society free from discrimination.



### Why are you a feminist?

We all came into this world the same way, so why shouldn't we all have access to the same opportunities? I'm a feminist because I believe in equality.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminism ≠ man-hating.

## Julia

### What is feminism to you?

Feminism to me is about recognising the historical and continued oppression of non-males in all cultures. In a nutshell, feminism to me is about giving people the platform to voice their concerns, and allowing them to take action.



### Why are you a feminist?

I am a feminist because we shouldn't sit idly and watch as the world continues to turn as it always has. I think it's important to address gender issues because it affects how our lives unfold, what choices we are able to make and which ones we cannot. I also think we need to recognise what those who came before us have done and continue their work.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminism is not just about women for women. It definitely isn't about pitting women against men. It's about equality for all, no matter what your sexual orientation is.

## Imogen

### What is feminism to you?

Equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender. Opportunities not just meaning some level of possibility, but considering a variety of social, institutional, economic and political factors.



### Why are you a feminist?

I am a feminist because I believe in equal opportunities for everyone and would like to do all I can to lift people up rather than put anyone down. Feminism for me has created ways to question things that I often dismissed as harsh facts of life. It gave me room to accept and take ownership over my own body.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

A 'feminist' is not a simple label; feminism is what you make of it. One or even a few people can not represent such a massive, historic movement.



## Jackie

### What is feminism to you?

Bell Hooks said it best: a movement to end sexist oppression.

### Why are you a feminist?

As a chubby 11-year-old at intermediate school I was teased relentlessly. In high school, I was maybe a little promiscuous and was labelled a 'slut' while all the boys who did the same were 'cool' and idolised.

My friend who had hairy legs was called an ugly lesbian (she was neither!). I've learned that women's bodies are constantly being policed, controlled and critiqued. I am a feminist because I don't want young girls to put up with that same sort of shit that scars them for life!

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

Feminists are not angry, militant man-haters. We are not perfect political beasts either. As Roxane Gay said, 'There is no such thing as the perfect feminist or the only way to do feminism.' It is OK to advocate for women's rights and equality, and still wear pink and shake our bootys to rap music. Try calling us passionate, not angry!



## Kieron

### What is feminism to you?

As a Māori, I tend to stray from western gender ideologies. The use of the single word 'ia' to refer to 'him' or 'her' implies that we are all one people and that there is no status of dominance or superiority between the two. At a grassroots level, I was taught at home to always respect our women – they are the carriers of our next generation. To me, feminism is the right to be equal, it has no status of dominance.

### Why are you a feminist?

I'm a feminist because I believe in the rights of all people whether this be social, political or economic.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

The use of the three letters 'fem' in feminism may imply to many that feminism is only about the rights of women, but this is because we unconsciously look at it with the male eye whereby we assume that anything remotely related to women is put in the 'female' category.



## Han

### What is feminism to you?

For me, feminism is simply the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities and rights.

### Why are you a feminist?

I am a feminist because why would you not want those who are your friends, mothers and partners to have the same rights and opportunities that you enjoy?

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

Some people think that being a feminist is not in the self-interest of males. I don't think this is true. Society as a whole (including males) benefits from men and women (and everyone else on the spectrum) being given equal opportunities and rights. Who knows how many societal or technological advances we could have had in the past if women had been afforded the same opportunities to use their talent as men had?



## Andrea

### What is feminism to you?

For me feminism is about striving for equality, through compassion and understanding.

### Why are you a feminist?

Because I want to live in a society where every member has the opportunity to flourish. Recognising and reducing the social, political and economic barriers that prevent this for all genders is a step in the right direction.

### What would you like people to know about feminism?

We need to be more conscious of gender oppression and their causes because it is still here today, especially for women.



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# How do you respond?

*By Sarah Butterfield*

I don't know how to explain to people that they should care about other people. Maybe you've seen this phrase on Facebook or Instagram. I know that when I saw it, I instantly identified with it. This is the difficulty that I encounter every time I talk to certain people about Trump's America, climate change, feminism or racial inequalities.

So I don't.

But is this the right response?

