



THE **WRITE** TO
END VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN AWARDS

Shortlisted Articles

Scottish Parliament

12th November 2013

Foreword

In the last few years the press have come under increased scrutiny and the practice of journalists has been rigorously examined. There has been wide public consensus that what the press do and say matters and that the power that the media has to shape public attitudes ought to be held to account.

The media has a vital role to play in preventing violence against women. The platform journalists have should be used to speak out against injustice and challenge dominant narratives that allow violence against women to continue. Journalists, editors and other media professionals have the choice to report truthfully and aid public understanding of violence against women, or to fall back on stereotypes and sensationalism.

We launched the Write to End Violence Against Women Awards to celebrate writers who make that choice and whose work contributes to shaping public attitudes for the better. All the pieces in the booklet were shortlisted for the high quality of their writing, and the part they play in challenging gender inequality and violence against women.

Please note to make judging as fair as possible we have removed much of the formatting from the original articles.

A big thanks to everyone who helped make these awards happen.



Liz Ely

Zero Tolerance





Why was the sheriff in the Walker case so puzzled?

- **Anni Donaldson**

Shona Robison MSP, minister with responsibility for equalities, recently stressed the Scottish Government's continued commitment to preventing domestic abuse and to challenging public attitudes. She was clear that 'there is never an excuse for abuse', and firmly blamed the perpetrators, not women and children. Her party's vision is for a Scotland where women have 'genuine equality, free from violence and abuse', that now was a 'time for reflection' and that 'ministers will listen'. Sheriff Mackie's recent judgement in the case of Bill Walker, a former SNP MSP, reveals how far Scotland has come in dealing with domestic abuse but also how much more careful listening is needed by everyone. Mackie's written judgement provides a timely opportunity for reflection. Walker was convicted of 24 criminal charges – of physical acts of violence and threats. Twenty four! Mackie acknowledged: 'There was evidence showing the accused to be controlling, domineering, demeaning and belittling towards the three complainers, his former wives'. However she went on: 'Whether I accepted that evidence and however abhorrent, unacceptable and abusive such behaviour might be it does not amount to a criminal offence'. So what then can be done about such men? With Scottish domestic abuse prevalence rates of around one in three women, almost 60,000 incidents reported annually, and Glasgow's domestic abuse courts stretched to their limit, it is very likely that we personally know of an abusive intimate relationship. What do we do? Do we do what the SNP did at candidate selection time? Nothing? Walker had not then been charged with or convicted of any offence, allegations of his abusive behaviour presented no apparent barrier to his ambitions for public office...end of. His ex-wives begged to differ.

If you learned that a friend was abusing his partner, what would you do? As a society we have traditionally been passive bystanders with non-intervention justified by statements like 'what goes on between couples is their business...she made her bed...'. The long reach of the Victorian over simplification of men and women inhabiting public and private spheres respectively may still be partly to blame.

Intimate relationships remains a key site of 21st-century Scottish women's subordination due to the attitudes of perpetrators and to a society still largely standing back. Doing nothing or minimising abuse is tantamount to collusion as the Catholic Church, the Benedictine Order and the BBC are discovering. Listening to those experiencing abuse is best.

Observe also Sheriff Mackie's puzzlement, '...why a woman stays in or returns to an abusive relationship is a complex issue not easily understood by the rational observer'. Complex? Yes. Hard to understand? No. Such victim blaming is common. Again, years of empirical research show that women, quite simply, are too frightened to leave. Staying put is often the safest option when living with such a 'controlling, domineering, demeaning and belittling' person who is given to regularly assaulting his family – remember those 24 assault convictions? Women live like hostages in such relationships.

Many women in Scotland are killed by a current or former partner around the time of separation – staying put is therefore a perfectly rational choice. In spite of finding the complainers' choices hard to understand however, the ever rational Mackie did find the women's evidence credible: they were believed. Thank goodness.

Domestic abuse is a public matter. Walker's 'non-criminal behaviour' controlled his wives by frightening them. Many women live with such fear 24/7. It follows them when they go out to work or education, into personal and social relationships; it restricts their freedom to socialise or pursue their creative interests. Men like Walker are thirled to an outmoded view of women's role in relationships and in society and have an exaggerated, narcissistic sense of their own entitlement.

Dominated as they are by oppressive domestic regimes, many Scottish women are not free citizens. Such liberty restrictions also deny women full equality in a democratic society. The personal is political, the private is public.

So here's to you Ms Robison, to your party, to your government's vision for women's equality in Scotland and to changing public attitudes. Domestic abuse is not happening way over there, to those people, in those communities. It is happening in plain sight, supported by outmoded attitudes and expectations which restrict women's freedom.

Scotland should be proud of her internationally-recognised approach to tackling domestic abuse. However, we could all, SNP workers and members included, usefully reflect on our personal attitudes and values. As we race towards the independence referendum, domestic abuse should be recognised as an important political issue for democracy. Such abuse is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality.

If asked, any rational person would likely agree that domestic abuse is a terrible thing and ask what can be done. When it is suggested that we might begin by taking a close look at how we, as men and women, treat each other in daily life, the chances are they may fall silent and walk away muttering: 'That's none of your business'.

Originally published in Scottish Review (03/09/13)

The global scourge of violence against women

- Claire Black

FLICKING through the headlines a depressing theme emerged. In Saudi Arabia a legal ban on domestic violence and other forms of abuse against women has just been passed.

Good news surely? Well, yes, sort of.

That sexual violence in the home and workplace is now a punishable crime is to be welcomed, but in a country where all women, no matter what age, must have a male guardian one can only wonder about the practical problems of reporting a father or husband who make up the vast majority of abusers. Scroll down. In London, a 42-year-old man walked free from court having been found guilty of slapping his wife as he drove her and their five and seven-year-old daughters along a busy street. Scroll down. In Scotland, a member of the country's parliament, former SNP MSP Bill Walker, having been convicted on 23 charges of assaulting three ex-wives and a step-daughter, has refused to resign his seat.

Men and their quick fists. The law and its limitations. The global scourge of violence against women.

Between one in three and one in five women will experience some form of domestic abuse during their lifetime. Two women every week die at the hands of a partner or ex-partner. We see these stats so often, but do we really understand what they mean?

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone – any age, any gender, any social class, any ethnicity or sexual orientation. Women, though, are far more likely to be victims than men. More than 80 per cent of reported incidents in Scotland involved a female victim and a male perpetrator.

According to Scottish Women's Aid, domestic abuse is "when a person uses coercion, intimidation

and fear to control their partner in an intimate relationship." It isn't just when someone slaps or punches, it might also be when they humiliate, isolate and control. It can be financial, sexual or emotional, it usually gets worse over time, and it may increase at specific points in a woman's life. According to the prosecution in the London case, the woman said that she had been a victim of domestic violence for a decade, since she was on her honey-moon, eight months pregnant with her first child. According to the sheriff hearing the case against Walker, the evidence presented showed him to be "controlling, domineering, demeaning and belittling" towards his former wives. Walker's refusal to show any remorse for his actions is a blatant refusal to accept what domestic abuse really is: it is an outrage. It should have no place in our society. On Friday, Scottish Women's Aid released a statement describing Walker as "not suitable to hold public office". Who could possibly disagree?

Originally published in The Scotsman (01/09/13)

One in four young Scots believe rape victims are partly to blame if drunk or dressed 'provocatively' when attacked

- Annie Brown

THE report, which studied our nation's view of violence against women, is calling on parents to address sexual inequality in a bid to change youngster's opinions. Respondents also thought heavy drinking is to blame

A QUARTER of young people in Scotland believe that a rape victim is partly to blame if she was attacked when she was drunk or dressed "provocatively".

The shocking attitude was revealed among 16 to 24-year-olds in a new survey of our nation's view of violence against women.

One-sixth of all respondents believed that rapists are men who can't control their sexual urges and a third thinks it's a woman's responsibility to walk out if she is the victim of domestic violence.

Callum Hendry, campaign co-ordinator of White Ribbon Scotland, said the survey results showed drastic action was needed to address ignorant attitudes in Scotland.

He said: "The fact that almost one in four young people believe that a woman can be held responsible for being raped because of her clothing or for being drunk is a huge concern.

"We need to continue to deliver education messages that change this attitude.

"This type of victim blaming prevents women from coming forward for support. We just cannot allow that to continue – it is a disservice to all women."

The research exposes dangerous myths that exist around the issue of violence against women, which was apparent in all age groups but particularly in youngsters.

Ten per cent of people thought that rapes were carried out by a stranger to the victim while in reality that happens in only eight per cent of cases.

This misinformed view doubled in the 16 to 24 age group.

The survey was designed as a snapshot of attitudes in Scotland, using just less than 2000 people from every local authority.

It is seven years since a similar analysis was conducted north of the border.

The research involved focus groups in Falkirk, Inverclyde and Edinburgh, two of which were with men under the age of 25 and two were conducted with men over 25.

White Ribbon was set up in 2010 to involve men in ending violence against women through education and campaigning.

In the focus groups it found, there was a consensus that “others” raped, not “normal” people and that they had to be “sick”.

The report said: “The idea that it is something abnormal or “sick” can lead people to believe that those around them are incapable of being violent towards women.

“This belief can easily lead to absolving rapists of responsibility unless they fit a violent or “sick” stereotype, which, as we know, is not the case.

“Such attitudes create an environment in which victims may feel less able to come forward for support as they feel they will not be believed or receive the justice they deserve.”

A commonly held myth was that men raped because they couldn’t control their sexual urges.

A quarter of young people in Scotland believe a rape victim is partly to blame if they dress provocatively

The report said: “Believing men are unable to control themselves against subconscious sexual urges implies that they are not entirely accountable for their actions but rather are victims themselves to their needs.”

The truth is that rape is often about power and control over a victim and not about sexual urges.

