



GENDER AGENDA

MICHAELMAS 2014

BAD

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# GENDER AGENDA/ GENDER AGENDA/

gender agenda is the cusu women's campaign zine; a space for writing about feminism, gender, sexuality.

we place ourselves explicitly in the history of girl 'zines, little self-published booklets detailing women's experiences of their bodies, politics and lives. we also see the mass produced pamphlet as of real symbolic importance, we should all be able to publish our ideas, complaints and yearnings, and we should all be able to read them.

this issue is about 'bad' – being bad, bad allies, bad girls and good girls, breaking rules, breaking down, fucking shit up and feeling guilty.

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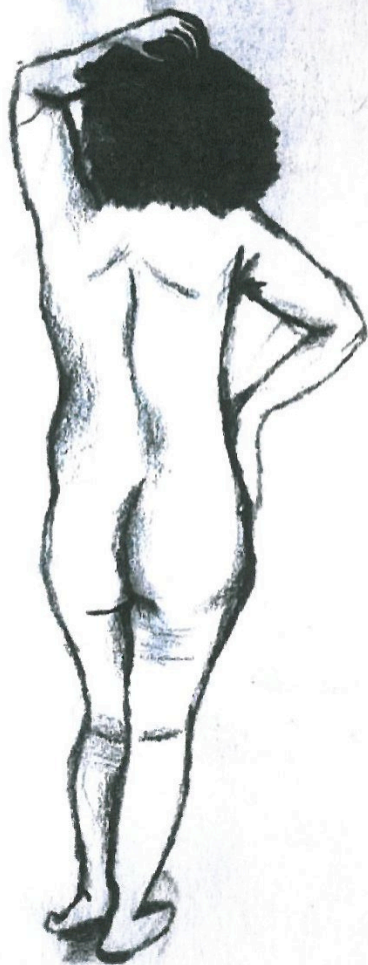
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"BAD ALLIES" - amelia horgan

"THIS HOUSE BELIEVES" - martha pw



**WE ARE NOT  
YOUR MUSE**



- amy dark



"BAD"

~Daisy Hughes

I spend a lot of my time at Cambridge feeling "bad".

Bad at work. Bad at activism. Bad at feminism. Bad at being a functioning human being who has time to call their mum and wash their hair.

And I've spent a lot of time recently trying to work out why.

I think part of it is the obvious: everyone is so good at everything here that you can't help but feel inadequate. People in Cambridge don't just play piano, they are concert pianists. They don't just do journalism, they run their own up-and-coming blog and write for the Guardian on the side.

But it's more than that.

There's something about the way this place has taught me to think about time – or perhaps the way in which I've come to think about time since I came here, I'm not sure – that means that each time I am doing *something* I am feeling bad for not doing *something else*.

Another part has to do with the absurd workload here, but again, it's more than that.

There's something in the way the sense of responsibility manifests itself that leads to this perpetual state of feeling "bad".

I've seen this particularly with the Women's Campaign. Because of the nature of the things we campaign on, the women involved feel such dedication to the work we do that its perceived significance makes it the utmost priority.

Surely speaking out for reproductive justice or against gendered oppression *has* to be more important than a weekly essay... or that coffee you planned with your friend... or that extra hour's sleep? People have to actively set aside time for "self-care," as though it is just another extra-curricular activity – and that is exactly what it has become, for many of us.

And it doesn't help when people on the outside – all those backseat activists out there – tell you on top of this that you're doing a bad job. Not only is it frustrating because a better job could be done if these people took ownership of their criticism and actively

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shared in the “responsibility”, but it is exhausting as you’re already pretty convinced you’re doing a bad job – or, at the very least, one that isn’t good enough.

We need to find a way around this. We need to find a way to make time for all the things, including ourselves. Or maybe we just need to find a way to not feel bad when we can’t make the time. Maybe we need to reclaim self-care as not a radical negation of doing “the things” but as a valuable “thing” in and of itself.

But I’m pretty bad at that too.

## Note to Self

~ Anon.

Be ragingly political, be unapologetically loud and erotic and sexual and human. Be intense and in love with many people at once and together, far apart and in different places, breathe the air around you and become a part of it, smoke your cigarette in sensual delight next to a woman who nuzzles at your neck while you lie back and

Release. Be ready to feel anything and everything: feel, touch, taste, listen to soft voices whispering dirty things in your ear as a hand slides up to your throat, down your leg, a tongue unleashing along your jaw, the sound of heavy, hot breath mixed with the soft melody of the speakers blurring in the background.

You are free to feel, feel without guilt, free to smile, free to fight, free to finally remove yourself from that emotion that you exist doesn't exist, that emotion that only intensifies when he's there, that deep, threatening pit- you are free to fill it with flowers and hearts and joy and life until it's brimming and glistening with glittering colours and

You

Are

Happy.

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## *Visions*

~Katy Lewis Hood

Held in eyeless view:

man of the house stands  
below burning roof,  
below hair flickering ember-  
orange,  
waiting for phoenixes,  
neither hatch nor cry—

lock hatches, cries un-  
clicked metal,  
milk skins bubble,  
beams splinter like  
hot glass,  
mirror dances, flashes

shattered gaze about  
sharp as new sight,  
sharp to split  
canvas, crumble  
pedestal, halve  
a tooth-hidden smile.

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Edged in peerless look:  
man of the house stands,  
pulling straw from his  
dusted-down,  
cinder-glanced,  
gaze-caught  
chest.

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**Sugar and spice and all things nice.**

~Emily Johnstone

Sugar and spice and all things nice: that's what little girls  
are made of?

What are little boys made of?

Frogs and snails and puppy-dogs' tails,

That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?

Sugar and spice and all things nice,

That's what little girls are made of.

It's not rocket science to realise that most innocent  
seeming nursery rhymes actually have rather sinister  
origins. Sadly the most famous example of this, Ring O  
Ring O Roses, is probably not about the plague and was  
instead a way to get around a Protestant ban on dancing  
(QI eat your heart out). Nonetheless, subject matters vary  
from murderous monarchs to Viking attacks.

