

**KATE**





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Painting title: Heads or Tails

This painting is an adaptation of Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus', which represents the pagan goddess of love, Aphrodite. This image drew my attention as it brings up questions surrounding women's role in the world and the sexualisation of female bodies. Within our 'liberated' society today, can a woman be sexually liberated without discrimination as well as intellectually liberated? Or are we as women forced to choose between 'heads or tails'?



# EDITORIAL

Welcome to *KATE*. We inherited the name; it has nothing to do with the royal wedding. It might be named after the Kate who helped to get women the vote, or the Kate who was the first woman in the British Empire to get a university degree (right here at UoA), or the Kate who happened to be AUSA President around the time the magazine got renamed from 'Platform'. In the latter case maybe we should have renamed it *JOE* this year. But I suspect *KATE* is named after all of those women, and meant to represent badass ladyhood in general. It's an example of one of the biggest flaws of the feminist movement, historically and today: those Kates are all awesome, but they do not represent badass ladyhood by a long shot. They represent the privileged tip of the iceberg.

I'm going to admit to you right now this magazine is hardly representative of all women either. There's no way to comprehensively cover the stories of all types of women in all situations in a 16-page insert in a magazine run by students (or any magazine, really. Even the internet hasn't quite managed it). What you've got here is a magazine written by students on lady-related things that interest them, which they wanted to share with you. So read on, and

you might learn something.

Oh, before you go, I should say that I'm very pleased with what I've seen of the women's rights-themed issue of *Craccum*. You might have read some of it already. You may have been offended, and it's possible you were offended on behalf of women. If there is something genuinely cruel or hurtful in *Craccum* that I or they have missed, I will vouch for the good intentions and feminist cred of the guys. We struck gold this year with *Craccum* editors who are unabashed feminists. They not only agreed to publish *KATE* as an insert this year, but gave us their cover to sell for charity and engaged in a dialogue with us about what they're publishing this week and throughout the year. I've already thanked their mothers, and I suppose I should thank Spencer and Rhys.

A big thank you from me to all the helpers, contributors, proofers, the *Craccum* editors, Aaron, my co-WRO and Nick. If I've missed you, it's because I am a terrible person, and I don't care about your feelings.

This issue of *KATE* is dedicated to Kristy Kearney.



Last year I was lucky enough to be elected as co-Women's Rights Officer with Kristy Kearney. Unfortunately she is not serving this position with me today because she took her own life earlier this year. She faced a lot of adversity in her life, such as the loss of her first child to forced adoption, but she was a fighter until the end.

She was a brave and awesome person, and one of the most hardened activists I know. She fought for everyone's rights the way she wanted others to fight for hers. She was a vocal supporter of GLBTI rights and even in her last few weeks went to quite some effort to let me know how much she

supported me. She was strongly opposed to any form of violence towards children and was deeply saddened by people who fought for the right to 'discipline' the children in their care. She was a vegetarian as she abhorred cruelty to any living creature but most importantly she lived every day as a **feminist** fighting for women's rights.

Kristy was a proud mother of two beautiful daughters, Rose and Maia, a loving wife to Michael, sister to Ben and James, and an awesome friend to all of us.

- Alana Chang

# MIGRANT WOMEN AND SHAKTI

KAYLYNN WONG & SOPHIE BUCHANAN

Through research and an interview with Shakti Youth Advisor, Shasha Ali, we gained some insight into issues confronting women from Asian, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds in New Zealand.

In NZ a migrant is not, as Paul Henry would say, someone who doesn't 'look' or 'sound' like a New Zealander. The term 'migrant' is an umbrella term for various identities. It includes people who have chosen or been forced to migrate to another country, children and grandchildren of migrants, those born in another country, etc. The word therefore includes any people/group/community not indigenous to the land. However, it has been used instead to stigmatise people who don't fit into NZ's reductive bi-cultural Maori-Pakeha identity. Rarely do people question this attitude.

During Auckland Uni's O-week, migrant women's organisation Shakti was concerned by how many of the students they approached rejected identification with the 'migrant' label. It is hardly surprising that this rejection is commonplace considering the 'us' versus 'them' approach to migrants that is ingrained in popular NZ culture. You only have to look at the vast number of

Paul Henry supporters, for instance. People often don't realise the impact of racism in NZ and what the term 'racism' itself even encompasses. In migrant communities, as well, there is an increasing denial of being affected by racism or even acknowledging it as an issue – perhaps an internalisation of the 'us' and 'them' process.

In this context, migrant women are triply marginalised as women, as migrants and as members of ethnic minorities. They can face common problems for women like domestic violence from a particularly vulnerable position, institutionalised racism, and sometimes problems that most people don't even realise exist in NZ in this day and age, such as forced marriage.

"Forced marriage is a social evil," according to Shakti Youth Advisor Shasha Ali. Forced marriages are not related to any specific ethnicity; the idea of exchanging women as property has been common throughout history and the world. In NZ today they involve young migrant women or men who are tricked or pressured into marriages they may not consent to because of a lack of support and a lack of knowledge about the New Zealand legal system. In cases of underage marriage, the woman's chastity and the honour, reputation and economic security of her family are valued over the woman herself. Even with an educated understanding of their rights from NZ schools and an awareness of the wrongness of domestic violence, it's not easy for young people – who are caught in a cross-cultural conflict between New Zealand mainstream beliefs and the beliefs of their families and communities – to avoid or reject forced marriages.

Research from the UK found that young migrant men are increasingly forced into marriages for a range of reasons, including that their parents suspect they might be homosexual or fear that they are too old. Shakti campaigns for a social services model that caters to young women and men to reduce the effects of these practices. For example, Shakti was one of the key agents that fought for the domestic violence category in the Immigrant Act in NZ. "There

should be consideration of women who are abused because of their immigration status and they should have rights to live in this country," Shasha told us. Shakti must also work to improve the position of migrant women within the family court, which is at times blind to the impacts of domestic violence on the lives of children, and often can't see the capacities of immigrant women to be good role models and mothers.

Considering all this, shouldn't Western feminists take more of an interest in migrant women? Shasha points out a central disjuncture between theoretical Western feminism and its application in migrant communities. Western material feminist concerns like the freedom to choose who to sleep with are very individualistic and don't always correspond with the central concerns of migrant women or the values of non-western communities. It becomes very complex to talk about feminism from a migrant woman's perspective. As Shasha says, "We talk about reproductive rights with migrant women... children are unfortunately still the reason why they are alive in their families."

There are a number of problems Shakti encounter in their work. As a Not-for-Profit, Non-Government Organisation, they face a lack of funding. Their refuges fall under the umbrella of Women's Refuges nationwide, which have just experienced drastic cuts of up to 50% in their funding from the government. As all members of the organisation volunteer for a 24-hour crisis line, Shasha was telling us that she always fears that Shakti will be unable to service the next woman who calls.

Shakti also encounters backlash from within migrant communities because of the strong feminist beliefs the organisation is based on. For instance, Shakti does not encourage women to go back to abusive relationships or negotiate on the basis that children should have two parents irrespective of abusive parenting. Their insistence on the existence of forced marriage and the prevalence of violence against migrant women – beliefs gained through experience in operating a crisis

If you're passionate about human rights and keen to help, Shakti is always looking for motivated young people to:

- Be part of the Shakti Youth Ambassadors Network. Email: [shakti.youth@gmail.com](mailto:shakti.youth@gmail.com).
- Be an interpreter; if you're skilled with languages, especially African, Middle Eastern and Asian languages.
- Volunteer for events and workshops.
- If you're in crisis or looking for comfort, you can contact Shakti's 24-hour crisis line on 09 636 8512 or 0800 SHAKTI.

For more information, contact Shakti at Shakti Community Council Inc: 3 Cardwell Street, Onehunga, Auckland / [scc@shakti.org.nz](mailto:scc@shakti.org.nz) / 09 6345427.

