

The front cover shows a close-up of the Molly Malone statue. While there are many statues of famous men on the main streets of Dublin's city centre, there are none of historical women. The well-known bronze statue of Molly Malone at the bottom of Grafton Street represents, not a real woman, but a character from the song of the same name, about an 18th century street trader. Also known as "The Tart with the Cart", she wheels her wheelbarrow and flaunts her wares for the passing tourists. Meanwhile the existence of Dublin's actual women street-traders is threatened, with trading laws and rising licence fees, as well as the upcoming "redevelopment" of the Moore Street trading area. The photograph was inspired by one taken for the Feminist Walking Tour of Dublin booklet, which RAG and Choice Ireland co-organised in March 2008.

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the RAG

anarcha-feminist
magazine

issue 3

getting active

domestic labour

feminists as trans allies

feminism in muslim countries

PLUS MORE INSIDE

Introduction



Thanks for picking up a copy of The Rag Issue 3!

RAG are a Dublin-based anarcho-feminist collective. Within our group we discuss, debate, write and organise. All the articles are written by individual members of RAG, with collective editing and group input. We do not all have the same opinions on everything you will read here, but we are all anarcho-feminists.

Anarcho-feminism stresses the feminism inherent in anarchism. Feminism demands women's liberation; anarchism shows us that we can't be meaningfully liberated under capitalism. As long as society is structured around unlimited economic growth, the accumulation of profits, exploitation of the global working class and our environment, no-one can be free. And, without a specific analysis of women's oppression, anarchism can't hold the key to women's freedom.

These perspectives are reflected in the various issues we have chosen to write about in The Rag issue 3. We can learn and take strength from the women and men who have struggled before us but we still have a long fight ahead. *I'm a Feminist, Now What?* looks at some of the practical ways people can get involved in the struggle for a decent, equitable society. *Capitalism and the Exploitation of Women* shows how women are exploited under capitalism through their unwaged domestic labour while *Feminism in Muslim Countries* takes on the stereotyping of Muslim women as helpless.

Sexist concepts embedded in language are examined in *Women and Words* and the gender stereotypes presented in children's TV are looked at from a light-hearted perspective in *TV Role Models*. The impact of the conventional perception of beauty on how we see each other and how we feel about our bodies is discussed in *You Know Who You Look Like, 5 things that make me feel good about myself and stop hating my body* and *Thoughts on a Lamppost*.

The oppressive nature of gender binaries is examined in *Adopting the TransPosition: Feminists as Trans Allies* and in a recording of their key note speech at Lesbian Lives 2008, *Dangerous Dreams and Damned Desires*, Kate Bornstein and Barbara Carrellas talk about their experiences of lesbian culture.

As anarchists we believe that meaningful social change will only happen with ordinary people organising and struggling together, in solidarity with each other. Women have always been to the fore of struggles to change the world. In *Mothers against Drugs - Communities Outside the State* we see how the women of Dublin's inner city organised their communities in the battle against drugs in the 1980s.

We've been incredibly happy to hear about new feminist and anarcho-feminist groups starting: Lash Back in Dublin, a fledgling men's feminist group also in Dublin and new anarcho-feminist collectives in Glasgow and London. A men's feminist zine from New Zealand called *From the Kitchen* has recently made it into our hands, as well as an anarcho-feminist one called *Misfit*. Maybe for the next issue we can do lots of reviews if you good people keep sending stuff to us!

In Ireland, like in many other countries, the economy is in recession. Unemployment is rising, house prices are finally falling (although the general price of living is not) and many of those who bought homes in recent years at inflated prices are now struggling to make repayments. People are worrying if their savings are safe. As usual the working class are the first to suffer and the rich remain comfortable with their financial backup and 'bail out' packages. As the media shove credit-crunch-mania down our throats, they avoid giving us a true analysis of what has got us in this mess. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we consider alternatives to the way Irish society has developed in the last two decades. We need to look at viable, sustainable ways of living that won't collapse, out of our control, in the blink of an eye. This capitalist system is getting us nowhere.

In Solidarity, RAG

Our thanks to (in no particular order): Our families and friends; everyone who came to the RAG gathering in May, Dee, Natalia and Willie for hosting it; Heathers, Ophelia and Riannon for playing at the Rag 2 launch; Michelle, for all the beautiful artwork at such short notice; Natalia for her stencil; Darren; Leo; Damo; Mark M; Eilís; Mark Grehan; Bridget and Danny at the IEN; Carol Hunt; Seomra Spraoi; Choice Ireland; the Belfast, Dublin and London anarchist bookfair organisers; WERRC; Anne Anas, for her photo that inspired our front cover.

Contact us: P.O. Box 10785, Dublin 1; www.ragdublin.blogspot.com; ragdublin@riseup.net. New members welcome!

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The Rag Year

words by RAG. images by niav and william

International Womens Day 2008: a feminist walking tour of Dublin

-For last international women's day RAG co-organised a feminist walking tour of Dublin with Choice Ireland, a feminist pro-choice organisation. We wanted to find women's Dublin and to celebrate the places where women have lived and struggled in the city across the years. Whereas the city streets are lined with bronze statues of 'important' men, women's contribution is largely invisible. The walking tour was our way of redressing this, of celebrating and making visible the history and struggles of Dublin's women.

Over 140 people attended with two separate tours taking place, one ten minutes after the next. A booklet with a map of the tour and information about each section of it was given to each attendee. Activity sheets made the day more interactive for the kids. Copies of the walking tour booklet are still available - email RAG for details.

The tour guides for the day were Carol Hunt - a history graduate and veteran tour guide - and Sinead Ahern, one of Choice Ireland's finest spokespeople. Carol joked that she used to run a women's history walking tour around

Dublin, but that it was often not that well attended by men - until she changed the tour's name to "A Sexual History of Dublin." Same tour - different name - far better male attendance!

The tour meandered across town, tracing women's history in the city - from the Brehon Laws, to the Ladies Land League of the 1880's, through the suffragette movement, the women involved in workers and republican struggles, to the radical feminist movement of the 1970's and the anti-domestic and sexual-violence movements to present-day pro choice struggles.

Helen Keyes from Choice Ireland spoke outside the "rogue" pregnancy-counselling agency on Dorset St. The so-called Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a fundamentalist Christian front which falsely claims to provide information on all crisis-pregnancy options, advertising under various names in the golden pages and online. However, once inside, it subjects vulnerable women to extreme anti-abortion propaganda. Some of Choice Ireland's first events were demonstrations against this agency. Helen described how members of the group visited the agency

to investigate what was really happening inside the WRC - even going as far as to source "pregnant pee" and conceal it on their persons! As she spoke during the tour on Saturday, a potato was thrown from a third floor window of the building, injuring one woman. The tour hastily reconvened around the corner, a safe distance from the WRC.

At the end of the tour, happy hungry walkers were invited back to the Teacher's Club on Parnell Square, where free soup and sandwiches were well received by all. Two short, recently-made, feminist films were shown. These were "The Future of Feminism" by Cara Holmes and "Breaking the Silence" by Katie - who also filmed the walking tour for Dublin Community Television. RAG had their distribution table at the back of the room selling their magazine as well as books, zines, moon cups, badges and more. There was information and leaflets from Choice Ireland. There was also music from the extremely talented young singer-songwriter duo Heathers.

<http://www.indymedia.ie/article/86643>

On the first weekend in May 2008, RAG hosted a feminist gathering near Carrick-on-Shannon in county Leitrim. We organised the event because we wanted to further the discussions we'd been having with other feminists. We hoped that the event would provide a chance for feminists of all genders, ages, locations and political backgrounds to meet, network and discuss feminist ideas in depth. And it did. Over 150 people attended the gathering over the weekend and surprisingly, considering the 'summer' that followed, the sun shone.

The workshops and discussions were diverse in topic. From 'Islam and feminism', 'capitalism and the exploitation of women', 'family structures' and 'feminism and women in prisons' to 'female solidarity', 'personal boundaries', 'challenging male privilege' and 'feminists as trans allies'. Not to mention a host of craft based workshops including a balaclava crocheting session and at least two dance workshops. All-ages activities ran all day alongside the adult's timetable with equally diverse activities including a nature walk, kite making, sock-puppet making, horseplay time and giant art!

**Feminist
Gathering,
May 2008**

The ethos of the weekend was very much D.I.Y. The gathering was held on a farm and several weekends of work were done to ready the place in anticipation of the feminist hordes. We knocked a concrete wall, filled a skip, cut back brambles, strimmed fields, built bridges, put up two benders (structures made from hazel, pallets and tarps), made benches, and built crates for the recycling. It was tough work but we had great help and it was worth it in the end. On registering, attendees got a booklet with the timetable, safer spaces policy and general guidelines for the weekend. Everyone then signed up to help with various aspects of the running of the weekend such as site maintenance, helping with the all-ages workshops, welfare/safe space duties, first aid, washing up etc.

People began to arrive early on Friday evening. Most of those who attended were from Ireland, mainly from Cork, Dublin, Sligo, Leitrim, and Roscommon. About 15 came from the UK representing different groups such as FAF (Feminist Activist Forum) and Womynspace (a squat in Hackney - now sadly evicted). The workshops ran all day Saturday and Sunday with discussions spilling out of the workshops as people sat in the sun chatting.



Carol Hunt addresses walkers on International Women's Day

There were about 12 children of different ages there and having workshops rather than just 'childcare' for them seemed to be a great success.

On Saturday, an evening session called 'Where We're At: Contemporary Feminist Organising' was held. Different groups, including Lash Back, Choice Ireland, FAF, Women's Right to Choose Cork branch, RAG, Womynspace and Ladyfest Cork, were able to tell everyone about who they were and what they were up to. As the different groups took turns speaking there was a real feeling that feminism was certainly alive and well.

Overall the weekend was a great success. It would definitely be a good idea to have a feminist gathering in an urban setting

where the issues of ability, illness, age, etc would not have such an impact on the decision to attend. The chance to get to meet other feminists face to face has certainly changed RAG. We had our eyes opened to many issues surrounding trans-awareness, ability-awareness and heterocentricity. Having the weekend open to all genders gave many people a chance to discuss feminist issues in a mixed-gender but pro-feminist setting and left us with a real sense of solidarity with our male allies. It was also great fun and hugely educational to be surrounded by children of different ages and to participate in all-ages activities with them. Thanks to everyone who came and hopefully another gathering will take place not in the not-too-distant future.



Enjoying the sun at the RAG gathering

On yer bike... cycling for solidarity

Last May four women from the RAG collective donned their helmets and saddled up along with 50 other women and men for the annual Women's Aid fun cycle from Dublin to Arklow.

Women's Aid is a feminist, political and campaigning organisation committed to the elimination of violence and abuse of women through effecting political, cultural and social change. The organisation works specifically with women experiencing domestic violence and runs a freephone helpline, staffed mainly by volunteers. Women's Aid works to support women affected by domestic violence and provides education and training about domestic abuse.

The cycle took us south from Dublin through Bray and Wicklow winding along the scenic coast road and down into Arklow, with a stop halfway for soup and sandwiches. The hills were amazing with equal measures of glorious freewheeling and frantic uphill peddling.

After about 5 hours of cycling we were very excited to reach the plush hotel where we were treated to an amazing massage, delicious dinner and disco dancing.

Prizes were awarded to the first and last cyclists past the post. The RAG women beat off some stiff competition from lycra-clad men wielding hi-tech racers to come in 2nd in the teams (in our estimation) and gaining the first prize for team solidarity (self awarded). We definitely lost the karaoke.

The Women's Aid fun cycle is one of Women's Aid's annual fundraising events. To participate, volunteer or find out more see

<http://www.womensaid.ie/>
Women's Aid confidential freephone helpline 1800 341 900

Dangerous Dreams & Damned Desires

The keynote speech of Kate Bornstein and Barbara Carrellas
at WERRC's Lesbian Lives conference, February 2008.

words by emily
image by clare

Brought to you by the dictaphone of Debi Withers and Red Chidgey of the Feminist Activist Forum (FAF), RAG are delighted to present, on CD and mp3*, the dual keynote speech of Kate Bornstein and Barbara Carrellas, who opened WERRC's (Women's Education and Research Resource Centre, University College Dublin) 15th Lesbian Lives conference in February of this year.

Kate Bornstein and Barbara Carrellas are queer superheroines. Kate Bornstein is an author, playwright and performance artist. Her publications include *Hello Cruel World: 101 alternatives to suicide for teens, freaks and other outlaws* and *Gender Outlaw: On men women and the rest of us*, a gender workbook and the most stolen book from University College Dublin's library, or so I'm told. Barbara Carrellas is an author, sex educator and theatre artist. Her most recent books include *Urban Tantra: sacred sex for the twenty-first century* and *Luxurious Loving: tantric inspirations for passion and pleasure*. In fact, having attended the Lesbian Lives conference myself, I had the pleasure of experiencing Barbara's instruction first hand, as she guided a room of fifty or more women (and a few men) through a 'gender free orgasm'. Phew! It was intense folks, intense.

Their speech is entitled 'Dangerous Dreams and Damned Desires' 'because it's sexy' they say, and indeed it is. The theme of the conference was 'creating lesbian culture'. Both Kate and Barbara talk through their encounters with and experiences of 'lesbian culture', which they 'admire and appreciate', but this admiration has been 'mostly from the outside'. While neither Kate nor Barbara call themselves lesbians, they nevertheless 'uphold the values' of lesbian culture, values such as: 'compassion; inclusiveness, generosity, the many many many ways to express love for women one to another and of course the yummy sex between women that goes on for hours'.

Kate and Barbara take a 'walk through memory lane', telling emotive and hilarious stories of theatre, spirituality, community, relationships, sex, sexuality, love and

women. They deliver a colourful, decorative tale of queer history and adventure starring gender queers, drag queens, lesbians, gays, dykes, sex-positivists, sex-radicals, polyamorists, sadomasochists, pornographers, 'academic lesbiana', shape-shifting freaks and transsexual-lesbians among others.

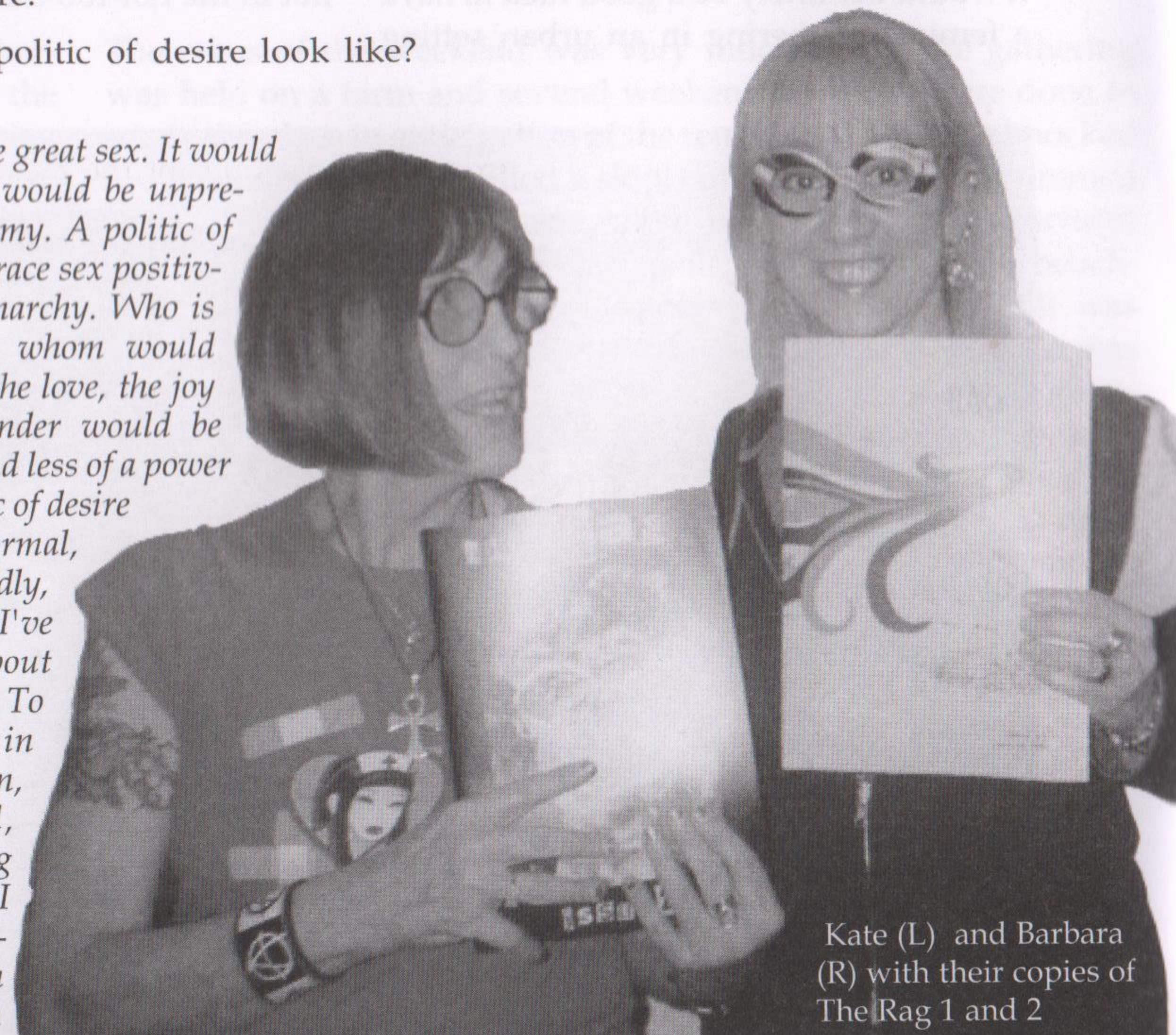
Kate and Barbara integrate their ideas in how they live and love, employing a 'politic of desire', which they consider to be central to lesbian culture: lesbian politics is based in desire more so than power or identity. Inspired by the Eastern traditions of Tantra, Kate and Barbara address the importance of sex in healing - healing from loss, from shame, from abuse: sex-positivity and gender-anarchy is key to their philosophy. They are advocates for queer youth: 'and all teens, freaks and other outlaws whose lives are being made miserable by America's puritanical über-culture that threatens to swallow the planet'. Lesbian culture in particular has taught them the multi-faceted ways in which one can love, and state that it is vital to name and maintain what we love about lesbian culture: the desire.

What would a politic of desire look like? Kate explains:

"It would look like great sex. It would be consensual, it would be unpredictable and yummy. A politic of desire would embrace sex positivity and gender anarchy. Who is having sex with whom would matter less than the love, the joy of sex itself. Gender would be more of a game and less of a power struggle. A politic of desire would be informal, chaotic and friendly, and that's what I've always loved about lesbian culture. To move forward in our post-modern, post-structural, queer-leaning world of desire, I believe it's important that lesbian culture align

itself with other cultures that are based in desire. To gain and hold any power in this world, it's important that lesbian culture form alliances. Lesbian identity, I feel, must align itself with other identities based in desire. To date, lesbian culture is the L in LGBT, but there are a fuck of a lot more letters with whom lesbian culture can align" ... [Anarchafeminism perhaps?]

Hearing Kate and Barbara speak was utterly invigorating and tremendously exciting. They speak openly with pride and humour about their lives, beliefs, and practices and propose radical, sensible and wonderful ways of living; wisdom we can take for ourselves too. Kate and Barbara each radiate with immense love and joy, both for their audience and with excitement for the possibilities of life. Their philosophy and practice encourages real care, compassion and play, and make known how we can live life to capacity. I have listened to this recording several times already and still feel energised by hearing them speak. What more is there to say than "Enjoy!" - both this wonderful document and the inspiration it is certain to evoke.



Kate (L) and Barbara (R) with their copies of The Rag 1 and 2

"YOU KNOW WHO YOU LOOK LIKE?"

words by dee, images by melissa robbison



FAH. everyone has heard this at some stage in their lives. Facial perception is something that is integral to humanity and has developed over thousands of years. There are two main theories on the subject. The first involves the idea that our brains develop special skills as we grow that are used specifically for facial registration. The other idea is that face recognition is just a general skill used all the time for recognition of plants, animals and other objects. After all, our survival depends on it! Either way, when we are called upon to use it, the part of the brain which perceives faces, the fusiform gyrus, gets to work. If we damage this part of the brain, we develop a condition called prosopagnosia which makes it impossible to remember faces.

So, provided we don't have prosopagnosia, registration of differences between faces allows us to remember our families, friends and acquaintances...but...it's also obvious that in this world we live in, there is a tendency towards "normalisation" of the facial features, and of perceptions of beauty in general. Fuck, take a look at Michael Jackson and how obsessive he became and the mess he made of his mug, or the colossal amounts of people having Botox and other more invasive forms of cosmetic surgery. As I'm writing I googled "facial recognition", and what comes up? Find your celebrity lookalike. Yep, that's pretty messed up and I'm thinking that this is the insidious form of "normalisation" and something I would like to briefly discuss.

We have all, at one time or another, been compared to celebrities by other people. "You look like Andre the Giant" or "God you're the spit of the Queen of England". Well, people don't use these "celebs" (I hope), cos they're "ugly" and that would be rude. Instead people tell you that you look like "a young Grace Kelly" or "Whitney Hueston before she became a crack head". Which I think is also quite rude.

What's wrong with it? Well, people do this if they are scrutinising your features. If that's the case, then what the fuck are they looking so intently at? The bad skin? It's the nose? Could it be the mole on your left eyelid? It could be your squinty cross-eyes? No it's your ears. Your big fat head. The snaggle teeth. The wrinkles. The

mustache. The red cheeks. Your eyebrows that meet in the middle. The list of insecurities goes on and is individual to everyone, as are the comparisons to "beautiful" people. This notion of comparison is important, as it's often the main reference point for people to make sense of themselves. Which is shit!

These comparisons give a sense of self which is defined in relation or opposition to a fictional 'other', a subversive opposite, a watchful gaze, something which monitors your image, actions and even relationships with others! For example, "I could never ask that person out because I don't look like a gorgeous celeb, I've been compared by people to Andre the Giant!" Of course that's an exaggeration, but you get my point. So, unfortunately, negative associations are often used to define our identity. We fall prey to illusion, the "beauty" that doesn't really exist and we are left with our comparison, an inward image of unattainable "perfection", or on the other hand conceit.

To compare ourselves, or others to these images, is to define people in opposition to caricatures. There is no real compliment or genuine exchange in saying "Wowzers, you look just like that Giant lad" as this doesn't refer to anyone as such. You may as well be saying, "You look like that sliced pan there", or "Gosh, you look like that rock today". The "person" you're referring to is a non-entity. You don't know them, the complimenter doesn't know them, and they don't really exist to you, except on celluloid. The comparison is a ghost. Alas, these icons are worshiped, traded and treasured as a useless currency. There's no knowledge of real worth or beauty, personal power or self-knowledge.

So, if someone can turn "you" into Natalie Portman in their head, or using a computer programme, aren't they trying to normalise your face and mould you into a common standard of beauty? I think so, and well, I just don't think that's nice! They may be telling you that you look like "such and such" because they want to pay you a compliment, but wouldn't it be a whole bunch nicer to just hear "God-damn! You are pretty!" So with that in mind, the next time you pay a compliment, don't take the easy way out. Be a little braver, a little more honest and tell that lady or gent that you think they are fucking smoking hot.

I'M A FEMINIST... NOW

WHAT?

WORDS BY SHONAGH
IMAGES BY MICHELLE

Somehow, at our own paces, through different influences in our own lives, everyone in RAG came to identify as anarchist and feminist. Women came together to form a collective to develop our own ideas and to produce a magazine. RAG was already formed and working on the magazine when I found them. At that time I felt politically isolated and helpless; anarchist groups seemed somehow unapproachable, socialist groups did not fit with my ideology or the way I wanted to work and feminism seemed to be a thing of academia and institution. The relief I felt at finally feeling a sense of shared beliefs and working towards a common aim was amazing.