Much of White Ribbon Scotland’s work exists to combat myths that can blame the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Some of the views in relation to domestic abuse were just as disturbing. A third believe it is a woman’s responsibility to leave an abusive relationship.

The report said this underestimates the trauma, the fear, control and difficulties faced by women in abusive relationships, which create significant obstacles in attempts to escape abuse.

But there was awareness that domestic violence was not only about physical abuse, with only eight per cent believing that was the case.

But 80 per cent thought alcohol and drugs caused men to be violent to their partners, which detracts from the abuser’s responsibility for his actions and the fact that domestic violence is about maintaining power and control over victims.

Lily Greenan from Scottish Women’s Aid said she was encouraged that respondents realised that domestic abuse could be mental and verbal torture, not just physical abuse.

But she said: “Victim blaming stops women reporting it. It stops them from seeking support and it stops them from getting justice. We need to work with young people to change the question from ‘Why does she stay?’ to ‘Why does he abuse?’”

When asked if the purchase of sex or sexual images can create harmful attitudes towards women, two-thirds agreed it did. Linda Thompson from The Women’s Support Project said she was heartened to find most people agreed that prostitution and pornography were damaging.

She said: “This highlights that men and women are aware of the wider potential cultural impact of the opportunity to buy sexual activity from, and view sexual images of, women on how women are viewed and treated.”

The report also gives a fascinating insight into how society views masculinity – there was still a view of men as being stereotypically macho.

Seven in 10 associated the word “control” with men, eight in 10 said they were expected to be physically strong and two-thirds said they should be viewed as powerful.

Yet only three in every hundred thought they should be emotional and five per cent thought they should be sensitive.

The report said: “This narrow view of masculinity is reflected in the difference in how young boys

and girls are spoken to as they grow up, and even in how products are marketed.

“The emphasis on physical strength and the lack of emphasis of sensitivity may influence how men behave in relationships and towards women.”

Almost 90 per cent of people agreed that sexual inequality contributes to a society where violence against women is acceptable.

And 97 per cent said everyone in society shared a duty in ending violence against women.

The report recommends that campaigning on issues such as gender gaps in pay and sexual inequality could help change the attitudes that perpetuate violence.

It suggests parents should be targeted to encourage them to educate children about sexual inequality, preventing violence and sexual consent.

It also emphasises the need to redefine its definition of masculinity and encourage men to stand up against violence and change controlling behaviour.

Originally published in the Daily Record (14/08/13)

Glasgow moves for White Ribbon status to end violence against women

- Rachael Fulton

White Ribbon: Glasgow hopes to raise greater awareness of violence against women.

Jenny was just 18 when she became involved with an abusive partner and was subjected to frequent violent episodes, rape and psychological trauma at the hands of her boyfriend. She reported one incident to the police after her partner threatened her with a knife, but claims the officers did not take her seriously and were charmed by her partner. Their suspicion deterred her from reporting his crimes again.

“I felt like a statistic to them - better a statistic of a ‘small domestic argument’ than full-on abuse,” said Jenny. “The signs were there and women are often too terrified to ask for help.

“At times when the police are called to homes in cases of potential domestic violence they should be trained to look carefully for signs and to treat both involved parties suspiciously for lying - I know some women who lied to the police and pretended they themselves were at fault out of fear.”

Four years later, Jenny has found the strength to leave her abusive partner and has gradually started to rebuild her life, and her self-esteem, through cognitive behavioural therapy.

She now has a new relationship which she feels comfortable in and is able to share her experiences, but many other domestic abuse victims never achieve this, even after the abuse has ended.

“The after effects of such abuse are worse than the abuse itself,” said Jenny, whose name has been changed to preserve her anonymity.

“At times I stop dead in my tracks on a busy street, sure that I have seen him, and have to quickly hold my own therapy session in my head when I realise it is not him.”

According to studies by the NHS, women who have been abused by their partner are five times more likely to attempt suicide, 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol, nine times more likely to abuse drugs and three times more likely to be diagnosed as depressed or psychotic.

Yet victim blaming, suspicion and lack of awareness all contribute to the under reporting of violence against women in Scotland, causing many survivors to suffer in silence.

According to Scottish Government figures, at least one in five women in Scotland will be the victim of domestic violence, in a country where an incident is recorded once every ten minutes.

In its fight to break ingrained negative attitudes and raise awareness about gender-based violence, Glasgow City Council's Executive Committee passed a motion on June 27 to work towards achieving what is called White Ribbon City status by 2014.

The Council will work with charity White Ribbon Scotland to produce a year-round programme to tackle gender inequality and domestic abuse, working with the council's Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership (GVAWP) and drawing on anti-violence initiatives operating across the city.

"Glasgow has a lot of programmes relating to violence against women," said Councillor James Coleman, chair of GVAWP.

"The city has a strong stance against prostitution, as we see that as violence against women, but there are other issues.

"In schools there is a lot of work to do; surveys show a high percentage of young boys who think it's OK to slap a girl in the right circumstances. Also concerning is the high percentage of girls who think that's acceptable.

"We've come a long way but there's still a lot to be done."

The planned council strategy involves writing workplace policies on domestic abuse and harassment to help survivors and potential victims, producing leaflets to help guide survivors to support networks and holding specific awareness raising events.

The White Ribbon Scotland Campaign calls upon men and boys of all ages to make a stand rejecting violence against women.

The Scottish branch of this international campaign was launched in 2006 after an overwhelming number of Scottish men were shown to have joined women's groups in order to oppose gender violence.

"We think it's crucial to educate men on these issues," said Cllr Coleman.

"A lot of it is based on equality. There's a high percentage of men who use women for prostitution, for example. They don't see these women as people, they see them as objects - objects they can buy, sell and use.

"These campaigns aim to show them that that behaviour is not acceptable."

For some survivors of domestic abuse living in the city, a move towards raising greater awareness and challenging misconceptions about the issue is welcomed.

"I hope that by targeting a male audience, too, this campaign can deliver the results which previous campaigns have not," said Jenny.

"So many of my male friends, although appalled by domestic violence, have never been educated about it. They would not be offended if they were spoken to about it, or even properly educated in schools."

Jenny, now 22, hopes that as Glasgow works towards White Ribbon status, the awareness raised will help eradicate domestic abuse within the city and give greater support to women like her.

"By targeting males directly and teaching them rights, equality and even anger management issues, I believe that many men will be prevented from becoming abusive," said Jenny.

"Perhaps then, even those who are abusive, or have been in the past, can successfully change."

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India: Courts fail thousands of rape victims

- Nita Bhalla

MILES away from India's capital, a mother-of-two who makes a living cobbling shoes, knows nothing about the fatal gang-rape of a young woman in New Delhi and the furious street protests that followed her grisly ordeal on a moving bus.

And she won't have heard about the guilty verdict passed down on the four men accused of the assault yesterday, or that they face the death penalty.

The 49-year-old low-caste woman was herself raped, by four policemen in a village police station in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. That was four years ago, and she is still waiting for justice.

"It's taking a long time. I've been to the court so many times, but still I am waiting. Each time, the hearing is delayed and delayed," said the woman, speaking by telephone from Jamwada village in Betul district.

"It's been four years. It is costly and time-consuming to keep going to court, but I want those men who did this to me to get what they deserve. I don't know when that will be or if it will ever happen," said the woman, who cannot be identified.

A special fast-track court took seven months to pronounce a verdict in the Delhi gang rape, a shocking assault that made headlines around the globe and sparked debate in India about an unbridled culture of crimes against women.

Human rights lawyers say the outcry over the Delhi case made it an exception to the rule of a criminal justice system that fails thousands of rape victims in India. For them, the judicial process is archaic, under-resourced, gender-insensitive and painfully slow.

"While we applaud this verdict and the relative speed with which the trial was conducted, we mourn the fact that there are so many survivors out there who are neither getting any kind of media attention, nor are they getting any kind of judicial attention," says Rebecca Mammen John, a Supreme Court lawyer. "As a result, their cases are languishing in courts with no end in sight."

Police in New Delhi say that only four out of ten rapes are reported, largely because of the deep-rooted conservatism of Indian society, where many victims are scared to come forward for fear of being "shamed" by their family and communities.

One of the biggest obstacles to winning justice for rape victims is the length of the trials. An average case can take five to ten years to reach judgment, legal experts say.

India has far too few courts, judges and prosecutors for its 1.2 billion people. There are more than 23,000 rape cases alone pending before the high courts, according to the law ministry.

"This verdict is welcomed but this case should not be an exceptional one due to all the media attention," warned Kavita Krishnan, secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association, after Tuesday's verdict.

"Rather it should set a standard. It cannot be tokenism. It has to be for all women."

One in ten men admit forcing a woman to have sex with them

ABOUT one in ten men in regions of Asia have said they raped a woman who was not their partner, according to a study of sexual violence. When their wife or girlfriend was included, that figure rose to about a quarter.

International researchers said their startling findings – based on a survey of six Asian countries – should change perceptions about how common violence against women is and prompt major campaigns to prevent it.

In the research, male interviewers surveyed more than 10,000 men in Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea. The word "rape" was not used in the questions, but the

men were asked if they had ever forced a woman to have sex when she wasn't willing or if they had ever forced sex on someone who was too drunk, or drugged, to consent. In most places, scientists concluded between 6 to 8 per cent of men had raped a woman who wasn't their partner. When they included wives and girlfriends, the figures were mostly between 30 to 57 per cent. The lowest rates were in Bangladesh and Indonesia and the highest were in Papua New Guinea. Of those who acknowledged forcing a woman to have sex, more than 70 per cent of men said it was because of "sexual entitlement". Nearly 60 per cent said they were bored.