# MIGRANT WOMEN AND SHAKTI

CONT.

line and women's refuges since 1995 – contrasts with the refusal of migrant community leaders to acknowledge that these problems happen in contemporary NZ.

Shasha feels that we as students have a huge opportunity to push for social change but so far have been complacent and even apathetic about the racial and sexual discrimination we come across on a daily

basis at the University. She advises, "If students know about the issues which their friends face, they should encourage them to seek help rather than justify the abuse they are going through." Students should realise that some of their peers, including young migrant women, experience domestic violence as an everyday reality.

To address this apathy, the Shakti Youth Ambassadors Network was set up. It

encourages young people, especially from Asian, African and Middle Eastern backgrounds, to take part in bringing about social change, saying no to family violence in their communities and believing in equality and respect for all genders, cultures and religions. "Saying no to family violence is not just an isolated issue," Shasha observes. "You don't have to be in a conflict of family violence to be a part of the social movement to create change in the community."

## POSITIVE WOMAN

J

When I was told that I was HIV positive it was a huge shock. I thought that I was going to die because I was very ill at the time, in and out of hospital. The specialist nurse explained that in 2005 the medication was very effective. He explained I had a good chance of living for a long time and I could probably have children. However, at the time I couldn't work, I couldn't even eat and my life felt like it had been blown apart. I was in a foreign land far away from my family and friends. It took me a long time to want to start reading and learning about HIV.

Although my life was all over the place I was keen to meet other positive people. During one of my hospital stays I met another positive woman who had a profound impact on me. I can't describe what it was like to meet someone who could have been one of my mother's friends. She was full of life, working and had lived with HIV for many years. She was starting a writers' group and I joined, even making it to the first meeting while I was still in hospital! The writing group educated me about the HIV world, the politics and organisations that supported people living with HIV. One thing that stood out for me was how so many of us (the general public) had no up to date knowledge of HIV. There was still a lot of fear surrounding HIV and I learnt that many people lived in fear of being found out that they were HIV positive. One member in our group had not told anyone about their status over an eight year period, not even a close family member.

I come from a close family and never considered not telling them. I felt very fortunate and grateful to my Mum who dropped everything in NZ to come and support me for 3 weeks.

She was with me when I was diagnosed. My family have been amazing. It wasn't easy but we are more educated now and for all of us, me being HIV positive does not dominate our lives anymore. In fact once my health returned and life became 'normal' again it was hardly discussed.

About one year after my diagnosis I joined a network that was being formed by positive women for positive women. We were a diverse group of women. Some women were activists, some were asylum seekers, some were citizens, some were foreigners, some worked, some didn't, some were long term survivors (diagnosed in the 1980s to mid 1990s) and some were a mixture of these things. It became evident that there were different challenges for women living with HIV compared to men.

More often than men, women are not always able to negotiate safe sex. Women in relationships with domestic violence often became more vulnerable after a HIV positive diagnosis. Women being diagnosed during pregnancy, while good for the unborn baby, could be incredibly traumatic for some pregnant women. I learnt that some pregnant women were too vulnerable to disclose their HIV status to their partners, husbands and/or families. Sometimes they breastfed their babies as the risk of not breastfeeding would mean their status would likely be found out and they could then be further abused or ostracised.

Quite a few women I met were only diagnosed HIV positive after nursing their ill partners/husbands and after becoming widows. The positive women's network reinforced for me the power and strength of women to support each other and their families.

When life became 'normal' my husband and I decided it was time to start trying for a family. It was a decision that was not taken lightly. At first I worried that we may not live long enough, that we might fall ill again, that our potential child might become infected if we were in an accident together, when should we tell our potential child of our HIV status and many other thoughts whizzed through my mind. After talking to our consultant and reading as much as I could find about pregnancy and HIV it was wonderful to learn that while I managed my HIV well, there was a very small possibility of passing on the HIV virus to my child.

It was actually incredible to learn that <1% of babies are born HIV + when the mother is able to keep her viral load suppressed by taking antiretroviral treatment during pregnancy and labour, when she does not breastfeed and antiretroviral treatment is given to the baby during the first 4 weeks after birth. When one or all of these precautions are not possible or are not taken, then there is a 25% chance that the baby will be born HIV+.

Since 1998, 92 babies have been born to known HIV+ mothers in New Zealand. All these babies were HIV-. Please note that the mothers were diagnosed before or during pregnancy and took antiretroviral treatment and did not breastfeed their babies.

My baby is one of these and she is our little miracle. She brings me hope and my hope for her is that when she is a young adult, people in New Zealand will be more educated and less fearful of the HIV virus.

# ABORTION LAW IN NZ

BONNIE HARTFIELD

On a scale of 1 to shit, New Zealand abortion law sits pretty firmly on the shit side of the scale. I'm talking full on shit. The *United States* has better abortion laws than us - some states even had better abortion laws before *Roe v. Wade* proved that women have a right to abortion in 1973.

Let's say you got pregnant, right now (yes, I can totally do that with my mind, watch yourself ladies). If you wanted to end this pregnancy in our fair country, you would have to prove that the pregnancy would cripple you mentally or physically. Rape is not considered grounds for an abortion, because it was thought that women would make false rape accusations in order to get an abortion. Which is, of course, a pretty ridiculous justification, considering how hard it is to prosecute rapists under our justice system. By law, if you knew you couldn't afford to look after the cells dividing inside you, you would not be allowed to abort them. If you weren't ready for this foetus to disrupt your life, then by law you would have to harbour it in your uterus until it decided it was time to evacuate. And if you did manage to meet the criteria for an abortion,

you'd have to prove to two certifying consultants that you are both capable of making such a big decision and incapable of looking after a child, and you'd have to do all of this within 20 weeks.

All our legislation on abortion stems from the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977, with input from the Crimes Act 1961 and the Care of Children Act 2004. The legislation which lays down the eligibility for having an abortion is actually found in the *Crimes Act*. The world has changed completely since 1977, so why haven't our abortion laws?

Since our laws are so restrictive and awful, you would think that politicians would be keen to change them. Upon quick investigation of political party websites, I found that the Green Party were the only party with policies to protect women's reproductive rights, and even they are weak policies. Upon tweeting the female members of the National Party, the Labour Party and the ACT Party, I found that none of them had a firm stance on abortion. Heather Roy, ACT Party MP, even said, "I think the law as it stands is about right." Con-

sidering Heather is a politician who stands for freedom of choice and personal responsibility, that statement is a bit of a joke. Steve Chadwick, a Labour backbencher MP, is on a mission to make abortion easier for all women to access, and has taken the first step by sponsoring a bill to reform abortion law. I was told by National and Labour MPs that abortion law is considered a "conscience issue", meaning that members of Parliament vote according to their own conscience, rather than a specific party line. Are the reproductive rights of women that unimportant that most political parties don't even bother making policies to support them? Are our rights debatable, or subject to opinion?

You may find yourself asking what you can do to help change our antiquated abortion laws, considering our representatives in Parliament aren't convinced that they're shit. Tell *everyone* you know how shit they are. Tell your local MP just how shit they are. Join ALRANZ (Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand) and go out and protest for the reproductive rights of women. Abortion is a health issue, not a crime.

# DRINK SAFETY 101

WITH THE CAMPUS FEMINIST COLLECTIVE

There have been a few nasty cases of drink spiking brought to our attention recently, and because we care about you and your safety very much, we have compiled this handy list to help keep you and your friends safe.

Firstly, the basics: NEVER leave your drink alone (we did say 101). If you're keen to cash in on a free drink someone's offering, don't just let them go off and buy it for you. Follow them to the bar and watch them order it, then get the bar to give it directly to you (most bars do this anyway).

Watch out for your friends. If your friend seems to be acting out of character or gets disproportionately drunk very suddenly, assume the worst. It's better to be wrong than not do anything. Besides, if your friend is just drunk, they are still easy prey (fun fact: alcohol is the most commonly used date rape drug.)