Thankfully most such grisly topics are no longer relevant  
to our modern lives... apart from that of the above rhyme,  
which lives on in society's tiresome 'boys will be boys'  
attitude.

Even before birth, a mother expecting a boy will be  
praised for his future footballing talent rather than offered  
sympathy for the fact that he's kicking her in the kidneys.  
Come primary school and the real divisions begin to  
show. Whilst the boys enjoy rough play, girls stick to more

demure activities, such as skipping and gymnastics. Restrictive gendered uniforms probably play some part in this (have you ever tried playing British Bulldog in a summer dress and sandals?) but the sad fact is that by the age of 5 or 6, girls are already aware that it is not their place to be 'bad'.

This is a trend which does not exist solely outside the classroom – in fact it flourishes there. For the most part, this learned obedience serves girls well; it's no secret that they tend to outperform their male peers throughout compulsory years of schooling. After all, an attitude of self-discipline and compliance perfectly suits exams with rigid mark schemes and syllabuses that can be learned by heart.

However, there is growing concern that the modesty and risk aversion for which girls are rewarded in their early schooling years proves to be their downfall later in life. The first hurdle is usually university. Female applications are still on the up – there were 31,000 more female than male UCAS applicants in 2014. Yet for the first time in their lives young people are faced with exams for which there are no obvious hoops to jump through; they have to think for themselves.

In 2009, 27% of male Cambridge students achieved a First in their Finals, compared to only 16.9% of girls. This is a problem that the university is aware of, having introduced a gender based analysis of examination reports in 2007 to explain such irregularities in results. Sadly they have yet to



solve the answer to a mystery, which to me seems obvious.

More than forty years after the first Cambridge Colleges began to admit women the Tripos is still geared towards male candidates. It is an exam system which rewards risk taking and bold arguments, despite the fact that girls are discouraged from exhibiting such traits from a very young age.

Studies show that this gender difference does in fact reflect social learning, rather than inherent gender traits (Booth and Nolen 2012)... therefore it is something we can change.

The same study demonstrated that girls were slightly more able to take risks in single sex learning environments; however, I do not feel that this is an apt solution.

Neither is radically altering the nature of the Tripos so that it ceases to reward "writing like a boy". This would simply postpone the adverse consequences of learned risk aversion, which persist in working life.

As Melissa Benn of the Guardian wrote this year, 'talented, hard-working women often flounder in work because they haven't been taught to think or fight for themselves, psychologically, professionally, or financially.'

Arguably, the only real answer is to stop teaching girls that they're predisposed to good, compliant behaviour. Girls are not made of 'sugar, spice and all things nice' and the sooner our education system stops rewarding them for exhibiting submissive behaviour, the better. Because in the long run being 'bad', opinionated, and unafraid of risks more often than not pays off.

## **FACT: "Ben & Jerry's" Fixes the Broken Hearts of All Genders**

~Elspeth Davies

A friend of mine told me recently that he feels less "manly" when he reaches to the depths of the freezer for salvation in the form of a tub of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, something which, stereotypically, is an act of a heartbroken woman. The idea that a man has to worry about not conforming to gender stereotypes, when we are almost in the year 2015, both baffles and upsets me.

The stigma surrounding women doing things such as playing rugby, fixing the kitchen sink or becoming engineers is slowly diminishing in our country, although, admittedly, there is still work to be done. It appears to me that this problem today in the UK is bad for men too, and though this issue seems to receive less press, I have witnessed many normally liberal people struggle to come to terms with men doing typically female things such as baking, ballet dancing or being stay-at-home fathers. It struck me that there would be absolute outrage if I suggested that a woman's goal should be to get married, procreate and Hoover for the rest of her life; that is a gender stereotype that is simply unacceptable in today's society, and very rightly so. However, people are far less willing to agree with the idea that it is acceptable for men to cry, feel sensitive, not be physically strong, or to prefer flower arranging to weightlifting. Today many people fail

to realise how wrong it is that men, sometimes even subconsciously, feel the need to conform to their gender stereotype for the fear of being mocked.

This mocking usually involve phrases like as "man up" - presumably meaning that you should be conforming to the male gender stereotype that men are strong and that you should stop being so weak. Or maybe, you could tell someone to "stop being such a girl". Perhaps without even realising it, you have thus turned the word "girl", a term used to describe a young person of the female gender, into an insult. Without needing to stress how offensive this insult is, you are only strengthening the gender stereotype that men must be resilient, indeed, somewhat indestructible, or else they are not "manly".

Maybe everyone just needs to think a little more before they speak. Or maybe you could say that I am just too easily offended. My issue is that we will never be able to destroy traditional roles if comments like these continue to be perfectly acceptable. So whatever gender you associate yourself with, I hope you can enjoy drowning your sorrows in overpriced but infinitely delicious ice cream once in a while because, whether it conforms with social norms or not, we all need a little bit of Ben, a tad of Jerry and a lot of cookie dough flavoured ice cream in our lives.

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## The Dissection

~ H.C. Dallas

\*\*TW: description of surgery, scars\*\*

On tentative feet I walked down a cobbled street  
In quest of a sign that I knew I would find,  
Swinging and creaking,  
Above a smart black door.  
I entered.

The smell of blood and metal  
And acid made my nose wrinkle.  
I lay down on the table.

When they'd opened my chest you stood  
And took your notes and made your sketches  
Of this specimen on the wood.  
Then they closed me up with stitches.

Sometimes, when I lose my private war,  
I lift up my nightdress to see the scar.  
My fingers on it, tracing,  
Asking why I was deemed lacking.

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"I may not like what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it!"

free speech now!



\* Mx. is a gender-neutral title

HELLO  
my name is  
Mx\* HEGEMONY

So... we think this speaker event has some problems?

What? Shut up. This is nonsense. Nobody asked you for your opinion.

Sorry, we were just saying...

Nigel Farage\*\*

(\*\* or DSK, Julian Assange etc etc)

should be allowed to speak!

We're not stopping him, we just —



HE MUST SPEAK! I WILL DEFEND HIS RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH!