Since RAG began there has been a small but palpable growth in the grassroots feminist movement in Ireland. Worldwide there is also a noticeable resurgence... some call it third wave, some fourth, I call it about time! The idea of this article is to give you isolated feminists a foothold or a couple of ideas on how to take the next step. I spoke to a just few different Irish and UK feminists / feminist collectives to get their inspiration. I am hugely grateful to them for their input and only sorry we can't print all the answers directly - but the whole article has been informed by their ideas (this is called "plagiarism" in some circles, "sharing" in others!)

"Learn as much as you can from those women around you who are and have been active but never underestimate the value of your own experience. Other women may have lived through some periods of historical significance for the women's movement but you are living through part of what will be women's history." - Roisin, human rights activist, disability-feminist.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

If you identify as someone who wants equality, chances are you have already been an active feminist: you have called someone on a sexist joke, you have fought back against sexual harassment. You have taken up space as a female in a male world - through sport, music, hobbies, education or work. You have celebrated strong female role models and talked with others about the inequalities you see; even if just to groan at another booty-shaking music video. Many of the feminists I spoke to talked about having early feminist stirrings but most were not able to name themselves feminists until well into their 20's, due to the negative connotations with the word "feminism".

If you are a woman, you have survived this long in a patriarchal world and have every bit as much to offer by your analysis of it as I or anyone else does. So, come out! Call yourself feminist, (call yourself anarchist) and let's get started.

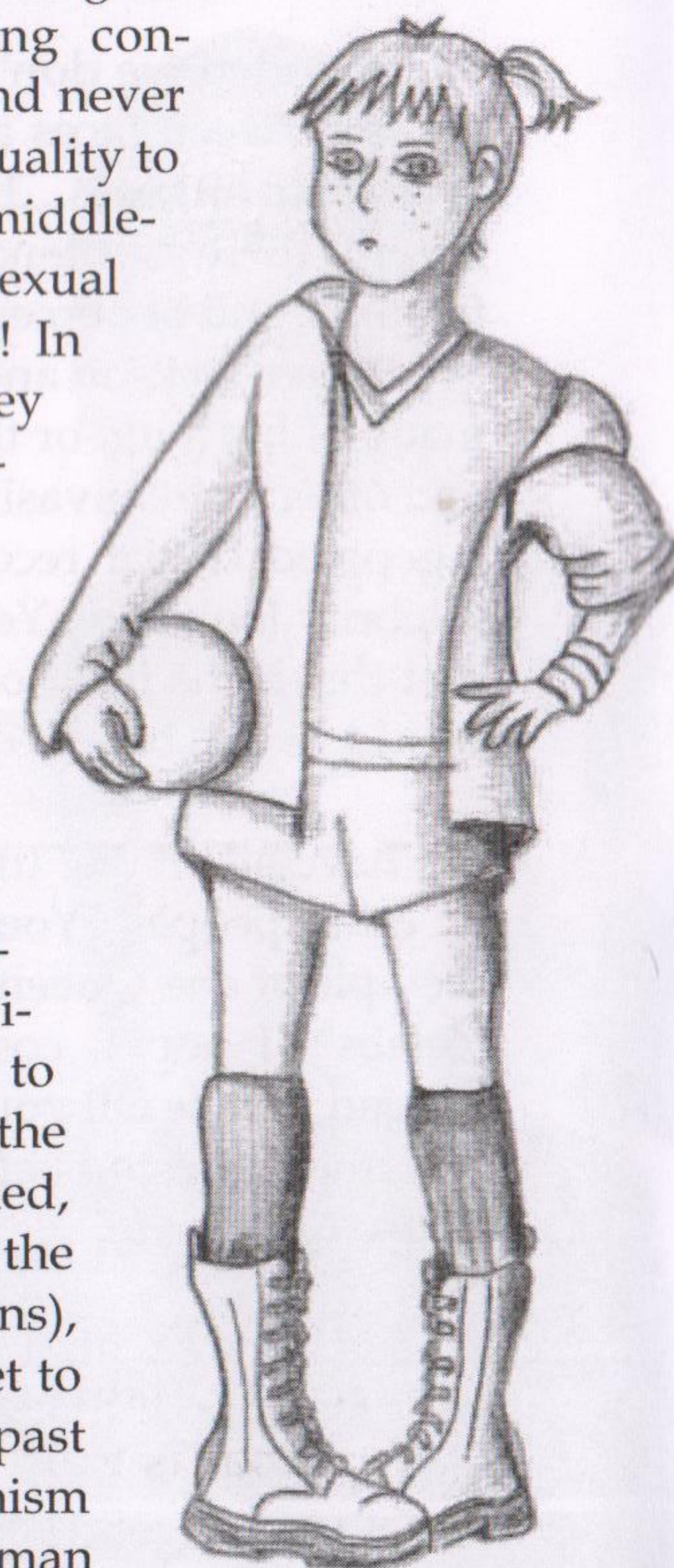
INFORM YOURSELF

Feminism isn't really something you stumble across every day. Unless we have feminist voices in our family or community growing up, all we might know about feminism are negative stereotypes, or a fight that has already been won. The only feminism in the media is the corrupted consumer-driven Girl-Power / Women Having It All message. So for many, their first sociology lesson, women's history lesson, feminist conversation or feminist book is like an awakening. There is a wealth of feminist literature and media out there - once you start looking. Use it to learn about the history of women's struggle in Ireland (or your area). Choose books and websites that speak to your own interests and help answer your questions - whether that be about the birth of misogyny, the politics of reproduction, the witch trials, queer theory etc.

"Make some feminist friends. That is probably the most important thing - finding your folk! Even if it's just one or two people. If you can't find them in the flesh, find them in history. Go to archives, libraries and carry that history in your heart and actions, let it empower you, let mischief inspire you." - Debi, FAF

If you read about the progress of feminism or worry about its place in the modern world I'd suggest looking into anarchism as well. Being an anarchist feminist means becoming conscious of all struggles for equality and never wanting the struggle for women's equality to become the struggle for white, middle-class, able-bodied, straight, heterosexual women's equality under capitalism! In their interviews, whether or not they identified as anarchist, all the feminists I spoke to strongly emphasised the need to question all aspects of power inequalities and privilege.

While as feminists we are aware of male-privilege, we also need to be aware of our own. The eternal difficulty with feminism, and all politics/activism, is that activism tends to be exclusive. It is more likely to be the educated, the white, the able-bodied, the non-marginalised, the young, the straight, the cis-gendered (non-trans), the child-free and the settled that get to participate in these groups. In the past this has led to some aspects of feminism meaning equality for privileged woman



only. Inform yourself from the outset. London Anarchafeminist Kollektiv advises, "make the effort to find out what support people need to fully participate in activism." If you already face specific challenges which make it hard for you to get active as a feminist, you could start by talking to others with the same challenges to get more insight into your situation. Or challenge formed groups into accepting and adapting to the realities of your life. Bring the politics of your life into feminist politics. It needs you.

"Whether you're a man or a woman, queer or non-queer, trans or otherwise, rich or poor, or of any ethnicity you can still be oppressing someone and not realise it. Feminism is about challenging our own privilege first and foremost, so that we can effect change." - Blanca, trans feminist

USE YOUR VOICE/ BE BRAVE

Ideas can't exist in a vacuum, and the only way we can develop our ideas past what we read, is to talk them out with others. Simply coming together with a group of women to talk about your personal experience in the world can be incredibly powerful and liberating. Sevinc from RAG pointed out that you should "shake off your prejudices" and talk to everyone about women's equality - you can meet the most amazing allies in the most unlikely circumstances. So be brave, overcome your shyness and other women's shyness to really talk to each other.

Growing up, young girls are not taught solidarity in the same way that boys are. We never really get to team up together to fight the baddie (real or imaginary!). Instead, girl culture is based on competition with each other. When we grow up, we are left with a lot of work to do to build healthy supportive relationships with other women. Again and again, in the answers to the questions I posed, feminists referred to the feeling of solidarity they have got from being around other feminists; feeling total open support and encouragement without any of the bad games that women are told we are supposed to play with each other. Solidarity is strength

"I think if you got over the possible initial fear you may have about meeting new people, sharing ideas etc try to get yourself out there and do what YOU want to do. Have short term goals and take them in small steps and be sound to people. Start or join an open feminist group and get involved in whatever capacity you can. Don't put yourself under too much pressure to do too much and be willing to learn and listen. Have fun and don't let it get you down." Cara, RAG/ feminist musician and film-maker

INFO BOX:

Consciousness Raising groups began as groups of women got together in the 60's and 70's to talk about the conditions of their lives. The idea was that what seemed like isolated individual problems were in fact systematic issues, common to all women, which could be tackled through feminist activism. Thus the phrase was spawned; "The Personal is Political"

You can also try to find your voice to defend feminism and fight sexual inequality where you see it - with workmates, in college, within your family or friends. In the words of the wonderfully-named Lash Back feminist collective, "Stand your ground and hold your head high among friends, family and people you're in contact with every day. You will experience backlash from people who just don't really get it, so have patience and be strong."

As females, we are not socialised to be warriors. Yet the fight for female equality is just that - a fight. That doesn't mean it's a bloody battle but it means it's not easy. Once you start, you might find it overwhelming - the amount of work that needs to be done. It can be upsetting, once you are aware of the inequalities, how all-pervasive they are. So take breaks, find support with your friends, and choose your battles.

BE VISIBLE

The history of women's oppression is the history of our invisibility. Our voices have been traditionally absent from literature, art, film and music, culture and sport. Where women are present in media, we are still too often presented as object not subject. For a woman to cultivate her own talents, or to strap on a guitar and get on the stage is a political act! Female artists can be positive female role models. Feminist writers, artists and filmmakers can create positive female role models. This is just as important as using your art to directly question women's oppression.

If you haven't heard about Ladyfest, look into it. These are autonomously-organised celebrations of female talent that take place worldwide. There was one in Dublin in 2004 which provided the funds to print the first RAG. There was an incredibly inspiring one in Cork in April 2008. Shelley described to me how it got off the ground through an idle conversation in the pub with her brother's girlfriend, through which they formed a core collective of twelve women, who, through hard work and determination, organised a wonderful event.

"There is definitely a strong sisterhood between all Ladyfests - you just have to show up at one in another country and feel instantly welcomed and at home! I think we all learned so much from doing the festival and met so many interesting intelligent women from all over the place. I guess Ladyfests are agents of the third wave and it's kind of funny and cool to think we've put Cork on the map in terms of third wave feminism." - Shelley, Ladyfest Cork

INFO BOX:

DIY culture rejects mainstream media and consumer culture and tries to create alternatives in whatever way possible. From organising shared childcare to running Ladyfests and self-publishing magazines, feminism has always embraced something of a DIY ethos.

DIRECT ACTION

Direct action is central to many people's feminism. It can include anything from a workplace strike to rallies, to political graffiti. It is

any political activity which takes place outside of political manoeuvring and lobbying. Anarchists believe that direct action is the only thing that can ultimately bring about societal change. Direct action is also like food for the soul. Getting out there and doing something silly or profound, big or small, might not change anything right now, but action keeps you going to want to work on the slow burning politics part. Here listed are a few smaller ideas - you'll need to think up the bigger ones yourself!

Stenciling: Photocopy a stencil onto a sheet of acetate or card. Cut it out with a Stanley knife and use it to spray stuff on t-shirts, bags, walls etc. Make a political point or give a positive message.

Subvertising: Sexist message on a billboard? Change it. The possibilities are endless and hilarity factor high.

Inserts: I always mean to get around to this; body-positive messages slipped into awful "women's" magazines for example? Please beat me to this.

Stickers: Print off your own designs - it's pretty easy with a computer, a printer and some sticker-paper, once you get the proportions right. You could give pro-choice information, make a point, start a discussion on a toilet door, or just make someone reading it feel good about herself.

Postering: One woman told me that she'd never had a much fun as when she learned how to make wheat paste from an internet recipe and used it to paste 60 multicoloured pictures of Jesus and the Host all over a Christian-run "pregnancy counselling" agency that was pretending to be pro-choice. "It was 6am on a Good Friday morning. We were working away like we were decorators, and no passers-by paid any attention. The place was absolutely beautiful afterwards. I only wish we could do it every day - that women would know not to go in to try to get help from those nutjobs!"

Leafletting: It's debatable how many people actually read these in our super-saturated advertisement-rich environments. The most wasted hours of my life have may have been spent leafletting for demos on busy street corners! Certainly, they are easy to home print though - and may be useful to your purposes.

ORGANISE

There will be no feminist revolution unless we organise! You can start with an idea and try to get the people around it, or start with the people and come up with ideas. You need to set clear goals and you need to work in a committed and democratic way - at the very least with proper meetings and recorded notes from meetings.

A collective is a group of people who meet and work together in a

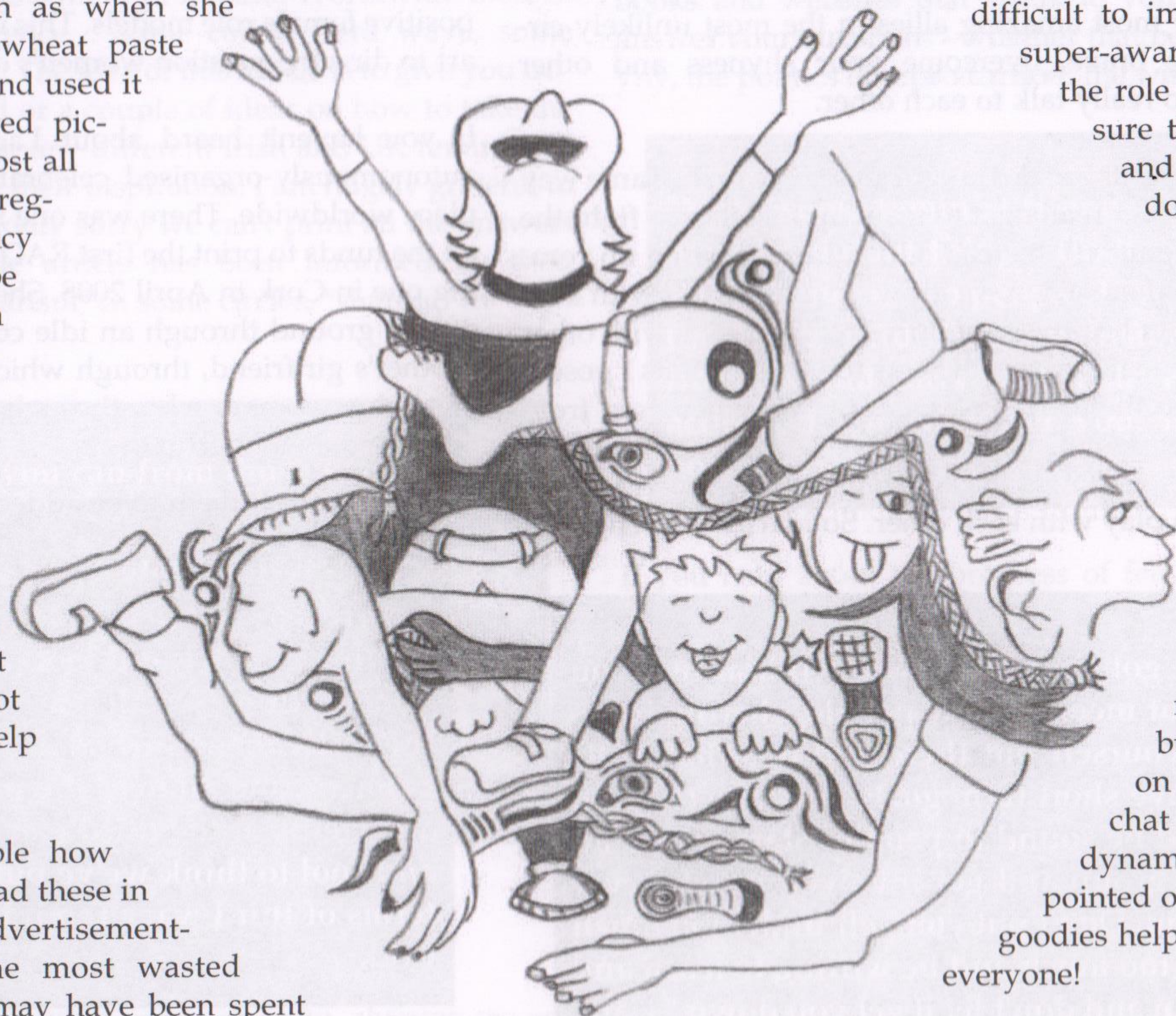
"I have a plan to bring out a birdwatchers book with the main photos being of the female birds. Did you know that even birdwatching books the females are treated as inferior?! Many books have big photos of the male birds and have a smaller photo of the female bird in the background. In my book those female birds are going to be calling the shots!" - Siobhán, RAG/ Magical Girl

non-hierarchical manner. Anarchism aims to abolish hierarchies - with the belief that everyone should have equal control and say in what directly affects them. If you want to set up a collective, you may have to be pretty specific about putting "rules" and structures in place to make sure everybody actually gets an equal say - as informal hierarchies tend to spring up - according to who has most energy/ is the most active etc. Many collectives rotate roles, such as meeting facilitator and minute-taker on a weekly basis, and other roles on a longer basis. Sticking to the rotations when they do come around is important to let everyone who wants to get a chance to develop their skills.

Consensus-based decision making is often used in anarchist and feminist groups instead of voting - where everyone's voice is heard in making decisions, and it is hoped that compromises can be made where not everyone agrees with a particular course of action. This can be very difficult to implement unless you are super-aware of group dynamics. It is the role of the facilitator to make sure that consensus is reached and not assumed. If you can't do this properly, use voting!

Practically, for both RAG and Choice Ireland recently, the habit of "checking in" at the start of every meeting has helped things run more smoothly. Here everyone gets the chance to say how they are and what they've been up to since the last meeting. It sounds simple but has helped cut-down on meeting-disturbing chit-chat and also helped group dynamics. Some groups also pointed out that tea, cake and other goodies help make meetings better for everyone!

Feminist, and certainly anarcho-feminist organised discussion meetings tend to have a more open format than the "talks" some of us are used to, so that everyone gets to contribute, not just those on the "panel" and a few from the "floor". Workshops and skill-sharing are an important part of feminism and anarchism. This is self-organised education. The London Anarchafeminist Kollektiv has focussed a lot on skillsharing - everything from soap making to welding. Kelly says that the best thing about being in collective is "a toss-up between my newly-found welding/climbing/sawing/barricading/herbalsomething skillz and all the new amazing friends I've made." RAG women have found that the editing, layout and design skills we've developed have come in really useful elsewhere, as have organisational and meeting-facilitation skills. Attend feminist workshops if you see them coming up, and maybe you can start to think about developing a workshop yourself.



Aim big, work small and take care of yourself and of the people you organise with.

You may not feel that you want to start your own feminist collective. You could join an already-existing feminist group or collective (like RAG!) You might also decide that you'd like to join a ready made political group or trade union and be a feminist voice within these.

If you'd prefer to study, there are some outstanding women's studies and equality studies departments in Ireland (it's where all the second wave feminists disappeared to!). There are myriad courses (as there are jobs) where you can practice feminism as a way of life - from sociology to midwifery to disability services. You can also be a feminist voice within your student union or form/join a feminist/equality society. Feminist research and publication is extremely valuable especially in relation to areas such as maternity and women's health.

If you only have a few hours to spare each week and would like some structure provided for your feminist activity, you might consider volunteering. In Ireland, Women's Aid and the Rape Crisis Centre both rely on volunteers to staff their helplines. One Family is another feminist organisation that takes on volunteers. These provide very useful training, as well as the opportunity to meet other feminists, while directly helping those in crises.

There are also myriad community-based women's groups that you can get involved in. These may work on feminist issues without necessarily ever identifying as feminist.

BEING AN ALLY

Though if it is difficult for a woman to begin to identify and then "come out" as feminist, it may be doubly so for a man. But feminism needs male feminists too. It needs men who see the potential feminism has to improve everyone's lives. The advice is the same, inform yourself and talk to others. Seek solidarity from women feminists, but don't expect them to organise for you: you have to do it yourself! Darren from a new Dublin feminist men's group advises: "As a 'man': Try to figure out what does it mean to be a male in a patriarchal society. What's your role in changing/overthrowing/destroying that society? Try not to get caught up on feeling guilty. Learn to question yourself without consuming yourself. Try not to feel excluded from 'women's spaces'. And remember that sometimes you'll probably do all of these things...get yourself some ice cream."

"I came to value the second wave after absorbing some queer theory ... The [radical separatist feminist] rhetoric still excludes me but I'm more comfortable with being excluded by feminism and feminists sometimes now - I understand more about why that is necessary and feeling a bit excluded now and then as a man is experiencing something that women have to cope with all the time ... I think that [queer theory] is really important for understanding what it means to be a male feminist." - Sef, male feminist

NETWORK

If solidarity is strength between feminist individuals - it is even more so between feminist groups. Reach out to established groups in your own locality - or to anyone you feel is sympathetic and supportive. If you want to start a pro-choice group for example, you could contact Choice Ireland and ask them to help you organ-

ise a meeting. Established groups may have a lot of advice to offer and more contacts to share. "Gatherings" are a great way to meet other people and share skills, there are various women's and feminist gatherings around the world every year - last year RAG organised one in Ireland. Basically it is a few days of inspiration, solidarity, workshops and skill-sharing. In the U.K., FAF - the Feminist Activist Forum, is attempting to build a large network of cooperation between different feminist groups old and new and, along with the feminist library, attempting to document feminist history as it happens. There was a feeling among Irish groups especially that they exist in "pockets" and could benefit from linking up and working together more. We also need to work on international solidarity, especially with women from the global south. Likeminded groups can (and do) publicise each others' events on their webpages, provide links to each others websites and mention each other in publications. So if you do start something, at the very least, let RAG know and we'll do our best to spread the word. Watch our blogspot for details of upcoming feminist meet-ups and events this year.

Both a blessing and a curse, the internet is used to disseminate all kinds of pro- and anti- feminist information. Here you may find new ideas, links to articles and resources. But use your time wisely and don't think that online activism is any replacement for real-time activity. Discuss feminist ideas on local-based forums, and try to arrange to meet up with people who share your ideas in real-life. Don't spend too much time trying to argue with internet misogynists. Use search engines to find and contact feminist groups and individuals or keep informed of feminist events.

That said, here's some links to contributors and info of interest!

thefword.org.uk is probably the most popular UK mainstream feminist blog of the moment. You can use Indymedia and Activelink (in Ireland) to find and publicise events. Search "anarchafeminist" on infoshop.org for lots of articles and links. The DIY tab on schnews.org.uk (anarchist) has some good (and some funny) info about everything from running a meeting to subvertising. seedsforchange.org.uk has some excellent resources for activist groups. Many feminist groups also have email lists that you can contact them to be added to.

Here's a list and some contacts for the feminists I spoke to for this article (though there are far more out there!)

RAG: ragdublin@riseup.net, www.ragdublin.blogspot.com

Lash Back: lashbackdublin@gmail.com, myspace.com/lashbackdublin

Choice Ireland: choiceireland@gmail.com, www.choiceireland.org

FAF: mail@feministactivistforum.org.uk, www.feministactivistforum.org.uk

London Anarchafeminist Kollektiv (formerly Womynspace) can be contacted at womenorganise@yahoo.co.uk

Ladyfest: Info about the one in Cork back in April: www.ladyfestcork.org, or wikipedia for your nearest/next one! Thanks Shelley.

Cara says you can email her if you'd like a copy of her film "The Future of Feminism" caraholmes@gmail.com

Thanks to Sef and Darren from the Dublin pro-feminist men's group which doesn't really have a name yet. But you can email RAG if you are interested in getting involved.

Thanks also to Siobhán, Roisín and Blanca.

Feminism in Muslim Countries

words by sevinc
(turkish ragster)

The notion that women are oppressed in Muslim countries because of Islam is one of the root causes of the confusing and complex stand-off between western liberal feminists and the Muslim feminists of all schools (including the author of this article). Muslim women are oppressed precisely because they live in a patriarchal society where religion is still the delivering arm of the system's brutality against women. It is essential to understand that one of the main concerns facing feminism in Muslim countries is to analyse whether the issues of the feminist movement are religious, cultural or social in nature.