On this note, keep an eye out for other girls you don't know. If you see a drunken girl alone, the cool thing to do is keep an eye on her.

If you feel dizzy, sick, or find yourself unable to stand without the aid of a wall, find your friends. Get someone you know and trust to take you home. This might sound unfair, but try to get a *female* friend to look after you. Date rape drugs can make you do things you might regret - they remove inhibitions and cause physical arousal on top of their disorienting effects - and women are generally better at recognising what's you and what's the influence, purely through experience. If you're by yourself, call an ambulance. This may seem extreme, but trust us - hospital staff would rather have you throwing up in a bed than wandering around by yourself. This also has the added benefit of blood work. It means they can find out what and how much is in your system, and treat accordingly.

Remember, drink spikers are opportunists. They will spike any drink they can, often multiple drinks in a night, and hope that someone wanders off on their own. They will

often use far too much of their drug of choice, to be sure. So ODs are an issue. After having your drink spiked, even if nothing happens to you physically, the drug will be in your system. Your emotional balance is upset chemically on top of however you feel about having your drink spiked, so simple things can set you off, and the disorienting effects may last a few days. The best thing to do is get medical help (as well as doing your bloods and helping with the symptoms, they can refer you to counselling), and find someone you can trust to take care of you as you wait for the drug to leave your system.

You shouldn't have to watch your drink and we shouldn't have to write this, but unfortunately not everyone cares about you like we do. If you see someone spiking a drink, don't let it pass. Your silence is their tool.

Go forth, and be excellent to each other.





# ASIAN FEMINISTS IN THE WEST

JIA LUO

Since its inception in Western Europe and North America, feminism has been a movement defined and lead by middle-class white women. It continues to operate under the same racial and class power structure today

Women of colour have been continually alienated and marginalised not only within general Western society but also within the various social and political movements that proclaim to be against discrimination and oppression, including feminism. Asian women have had to overcome internal and external obstacles in order to become more politically aware and active, gradually establishing and extending their social and political presence and influence. It's imperative that Asian women from all walks of life continue to speak out and unite in solidarity against all forms of inequality.

As a 1.5 generation Kiwi-Chinese who grew up with an ingrained sense of alienation and self-loathing - feelings commonly internalised by people experiencing oppression - I derived a great sense of empowerment and belonging engaging with feminism through online blogs and communities. You could say that feminism was my gateway "ism" into the world of "isms". As I subsequently began to develop a stronger sense of self and express interest in the issues of race relations and my own cultural history, there was one troubling question emerging in my mind: where were

all the Asian feminists? I figured if I had to ask a question like that, the answer was most likely going to be grim.

I was correct. Given the scant and at times dodgy results yielded by Google and library database searches, I am unsurprised that I can't recall ever having had positive female Asian role models to look up to. Although Asians form a significant percentage of the total population in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, empowering images of Asians that are devoid of racial stereotyping remain scarce in Western media.

I found it difficult to obtain information regarding Asian women's experience with social and political activism. I was unable to find any texts discussing the experience of Asian women in New Zealand. Most of the available library resources were written from an academic perspective and thus inaccessible to most people. It's disappointing that the information regarding an issue in such obvious need of attention could require so much effort to acquire and digest.

Thankfully, friends and online communities proved more helpful in directing my search, further demonstrating the underground existence of feminism, particularly the kind that reaches out to Asian women. Only after much enquiring and scouring did I find a handful of relevant and up-to-date books, blogs and zines written by contemporaries that I could easily understand and relate to (see list below).

The word "Asian" encompasses a diverse range of ethnicities, histories and traditions that pose difficulties to constructing a collective identity. But it is important to acknowledge that we are unified by our shared experience of oppression under society's racial, class and gender hierarchies and legal-political system.

Asian women are blocked from achieving complete self-determination and self-actualisation by a number of barriers. In addition to white supremacy and patriarchy (oppression of women by male dominance and privilege), we must also cope with sexist traditions, internal racism and class elitism within Asian life. Some of us are also burdened with language barriers that prevent proper access to important information, thus limiting

our ability to make effective responses and demands.

Asian women and girls are expected to meet the demands of our own native cultures, assimilate and conform to Western societal norms, and also internalise and project reductive and demeaning stereotypes which define Asian women as exotic, passive and subservient sex objects. Confusion and frustration is the common result of attempts to accommodate the expectations of conflicting cultures.

Many Asian cultures encourage endurance in the face of oppression and admonish challenges to authority and the status quo. Valued characteristics in Asian women include timidity, submissiveness, adaptiveness, and self-control. Adherence to these codes of conduct help to uphold the culture of silence and passivity prevalent in the Asian mentality, and prevent free expression and the development of more positive and diverse identities in Asian women.

It's a common misconception that Asians are politically apathetic and unaware, but in reality it's others who are oblivious to us. Within Asian communities and activist organisations, women are assigned domestic and subservient roles and barred from holding positions of power and influence. Many leftist movements are unsympathetic to the specific concerns of women of colour, and feminism is one such. The experience of white middle-class women continues to be perceived as the universal experience of all women. The assumption that racism is a struggle between black and white is still widely held in present day activist communities, which tend to prioritise class, race, gender or ethnicity and refuse to see them as inextricably linked and equally significant. For reasons such as the above, Asian women have tended to avoid organising groups specifically dedicated to serving Asian women's interests for fear of being accused of having separatist motivations and therefore perceived as being counterproductive to the overall cause.

Migrant Asian women are often unable to participate in political movements due to restricted interaction with people outside their cultural networks, work and domestic obligations and/or lack of support from their spouses and families. Lack of language proficiency can pose another obstacle. Younger generations of Asian females may find participation and organisation easier.

## Resources:

Mellow Yellow Aotearoa blog and zine:  
[www.mellowyellow-aotearoa.blogspot.com](http://www.mellowyellow-aotearoa.blogspot.com)

Ka Shue: Letters Home by Lynda-Chanwai-Earle (4<sup>th</sup> generation NZ-Chinese writer)

Yellow Rage def poetry jam performances:  
[www.yellowrage.com](http://www.yellowrage.com)

Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire edited by Soniah Shah

Bamboo Girl Zine:  
[www.bamboogirl.com](http://www.bamboogirl.com)

[BigBadChineseMama.com](http://BigBadChineseMama.com)

Shakti Community Council Inc. (NZ migrant and refugee services for women):  
[www.shakti.org.nz](http://www.shakti.org.nz)

It's important that we become more informed and raise awareness about Asian women's struggles against discrimination and the underlying mechanisms of our oppression. Knowing about the causes allows us to better resist subjugation and assume more control over our lives. We must break the silence and engage in an ongoing discourse on Asian

women's experience - including our own - with both Asian and non-Asian individuals and communities. We must establish more groups, organisations and wider communities (including online ones) dedicated to empowering and serving the interests of Asian girls and women. We must consistently question and challenge the rigid social and political

structures which govern our identities and experiences. We must perceive this as a collective undertaking and unite with other oppressed people of all ethnicities, classes, genders and sexualities to bring about changes that will benefit us and future generations to come.

# WHAT MY MOTHER NEVER TOLD ME

THE GREEN LABIA

If anyone else had written this article, it would be titled "What My Health Teacher/My Best Friend/Cosmo Never Told Me". However, my mother was a great believer in educating her children on the facts of life, and I can never remember a time when I did not know what "sex" meant. Unfortunately, my mother in all her wisdom was unable to warn me that one day sex could become unbearably painful.

You see, four years ago I developed a chronic pain condition called vulvodynia. Don't worry if you've never heard of it before - chances are that even your doctor doesn't know what it is!

