The Second Annual Write to End Violence against Women Awards
10th December 2014
Scottish Parliament: Members Restaurant
6pm-8pm

Programme

6pm: Guest Arrival.

6.30pm: Introduction: Alison Johnstone MSP.

6.40pm: Award Announcement: Best Blog.

6.45pm: Award Announcement: Best Student Article.

6.55pm: Professor Karen Boyle: Director of Feminist Media Studies at Stirling University.

7.10pm: Award Announcement: Best Article.

8pm: Event Close.
Foreword

by Anni Donaldson, 2013 “Best Article” Winner of the Write to End Violence Against Women Awards

It was a bit of a shock when I was told I had been nominated for Best Article in the first Write to End VAW Awards in 2013. Writing about violence against women seemed like a natural extension of my VAW development work with West Dunbartonshire Council and my academic work in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, CELCIS and the Scottish Oral History Centre at Strathclyde University. I had always felt that the general media coverage was not really dealing with the issues in the way that so many of us working in the field understood it.

The gap between women’s experiences of gender-based violence and public awareness seemed very wide and I wondered if I could do something to address this by writing for a general audience. The Scottish Review and Bella Caledonia accepted some of my early attempts but it was the high profile Bill Walker case which really incensed me. My article about Walker, his conviction and the limitations of Scots law in prosecuting abusers like him proved a winner with last year’s judges and I could not have been more surprised or pleased. The award, granted by a panel of experts from both the VAW field and from journalism, proved to be a tremendous boost to both my journalism and, I hope, to public awareness.

The media have always been a key player in shaping public attitudes to all forms of violence against women – not all of it positive. Zero Tolerance are to be congratulated for their part in the Write to End VAW Awards and for publishing excellent guidance promoting responsible journalism. The work is still needed sadly as domestic abuse cases, sexual abuse disclosures and high profile perpetrators continue to dominate media platforms. A great deal of reporting remains voyeuristic and exploitative with victims and survivors’ voices screaming to be heard above the clamour often focussed on the male perpetrators and public sympathy for them. Recent critiques of coverage of the trial of Reeva Steenkamp’s killer and the Ched Evans rape case show what we are still up against. Similarly, revelations of high profile celebrity child sexual abuse predators, the systematic and almost industrial scale sexual exploitation of children and young people by large numbers of men in Rotherham, Oxford and Rochdale all require our continued vigilance in challenging inadequate reporting, biased journalism and in promoting an ethical alternative.

Scotland has come a very long way since those first Zero Tolerance posters drew the public’s attention to domestic abuse. However we still have a long way to go to create a society where everyone finds all forms of violence against women intolerable and says so. Challenging media portrayals is a key part of the work to be done in Scotland and across the world. I hope other countries will follow the example of the Write to End VAW Awards. I feel privileged to be part of this new and exciting part of the journey. I congratulate all of this year’s nominees; win or lose, your writing is important.

Follow me on twitter: @AnniDonaldson
THE **WRITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AWARDS** 
**BEST ARTICLE**
Best Article

SCOTLAND’S GOT IT RIGHT ON DOMESTIC ABUSE: IT TAKES IT SERIOUSLY – AUDREY GILLIAN

‘In Scotland, elite teams have been set up to deal with domestic abuse in the same way that a homicide would be investigated.

It is just past dawn on a winter’s morning and police officers are gathered in the landing of a high-rise block of flats in the west of Scotland. One of them is holding a “ramit”, but this time the door is not battered down because the suspect answers. He is shown a warrant, which he must not touch. The man is told he is being investigated for domestic abuse – he laughs.

But in Scotland domestic abuse is taken seriously. The groundbreaking Domestic Abuse Task Force that arrested the laughing suspect was launched in Strathclyde, a force area now merged with eight others into the unified Police Scotland. An elite unit of investigators, it was the first team of its kind in the UK to specifically tackle domestic abuse in the same way that detectives would a homicide. It took a radical approach to serious and serial domestic attackers, and aimed to stop them in their tracks by investigating all aspects of criminal lifestyle.