In Muslim countries, the feminist movement slowly began to gather momentum in the 1950s. It started primarily in the more liberal, secular regimes such as Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Iran and Morocco; with Iran falling out of this category following the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Women's rights were used by these regimes to showcase their modernity, progress and democracy and the early

feminists were mainly academics, both female and male, and members of the ruling elite classes. In Turkey, for example, women were encouraged to run for national elections. During the early years of the Republic, after the establishment of the National

Assembly in 1923, positive discrimination was used as part of the modernisation and westernisation of Turkish society. Emancipation, which was offered on a silver plate to the privileged few, failed to address the issues of ordinary women.

Women in all Muslim countries had to wait until the 1970s and

1980s for a feminist movement that started to question the practice of religion and its role in the oppression of women.

During the 7th century, in the early days of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad enforced a series of social, economic and cultural reforms. Many of these radical reforms affected the treatment and place of women. For example, the killing of baby girls was outlawed, women were granted the right to control their wealth and were guaranteed the right to inherit property. Strict limits were placed on polygamy and women were allowed to keep their dowry. Muslim feminists of the religious school base their politics on these social and economic changes.

"Emancipation, which was offered on a silver plate to the privileged few, failed to address the issues of ordinary women."

In contrast, the Koran - the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad - explicitly orders segregation of the sexes and confines women to traditional roles. This calls into question the credibility of historical stories of Muhammad's "radical reforms". The Koran forms the basis of family law in the majority of Muslim countries and is considered to be the word of God. Hence, Koranic regulations regarding women are followed with great strictness, and despite the positive reforms Muhammad introduced in the 7th century, the Koran states that "men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted one above the other."

Quoted in an article on Islam and feminism[1], author Freda Hussain finds that the issues raised by Islamic feminists are not directed at God's word as revealed in the

Koran, but with religious scholars' interpretations of the Koran, and the 'contrived or inauthentic traditions of later provenance which either do not reflect what the Prophet said or represent fallible variations of his hadith'. Nazira Zayn El-din, a scholar of Muslim feminism, goes further. She blames early and medieval interpreters of the Koran for disregarding the holy word of the Prophet in the area of family law, and also his teaching about respect for women. But this in no way makes Muhammad a leading feminist aide in my eyes.

I find this widely popular idea of reinterpreting the Koran contradictory to a class based analysis of feminism, as it reinstates the hierarchy of patriarchy. Although a step forward, and some political scientists believe it may lay the groundwork for democracy, it does not appear to be concerned with the radical changes which are necessary to improve the lives of women in Muslim countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim. I also have a problem with this notion from a libertarian point of view: why would and should feminism serve to benefit religion in the first place? It is supposed to serve women.

The greater danger in Muslim feminists' search for solutions within Sharia (Islamic Law based on the Koran, hadith and other texts) is the relatively cheap PR and spin which misogynist Sharia regimes get out of it. Because this school of Muslim feminists support it, these regimes can claim Sharia law is progressive and forward-thinking.

It is ironic that while these regimes condemn western media as servants of evil, they so desperately want to be seen by the west as "not so bad after all". Over the past ten years or so, Iran has seen the publication of a number of journals aiming to address the issues of Muslim women. A short search on the Internet leads the researcher to thousands of articles celebrating the feminist movement in Iran and the great star of Iranian feminism, former Ayatollah Rafsanjani's daughter, Faezah Hashemi, who was a member of a parliament that delivered very little to the women of Iran in the last ten years. There is a nauseating smell of "emancipation on a silver plate" from the whole affair. This manifests best in her failure to mention the hypocrisy of a regime which benefits greatly from women's cheap labour, and yet fails to respect the work they do in a war-torn country.

Hashemi has been busy publishing Tehran-based Zonan

and Zan, an Islamist Feminist Magazine, which promotes the idea that "Western feminism has promoted hostility between the sexes, confused sex roles, and the sexual objectification of women". This is a correct analysis of certain sections of the feminist movement, but fails to provide a "feminist" alternative. A number of its writers have proposed an Islamic-style feminism that would stress

"gender complementarity" rather than equality and that would pay full respect to housewifery and motherhood while also giving women access to education and jobs. This is enough to tell you where our comrades get it wrong.

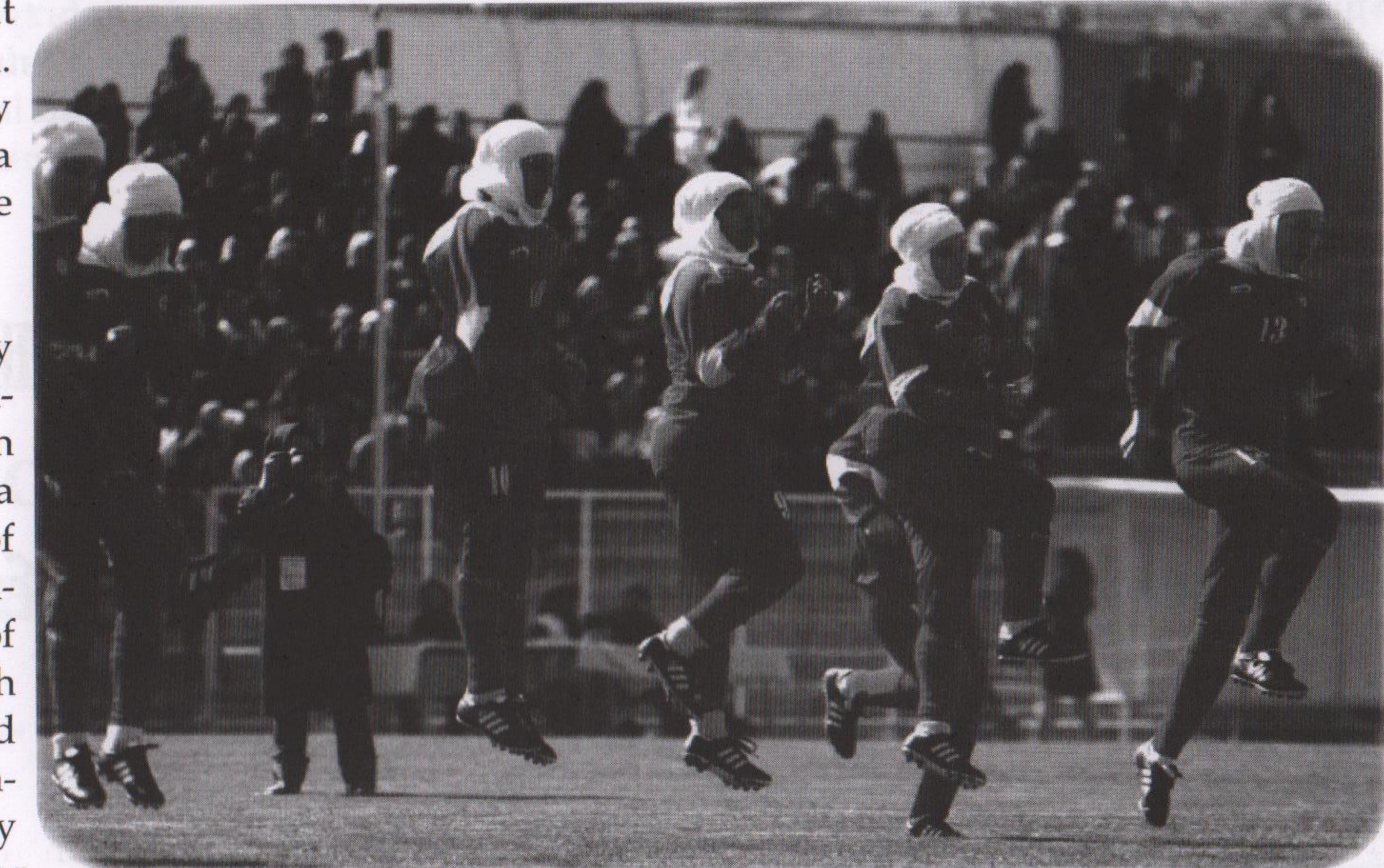
There is also the white elephant in the corner of the room; feminists in Muslim countries operate with the fear of taking on and enduring even more hostility than is normal within their countries. Even among secular groups, it is taboo to criticise religion or the fundamental values forced upon women in

Muslim societies in relation to virginity, marriage, divorce, etc. Our comrades elsewhere are left to wonder why Muslim women seek solutions within the religion itself.

A class-based analysis of women's issues has only emerged recently. Egyptian scholar Nawal El Saddawi has made one of the first such analyses of Muslim women's issues and oppression. She states that women's oppression is

"not essentially due to religious ideologies . . . but derives its roots from the class and patriarchal system. Islamic history paints a picture of pre-Islamic society where women's sexuality is 'chaotic, all-embracing, rampant promiscuity whose essence is woman's self determination'. The male is left with a lack of initiative, and is unable to control relationships through a position of privilege. Such fears are behind the construction of Muslim sex roles, which find their basis in the assumption that proper social order relies on the curtailment of female sexuality."

There are so many examples of brutality and oppression against women in Muslim countries that if we were to imagine women and men as two nations, we would end up with the longest, most ruthless invasion and war in the history of humanity. It is this long-standing hostility which needs explanation first. It is important to have first-



"the degree of our modernism is measured by the inches of flesh and hair we reveal and not by what we can achieve."

hand knowledge of these events in our communication with Muslim women in order to let them know, firstly, that we are aware and interested, and secondly, that we will support them in their struggle to end this brutality. It is not difficult to compile a list of atrocities and human rights violations against Muslim women. Unfortunately, the mainstream media increased their interest only after the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, and these atrocities are the consequence of the American war machine. The plight of Afghan women in turn is used as a scare tactic by the regimes such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries against the women who demand more freedom.

While some feminists in the West beat around the bush with an air of multiculturalist political correctness and go out of their way to show respect for one's religion, there is a growing number of feminists in countries like Palestine, Turkey and Iran and in the diaspora in non-Muslim countries whose policies and strategies for feminism do not adopt the route of Western Liberal Feminism. Instead, their high priestesses are the likes of Condoleezza Rice, Thatcher and Mary Harney, and their high products were first The Spice Girls and subsequently Sex in the City. At the same time, the degree of our modernism is measured by the inches of flesh and hair we can reveal and not by what we can achieve.

The media and pop culture portrays the brutality and oppression of women in Muslim countries as the manifestation of Muslim ideology, however it never attaches "Christian" or any other religion to the headlines about the brutality and oppression against women in non-Muslim countries, e.g. stories of the men of former socialist countries benefiting from the \$300 billion turnover in the trafficking of women and children in the west alone.

This article is written neither in defence of the religion nor in agreement with Muslim feminists who seek solutions within the structure of Islam. Their desperate search within Sharia laws and regimes may achieve a few limited steps forward within a realistic timeframe, but radical changes are not likely to come

overnight, as the brute is too big and too damn powerful. However, these feminist movements can provide relative safer spaces for freedom of expression through which women can develop their ideologies while working towards a more radical non-religious space.

WHAT CHANGES DO WE NEED?

We are in need of an urgent clarification here in the 'developed' world; Muslim women in the global media are depicted, written about and heard of only when they are victims. The outsider tells them, from this perspective, what their identities and problems are and how to live. The achievements of Muslim women in education, health and art production, their struggle and gains, are always seen as concessions and rights which are 'granted' by the regimes they live in.

Just over half a billion women and children have no basic education. They lack the power to demand their basic human rights. Women produce two thirds of the world's wealth but get paid little, often nothing, for this work. The reckless and hungry profit economy benefits hugely from this work force. Women cost next to nothing to their employers or their states in health services or education; due to this, they die young. Imagination calls for a place, in 30 years time, when Muslim women will have reclaimed their basic human and workers' rights and will have landed the bill for their old age pension care on their respective countries' exchequers' desks. What will we do about them then, as gassing them is not an option? So the cheapest "humanitarian" approach is to do nothing and keep them uneducated, powerless and unhealthy.

The World Powers are only prepared to give basic old age care to a lucky few million. This needs to be changed immediately, making a genuine effort to realise a class revolution. There is an urgent need and call for land and income redistribution reforms. Organisations such as WTO, the World Bank and the IMF should cease operation immediately and all foreign deficit for underdeveloped countries should be defaulted collectively. Arms, missile and mine production must end immediately, all arms

should be decommissioned and all debt created for military spending should also be defaulted. Workers in disadvantaged regions and countries should be paid the maximum standard for their work, not the minimum. Immediate studies should be carried out to determine real demand for production, type of production and products; sustainable living should be enforced despite monetary cost. Domestic work should be organised in

collective or other ways to be paid and shared by all involved. Alternative education modules and schools should be facilitated. Tax and investment subsidies for big businesses and syndicates should cease and workers should have full say on where the tax revenue generated thus far should be spent. Commitment and an in-depth understanding of the relevance of these types of radical changes in our lifestyles and production culture,

combined with communal, collective activity and ownership, may be a place to start to aid the workers of the world.

You do not rise up in a regime like Iran without a consciousness against imperialism and you definitely do not rise up to die, but to succeed. It is humiliating how we are viewed at times as being so ignorant. As the West banters on mile-long newspaper columns and film and TV time about the hijab, burka and the scarves, the majority of Muslim women are struggling to put food on the table, basic health care and education for their children, not worrying about their clothes.

Muslim women get this tough love from the world, all this 'concern' from western media, without knowing why. They are seeking justice under dire and simply unsafe conditions while being bullied into justifying their way of life, not by the immediate oppressors, but by their so-called allies. Why is it that the hijab and hijab alone is the only subject of interest when it comes to women in Muslim countries? Could it be because very few in a broad spectrum of the political correctness league are able to overcome their under-toned prejudices. The remainder are happy only to pay attention when a woman's (or a child's) hijab, or worse - her vagina, is the subject matter.

Muslim women have little to expect from a feminist movement which confines its search for justice to within a system built by and existing for men. The majority of feminist ideologies and activism in the developed world today do not address and support the struggle of their Muslim comrades openly, directly or sufficiently. The trust, which is necessary to make radical changes together, has not been built yet. Western feminists may have to face the fact that their discomforts may be seen as petulant and they may have a hard time mobilising their Muslim comrades to join the fight for equal membership in exclusive golf clubs.

Muslim women struggle to overcome their permanent image as helpless and voiceless victims. It is a delicate balance between demanding to be seen and heard in all areas of life, and cele-

brate these achievements while trying to voice the violations of their rights.

We don't want to be equal to men within a Sharia regime; this is the common ground for non-religious feminists in relatively more liberal secular Muslim countries such as Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria. The non-believing, non-practicing members of this broad concept of "secular feminism" simply reject any rule by religion. Some of them suggest the separation of state and religious affairs as if they do not exist to serve each other. This may be due to the fear I mentioned earlier.

Little in the lives of the women in the Western world suggests that theirs is the model of emancipation. Muslim women are well aware of the ills of capitalist society and they want to protect themselves and their children from them. This is where our well-meaning non-Muslim comrades get confused. We don't want to arrive to the ridiculed space western feminism has arrived to, although having made great gains for women; neither do we want to take the same route. We don't want to serve in the army; we don't want to sit in parliaments which take decisions to go on wars and to spend state budgets on buying more arms. We don't want the power to subject our countries to 150 year long foreign deficits to the World Bank. We don't want to surrender our lives to the hands of those like the WTO who steal the food from our tables.

What we primarily need and want is basic human rights, economic freedom, education, jobs and healthy affordable food. As things stand in the world we live in today, these rights are denied to the majority of the world's workers and they will not be handed to us either. That is, unless we get out there and organise for radical change where we will have full control of our production and its tools and where all responsibilities are shared mutually.

*the hadith is the written record of the life of the Prophet Muhammad

[1] Freda Hussain, Muslim women, quoted at http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/3499/asr317_2.htm

“What we primarily need and want is basic human rights, economic freedom, education, jobs and healthy affordable food.”



Mothers against drugs: Communities outside the state

*A look back on the role
of women in Dublin's anti-drugs
movement*

words by hilary
image shows Little Strand
Street in Dublin's north
inner city

The 'pushers out' movement was highly complex and took place in multiple locations over the course of two decades. This article is an attempt to address the changing roles of women in their community during the anti-drugs campaign by focusing on the experiences of women from Teresa's Garden in the South inner city. Check out the recommended reading list for more information on different aspects of the movement.

**"Build a bonfire,
Build a bonfire,
Put the pushers on the top,
Put the TDs* in the middle,
And we'll burn the fucking lot"**

This was the protest chant of the 'Concerned Parents Against Drugs' (CPAD), Dublin's anti-drugs movement that rose up throughout the inner city initially in the early 80's followed by a second wave of campaigns in the mid 90's. The second wave consisted of COCAD (Coalition of Communities Against Drugs) which operated on the southside while on the northside CDCC (Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign) functioned as a subset of ICON (Inner City Organizations Network) - a community development focused association of activists. The chant serves well to illustrate the adverse relation between Dublin's working classes and the state. The inaction of the Irish government to the heroin epidemic that claimed so many lives of the activists' children left them little choice but to organise autonomously through grassroots community action. The reaction of the government to communities addressing their needs, the greatest threat to state legitimacy, was to suppress the movement through various means including the use of the juryless special criminal court which tries terrorist and organised crime cases.

The anti-drugs or 'Pushers Out' movement is a story about how Dublin City works, or rather how it doesn't work, as mass unemployment in the 70's, 80's and early 90's hit the poorest people hardest and the inner city suffered widespread poverty. The now gentrified and gated communities of the north inner city, currently desirable property for Dublin's post industrial workforce, were originally built to house generations of people who would have left school at 14 to spend their lives working on the docks. This shift in occupancy serves as an example of Ireland's changing class relations. Those once employed in the industrial sector (in this case as dockers - until new freight container technology created thousands of redundancies) became irrelevant to the changing needs of Ireland's service-based economy and suffered decades of state neglect. This neglect facilitated an indifference to the state and the rise of organised crime.

Sue Richardson is a prisoners rights activist and co-author of 'Pure Murder', a book about heroin addiction based on a

selection of interviews with drug users. She lives in the north inner city and supported the second phase of the 'Pushers Out' campaign. She described the rise to power of criminal gangs.

"There had been a continuous battle of wills in this area (north inner city) between the crims (criminals) and the gardai (gardai siochana - Ireland's police force) and usually the crims won - The gardai were regularly attacked and a lot of the people who went into bank robbery and started using guns came from this area originally."

In the late 70's drugs began to appear in the inner city and by the early 80's a real life nightmare began as widespread heroin use led to overdoses, AIDs, and suicides. Addiction became viewed as a death sentence. Anarchist and community development worker Brid (name changed), also active in the second phase of the movement in the north side, explained that life at the time was marred with fear of your children succumbing to drug use, "It was considered lucky if you got your kids to their 20's without being addicted". Working class communities, stigmatised as 'no-go areas', seemed to exist in a vacuum outside of the state. I asked Chris McCarthy who lives in St. Teresa's Garden, a flat complex in the south inner city from which the CPAD emerged, why the government turned their backs on working class communities across Dublin who struggled daily against the effects of the drug economy.

"It suited all the powers that be, it wasn't just the cops, it suited the government and all. There was one stage in the 80's when there were elections going on. There was never anybody coming to Teresa's Garden to canvass. They didn't bother their backsides to come up to see who we wanted to vote for, can they help, is there anything they could do. It was like, 'keep them in their box, leave them there, ignore them and we'll get on with life'."

Theories developed that the inaction of the cops to the open air dealing that was taking place was a deliberate attempt to undercut the rise of organised crime.

"The Pushers, they were quite powerful. There was this theory at one point that actually the guards promoted drugs because when people are stoned out of their heads they're not capable of committing crime and certainly they used it to get information out of people. If they knew that someone was on drugs they would bring them in and be questioning them and if they hadn't had a fix for long enough syringes were dangled in front of their eyes. It was a very strong notion around the area that the guards were useless. People hated guards and they'd never inform on anybody. There was nobody really to deal with the pushers. That's why the movement got so strong." (Sue)

But these 'no go areas' weren't unlivable zones of despair. They were tightly woven communities, people connected over generations and it was these connections that built the movement. Entire families took part in mass meetings and marches to suspected dealers houses. Women kept permanent vigil during the day - their husbands took over at night - preventing addicts or dealers from entering their estates. Street traders operated much of the intelligence function of the movement, gathering information on suspected dealers while playing a major role in the flying columns that would mobilise in support of communities confronting dealers out of town. The 'ordinary decent criminals', not involved in the drug economy, marched against the pushers or 'druggy criminals'. Local women played a central role in the events. However, activist with COCAD and author of Pushers Out -

the inside story of Dublin's anti-drugs movement, Andre Lyder makes the observation that - "while women were the backbone of the campaign, overwhelmingly filling the meetings and marches, very few made a contribution at Executive Committee level though we always sought to encourage it."

Mothers Against Drugs

Curious to understand what held women back from taking a more public role in the movement, I asked Chris to describe her involvement in the campaign. In the summer of 1982, a women's group, of which Chris was a member, were training to run a marathon to raise money for the crèche at the Mercy Family centre based in the Liberties (which was originally set up by the Sisters of Mercy). They met to go jogging around Teresa's Garden and on their route they came upon two men pants down and shooting up into their groin. Teresa's Garden had become a regular haunt for addicts to come and get their fix. Dealers lived prosperously while the drugs they sold devastated communities. Syringes and other drug debris littered the play area of these women's children. Determined to address the crises, the women's group called a meeting, which led to the first collective action against drugs.

"We were standing at the front of the flats with banners saying that we weren't having drugs - it was 'Mothers Against Drugs' at the time before it was the concerned parents (CPAD). Then it started to get a little bit violent and people were getting threatened by these drug pushers - they were told that this was big business and to keep out. They told their husbands and then the men decided that they were going to take over and call the meetings and that they would head meetings in future so the women were pushed into the background but I have to say at the time we were so scared that we were happy to move into the background."

CPAD emerged and began a direct action campaign to get the pushers out of Teresa's Garden.

"We went for the biggest pusher in town one time - he was one of the main pushers in Ireland - we were marching on that family and believe it or not, the police protected them, we were getting shifted, the men were getting arrested for standing there trying to get a drug pusher out. So women mainly got disillusioned and frightened as well because if you were going to get arrested who was going to take care of your children?"

I asked Chris what involvement in the campaign meant to women from Teresa's Garden. She described a transition in how women related to their community moving from traditional private roles in the home to public, political roles in community politics.

"Women got stronger in that we were out there and we got involved in community development and stuff that made the community a better place. Getting rid of drugs obviously was the first thing you had to do but that was left to the men then and most of us would have been involved here in the family centre. It had nothing at the time and we've developed this centre to what it is today - because of I suppose the leadership role and what happened to us, what happened to the first generation of our children. We weren't going to let that happen again, we just weren't. So all the activities that were run - the clubs, the youth centre, the family centre, the crèche, the playschool - all developed from that and women started coming to women's groups and loads of women's education goes on here today."

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Politicisation through anti-drug activism was the spark for the women to demand more for themselves. Their focus shifted from direct action to self and community development. This drive was facilitated by the women's education groups at the centre which, for a lot of women from Teresa's Garden, led on to literacy and English classes, Junior and Leaving Cert examinations, courses in self development and assertiveness, classes on social analysis and community development resulting in professional roles.

"I actually ended up going to UCD Belfield and doing women's studies and got my accreditation there to get the job which would never have happened if the group of us that night had decided to ignore those lads... A few years ago it would be very noticeable to a man if his wife or his partner came here because we were getting stronger and the personal development was making us more assertive and we were able to stand up for our rights. Our husbands would say 'you weren't like that before you went to that centre' so they knew that we were moving on. Now it's just acceptable because the women come here very young now so the way they start with their partners is the way they're going to go on. Years ago when we came first your husband was used to you staying at home and minding the kids and not doing anything for yourself. Now women expect more for themselves, they're much more assertive - I can see the difference in them I can see the difference in their partners, they're more respected."

I asked Chris about her thoughts on feminism.