Vulvodynia is characterised by burning, stabbing or cutting pain in the vulvar region, and as a chronic condition it can last for years. The type of vulvodynia I have is called "provoked localised vulvodynia". Put simply, vaginal penetration is painful for me, whether with tampons, fingers, sex toys or penises. The larger the object, the more pain it causes, which makes it damn near impossible for me to have sexual intercourse. Pain can also be provoked by non-penetrative stimulation, like prolonged periods of sitting or bike-riding.

Other types of vulvodynia also exist, for example, some women have non-provoked pain that is constantly present or occurs at random. Similarly, while my pain is localised to the opening of my vag, some women have pain localised to another area and others feel pain across their whole vulva.

Nobody really knows what causes vulvodynia, and it can appear at any age. Some women notice pain from the first time they attempt to use a tampon or have sex, whereas others may be pain-free for years before developing vulvodynia. I used to enjoy sex as much as anyone else, but one day for no apparent reason it

started to hurt. Several months later (and after losing all faith in the medical system) I discovered that I didn't actually have thrush like all the doctors thought; instead I had vulvodynia.

One of the biggest troubles I've found with having vulvodynia is that it's a hidden problem. It's estimated that up to one in five women may experience painful intercourse during her lifetime, but vulvodynia is not well-known and women with vulvodynia can feel very isolated. Friends, family and partners, who had previously never imagined that painful sex could be a serious long-term problem, can find it difficult to understand and empathise. After sex started to become too painful for me, my (wonderfully supportive) boyfriend and I went for three years, seven months and eleven days without sexual intercourse! This experience is totally alien for our friends, who start to whinge when they haven't had sex for a month or two. Additionally, talking about sexual problems is still taboo for many people, including those who will happily discuss which positions and toys they enjoy most.

These problems are compounded by the fact that many doctors don't know what vulvodynia is, which means some women spend years searching for a diagnosis and treatment for their condition. I've encountered doctors at the University Health Centre who haven't heard of vulvodynia, and even Family Planning doctors seem to have an outdated understanding of the condition.

The good news is that there is a comprehensive team of vulvodynia experts at the Auckland Sexual Health Clinic at Greenlane Clinical Centre, and I'm very thankful that such a service exists in Auckland. Once diagnosed, vulvodynia is fairly easy to treat using a multifaceted approach involving doctors, physiotherapists and counsellors. For me, physio-

therapy has been very useful in overcoming the physical pain of my vulvodynia, while counselling has been valuable to help me maintain a healthy relationship with my boyfriend.

Of course, I should stress that having pain during sex doesn't necessarily mean that you have vulvodynia. (It also doesn't mean you're a woman - men can experience painful sex too, although they are less likely to do so than women). Anyone who starts noticing genital pain should firstly get themselves and their partners checked for sexually transmitted infections\*. If infection has been ruled out, sexual pain may also be caused by a variety of other conditions. A notable example is vaginismus, in which the pelvic floor muscles spasm upon vaginal penetration, usually due to negative emotional associations with sex (often described as a "fear" of sex, although I think this viewpoint belittles the problem).

Ultimately, both sexual dysfunction and chronic pain tend to be hidden problems. They are widely unheard of and unconsidered by both the general public and within medical communities. Better education about conditions like vulvodynia will not only help women receive a correct diagnosis and treatment, but will also enable us to receive better understanding and support from partners, family and friends.

Note: More information on vulvodynia, including treatment and support services, can be found at [www.vulvodynia.org.nz](http://www.vulvodynia.org.nz).

\* The University Health Clinic is free for PHO enrolled students, while Family Planning clinics are free for under-22 year olds and remarkably cheap for everyone else

# WHY NOTHING MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY

## The Politics of Name, Audience and Genre for Female Authors

ANJORI MITRA

It's relatively well known that the Bronte sisters published under men's names. As women in the nineteenth-century, they were well aware that their books were more likely to be read if potential readers thought they had been authored by men. After all, they were writing about heavy subject matter: disturbing love affairs, madness and serious societal issues – things that men supposedly knew more about than women did. Jane Austen, who published her first novel thirty-six years before *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, apparently did not share their concerns. She published *Sense and Sensibility* under the name, 'A Lady', thereby emphasising her gender. But Austen was writing comedic stories about marriage and family, complete with happy endings and multiple weddings – things women were supposed to know about and subjects that it was thus expected for a woman to write about. From this simple example, we can see that for female writers, the politics of gender have always been important, usually determining if, and by whom, their work is read. There are basic rules: serious subject matter must be directed at men in order to be read; lighter stories and romances with happy endings are by default directed at women. A woman's name on a book means only women will read it; a man's name on a book means that everyone will read it. The male perspective tends to stand in for society as a whole, it is the superior perspective, the one that deals with "important" issues. It follows that the work of female authors has long been popularly seen as essentially frivolous "light reading". The nineteenth-century author Mary Anne Evans wrote under the name George Eliot in order to distance herself from this popular perception, aware of the pitfalls of being a woman who wrote under a woman's name. Popular opinion had by then evidently convinced female authors that, in order to be successful, they must write just the sort of trivial plots that women were expected to come up with, thus creating a vicious cycle. It could now be argued that women writers were incapable of writing serious novels – because,

quite simply, they weren't, as Eliot pointed out in her 1856 essay with its brilliantly self-explanatory title: "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists."

But I'm talking about the nineteenth-century, you might argue. Hasn't so much changed since then? Actually, surprisingly little has changed as far as gender and authorship is concerned. Some of today's most widely read female authors are those whose pen-names imply that they are male – P.D. James, or J. K. Rowling, who was told by her publisher to use initials so that boys would read her books. The latter example blatantly reveals the understanding *even today* that a male reader is unlikely to read a book by a woman. Furthermore, these female authors understood that in order to be most successful, they must create *male* protagonists – again the male viewpoint is seen as the universal one, even if that man is (secretly) created by a woman. Take Patricia Cornwall, who, despite being extremely popular, is primarily read by women, though her crime novels are dark and serious – due to her use of her female name and her female protagonist.

I'm not saying that the above examples of fiction are classics or even especially good. This is just what's on the best-seller lists. Take the notorious *Twilight* series. I won't dwell on it, because if I do I will probably spend the rest of this article criticising it as a poorly written, anti-feminist Mormon parable. Suffice to say that a book focusing on romance – the kind of romance where the heroine continually requires rescuing by the male characters – can be published under a female name as unambiguous as "Stephanie", because it is targeted at women. Obviously, all women like to read about adolescent girls who worship their boyfriends, have no friends of their own and choose marriage over higher education. According to Whitcoulls, it would make "Mum's day this Mother's Day" if I bought my mother the *Twilight* series (saga?). If I gave *Twilight* to my mother I'm fairly certain that, strangely

enough it would *not*, in fact, make her day (the bad grammar alone would cause her sleepless nights, let alone the plot).

What the *Twilight* example is supposed to convey is that women are continually fed writing that is promoted as "women's fiction". Women write frivolous novels about women desperate for a boyfriend/marriage/handsome vampire because they are told it will sell – and women buy these novels because they are told that this is what they should read. The vicious cycle Mary Anne Evans wanted to avoid is still very much in action. While it was valid for Austen to make marriage a primary concern for her heroines, almost 200 years on, is this really what all women genuinely want to read about? Women are encouraged both to consume and to write "chick-lit" (a phrase, which to me, has derogatory connotations – it suggests a dumbed-down form of writing implying that women don't read *real* literature). Most general fiction by women, however serious, is shoved into this category. Though "chick-lit" is supposed to focus on the experiences of the modern woman, the genre is popularly associated with consumerism and searching for the right man – ideas that simultaneously demean fiction by and about women *and* demean the concept of the successful, independent women, suggesting that education and independence is not enough – a woman is still inadequate if she does not look good and have a boyfriend.