Should we be questioning the people

who say dumb racist shit and calling them out on their bias? Should we be confronting people who make derogatory and sexist statements?

Here's the thing, I don't have a clue.

Earlier this year when I attended the Auckland Women's March there were a number of men who heckled us marchers. My friends and I snickered at these people, and continued marching. We were caught up in the euphoria of one thousand strong

women marching down Queen Street and declaring no to sexism and no to Trump.

When we were about half way through the march a distressed looking older man started to walk alongside us. He asked if he could tell us something. We turned to him and listened attentively. I don't know why we did this. Perhaps we thought he needed help, or maybe we are just conditioned to listen to men when they tell us to. But suddenly, he was babbling to us about how Bill Clinton was a rapist and other horrible things. We responded with angry and dismissive words. I'm ashamed to say that I was probably the worst. But we walked away. Happy to label him as a deplorable, and therefore not worth associating with.

He was also a stranger. What did it matter to me if he lived his life as a hateful, sexist and ugly person. This was likely to be the only time that I would ever encounter him. What impact did he have on my life?

The rest of the day was beautiful. I sat with my best girlfriends and complete strangers, and together we cried as the speakers spoke about their anguish at seeing Trump elected. Together we shouted that no, Trump's America would never be a reality in our country.

At the end of the day I was brimming with happiness. I was so proud of myself,







my friends, and all of the women who had participated. When I got home I called my parents excited to share about my role in an important global movement. My dad picked up the phone. I started telling dad all about my day. However, as soon as I mentioned the ‘Women’s March’ he exploded. He began to talk over me and declare how mad he was at this movement and the fact that it wasn’t giving Trump a ‘chance’. I wish I could say I responded reasonably giving him clear and concise examples of why Trump had already been given chances and had failed miserably. But I didn’t. I started yelling back. I said terrible things that you should never say to a parent. Mostly, I told him he was ignorant. Eventually my mother wrangled the phone off of him, and patiently explained to me that there was no use talking to dad about Trump, because, for whatever reason he loved the bastard. My lovely liberal mum then went on to tell me that she didn’t understand why we were marching in New Zealand when this was all happening in the USA. :/

When your family says things that you think are wrong it’s much harder to dismiss and other them. My parents are my best

friends. They sacrificed so much to raise my siblings and I. My dad adores me. I have only seen him cry twice in my life and one of those times was when he spoke at my 21st about how much he loved and was proud of me.

You can’t dismiss family. You can’t other them. You know them, you know their humanity, and they made you who you are. So how do you respond?

For the last couple of months these two confrontations have been stuck in my mind. I have frequently replayed them in my memories. I have thought long and hard about how I should have responded. I should have kept my cool. I should have exercised kindness. I should have politely listened first and then given rational rebuttals. Or, I should have been angrier. I should have yelled sassy and instantly iconic things. My girlfriends and I should have linked arms and chanted “my body my choice”.

After I wrote the above, I called my parents. I read them the article and I sought their blessing. Both of my parents listened and were understanding although my dad still thinks Trump gets a hard go of things. :/ Together we talked about some strate-

gies that we could use to communicate our disagreements productively and without hurting one another. We came up with the following five things to do when we disagree (these are context specific):

- Be aware of your context (are you having a bad day and want to rant? Are you tired? Because you may react badly.)
- Be willing to actively listen to the other person regardless of whether you agree with them or not.
- You have to be friends/family/co-workers the next day (think, is this worth losing a relationship over?).
- Be respectful - don’t talk over one another.
- Be firm but not aggressive about what you believe. •



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# *Bite the Hand that Starves You*

*By Fiona Wu*

*"I have done everything  
that I wanted to do.  
I am quite happy  
to die now."*





These words would not be shocking had they come from an elderly person, looking back at a life well-lived. But they did not. They come from 35-year-old Charlotte Green who spent half of her life battling an insidious disease that sapped her of all that makes life worth living. Four years later, she would die from it.

Charlotte was not the first victim anorexia took as its own. Statistics say that 1% of the population will suffer from this disease. Of those 1% maybe 20% will die from it by malnutrition, heart attacks or suicide. Only a third will ever fully recover. The rest will live diminished lives, losing years to the rollercoaster of relapse and recovery, hospital beds and treatment centres. They live lives of dysfunction and despair, alone in every way that matters.