Originally published in The Scotsman (11/09/13)



One Billion Rising while another one falls: Media treatment of Reeva Steenkamp

- Eve Livingston

Thursday 14th February marked V-Day (or 'One Billion Rising'), the celebration of a global movement designed to challenge the fact that 1 in 3 women will in their lifetimes be the victims of violence, many in their own homes or at the hands of someone close to them. It also marked a day, sadly like any other, when many women lost their lives as a result of such violence – one every 6 hours in South Africa alone, including Reeva Steenkamp, shot to death in her partner's home. Given that to cover every instance of violence against women in the world news would eclipse the coverage of anything else, it's only natural that this particular case has been given prominence, owing to the alleged male perpetrator's status as a famous Paralympian and Olympian. But my defence of the media's coverage of this story ends here I'm afraid, because I certainly can't get on board with what seems to be at best domestic violence apologism, and at worst victim porn.

Coverage of an instance of violence against women in South Africa probably should have started with the fact that the country has one of the highest rates of rape in the world, the highest rate of intimate femicide (women killed by their partners), and was the setting for a gang rape which left a 17 year old girl dead last month. Coverage of Steenkamp's particular case could then have gone on to discuss the poignant sense of irony in how she lost her life, given that she was an active campaigner against rape and violence against women, and someone who visited schools to talk about female empowerment. She was also a law graduate. Instead, we were treated to accounts of her partner's life, analysis about how this would affect his career, articles advancing his presumed defence (that he mistook her for an intruder) and editorials lamenting the tragedy for disability rights. Meanwhile, by broadsheets and tabloids alike, the victim has been defined by her partner's fame, by a reality TV show she hadn't yet appeared on, and by her venture into swimsuit modelling despite the fact that she was also the face of Avon and therefore most frequently photographed from the neck up.

This glamourisation and eroticisation of violence against women is, sickeningly, a familiar trope; you only need to take a look at Kanye West's 'Monster' video, or this advert for Xbox game 'Dead Island Riptide' to see the extent of it. In drawing attention in a Facebook status to how this dangerous trend was perpetuated by the media's fixation on Steenkamp's modelling career, I was told that my argument was far-fetched and unfounded. Of course it would be preposterous to suggest that journalists saw this case and thought with glee, "oh great, another chance to talk about how sexy it is when men kill their partners", but sex sells and that the sexuality being sold here is that of a murdered woman tells us all we need to know. The subconscious nature of such a focus is key – accounts like this are extremely telling of a wider media instinct to reduce a woman's worth to her looks and body, regardless of how that woman ended up on their pages in the first place.

Not all coverage was subconscious and subtle in its sexism and eroticisation of violence. I would go so far as to say that the widely criticised Sun front cover served as an example of everything that is wrong with media representations of women. The suggestion that the highly sexualised image used was just one of her modelling, "as she spent most of her time doing", is a ridiculous one. Come back to me when you've researched exactly how much time she devoted to lingerie and swimsuit modelling compared to feminist activism, studying for a degree and modelling for a cosmetics range among other things (hint: I think you'll find the semi-naked stuff was a relatively small proportion). Come back to me when murdered shop assistants are pictured behind a till, or those who worked as doctors are seen examining a patient. That she chose to be in the pictures and make them public in the first place is irrelevant – I've posed naked in a charity calendar, because it was my choice to do so

as a living, breathing person with agency. The same calendar is up on the wall of my flat, and I'm not ashamed or embarrassed by it. But I sincerely hope that if I ever went missing, for example, that it wouldn't be the picture flashed up of me in the middle of a news report.

But wait – let's not give The Sun such a hard time. They are, after all, beacons of morality where female modesty is concerned. Just last week they ran a double page spread chastising other media outlets for running pictures of a pregnant Kate Middleton in a bikini, and choosing not to print those pictures 'out of respect'. Presumably because she's a princess, obviously more worthy of our respect than a slutty lingerie model who took her clothes off for money, god forbid. Or maybe just because nobody violently murdered her first. Perhaps most sinister was the conspicuous lack of a page 3 in that edition of the newspaper. Who needs a living, breathing woman when you can ogle a dead one?

The problem here isn't that Reeva Steenkamp was a model and took her clothes off in front of the camera. Good on her, she was beautiful and had a body to match. The problem here is the media's instinctive reaction to reduce her to that, in the process glamourising the violence against her. If they can flippantly turn a freshly murdered woman into a pair of boobs and a thigh gap, where does this ruthless treatment end?

It's been very easy not to mention Reeva Steenkamp's boyfriend and alleged killer's name in this article – not because I necessarily advocate that style for all coverage but because, at the end of it all, he is to a certain extent irrelevant in all of this. Steenkamp is just one of many tragic victims of violence against women, as she is one of many victims of objectification and media sexism. This is not primarily a tragedy for the sportsman, or for his sport, or for the wider category of disabled people; this is a tragedy for women. Yes, Steenkamp's partner and alleged killer has the right to a fair trial, and I sincerely hope he manages to get one in amongst the media circus surrounding the case. But women everywhere also have the right to a safe home and equality of opportunity, and too often they still don't manage to get that in amongst the media circus surrounding their bodies.

Originally published on nanu-nanu.com (17/02/13)

Crisis 2

- Lady Rara

This morning I fell down a flight of steps. Clattered down them. Knee and ankle forcibly met tenement concrete, while my roller bag catapulted down ahead of me like a kamikazee sledge.

This was my crisis for today.

For the rest of the day, I learned about the crisis of others.

I saw cardboard beds in back alleys, makeshift tents assembled beneath bridges, cracks in multi-storey car parks where the homeless and neglected of my city go to sleep. I was taught about their suffering in a broad, generic sense - of the complexities of their needs, the vicious cycles of substance abuse, rape, homelessness and violence that swallow, spin and spit them out. I know more, now, about gender violence, the myths and misconceptions that allow rapists to dodge jail sentences and walk away with nothing but a debt to their conscience. The injustice of recounting the devastating abuse inflicted upon you to the authorities, only for it to be insinuated you are a liar. I spoke to the people who help them, who operate as the front line contact in their crisis intervention - the people

who step in when everything comes clattering down.

Later in the day I met Sharon. Sharon is not her name. She's 30 - four years older than me, and is currently on a methadone programme to wean her off heroin, which she has been using on and off since she was 13. Sharon knows a lot about crisis.

"I took it to take away the pain," she said. "It numbed me."

Junkies are constantly dismissed as the scourge of society. The bleary eyed men and women scrounging in bins, peeling the smoking stubs of cigarettes from pavements or stumbling down Glasgow's streets are looked down upon. People have a stilted view of them as layabouts, of selfish pleasure-seekers operating beneath mainstream society like rats scuttling under floorboards. A heroin user's own need to unhook themselves from reality, their motivation to disappear into an opiate-blinded alternative universe - their crisis - is hidden from us.

The first crisis in the catastrophic domino line of Sharon's life happened when she was three years old and was taken into care. She was already being sexually abused by an uncle, though as a little girl wasn't aware that what was happening was out of the ordinary. Being abused was as every day as eating a meal and was a large part of what little of the world Sharon knew. Once in the care system, she was sexually abused by two carers employed to look after her - just one of dozens of helpless children exploited at the home, hurt by the people entrusted with their welfare. To Sharon it was normal.

When Sharon first started learning about sex as a teenager, her attitude drastically changed. It turned out that some things weren't normal, that other girls in different houses weren't doing the same things as she had been, that other people's relatives and care-givers didn't treat their charges in the same way. When she realised the crimes that had been committed against her, she turned to heroin to escape.

"I used it when I knew somebody was going to come to my room and I would need to do something," she said of her time in care.

"All I knew was when I took [valium] it took pain away, It got me to sleep. Otherwise if I didn't take heroin or valium I wouldn't sleep. You were scared to go to sleep when you weren't doing it, because you didn't know who was coming for you next.

"I thought what was happening to me was meant to happen. I was only a wean, I didn't know.

"I wasn't a bad child, but I ended up turning out to be a bad child when I found out that it was wrong what was happening to me."

Other girls were abused, sexually, physically and psychologically at the care home, which has now been closed down. Sharon's abusers have been jailed.

Since then, Sharon has struggled with her heroin habit and a turbulent personal life, as many women who experience sexual violence do. Sharon asked that I leave out many of the details of family relationships that have heightened her anguish in recent years, most of which involved separation from or loss of loved ones, many stemming from her horrific experience of violence and resulting drug addiction. She has lost everything.

She broke down as she told me of how, after five years clean from heroin, she spiralled back into substance abuse in recent months when struggling to cope with grief. The despair she suffered, compounded with a sudden return to using heroin, led to her sleeping rough out on the streets. There, when left alone one night, she was raped by a man who had just been freed after serving a life sentence for child sex abuse. Her rapist was caught and jailed again. In response to the crime, the authorities offered to compensate Sharon financially for her ordeal. Despite having no home, very few possessions and a ferocious fight with drug addiction to contend with, she refused the payment on moral grounds.

"They said I can get compensation. I said 'I don't want your compensation,'" said Sharon, breaking down.

"I've never taken it - I don't want compensation now. If I was to take compensation it would be taking money for lying back and letting people do things to me, which is wrong and it shouldn't happen.

"They offered me support, and a counsellor. A counsellor can't help me. No one can help me.

"I'm not this big person or anything, I'm just me. I'm a human being I've got feelings just like everybody else.

"It's wrong that people can do that to you and all they offer you is compensation money. So I've to get paid?!? I'm better off working in the fucking street. That's wrong.

"The bad things I've done in my life don't compare to what I've had done to me in my life."

Crisis.

Listening to Sharon's story is traumatising in itself. Her support workers offered me a cup of tea and a sit-down to make sure that I was OK when I left the interview room. However I was only burdened with the knowledge of such horrendous suffering, not by the experience of it. Not the aftershocks of addiction, fear, nightmares and isolation - the cracks that have fractured Sharon's adult life and torn chasms between she and her family, her partners, and the children she no longer has the rights to see.