But not only are women expected to like "chick-lit", they are, ironically, *also* expected to enjoy even the most male-oriented works of literature. When I studied *The Taming of the Shrew* at school, there was no discussion of the play's explicitly sexist ideology; it was considered a perfect masterpiece, beyond criticism. Teachers shrugged off the misogyny with, "it was just the time period", and we were supposed to laugh at every blow taken against Katherina. Novels like *The Catcher in the Rye*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (which, don't get me wrong, are



great novels) are touted as capturing universal experiences. These are explicitly male texts, but society still pre-supposes that the male viewpoint is everyone's viewpoint. Humanity is *mankind*. Women must (somehow) relate to Holden Caulfield's insecurity in front of a young prostitute in *The Catcher in the Rye*, but I think few men have put themselves in Esther Greenwood's shoes when she is nearly

raped in *The Bell Jar*.

I recently took an English paper called "Women's Texts of Experience". Very few men took it. Maybe the words "Women's Texts" seemed frightening, regardless of the fact many of the texts I studied in other courses could as well be called "Men's Texts of Experience". But books by women are different, somehow

below the male interest. I've probably made about a million generalisations in this article, and a lot of men aren't going to agree with anything I've said. So men, if you're reading this, I dare you to prove me wrong. Read a book by a woman. Books that are part of the reading list for a course don't count. Read *Jane Eyre*. Read *The Bell Jar*. Be really daring and read something by Virginia Woolf.

# DON'T BE DISREGARDING THE POTENTIAL MOTHERS.

NICOLE WALLACE

The public abortion debate has been saddled with a lot of absolutes. Both sides have been whittled down to a variety of catch phrases in the public eye. While this makes for some appealing banners, catch phrases don't give substantial argument, let alone allow space for subtle shifts in position. Instead a ferocious banner battle is waged, the ferocity of which can lead some to feel that an amendment to their position would be an admission of defeat. And so some of the subtle issues of abortion are ignored. Acknowledging these issues is important if we are ever going to come to an understanding about the morality of abortion.

The issue of whether the human foetus or zygote should be considered a person with full human rights is often taken as the defining issue of abortion. If it is a person, aborting bad. If it is not a person, aborting okay. Deciding on the personhood issue alone doesn't solve the abortion debate. In more recent decades, notions of bodily autonomy have been introduced to the arena. The recognition that the foetus is not developing in some bizarre bi-dome but rather in the body of another person is still a concept some fail to grasp. Unfortunately, this has also too often been treated as an all or nothing concept, with abortion being seen as either something that a woman has an absolute right to or something that a woman can never (or almost never) procure.

Debate on the personhood issue often rather crudely implies that if a foetus is not human it has no value at all. This is about as accurate as our government's understanding of the internet. Everyone can agree that, whatever else it is, a zygote/embryo/foetus is a potential person (or persons if it splits up). If the z/e/f is a potential person (or child, one might say), then the woman who is pregnant with that z/e/f is a potential mother. This potential mother/

child relationship is crucial when it comes to understanding why people have abortions. It should come as no surprise that many women get abortions because they do not want to be a mother, whether that's now, ever or again. In other words, women are often choosing abortions because they don't want this potential relationship to become an actual relationship.

Here we get a sense of what makes abortion so peculiar; it is not, in many cases, simply an alternative to pregnancy (though that is also a factor, and in some cases the main factor). Abortion is an alternative to creating a particular relationship. Some would say that adoption also presents this option, but adoption is rather an alternative to child rearing. It does not avoid the creation of an actual mother/child relationship; it just changes its nature. It is common for women to not see adoption as a viable alternative for precisely this reason. Statements like, "If I carry this pregnancy to term, I will have to raise it. I won't be able to give it away," are not just about loving the resulting child. Rather, it is a point about the type of mother/child relationships a person can live with.

Some people see this as selfish, particularly those inclined to grant a z/e/f personhood. However, to immediately write off the feelings of women who do not desire this relationship is fairly ignorant. The mother/child relationship can be incredibly fulfilling, but it carries many burdens, especially in a society where women do the bulk of the childrearing. Kids cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to raise. They require a lot of time and sacrifice. While people talk about how they would gladly support these mothers and their children, the fact is, they don't. We are not supportive of mothers as a society. If we were then women wouldn't be going without food so their children can eat.

Women wouldn't have to put all other aspects of their life on hold because their child or children take up all available time. If you think that these situations are rare, talk to a few of the single mothers on campus. While our society should certainly be striving for better support for mothers, changing our current society would take time. And time is the one thing that potential mothers do not have.

Most potential mothers are very aware of the burdens that the actual mother/child relationship has. To say to another individual that they must enter into this relationship, despite any burden or personal cost, is not just unreasonable but cruel. It is equally cruel to say to a woman that the nature of her potential mother/child relationship is meaningless. The love for one's child is incredible (once again, ask mothers) and to be aware of the fulfilling nature of the actual mother/child relationship, whilst also knowing that one cannot accept the burdens, is heartbreaking. To treat an abortion as something of little consequence, as something that does not require careful consideration, is to show poor moral character.

Those of you who haven't moved on to the awesome comic adventures of Spencer and Rhys are probably thinking "And...? Is this really that important in the abortion debate when there are issues of personhood and bodily autonomy on the line?" These issues are important, of course, as are others that haven't been mentioned. But if we don't look at the actual reasons why women have abortions, we are not going to be able to comprehend their actions. The burdens of motherhood today may not give anyone the unlimited right to have an abortion, but they may mean society has the obligation to give women access to safe and relatively stress-free means of ending a pregnancy when it does not alleviate those burdens.



# FEMINISM IN ART

KAYLYNN WONG

When you see the words 'feminist art', you may either shrug, instantly imagine vaginas everywhere, or think of Barbara Kruger's advertising slogans (such as "Your body is a battleground" and "I shop, therefore I am") which voice feminist concerns with sexism, abortion and reproductive rights, consumerism and power in popular culture. But what does it all mean? What actually is feminist art?

Publishing her revolutionary essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in 1971, art historian, Linda Nochlin, exposed the social and economic factors that have prevented women throughout history from achieving the same artistic recognition as their male counterparts. This led to the birth of feminist art. Kicking ass since 1970, the feminist art movement refers to the international efforts of feminists to create art that directly reflects women's lives and experiences and gives them greater visibility within the art world. While early feminist artists like Carolee Schneemann and Judy Chicago celebrated feminine experience through vaginal imagery and menstrual blood (google "menstrual art" and you'll see), post-feminist artists have focused on deconstructing ideas of gender, sexuality and identity. Feminist artists also

encourage people to embrace the tenets of feminism, which range from ending gender-based discrimination to giving women personal autonomy to their bodies.

Calling themselves "feminist masked avengers in the tradition of anonymous do-gooders like Robin Hood, Wonder Woman and Bat-

man," the New York based, gorilla-masked **Guerrilla Girls** have rocked the art world since 1985 with their funny and outrageous posters and billboards that highlight the sexism, racism and corruption in politics, art, film and popular culture. One such example that attacks the marginalisation of women artists in the male-dominated art world is:

## THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success  
 Not having to be in shows with men  
 Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs  
 Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty  
 Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine  
 Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position  
 Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others  
 Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood  
 Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits  
 Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger  
 Being included in revised versions of art history  
 Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius  
 Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** DO-BORN-CE OF THE ART WORLD



As early as 1969, Viennese performance artist, **Valie Export** began challenging the patriarchal objectification of the female body in film. At a time when actresses and female characters were largely passive sex objects to be looked at by men, Export's **Action Pants: Genital Panic (1969)** involved her hijacking a porn cinema in Germany equipped with a fake machine gun and action pants that exposed her vagina. Challenging the all-male

audience not to look at the screen but to face "the real thing" – her vagina – Export empowers women by using her body as a weapon of patriarchal-smashing social commentary.



Export's earlier collaborative performance, **Tap and Touch Cinema (1968)**, also radically challenges our voyeurism in the cinema. Hitting the streets with a cardboard box resembling a mini-cinema theatre strapped around her chest, Export's male collaborative partner invited anyone and everyone to touch her breasts. By shifting the anonymity of voyeurism in the cinema to the public street, Export raises awareness of the ways in which we objectify women by making the men and women who touched her breasts accountable for their exploitation. She also exposes the feminist

concern that gender and sexuality are only socially constructed performances.