90% of anorexics are young women. I can say that I write this story to plead a case for my peers, for something society too often ignores. And both are true. But more than that, I write to tell a personal story, the story of one young woman among many who could have been Charlotte.

For most of my childhood, I never worried about my weight. I thought I was smart enough never to fall into the trap. I thought I was the kind of person who was safe from eating disorders. It wasn't until my early teenage years that I put on some weight, so my GP recommended I lose some. I was dubious, but like everything else, I soon threw myself into a weight loss regimen with characteristic zeal and perfectionism. I researched calorie contents of food, read weight loss books, kept a diary of daily calorie intake and planned my meals down to the absolute calorie. I started exercising.

Within weeks, I felt more energetic, met my target and was medically at a perfectly healthy weight. I could have stopped then. But for some reason I didn't know - maybe it was the praise from friends and family, maybe it was seeing how much better I looked in clothes, maybe it was the insecurity from being surrounded by slender and graceful girls in my high school - I carried on. For most of the year, I stayed relatively well. I didn't panic about missing a workout or eating something unplanned. My weight hovered at the borderline of healthy but, vitally, my mind was well. I was happy then.

Then, in the summer of that year, I was crushed by a serious disappointment from failing to gain a coveted and prestigious leadership role at school, which left me shocked, angry at myself and devastated that I wasn't good enough for the one thing

I always thought I was. Within weeks, I slashed my daily calorie limit from 1200 to 900, then 800, then 500, until I was barely eating for days at a time, often living on sliced apples, coffee and chewing gum.

For months, I lay in bed at night for hours, ruminating over every flaw and mistake that I didn't know how to forgive, channeling all my shame and disappointment into feelings of being fat. Anorexia is a prison sentence for a crime you never committed but nonetheless fills you with guilt and dread. The starvation, exhaustion and depression felt like just retribution for everything wrong with myself. It felt like a sort of penance. I was an atheist who needed a religion, and anorexia became the way I could purge my sins.

Eating disorders, in particular anorexia and bulimia, are the butt of a lot of media jokes and put-downs. The myth that they afflict affluent upper-class white girls who have nothing to worry about but their appearance just will not die. In fact, eating disorders show how an individual turns the nourishment of the body into a painful attack on themselves, and presents a deeply conflicted battle of the image the individual wishes to present to the world. On the one hand, I brushed off concerns from family, friends and teachers with such ease; on the other hand, I walked around desperate to be pitied, looked after and taken care of. My body was a convenient metaphor for everything I was too proud to say. I have never felt less beautiful in my life.

That is one reason of many for why eating disorders are so difficult to treat. As one falls down the rabbit hole, not only do they experience a decline in health day after day, they also retreat further and further from those who can help them. As their world closes in on them, eventually all they are left with is the whispers of their eating disorder, their shameful friend, until the shadow of the illness is imprinted upon their face, until it becomes the essence of their personalities and what the world knows them for.

For so long, my ability to lose weight was my sole source of pride. It was also never, ever enough. The fact that I fainted in a gym, was in constant pain and too weak to open doors did not stop me from being perversely ashamed that I never got bad enough to necessitate hospital treatment. *Goddamn it*, I thought, *I couldn't even do this right*.

Sadly, I knew that what happened to me was not an isolated incident. I saw girls around me with privileged backgrounds, who were smart, beautiful

with happy families, hospitalised for months. To the world, we were destined for great things. In private, we battled the same secret torment.

So why?

Genetics, environment and social conditioning are part of it, of course. But this is only such a small part of the story. It doesn't explain why eating disorders are so difficult to treat, or why they so disproportionately affect perfectionistic upper middle class young women. Instead, I believe eating disorders, above all, reflect a desperate desire, and failure, to meet the essential human needs of being valued, loved and accepted. Our innate human desire for recognition and meaningful lives isn't something we can make go away. If we can't fulfil them in a healthy way, we will turn to something that gives us validation.