"I think you have to be at a certain stage in your life before you can be a feminist and I think you actually have to afford to be a feminist. I don't think it's very easy to be a feminist, you have to be in a certain position, you have to get training and a certain amount of education before you are strong enough to ever afford to be a feminist. Because when I went to Belfield it was a shock to me that women were such feminists to a degree that I was kind of frightened of it, of what was expected of me, frightened to go there and turn out to be a feminist because it didn't fit into this area. It didn't fit into my lifestyle, obviously slowly you do grow and change... I was a bit intimidated by feminism to start with, and I'd say a lot of people are, especially people in this area because feminists are... you're either a lesbian or your husband will leave you, all sorts of crazy years ago issues."

I asked if it's seen as something that creates more problems in your life than you already have.

"Yeah, go away I don't need any more shit in my life... it's hard if you're not brought up like that. Joanna was a nun, the woman that opened this centre so feminism probably wouldn't have been her biggest thing. Training us to be better parents was the main thing. The growth came through being here and trying to get our husbands involved in parenting, not just the mammy had to do that... a lot of the time she would take us away at the weekend and insist that it was the husband that would mind the children; we weren't to get our family members to mind them. In that way she was a little bit of a feminist getting the men involved."

Chris and the other women from St Teresa's Garden eventually took over the Mercy Family Centre in 2001 and now run it as a community resource centre which continues to provide social service including childcare, educational, cultural and community development opportunities

Image Left: Women at one of the first meetings held in St Teresa's Gardens, south inner city in 1982

Reflections

Women's involvement in the campaign was forced to change as harassment at the hands of the dealers and the Gardaí made life dangerous for them and their families. Their activism, now focused on the family centre, created a different sort of social change; challenging traditional gender roles and carving out a public role for themselves in community development. The centre provided childcare facilities and educational opportunities; the practical and personal support necessary for the women to challenge limitations placed on them by traditional, patriarchal family structures, lack of experience and skills necessary to operate in the public, political sphere. While the women challenged family structures and traditional gender roles, identifying as a feminist didn't fit into the lifestyle within the community and feminism was stigmatized. Sue spent time teaching adult literacy at the Lourdes Youth Community Services (LYCS) centre based just off Sean Mac Dermott Street in Dublin's North East Inner City and LYCS ran women's health groups which operated in a similar fashion to feminist consciousness-raising groups. I asked her about the courses.

"Anybody who raises these issues is going to be marginalised, especially now because Feminism is such a dirty word these days. There isn't anything like the consciousness-raising groups around anymore. I suppose in a way that's what the courses were... The courses were a sort of forerunner of participation (in the pushers out movement) because they raised contentious issues. They (the women) would gradually change a bit and they would start thinking. Some of the women threw their husbands out of the house... There was a fear of the courses because when people did get involved they changed - the more knowledge you get about something you change from what you were. Your behaviour changes and your language changes, certainly your ideas change so your attitudes to people change and their attitudes to you change as well. People don't like to be isolated. They're not used to being isolated by change. It's one thing to be isolated because your kid is HIV positive but to be isolated for ideas - I think people are very scared of that."

This article is based on interviews with Chris McCarthy, Sue Richardson, Brid (name changed) and Jim Davis who is currently working on the production of a documentary about the 1st phase of the 'Pushers out' movement. Thanks also to Andre Lyder for permission to use images from his book.

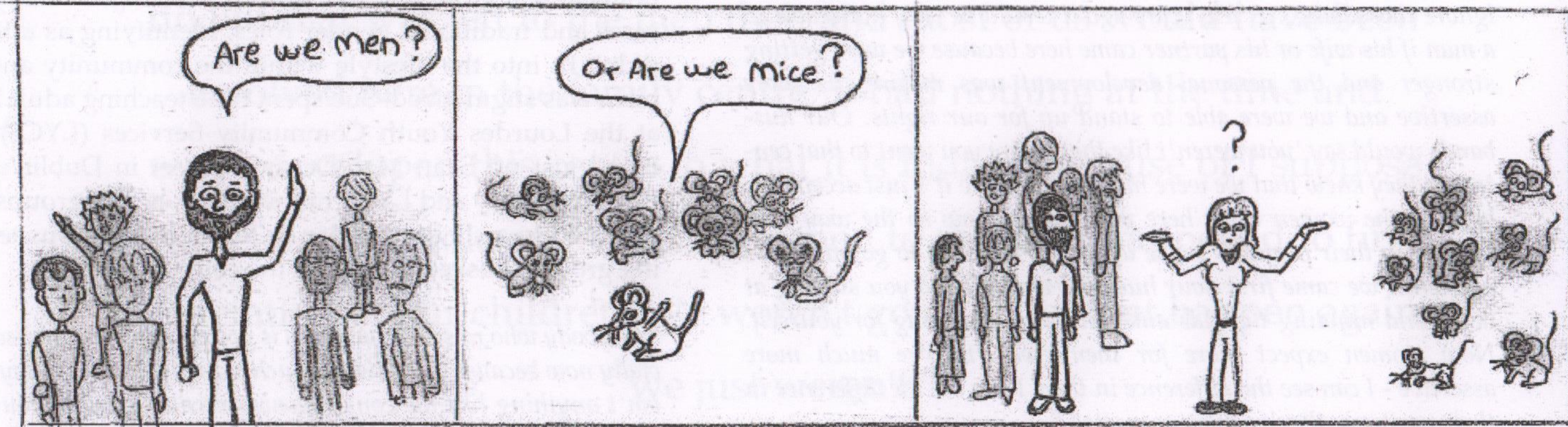
* TD Teachta Dála is the Irish for Deputy to the Dáil - the term is used to describe Irish parliamentarians

Recommended reading

- + **A really useful education by Aoife in RAG 2.** A good explanation about the history and method of community and women's education
- + **Pushers Out - the inside story of Dublin's Anti Drug Movement** by Andre Lyder
- + **Smack - the criminal drugs racket in Ireland** by Sean Flynn
- + **Distant Babylon** by Patrick Ryan. Autobiography of an ex-heroin user.
- + **Pure Murder** by Sue Richardson and Noreen O'Donoghue. An account of heroin addiction based on interviews with drug users.

Women and Words

words by clare
images by michelle and shonagh



Language and linguistic sexism

Language is essentially something external to us - we acquire it, use it and learn as we go. However, it is more than a communication tool as it also provides us with a framework from which to hang our thoughts and construct our ideas. For most, the words available to us can have just as great an influence on how we can describe an event or feeling, as the experience of the event itself. Language can shape how we engage with the world and how we perceive others and ourselves within it.

The sexist bias concealed in the language we use is nothing new, but rather an historical, inherited "norm". In the last number of decades, a move has been underway to acknowledge and address linguistic sexism. Despite this, demeaning terms and male-orientated words do persist. Once we acknowledge that women face discrimination and inequality, it is also clear that many chauvinistic attitudes are sustained and solidly enshrined in language used daily - spoken in conversations; printed in the media; broadcast on radio and television.

Last year, I had the good fortune to meet Kate Swift, a writer and feminist who in 1972, along with her partner Casey Miller, co-wrote two articles on the issue of linguistic sexism. The first was published in the first edition of Ms. magazine and shortly after a second article appeared in The New York Times Magazine - making it one of the first pieces of writing dealing with this issue to reach such a mainstream audience. Swift and Miller went on to write two books on this topic, both of which I have read and have greatly informed the contents of this article (Women and Words (1970) and The handbook of non-sexist

Oh, man! ... a recent real life experience

I work in the Civil Service and a few months back attended a course on the new Contract for Public Works. Despite the fact that throughout the contract documents gender-neutral language is used, the people giving the training course used "he" and "his" every time they made reference to the contractor, builders, engineer, architect, or client e.g. he will agree, he will sign, his quote, his claim. The course lasted for three days and half the people attending were women. I really hope I wasn't the only one there that was disgusted.

writing (1980)). I interviewed Kate via email over recent months and have included some her replies below in the second half of this article.

Man as generic

The term "man" is often used to refer to both men and women. It is easy to make the argument that "man" and male pronouns are used as shorthand, a less clumsy way of repeatedly saying "women and men" or "he/she". Another, more interesting view (and for interesting read fucked-up) I have heard touted is that using "man" as a generic term is just the way it has always been. Surely, what this belief really hints at is that sexism is a tradition which must be upheld!

How irritating it is to read classic anarchist and political texts that make use of almost purely male-centric references e.g. the struggle of man and his wage slavery, the workingman and brotherhood, "single-handed he is powerless ... by the aid of his fellow men he triumphs over all obstacles". (Check it out; they all do it more or less.) How can language that has so much to say, such power and sincerity, at the same time be at a loss for words to recognise me - and half of the world's population.

"Man" cannot mean male and female in one sentence and just male in the next. It doesn't work and it is definitely not inclusive.

Often the words "they" and "their" are used when referring to people in general terms and it works fine. In many other cases pronouns may be unnecessary and can be removed without interfering with the meaning of an expression or sentence.

Hierarchy, ranking, loaded adjectives and double standards

Another, less recognised occurrence is the ranking which is often common in words or lists e.g. his and hers, he/she, men and women, boys and girls, brother and sister, uncle and aunt, Grandpa Joe and Grandma Josephine. This ordering reflects the historically accepted hierarchy between women and men but its sustained usage is not okay.

"Dear God,
Are boys better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair.
Syliva"

Taken from *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*

When deconstructing biased language we must also consider the many nouns and adjectives that are often particularly associated with women or with men. These expressions are loaded with assumptions, which reinforce dangerous stereotypes. Perhaps, it is fair to say that they are one of the central tools that maintain the simplified gender binary under which we all suffer. Ideas became words, and now these words have firmly lodged themselves as established, uncontested ideas.

All too frequently, a different approach is taken when describing a woman than a man. Again, slanted nouns and veiled adjectives are thrown in but unfortunately it runs deeper than this. The media are always quick to point out if a woman is a mother, if she is married, what she was wearing and how she looked. In fact, we are regularly served up these details before we even get to the main point of the story - actually, annoyingly, often this "clutter" is the main story! Seemingly neutral adjectives all at once take on another meaning - the implications often leading us to judge the woman in question in a negative light or expecting us to be surprised by her achievements. The 2008 US presidential election campaign has thrown up many instances and thankfully they have not all gone un-challenged.

Messages gender biased language can communicate

The messages gender biased language communicate must not be underestimated and the confusion it can cause in a child's mind should also not be overlooked. As very young children begin to create and realise their identity, they first realise there is an "I" and then recognise there are separate others too. Almost immediately, these "others" will be classified as boys or girls with all the cultural and societal trappings this binary entails. How is this primarily communicated? Language. Words, clichés

or throw-away phrases which are widely used give a clear message of what is expected of us all.

Children will hear and read about cavemen, ancient man, man the explorer and inventor, the evolution of man, the workingman and man-made objects. We are presented with Famous Irish Writers, the Old Masters and the dead heroes of 1916 etc. - all male. A boy will grow up to be a man, but (in most cases) a girl will not. I wonder, are little girls confused by these messages; how can they identify with or understand their place in this seemingly all-male world? Surely, at this early stage young girls begin to internalise this conflict. They are expected to just get on with their lives accepting their positions as secondary citizens while enthusiastically embracing all the trappings which they are granted (to be "girly", "womanly" or perhaps even lady-like).

"Man and wife"

This phrase is used so frequently, we rarely give it a second thought. Consider it for a moment, the ranking is clear - male first, female second - but even more worrying is the allusion to the woman in this couple as a mere accessory to the man or, dare I say it, a possession.

Highlighting some of the phenomena that I have briefly touched on above, I am not (yet) proposing that we eliminate all gendered pronouns and references to a person's sex in our language. In many cases, I believe it may be useful and not necessarily a negative thing, if used correctly and respectfully. Different languages deal with gender in many different ways, in some there is only one, non-gendered, pronoun, in others all nouns are assigned a gender. Think about the words you use and those you hear or read. There is plenty of literature available which deals much more in-depth with this topic and it is worth investigating.

And it's not just gender

The hidden bias in language is just as applicable and oppressive in other areas such as race, class and sexuality but that, I'm afraid, is an article for another day.

Interview with writer and feminist Kate Swift

photo by kathy gravino

In the following short interview, Kate discusses her early influences, her journey to feminism and on-going activism.

RAG: What were your early influences and how did the time you both spent in the army/navy impact you?

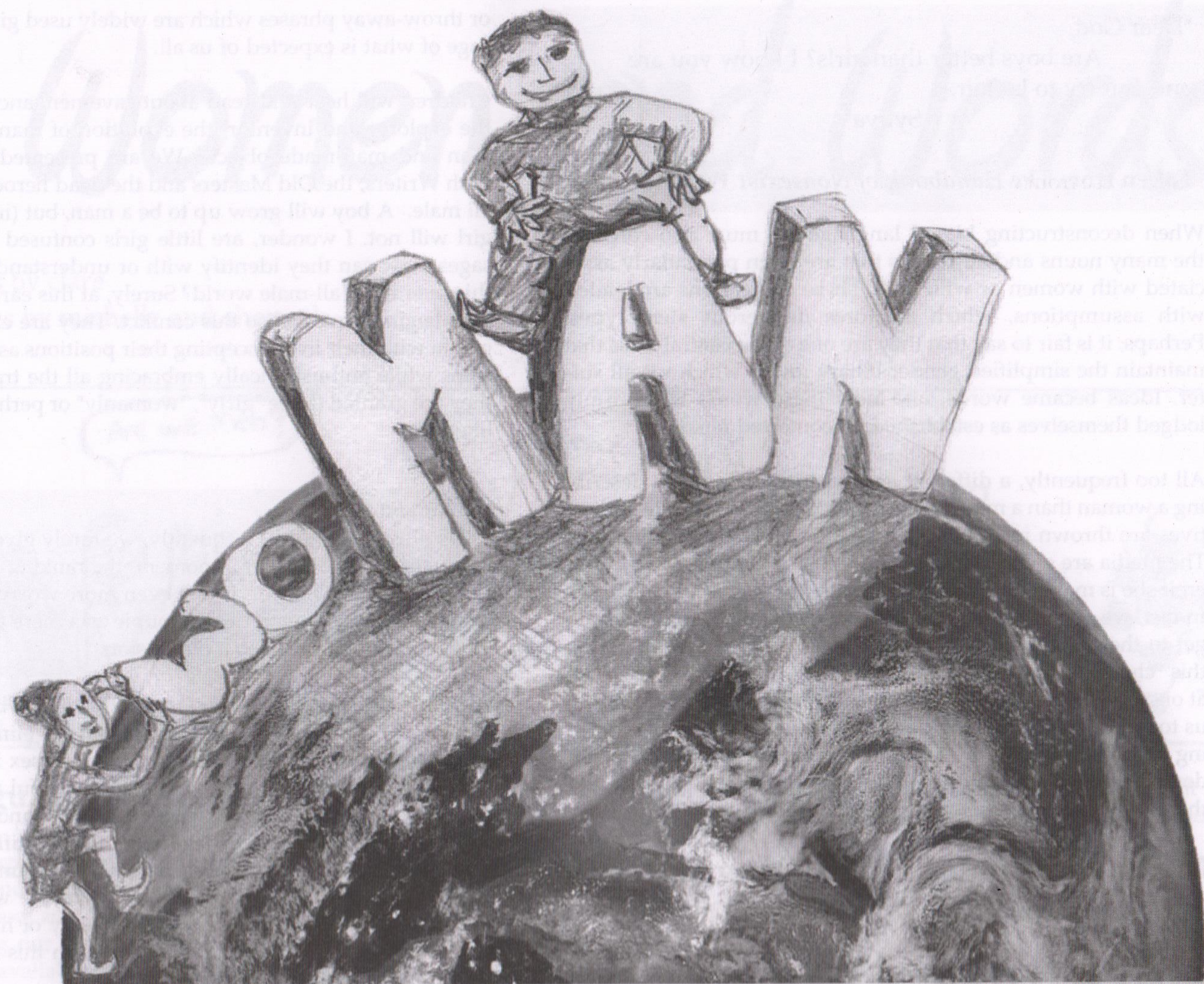
Kate: Both Casey [Kate's partner] and I had supportive parents who helped us build self-confidence in our early childhoods. Casey's father died when she was 10, and my parents were separated from the time I was 12 (later divorced); both of us were sent to girls' boarding schools where we were encouraged to think independently.

As for the impact of our military service, I can't speak for Casey whose work in naval intelligence involved breaking the codes Japan used in the Pacific theatre of war. She was so effectively

sworn to secrecy that she would never talk much about it for the rest of her life (although she told wonderful stories about her social life as a navy officer). My work in the information and education section of the army medical corps gave me terrific experience in writing and broadcasting, and I had relatively free rein to write or say whatever I wanted in army newspapers and on army hospital radio stations.

But although I had gone to an all-white college in the South, it wasn't until I was in the army that I was fully aware of institutional racial segregation. Working at army hospitals in Georgia, Alabama, and other states in the Deep South, I became friends with several





African-American (then called Negro) patients. We could be together in the wards and recreation rooms, but they were not admitted to the whites-only clubs where male and female service members danced and socialized with food and drinks. All local civilian restaurants and bars were segregated. I think that was my wake-up call on civil rights, and my disenchantment with human nature (or my disappointment with society).

But I was not yet a feminist. (Reading them in retrospect, I wrote some dreadful columns, in army newspapers, about what women in the military looked forward to after they were discharged. It was the late 1940s.) I didn't wake up to civil rights & equality for women until the late 1960s when I met Casey and we started writing together.

RAG: Can you tell me about your path to feminism?

Kate: You may find this hard to believe but I grew up knowing nothing of the history of women's rights. I'd never heard of Mary Wollstonecraft until I was well over 30. Susan B. Anthony was a joke in my childhood. In retrospect, I realize that my parents' expectations and hopes for my brother (15 months my senior) were mainly a successful career and high achievement in whatever work he chose; for me, a happy marriage and children. I accepted that

notion early on, in spite of their encouraging support for my interest in poetry, writing, and theatre. But I must have felt feminist stirrings when I saw that my brother was given greater freedom to take risks, to be adventurous, bold, brave - qualities I felt I also had and wanted to express. Those feelings were surely compounded by my awareness that I was attracted more to people who were female than male - teachers, mothers and older sisters of my friends.

Obviously, I was a slow learner and didn't catch up with the second wave of feminism until I was in my forties. I was working at Yale School of Medicine then (mid-1960s) where I saw the sexist behaviour of the nearly all-male faculty and how badly female medical students were treated. Reading Betty Friedan at that time, I recognized my own total submersion in the numbing popular culture of the 1940s and '50s, "the feminine mystique".

By 1970 I had reached the glass ceiling in my career at Yale. Casey was already freelancing and suggested we start a free-lance partnership; we did and in the next few years began working for the women's movement's political goals - still far from achieved.

Our initial discoveries about language and sexism are described in the preface to *Words and Women*.

RAG: You mentioned working for the women's movement's political goals - did you and Casey organise with others?

Kate: Casey and I worked toward the movement's goals with both organizations and individuals. One of our first involvements was a legal case, *Women vs. Connecticut*, a class action lawsuit to overturn Connecticut's nineteenth-century law that criminalized abortion. Hundreds of women, including the two of us, signed on as plaintiffs, attended court sessions and testified at hearings in the state legislature. The case was still pending in 1973 when the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*, a similar case originating in Texas, which established the basic right to abortion in all states (at which the courts have been chipping away ever since).

We also worked for the Equal Rights Amendment [see text box] to the U.S. Constitution during the early 1970s, lobbying members of Congress and our state legislators. The Connecticut legislature ratified the amendment in about 1974, but it died in 1982 when time ran out and it was 3 states short of the 38 needed for passage. That was a terrible loss, but I'm still working for it and am confident it will pass eventually.

We joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) in about 1970. For 2 or 3 years in the 1970s we co-edited the

Connecticut NOW newsletter. We helped organise marches and demonstrations at the Connecticut capitol and in Washington for the ERA, reproductive rights, LGBT rights, against violence against women, etc. In 1995, I was a NOW delegate to the non-governmental organizations (NGO) conference at the 5th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. (Casey was ill with the lung disease from which she died two years later, but was with me in spirit.)

We joined the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press (WIFP) in the mid-1970s and gave a workshop on dealing with sexism in the media, sponsored by WIFP, in about 1981 at the National Press Club in Washington.

One of our main concerns was always to help feminist women get elected to public office. We worked in local, state, and national campaigns, writing brochures and press releases, doing door-to-door visits, mailings, telephoning, etc. We had a lot of fun and felt huge satisfaction as more and more feminists, both female and male, got into politics, but also felt frustrated by the slow pace of lasting changes.

I agree completely that as long as we have a capitalist economy, based on exploitation rather than cooperation, injustices will persist. My gut feeling is still that human society is capable of evolving into a more equitable community.

RAG: You have been involved in campaigns to get feminist women elected. From your experience, what were the main obstacles to their demands and to lasting change?

Kate: Supporting feminist women in public office: Yes, efforts to crash the boys' club can be painful to the point of exhaustion and drop-out, as happened in the 1970s and '80s. Fortunately, there are more feminist men in public office today than 35 years ago; they can be powerful allies. The main obstacle to the agenda of elected feminists' is still the unwillingness of some men and institutions to give up power. Lessons learned? That politics is the art of compromise, and it's better to settle for a partial victory than to demand everything at once and get nothing. Lasting change is usually by increments - often two steps forward, one step back - as in the reproductive rights and gay marriage campaigns, while keeping the goal in sight and knowing that it will be reached eventually.

RAG: Do you have any advice for struggling pro-choice Irish activists?

Kate: The only advice I can think of to give to pro-choice activists is: don't ever argue with anti-abortionists about when life begins. I think the so-called pro-life adherents, particularly legislators, can only be won over by knowing personal stories of the tragic consequences of unintended pregnancies that result for women in botched illegal abortions, as well as for unwanted children born to women who can't possibly (for whatever reasons) give them adequate care. My experience is that they are less persuaded (especially if they're deeply religious in their "pro-life" convictions) by

Equality Rights Amendment (ERA) is a proposed, but not yet ratified, amendment to the US constitution - "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Though it hasn't yet become part of the Constitution, discrimination based on a person's sex has been greatly limited by federal and state laws and through court decisions. Check out the website for more details: www.equalrightsamendment.org. However, it does have some very disappointing FAQ answers that try to distance the ERA from the evils of abortion and gay marriage! It's heartbreaking to see that in order to argue for the one set of human rights people feel it's acceptable to slur another.

women's right to autonomy over their own bodies.

RAG: How do you think the movement for non-sexist language has progressed? Do you think a third, gender free pronoun system is possible?

Kate: Sexism in language--yes, there's been a lot of progress in the past 25 years, much of it simply reflecting the reality of historical change; e.g., invitations from corporations to "department heads and their spouses"; politicians refer to "our men and women in our armed forces"; news coverage citing "the next senator (governor, chair of the city council, whatever), when he or she is elected"--but note the order where male priority is unchanged.

There has been diminishing use of "man" as a false generic noun, as in "early man in Africa" and math wording in schoolbooks "if a man bicycles 40 km a day . . .", but it's still common as a verb, e.g., "manned space flight" and tv footage of New Orleans police of both sexes "manning command posts as Hurricane Gustav approached," according to the voice over.

More subtle sexist usage persists: e.g., descriptions of strong women as "domineering" vs. strong men as "authoritative"; the use of female-related words to insult males; and the media's greater emphasis on the physical appearance and clothes of women in the news than of men, which filters down to female consumers and feeds the cosmetic and garment industries, who in turn reinforce the anxiety many women feel about their appearance. . . all circular.

On the accusation of being "too PC," I've noticed that people who make it are usually members of an advantaged or political majority, who are not able to imagine themselves being disadvantaged or in any kind of minority class. My definition of PC is Plain Civility.

As to the possibility of a third gender-free personal pronoun system in the future, it seems unlikely--at least in the English language. When we devoted an entire chapter to The Pronoun Problem in *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*, we ended the chapter with that question and our response that "increased use of singular they in writing as well as speech--and the restitution of the status it enjoyed before grammarians arbitrarily proscribed it--now seems inevitable." That's what has happened and I doubt that any grammarian is tearing their hair out.