One of the few postmodern performance artists to use plastic surgery as an artistic medium, French performance artist **Orlan** explores the complex relationship between feminism, beauty, identity, the human body, science and art. Especially considering that we live in a technological age of breast implants, botox, cloning and the ability to create alternative identities over the internet, Orlan undergoes plastic surgery herself –without anaesthetic – to expose the monstrosity of our narcissistic obsession with female beauty and youth. In one performance, she parodies the tenets of Renaissance female beauty by surgically modifying herself to have the chin of Botticelli's Venus, the nose of Gerome's Psyche and the forehead of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. The result is a monstrous sci-fi female beauty that reveals a lot about our cultural anxieties.

Feminist and post-feminist artists today highlight feminist concerns with the performative nature of the female body, sexuality, race and identity in art and society, while still being as razor-sharp, ball-busting and bad-ass as ever.

# THE GIRL'S HANDY-DANDY GUIDE TO ANAL

NICOLE WALLACE

So you want to try anal. Yay! However, you don't know how to use that orifice in your sexy times. Awkward! Lucky for you, the kind folks at KATE care about your dilemma and have gathered some tips to help you out.

Know your medium: The most common things to insert are those things that are handy – fingers, tongues, penises. There are also dildos, butt plugs and anal beads. Each of these mediums requires different considerations. Using fingers? Make sure the nails are short. Dildos and butt plugs come in different sizes and shapes. If it's your first time, "Gargantua" probably isn't a good idea. Anybody who has read or seen *Choke* will know that one should always use quality anal beads – only toys with a flared base should be used; otherwise they may be sucked into the intestinal tract which will require a visit to the hospital. The staff at any good sex store can help customers choose the right sex toys for their needs. Dvice is excellent in this area (dvice.co.nz).

Unlike the vagina, the anus does not create its own lubrication, so the use of store-bought lubricants is essential. Apply a generous amount to your medium: the more the better. We recommend a high quality water-based lubricant like *Probe*, which can be purchased from any good sex shop. (Also, cheap lubricant is full of sugar, which you don't want anywhere near your vagina.)

It doesn't open up easily: the anus will tend to tighten upon initial stimulation, so take a bit of time to stimulate the entrance before attempting to enter slowly and gradually. Soon the anus will relax, after which things can proceed with greater ease and enjoyment.

Enveloping is your friend: for first-timers, it can be far more pleasurable if the person being anally stimulated controls how deep and how fast the medium goes. You can think of this as the anus "sucking" the medium in and enveloping it, rather than the medium penetrating the anus.

Digestive health is good for anal sex. The person/s being penetrated should go to the bathroom before sex; however, if their bowels are unhappy for any reason it may get a bit messy. Even if the person is the perfect specimen of health, you still may see a little bit of poo. If you will lose your figurative shit upon seeing shit, you may want to rethink this.

Be safe: anal sex still carries the risk of STIs, so the use of condoms and dams is essential if you don't want to compromise your health. This goes for sex toys too. Use a condom to prevent contamination of the toy and any future place it enters. And always change condoms etc. before entering another orifice, or you will have a whole heap of trouble.

Above all, respect your partner: consent is sexy. Sex should be for the benefit of all parties involved. Respect each other's choices – it's the right thing to do, plus it leads to better sex. Have fun!



# TEN YEARS ON, BRING IT ON

PASAN JAYASINGHE

The high school comedy genre is sadly plagued with a bunch of films that sacrifice character development, especially of women, for humour. Too often, the women in such films are just objects of male sexual fantasy or cheap jokes. Not *Bring it On*, which, a decade after its release, still stands as a refreshing antidote to sidelined female characters and lazy humour. It's a film that easily inspires affection, be it through its mature handling of gender, race and sexuality, the cutting humour ("it's a cheerocracy!" or "spirit fingers!"), or the giddy, infectious enthusiasm that is hard to resist.

*Bring it On* succeeds in large part because it manages to successfully turn a much maligned role on its head. The cheerleader trope is burdened not only with the idea of being an add-on to (inevitably) masculine sporting pursuits, but also with ideas of stupidity that are inspired by the stereotypical image of the blindly cheering blonde girl. *Bring it On* begins with this pretext, as the protagonist Torrance Shipman (Kirsten Dunst), pretty, blonde and extremely devoted to cheerleading, fits the bill almost perfectly. But the film develops her and the characters assembled around her with such enthusiasm that the stereotype is quickly dismantled.

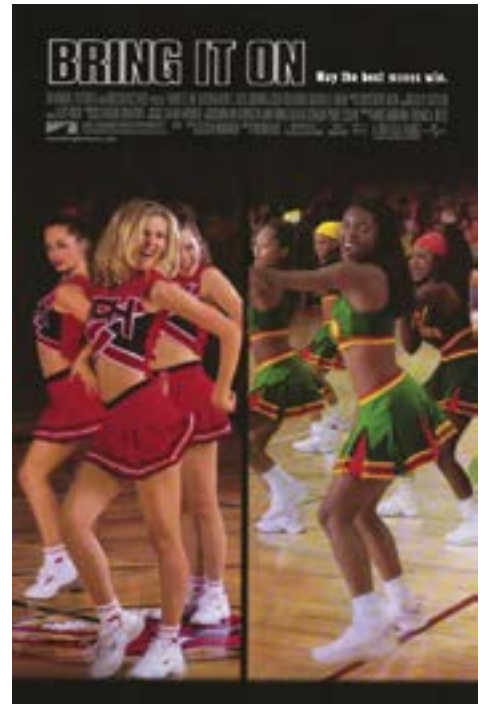
Torrance herself is aware that she is not particularly smart, and that cheerleading is the ceiling of her abilities. When Missy (Eliza Dushku) attempts to reassure her that "It's only cheerleading", Torrance exasperates "I am only cheerleading". Yet she is determined to be a decent person; one that achieves success on her own merits. Torrance's shock at Big Red's deception, in stealing the team's routine from the Clovers, and her realisation that her entire cheerleading career has been a big lie, allows director Peyton Reed and screenwriter Jessica Bendinger to fully flesh this out. The movie places Torrance, and all other cheerleaders, in a firm meritocracy, where those who have it bring it, and those who bring it win. The message is succinct and never preached; the film instead lets it be demonstrated by the cheerleaders and the competition. It may not be particularly deep, but considering the target demographic, and the fre-

quent condescension rampant in the genre, it's positively enlightened.

On the flip side of this are Isis and the Clovers. Isis pushes the "Bring it!" line from the start, long before Torrance is fully convinced. But this is layered with a delicate point on race. The Clovers' initial hate towards Torrance and the Toros stems from them breaching the rules; the blatant plagiarising of the routine is the target of the quips and the showdown at the football game, more so than the fact that the Toros are (largely) white. The latter point, of their potential exoticisation by the white girls, is left to be addressed with the film's biting humour: "were the ethnic festivities to your liking today?" for example. To get their revenge, the Clovers will go at it their own way, without any condescending help, because even though Torrance is full of good intentions, from the Clovers' perspective, her help is just the rich white girl learning an Important Lesson. The film discards liberal white guilt and pity at racial disadvantage as effortlessly as Isis rips up Torrance's daddy's cheque.

The film also breaks the stereotype of cheerleading by presenting it as a legitimate athletic pursuit, not just a frivolous exercise for girls, requiring as much, if not more, skill and hard work than conventional (and male) sports. Competitive cheerleading as painted by the film is full of the same bloody noses and obnoxious competitors as any other sport, but it's also hugely versatile, combining dance, hip hop and, and often, just plain fun. The final cheer routines are simple proof of this: dynamic, energetic and infectious. The point is also made hilariously with the school's useless football team, who draw fewer fans than the Toros, and whose games seem to conclude with announcements to fans of the date of their next defeat. The Toros are hardly an attachment to the football team; if anything, it's the other way around. As Torrance bluntly puts it, the football games are just like practices for the Toros.