I know for a fact I wouldn't have been able to take my first step to recovery if I hadn't discovered another place to direct my energy. Towards the end of the year, I took up a position as an academic buddy to younger students. While sharing academic knowledge was useful, it was the sharing of life experience and other accumulated wisdom, and mentoring them to achieve what I had not, that was most therapeutic. For the first time in so long, I felt I had done something meaningful. I realised that I didn't have to be proud of being ill anymore, that I was worth more than the identity of sick.

With that realisation came a reflection upon my year, and I didn't like what I remembered at all.

A year where I should have been making pre-

cious memories was a year defined by what I had missed: debating tournaments, the Year 13 Ball, friends' birthday parties, job interviews...because all I wanted to do was sleep, work out meal plans and avoid food. I thought about everything I was missing then and everything I would miss if things never got better: a social life, university, health, a life that I deserved.

Among those who have lived with anorexia, I was very fortunate: my school provided a lot of channels for positive recognition and fulfilment, I had the resources to recover and it wasn't too late. Many though, were not so fortunate. The longer one lives with an eating disorder, the more difficult it becomes to ever recover.

And here is where our culture does not help. Anorexia is by no means an illness that only affects women, but it is definitely one that disproportionately affects women by huge margins. The cultural assumption discourages female appetite in the same way male appetite is applauded. We are socialised to fear our appetites, be they for food or sex or power. We're taught from birth to make ourselves small and dainty, to not take up room. We don't have to accept this.

Eating disorders claim enough victims as a statistic. They condemn many more to entire lives in shades of grey. It takes courage to believe your life deserves to be lived in full colour. Luckily, that is one thing we do not lack. Let the desire to live trump the desire to stay ill. Let your strength be measured in smiles and tears, life's highs and lows, not the number on the scale. ♦







# PHOTOGRAPHY



***“Women should never be underestimated in their ability to achieve and thinking that women achieving great things is extraordinary is somewhat patronising.”***

By Johnson Zhuang

I was inspired to do this project after hearing the featured quote from my friend, Holly. After hearing it, I decided I wanted to depict women being comfortable with who they are and this was the main theme for this project; women don't have to be any particular way, they just need to be themselves. Women being themselves what creates empowerment, and I personally think is something that everyone needs to realise.

I gathered some of my closest friends, Sophia, Holly, Michelle and Olivia and portrayed them doing what they love, and them being proud of who they are. Through these photos, they can do what they want, and be who they are, but as long as they are happy with themselves, they are empowered.

While the irony of me being a straight male and directing this shoot is not lost on me, I hope that this project is able to inspire others to think about empowerment and teach others that empowerment comes from within.

Empowerment comes in the form of women doing what they love, and not from ideas of what feminism might be.











there are wildfires in my heart. the  
oceans sing in my blood.  
I have been freed from my cage.

// escaping gender norms  
By Priya Moraes

Photos by Timothy Law Photography



# Auckland University Students' Association presents... Womensfest

7-11 August

We would like to thank everyone who helped make Womensfest 2017 a wonderful week of celebration!













# CREATIVE WRITING



## Good Enough

By Sarah Tribble

I have been struggling with self-esteem recently, but you know what?

I am good enough.

I am a being of inherent empathy and self-taught kindness and I am good enough. I am a masterpiece of my own design, a canvas of compassion, brush strokes of boldness, coloured by creativity and honesty; I may be a work in progress, but I am still good enough.

I think I might have taught myself to believe that making mistakes makes you a bad person, but it is your intentions that define your character, not how those intentions are received, and if my intentions are always good then I must be good enough.

I make mistakes every day but at least I learn from them, at least they build me up, at least they don't change the fact that I have always been good enough.

My values are deliberate, hand-picked, a careful calculation composition construction creation, a foundation stacked a hundred storeys high: I choose to be kind, I choose to love wholly and blindly and to gaze upon this life with optimistic wonder, I am choosing what I want to be and what I want to be is good enough.

I am not the burden or the waste of space I have trained myself to apologise for. I am human, worthy of patience, blessed with forgiveness, deserving of love, and I am good enough.