FREE SPEECH WARRIORS! DEFENDING THE PEOPLE WHO REALLY MATTER!

-sanna facey

## Untitled

~Cal

hey,

if you feel like a mess

would you care to leave some of your blood

to stain & scab

the dip of my collar bone?

i'll lend it to you some time

you can mount it

or give it heirloom to your family

and you can see that i am really a bird and let me really be a

tree

by filling it with dirt and planting a seed in there.

i'm smiling because i am thinking about how nothing is too

bad

when you can be reborn:

i want to be

an angel whose ribcage is showing

but not to say that that is how you should be,

rather just that you could just reach up and cut out my heart

if i do something wrong

or if you want to.

a canvas painted white in my neighbour's conservatory

with the sun turning the sea blue-brown

somehow

and in the light, a buried pin-hole camera wishes it could  
preserve something other than itself.

we've spoken since i wrote these stanzas  
and you say you don't feel like the birds or the trees or  
any  
thing

but considering what i was saying  
i still think the absolute truthlessness of us and all things  
(and us as all things)  
i still think it all makes sense.

if it is not 'us full of flowers'  
then maybe 'full of fantasies';  
it is hard to imagine a wedding bed without garlands  
even if we don't want to be married  
by words "too solid".

maybe i am hearing the patterns of the rain wrong  
but what it sounds like is that  
"the flowers will die if i keep them in my mouth too long"

## Monogamy

~Hannah Graham

The theme 'bad' leads fairly naturally to discussions of sex and sexuality: traditionally the realm of the bad, the naughty and the transgressive. Yet even in this supposedly transgressive arena, there are some boundaries we're taught not to cross, one of which is monogamy. "Do what you like in private." says society. "Of course, I'll do my best to 'slut-' or 'prude-shame' you for it, but whatever you do, you'd better not do it with more than one person."

Now, I'm not knocking monogamy as a choice for those that want it, but for a system so ingrained in our collective consciousness, so that for most people, monogamy is an unquestionable, automatic part of a sexual relationship, it has a lot of problems. For one thing, the institution of the monogamous couple is incredibly heteronormative. The celebrations around the UK's recent equal marriage act often overlooked the way that such acts can risk attempting to 'legitimise' queer relationships by making them look as much like straight relationships as possible. "It's ok everyone" they seem to be saying "you can have relationships just like us now!" Why should we want that? In my experience, once I took one step away from the traditional fairy tale dream and realised that my Prince Charming might turn out to be a Princess, it was easier to take further steps away from conventional ideas about relationships. Attempts to subsume queer

relationships into the framework of traditional relationships may aim at equality, but what they actually achieve is further control of everyone's sexuality.

The patriarchal baggage attached to monogamous relationships is fairly obvious. The idea of owning another person's sexuality is often explicitly put forward as a romantic one: how many songs or romantic dramas use "I'm yours" as a statement of ultimate love? It only takes a little consideration to see how disturbing this is in the context of thousands of years of control of women's bodies within relationships. If we leave that context aside, the logic of fidelity starts to look kind of strange. Hardly anyone would think that just because I have a friend who I play squash with, I can't play squash with anyone else; hardly anyone thinks that because I have a friend who I love and care about, I can't love or care about anyone else. Yet when sex enters the picture, this strange exclusivity has to come with it. Touch one person's genitals, our culture says, and now these are the only genitals you may touch, until you decide you're not touching those genitals, and very probably not talking to that person, any more.

The way we fetishise monogamous relationships can also devalue other kinds of love. There are friends who I love fiercely, committedly and passionately, who I have often loved more than anyone I've been fucking at the time, yet for some reason culture insists that the relationship that involves sex must be the most

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important one. Equally there are friends who I have fucked, and loved, without wanting to pretend that they're more important than other friends, or that I want to confine myself solely to them.

Moving away from an insistence on monogamy can, in my view, only be a good thing. It makes greater room for relationships which are queer in a number of ways, for romantic relationships which do not involve sex; for relationships involving multiple partners; for relationships which are negotiated between the individuals involved and conducted on their terms, instead of imposed on them by Disney films and marriage laws and their parent's expectations. It allows us to accept the great value of friendship, accepting that people who don't want a romantic relationship may share an intense bond and may wish to adopt some of the traditional aspects of romantic relationships such as living together long-term or raising children together. Furthermore, it enables those who do want to be monogamous to do so in conditions of mutual respect and consent, moving away from patriarchal ideas of ownership and fidelity.

## Some thoughts on fatness & concern trolling

~Jessica Wing

Reading an article about fat fashion got me thinking about social and cultural perceptions of fat people - especially fat women. The article I have in mind interviewed two or three bloggers and featured photographs of them modelling their own looks. What struck me first - as always strikes me when I see a photo of a fat woman who is not consciously trying to make herself look smaller - was the *image* of those fat bodies clad in bright colours, unapologetically occupying the space in the photographs, assuming the same poses as any size 8 model might. It is something none of us see enough. We see so few of such images that when we do, it is as though we are being *challenged*.

Discussion of fat body politics has remained so basic and gained so little traction within queer and feminist circles that it might suffice to write purely about the tensions involved in a picture of a confident fat woman being printed in a glossy magazine. But what I care more about is *why* conversation has not amounted to more than that. I do not believe that individuals and small groups are not talking, blogging, tweeting about their experiences of fatness. Absolutely, they are, and those individuals are how I began to find my voice. Rather, media portrayal and baseless socially sanctioned opinions about fat people drown us out in various ways, resulting in no clear community or

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network and no on-going dialogue that we can build on and expand.

What struck me after the images of those fat women was the comment section of the article. None of us are strangers to those. As expected, several argument threads had erupted chiefly concerning the *health* of those fashion bloggers - this comes as no surprise to anyone. But what I want to focus on is that these comments had nothing to do with the subject of the article itself - they had merely picked up on the women's fatness and proceeded to parrot glib advice - lose weight - you're a strain on the NHS - you ate yourself into this mess - you made terrible decisions - you get the idea. We have a name for this: concern trolling, which is the practice of pretending to be concerned about someone's wellbeing in order to silence and delegitimise them - often, funnily enough, ignoring the effect this "concern" might have on that person's *mental* health, which obviously, is not as important as the size of their backside.