One of its high-profile cases was that of Joseph Loughran, 52, who was given a 15-year sentence for a 30-year campaign of violence and domestic abuse against his partners. He choked his victims, burned them with cigarettes, cut them with knives and beat them unconscious.

Now, there are three such teams in Scotland – in the north, east and west – with smaller, local domestic abuse investigation units in the 14 divisions. Police Scotland’s website has an online form for reporting domestic abuse, which is prefaced with the note: “You are not to blame for what is happening to you, it is NOT your fault. Above all, you are not alone and you don’t need to suffer in silence. Help is available to you.”

In the wake of Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary’s damning report exposing “alarming and unacceptable weaknesses” in the way police respond to domestic violence in England and Wales, force chiefs may want to cast their eyes across the border. In Scotland, the term “domestic violence” is no longer in use and is referred to officially as “domestic abuse” because verbal attack and controlling behaviour can be used to subjugate a victim to the perpetrator’s will.

As chief constable of the then Strathclyde force, Sir Stephen House was passionate about domestic abuse, speaking out about horrendous figures showing that the crime escalated in the wake of clashes between Rangers and Celtic.

Then, taking on his new mantle as chief of the new Scotland-wide force, he reaffirmed that domestic abuse was a police priority. Last Christmas, he delivered a video warning to offenders: “This is a crime. It’s not a private matter. You are an offender and you will be dealt with as an offender … The fact that it happens behind closed doors is not an escape. As far as we are concerned, if you commit domestic abuse and we find out, we will be knocking on your door and we will be taking you into custody.”

House’s message, though, is not just to offenders but to his officers. And it’s not just his message. Prosecutors, case workers, campaigners and victims in Scotland have all fought tirelessly to keep the issue of domestic abuse on the agenda and tried to bring its perpetrators to justice.
In May 2012, I spent a few days in the small windowless room that is Glasgow’s specialist domestic abuse court, one of the busiest courts in the country, set up in March 2009 after the Scottish government agreed that such violence need to be treated as a serious crime. Such courts are being rolled out across the country under the aegis of the procurator fiscal’s domestic abuse unit.

When she was head of Strathclyde’s Domestic Abuse Task Force, detective chief inspector Yvonne Scott told me: “There’s a complete change of mindset and culture in our policing. This just wouldn’t have happened in the past. There was a great mistrust of the police because we treated these crimes as ‘just another domestic’. But we have come on leaps and bounds, and recognised that there are so many crimes that can go on in an intimate relationship.”

Forces across the UK need to take their “behind closed doors” mentality towards domestic incidents and kick them out into the open. In its report, HMIC says not all police leaders are making sure domestic abuse is a priority for their forces. It’s time they did.

*Originally published in the Guardian 27/3/14*

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**GIRLS ARE TAUGHT YOUNG THAT VIOLENCE TOWARDS THEM IS NORMAL – NANCY LOMBARD**

The latest European survey on violence towards women did the usual rounds with the same old figures when it was released earlier in the month. One in three women have experienced abuse in their lifetime, one in ten within the past 12 months.

It may even aggravate the problem. Arguably the continued recognition of the magnitude of violence against women results in further normalisation rather than leading to resistance.

We know that locally, nationally and globally, men’s violence against women is an endemic social problem and an enduring human rights issue within all societies and cultures. This is confirmed by official data reproduced worldwide, year after year.

**My experience**

I have been a volunteer, activist and researcher in the field of violence against women since I was 18. My most recent research looked at what primary school children think about men’s violence against women.

When I was writing up the research I reflected upon my autobiographical path, thinking about why I became interested in this field. Often women do this because of direct experience, but I had always assumed I was not one of them, as I didn’t have any personal history.

But when I sat down and reflected I was shocked, not only by the list of abuses I had experienced, but by my normalisation and minimisation of them – and how I still remained affected.

It has been argued that the experience or naming of violence is not always an immediate one. Rather it can be “experienced by the woman or girl at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault”.