*I am good enough.* I struggle to believe it sometimes. I struggle to see myself the way others do, the way I am; it's so simple to sabotage myself, so much easier to believe in my shortcomings than it is to believe that I am good enough.

So I remind myself.

I address letters to my name and fill them with truths and mail them away with promises that I am good enough. I look in the mirror and smile at the woman I have created and watch my reflection whisper, "I am good enough." I struggle, but I persist, because I deserve to believe that I am good enough. I tell it to myself in sweeping poetry and I tell it to myself in cold, hard facts: I am made of the moments that have changed me and the people I have chosen and the books I have read, the songs I have loved, the words I have threatened to ink into my skin, and I am good enough. I am who I am because of the choices I have made, and I am good enough.



## 101 Beginner's Stitches

By Imogen Spray

Threads tucked safely under  
Anxious stretched weave of  
Crepe paper skin  
The trusted tangle and tug:  
I show you  
Whip, satin, petal loop  
Herringbone and climbing ferns  
Dancing, effortlessly  
Bleeding effervescent coils of  
Atlantic Blues and  
Pine Greens

Behind the weary rigid frame  
It's cloudy glamour, with  
Fraying knots like  
A house without foundations  
A painting without primer  
See, my palms, how they shatter  
Over empty effort, yet

From fault lines,  
Sprout sunflowers and sweetpeas  
Familiar fractures  
Spring, rows of rosemary

Now daisies chain  
Behind my iris  
Braids of sunlight once blinding,  
Binding,  
And the places I once weeded,  
In time, become  
strong proud ties.

## Below the Blueberry Moon

By Lily Kwok

Who do you live for, O twilight  
bloom?  
Whilst your hosts dwell in their  
clay taverns,  
drunken on bread and wine.  
Have they so much  
as poured a drop of scarlet  
liquid  
to praise your clean white down?

Truly you are mystical below  
the blueberry

moon

So she speaks to me,  
in tenderness and wisdom.  
To mark her sacred dancing ground,  
untainted and austere.  
Let not the coarse speech of  
men  
pluck you from the grafts,  
Bloom as you ought dear companion  
not as other ought you to.

Truly you are mystical below  
the blueberry

moon

I gazed at her upturned curls,  
soft like winter duvet.  
And stilled  
by the stagnant night air,  
to mark another day.  
Whenceforth does a purest beauty  
pour  
than a duty unabandoned?

Truly you are mystical below  
the blueberry

moon.





## **He tells me to look to my core**

By Georgia McCrory-Bowick

He tells me to look to my core.  
To look to my strength of being.

I tell him my core is shattered.  
He tells me what is shattered is also sharp.  
He says:

Let them walk on your cut glass.  
Let them walk.  
Sliced toes stinging a bitter song.  
Let them feel your pain.  
Let them feel your vulnerability,  
With the full force of a human heart.

My mouth hardens in agreement,  
Eyes magnify, a grim satisfaction.

Let them swallow my many edges.  
Cut deep within my chest.  
Let them feel,  
All the paper cuts and shattered glass.

Let them feel their words unstitching my wounds.  
As I howl in their faces.

## **I've had enough**

By Georgia McCrory-Bowick

I've had enough,  
Of that mechanical edge  
To lovers past, fucked on a roadmap  
- A combination of neurons -

Messengers to actions.  
This arm here. That arm there.  
Moving my hips  
Shove it in.  
Maybe it will fit.  
Maybe I will gasp.

Was it me?  
Or my neurons?  
Habits formed in the brain.  
Reinforced by a bubble of grey matter.

Meatpacking my way through love.  
- Pound me till I feel -  
Limbs moving in expected motions.  
Preemptive patterns.  
Step one  
Step two  
Step three  
Cum in the hole!  
The meatpack is sufficiently lubricated.  
And I am sufficiently bored.

(Maybe not at first.  
But three fucks down the line. Yeah.)

Perhaps happy. You came.  
Happy. I could be of service.  
Until I'm sick of being of service.  
And your cock can no longer find a home.  
In my unfeeling, little, cunt.