Sharon's is not the fleeting shock of a trip down a set of stairs, or the panic at lost house keys or a missed deadline. Hers is not the failed exam, the broken heart or the confrontation with a boss that I would term a crisis in my own life. Her life is crisis, and she knows little else.

It's easy to put Sharon's case in a box. A nice, safe, distant pigeon hole covered in sticky labels reading 'Junkie', 'Homeless' and 'Nothing Like Me', filed away where it can't be a threat to our own personal safety, where her story can't frighten us into believing we are in danger. As women, we are in danger whether we distance ourselves from Sharon's story or not.

The misconception is that victims of rape, sexual and domestic violence are in some way to blame, or are all people who, for whatever reason, are not like us. This mindset knits us a fragile feigned security blanket, but damages those who are suffering by ostracising them as 'other.' We are not made invincible by scrambling for reasons as to why we are not like Sharon - as women we are made stronger only if we recognise the similarities, accept the dangers and provide a network of support to help protect others like her.

Meet Beth.

Beth's a bubbly 22-year-old, madly in love with her live-in boyfriend and loved in turn by a loyal pack of friends. Meeting her, you wouldn't think to align her with Sharon - wouldn't believe the sassy recent graduate had any common ground with a homeless drug addict, aside from sharing the same city.

Both women are survivors of rape and violence. They both must shoulder the devastating after-effects of abuse, must find ways to circumvent their suffering and depend on the human flight or fight instinct to kick in somehow. Beth's crutch is cognitive behavioural therapy [CBT], which coaches her through her body's natural coping mechanisms of anxiety attacks and paranoia.

"[The abuse] was four and a half years ago," recalled Beth, who is keen to share her story (with the promise of anonymity) so that it might help other girls in her situation.

"And despite months of private therapy sessions, my self esteem is still very low. I constantly question my self worth and until recently have not been able to trust men or be in a relationship.

"After years of failed relationships, the inability to enjoy sex and each failed relationship leading me to further question my self worth, I finally sought help through therapy. I stopped after a few sessions as I couldn't afford the £30-an-hour fees.

"When I met my current boyfriend, the love of my life, he urged me to open up about my past, so I finally bit the bullet and started months of gruelling therapy. It's a horrible process, dredging up every horrible and painful memory but the sooner it's done the better. CBT is perhaps the best thing

I have ever done. It re-trained my brain on how to view myself, and how to view others. Life is no longer a massive negative and not every man is a potential threat.”

The last four and a half years have been a long, arduous self-preservation process for Beth. At 18, she fell in love with an abusive older boyfriend who regularly psychologically abused her, beat and raped her. If she hadn't done the housework, he'd rape her. If she denied him sex, the same. Her screams reverberated around the walls of their tenement flat, echoing in the close, but no neighbour ever chapped the door to check she was alright or called the police to report a disturbance. She became increasingly isolated, trapped in terror beneath his constant threat of violence.

“Even the most menial of arguments would lead to me being dragged through the flat, beaten and raped over and over,” said Beth.

“If the flat wasn't tidied, dinner wasn't made on time, or I didn't feel like sleeping with him I would be threatened, slapped, punched or kicked in the stomach until I couldn't breathe. Yet after each argument or abusive fight he'd switch to being a tearful, begging mess, begging me not to leave him, that he was sorry and he would never hurt me again.”

Her partner's psychological taunts intensified the trauma inflicted on Beth through violence.

Constant slurs against her intelligence, her personality and physical appearance left her self esteem in tatters, leading her to drop out of university and become cut off from her love ones. Beth's partner prevented her from seeing her family and friends and manipulated her into believing he was the only one in the world who would put up with her. One day he held a knife to her throat, and Beth feared so much for her life she summoned the courage to call the police.

“Two male officers arrived at our flat, and despite the marks on my neck and bruises to show them, they were charmed by my partner and believed his story - that it was just a small argument that got out of hand,” said Beth.

“As I sat in tears he laughed with them about ‘bloody women’ in the hall way. He was taken to a friend's house - not charged and taken to a police station - and despite [the police's] warning of leaving me alone for a day or two he was back within a few hours, extremely drunk.”

Crisis.

Circumstances like these - in which domestic abuse and rape survivors are made to feel partially or wholly responsible for violence - perpetuate an existing culture of victim-blaming that further persecutes the victim and deters future survivors from coming forward. Domestic violence and rape statistics remain unreliable due to the chronic underreporting of crimes, and women are often made to feel culpable for the violence committed against them by authorities, medical staff and others.

The number of domestic violence incidents recorded across Scotland in 2012/13 was 54,430 - a rise of 3.85% on the previous year and 4% higher than the average for the previous five years. It is hoped this is due to an increase in willingness and awareness for victims to come forward, but again this is impossible to verify.

Many of you reading this are perhaps less likely to know a Sharon, due to her circumstances, but may be unknowingly surrounded by Beths. Those quietly withdrawing from their family and friends, those who justify their partner's flaws or negative actions - no matter how minor - and seem to be gradually losing any concept of themselves. Those who appear afraid to upset their partners, who dodge questions about their personal situation when previously they would have opened up, those who have begun viewing their friends as those without their best interests at heart. The dangerous extent to which this cancer of gender violence burrows under the skin of society and spreads unnoticed is terrifying.

Recently my partner and I came across a man screaming abuse in his girlfriend's face on a public street. She was backed up against a wall, scared and crying. When my partner interrupted the tirade, the man turned on us and the other girl we were with and threatened all of us. We told two police officers, one male and one female, that we were worried for the girl and thought her partner might

turn violent. When we caught up with the police later, the female officer told me: “Yeah he was starting on us as well, but she was as bad as he was.”

The crying girl? The crying girl was as bad as the man screaming in her face, in strangers' faces, in police officers' faces? It shocked me that anyone, let alone someone in a position of trust and authority, someone paid to serve and protect us, could even draw comparison between the two. This is the reality victims face.

Shortly after this, a quiz master at student bar Radio in Ashton Lane asked his audience ‘Is it still rape if you kill her first?’ Along side plenty of other misogynist quips about rape and violence that undermined the trauma of this subject matter. The online reaction to news of the quiz led to the quizmaster's prompt sacking, but comments left on the article and the fact it happened in the first place point to our society's deeply ingrained victim-blaming culture. Frankie Boyle may have spawned a generation of clones, without the wit to tell intelligent jokes but armed with one-liners to shock people into awkward laughter. Each wannabe stand-up secretes another drop of poison into society with every ‘joke’, convinces another crowd that these things are OK. If their mothers, sisters or girlfriends were raped and murdered, would it still be funny?

In the same month as the quizmaster made this hilarious joke, it was reported that a girl walking home past Lilybank Gardens (the gardens behind Ashton Lane) was beaten into submission and violently raped. CCTV tapes show the rapist ducking behind a van to hide from the victim while he follows her. After attacking her, he left her lying on the ground and went home to his girlfriend, who asked him why he had all those horrible scratches on his face.

When I mentioned the attack to a friend, an attack which I had read about in explicit and upsetting detail, they said: “Yeah, I heard about that. Had he not had like 15 pints or something?” I was also ashamed that my automatic internal reaction when I read it was That's why I never walk home alone at night. In that moment I drove distance between myself and the battered rape victim, a girl my age from my neighbourhood, in an attempt to feel less unsafe.

Elsewhere in the UK, a judge accused a 13-year-old girl of being ‘predatory’ when a 41 year old man abused her.

This is our crisis. This is what we as a society must try to recover from, must cope with and overcome in order to struggle forward. It's not our fault the streets aren't safe for us to walk at night, or that our homes and partner's homes are statistically even less safe for us. It's the violence and approach to violence we have to prevent and deconstruct, rather than focus our attention on constructing ways to protect ourselves. I didn't always know that, wasn't aware of how brainwashed I'd been by misconceptions or how distracted I'd been by people who wanted to convince me that survivors were in some way at fault. We must protect our Sharons and our Beths, must protect all of the girls walking home at night, must protect people from hearing rape and violence trivialised in rooms full of people laughing - laughing at their trauma, their crisis.

*Names have been changed to protect victim identities.

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Children, Schools and Preventing Sexual Violence

- Sarah Lauren Scott

Recently the government has focused on funding prevention programmes when it comes to tackling sexual violence. Part of this bothers me because it's almost like saying that it's 'too late' for women who have already fallen prey to sexual violence at the hands of men. It's brushing them off as damaged - it's brushing me off as damaged.

Funding for support and counselling services for survivors is imperative. Without adequate support survivors face greater risks of substance abuse and other addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation, suicide, self-harm and a whole host of other mental health issues. It creates a downward spiral of despair from which there is no escape. The after-effects of sexual violence are vast and devastating. I understand that the country is in financial dire straits and it needs to save money, but by not supporting survivors it is preventing them from being self-sufficient, productive members of society. With correct help many survivors with mental health problems could heal and return to work, for example.

Sexual violence costs our economy a lot of money; it's estimated that one rape costs the British government £76,000 and violence against women as a whole costs a massive £40bn a year. That money isn't just spent on investigating and prosecuting; it's also spent on support for the survivor - be that from the NHS or a charitable counselling organisation.

Although I believe that government backing for support services is vital, prevention is also extremely important. There is some controversy over how effective prevention methods can be. Too often prevention campaigns target potential victims - don't walk alone, don't get into taxis, watch your drink, don't wear anything that shows anything beyond your ankles. This kind of awareness is redundant, insulting, dated and quite frankly absolutely pointless. Sobriety doesn't prevent rape, covering every inch of your skin in clothing doesn't prevent rape and blaming women doesn't prevent rape. The only common denominator in every single case of sexual violence is the presence of a perpetrator.