RAG: Any other suggestions for us? Any books or sources which you would like to recommend to the readers of *The Rag*?

Kate: On linguistic gender bias, the subject hasn't had much public attention in recent years, in part because there has been a more conscious effort by the media, public speakers, and politicians to use gender-inclusive language. But sexist attitudes are so deeply ingrained in western cultures that they still surface in language use.

The only really good resource I know of that's been published since Casey and I were writing on the subject is a book called *Talking About People* by Rosalie Maggio, 1997, Oryx Press, Phoenix, Arizona. The introductory material is excellent. The main part of the book is an alphabetical listing of words and phrases that varied categories of people (women, ethnic minorities, LGBTs, disabled, etc.) find offensive, and for which she suggests alternatives.

The thing I would say to younger feminists today is Keep up the momentum, with strength and courage, toward our goals. Or in the words of Susan Brownell Anthony, who led the woman suffrage movement in the US more than 100 years ago, "Failure is impossible."

Nell McCafferty's

A Woman to Blame



words by clodagh, image by eve

Irish comedian Tommy Tiernan describes his schoolyard sex-education. At break-time, a more knowledgeable peer explains: "First your willy goes hard... then you put it inside her". One perplexed schoolboy replies, "but I don't like cider!"

Nell McCafferty's description of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Kerry Babies Case creates similar images to those of the boys in Tiernan's class, although they are now grown men. These men are at the top of their game in the Gardaí Síochána and legal professions, sitting on the Tribunal but still not much clearer on the mysteries of sex and baby making. Judge Kevin Lynch, the Tribunal Judge, asks at one point if it is possible to give birth standing up - and there really isn't anything funny about that.

A Woman To Blame by Nell McCafferty, a well known Irish feminist, is a book of less than 200 pages explaining what happened in Ireland in 1984 when the body of a newly born child was washed up on a beach in County Kerry. This child became known as the Kerry Baby. A local woman, Joanne Hayes, was accused of killing the child; while her mother, sister, brothers and aunt were accused of concealing its birth. The case was not brought to trial, as the allega-

Judge Kevin Lynch, the Tribunal Judge, asks at one point if it is possible to give birth standing up - and there really isn't anything funny about that.

tions were unfounded and the evidence contradictory, most notably that Joanne had a different blood type to the Kerry Baby. However, the Tribunal that followed turned into a trial for Joanne. Nell McCafferty has an excellent, factual style of writing and painstakingly explains the complicated details of the case. I hope I can do her justice in this review while informing the reader of some of

what I consider to be the most important and interesting facts, reading this book from an anarchy-feminist perspective.

The events take place against the background of Holy Catholic Ireland. At this time, contraceptives were legally available to married couples only, and devout doctors or pharmacists could refuse to prescribe or accept a prescription of any contraceptives if their beliefs prevented them. Then a young woman, Joanne had an affair with a married man. She had a baby by him which he didn't acknowledge. Still convinced he loved her the affair continued. Her next pregnancy ended in miscarriage. A third ended with Joanne giving birth in a field and the child dying within minutes of complications or exposure - it's not entirely clear. The body was placed in a plastic bag, in a pool of water on the farm where Joanne lived, and life continued as normal.

Upon the discovery of the "Kerry Baby" (the child found washed up on a beach) in the same month, Joanne was singled out as the possible mother. This was because the police found that she had been pregnant, hadn't lost a child in hospital and now was no longer pregnant.

These events need to be put in context and the book can be viewed as a time

capsule reminding (or informing) the reader of what Irish society was like in the 1980s: there was an economic depression, the power of the Catholic Church was all encompassing and women were subordinate. McCafferty presents an overview of rural life where the events unfolded including the organisations that had influence, those being the Gaelic Athletic Association, Macra na Feirme and once again the all pervasive Catholic Church. She describes how people lived, worked, socialised and the respect accorded to the local policeman.

The Tribunal of Inquiry into the Kerry Babies Case takes up about half the book, it lasted from December 1984 to June 1985. The main aim of the Tribunal was to find out how police conducted themselves during the questioning of the Hayes family. It also addressed the allegations of the Hayes family against the police and any other relevant matters. Unsurprisingly, the allegations against the police were brushed over and as the Tribunal proceeded, it became a public investigation into the personality and sexuality of Joanne Hayes.

The allegations against the police included; Joanne being told her one year old child would be put in an orphanage if she didn't confess to murdering the Kerry Baby, her brother Ned being assaulted during questioning, and her sister Kathleen being told she would be put in a mental institution. There were massive contradictions in the confessions of each member of the family and the writer suggests that the family were telling the Guards what they wanted to hear.

The Tribunal tried to prove that the Kerry Baby was Joanne's child through an extremely rare occurrence of "superfecundation" where a woman can be pregnant with twins of two different fathers with different blood types.

Reading this book my emotions were sadness, shock, anger and indignation. The usual suspects - the men in power of the Catholic Church, the politicians, many in the health and legal system behaved in the callous way you might expect. However, there were uplifting moments in *A Woman To Blame*. Joanne continuously got letters and mass cards from the public. Perhaps a curious phenomenon to a non-catholic, a mass card is a greeting card which states that a mass is being said for you. These cards illustrated how out of touch the Catholic hierarchy was/is with the typical Catholic "on the street" who believed Jesus preached love and forgiveness. A

chapter is devoted to some of the messages in these cards, which tell of a massive compassion from people of all ages and walks of life: "Joanne Hayes' public suffering evoked private ordeals and tribulations ... a sense of being trapped and helpless while [she] was being publicly crucified."

The parish priests of Abbeydorney (nearest village to the Hayes' farm) refused to say mass in the Hayes family home. This would have been very insulting to the family. But the people of the village who were sickened by seeing their neighbour Joanne publicly interrogated (at one point under medication)

"the Irish women's movement did not stand idly by. In addition to protesting outside the court - feminists nationwide sent yellow flowers to Joanne. I think this was a beautiful idea."

organised a protest. The mostly farming community stood in solidarity outside the courthouse with banners that said simply "Abbeydorney supports Joanne". McCafferty puts a lot of significance on this event.

Of course the Irish women's movement did not stand idly by. In addition to protesting outside the court - being condemned by Judge Lynch and threatened with a jail sentence - feminists nationwide sent yellow flowers to Joanne. I think this was a beautiful idea - when the TV and press cameras snapped her leaving court every day her arms were full of yellow flowers. This symbol caught on and hundreds of flowers were sent daily, McCafferty admits it was unlikely that each flower represented an active Irish feminist. She offers a snap shot of the women's movement of that time. Two years prior to the tribunal, many women's groups formed with the agenda of opposing the government's proposed amendment to Irish legislation in relation to abortion. But they were faced with the might of church and state and many buckled under this pressure. Now they had a chance to organise again and it is interesting to hear (for the first time in my case) of the people and the projects of the time e.g., the Women's Community Press and Irishwomen's Guidebook and Diary.

In another book, *Documenting Irish Feminisms*, Connolly and O'Toole write that the Tralee Women's Group organised regular demonstrations locally and that a protest march was held in Dublin. The authors feel that after this particularly low point for the women of Ireland, there was a move away from the conservative catholic opinions of sexuality. The photos I've seen of demonstrations from this time have women's groups from all over Ireland, so maybe this cloud had a silver lining as women's groups mobilised and were inspired to make a change.

Until I read *A Woman To Blame* I had always mixed up the "Kerry Babies" with the story of Anne Lovett. Poor 15 year old Anne was pregnant in 1984, and had her baby in a grotto at the foot of a statue of the Virgin Mary. Both she and the baby died there. Although I have many memories of current affairs from 1984, for some reason these two tragedies never entered my childish world. And as I inform myself by reading this book today in 2008 I just can't understand how the stories of these two women and three dead babies didn't change the laws in relation to contraception and abortion immediately! In fact, condoms only became freely available in 1993 and of course abortion is still illegal. It seems these crazy creatures called women have a bit more autonomy now, but still the state exerts too much control over our bodies.

A Woman To Blame is an uncomfortable book to read, but I would recommend you do.

Further reading:

Truth, Power and Lies, Irish Society and The Case of the Kerry Babies, By Tom Inglis (2005).

Politics of the Kitchen Sink: Capitalism and the exploitation of Women

words by eve

"Women do two-thirds of the worlds work for 5% of the income"[1]

"As carers, waged or unwaged, we [women] are always WORKERS, and ... we have the power to bring the whole economy to a halt... WHEN WOMEN STOP, EVERYTHING STOPS." [2]

When the current Irish constitution was unveiled in 1937, it set out a special place for women within the home. According to article 41.2.1 "The State recognises that by her life within the home, women gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." This article has often been highlighted as a sexist piece of legislation, confining women to the house and illustrating the unholy unity of state and church that has characterised Ireland since independence. And it is. But while the article in its context is worthy of feminist ire, there is a sentiment in article 41.2.1 that cannot be dismissed[3] ; without the support that women give to society through their lives in the home the 'common good' cannot be achieved. In capitalist society the 'common good' too often comes to mean the profits of capital, and without the work of women the profits of capital certainly cannot be achieved; they depend upon it. In this article I want to look at the specific way in which women are exploited in capitalism, namely through their unwaged work in the home. The article starts by sketching out the emergence of capitalism and how it affected women[4] , before looking at some of the arguments made by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in their classic text *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Finally it will look at the movement of grassroots women demanding recognition and remuneration for their caring work who have come together in the Global Women's Strike.

Women and the emergence of capitalism

Capitalism emerged in Europe between the 15th and 17th centuries. Its tumultuous birth was attended by huge social upheavals and serious resistance from those sectors of the population who stood to lose the most. The emerging capitalist economy was built on the dispossession of the peasants of Europe and the slavery of the populations of the new world. The advent of capitalism's pivotal relationship, the wage, and the attendant capitalist division of labour heralded a new and intense form of exploitation, especially for women.

The initial period in the emergence of capitalism is known as primitive accumulation. Before the capitalist mode of production could establish and maintain itself, enough capital had to be accumulated to start this process [5]. In Federici's[6] words "Primitive accumulation consisted in an immense accumulation of labor power - 'dead labor' in the form of stolen goods, and 'living labor' in the form of human beings being made available for exploitation- realized on a scale never before matched in the course of history"[7]. This primitive accumulation of capital was achieved by means of a vicious class war against the peasantry of Europe and the enslavement and dispossession of the populations of Africa and the 'new world'.

The emergence of capitalism had a particularly devastating effect on women, and as Federici has illustrated, women were to the fore in resisting its impositions, leading anti-enclosure protests and food riots.[8] Women's control over their own bodies was attacked in the witch hunts and they were subordinated to the position of unpaid domestic servants in a hierarchical division of labour. The new capitalist division of labour wrenched apart the previously unified spheres of production and reproduction. It "destroyed the family and the community and production as one whole," separating out production from the reproduction of labour and ordering them hierarchically according to the wage. [9] In the new market economy only production-for-market was deemed value creating. The work of reproduction (giving birth, rearing children, feeding, cleaning and caring for people) was relegated to the home, rendered invisible and reckoned economically valueless; it even ceased to be considered work [10]. "The economic importance of the reproduction of labour power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labeled as 'women's labour'"[11].



Domestic Labour: The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community.

The gendered schism between domestic work and waged work that was brought about by the emergence of capitalism is key to understanding the how women are exploited by it. In their ground breaking essay *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (PWSC), Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James look in depth at domestic labour and its place in capitalist society. PWSC was written in 1972 in the context of second wave feminism and the social movements that shook Italy in the early seventies. The text emerged from a background where the analysis of women's position fell into two categories. Those for who caste (women v men) not class was the major conflict in society and those for who women's liberation was appended to a male-centric class struggle [12]. Rejecting both views and building on their own experience of struggle as women, they set out by posing the question "what is the relation of women to capital and what kind of struggle can we effectively wage to destroy it?"[13]

Dalla Costa and James set out to examine women's relation to capital by examining their relation to the wage. The wage is the main tool of capitalist exploitation; in Selma James' words it is "capital's special way of robbing the worker." [14] In the wage relationship the worker's labour power, or ability to work, is sold in exchange for wages. The wage which the worker receives is worth only a fraction of the wealth which the worker creates. The rest of the wealth which the worker creates is accumulated by his or her boss as profit or surplus value. But the process of capitalist exploitation does not start and end with the worker and the boss. In order to be able to go to work and be exploited in the first place a worker has to be born, reared, taught, fed and loved; her or his labour power or ability to work has to be made, and remade. The major contribution of Dalla Costa and James was to show that the work

that women do in the daily grind of housework contributes to the creation of surplus value and so to the profits of capital; and that the working class home comprises the other hidden half of capitalist exploitation.[15]

"It is often asserted that within the definition of wage labour women in domestic labour are not productive. In fact precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services which capitalist organisation transforms into privatised activity putting them on the back of housewives." [16]

By producing workers and caring for workers to enable them to face into the daily slog of waged work women directly contribute to the profits of capital. But while the wage worker gets a fraction of the wealth they create, the housewife gets none. Her work is done for free.

In the opening lines of PWSC Dalla Costa and James describes the "role of the working class housewife as the determinant position of all other women." Ireland in the 'noughties' is a long way from Dalla Costa's Italy of the 1970s where few women had waged jobs and the position of the housewife seemed 'frozen'[17] but James's and Dalla Costa's arguments laid out in PWSC are still vital for understanding the position of women almost forty years later. From a global perspective the majority of women continue to work as housewives. James's and Dalla Costa's analysis of the place of domestic work in capitalist society also sheds light on the position of women in the waged workforce.

Women and work outside the home

In (post) celtic tiger Ireland the majority of women are in paid employment, women's large scale entry into the workplace having helped to fuel the economic boom.[19] A large number of these women work in low paid casualised or part time work. The lack of value accorded to domestic labour has implications not just for unwaged housewives; it devalues all caring work and keeps women's wages lower than men's across the board. Typically

'female' occupations such as cleaning, nursing and caring are seen as extensions of the housewife role and thus are lower paid. In the 1960s nursing for example was seen as a vocation and extension of the role of the housewife and not as a skilled profession [20]. The economic strategy of defining all women as housewives and the consequences of this for women in the developing world has been illustrated by feminist writer Maria Mies, with particular reference to women who work in the export processing zones;

"this strategy ... defines third world women not as workers but as housewives. What they do is not defined as work but as activity. By universalizing the housewife ideology and the model of the nuclear family as a sign of progress, it is also possible to define all the work women do as supplementary work, her income as supplementary income to the main breadwinner, the husband. The economic logic of housewifization is a tremendous reduction in labour costs" [24]

According to the Fawcett Society, a feminist organisation based in the UK, women working full-time in the UK are on average paid 17% less than men, and women working part-time are paid 36% less than men working full-time. Even for professional women wages are lower than those of their male equivalents. In Ireland the pay gap between male and female university graduates is 11% with the average pay gap running at 16%. [21]

One of the contributing factors to why women's wages are lower is that the fact that they are the child bearers of the species - which represents an economic liability to employers. When women have children they need maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks [22]. A campaign run by the Fawcett society, called Keeping Mum, has drawn attention to the disadvantage and increased poverty risk that becoming pregnant means for women.

"From the moment they conceive a child, women face immediate financial penalties - thousands lose their jobs, and many more face disadvantage and reduced opportunities in the workplace. The gender pay gap more than trebles when women reach their thirties, as a result of the financial penalties associated with motherhood. The issues of in-work poverty and insecure work are also more likely to be faced by women. Two thirds of vulnerable and low-paid workers are women. Women, and particularly mothers, are more likely to be in insecure jobs as temps or homeworkers. Mothers need the flexibility these jobs offer so that they can combine work with childcare, but this has trade-offs in terms of the rights and pay available to them." [23]

Bibliography & Resources

Books

* *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, 1972. Online at <http://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-della-costa-selma-james>

* *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale- Women in the International Division of Labour*, Marie Mies, 1986

* *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Silvia Federici, 2004

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* *The Milk of Human Kindness - A Global Factsheet on the economic value of breastfeeding*, International Women Count Network, 2000

On the web

* *The Global Women's Strike website* - <http://www.globalwomenstrike.net/>

* *The World's Largest Workplace: Social Reproduction and Wages for Housework* by PJ Lilley & Jeff Shantz <http://nefac.net/node/1247>

* *Wages for Anyone is Bad for Business* Mute Magazine interview with Selma James and Nina Lopez <http://www.metamute.org/en/Wages-for-Anyone-Is-Bad-for-Business>

* *Home truths for feminists*. An exchange between Selma James and Melissa Benn <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/21/gender.comment>

* *Why the Irish Constitution Must Recognise Workers in the Home and Pay Equity*, Maggie Ronayne, VILLAGE

For most women with waged jobs, their work is not over when the shift finishes. The presumption in capitalism that the wage is subsidized by unpaid care work doubles women's work loads. The 'double day' day is done by millions of women worldwide. Time use surveys continually show that women do more housework than men, even when both parties in a heterosexual couple are in paid jobs. A recent study by the Irish Equality Authority, for example, found that on average Irish women in couples do 72% of the unpaid work and 55% of the total work per day. They found that there is a more equal division of labour in dual earner couples although women still do more unpaid work than their male partners and have a higher total workload.

A new compass for the class struggle

Women worldwide are chained to the proverbial kitchen sink. Meaningful liberation for women cannot lie in casting off the 'shackles of domesticity' and embracing the 'liberation' of wage slavery. The kitchen sink will not disappear and neither will housework. What Dalla Costa and James did was to find a mode of struggle that acknowledges that the 'kitchen sink' is not going anywhere, to acknowledge that in fact it is the basis of human survival. They call for a new compass for the class struggle, one which acknowledges the central yet hidden role of the housewife:

"The question is to develop forms of struggle that do not leave the housewife peaceably at home, at most ready to take part in occasional demonstrations through the streets, waiting for a wage that would never pay for anything; rather we must discover forms of struggle which immediately break the whole structure of domestic work, rejecting it absolutely, rejecting our role as housewives and the home as the ghetto of our existence, since the problem is not only to stop doing this work but to smash the entire role of the housewife. The starting point is not how to do housework more effectively, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle; that is not a higher productivity of domestic labour but a higher subversiveness in the struggle." [25]

The call for a new shape of struggle, in which the housewife can find a 'place as protagonist' has been answered by a body of grass roots women demanding recognition and remuneration for domestic work. Selma James went on found the Wages for Housework Campaign calling for the recognition and payment for all caring work. In 1999 the Global Women's Strike (GWS) was

magazine, 2-8 September 2005 http://www.globalwomenstrike.net/English2005/why_the_irish_constitution_must_.htm

* *The day the women went on strike* - Report on the 1975 Icelandic Women's Strike <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/18/gender.uk>

* *Gender Inequalities in Time Use - The Distribution of Caring, Housework and Employment Among Women and Men in Ireland*, a report by the Equality Authority <http://www.equality.ie/index.asp?locID=105&docID=725>

* *The door to the garden: feminism and Operaismo* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa <http://libcom.org/library/the-door-to-the-garden-feminism-and-operaismo-mariarosa-dalla-costa>

Contact for the G.W.S. <http://www.globalwomenstrike.net/>
Email: Ireland@globalwomenstrike.net
Mobile: +353 87 7838688

Demands of the Strike

+ Payment for all caring work - in wages, pensions, land & other resources. What is more valuable than raising children & caring for others? Invest in life & welfare, not military budgets or prisons

+ Pay equity for all, women & men, in the global market.

+ Food security for breastfeeding mothers, paid maternity leave and maternity breaks. Stop penalizing us for being women.

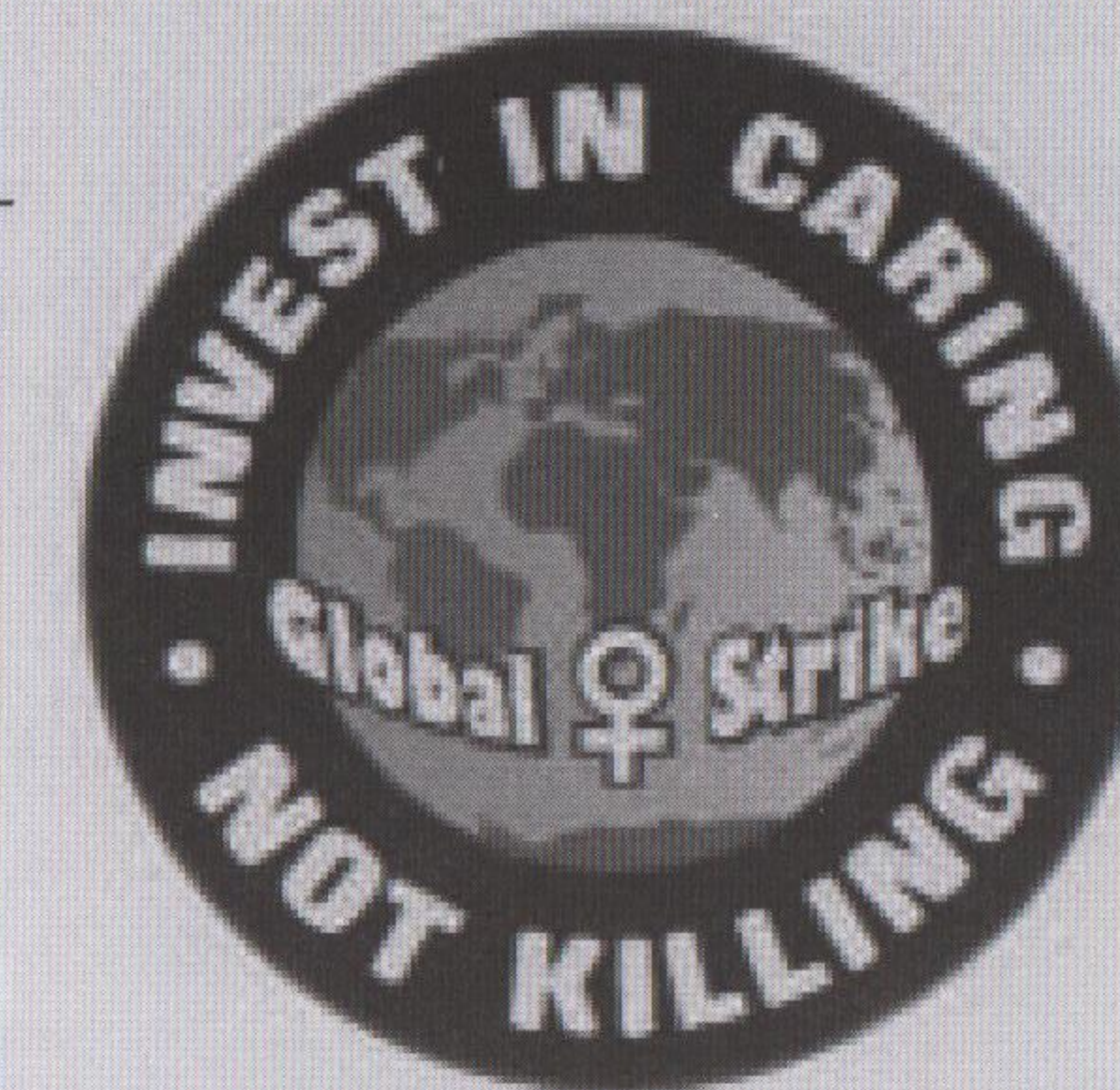
+ Don't pay 'Third World debt'. We owe nothing, they owe us.

+ Accessible clean water, healthcare, housing, transport, literacy.

+ Non-polluting energy & technology which shortens the hours we work. We all need cookers, fridges, washing machines, computers, & time off!

+ Protection & asylum from all violence & persecution, including by family members & people in positions of authority.