## **On Being Born Into Patriarchy**

By Ashlee-Ann Sneller

In my family  
Women, girls –  
We are born with our  
Mouths sewn shut.  
When I grew breasts  
My dad tightened the knots  
At each end of my mouth  
So I resembled the Joker –  
There was no Batman in my world;  
Only mum who smothered lipstick  
Red as the blood that would  
Drip between my legs no matter how tight  
I closed them. It was only at university  
That I came home; Let tears fall –  
My hands pulled at stitches and my parents  
Watched horrified as blood took a turn to  
Drip from my mouth and when I screamed  
My dad shoved a hand over the noise  
But I was done living with my mouth closed.  
I bit at his fingers and that night  
I taught my mum how to sew her eyelids  
High up to her eyebrows;  
  
For my eyes were now open.

## **Origins of a She-Wolf**

By Ashlee-Ann Sneller

It was in a lecture  
That her skin was ripped off  
The light a bright bulb  
Pupils dilated  
Sweat dripping

It was in the bathroom  
She started sharpening her teeth  
To fine points  
Ready to roll out her tongue  
And snap if need be

It was a Saturday night  
When she came awake in a daze  
Her textbook chewed  
The binding  
Gnawed

And it was at her graduation  
That she smiled;  
Slightly feral  
And howled at  
The change within her.



## Impromptu Poem 2

By Ngaire Smith

I was looking at my body today.  
The way it  
Rolls and  
Folds  
And bends  
I wondered where it came from.  
It looked nothing like my old one did.  
It used to  
Jut out  
At  
Angles  
All ribs and hips and collar bones.  
I put my hands to my soft belly.  
"Now you, I  
Do recall  
You  
Never were  
Taut or firm, I used to hate you."  
I thought it so unbelievably strange.  
How so much  
Changes  
And  
This one  
Sameness is changed in my heart.  
I thought of how this body will leave.  
Just like the  
Last one  
Did  
How I'll  
Look down wondering where I've gone.  
My hands and belly will meet then too.  
Old, fond  
Friends  
Just  
Overjoyed  
To find each other in place and intact.  
I was looking at my body today.  
The way it  
Rolls and  
Folds  
And bends  
I found I couldn't help but smile.



ARTWORK BY JULIA ZHU





## **I get this feeling, it's all connected**

By Radhika Lodhi

There's this part in *Elastic Heart* where Sia sings "I want it, I want my life so bad, I'm doing everything I can" and there's a sense of yearning there. There's this moment where her voice almost breaks. I don't know how else to explain it, but when I think about my life I climb into that moment, I climb into her wavering voice, I climb into the fraction of a second where it starts to fall apart.

Sometimes all I know is that I'm very well-versed in that feeling - that guttural, desperate feeling. The banging on the door with ripped up knuckles feeling. That screaming underwater feeling. Sometimes I dream I'm trapped in a confined space and I can't move and I can't breathe and I can't move and I can't move and I can't move feeling. You know those dreams, where your face is twisted up somewhere under a cabinet and you don't know how you got there, but it feels wrong **IT FEELS WRONG & YOU CANT MOVE**. Do you know what I mean? It's that kind of feeling.

I get this feeling, this foreboding feeling. I feel it in the roots of my teeth and behind my eye sockets. It's all connected. Like the fibres covering the skeleton. I want to cut my skull open, show you the tiny hooks in my brain. I don't know how else to describe it. There's a wrongness that sits in the pit of my stomach and in the back of my throat. I think too much, I

feel too little, and then it flips on me: I feel too much, I think too little.

I get this feeling. This overwhelming feeling. It's all connected. Like with Sia's voice. I climb into that moment, where it all falls apart. But my heart isn't elastic, it's made of tree bark and year 12 science class razor blades. I'm projecting. It's made of soft mushy things, too soft. It doesn't hold its shape, slips out from between the cracks. Sometimes I reconceptualise it. Turn it into a different idea; my heart isn't full of rooms, it's an open road, it's full of potholes and quicksand. The road disappears into gravel. It's a special type of gravel; every stone is a stone you get stuck in your shoe.

When I was eleven we went to the big Shiva temple. There were sharp rocks all over the ground and I took my shoes off and walked across the sharp rocks because my parents taught me to remove my shoes before we enter the temple. My heart is like the rocks from the temple. It's not so much that I think that they're holy, but that I cut myself up trying to do the right thing by them. My parents I mean. Or god. Both.