Additionally, the film is surprisingly thoughtful concerning sexuality, voicing the frustrations of the male cheerleaders who



must constantly defend their sexuality. Yet it sidesteps the defensiveness of insisting that "cheerleading's not gay!" with the inclusion of Les, who "speaks fag fluently". It is as gay as it is straight, which is to say, not one or the other at all. For a mainstream film at the turn of the millennium to be this considered, when pop culture today is only just catching on, is audacious, but as with most other things in the film, it comes naturally.

*Bring it On* handles the obligatory teen romance element just as well. Despite signing up to the "I believe in you" line of romantic affirmation – one of the film's only real weaknesses – the film follows through on it by discarding Torrance's douchebag boyfriend, and by having her crush Cliff (Jesse Bradford) demonstrate his Belief In Her twice, because if he really does like her, then he would show up for her again. Torrance never seems like an accessory to any of her romances. And that silent toothbrush flirting scene is as enjoyable as it is ridiculous.

Combined with its excellent production design (including striking visual compositions, snappy editing and a lively score), a fantastic cast, and thoughtful consideration of issues that it doesn't even need to tackle, rewatchings of *Bring it On* push home the point that it simply has no business being this good. It's perhaps a sad indictment of Hollywood that few films in the decade since have met this threshold; *Mean Girls* yes, *Easy A* maybe. Perhaps because of this, but more likely because of its own sheer brilliance, *Bring it On* still stands, and jumps and cheers, boldly defiant.

# PERCEPTION AND ALTERATION OF THE VAGINA

How many vaginae have you seen in real life? This question is for the ladies. Have you ever seen one up close and personal that wasn't your own or in some kind of photograph or video? Hands down, queer ladies, there's no need to brag. The fact is that not many (heterosexual) (non-medical professional) women have ever gotten around to having a close look at another girl's bits (hell, even their own), and as a result they have no definitely realistic examples to compare themselves to. More and more porn featuring airbrushed and surgically modified models and actors, paired with the tendency in sex ed to show just a sketchy diagram of the fallopian tubes, has led to a strange situation.

Do we have any idea what we're supposed to look like down there? If someone told us we weren't normal, would we have any frame of reference to tell them to sod off?

Any lady reading this is probably now wondering. The answer is: you're fine. Vaginae are as individual as faces, and whatever your situation down there is, it's normal in the way that every face is normal. But like faces, there is a growing industry based around cosmetically altering vaginae to fit a certain standard, in this case exemplified by 'labiaplasty'.

Labiaplasty involves surgically trimming the labia majora or minora, that is, the outer or inner lips of the vagina. Not sure what those are? Okay, go get a hand mirror. Yeah, you heard me, go on. Also, you may want to go somewhere private and lock the door. Done? Good. (Note: this exercise only applies to people with a vagina. Men and non-op or pre-op transwomen will find the instructions do not correspond with their reality.) Now look for the mounds of flesh which bracket all the interesting stuff. They should be the same

colour as the rest of your skin, under the hair. Those are the labia majora, or 'outer lips'. Between them it should be easy enough to find the darker 'inner lips'. They often flare out. Got them? Okay, well, labiaplasty involves cutting those lips off.

There are actually a number of practical surgical procedures involving the vagina, such as reconstruction of a vagina damaged by a difficult birthing (even if it's a smooth ride, after you've pushed a baby through it, it's never the same). Even labiaplasty, for some women, is used to relieve physical discomfort. But for the majority of women who get it done, labiaplasty is entirely for the look of the thing, usually because they have been led to believe the look of their thing is wrong. It's a fiddly and dangerous procedure which has the potential to go wrong in a number of ways, including damage to the nerves and loss of sensation, and because it's cosmetic it's practiced by private surgeons unregulated by health standards. It is also hella expensive. Yet more and more women are getting this done.

Getting labiaplasty, or any procedure dealing with her own body, is totally a woman's prerogative. We should be all about that. But it is unfortunate that body-shaming and misinformation can lead to such widespread insecurity, because they're cutting their vagina down to unrealistic, improbable and photo-shopped standards.

There are less permanent ways of altering the vagina. By now everyone knows about shaving, dyeing, mowing shapes in and waxing off pubic hair. It's become so embedded that porn with untamed pubic hair is a niche market. Once we became acclimatised to the idea of women cutting or ripping all the hair

off the sensitive area around their genitals, it was only a matter of time before someone had the bright idea of gluing colourful crystals to the thus-bared skin. Vajazzling is becoming more and more common; it's become a common procedure for schoolgirls in their prom preparations, and even some mothers preparing to give birth feel like it's necessary so the doctors won't judge their unadorned vaginas.

Some marketing genius, possibly the sibling of whoever popularised anal bleaching, came up with the idea of vulva dye. Like labiaplasty, vulva dye relies on telling women that their vulvas don't look right the way they are, and then selling the solution to that newly-created problem. Products like My New Pink Button promise to "[restore] the Pink back to a Woman's Genitals". Even leaving aside the ageist and racist elements of this colouring concept, it's just plain creating a 'problem' that women never knew they had, and then selling the solution.

In the face of this drive to problematise and alter the vagina, the German vagina perfume Vulva is almost a relief. You might hear "vagina perfume" and jump to the conclusion that it's a flowery cover-up scent. In fact, it's bottling the "beguiling vaginal scent" (no word on whether they synthesise the ingredients or... what), to sell as a masturbatory device for men. Sure, the internet ad is creepy, it's objectifying, and the concept might squick some people out, but there's nothing inherently wrong with sex aids. At least, instead of representing a natural part of a woman's body to her as problematic, it's packaging it as desirable. And that is what it boils down to: the vagina is fetishised for men, problematised for women, sold to both, and owned by no one and everyone all at once.

**BLOG  
ROLL**

## Good introductory feminist blogs:

<http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/>  
<http://yesmeansyesblog.wordpress.com/>  
<http://shakespeareessister.blogspot.com/>  
<http://www.feministe.us/blog/>  
<http://feministing.com/>  
<http://www.racialicious.com/>

## Some NZ feminist blogs we like:

[www.thehandmirror.blogspot.com](http://www.thehandmirror.blogspot.com)  
<http://mellowyellow-aotearoa.blogspot.com/>  
[www.bogannette.com](http://www.bogannette.com)  
<http://ideologicallyimpure.wordpress.com/>  
<http://history-herstory-scubanurse.blogspot.com/>  
<http://inthegateaux.blogspot.com/>  
<http://www.ladynews.co.nz/>  
<http://octavias-spitfire-emporium.blogspot.com/>

# a LADY'S REPUTATION

**"Nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman; it is at once the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things." – Evelina, Fanny Burney**

It's very easy to become a fallen woman. All you have to do is be a girl, not wear a certified Chastity Belt 2000 with reinforced titanium, and get on the wrong side of someone with a big mouth. People use 'slut', or the implication that someone is slutty, as a pejorative against women they don't like or approve of. This is called 'slut-shaming'. It's a powerful tool that is wielded carelessly by almost everyone, even those who think of themselves as sex-positive.

Getting a slutty reputation takes you out of the 'good girl' category, and puts you in the 'slut' category, which is like being dipped in a big ol' bowl of slut-rust: reputation officially tarnished. Your word is treated as worth less in situations where sexual assault is involved because you will be assumed to have brought it on yourself with your real or rumoured sexuality.

By slut-shaming, people (inadvertently) help rapists get away with rape.