Viewing these comments, I realised fully the reality of the detrimental effect that concern trolling had on discussions of experiences of fatness. At any point that a fat person might want to write an article about - for example - navigating the fashion industry as a fat person, any constructive discussion about that person's experiences is immediately shut down: discussion is not

allowed to get more complex than mock-concern about heart disease.

With this in mind I've listed off the top of my head a few things I'd like to see discussed within queer and feminist spaces (encompassing and foregrounding narratives of fatness beyond the experiences of a relatively able-bodied white cisgender woman). There is so much more to be said and this brief list is only a beginning.

what it means to be 'fat-positive'  
representations of fat bodies in fat-positive art  
the kinds of fat distribution that are considered socially acceptable  
media portrayal of fatness & stereotyping  
healthcare gatekeeping and fatness  
interactions between race, class, gender, disability and fatness

**"It's not about your freedom of fucking speech."**

~ Jasmine Hackett

**\*\*TW: mention of rape, harassment, homophobia, transphobia, class privilege\*\***

It's not about your freedom of fucking speech.

where are you every day when white people's platform for freedom of expression is prioritised over that of black people?

where are you when gay people told they can 'do what they want in the privacy of their own homes'?

where are you when women are deluged with threats of rape and murder for daring to use twitter or facebook to establish a platform for their feminism?

where are your efforts to preserve the sanctity of debate when women's voices are ignored in supervisions and in the workplace and in parliament?

where are you when people can't come to Cambridge, the university that forbids its students from getting jobs, because their family can't afford to live without their income?

why aren't you outraged when trans folk are literally denied the platform to EXIST, even by people calling themselves 'feminists'?

where were you when a Cambridge student was suspended for 7 terms for his involvement in a protest? Does protest not conform to your comfortable little ideal of what freedom of speech looks like?

is your love of freedom of speech only applicable to white cis men in dinner jackets prowling round a room crowned by college crests?

why are you protecting the protected?

why can't you see that, for us, these issues are not motions for your debates? They are real. They make us shout and they make us angry and they make us protest and they make us cry and they make us poor and they get us in trouble and they get us injured and they get us raped but most of all they are ours and not yours to debate in a room overlooked by pictures of dead white men.

and you will cry BUT MY FREEDOM OF SPEECH again and again because you aren't used to being systematically denied a voice. You don't understand.

poor you.

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CALL ME MEDUSA

FOR MY MONSTROSITY IS NOT

MINE TO BEAR

BUT YOURS TO FEAR

*- amy clark*

Rhoads Cannon

*in his own words*

~Joey Frances

the phenomenon,  
proud citizen of a free society,  
unique repository of insights and skill-  
sets:

a deeper explanation  
in my generation's future legacy.

I am

singular and unique  
devoid of excessive  
concrete.

Although not comprehensive, by any means  
infused with the ability and the resolve to mine life to  
the fullest.

I also appreciate

Me: analyzing individuals is an important facet of  
history

In my spare time, I enjoy fly-fishing,  
competitive archery, playing the bagpipes,  
travel, macro-level individual  
affairs, barriers, timely barbwire impact, shrink-wrapped  
discipline technology, a substantive platform, an acute  
specific lens, The Fall of the Berlin Wall and more.

I have a firm grasp  
global energy  
security issues

I feel

the urgency of unity  
and focus of purpose  
intensity of my regions  
key to comprehending and anticipating

the impact

I am poised

to make a contribution and seek a venue

for

my profound,  
unique, refined  
and  
rigorous institutions.

In my life pursuits, I intend to further my world  
perspective and skill-sets.

I am well prepared to make extraordinary and  
significant contributions,

This reality has shaped the 'stage-set' of  
the world, my sense of empathy, humanity and  
world community. I believe the speed of the  
world trends towards germane often virulent  
present undertaking(s).

I recommend my perspective and  
horizons well done.

Addressing underscores knowledge.

I am a stability and future scope capable of Empire-  
building, and I await hearing from you.

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## Si: a prose poem

~Adam Napier

I looked down between my legs and saw a face. There he was stark as ought in the toilet bowl, shimmering in the piss-rippling water. Them eyes unblinking as he tried to snatch a glimpse of I-don't-know-what. I put on my dressing gown, tied it with a figure of eight, before plungering him out. He was beardy, catalogue-model material and dripped on my tiles, looking like you do when you've been in the bath too long. 'I'm Poseidon,' he said. 'But feel free to call me Si.' 'Where's your trident?' I asked. And you don't want to know what he said back to me. We trundled downstairs, he plonking his webbed feet on my coffee table while I clipped the kettle on. The sofa was up to the eyes all messy with tea-soggy biscuit crumbs by the time he'd finished. But I didn't really mind and settled in next to him, using his mossy armpit hair as a not-too-unpleasant pillow. His soon-to-be-ex-wife (divorce pending) was on the telly, gaffer-taped to a rustic throne on stage in a white-bright studio that was chock-a-block with audience. A woman, whose hair was nothing short of a burning bush, descended into shot on a web of red ribbon. She cut herself free with one of her high heels, to much applause, and told us she'd had a *lorra lorra laughs* getting Amphitrite (Si's nearly-ex-spouse) onto the set and our television screens. There was more applause as three men, named A, B and C respectively, walked on and shook her hand, kissing the air around her cheeks

as they did so. Amphitrite wept these big, rotund tears. Hefty globules, all the weight of the ocean behind them, that left pale tracks in the make-up Wardrobe had slapped on her face. The Burning Bush made her – she didn't want to – pick one and she picked this country-looking boy. Cut him open, I said to Si, and he'd probably bleed gravy. But she must've been somewhat keen. Because she screamed the place down with his name. 'C. C. C. C.' I had to turn the volume down.

## Moon

~ Bethan Kitchen

*I show my MUM my third tattoo over Skype, an illustration of the moon cycle just below my right breast.*

ME: I just always feel like the Moon's got my back, you know?