When I was a girl my sister did the *Jaya Parvati* varat. She fasted for days, grew the mother plant and prayed to it. On one of the days you had to stay up all night. I would fast with my sister and set up the mattresses on the floor of the sitting room. We played



board games and watched Dracula. I remember when I would wait all year for the day we'd stay up all night. I wondered if I would do this too one day, start some ritual contract praying for the husband of my choice. When my first ex broke up with me I realised I wouldn't. I wouldn't pray to find love.

My heart is like the light switch in the movie, black and white. Nosferatu turns it on and off and on and off and on and off again. When my second ex broke up with me my mother told me to turn my heart to stone. But my heart isn't made of rocks, or electricity, or feeling; it's made of band-less hair ties and pencil sharpener razor blades.

I'm projecting. My heart is a site of confusion, frustration. It weighs 100 tonnes and sinks through my body, you can caress it through the thin skin on my back. I get this feeling, like the elastic heart, but my heart isn't made of elastic. The hair ties snap. The razors tumble out.

I come from a long line of unhappy Gujarati women. A chain of hands that clasp each other's desperately. Like the song, that moment. I try not to make too much eye contact with my cousin, I see her mother in the bags of her eyes. My own mother breaks down crying at the table. She carries with her a family tree that sustains itself with the tears of the women who appear inside it. Us women...the life force.

I come from a long line of unhappy Gujarati women. When I found out I couldn't have kids myself I was glad to think that the line would die with me. Beyoncé talks about wearing your mother's lipstick the way she wears disappointment; here we wear red vermilion in the parting of our hair. New jewellery, old story, heavy embellished saris. We sit cross legged, cover our heads when we pray, pray for strength that we don't wear our mother's disappointment when we

have enough of our own.

Family teaches us how to be good girls. Negotiate our very existence away. Compromise our lives. Sacrifice our happiness. Step into flower garlands like lowering your head into a noose I always thought if ever got married I'd play that song from that sad movie "Mubarak Mubarak". Everyone plays it at weddings but it's not a happy song. Perhaps that's why they play it in the first place. I would.

I get this feeling, and it's bearing on me like the song, like the hooks in my head, the flowers, the noose, the

razorblades, the vermilion. My heart is a vessel for the holy fire. I can feel it in my eye sockets, it's burning in the back of my throat. They teach us to be good girls. I lie awake wondering if I'll lie like a corpse in our bed.

My mother told me to turn my heart to stone, but I come from a long line of unhappy Gujarati women with stone hearts. Generations of heartache etched into the lines of their skin, decades of exhaustion in the droop of their shoulders, a sisterhood of strength holding up the hard lines of their

backs. These women, who carry their mother's guilt in their own tear ducts, wear their disappointment like a full face of makeup. A circle of women banging their heads against their stone hearts waiting for them to crack open. I climb into that moment. My heart is made of excuses and dark matter, sharp rocks that haven't weathered into stone just yet.

I get this feeling. Like the other shoe is about to drop. I'm suspended there in that desperate moment. That desperate moment where her voice almost breaks but-

And here's the kicker:

It doesn't. •



ARTWORK BY ISOBEL GLEDHILL

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## FRONT COVER ARTIST

Daphne Zheng

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## DESIGNER

Nick Withers

## CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Butterfield, Isobel Gledhill, Ishan Kokulan, Lily Kwok, Timothy Law, Radhika Lodhi, Georgia McCrory-Bowick, Priya Moraes, Ngairé Smith, Ashlee-Ann Sneller, Imogen Spray, Sarah Tribble, Logan Webber, Fiona Wu, Julia Zhu, Johnson Zhuang

## EDITORS

Melissa Castelino  
and Noelle Dumo

## EDITORIAL OFFICE

4 Alfred Street,  
Private Bag 92019,  
Auckland

## ADVERTISING

Aaron Haugh  
[advertising@ausa.org.nz](mailto:advertising@ausa.org.nz)

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# Congratulations Graduates!