+ Freedom of movement. Capital travels freely, why not people?



founded after the National Women's Council of Ireland invited the Wages for Housework campaign to support their call for a general strike of women. The call for women to strike was in part inspired by the amazing events that occurred in Iceland on October 24th 1975 when 90% of Iceland's women refused to work, cook or look after children. The national women's strike, which ground the country to a halt, was Icelandic women's response to the UN's declaration of 1975 as a 'Women's Year'. For Iceland and beyond it was a powerful reminder of the role women play in running society, their low pay, and the low value placed on their work inside and outside the home [26]. With the successes of Icelandic women in mind the 1999 strike that began in Ireland went on to become global, and the GWS was born.

The GWS calls for a shift in global priorities from those of the capitalist war machine to those of caring and community spelled out in their demands (see box) It has a strong anti-war ethos summed up by its slogan 'invest in caring not killing' and its demand that global military budgets be returned to the community, starting with women the main carers. Grassroots women from over sixty countries have participated in the Global Women's Strike, which happens each International Women's Day, winning significant victories for themselves along the way. As well as winning solid victories like the abolition of cost sharing in hospitals in Uganda, the GWS has provided an opportunity for women

from different backgrounds and experiences to come together and to show solidarity with each other's struggles. "We use the Strike as a framework for unity -- among sectors of women, between women and men, within and among countries -- because it is based on each sector accepting and enriching the independent struggle of every other." [27] In the words of Kaabong Women's Group from Uganda "The Strike always brings us women together across many divisions." [28]

Conclusion

Capitalism depends on women's low paid and unpaid domestic labour. Women do the bulk of the world's work, yet control very little of the wealth which they create. The lack of social and economic value accorded to the domestic caring work that women do has serious consequences for all women, as has been highlighted by the Wages for Housework campaign and the Global Women's Strike.

The struggle for liberation for all women is the struggle against capitalism. The demand for recognition and remuneration for caring domestic work - work which is vital to human survival and which contributes to the profits of capital - is an important starting point in the struggle to destroy capitalism.

UGANDA Kaabong Women's Group says:

"Every International Women's Day, we join all women in over 60 countries since 2000 to demand and say together the burning issues women face especially grassroots women e.g we need accessible clean water, free medical care, food security, an end to domestic violence and all sorts of discriminations against women. This year KWGO ... demands END POVERTY AND WAR. Women, our children, disabled people are the direct sufferers, yet we are the care givers who struggle every single day to sustain life, working the hardest for least. For example the Northern Uganda War which has been there for 19 years has killed many women and children and million [of] shillings [have been] used but the war still continues as if there is a lot of business going on by killing us. The Strike always brings us women together across many divisions. It begins with those of us who are invisible as mothers. Since the Strike has grown stronger, we call upon you to join hands together for the strike and we change the world we live in."

Five things that make me feel better about myself and stop hating my body:



words by tamarack

1: when clothes fit

in the past few years, perhaps the single biggest pick-me-up for my self-confidence is a top i made for my very own body out of some polka-dot thrift shop fabric. wearing this shirt makes me feel like my body is okay and i'm a pretty hot lady! it's long enough, fitted and comfy, but also pretty billowing around the belly - making me feel like there's room for growth instead of constricting me with "get smaller!" messages. if only i was a better seamstress i could fill my closet with these positive forms. since the industrial revolution women have been trying to fit into clothes designed for someone else's form. before the mass-making of garments, clothes would have been made for each body individually. now we've got pre-shaped items that it is assumed we will mould our bodies to. sizes are all over the map! and names like "small" and "large" are nothing but infuriating labels, conferring status or damnation their on wearers. realising that most clothes aren't going to fit me because they are shoddily made pieces of trash, and not because my body is 'all wrong', has helped me to ease up on the self depreciating thoughts. learning through experience which clothes are going to look good only on the rack and look like a cruel joke on my body has helped me avoid much fitting room frustration: i just don't try that shit on. a lot of the clothes that i pick up require a little alteration. i'm not quite skilled enough to make my own wardrobe, but i'm still going to work on my dreams of seamstressing. in the meanwhile will keep reminding myself that it's the shirt and not my body that needs changing. and like my good friend so keenly pointed out: sewing and alteration are not only subversion of the garment industry, but very enjoyable DIY pastimes!

2: read*, write**, discuss

it's ridiculously hard to find good chub-love¹ writing these days. i wish there were more queers and anarchists writing about body image; because as much as we'd all like to think we're beyond these issues, i keep meeting these radical people, both in real life and through their writings, who are still hurting and being hurt. "body image" isn't something you get over. we live with our bodies every day and night, and hopefully we come to love them. as we grow up many of us feel differently than when we were younger: the self-loathing fades away, but the imprint often remains. i'm embarrassed to admit i'm not over this shit. how can i be this radical anarchist yet still worry i'm "too fat" to be loved, and "too fat" to be a great person? these self-harming thoughts need to be deprogrammed. what i want to figure out now is how can we talk about body image in a radical context? how do we admit that we are not immune to mainstream beauty ideals? how do we acknowledge our hurts; and how do we move the fuck on? deconstruction of body image norms is part self-reflection and part healthy expression. it's not a matter of fetishising our "defects", it's about being honest about our likes and dislikes. i'd like to have a lot more conversations and comments that reaffirm we're some amazing, hot people the way that we look now. we need more writing, more songs, more art and methods of expression. we gotta make space for people, and for ourselves, and not let our amazing efforts get squelched by low self-opinions. in my anarchist utopia people don't look like a bunch of clones - i'm pretty stoked on individuality in the physical realm as well as the mental.

3: pick your peeps

this might sound obvious, but don't hang out with people who make you feel bad about yourself. if certain friends or family make you less-than-comfortable/confident but you're not sure that you want to ditch them just yet, then balance out their company by spending lots of extra time with your close and supportive crew members. i have found that having as many people as possible with whom i can have some healthy chats about body image makes all the difference in my self-opinion. there are those who will judge us by our size - a kind of ableist² mentality that defines worth by appearance. it's bullshit to discriminate based on who "looks" like a more picturesque anarchist/activist. a lot of these bogus ideas are based in assumptions that fat people are unhealthy and weak, and thin people are fit and strong. this shit needs to be debunked, 'cause it is totally untrue and not at all scientific or supportable. discriminating based on size and appearance, be it subtle or whatever, keeps us separated from each other and hung up on shit that just doesn't matter. who here wants to recreate mainstream society with its exclusivity and put-downs? we need a community of greater love and acceptance. and speaking of love: don't be above considering what kind of body types you find yourself attracted to (though i know we're all beyond this sort of profiling now - *ahem*). Take note that you are surrounded by some super rad and individualistic peeps of all description. break away from normative notions of sexy: find that special someone in XL (or XS) and invite them home! it's amazingly liberating to allow yourself to be attracted to all body types.

4: forget your parents

a buddy once pointed out to me that for all the bitching about images from magazines and telly and the effect they have on us, when we think back to incidents that really scarred our self-worth, it most likely involved family and not the big bad Media. advertising reinforces the stereotype, and holds up a demanding image of conformity, but seventeen magazine didn't come into my home, humiliate me, and put me on the ultra slimfast diet when i was eleven. we're big people now, and we can look to all the ways we did not turn out like those family members who (albeit perhaps unintentionally) bullied us about our weight when we were kids. i can now tell my aunt that i don't want to hear her latest assessment on my weight - and that i think it's fucked up she would even consider it her right to comment on my body! i can open my big fat mouth and talk back. i can speak up when i see it happening to my friends' kids. i can balance out my childhood with words and actions now. human interaction has far deeper-reaching effects than television and magazines, and i still believe we can overcome the stereotypes with community and communication!

5: forgiveness

some of us are our own personal slave-drivers, constantly exuding pressure to meet exceptionally high standards. it seems like society expects so little of us: just play your part, consume and produce. so we're used to living on less than the minimum, and giving our time and energies away in the hopes of creating something better. we've got great ideas, and we've got a lot of pretty high standards. i need to forgive myself for not exceeding all the standards. i need to forgive myself for not being 'over it', and for being full of contradictions. i'm neither a perfect anarchist nor a perfect body - but hey, whatever. i can't allow the mean voices that have gotten into my head to keep me down: i need to keep going outside, i need to quit suppressing myself! we've all got fucked up personal shit to get through, and it's not going to wait until after the revolution. we're alive now, and right now we need a lot more forgiveness, mutual support, and all that good stuff. it's not easy to change, be it your state of mind or the whole wide world, so let's agree to ease up on ourselves enough that we don't crumble under the pressure.

*i heartily recommend *Figure 8* zine outta portland. krissy has recently put out issue 5. all issues are available from ponyboy press (www.ponyboy-press.com).

**Fat!So?* by marilyn wann is another heralded piece of fat-lovin' counter-culture. the zine that became a book is available from her website (www.fatso.com).

***wake up, i'm fat!* by camryn manheim is an autobiographical work on camryn's journey into acting and performance. "wake up!" is an easy read, all pretty personal stuff: from her positive experiences with counter-culture, to a bullying and abusive acting college. manheim comes out with a strong and fighting belief that fat women need to be represented in the media and contributes to this through her own performances.

* if you can get your hands on copies of *i'm so fucking beautiful* by nomy lamm, then you are one lucky duck and you should definitely read that shit! otherwise, check out nomy's website (www.nomylamm.com) for lots of great links!

**lastly! if you are interested in contributing your voice to the dialogue on fat n' queer issues, there is a feminist studies PhD student in the states putting together an anthology: submissions due by december 1 2008 (www.myspace.com/spillingoveranthology)

¹ 'chub-love': as in 'chub' for chubby/fat/etc and 'love' for loving/lovely/etc. lingo to indicate a fat-positive stance (www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=chublove).

² Birgit Jensen wrote a fabulous zine about ableism in the punk/anarchist scene which is available as a blog on her Myspace page: www.myspace.com/bixxx



Words by Emily
Images by Eve

I have had more than a few hair styles in my time: curly and brown; half shaved, half pink; short and green; white blonde; long, red and wild. Currently, I have hair like a boy's, shaved tight on the back and sides with a substantial fringe at the front. Usually I cut my own hair, but now and then I take a trip to the Barber's and sometimes, these outings make me nervous. Despite my anxiety, I have never been refused a cut, until this morning. One or two grey-haired old men were getting their Monday morning trims and showed little interest in the young woman wanting her hair barbered:

"Sorry, I just don't cut women's hair. I'm a Barber, I'm trained to cut men's hair. I don't cut women's hair. But if you ask Leanne nicely, maybe she'll cut your hair for you". "My hair is already short", I said, "and my head - well, I guess it's a pretty standard shape..." At this point, Leanne, who'd been eye-balling me suspiciously, started to explain the "very different type of skill" involved in cutting men's hair and how "people train especially" to cut men's hair in that particular way. I was getting impatient so I jumped in with the remark, "you mean, you are trained in men's hair styles, which is exactly what I want".

In the end, Leanne obliged and even made sure to invite me back, but the encounter got me thinking. As I walked home, I wondered about people's reactions to me. It was lunch hour on the first day of a working week with business men and women out for their coffee in hordes. I wondered if the smart, suited women liked the waft of Barber-shop product. Indeed, several men turn to check out my freshly shorn head, and although I

hope it was because I looked devilishly handsome, perhaps I got it all wrong. Perhaps they thought I looked silly - a typical dyke. On the other hand, maybe I confused them by innocently interrupting their visual landscape... or perhaps my quiet difference was making them curious...

I started thinking about trans-issues more specifically after I read an invigorating article by my wonderful friend Debi Withers on why she's a trans ally. Debi makes the point that transphobia is

Transphobia is something everyone - male, female or otherwise - can encounter in everyday life. In my case transphobia revealed itself when the Barber refused to give me, a woman, a 'man's' haircut.

something everyone - male, female or otherwise - can encounter in everyday life. In my case transphobia revealed itself when the Barber refused to give me, a woman, a "man's" haircut. As Debi points out, we live in a society which "is structured by stable categories" of male and female, boys and girls, men and women, who acquire visual "cues" [1] which signify our assigned-at-birth gender: pink or blue, smooth or hairy, trousers or skirts. Like my masculine (or unconventionally feminine?) hair style, Debi reflects on how her body and life "continually and innocently" break down and disturb the strict binary categories which are imposed upon our bodies in Western society and culture. Debi observes that she need not do anything in particular in order to disrupt the narrow gender categories of "male" and "female". She says:

"I am simply being in my natural biological state existing in a cultural world unable to cope with my nature. In the summer wearing pretty dresses my hilariously hairy legs do not make sense to the world - they produce reactions of fear and disgust - I can see the patriarchal world crumbling down before me as I flash my ankles at a

fascinated, easy picking crowd." [2]

Debi embraces the 'trans position' as a "site of agency" which enables her to construct, create and communicate "gendered embodiments in lasting and changeable ways". This self-directed and fluid creation of gender embodiment, she says, "is also a form of intervention into the social world - a way of reordering it through my body and my experience".

In many respects however, women experience a greater gender-flexibility than men do. An article on transgender children published in The Guardian in August 2008 [3], details how "gender issues can appear in children as young as four". In the article, a spokesperson for Mermaids, the only UK support group for children with "gender identity disorder", observes that the helpline receives a significant amount of calls from parents of children aged between five and nine. The representative says that there seems to be more boys than girls affected at this age, "which is probably because it's more acceptable for girls to be tomboys. If you have a little girl who wants to cut her hair short or play football, that is seen as normal. But if you have a boy who wants to draw mermaids or dress up as a princess, they get made fun of". What comes across clearly in this article is how outside forces can seriously impact on children's self-esteem, often contributing significantly to negative self-perception, even self-harm or worse: there have been a number of reports this year of children, one as young as ten, killing themselves as a result of gender discrimination, specifically transphobia [4]. In another recent Guardian article [5], Victoria Neumark discusses the social consequences facing "teenagers who dare to be different" since "peer pressure can be intense and spiteful - and drive many to despair". According to ChildLine [6], "boys consistently wait longer to ask for help":

"They suffer the same forms of abuse as girls and in equal numbers, but are shy of expressing feelings and terrified of revealing vulnerability. Little wonder when "gay" is a standard disparagement at school."

According to a recent report which Neumark makes reference to, "some 27, 000 young people call ChildLine each year about sexual orientation, homophobia or homophobic bullying". Most of these calls are made by boys: "Appearing inadequately male is serious".

While ChildLine found verbal homophobic abuse equally distributed between genders, boys were more than twice as likely to be physically attacked. Being pushed, kicked, spat on and chased

by gangs is not uncommon. Homophobic abuse is not aimed just at lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) people; it polices traditional gender roles and boundaries.

The above example reinforces the argument that transphobia and homophobia are interconnected as gender prejudice which impacts on everyone in negative ways. Indeed, when I first read Debi's article, fresh from her having just written it, I immediately recognised that the issues most central to her discussion were those of bodily integrity, safety and gender discrimination, all of which are plainly feminist issues.

Most importantly for me however, was Debi's urgent desire for a new human experience (my words, not hers) inspired by the flexibility and freedom which "the trans position" can offer us. Kate Bornstein - queer superheroine - states that:

"A fluid identity, incidentally, is one way to solve problems with boundaries. As a person's identity keeps shifting, so do individual borders and boundaries. It's hard to cross a boundary that keeps moving!" [7]

The cultivation of a new human experience therefore, I suggest, would adopt the flexibility of a trans-perspective opening up unlimited space for expression, creativity and playfulness with how we look and who we are. Feminism (queer feminism(s) in particular), I believe, can facilitate the integration of more exciting ways of thinking and operating - of living - in relation to ourselves and each other in our society. Personally speaking, feminism and queer theory have been the biggest influences upon my "reality" - how I construct and understand my environment. But it also motivates how I live, move, learn, work and create in the world, particularly as an

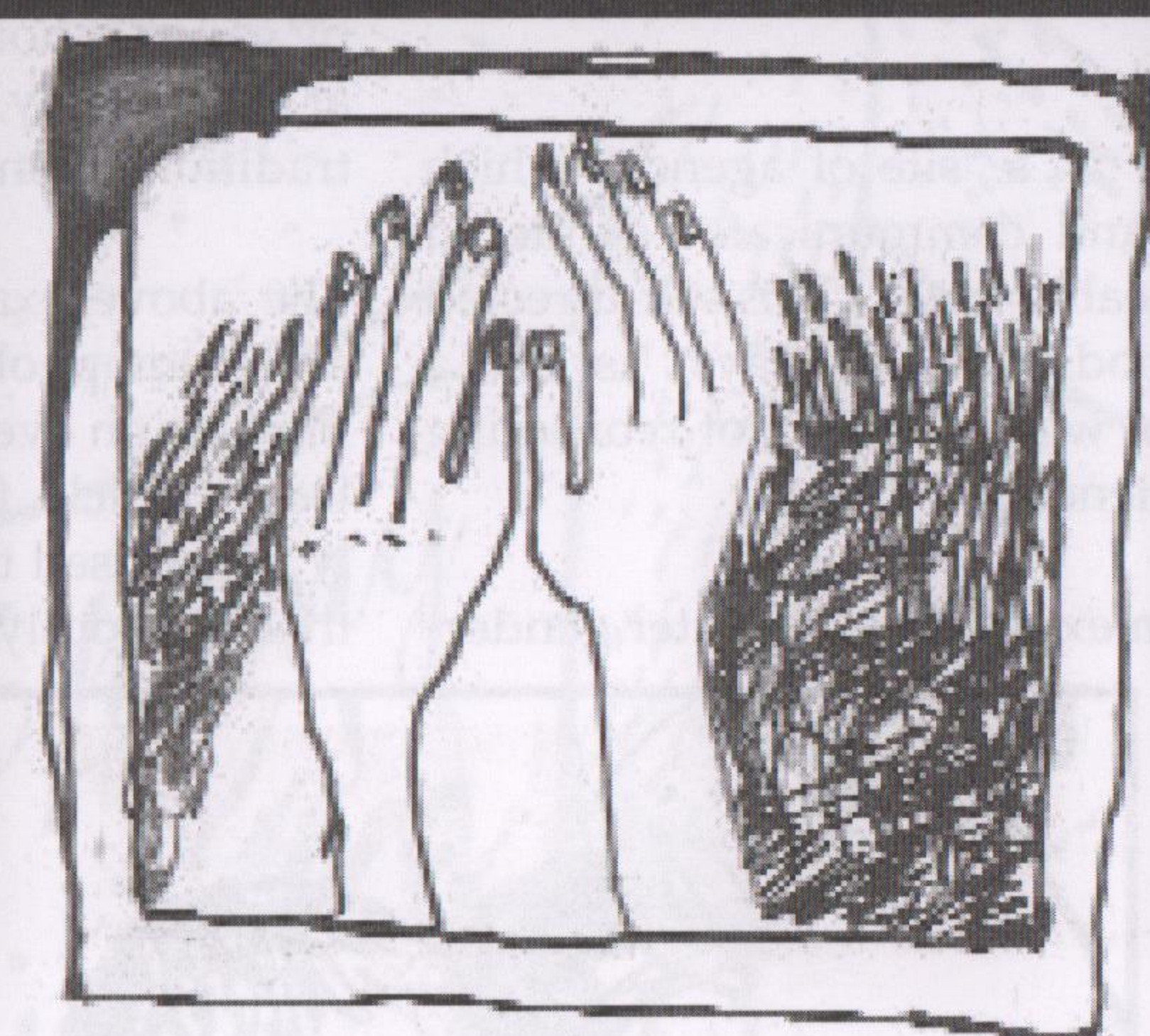
"embodied" being: inhabiting, as I do, a body.

In order for us to cultivate an environment which reflects and makes manifest this urgent desire for a new human experience (i.e. MORE FUN) and to see our feminist aspirations come to life, drastic changes must occur in our perception and our compassion for ourselves and each other. The "trans-position", it could be said, is a particularly appropriate and adventurous position to consider so that we may begin to build a solid framework which seeks out new ways of imagining our lives, bodies, identities and interactions. As Leslie Feinberg puts it:

"How can we weed out all the forms of trans-phobic and gender-phobic discrimination? Where does the struggle for sex and gender liberation fit in relation to other movements for economic and social equality?"

not just tolerate them? How can we forge a movement that can bring about profound and lasting change - a movement capable of transforming society? These questions can only be answered when we begin to organize together, ready to struggle on each other's behalf. Understanding each other will compel us as honest, caring people to fight each other's oppression as though it were our own." [8]

What Feinberg describes here is exactly the urgent desire which excited me reading Debi's article: the desire and quest for more from our interactions and encounters as humans, beginning with funda-



open to people (in her article Tamarack specifically means people of varying body-shapes) who we might otherwise dismiss since they don't subscribe to what we normally consider attractive. Making choice a possibility for cultivating desire may seem unworkable - even impossible, but figuring out how to abandon the cultural rules which keep us within strict lines of perception and behaviour is both exciting and powerful. This "choosing" can be compared to Debi's understanding of the trans-position as a "site of agency", a space where we can construct and cre-

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mental co-organisation based on immense compassion and resulting in lasting and transformative societal change. This is what RAG strive for as a collective is it not? Making connections with other feminists and radical groups demanding change, being open and compassionate - and having lots of fun - in order to totally revamp society (or at least our experience of it) so that we can exercise total freedom with regard to our own lives and generally, have a better time all round? We know it's possible.

Compassion, in fact, is key to trans-issues, as it is for much of our activities as feminists and anarchists. But how do we even begin to comprehend the impact of gender on our perceptions? How do we integrate compassion into a society which is so often alienating and viciously unempathetic, even violent, toward difference? Kate Bornstein reminds us:

about gender... We bring about the future of gender when we put gender into play in any aspect of our daily lives: family, work, play, or relationships. It's when we put gender into play, it's when we question the binary, it's when we break the rules and keep calling attention to the fact that the rules are breakable: that's when we create a Third Space." [9]

For Bornstein this "Third Space" was her queer theatre. By "breaking the rules" and questioning what we often take for granted (gender, capitalism, hierarchy and the existence of misery to name a few), we can make space in order to rethink our perceptions and question that which seems absolute. We can learn how to suspend (erradicate?) our prejudice, and instead embrace our curious and wonderful child-like-elements which naturally incline towards difference, adventure and mystery. Yippee! Adventure! Mystery!

In 5 things that make me feel better about myself... (page 29-30), Tamarack suggests that challenging our own body perceptions can also involve choosing to be

ate our own views, perceptions, desires, actions, bodies and identities. Adopting a perspective and ethos of fun, adventure and compassion in our relationships with others (and taking care of ourselves and our friends), reveals many fields of possibilities for learning, comradeship, better days, better experiences and high quality escapades.

Fundamentally, vigilant openness to otherness is within our grasp and, I believe, is something that will not only contribute significantly to the feminist and anarchist ideal societal reorganisation, but can also facilitate us to reclaim power to define our own bodies, our own selves, or indeed, to continuously move beyond definition, past those "stable categories" that make our culture and society so inflexible to difference and deviance. A trans-anarchist-feminist-utopia? You betcha.