MUM: Yeah, I guess it's a bit like me wearing a rosary around my neck, I always feel like God's got my back.

ME: Yeah. That's what it's like Mum, exactly like that. Because the Moon feels my

rhythms, and I feel hers. My stirs, and whirs and purrs are hers. Those purrs of peace that entwine us together. No, not entwine, that's too violent, too, stuck. We just exist together, hand in hand. She's my Goddess but I'm her equal, and I love her as she swims back and forth to each edge of my soul.

The beautiful, delicious, wholesome she, Moon.

Two weeks after this conversation with my mum, I was back in the Toon. Back in the womb where I lived before life, where I lived before I found the Moon and her warm, empowering, dreamy cocoon, of hers. The Toon, Newcastle.

*In the kitchen, ME and DAD.*

ME: You know Dad, being in Newcastle night life is one of the only times and places that I

feel truly sad to be a woman. It's a fucking cattle market. It's disgusting.

And yet it wasn't *that* I was sorry to the Moon about. I was sorry because I'd known that about Newcastle night life for years and yet I'd always gone back to it. I'd always gone back into Newcastle's night time marketplace with the best cuts of female in the nation on offer.

HOUSE OF SMITH: Two pretty ladies for three  
jaegerbombs!

MIMO'S: Or, if you're after something a little  
cheaper, one tan-fried slut for three  
trebels? That's a bargain that is, spend a fiver on  
three trebels and you get a nice bird in  
return.

Why? It's not like I wanted to meet any of those boys, I didn't want a boy who only wanted my body, and they probably wouldn't even want that because I look like I'm at one with the moon. They wouldn't *know* that's why I looked like I did, but it is.

Because being at one with the moon involves peace.  
Peace with myself involving blissful release  
From the world. Not the real world, but the people's  
world. And not altogether but on the whole. And I was  
wholesome, I was free, self-righteous, I was me. I was the  
moon and the moon was me. The moon lets me be who

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I'm supposed to be. And that's not supposed to be anything.

But by hitting the Toon I infected the moon. I hate that word, infected, but it's the only way I can relate this to you properly, it's the only way I can do the moon justice. That's the only way I felt, the morning I woke up after a night out in Newcastle for the last time in my life. I'd infected the moon because I'd let something in that didn't let me in, in return. I'd let that world, for one night, deform me, or at least make me try to be deformed in the same way the other girls were. Man's world, literally, exclusively. Women? What's that? Products taught to compete with each other, is more like it.

ME: I just always feel like the moon's got my back, you know?

But, what if I don't have the moon's back? That's what I thought, the morning I woke up after a night out in Newcastle for the last time in my life. And that question truly scares me more than any question that I've ever been asked. What if I don't have the moon's back?

Not got the moon's back?

You ain't got your own.

Stopped loving my goddess,

I've stop loving me.

Stopped worshipping her?

Then I'm putting myself second, second to another she, not a real she but an alien she, not an alien she that

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comes from out of space but one that's bred here, one that's taken hundreds of years of designing, conditioning, painting, and programming to perfect. An alien she that doesn't know herself but definitely, undeniably thinks she does.

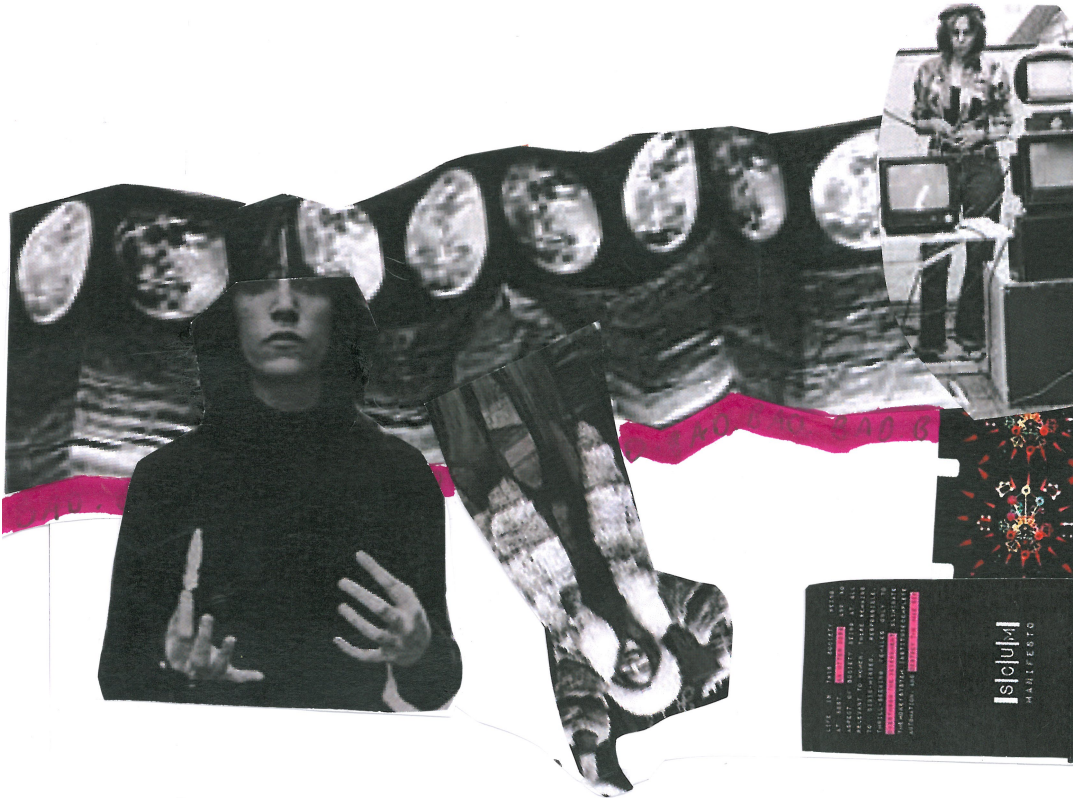
Most of the time, it's absolutely impossible to find a me that isn't at least a little designed, conditioned, painted and programmed. The people's world has its rhythms and we align our own rhythms to it without even realising it. But I discovered a little friend called the Moon, and she told me she wasn't just my friend but she was me, and I told her she wasn't just me but she was my freedom, because being me is being free. She altered my rhythms, she altered my rhythms in the same way Patti Smith's were altered, in the same way Harry Smith's and Shirley Clarke's and Lou Reed's and Abbie Hoffman's and Janis Joplin's and Vali Myers' and Valerie Solanas' were altered. Awake, they can all see true beauty.