Another thing that helps to weave rape into

the fabric of our culture is the 'no means no' attitude. While it is absolutely true that no means no, every time, at any point, the attitude that it is someone's job to be the gatekeeper of their own body against others is flawed. 'No means no' puts the onus on a person to say no, which can be hard, and it ignores the unacceptable gray areas that result – for example, just because they didn't say no, it doesn't mean they said yes. A 'yes means yes' approach deals with those gray areas by putting the responsibility on everyone to seek permission before doing anything to someone else. It is simple, and logical, and unfortunately not widely practiced. There is a clear connection between a woman being labelled a slut and blamed if she gets raped, and seeing people as responsible for saying 'no' instead of seeking a 'yes'.

To put it into perspective, a prominent case of slut-shaming and rape that many people will remember was New Zealand woman Louise Nicolas. When she came forward about her rape by several police officers, the fact that she'd had sex before was deemed relevant to the case and discussed at length. The fact that the alleged rapists had already been convicted of rape was not only seen as irrelevant; it was suppressed. The men were

acquitted because their defence successfully slut-shamed Louise; working from the position of a slut, reputation for reputation the slut generally loses. Is it fair for a victim of sexual assault to have the spotlight turned on her while the perpetrator(s) melt unexamined into the crowd? No, but that's what happens when a culture sees it as normal for people to push themselves on others without their permission in the expectation that 'if they don't want it, they'll say stop'. That's what happens when people slut-shame.

Labels are powerful. Reputations are delicate. Using 'slut' as a pejorative is more harmful than people think. A reaction against this situation is growing, not only in the 'yes means yes' movement but in direct action around the world. People are taking part in Slutwalks in many cities, marching to "make a unified statement about sexual assault and victims' rights and to demand respect for all" (Slutwalk Toronto). And what a coincidence, there is one coming to a city near you:

**Slutwalk Aotearoa: Auckland Chapter. Saturday June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-3:30 PM. Britomart to Aotea Square. Bring your banners. Modesty optional.**

# DENTAL DAMS MEET REALITY

A. CHANG

O-week was such a bustle of excitement and overly enthusiastic first-years that I missed the 'make a dental dam out of a condom' demonstration that occurred at the UniQ stall. Not to worry however, as I had a friend who was more than willing to take me through the step-by-step process. She seemed a bit surprised when I couldn't help but wrinkle my face up in disgust. As I waxed poetic about how a latex barrier takes away from the sheer deliciousness of a luscious vagina or the satisfaction of swallowing semen down your throat my friend became more and more perplexed. "But those are the kind of arguments that people use to get out of having safe sex," my friend pointed out, "You sound like one of those people who say that condoms are unnatural and feel like a raincoat in a shower."

My friend was right. I was a bit disgusted with myself. If anyone asked me if oral sex was real sex I would reply that yes, it was. Yet in practice I treated it completely different. For several days now I've been trying to work out how I could reconcile the things I know need to be done (like practicing safe oral sex) with the realities of what will probably happen (safe penetrative sex but very unsafe and dangerous oral sex).

I've worked out a compromise with myself. If I find myself in a sexual situation I can engage in hand jobs (fairly low risk but not completely safe) and protected penetrative sex. I could even engage in short instances of oral sex using condoms/dental dams in order to de-sensitise myself against my dislike of protection in oral sex. As for the unprotected oral sex, I

can save that for slightly later in the relationship when I'm comfortable enough to suggest that we both get tested first. The safety of this, of course, would be reliant on the two of us being exclusive and honest, but that's a factor in all unprotected sex.

It all makes me wonder why we aren't having these conversations more often. Not necessarily about oral sex, but about that enormous gulf that seems to exist between what we know about safe sex practices and the realities of what we actually engage in. We need to have these discussions more often because it's essential that we start taking better care of each other and ourselves. Because if we don't care enough to protect each other, should we really be fucking?



# CUPCAKES CAN BE SUBVERSIVE

## Chocolate Vegan Muffins:

3 cups flour  
2 cups sugar  
6 tablespoons cocoa  
2 teaspoons baking soda  
1 teaspoon salt  
2 teaspoon vanilla essence  
3/4 cup vegetable oil  
2 tablespoon vinegar  
2 cups cold water

## Banana Vegan Muffins:

2 cups flour  
3 1/4 cups sugar  
3/4 teaspoon salt  
1 1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
2 1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
1/2 cup oil  
4 bananas  
1 1/2 cup water  
2 teaspoon vanilla  
2 1/2 tablespoon vinegar



Sift and mix dry ingredients. Add and mix wet ingredients. Pour into greased muffin trays or paper cases. Bake at 175 degrees Celsius for 10-15 minutes or until a toothpick pushed into the center of a muffin right down to the bottom comes out clean.

Do you want to be cool like us and make vulva

muffins, or even other nifty shapes you can't achieve with normal icing sugar+water type frosting? Buy a pack of royal icing. Separate it into sections, and massage drops of food colouring into each section, mixing until you get the colours you want. Roll together, shape and decorate the icing as you like, then put it on top of the muffins.

# GENDERED SPACES

LENA DUFFIN

Most people reading this have had gender-related experiences in city areas, as they are places where people spend much of their time. However, these experiences very easily go unnoticed unless they are pointed out. At home, work, university and in any leisure spaces, gender can and does influence the way people use spaces and the way that spaces are formed.

A primary issue that many women will identify with is that of safety, both when in public or in the private sphere. Just last night, whilst waiting for a bus in the dark, I was constantly vigilant about my surroundings and trying to be aware of what was going on around me, aiming to avoid any dangers that were nearby. Discussions with men lead me to believe that very few of them have ever experienced this fear when doing something as mundane as waiting for a bus, yet this is a very common theme within the lives of women. Perceptions of danger are based on my personal experience of being assaulted outside a bar one night in town, and general discourses around women's vulnerability when alone. This is not only specific to dark areas of the city, as safety is also an issue on

campus during the day. Often in *Craccum* the topic of Womenspace's existence comes up, and it is frequently described as being an example of 'reverse sexism.' However, I firmly disagree with this label, as for many women it's the one place on campus where they can feel entirely safe. It is a haven where they are protected from physical violence and verbal abuse of the 'tits out for the boys' variety, which is unfortunately common around the campus and city in general.

Spaces are also gendered in the respect of the design of many buildings being geared towards men. This seems innocuous, but it is an example of how gender biases can pervade all levels of people's lives. In my own experience, the designs of houses are gender-biased in regard to accessibility of storage spaces, particularly those in the kitchen. This is somewhat ironic, considering it is assumed to be where 'women's work' is carried out. In my own home, I'm unable to reach many of the kitchen cupboards without standing on a chair. Although I know this doesn't majorly disadvantage me, the design of the house being more suitable for men (who are, on average, taller than women) is something

that influences my daily life. The design of physical environments can also be gendered, even regarding things as unobtrusive as the heights of cupboards and bench tops in home, work and leisure spaces.

Although I have primarily focused on the experiences of women, as this is after all a women's rights magazine, I recognise that men also may have their experiences coloured by gender. However, in most cases I would argue that it occurs less often, and to a lesser intensity than for women. Those men who do have negative gender-based experiences are often of non-dominant forms of masculinity, such as homosexual men, who frequently experience discrimination on this basis. They may therefore choose to conduct their lives in a different manner within the city. In short, gender is one of the main characteristics which people define themselves and others by, and cities are common places where people spend large amounts of their time, therefore it is only natural that home, work and leisure spaces across the city are influenced by gender.



# INTERNATIONAL NO DIET DAY

International No Diet Day (INDD) is an annual celebration of body acceptance and body shape diversity. It's also dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle and raising awareness of the dangers and futility of dieting.

To celebrate INDD on Friday the 6th May, the Campus Feminist Collective with support from AUSA put on a fashion show in the quad with clothes from Dotti, Pagani, Stax and TAV. Kate went to print before the show but here are a couple snaps of some of our beautiful models!

[Ed. note: The INDD parade was organised by the tireless and amazing Nicole Boyce, light of my life, apple of my eye, causer of things to happen.]

Photos by Alliv Samson