It might seem futile to ask a rapist not to rape and perhaps it is in some cases. There are campaigns that target rapists and they do work but we really need to reach predators before they become predisposed to sexual violence - before they get a taste for it. We need to talk to our sons, brothers, nephews and grandsons. We need to address young boys.

Before we can speak to young men we need to understand why we live in a culture that normalises rape - a culture that promotes violence against women. We need to take a step back from sexual abuse and view the bigger picture - misogyny and patriarchy. Patriarchy is an ancient social construct that is to blame for the inequality women face in society today and it is to blame for rape.

Patriarchal social structures were defined by Allan G Johnson in *The Gender Knot* as:

- Male dominated - which doesn't mean that all men are powerful or all women are powerless-- only that the most powerful roles in most sectors of society are held predominantly by men, and the least powerful roles are held predominantly by women
- Organised around an obsession with control, with men elevated in the social structure because of their presumed ability to exert control (whether rationally or through violence or the threat of violence) and women devalued for their supposed lack of control--women are assumed to need men's supervision, protection, or control
- Male identified: aspects of society and personal attributes that are highly valued are associated with men, while devalued attributes and social activities are associated with women. There is a sense of threat to the social structure of patriarchies when these gendered associations are

destabilised--and the response in patriarchy is to increase the level of control, often by exerting control over women (as well as groups who are devalued by virtue of race, ethnicity, sexuality, or class).

- Male centred: It is taken for granted that the centre of attention is the natural place for men and boys, and that women should occupy the margins. Public attention is focused on men. (To test this, take a look at any daily newspaper; what do you find on the front page about men? What about women?)

From birth children are exposed to misogyny and assigned patriarchal roles based on their sex: through the casual sexism of their elders, mother vs father - dad is the breadwinner and mother is the homemaker, the everyday accepted sexual objectification of women, the lack of female role models in children's literature and entertainment - e.g. the 'damsel in distress' trope, domestic abuse, toys that portray women as weak and men as strong - Action Man vs Barbie, female is negative and an insult - e.g. 'you throw like a girl'. The list is endless.

It only gets worse as children mature and reach puberty and sexual maturation. In today's world pornography is highly accessible to young children. Exposure to even 'soft' pornography is confusing and damaging at such an impressionable age. Natasha Walter, a feminist author, cites a Canadian study in her book *Living Dolls* which showed that 90% of boys aged 13 and 14 had viewed internet pornography. Viewing pornography can be harmful for mature individuals but it is particularly detrimental to children and teenagers. It portrays a warped view of what sex is and it places women and men in assigned, patriarchal roles that show men in control and women as mere sexual objects. She laments:

For an increasing number of young people, pornography is no longer something that goes alongside sex but something that precedes sex. Before they have touched another person sexually or entered into any kind of sexual relationship, many children have seen hundreds of adult strangers having sex. The massive colonisation of teenagers' erotic life by commercial pornographic materials is something that it is hard to feel sanguine about. By expanding so much in a world that is still so unequal, pornography has often reinforced and reflected the inequalities around us.

This means that men are still encouraged, through most pornographic materials, to see women as objects, and women are still encouraged much of the time to concentrate on their sexual allure rather than their imagination or pleasure. No wonder we have seen the rise of the idea that erotic experience will necessarily involve, for women, a performance in which they will be judged visually.

A 2011 BBC survey, conducted by TNS, of 18-24 year-old men showed that one-fifth of men worried that pornography was influencing their behaviour. Two-thirds of respondents to a White Ribbon Scotland survey of 16-24 year-olds believe that sexual images can create harmful attitudes towards women.

It then gets even more confusing and dangerous when we figure in that children are exposed to 'torture pornography' and 'rape pornography' - providing their malleable minds a blueprint for how to rape.

We are alarmed but not shocked when we learn of young boys subjecting girls to sexual violence. We accept it, begrudgingly, and placate ourselves with the soothing, familiar utterance "my son would never do that". But every rapist is someone's son, every survivor or victim is someone's daughter. In 1920 in Wales, 14-year old Harold Jones murdered and sexually assaulted two young girls, the youngest just eight-years old. He was said to be disinterested by the romantic advances of willing girls and was only excited by absolute control.

More recently in 2012, America was horrified by the story of 13-year old Noah Crooks. He murdered his mother, Gretchen Crooks, after his attempt to rape her failed. He claimed he was motivated by his mother taking away his *Call of Duty* video game.

These stories, however horrifying, are not rare.

Another common - and equally disturbing - occurrence is teenage gang rape. With the notoriety of Steubenville, the Reeta Parsons case and the Audrie Pott case, society is finally accepting that it has a serious problem. But it is not a recent phenomenon and it is not only hiding behind the white picket fences of suburbia. Teenage gang rape is often the bullet used to seek revenge on rival gang members - female relatives and girlfriends of rivals are often targeted. Female gang members who have 'stepped out of line' are also subjected to brutal gang rapes as punishment and to keep them silent.

Schools are sadly breeding grounds for sexual violence and misogyny. In the United Kingdom one-third of girls have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. The World Health Organisation has said that globally schools serve as the most common setting for sexual harassment and coercion. In North Wales in August 2013 it was reported that a 14-year old boy sexually assaulted his teacher. He barricaded her in a room and subjected her to a sexual assault while laughing. The boy has two previous convictions for sexual assaults and was on bail for a third when the attack took place. He has been sentenced to three years in a juvenile detention centre.

It's not just a predisposition to sexual violence that is ingrained at an early age; attitudes to sexual violence and prejudices against victims are also established. According to the End Violence Against Women Coalition, half of boys believe that it is acceptable to sometimes hit a woman or force her to have sex. A recent survey conducted by White Ribbon Scotland showed that a quarter of people believe that a survivor is partly to blame if she was drunk or dressed 'provocatively' - echoing earlier findings from the Scottish Government, The Havens and Amnesty International. The study also showed that one-third think that it is the responsibility of a domestic abuse victim to walk away. One-sixth believe that a rapist is a man who can't control his sexual urges. Callum Hendry, co-ordinator of White Ribbon Scotland, stated that this idea is absolving men of responsibility and placing blame on survivors for 'tempting' rapists. Rape is not a loss of control and power - it is the act of taking control and abusing power. Similarly, four-fifths of people believed that alcohol and drugs caused men to be abusive towards their partners, a belief further exonerating the perpetrator of blame.

Misogyny is the cornerstone of patriarchy. By ingraining a deep, internal - even subconscious - hatred of women in boys, men as a class can continue stand at the top of the hierarchy; giving them the control to subordinate women and deny them their fundamental human rights. In order to prevent sexual violence we need to intervene at an early stage. So what is the solution? There is no clear definitive answer but there are steps we can take - at home, in schools and at a societal level:

Society and home

Society and parents need to challenge how they view men and women's roles - at home, the workplace and in everyday life. Parents need to address the belief of what traditionally defines masculinity and femininity is wrong and harmful. Children need to be exposed to a wide range of positive male and female role models who do not conform to patriarchal sex roles. Parents need to monitor the language they use that may enforce negative sex-based stereotypes in children's young, impressionable minds - children are not born sexist; it is learned behaviour.

Children's access to outside, negative stimuli like pornographic and sexually degrading and objectifying imagery needs to be eliminated. It's impossible to police the internet but it is possible for parents to decide what their children are and are not exposed to. Parents need to limit their children's access to sexist and objectifying material but society as a whole needs to work to eradicate it entirely; not just brush it under the carpet. The presence of demeaning material like Page Three in The Sun newspaper normalises sexual objectification and in turn embeds sexist views. It's not a case of censorship - it's a case of society viewing women as equal human beings whose value is not determined by the size of their breasts. The National Union of Teachers states that not only does Page Three have a negative impact on the self-esteem of young girls, it has a detrimental effect on young boys and their views of women.

Parents need to dispel the fear of discussing sex with their children. Parents need to discuss rape with their children and teach them that consent is their human right. Parents need to eliminate the culture of silence around sexual violence and teach their sons not to rape or stand idly by in the face of sexual inequality.

School

Sex education needs to be revitalised and it needs to start earlier. Currently, sex education tends to focus on pregnancy, puberty and sexually transmitted diseases - it doesn't sufficiently teach children about enthusiastic consent, healthy sexual relationships and respecting the bodily autonomy of others.

There is insufficient information (and plenty of misinformation) provided to young people about what rape actually is. Young people are incessantly lectured about 'stranger danger', which is important, but disproportionate when most rapes and sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the survivor - a father, brother, friend, partner. Rape is portrayed as a physically violent act which occurs between two strangers in a dark alley way when that is simply not what it is. Only 13% of rapes in Scotland are classified as stranger rapes, most people are raped in their own home and in 90% of cases no weapon is used or implied. Children need to be taught that rape is simply sex without consent and it is a crime; there should be no ambiguity. There is too much focus on what young women and girls can do to prevent becoming victims and not enough focus on teaching boys not to become rapists; which in turn infuses victim-blaming attitudes. Enthusiastic consent needs to be taught in schools - we need to teach young people to look for a yes (including non-verbal cues and body language), not simply the presence of a no. We need schools to teach young people what the repercussions of rape are for the survivor and the perpetrator - including custodial punishments and what life as a convicted sex offender entails.

The culture of impunity in regards to sexual bullying, sexual harassment and casual sexism must be eradicated. Schools need to take reports of unwanted sexual attention seriously - perpetrators need to be punished. Teachers need to be taught how to deal with and detect sexism and sexual bullying in classrooms and beyond. To prevent it from occurring in the first instance sexual equality need to become part of the school's ethos - sex-based stereotypes and their impact need to be discussed with children. Schools need to make children want to care about sexual inequality - young people need to be impelled to want to fight sexism, sexual abuse and sexual bullying. Schools need to be a safe space for everyone - children, adults, girls and boys.