SHERILL TIPPINS: The way to a viewers unconscious - his "soul" - lay in the interstices between his inner rhythms (spiritual, emotional, and physiological) and the rhythms of the outer world. Change the relation between these two sets of patterns, and you could create the neurological and physiological conditions that made evolutionary change possible."

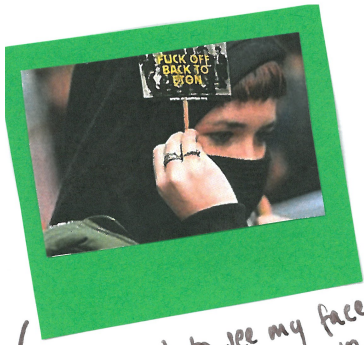
It's not just specific incidents of explicit prejudice, oppression, rape, sexual harassment, assault, exploitation,

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problematic pornography, objectification, classism, subservience, lower pay, domestic violence, public violence, patriarchy, belittling, silencing, deforming and reducing women. It's a whole fucking moon-infecting culture that trains us to think these things aren't happening, that they are ok when they are happening, or are exaggerated and blown out of proportion by the women suffering at their hands. It's a culture that trains us to hate other women, other goddesses, other moons. To blame them, even. I wish I had the power to alter people's rhythms in the same way the moon did mine.



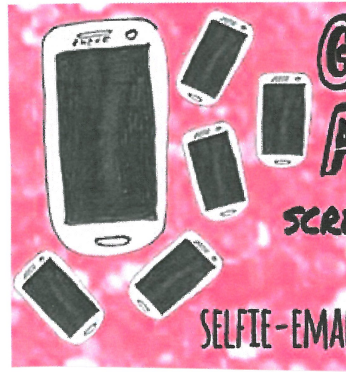




↓ You don't need to see my face, this tells you all you need to know.



"channelling KIM K imo"



SELFIE-EMAS



"aw yeah"

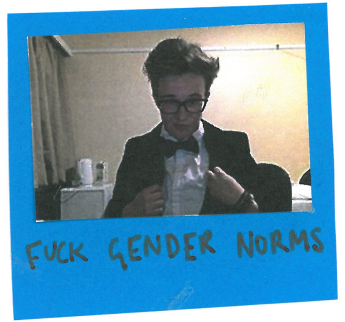
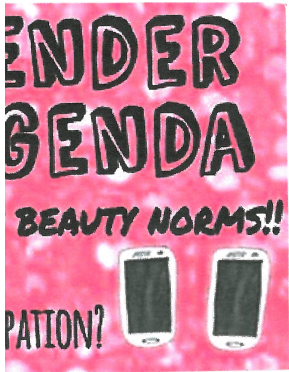


↪ "Feeling great even with gunk on my face! Patriarchy: 0 ME: 1"



"NONE SO FIT TO 'SELFIE' THE BIG LOO NONE SO WELL 'EQUIPPED' TO DECIDE





not "exotic" for being non-white. I'm not "interesting" for not abiding to gender norms. But I am beautiful, because I say I am. No scare quotes, just beautiful."



one of the days when I level in messy hair & ggg, angry shirts."



[because I hate hierarchy, but I love standing on top of buildings]

AS THEY WHO WEAR THEM, THAT IS A BIG LOOK. "\*"

at them ... what is a fetter"

## Should It Matter That It's Fashionable To Be A Feminist?

~Micha Frazer Carroll

Beyoncé is doing it. Emma Watson is doing it. Heck, even Taylor Swift is doing it. There is no denying that in 2014, it is indeed fashionable to be a feminist. But does this help the cause?

The big problem with fashion is that it's superficial. We're doing things or wearing things or talking about things because our friends are, even if we're not quite sure why. The difference between doing something because you really want to and doing it because it's fashionable is that fashion is all about appearance, the borrowing of symbols and icons because you like what it says about you. This becomes a bit tricky when we get into the sphere of social justice. And for the feminists out there who feel like they were 'doing it before it was cool', this all can be a teensy bit disheartening. It's never nice to see people catching on to something that you feel like they don't get like you do. What's more, to make something a fashion statement arguably devalues said object, as another feature of fashionable things is that they are trends, and thus impermanent, fleeting, and at the end of the day, disposable. Trends are short-lived, and things that are fashionable, unless normalised, inevitably become unfashionable. Again, gender equality is kind of for life.

Another big problem with feminism being a trend and thus subject to celebrity branding is that it makes the

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movement a bit too malleable for my taste. The moment feminism begins to bear cultural capital, it becomes a status symbol. This means that it naturally becomes difficult to tell whether celebrities such as Queen Bey are using themselves to promote the movement, or using the movement to promote themselves, twisting its aims and ethos to suit their methods of money-making and advertising. In a way, maybe it's great that feminism can be whatever we want it to be - but in turn, if it is whatever we want it to be, then isn't it sort of...nothing at all? Just a click-bait headline or a buzzword for celebrity interviews? In my opinion, the commercial brand of feminism that much of the media sells is a watered-down, soft and cuddly version of the cause, and I find reassuring statements to the public such as 'feminism isn't a threat' pretty off-putting. The whole point of fighting for social equality is that it should threaten the status quo, which in this case is patriarchy. So yes, feminism is a threat. It's a radical movement and I don't think we should be masking it as anything else or making it digestible just to please the masses for the sake of popularity.