My own recalled experiences of abuse included: physical abuse, experiences of coerced sex, flashing and indecent exposure, sexual assaults, physical assaults, verbal sexual abuse. Being aware of the ways in which I normalised personal experiences of violence made me acutely sensitive to the stories by the young people in my study of their own experiences and how they view men’s violence against women.
Interview participants

I asked boys and girls aged 11 and 12 about what they understood violence was and how and why it happened. I also spoke to them about their own lives, friendships and experiences.

For the majority, violence was something that happened in a public place, between adult men who were physically fighting. There would be visible injuries and the men’s behaviour would be stopped. They would be told they were wrong and suffered consequences, such as jail.

This same sequence was replicated at school. Boys would physically fight in public and be told by the teachers or playground assistants that their behaviour was wrong and they were punished for it.

But that didn’t happen for the girls. They talked about being pushed, shoved, kicked, followed and called sexual names by their male peers. Their experiences did not fit the usual description of “real” violence, involving men fighting in public and suffering official reaction and consequences.

Time and time again, when the girls approached teachers or other authority figures they were dismissed for telling tales or raising something perceived as trivial. Or they were relayed that old adage, “he’s only doing it because he likes you”.

Naming violence

Having their behaviour minimised and normalised in this way meant the girls’ experiences were invalidated. This is then typically replicated in their adult lives by what has been termed the “everyday interactions” between men and women.

For me this also explains why countries such as Denmark and Sweden had higher figures for men’s violence against women in the recent study. Countries with greater levels of gender equality are more likely to provide official recognition for women, which enables them to not only name but also define their experiences as violence.

We need to start acting upon these figures rather than finding different ways of presenting the same old story. Preventive education and public awareness campaigns to encourage resistance to violence are essential.

But we also need to challenge the normalisation of violence. We must contest the dynamics in heterosexual relationships where men’s power over women is naturalised, normalised and used as a justification both of and for the violence.

Originally published in the Conversation 17/3/2014
From taking refuge to giving help

Janet McLeod, 65, has worked for Glasgow Women’s Aid for 35 years. Before that, she lived in one of their refuges after fleeing an abusive marriage. She shares her experiences and views with Cordelia O’Neill.

THINGS have changed because domestic abuse is acknowledged now.

Years ago, it wasn’t a topic that was talked about. People knew it went on, but it wasn’t out there. Quite often, women felt ashamed and would cover it up.

It was quite difficult to tell people what was happening and there were not many places to go to get help. It was very difficult in the beginning of Women’s Aid to get any accommodation. We had very little money, and it was difficult to plan forwards.

It doesn’t seem to be the case that things are improving.

There’s as much abuse about now as there was before – maybe because it is out in the open more and is more publicised.

It isn’t just working-class people, you get all kinds of different people becoming the victims of abuse. Some people say there is a link between increased domestic abuse and the Old Firm in Glasgow but I don’t really see the connection.

It is about lack of self-control and power. I don’t believe it is about alcohol, although that is a trigger. I think it is simply an abuse of power.

There is domestic violence against males as well, but it is far more prevalent for males to abuse their partners or girlfriends – I think it is about wanting to control women.

The problems often seem to lie in what they wear or how they look, or who they talk to. There is a distrust that is linked to a man’s self-esteem.

Everybody hopes that there wouldn’t continue to be a need. We would hope that there would be less need for Women’s Aid now than there was 40 years ago.

I remember one woman, who came to us with drug problems and alcohol problems but she really knuckled down and got a cleaning job, and went to AA meetings.

On my way into work, I saw some new council flats being built, and I really wanted one of them for her, so she could start a new life.

We got the forms and applied – and she got one and she just continued to grow and blossom and find a whole new life that had just been dulled before.

It was like turning the lights on. It was just the best thing and it will really stick in my mind forever.
I just so wanted something good to happen to her. I find her very inspiring and it is wonderful when you get a fantastic success story like that.

I would say young women need educating about abuse – they need to learn not to put up with any nonsense or abuse, and know that it is never going to change once it starts. Awareness and education are really important.