END NOTES

- [1] Julia Serano refers to these visual gender-signifiers as gender 'cues'. See: www.juliaserano.com and Whipping Girl by Julia Serano.
- [2] Debi Withers, 2008: unpublished article. Available from www.debi-rah.net
- [3] Groskop, 2008. The Guardian, G2 Supplement (14.08.08), 'My Body is Wrong' by Viv Groskop (p. 12-15)
- [4] Cameron McWilliams, a 10 year old from Doncaster, UK, hanged himself, having expressed a desire to wear make-up and girls underwear. Another young person, Lawrence King, aged 15 from Oxnard, California, described himself as "gender non-conforming" and was shot to death by

- another pupil in a science laboratory (see: Groskop, 2008).
- [5] Neumark, 2008. The Guardian, NSPCC supplement: A special report on safeguarding the wellbeing of children (27.09.2008), 'Sticks and Stones' by Victoria Neumark (p. 2)
- [6] ChildLine is a telephone support service for children operating in Ireland and the UK.
- [7] Bornstein, 1994: 52. See: Gender Outlaw: On men, women and the rest of us by Kate Bornstein.
- [8] Feinberg, 1998: 11/ 12. See: Trans Liberation: beyond pink or blue by Leslie Feinberg.
- [9] Bornstein, 1994: 140

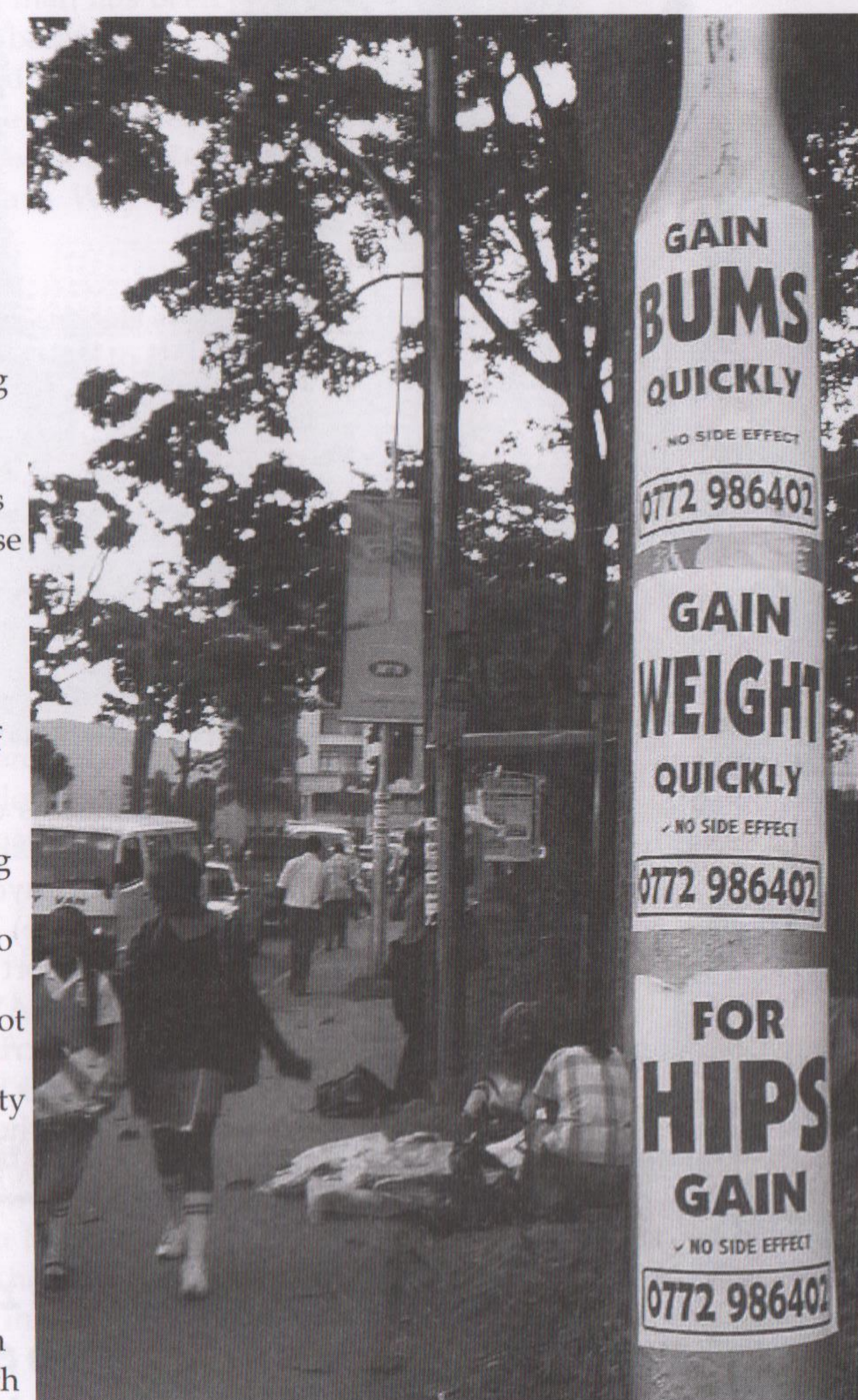
Thoughts on a lamppost...

words and images by marianne

I spent this summer travelling around East Africa; Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania. I'd love to write about all of it, how amazing and different and crazy it was, but for the purposes of keeping things short - I'm going to focus on one lamppost, photographed here, and a couple of bus trips with hours of non-stop music videos. From these experiences, one thing I really noticed was the difference in the 'ideal body' there compared to at home in Ireland. Music videos and TV programmes featured women of all ages, shapes and sizes, far more diverse than we have here, and the majority were large women with big bums shaking their asses to the music. Having a big bum seemed to be incredibly important in looking attractive while being skinny was not seen as a positive body trait. There were even posters up all over the city advertising a product that would make your hips and bum(s) bigger, "with no side effects!" It felt really good to see realistic images of women; I couldn't imagine anyone trying to sell clothing in Africa with advertising that depicts women with their ribs showing, looking totally malnourished. What has become chic in Europe is in Africa an image relating to poverty, misery and shame. At the same time, I wondered about this African body ideal. What were these products with their 'no side effects', and did women really go to such lengths to get fatter?

Worldwide, the images of beauty for men and women vary hugely. In the north of Kenya, the Samburu tribe's male warriors wear colourful feathers in their hair, bright pink wraps around their waists and tonnes of colourful beaded jewellery on their arms, necks and ankles. This is the most macho outfit a man can wear in their culture and they look stunning. I can only imagine what a European man would think of wearing the same clothes. A Samburu warrior pitied my black bracelets saying, "you wear these for beauty?" "Uh, I dunno, never thought of it that way but..."

In Africa, many people, mostly wealthier urban people, want to have lighter skin. Thousands of products are available to straighten hair and moisturisers and special creams are sold to make skin lighter. These products do all kinds of harm, as they contain bleach to whiten skin. One night on a beach in Zanzibar a guy said to us, "white people just sit on the beach, they want to get darker and darker, but they will never be black, never". He was right, white people risk skin cancer every day to bronze

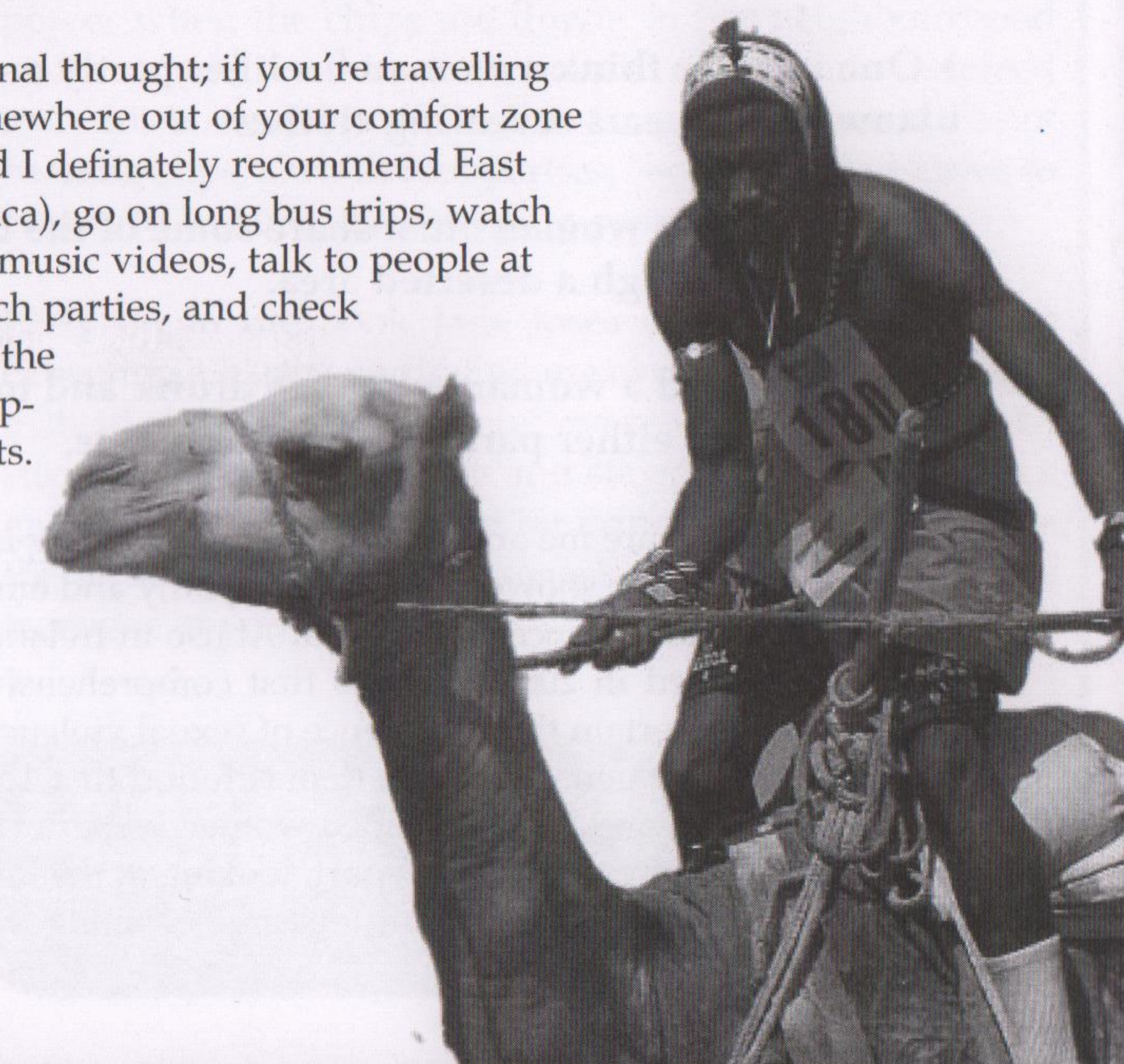


themselves on African beaches, and it seems as if we're all striving to be things that we will never, and can never possibly be. I obviously don't think that white people want to be black, or that black people want to be white, but for some reason, no one is happy with how they look naturally.

As a teenager I spent three years in southern Africa and found a similar attitude there. Although there were no ads on the lampposts, it was a matter of pride there for a husband to have a fat wife, it showed that he was wealthy and could 'look after her properly'. This was detrimental to the health of many women who ate large quantities of the local starchy corn-based mash and often had huge health problems. As in Europe, it is a class issue where richer people can afford to eat enough to be fat, or pay for the gym/eating expensive health foods/surgery to be thinner. The rich in Africa don't have to work outdoors and can stay out of the sun to keep their skin light, or can take time off and spend money to go on sun holidays all year round. It surprised me to find

that this is a global issue. People everywhere are paying money and doing harm to themselves trying to gain an unrealistic image of what it is to be beautiful, whether it's being skinny or fat, dark or light.

A final thought; if you're travelling somewhere out of your comfort zone (and I definitely recommend East Africa), go on long bus trips, watch the music videos, talk to people at beach parties, and check out the lampposts.



Attitudes to Rape in Ireland



words by niav
image by sfar

In issue 1 of "The Rag", Deirdre wrote extensively about rape culture in Ireland and I wanted to revisit this topic as it has been in the media a lot recently. Following the findings of a national survey published in the "The Irish Examiner" on 26th March 2008, I want to briefly address Ireland's attitude to rape.

Red C, an independent market research company, conducted a survey. The poll found that...

- 25% of people questioned believe that women who had been raped were in some way to blame for the attack.
- 10% of people think the victim is entirely at fault if she has had a number of sexual partners.
- 37% think a woman who flirts extensively is at least complicit, if not completely in the wrong, if she is the victim of a sex crime.
- One in three think a woman is either partly or fully to blame if she wears revealing clothes.
- 38% believe a woman must share some of the blame if she walks through a deserted area.
- 25% believed a woman who was drunk and took illegal drugs was either partly or fully to blame.

These statistics scare me and what is more disturbing is the fact that so many people showed so little sympathy and empathy to victims of sexual violence. The Sexual Abuse in Ireland (SAVI) Report, published in 2002, was the first comprehensive study conducted to ascertain the prevalence of sexual violence among Irish men and women. The SAVI Report found that 15% of the population of Ireland believed raped women were not innocent victims. 6 years after the SAVI report, looking at the Red C survey, we can see that people's attitudes are becoming worse, not better.

Often, rape victims don't report the crime because of the fear that they will be blamed or not believed. These statistics do little to encourage anyone in Ireland to report these crimes to the Gardai (Irish police). The Rape Crisis centre claim 79.6% of their callers didn't report the crime (Rape Crisis Network annual report 1994), the SAVI report found lower, just 1 in 10. Those that do report the crime face more difficulties within the justice system - Ireland has the lowest conviction rate in Europe at only 2.5% according to the Irish Tribune (Aug 10th 2008)

25 percent of people questioned believe that women who had been raped were in some way to blame for the attack.

Another obstacle is the attitude of judges and our system of character references for defendants. It is common practice for politicians and priests to be approached to write letters giving background information on the accused, often pleading for lenient sentences. These character references are the used by judges when sentencing defendants. In April 2008, Kathleen Lynch, a Labour Party TD from Cork, became embroiled in controversy when she wrote a letter to a judge stating that a convicted rapist had come from a 'good family'. In this particular case, Trevor Casey had been found guilty of raping two young sisters who were 14 and 16 at the time of offence. In another case, three years of a five-year sentence given to a man named Billy Keogh for raping a Croatian prostitute were suspended because the judge felt that he was a 'man of good character'. Keogh had also threatened to throw the woman from a hotel window. He had removed the condom she had insisted he wear and she retracted her consent. The defence lawyer 'outlined that there were dif-

ferent scales of rape and that this case didn't involve the "forcible removal of clothing from a stranger".

What can we do to change these attitudes?

The Rape Crisis Network calls for a change in legislation to define clearly what 'consent' is and how it is understood and a comprehensive education programme to back it up.

I believe rape means that there is no consent and therefore the perpetrator is fully responsible. We need to have the knowledge to define clearly what consent is. A man has been cleared of a charge of raping a Dublin prostitute because she didn't give the man back his money when she asked him to stop. The accused paid the woman €200 for sex and she put a condom on him but asked him to stop after a few minutes of sex when she noticed the condom was no longer on his penis. Why doesn't No mean No?

We need proper sex education in Irish schools and an end to the stigma surrounding sexual health in order to change these attitudes.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 prohibits "any sexual act" (intercourse and other specified acts) with a child under 17. The Act, however, allows the defence of an accused's "honest belief" that the child concerned was 17 or over. A sex predator's subjective claim of such 'belief' constitutes the defence. The recent "K" case where a jury found a 20-year-old not guilty under the 2006 Act due to his mistaken belief that a 13-year-old with whom he had intercourse was over 17, highlights the need to reform our law. However, we need to ensure that any new law does not criminalise consenting teenagers from experimenting sexually.

There were 73 rape cases heard before the Central Criminal Court in 2007, an increase of 26%. I wonder if our world has become a more dangerous place or is it that more men and women have had the courage to report the crime and bring the case to trial.

In researching this article, I reviewed media reports of rape stories from the previous six months. I was totally sickened to read reports of an 86 year old woman in Monaghan being raped in her own home and that Lorraine White, who was murdered in Kilkenny, died of massive internal injuries after being brutally raped.

The lack of sexual assault treatment units in Donegal meant one woman had to make a ten hour round trip without eating, drinking or showering. I can't possibly understand how horrific that journey could have been.

These stories shock and sadden me and they make me really, really angry. The Women's Movement in Ireland was instrumental in campaigning for legislation to deal with the crime of rape and campaigning for rape within marriage to be recognised as a crime. Perhaps, it's time for the new generation of feminists in Ireland to deal with these disturbing figures and get active to change these attitudes. Sexual violence is an uncomfortable thing to talk about, it's emotional just reading these reports of events, but we have to face up to it.

Disclaimer: I'd like to point out that the lack of discussion about the male victims of sexual violence is not intentional but the Red C poll only dealt with female victims of sexual violence. Most of the stories from my online trawl through Irish newspapers dealt with women victims not men. Sexual violence is all about power and the unequal distribution of power among two individuals. Sexual Violence is horrific, no matter what the gender of the victim.

BOOK REVIEW

The Last Free Cat

Review by clodagh



"If only I'd never met Feela and taken her in, and carried on with my normal life - gone to college, had a career, accepted the world I lived in without a complaint - and been content within those limits. Even as I thought these things, they frightened me... to live in ignorance the way I lived before we'd begun our desperate adventure - that was to be a human pet in the hands of the Viafara Corporation".

In the not-too-distant future, England is practically a police state, big business rules and worst of all, if you want a pet cat you need to be really rich because one multinational corporation owns the rights to this animal: that's the premise of *The Last Free Cat*.

Our heroine, Jade, is a naïve middle class kid who finds a cat (Feela) outside her house and this turns her world upside down. She totally trusts the government and what she sees on TV, but one incident causes her to question it, a chain reaction is set off and she soon discovers just how corrupt and rotten the whole fucking system is.

Soon Jade is on an adventure where she discovers people power when the chips are down: in her neighbourhood and in what I would call the activist community (referred to in this book as "The Free Cats League"). When she's not bashing cops, she's at free parties, "borrowing" vehicles to escape to Ireland and inspiring protests.

Early on in the book Jade loses everything and I was expecting a happy ending where everything was resolved instead she loses *absolutely* everything but learns to be strong, keeps her integrity and stays positive. This was a great book, (maybe a little bit cringe-worthy at times in the teen-romance type passages). Get it and corrupt the teenager in your life!

THE LAST FREE CAT by Jon Blake, 2008
Hodder Children's Books ISBN: 978-0-340-94474-5

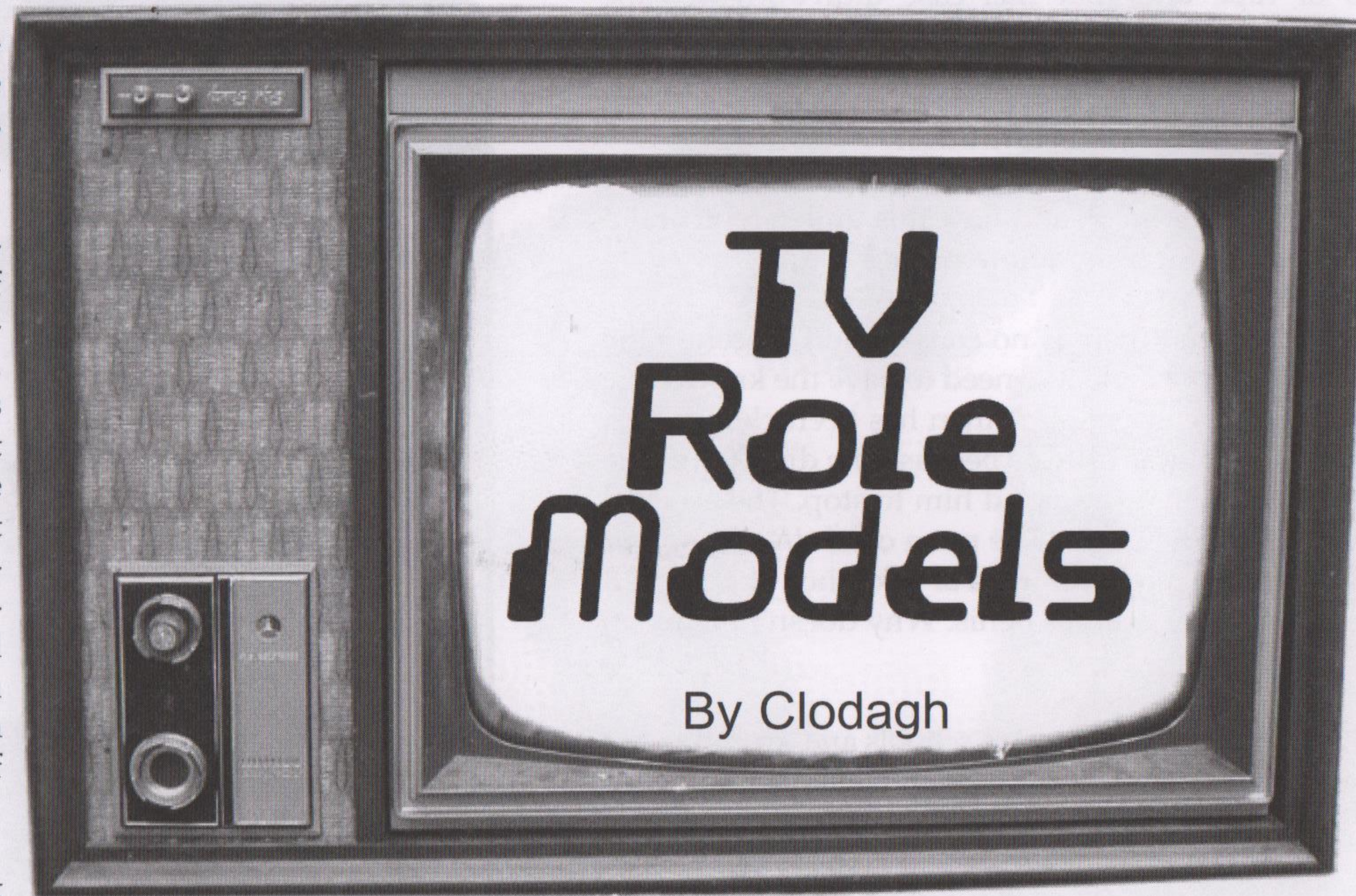
A light-hearted view of television and popular culture might be that it transcends boundaries of class, and it helps you relax. It's escapism and a natural progression of expression in the high-tech world we live in. Another approach is that it's a capitalist tool, brainwashing the masses, teaching what behaviour is "acceptable", promoting cultural hegemony. (I'll be up front with you and let you know I'm in the latter school of thought.)

I've been thinking recently of how lucky and privileged I am to be literate and have been exposed to a wide range of books and 'zines that made me question the status quo through the punk-scene, third level education and political circles.

In considering this I've also been wondering how my opinions would be different if I hadn't had these experiences. Would I have been able to inform myself and learn about feminism if my only source for messages about gender was TV and the mainstream media?

The idea of positive female role models in popular culture is important because the mainstream media is an insidious force that makes its way into your subconscious no matter how hard you try to avoid it, shaping your opinions without you even noticing!

While I was growing up and I came across a female character on TV or in a film, it made me feel happy. I wouldn't have been able to articulate the sentiment at the time, but I was happy to know there could be many definitions of "girl" - that included being active and smart and funny - not just the love interest. Even if the character was those things I didn't identify with, at least I could use her as a yard stick - this is the kind of girl I wasn't but there's almost always something in a character that you



There weren't many Irish produced programmes on television in the times I'm speaking of, but Bosco stands out now as the inquisitive, genderfucking hand puppet.

can warm to in the spectrum from "goody-two-shoes" to "wicked witch of the west"! But isn't it pathetic that I am grateful to some faceless multimedia corporation for being so kind as to include a significant character who is female and white that I can identify with? What were the non-white/disabled/queer TV addicts in the mid 80s-90s supposed to do?

How many kids cartoons have a brainy guy, a cool rebellious guy, a leader guy and a woman - like a woman is a type of personality you can have?

I don't think it's just my bad memory, there was a genuine dearth of positive female role models when I was younger and watching too much TV. Here's a few examples and some of the lessons I learned:

Anne of Green Gables - pursuing your own dreams is just as important as love (and sometimes you can have both), female friends are important.

Little House on the Prairie - a woman's place is in the home. Pa got depressed, never to recover after the boy-child died. So it would appear that father's love their male children more. (Obviously I don't think that any more!)

Jem - women could be successful in business and still be nice people (Jerrica ran a record label and a foster home for girls). Sometimes men can have the weird condition (usually seen amongst women) where he [inexplicably] can't tell the difference between his girlfriend and the superhero that he's falling for who only shows up to save the day whenever she's not around.

Maid Marion and her Merry Men - a woman can be the leader of a gang.

Press Gang - A woman can be a success in a traditional men's industry. In it Lynda Day is editor of a magazine for young people.

How was Margot in Shoe People or Smurfette of The Smurfs supposed to get a word in edge-ways considering they were outnumbered at least 5 to 1? The message was clear to girls and boys watching: male is normal, female is "other".