On the flip-side, isn't feminism supposed to be a discussion - not a rulebook? Who's to say that we can't interpret its aims in a variety of ways? Who's the queen of feminism anyway? And shouldn't we all get on board with something that aims to stimulate positive societal change, even if we suspect that people might not be doing it for the 'right' reasons? Historically, a lot of positive revolutionary movements were fashionable, in fact,

that's kind of the only way they won the struggle, through winning people over. In a sense, the Suffragettes were fashionable. Civil rights were fashionable. It's kind of how these things became what they are today, through making a stir and gaining acceptance into our collective consciousness. And what better way for things to become culturally assimilated than through fashion? Isn't 'fashion' in many ways simply synonymous with 'in public awareness'? And maybe celebrities are doing us all a huge favour by on-boarding ex-sceptics and gradually easing them into the movement.

Overall, it's a tricky one. Of course it's positive that interest in feminism has rocketed, it means that people are talking about it, and that, in many ways, is the first step. As for feminist posers - I try to think of them like people who wear Ramones t-shirts even though they heard 'Judy Is A Punk' in a movie once. It's superficial, but it's still good advertising. However, we should be wary and remain critical of celebrity-dominated discussion, as we should be with everything we hear celebrities plugging - at the end of the day, it is their job to sell things. But I don't think we should be feminism snobs, and we certainly shouldn't backlash against the movement as we see its popularity increase; do we really want to be those people who say 'I believe in equal rights, but I'm not a feminist', just because we think the word is overused and misunderstood? Just as blindly following the crowd is senseless, not doing something just because everyone else is doing it is simply not a good enough reason.



FEMINISM IS NOT ABOUT

*"choice"*

FEMINISM IS THE

**HAMMER**

WE USE TO CRUSH THE

PATRIARCHY

*- sylvia*

This space = HEGEMONY. You can tell its rules by observation: public

just trying to get along. Try it

THINGS  
STUFF (THINGS men?) -



I'd like to say something about women's experience?

- nope

Sure!  
what why that's not relevant

shut up -

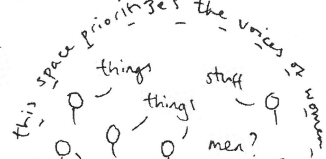
why do you have to attack men all the time

'powerful people are more likely to be right about stuff'

'racism is just hurt feelings'

CAPITALISM RULES O.K.

'state violence is sometimes justified'



'sure, but you do have all that other space. can we have this one?'

okay, but ... men?'

here patriarchy things roam freely...

(not to scale)...

'fat is bad' 'heterosexuality is normal' 'wouldn't it be great if no-one was disabled'

and on other things is perceived as an attack on 'normal', 'right-thinking' talk

is. count on some things is normal

WHY 'WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?' AND 'WHAT ABOUT MEN?'  
ARE NOT THE SAME THING

- sarra facey

## Poems

~Jessica Wing

\*

I am a windbreak.  
A point of resistance.  
An unassuming obstacle.  
I feel like my brain is  
breaking itself up  
into little bits.  
The gaps between each part  
grow  
until there are gulfs in my mind.  
There are great leaps  
that I must take, and  
an all-encompassing fog  
hinders me, constrains me until  
I am nought but a dot in my own little head.

\*\*

Everything is so much noise and  
so much feeling. I see it  
like a web of filigree, with each  
delicate tendril reaching  
out to an island.  
The islands hold everything that can be perceived. But  
the  
silvered bridges span so far between

each sanctuary that I will never  
get to travel to another.  
I have everything, but no means  
by which to experience everything.  
I cannot comprehend the patterns  
weaved by these terrible bridges.  
Sunlight glints off each surface  
directly into my eyes.  
I shrink back into my mossy alcove.  
I steady my breathing,  
and focus on the waves as they  
lap sleepily against the rocks,  
as I have and always will.

\*\*\*

I wonder what it would be like to stand  
on the roof of this building, wedged  
as it is into the rocks. I would look  
down as a queen on her royal subjects,  
the rocks,  
moist with a film of sea water, and small people  
on a jetty, or else  
kicking through the water, turning  
on their backs, bellies exposed  
to the sky and to me.



## Possibilities

**\*\*CW: internalised fatphobia, language of body hate, eating and food policing\*\***

It is not compulsory to feel anything in particular about your body. It doesn't make you bad or wrong not to have any feelings about it at all, or only negative, frustrating ones. You don't have to feel brilliantly comfortable in your skin to be a person, or a feminist, or to appreciate that some things about you can be beautiful, or to decide what beautiful means in the context of you. Once a girl in France, where I was taking a creative writing course, told me that for her to break through her writer's block she had to go via the body, the movement, the rhythm of her body. Dance was her thing, I think. To me this seemed laughably unrealistic. Hasn't she noticed I'm fat? I thought. Has she not seen how awkwardly I hold myself, how I sit with my hands folded over my stomach to try to make it not be there? She can't have seen the looks I give myself in the mirror, how I touch my legs without affection or appreciation. As a teenage girl I never felt entitled to anything much – that comes with the territory – but to feel comfortable in my skin was a ridiculous, impossible dream. I hated my belly and my arms and my back and my knees and most of all my thighs. I really hated them. My legs were huge terrible tree trunks that marked me as unacceptable and must

be hidden as much as possible at all costs. It's painful to recollect that hate. Because you can change the way you look at and think about, talk to and touch, fat.

And it took a lot of courage to be able to go running ever, but especially to start from my parents' house. Because it would make my mother so happy. She would be so relieved to maybe get to have a daughter who didn't go around being so hideously fat all the time. Her happiness would be heartbreaking. Even still on skype I hear 'don't eat that too fast! Don't have too much!' But I found a way for it to be for me, somehow, about feeling strong and trying something out and seeing what my body could do. It can do a lot of things. It can even do sex.

Not so long ago I had cause to look through a lot of photos of myself, from times in my life I hadn't even realised had been photographed. I recalled how I felt about my body at the time, how unacceptable, how revolting, how generally disconnected from the world of bodies; but I also looked with new eyes at this interesting, beautiful, growing, changing girl.