Some of these suggestions are already implemented in some schools but there is no uniformity - rape awareness and sexual equality need to be taught at an early stage in a consistent manner if we are ever to eliminate violence against women.

On a positive note, Rape Crisis Scotland has recently secured funding from The Big Lottery to recruit eight workers throughout the country to develop 'local strategic approaches to sexual violence prevention, and to deliver interventions to young people around healthy sexual relationships'.

What do you think we should do to prevent sexual violence?

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Sexual history mitigates rape? It does in Scotland...

- Andrew Tickell

In 2011, Ken Clarke, then serving as Lord Chancellor and Justice Minister in the UK government, got into serious bother when he referred to “serious rape” in a radio interview. Labour called for his resignation, he eventually got the heave-ho, replaced by Chris Grayling, and the row died down. Rather less likely to hit the UK news headlines is a decision of the Court of Criminal Appeal, handed down this morning, in *Her Majesty’s Advocate v. Cooperwhite*.

It transpires that, according to Scots criminal law, raping someone with whom you have any sexual history, even years after you ceased to have sexual contact, actually mitigates the seriousness of the offence on sentencing.

In February of this year, Cooperwhite was convicted of sexually assaulting two women, and was sentenced to six years in prison. The Crown appealed, arguing that this sentence was unduly lenient, given the facts. A panel, consisting of Lords Carloway, Eassie and Bracadale rejected the appeal, holding that the sentence, while lenient, fell within the “range of sentences which a trial judge, applying his mind to all relevant factors, could reasonably have considered appropriate.”

In the course of their submissions, and with reference to authorities of the court, Cooperwhite’s lawyers argued that:

‘... “familiarity” between a rapist and his victim was regarded as something justifying a more lenient sentence than might normally have been thought appropriate.’

Ultimately, the appeal was rejected on other grounds, but in an unusual move, Lord Carloway appended “further considerations” to his opinion, on the question of whether, as a matter of law, raping a sexual partner, friend, or person known to you represented a mitigating factor in determining the punishment to be imposed. Discussing the Appeal Court’s past cases, Carloway concluded - to my mind, shockingly - that:

“It is undoubtedly correct, as the respondent submitted, that the existence of both a pre-existing and an existing sexual relationship has been regarded by the court, in the past, as a mitigating circumstance.”

He gave a couple of examples. The 1999 case of *Ramage*, where the convicted man and the complainer “had been in a relationship of a sexual nature, but that this had ceased some six years” before the sexual assault of which he was convicted. Reducing his sentence from five years to three and a half years imprisonment on appeal, Lord Caplan made this outrageous statement:

“... there are factors in this case which could perhaps justify treating the case as being less serious than would normally be the case with a rape offence. The appellant and the complainer were not in any sense strangers. They had been in an intimate relationship before and, indeed, at one point they had been in a sexual relationship. Moreover they had resumed friendship and were seeing each other regularly (although it must be acknowledged that the complainer in no way gave the appellant to understand that she was prepared to resume a sexual relationship with him). Nevertheless, there was perhaps room for the appellant to delude himself as to what the position was on that point. Beyond the rape itself there had been no serious degree of personal violence and the appellant was not likely to repeat this conduct with other women”.

As Carloway notes in today’s opinion:

‘It may be that the repetitive use of the word “perhaps” shows that the court may have felt somewhat uncomfortable with what it was saying and, indeed, with the import of its dictum. Nevertheless, that dictum seems to be clear authority for the proposition that, if there has been a prior sexual relationship, that is a mitigating factor. Indeed, following the logic of the dictum, mere acquaintanceship may be such a factor, at least when compared with the rare “stranger rape”’

The principles have also been applied more recently, in the 2012 case of *Petrie*, in which the appeal court reduced another sentence from seven to five years, illustrating, said Carloway: “... the court being prepared to regard the existence of an on-going sexual relationship as a significant factor in reducing a sentence imposed by a trial judge, who regarded the existence of that relationship as one of trust and hence an aggravating feature of the crime.”

Many of you will, I’m sure, sympathise with the trial judge’s sentiments. Ken Clarke’s ill-judged and clumsily-phrased observations represented only his own opinion. These statements are the law of Scotland. Carloway’s opinion, rightly, expresses muted unease with these authorities, and their outmoded logic. The idea that being raped by your sexual partner, husband or boyfriend counts in their favour if and when it comes to sentencing is a disgusting juridical principle, whose elimination from our sentencing book is long overdue.

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Frances Andrade’s Suicide and the Re-victimisation of Rape Survivors in the Witness Box

- Sarah Lauren Scott

I can’t stop reading about Frances Andrade’s suicide.

It’s so sad but I can entirely understand why she chose to end her life.

I try not to talk or think about this part of my life, but I remember vividly even now -- almost two years later -- how fucking horrible it was giving evidence against my attacker. For hours and hours I had to stand in a room full of strangers, alone, as a man who did not know me was allowed to tear my character to shreds, tell the court my private business, call me a liar over and over again and there was nothing I nor anyone else could do to end it. Add to that the trauma of being just feet away from the man who only five months earlier had assaulted me, beat me, raped me. I can still remember his ugly, smarmy face as I told the court how he tore me open and left me bleeding on the floor. But I couldn’t just walk away when this man accused me of heinous things -- of lying, of liking it, of asking for this -- I wasn’t allowed to. No-one stood up in that crowded court room and said ‘stop’. I lost my temper when he questioned me on something private from when I was a young teenager and the judge called a recess. I remember asking his QC how he could do this to people, but he didn’t answer me. I wasn’t going to come back. I told them I refused to come back, but I was told there would be a warrant for my arrest if I didn’t. That day was one of the worst days of my life. I felt like I was being raped again -- this time with an audience.

Something needs to change. It has to. The way things are just now isn’t right, it isn’t fair. Survivors of rape and sexual assault are treated like criminals in the witness box. Defence lawyers are allowed to dig up and lambast your most personal details that are irrelevant to the fact you were a victim of this fucking horrible crime. The system is traumatising and re-victimising survivors and it’s putting survivors off of reporting. It’s making survivors kill themselves. Honestly, if I wasn’t in a psychiatric hospital for the duration of the trial I may have taken the same path as Frances.

Frances’ case has strengthened my belief that survivors should have their own lawyer to represent solely their interests. Rape Crisis Scotland have been campaigning this for a long time. The

prosecutor, despite their best intentions, isn't there for the survivor. They represent the public. Experiences of survivors giving evidence, reporting figures and conviction rates all show that when it comes to trial a survivor's interests are not represented. They are simply a witness, they are an exhibit, they don't matter. As long as they answer all the questions thrown at them the court doesn't give a fuck what happens afterwards. Their life, their autonomy, their wellbeing doesn't matter to the court. The court doesn't care. All the court cares about is the process.

Survivors need someone in court to represent them and to be there for them. A lawyer for the survivor could stand up when the questioning turns to abuse and bullying. A lawyer could oppose the introduction of irrelevant and private medical records and psychiatric records. If anything bittersweet can come of Frances' death I hope it is that. I hope the court opens its eyes. I hope it listens to our voices, our cries, our pleas. A survivor who is cited to give evidence may, if she's lucky, get a tour of the court room and get to meet the prosecutor for a few minutes before she testifies. That is pretty much it. Survivors aren't prepared for questioning, the process and the law whereas a defendant has months to prepare and discuss the case with their lawyer -- they are told what they should and shouldn't answer, say, wear. Survivors go in there not knowing, vulnerable, exposed and alone. It's wrong.

Women are being raped on a staggering level and the court system is abetting it. It's allowing it.

A guilty verdict shouldn't be an anomaly.

Survivors' private lives shouldn't be exposed and castigated.

Survivors shouldn't have to weigh the pros and cons of reporting their attackers.

The court fed Frances those pills, they forced them down her throat.

Of course I understand that there is a balance -- due process must take place and the validity of the survivor's testimony must be questioned so the jury can make an informed decision -- but too often, as I have stated, that balance isn't right. The lawyers for the defence don't merely question the evidence, they question the character of the survivor on a scale unseen in survivors and victims of other kinds of crimes. Quite frankly it is bullying.

Frances' rapists will now spend a few years in prison for abusing her, get out half way through their sentence for 'good behaviour' and continue living their lives as if this never happened. Her family is now destroyed. Her children are left without a mother, her husband without his wife. Of course they should have been punished but is it even worth it? I don't believe in God, an afterlife or any other spiritual bullshit but I hope Frances is at peace now. It leaves me with the question that I always ask myself - how do those who re-victimise rape survivors in court sleep at night?

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Forgotten Brides: Life after Forced Marriage

- Lauren Wilks

“Parents, family, friends – I left everyone because he was after me and my daughter”, says Tehmina when I ask her how she came to leave Pakistan in 2002 and claim asylum in the UK. “It was an arranged marriage”, she tells me through a broken phone line, “but when I married him he turned out to be another person. I was beaten and abused for ten months.”

After escaping, Tehmina was rejected by almost all of her family members. While her father remained sympathetic, he told her that she and her daughter no longer had a life in Pakistan. She received death threats from her brothers and the police ignored her cry for help, saying it was “her own matter”. “The situation in Pakistan is very difficult,” Tehmina explains, “it’s impossible to live as a single woman or single mother...honour killings are everywhere”.

Forced marriage is not a new and undiscovered problem in the UK. Campaigners have long called for greater attention to be paid to the issue. In recent years policy-makers have cast aside claims of cultural difference, introducing a range of measures – both at home and abroad – to see that the practice is ended. However, tougher laws and awareness campaigns, while important, fail to address the needs of those who are today living in or escaping forced marriages. For women like Tehmina, the trauma does not end upon running away.