I often found myself identifying more with the hero than the often insignificant female character. I would like to think the writers of children's TV programmes these days can push the boundaries a bit and make a few more characters female.

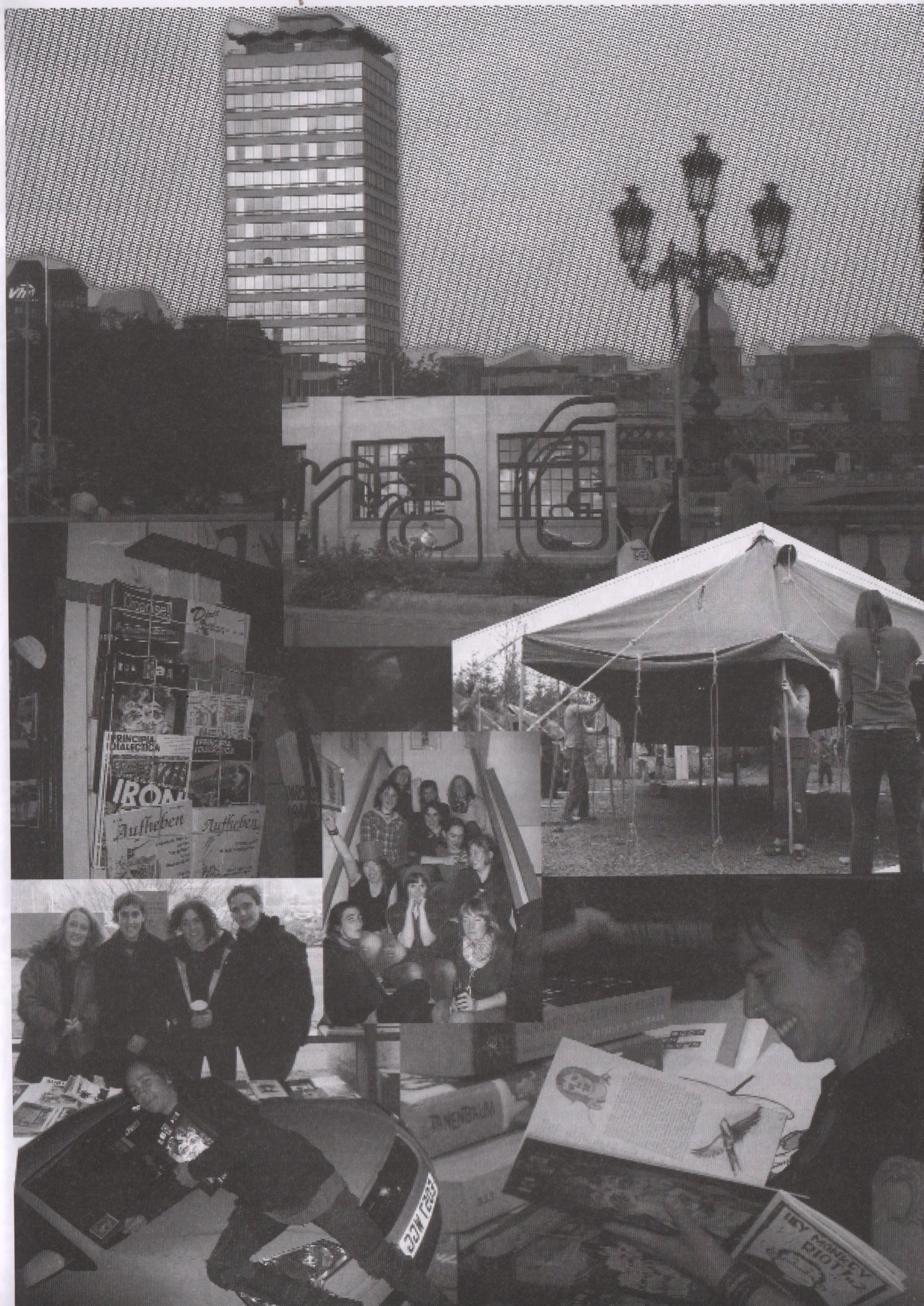
There weren't many Irish produced programmes on television in the times I'm speaking of, but Bosco stands out now as the inquisitive, genderfucking hand puppet. I mean, when I think of Bosco, I consider him male but he did a few feminine traits - the voice, long hair; the clothes too (smock over denim pants) were fairly gender neutral.

In terms of Superheroes, certainly there was the Bionic Woman (originally introduced as the six million

dollar man's love interest), Shera (He-man's twin sister) Super Girl (superman's cousin) appearing now and then but they always seemed a poor imitation of the male counterpart who came along first. I don't, however, remember a male version on TV of Wonder Woman - the all-American super hero whose bullet proof bracelets and other super powers were equally as incredible as her strapless swimming costume - how could she run and fight in it?

I can safely say that I wouldn't have stumbled upon anarcha-feminism if it had been left up to the idiot box in the corner of the sitting room. But strong girl characters do have a positive role to play for all kids. Comics, books, pop stars all influenced this woman (born in the 1970s). Anti-heroines in rock and roll, literature and real life played a more significant part.

Putting a brick through the TV is one easy way to keep the negative influence out of your life. A suggestion and a challenge for anarchists, feminists, libertarians, dreamers everywhere is to make y/our ideas attractive and accessible to everyone. Even those with square-eyes and a very short attention span.



Rag Recommends

Shonagh

Active Listening

The biggest value that people get out of counselling is being heard. Very often, although we have problems, we also have the answers to them - that is, if only we could sort through everything, face up to things and find a starting point for action. It's not often that we get the chance to talk out our problems, but when we do, we benefit endlessly from being listened to. Active listening is a skill that everyone can work on. It is the ability to really listen, to clarify, to attempt to understand and to reflect back what has been said in a non-judgemental way. Listeners are not expected to solve problems. Indeed they cannot. Listeners do not need to share their own experience of similar issues, but should maintain their focus on the speaker. Encouragement and reflection on the strength and value of the speaker is also helpful. Next time someone comes to you with a problem, don't attempt to offer solutions, instead, see if you are able to listen. You may be of more help than you could ever have thought possible.

Hilary

Ditching Binaries

It constantly amazes me when I hear people resorting to dichotomies to explain the world around them...intellectual / creative - rational / emotional - logical / illogical - black / white - male / female - presence / absence - civilised / savage. Viewing the world in binary oppositions or split into two opposites is a characteristic of western-derived thought. It perpetuates power structures and we are socialised into thinking this way... But this framework is limiting; things are much more complicated and complementary. It's destructive; usually one way of being, thinking or feeling is prioritised or dominates over another. It's oppressive; for example women are usually associated with the believed inferior traits of one side of the dichotomy. And it's controlling; people are shaped to think and feel this way.

Switch focus next time your intellectual activity has you feeling stale and do something creative. Rage can be harnessed and used in a rational way to attack oppressive power structures.

Aoife

Ask open-ended questions.

Then stop to listen. People, when invited to talk, can be a lot more bloody interesting than you expect. You already know what you think yourself (well, most of the time!), so when you are with friends, ask open ended questions 'why do you think that?', 'what choices are there?' and 'explain that to me' are a good start.

Throw a street party with your neighbours.

Cheesy bunting, kids' films projected onto a wall, a raffle, dinner outside on the street with Betty and George ... keeping neighbourhood communities alive. I've lived in my new place for just a week and what a welcome their annual party was!

Olives

They're an acquired taste. Start acquiring and trust me, it'll be worth it. The trees are elegant and beautiful, the oil is delish and learning how they're produced is really interesting.

BBC Radio 4 (on the internet)

Documentaries, comedy series, dramas and current affairs with a bit of thought. Full of podcasts that'll keep you awake on your way to work in the morning. If you're not a radio listener - this might just turn you.

Niav

Spinning

So if you had asked me 12 months ago what Spinning was I would have replied that maybe it was where someone twirled around and around until they got dizzy but I would have been wrong. My recommendation is Spin Classes. Spinning involves cycling on a stationary bike while you vary the resistance and your pedalling speed. As the instructor shouts out instructions, you have to imagine you're frantically pedalling up mountains, down hills and sprinting down straight roads. Spinning burns a lot of calories, is really good aerobic exercise and most importantly, lots of fun! Okay, so after the first class I thought I was going to collapse and was glad that the Dublin Fire Ambulance is conveniently located across the road from the Markievicz centre but after a few weeks I'm really enjoying it. Considering the state of our Irish weather, it's nice to be able to get on a bike and not have to worry about the rain, wind or puddles.

Clodagh

Susie Long was a socialist, home-birth advocate, environmental campaigner, defender of women's rights and I consider myself very lucky to have met her. She became a public figure in 2007 after writing a letter to a well-known radio show. She wrote not because she was dying of bowel cancer but because she was disgusted with the health service. As she was a public patient on a waiting list for months before being diagnosed, her cancer had spread. She believed it wasn't right to pay extra to skip the queue, that decent health care should be a right for all citizens.

As there is no hospice in Kilkenny, Susie spent her last days in Dublin. There's a sweet story of her comforting a cleaning lady who was upset because all the patients kept dying. A voluntary group in Kilkenny inspired by Susie are fundraising to build a hospice there.

www.susielonghospice.com

Marianne

'Half of a Yellow Sun' by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a book set during the Biafran war in Nigeria. It's a fictional story based in an accurate historical context. Different characters help us explore different aspects of Nigerian society at this time. The political discussions between university professors give insight into the ideals behind the Igbo tribe's struggle for an independent state and also the effect of colonization on Nigerian society. Ugwu, the houseboy of a professor, struggles with the contrast between his home in a rural village and the life he lives among the wealthy urban Biafrans. Richard is an Englishman with a great interest in Igbo culture, who eventually considers himself to be Biafran. Through him many topics around the mistrust of white people are dealt with, as is the extent to which an outsider could ever belong in this tribal struggle. Another major character is Olanna, lover of Odenigbo, one of the professors. As the war progresses she moves from middle class comfort to dire poverty. Through her voice we hear the effects of the violence and starvation caused by the closing of the borders and the prevention of food aid from reaching Biafra. The author grew up in a society still affected by this struggle. Both her grandfathers died in the war and their stories as well as those of many people she spoke to are woven throughout the book. A great read.

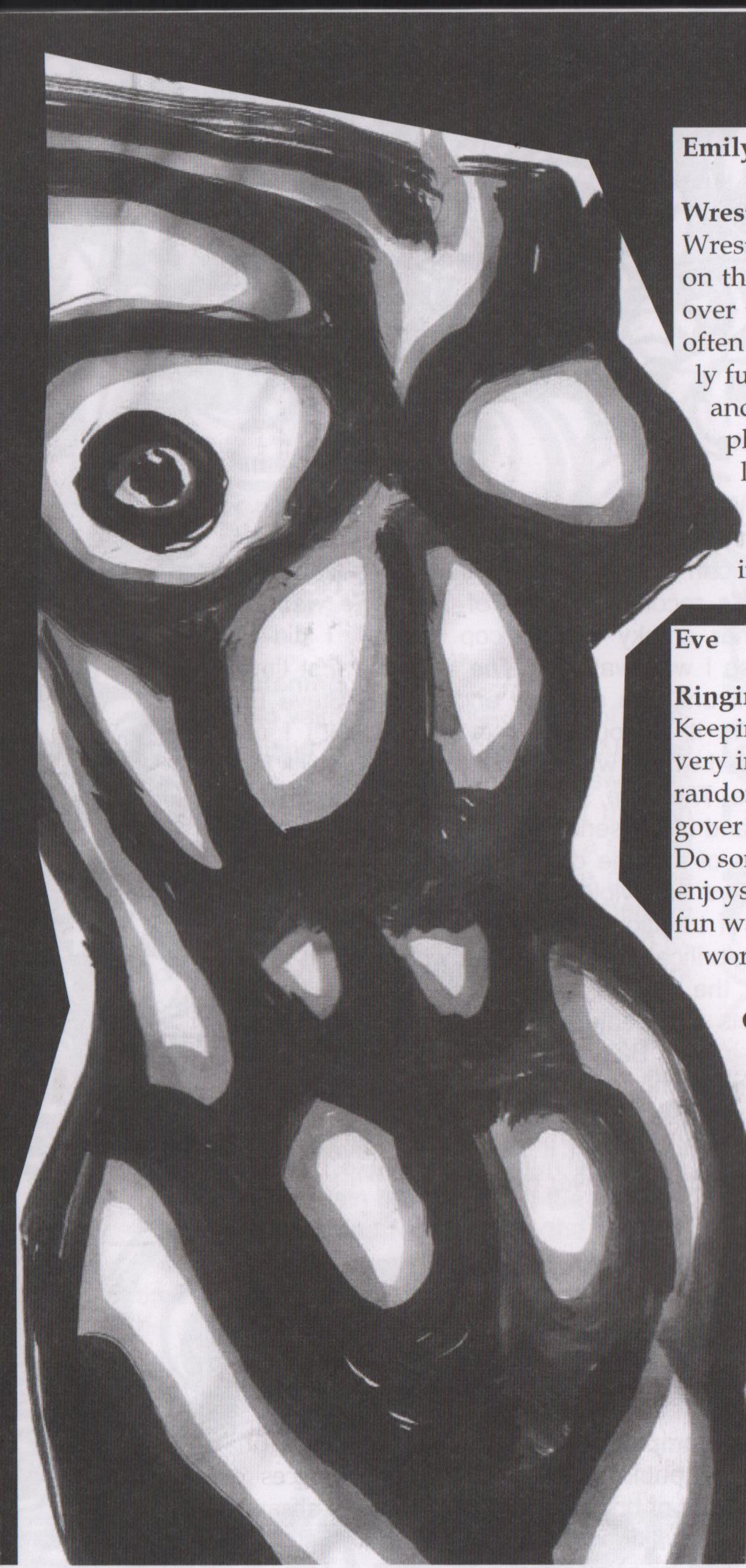


image by sarah

Emily

Wrestling

Wrestling is one of my favourite things to do with my best-loved people. Also, climbing on them in general, wrapping myself around them upside down, side ways, crawling over their shoulders and under their legs, great stuff! I've always been rambunctious, often indulging in terrific physical adventures at gigs, parties and get-togethers. It's really fun to have a high energy roll around with total disregard for preserving your body and whatever stuff happens to be in the vicinity - that sometimes includes other people (headwrecker?... mischief!). Recently I have had to remind myself that I'm no longer a super-healing ten year old, but sometimes bruises and scratches remind me that I'm young, able-bodied, tough and having loads of outrageous, ridiculous and childish fun. So I recommend wrestling. That, or take up drumming... or fisting...

Eve

Ringling in sick to work:

Keeping in mind that you don't owe your boss anything and that your mental health is very important I highly recommend calling in sick to work. The best sickies are taken randomly when you need a bit of 'me time' rather than as a result of being too hungover to go to work. Have a nice lie in, read a good book and have a leisurely breakfast. Do something fun like going to the seaside. One ex-workmate of mine particularly enjoys going to morning screenings at the cinema. [Disclaimer: while calling in sick is a fun way to vent your frustration at the capitalist work system it is not a substitute for work place organising]

Cycling holidays in Ireland: Load up the panniers and head for Roscommon.

Learning to fix bike punctures: I once thought that learning to fix my bike would make me a better person. Several mended tubes later and I can say that it hasn't - but at least I can get the tire back into the wheel now.

Books:

- + *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* by Marina Sitrin (Editor);
- + *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James
- + *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker.

the rag mail bag

Dear RAG,

I've gone from spending a lot of time with people who might label themselves "libertarian", "anarchist", "working class" or at the very least "conscious" to spending a lot of time (working) with people who are more likely to define themselves in terms of the hurling or football prowess of the county they happened to be born in. And nothing wrong with that!

So you can imagine how my jaw goes slack at the occasional casual racist remark regarding "non-nationals" (a vague term which I gather means anyone who is not white-irish, white-english, or white-any other country that irish people ever emigrated to), how my eyes glaze over during discussions about what celebrity is dating some millionaire footballer or how my heart sinks when a colleague (with whom I've had many the bitchy chat about middle management) changes utterly at the prospect of promotion or when promotion is bestowed upon them.

That's how the Irish working class looks to me. And it makes me want to shuffle away - interacting only with those who are already converted. Does that make me a bad anarchist? How can I make a difference?

Despondently yours.

Dear RAG,

It's hard to explain to people just how little time you have when you've got a baby and are also working full-time outside the home. It's incredibly really how you just don't have time for *anything* anymore - even those small things that don't take much time at all, like watering your plants or checking your email, just never get done anymore because they never make it near the top of the priority list.

I had wanted to write an article for RAG about how un-ideal modern capitalist society is when it comes to raising children. About what few and what stark choices you seem to have when it comes to how you are going to organise your life with a child.

I think that there has to be better ways to organise society and family structure so that childcare and work in the home are understood and valued and fully integrated with work outside the home; so that looking after children and housework is also shared more and becomes the responsibility of more than a tiny family unit in its own disjoint little box, trying to do everything itself.

Ironically I haven't had the time to write the article and will have to make do with submitting this short letter! One of the reasons there are so few women involved in revolutionary politics is because women still tend to hold the primary responsibility for looking after children and home and if they have kids they simply have very little time. But even in a situation where a couple share childcare responsibilities evenly, time is still precious. I am beginning to really understand the importance of making political events as child-friendly as possible. If I only get to hang out with my baby two days a week then on those days I would like to be able to bring him along with me to any event I attend.

Yours for revolution,
Deirdre

Dear RAG

I recently had a conversation with a male friend who proceeded to lament the woes of falling prey to attractive women. He spoke about his experience of having some women he was attracted to use him to do things for them. He also spoke about seeing female friends use their "beauty" to manipulate male admirers. Surprisingly, the women he was talking about had all been feminists. One was an environmental activist, anarchist and feminist and the other he described as "a raging feminist". He had watched as these women repeated this behaviour with numerous men. The thought occurred to

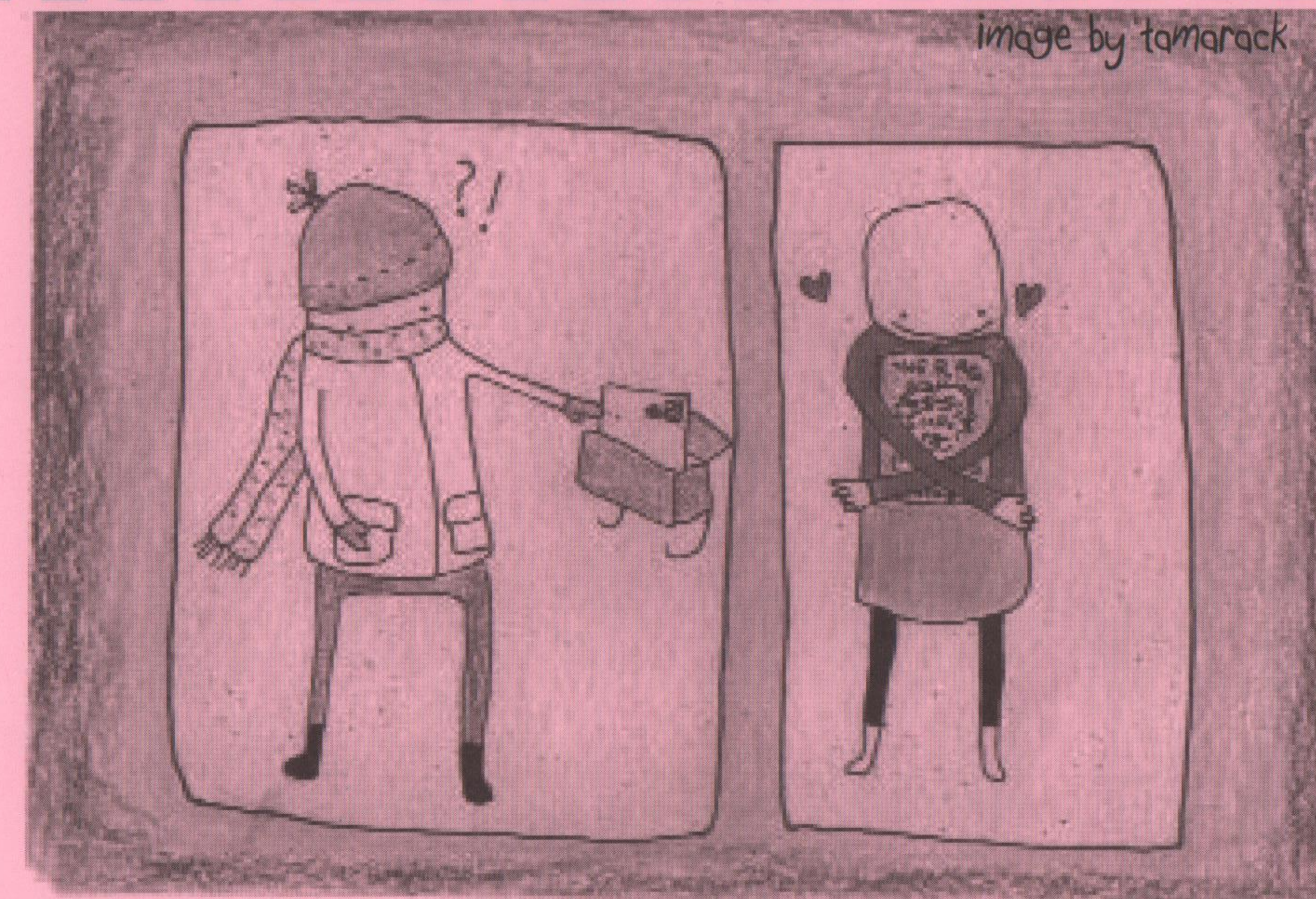


image by tamarack

my friend, that maybe women confused manipulation with power. Then he wondered if they actually realised they were doing it. So, now my question to you, the reader, is do you think that you do this? have you ever been guilty of these accusations? if so, it's time for a new plan of action.

After discussion of this topic and me admitting that yes I have been a manipulator in the past (I'm sorry Ronan 'O Leary...I was only 16), I expressed something about male behaviour that I had experienced and disliked. I found that many men that I had come into contact with had objectified me...ya ya ya I know...that's a given in "patriarchal society", but I mean my "leftie" friends! I'd found that quite a few men I knew who were unhappy, feeling unloved, lonely or unwanted had made me feel like a replacement wife, girlfriend or mother. Now, aside from the replacement mother bit, this objectification was often sexual. I was being used by the men in question so that they could fill the role of pursuer or estranged lover or Don Juan or whatever. They honestly couldn't care about what was going on with me, like my father being sick and having family issues, they just wanted someone to indulge their fantasies.

Which brings me to the conclusion; as progressive people, shouldn't we take personal experiences like these, ask if we have ever done these things, remember how it felt to be on the receiving end of such bullshit and not feckin do it to each other? So, I hope as you read, you think (as I'm thinking right now) about how to be a little bit more caring, a little nicer and a little more respectful of everyone. Especially your friends.

Anon.

Dear RAG,

I freakin hate kelloggs! When I was a child kelloggs cornflakes was a treat in our house and I'd savour every bite, but now one of their cereals, Special K, has caused a level of disgust that no happy childhood memories can overcome. Have you ever looked at the label on a box of red berry Special K? I have. It's 30% sugar!! Even the normal Special K tastes sugary. Their advertising of women being so virtuous by passing by a tray of biscuits makes me sick. Fuck that, eat the fuckin biscuits. I hate their stupid swimsuit ads coming up to summer, telling women their insecurities will fade away when the weight drops off from eating these little sugary pieces of cardboard. And not content with having the breakfast cereal market pretty much under their thumb, they decide to go for the lunch market too! Pretending it's healthy and nutritious to eat their products for two meals a day! That you will lose weight on their 'eat two bowls of kelloggs and you'll drop a dress size' campaign. You'll get malnourished more like. Fuck you kelloggs and your manipulating ways. Put down the box people, eat something really good for you, some toast, muesli, porridge, make soup, eat salad, cook a big proper meal. Have I mentioned that I hate kelloggs???

Choking on my cornflake,

Friend of RAG

Dear RAG,

Why is the milk I buy always gone off despite the fact it's still in date?

Kind regards,
Clare