It isn't cheating if you can't manage to love yourself first, or in a vacuum. It isn't cheating to use other people's love as a model. I could not conceive of a time I could be naked with another person without having to apologise for my body. That someone could like the way I look rather than put up with it. Now my partner

touches my body. She strokes it, kisses it, looks at it, can't get enough of it. That still occasionally makes me want to cry. Nothing's impossible. I thought nobody could be attracted to fat girls, and then it turned out I am attracted to fat girls. I think we're gorgeous.

I started writing this a few months ago and since then I've put on weight, and I struggle again to remember that I get to take up even this little bit more space. It's so frustrating because I worked through this. At length. And now I have to do it again. Mentally registering, again, for a moment, whenever I'm the fattest person in the room, which is often. Crossing another few shops off the list of places that stock my size. But it is quite a lot easier this time around to remember that the voices that insist fat has to be disgusting are voices that hate women and want us to live in fear. To refuse that fear, to say 'look, the worst happened, I got fatter, I'm still here, so what now?' and then get right on with living the life you want as best you can, moving through the world without apology, as comfortably as you can, practising being kind to your reflection – that is powerful indeed. Not easy, not compulsory, not a perfect shield against all the world's bullshit, but definitely worth it. And definitely not impossible.



## televangelists

~Cal

the valley of the shadow of death  
is a V i can make by opening my legs,  
downed with hair  
that i will never shave again.

you will not tell me  
where i fit in a plan,  
you will not paint me  
in some colour i have not chosen,  
you will not even talk about me:  
i will come in *my* night and  
i will sew *your* mouths shut  
and i will warm *my* needle  
with the flame of 100 pink candles,  
imagined wax dripping into  
a new body i made for myself  
with a whole new sound of mouth.

you try, you Ovids, scratching your exile songs,  
to murder in shades of Pan  
all in order  
to make a reed-flute sing how you want it to.

i am not recycling ideas;  
i am a spirit  
and i've damn well chosen it

## Bad allies

~ Amelia Horgan

The co-option of feminist theory by yogurt advertisers and boardroom seminars has reinforced the notion of the good feminist and the bad feminist. The good feminist is nice, white, middle-class; she is what she consumes and that's the right sort of Sunday supplements (and not much else); she likes men, even the rude ones.

The bad feminist doesn't stop talking, thinks critically about 'politeness' and whom it benefits (big clue, it's not the oppressed), doesn't stop shouting, and struggles against socialisation and against patriarchy - to stop caring about what the men think about her.

Enough has been written about why this distinction is big pile of bullshit, so I want to reframe this – it's not our (as the feminist bad girls) duty to explain away our existence. We are unapologetically angry; we don't want to ""debate"" our lives and our bodies anymore. We want you (if you count yourself as an ally of ours) to take our anger seriously, and support us. Use the power and privilege you have access to so that we can act how we'd like rather than spending our time explaining and apologising.

Some suggestions:

- i. Use the spaces you already have access to (and, fuck, there are loads of them) and make them feminist. Call out your shitty mate Steve and his rape jokes.
-

- ii. Be prepared to lose your male privilege. Don't automatically assume you will be cool with this. Really think about what this will look and feel like.
- iii. Question how your privilege influences not only the way you think about things but the things that have happened to you in your life.
- iv. Use the full range of tactics you'd use for anything else – if you're prepared to use direct action against the manifestations of a neo-liberal university be prepared to use it against manifestations of patriarchy.
- v. This does not mean going on some macho crusade, do not use feminist theory to prove how great a man you are, or how great an activist you are. This is the theory of our survival and resistance; do not use it to enhance your status, whether for profit in academia or for activist brownie points.
- vi. We will not hold your hand through feminism; we're too busy trying to survive.
- vii. If you want our opinions on something, don't approach us as if we're some feminist oracles; listen to what we say because we're your friends and comrades. We do not have the answers; we will not speak for all women.
- viii. Feminism is not a badge to show how good you are; it's not a way to make feminist women have sex with you.
- ix. Similarly, do not befriend or have sex with feminist women only because you think that will prove you to be a better ally, or provide some wonderful insight into feminist theory.
- x. There are lots of practical things you can do if you want to help us: come to the meetings and actions we organise if they're open to you. Bring your friends, organise solidarity



- actions or meetings, share information, offer to do menial tasks (data entry, resource making etc.) and actually do these.
- xi. Believe us when we talk about our experiences of gender oppression.
  - xii. Feminism is not about you.
  - xiii. Feminism is not about you.
  - xiv. Feminism is not about you.
  - xv. Feminism is not about you.



*eat  
the  
rich*

- sylvia

## THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

~ Martha PW

### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

politics starts and ends in this room,  
surrounded on all sides by  
tasteful mahogany panelling  
and the heraldry of our forefathers, and

### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

all this is to be spoken of in the abstract,  
an engaging intellectual exercise  
worthy of a five minute speech or  
2500 words in times new roman, and

### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

it's all very well intelligently exchanging ideas  
here in the warm and dry, but what on earth  
are those people doing out there, with the  
placards, and the yelling? it all looks so dirty, and

### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

we're gentlemen, fond of gentlemanly games,  
you know - cricket, lacrosse, polo,  
toying with the lives of strangers  
less fortunate than we are, and

### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

we might disagree in the chamber  
but, look, we're all friends here,

no need to take it personally,  
or get overemotional, and

#### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

it would be shockingly uncivilised  
if we invited the fascists to speak  
but didn't provide them with a four-course meal  
(wine included; we're not savages), and

#### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

there's no point thinking about the people  
and lives behind the statistics, when we  
could be formulating witty rhetorical quips  
to get us some applause later, and

#### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

that some people (naming no names)  
can be so thin-skinned about these things,  
as if our academic discussions have  
anything to do with real life, and

#### THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

there's really no relation between  
theory and practice, and we're all  
getting together in the common room  
later for port and cheese, and

THIS HOUSE BELIEVES

in free speech,  
robust public debate,  
and open intellectual inquiry,  
and you should too, and

THIS HOUSE WOULD

remain here in this oasis of rationality  
and keep things exactly as they are  
but thank you for your concern;  
we hope to see you at thursday's debate.



gender

agenda

read online at [www.gender-agenda.org.uk](http://www.gender-agenda.org.uk)