“It’s an uphill struggle; very often as bad as the forced marriage itself”, says Angela Voulgari of Saheliya – an Edinburgh-based organisation specialising in holistic support for black and minority ethnic women. Angela wants to see more intensive support to protect those trapped in and escaping forced marriages. As she tells me, fleeing can mark the beginning of another, more frightening chapter for survivors.

Like other forms of abuse, forced marriage is a hidden problem and statistics, as Carla Thomas of the Forced Marriage Unit points out, represent “the tip of the iceberg”. Those working with survivors speak of the difficulty in identifying forced marriage especially since many of their clients, like Tehmina, come from places where the concept simply does not exist. The full horror of a person’s experience often only comes to light during the course of counselling. “Sometimes we have women coming to us saying they would like help with learning English or with their finances,” explains Angela, “and in the course of working with them they disclose that they’ve been forced into a marriage, raped or held like a slave. Anything can happen.”

Despite the difficulties in identifying forced marriage – not to mention the long-standing reluctance of policy-makers to enter into the discussion for fear of being hailed culturally insensitive – there has been increasing pressure on governments to act. In 2011, David Cameron pledged to use the resources of the government to end the practice within the UK and overseas, and in Scotland legislation was hurriedly passed introducing Forced Marriage Protection Orders and making it a criminal offence to breach them.

While many welcome the move towards more rigorous legislation, critics warn that criminalisation alone is insufficient, as it will do little to tackle the root causes. Others argue that not enough people know about the law and even for those that do, legal proceedings are unappealing. In a survey carried out last year with residents of refugees run by the Ashiana Network, 19 out of 20 women said that if forced marriage had been a criminal offence they would not have alerted the authorities because they would not have wanted to see their parents prosecuted.

The debate on criminalisation highlights a fundamental problem with strategies that focus exclusively on entry into marriage: they fail to address the experiences and needs of those living in or running away from forced marriages. As with other forms of abuse, a variety of control mechanisms – financial, psychological, physical and sexual – make it difficult and often dangerous for women to

leave. As Tehmina found, escaping forced marriage can also entail breaking ties and moving country, as the stigma surrounding divorce forces people to cross borders and forge new lives elsewhere.

The psychological costs of leaving loved ones behind are enormous and survivors report living with the daily fear of retribution. More saddening is that on arrival in the place where they expect to find sanctuary, survivors can find themselves vulnerable and isolated. As E. Benjamin Skinner points out in his exposé on modern-day slavery, *A Crime So Monstrous*, traffickers often prey on those who have travelled – perfectly legally – to other countries, using the debts incurred along a person’s journey to hold them in bondage.

The trauma of fleeing is further compounded by the task of securing an immigration status in the UK. Survivors find themselves thrown into a tangled web of regulations or up against an asylum system that many argue is designed to make people turn around and go back.

In some cases, Saheliya’s clients have had their passports taken away from them by their husbands and the Home Office is completely unaware of their existence. As she puts it, “they effectively become non-persons”.

On top of this, immigration regulations require survivors to recount their stories time and time again – a traumatic experience in itself – often in front of interpreters from their own communities. This again puts them at risk of honour-based violence and, as Angela points out, “pushes them back to where they started from”.

While in some ways fleeing forced marriage within the UK seems less of an ordeal, huge funding cuts to women’s refuges – 100 per cent in some areas – and the retreat from community-specific provision have made the chances of safe exit slim. Additionally, as Nina Murray, Women’s Policy Development Officer at the Scottish Refugee Council, tells me, “there is still some way to go” in terms of spreading understanding of the gendered experiences that women may have fled. Saheliya runs a number of outreach activities in schools and the community to spread awareness of forced marriage and the support available to those at risk. Because many survivors are unfamiliar with the idea of forced marriage, such activities are an important part of the efforts of grassroots organisations to bring the issue to the fore.

Forced marriage is not just about being forced into marriage, it is also about being forced to stay. Whilst welcoming more concerted policy interventions aimed at protecting people from the threat of forced marriage, greater efforts should be made to protect those who are today living in abusive relationships and are unable to flee. Similarly, we need to rethink the assumption that after fleeing the individual is safe and protected from harm; almost eleven years since Tehmina fled Pakistan, she still lives in fear. “I can’t trust anyone and all I can see is how he ruined my life and my daughter’s life.”

Some names have been changed.

Originally published in The Student (10/02/13)

Glasgow Union must challenge its sexism

- Maria Vole

Following the incident at the Glasgow Ancients debating competition last weekend where two female debaters were booed and heckled because of their gender, the lingering misogyny of

the Glasgow University Union (GUU) has come to light. There is a strong history of sexism in the GUU which was male-only until 1980. The union still hosts an annual 'Last All Male Board' (LAMB) dinner which was set up to honour the men who voted against admitting women in 1980. The fact that the LAMB event is still running demonstrates the union's legacy of misogyny. The events that took place last weekend show that the GUU still holds misogynistic views. Women are unable to take part in a serious debate without being demeaned and derided simply for being female. The fact that Marlena Valles and Rebecca Meredith experienced sexist heckling and misogynistic objectification during a serious university debate is shocking. More shocking still is the lack of response the women received when they complained about the incident. In a blog post on the HuffPost news site, Meredith stated that when she and her partner confronted the committee at GUU, they were met with "a brick wall of silence". The women were told that this type of behaviour was "to be expected" from certain members of the GUU, and is considered "par for the course". In a response to the incident posted on Facebook, Valles also criticized the lack of action taken by the GUU committee toward the hecklers, and stated that the response from the Union had been 'abysmal'.

The GUU has issued an official apology and announced that the Union will be launching an investigation. But it has also been announced that disciplinary action will only be taken against two of the perpetrators because of a "lack of evidence" against them, despite eyewitness accounts of the incident. This is a pretty lacklustre response on the part of the GUU to such a serious incident. The union is still clearly misogynistic, with the Debates Convener (also a GUU member) stating on Facebook that the incident was 'funny'. Valles said on Facebook that "the entire Union seemed to be weirdly proud of its misogynistic roots throughout the competition", with one GUU member shouting "get that woman out of my chamber" as Valles passed by him at a social after the debate. The GUU needs to challenge this misogynistic culture. It must make it clear to its members that shouting sexist remarks a serious debate is not acceptable behaviour. The incident should not be considered "par for the course" and "to be expected". It should be openly rejected as sexism, and the GUU needs to take a stand against it. To abolish the ideas of its sexist past, the GUU needs to take action against the members who took part in the shocking display of sexism and misogyny at the debate. Questioning the validity of debaters' points based on the fact that the speakers are female is gross discrimination. Misogyny such as this has no place in society and certainly not in a serious university debating hall.

Originally published in The Student (13/03/13)

Fight against campus devaluation of women

- Kelly Temple

NUS women's officer calls on students to challenge 'lad culture' and make universities a better place for women

I got involved in my student politics because I was sick of women's contributions being devalued in my students' association. I was bored of seeing it in wider politics and tired of the way women's liberation gets sidelined when women are not the decision makers. Or at least make up half of those

who make the decisions.

While working as women's officer I've learned more about the problems women students face while at university.

National Union of Students (NUS) research has shown that one in seven women students has been a victim of serious physical or sexual harassment while at university.

Women students are also more likely to be working for lower wages than men and student carers (who are predominately women) are more likely to have considered dropping out of uni due to time and financial pressures.

The research sheds further light on the issues affecting women at uni.

'That's what she said: Women students' experiences of lad culture in higher education' published on International Women's Day reveals that that 50 per cent of study participants identified "prevailing sexism, 'laddism' and a culture of harassment" at their universities.

It's gathered mass opinion from the women's movement, The Everyday Sexism Project, Equalities Challenge Unit and garnered support from Universities UK, and British Universities and Colleges Sports (BUCS).

All of these parties are committed to a summit which will aim to tackle 'lad culture' and NUS is calling on Jo Swinson to convene the summit as Minister for Women and Equalities. I hope she will answer it.

Even in the student movement women are woefully under-represented. We currently make up almost 57 per cent of the UK higher education student population, but just 18 per cent of its students' union presidents this year are women. It's depressing, if I'm honest.

But although these figures are depressing, there are plenty of women students making change happen.

Royal Holloway Students' Union's Susuana Antubam was named Inspirational Woman Student of the Year by the NUS women's campaign.

Susuana is a full-time student, president of the RHUL Feminist Society as well as founder of the London Student Feminist Network, and played a major role in organising the Student Feminist Conference.

It was an exciting grassroots feminist conference bringing together women and feminists locally with a vision to bring this nationally to share best practice and learn about different issues and create an important informal space for women students to come together and develop their own campaigning capacity.

Edinburgh University Feminist Society boasts a great membership that has worked within their community against anti-choice groups and affiliated Edinburgh University Students' Association to Abortion Rights (a national campaign calling for an extension of women's rights and access to safe and legal abortion).

They've done some amazing work discussing the effects of lad culture on their campus.

I think it's really important that we recognise the great women like Susuana who are on campuses making real change for women students.

Not only is it vital that, as women, we realise that we have the power to shape our education, but also that collectively we can challenge the sexism and prejudice which women have to navigate in pursuit of an education and wider student life.

By working together and supporting each other we can challenge this 'lad culture' and make our universities a better place for women.

Originally published in The Journal (28/03/13)

Page three: media objectification

- Frances Bell

Whatever your thoughts on the No More Page 3 campaign, you've got to admit that it's been pretty impressive. Started by self-identified 'non-campaigner' Lucy-Anne Holmes last September, the original petition has gained worldwide attention, sparked extensive debate in the UK media and achieved over 63,000 signatures – of which the SRC is one of the latest.