They need to learn that if you see signs, don’t think things are going to magically change.

Domestic abuse affects your whole life. You lose your self-confidence, and you can’t make decisions. You stop going out, and you become more and more isolated.

It was mental abuse for me but he did hit me too, so I know what it is like. I was always quite a quiet person, and I was young and I just lost my confidence. I felt I didn’t have anybody to turn to.

My parents had died, but the last thing my father said to me was, ‘If you get a chance, take it.’

Something happened with my son at school, and they just asked me, ‘Is your husband hurting you?’ and I thought of my dad, and I told them.

I found it difficult in the refuge. It was grim. There were seven women and 17 children in one house. But I remember my son used to say he loved it there. He would say, ‘My mummy is happy. She doesn’t cry anymore.’

When I applied for the job with Women’s Aid, I didn’t think I would get it. I left school at 15 and didn’t have any qualifications but someone said to me, ‘You are just as well qualified as anyone, because you have been through this.’

It doesn’t feel like 35 years. I love working with women and helping them to move on. I wanted to put a bit of what I got back in.

I felt it was a miracle that something had come along to get me out of that situation.
I don’t speak to the sister I loved because abuse scared her so much

DOMESTIC abuse’s impact is not confined to the victims themselves. It also affects their relationships with their families. Here, the sister of a victim reveals the toll on them. All names have been changed.

I was always really close to my sister, Lucy. She is two years older than me and I always looked to her for all the answers. She was always positive and outgoing, and was really popular and sporty at school and university. Things started to change very slowly after she met her boyfriend, Daniel. At first, they seemed really happy. He was very charming, and worked in a well-paid job. He would always come round to our family home armed with presents and flowers.

But then she started becoming more and more withdrawn and coming home to our parents’ house every weekend, instead of going out with her friends. She also changed the way she dressed, and wore things that he had chosen and stopped wearing make-up and doing her hair. If he called, she wouldn’t speak to him, but would tell us to say she was out with the dog or had gone to bed. I suspected things were bad when I ended up moving in with her when the lease on my flat ended. She said there couldn’t be any sign that I was staying there and I would have to either go out or stay in my room.

When I asked why, she said he thought I was a bad influence. She also told me that he had deleted all the male numbers on her phone. She tried to leave him a few times but he would work out where she was and start hammering on the door in the middle of the night. When she eventually broke up with him, he attacked her, pulled her down the stairs by her hair and spat on her.

She moved to the other end of the country to get away from him but the abuse has harmed her relationship with the family. She has said that I should have done more to help her and I let her down. She also blames our mother for being nice to him when he visited.

She has huge problems with trust, and tries to control every last detail of her life – I suppose because she feels she lost control so much. My sister and I don’t even speak any more. It breaks my heart, and I know it is because she has been so damaged by being mentally and physically attacked by someone who said he loved her.

VIOLENCE against women is a problem that won’t go away, despite 40 years of work by Glasgow’s Women’s Aid.

As the organisation prepare to mark their four-decade anniversary in the city, a senior staff member has warned they are as much needed as ever.

Training and development manager Susan Jack, says women will continue to be abused physically and mentally by their partners unless serious action is taken to tackle the root of the issue.
And she believes that the situation could even get worse unless women are given more power within society.

Susan said: “We are 40 years on from where we started, and the problem is still here. There is more public awareness, which means people are coming forward. But there are no real steps being taken to tackle the roots of the problem.

“We are reluctant to call this a celebration but we wanted to mark it as important. I don’t think that there is evidence to make me think that Women's Aid won't be needed in another 40 years.

I think if anything, things might get slightly worse, with the media portrayal of women and pornography, which are changing the way women are seen by men.

I don’t think for one moment that we won’t be here unless we get more women into positions of power who say, ‘You really need to look at this problem and find answers,’

“Educating young people is an important start.

“Attitudes have changed a bit, but there is still a long way to go. It is such a screwed-up society we have.”

But Susan believes their clients only represent a tiny fraction of women who suffer abuse. She said: “The people we help are really just the tip of the iceberg in terms of people who suffer domestic abuse. Most people won't come to us.”