In his evidence to the Leveson inquiry last year, The Sun editor Dominic Mohan described Page 3 as a “British institution”, and to a certain extent he's right. Page 3 has become such a ubiquitous part of British journalism that most people don't really think about it all that much. When you stop to consider it however, Page 3 does seem a bit...odd. Regardless of what you think about porn, it is a bit incongruous to casually put a semi-naked woman on page 3 of what is otherwise a fairly normal tabloid. As the campaign petition puts it: “George Alagiah doesn't say, ‘And now let's look at Courtney, 21, from Warrington's bare breasts,’ in the middle of the 6 O'Clock News, does he[?].... There would be an outcry.” So why is it okay when you're reading a paper?

Aside from just being a bit weird, Page 3, and the wider culture of sexual objectification that it represents, is pretty harmful to all those involved. We live in a society where women are taught (often by the media) that their appearance is crucial to their success, and in light of this I can understand why being a Page 3 model – being held up as an example of beauty – is often portrayed as being empowering. However, it doesn't seem particularly empowering to value a person for just one superficial characteristic. One of the key problems with objectification is that as soon as someone is valued for their appearance, all other aspects of them are devalued. Page 3 directly feeds into this culture – everyone knows that a model isn't chosen for her opinion on current affairs. Encouraging people to appreciate themselves for their looks, rather than for what they say, do and believe, is not empowering; it's insulting.

Over the past few decades this culture of objectification has been challenged and society is changing. Although it's still far from perfect, women are increasingly being portrayed as more rounded human beings, whether in film & television or in the news. In continuing to print the Page 3 feature, The Sun is holding on to an archaic sexism that most of society left behind a few decades ago. Instead of ‘celebrating’ women for their breasts, it's time for the paper to be celebrating women for their opinions, values and actions. Page 3 should be recognised and dumped as the relic that it is.

One of the most common arguments against the No More Page 3 campaign has been that it's removal would be anti-freedom of speech. To me this seems a bit strange. I can understand an insistence to uphold the right to freedom of speech in journalistic practice – freedom to publish state secrets or controversial news, for example. But topless photos are not exactly in the ‘public interest.’ In fact, I have yet to hear a strong argument for keeping Page 3. There's nothing outlawing Page 3 from being printed, but it's pretty irresponsible and regressive for The Sun to do so.

For all these reasons, I'm proud that the SRC has chosen to back the campaign. It is elected to act in what it perceives to be the students' best interests, and supporting a campaign to improve the representation of women in the media seems like a no-brainer. It forms just one part of the work being done by the SRC to tackle the issues faced by women on campus. It doesn't take that long to sign a petition, and commitment to the campaign strengthens, rather than detracts from, other SRC projects. Most importantly, the decision to back the No More Page 3 campaign raises awareness of the issues on campus and encourages discussion of objectification and female representation in the media.

Originally published in the Glasgow Guardian (07/02/13)

No we won't back down!

- Konrad Wojnar & Alicia Jensen

At least a hundred students stand gathered besides the Central Building in Hillhead in Aberdeen. Some are holding big banners and some carry megaphones, but most are hiding away in their thick coats, covering themselves from the perpetual cold. The people standing about are mostly quiet or chatting away to their friends. A particular aspect of this group might catch the least observant eye. They're all women!

In fact, this is exclusively a woman's event, staged in relation to the October 27th rape that happened on Bedford Avenue. A lot of these people live a walking distance from where the incident took place. Some feel psychologically and emotionally connected with this march, some are politically motivated. They all have one thing in common- a feeling of personal responsibility to act for the greater good of the community, for women, and to reclaim the streets that have been ‘taken away’ from them.

Taking Back the Night

You could automatically ask yourself; taken away by who? The rapist? Crime is an intrinsic part of any city and whether you like it or not, it will always be there. In fact, the event sprouted out of the Aberdeen University's community not as a retort against the rape itself, but against the feeling that came out of the response towards the incident. Although the police investigation achieved its goals, the subsequent feeling that was left lingering in the Aberdonian air gave a sense of stale and overused rhetoric. Some people began feeling that the blame was being diverted from the suspect to the victim – women in general.

The investigation was hailed as one of the largest ones ever conducted by the Grampian police, and the supposed perpetrator, William Fraser (21), was charged on November 9th for abduction, assault and rape of a 22 year old woman on Saturday, October 27th. Currently, he is remanded until further notice.

The buzz around the topic seems to be dying down among students. There were statements sent out to the Aberdeen community to keep a watchful eye out and to keep safe. Women especially were told to avoid walking alone, whether it was during the day or the night. Partly deviating the blame from the crime suspect to the crime victim was blatantly out there; ‘If you're a woman, take extra care.’ In order to raise awareness about this bias and to change people's attitudes towards victim blaming, Lisa Frach and Daphne Heijdelberg decided to create a retaking of the streets march. On Reclaim the Night's facebook page, Lisa and Daphne write, “following the sexual assault that happened on Bedford Ave on Saturday morning the police and several other people gave advice to women not to walk alone, even in the daytime. This and similar advice have been given to women basically forever. However, this way of arguing forces not only the focus onto the victim, but also the blame... It is not acceptable that women are still being told that they are the ones to prevent sexual assault.”

It is interesting and saddening at the same time to think that only after such a horrific event does the student community start to take notice of the larger picture. If we delve a little behind the scenes of Reclaim the Night March, we'll uncover a whole group of students dedicated to, what still a lot of people might call, an unconventional ideal; that is, the pursuit and struggle against common prejudices and biases that are widespread and generally accepted throughout our culture.

Behind the Scenes

Daphne Heijdelberg, a 4th year student and the VP for Welfare and Equal Opps, recalls her beginnings with the Reclaim the Night marches as the previous Women and Gender Officer. She remembers that the idea behind the marches first came to her when she was still at school. She recalls from her studies that women in the late '70's would march out onto the streets in order to

protest violence against women. Aberdeen women were among them then, and now, for the third time in a row, keep going back.

By taking the same road that the 22 year old took on the morning of her assault, the march shows that fear and violence should be driven out once and for all. In their eyes, it wasn't fair to push the blame onto women by saying they should fear the streets, avoid going out alone and generally stay indoors. "When you heard about how the police went about it, and how they began to treat the case, you couldn't help but see the similarities between 40 years ago and now," said Daphne.

Daphne gained her interest in women's rights during her last two years of school. She attended an international school in India where the social issues facing women are moving forward, but are still fresh on everyone's minds.

"I had a great teacher in school, in India, where we discussed topics ranging from gender issues and ethics to equality. That's when I really became interested in this. When I came to Aberdeen, I spotted a great big sign saying "Woman's Officer Wanted", or something like that, and I immediately tried my hand at it." That was Daphne's second year at Aberdeen University. By third year she was the Women's officer, managing forums and organising Reclaim the Night marches, among other things. Now, in her fourth year, she's the VP of Equal Opportunities, serving with Gordon Maloney to promote equal rights and liaises with the university and external groups on equal opportunities issues.

Lisa Frach, a 3rd year student and the current Women and Gender Officer and one of the organizers of the march (along with Daphne), says she is still learning a lot since she is fairly new to the position.

In an indirect way, Lisa became involved with the Equal Opportunities committee through a Canadian theatre group. While on a year abroad, she became involved in the production of The Vagina Monologues, a play produced by Eve Ensler. After over 200 interviews with women from different backgrounds, Ensler produced a play that uncovers matters of sex, rape, menstruation, orgasm and anything you can think of that is connected to women's' issues, whether personal or societal.

She says that getting involved in the play, which has a big significance in the feminist community, and subsequently getting involved with a lot of feminism oriented groups made her wonder why places like Aberdeen and other European cities can't contribute to the movement. She contacted Daphne after that, and became this year's Women and Gender Officer by a stroke of luck and skill. It isn't just Daphne Heijdelberg or Lisa Frach that are responsible for the march on November 10th. It's a whole group of people that have been involved with the campaign, the events leading up it, the women empowerment movement in Aberdeen, and all the people that participated in the actual march.

A Not so Secret, Secret Society

Lisa, the current Women and Gender Officer, says 'I worry a little bit that it sounds like our main criticism goes out to the police, which isn't entirely true, it's more about attacking a broader culture of victim blaming. Overall I think it's good, hopefully the crowds of people will actually be there on Saturday!' Looking at the bigger picture, the event is just a glimpse at what Lisa and Daphne try to accomplish. They want to shed light not only on physical assaults towards woman, but the whole culture that surrounds the rape, something which was highlighted clearly in its aftermath. NUS Scotland published a report called "Hidden Marks", documenting the situation of female students in Scotland and their experience with sexual assault/harrassment. "I'd like to do the same," Lisa points out. "I'd like to document the situation of female students at Aberdeen University in order to implement the Zero Tolerance Policy – a policy about sexual harrassment directed at woman within AUSA, as well as the clubs and pubs in the city."

In the past, movements such as these have been successful in raising awareness. In 2010, Reclaiming the Night march was a shared project between AUSA Equal Opportunities (with Jenny Batty

leading it) and the Amnesty International Society. "Other achievements in the movement are the Women's Forum, as an autonomous space for woman to speak out and decide what actions to take. The women's week around the 8th March, with debates, film nights and workshops. The passing of the 'Zero Tolerance policy against Sexual Harassment' and finally the banning of the 'lads mags' on campus. The last of the two still need better implementation methods" Daphne says.

In relation to where the movement is going, Lisa Frach says she wants to keep with the campaign of raising awareness on issues like sexual harrassment. She also wants to keep building up the zero tolerance policy and basically agrees with the direction that the movement is heading in. Seeing as she is new to her position as Women's and Gender Officer, we have yet to see where she will end up heading the movement in the end.

What happened on October 27th seems to have exposed a lot of issues that never saw the light of day. To ignore the message that Aberdeen women's movement is trying to send out seems to take away from the debate what needs to be happening at all times in our community in relation to our peers, our places in society and our rights. Our attention towards these issues needs to be especially keen when the debate gets uncomfortable.

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