Inequality between men and women in society lies at the heart of the problem of abuse, Susan says.

She said: “You only have to look at things like the representation of women in the Houses of Parliament or the Cabinet.

“Women make up 50 per cent of the population, but we are not equally represented. If you want things to change, you need to have women talking about issues such as how women are represented, equal pay and childcare

“Historically, men have always had more power than women. Girls outperform boys at school and university, but then we seem to be discriminated against because of the facts of reproduction

Women’s Aid will mark their 40th anniversary in Glasgow with an event at St Andrews in the Square. They are also holding a Past, Present and Future Exhibition at the Glasgow Women’s Library.

Anyone affected by abuse can contact them on 0141 553 4088.

*Originally published in Glasgow Now 16/10/2013*
ABUSE MYTHS HAVE TO STOP – GINA DAVIDSON

THERE’S been a lot said and written about how appalling the British press is in the light of the phone-hacking scandal and Leveson inquiry.

While there might be a point in specific cases, and while there are no doubt readers of this paper who often don’t like what is printed and there are times when genuine errors in reporting can happen, I still believe that the mass – if reducing – press is the only way society currently has of holding publicly-funded organisations and politicians to account, of raising awareness of corruption and scandals, of standing up for the people who are not in power and don’t have access to the levers of power.

Always more could be done but this paper does the good that it can. This week is a case in point.

Every year the Evening News runs a Christmas appeal, focusing on a city charity and helping to raise awareness about its work and hopefully some money through donations by you, our generous readers.

This week the 2013 appeal was launched on behalf of Edinburgh Women’s Aid, and in a year when domestic abuse has rarely been out of the headlines – from former MSP Bill Walker to Charles Saatchi’s throat grab of Nigella Lawson – and in the organisation’s 40th anniversary, it seemed highly appropriate to choose a charity whose reason for existing is to help women extricate themselves from abusive relationships, by offering shelter and support.

Of course, women are not the only victims of domestic violence. There are men who are abused by their female partners, or male partners in same-sex relationships, and then there is the collateral damage when children are witness to physical or mental violence. All victims should be able to have a safe place to escape to and help to get their lives back together while the perpetrator of the abuse is dealt with by the law.

But let’s not be in any doubt that it is women who are the vast majority of victims and their male partners the abusers

It’s hard to imagine the days when EWA first began, when the women who campaigned for domestic abuse victims to have a refuge were denounced as marriage-wreckers and when High Court judges could refuse an abused woman a divorce on the grounds that her “change in attitude” since she started working was an excuse for violence.

Yet that old idea of “she provoked it” is not hard to imagine because it’s still held in the minds of many today. Speak to a woman who’s been assaulted and she’ll tell you that amid the apologies and promises it would never happen again was the fact that she brought it on herself – “if only you hadn’t said that, given me that look, worn those clothes.

The idea that domestic abuse is the victim’s fault has to stop. The only person at fault is the perpetrator of the violence – the one with his hands balled into fists, foot raised to kick, mouth opened to yell abuse.
Back in 1973, a woman looking to escape from violence would not be helped by the council housing department because she already had a home “with her husband”, nor by social work unless she was prepared to give her kids into care. The EWA founders were also told domestic abuse “didn’t happen in Edinburgh, Glasgow or Dundee perhaps”. How ridiculous is that? And how ridiculous that society wouldn’t help a woman running for her life.

EWA changed that. It changed attitudes, too. With more money it can change the lives of more women and their children.

*Originally published in the Edinburgh Evening News 28/11/2013*
The WRITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AWARDS

BEST BLOG
A critique of BBC Panorama’s reporting of the Jimmy Saville case recently appeared as part of the moral panic seminar series. This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and is hosting events across a number of UK academic institutions. The Saville post is problematic beyond its inappropriate title: “Lunatics taking over asylums”. Its author relates falling journalistic standards to creation of a modern moral panic, but the actual target of its ire appears to be something else altogether.

Media coverage of Jimmy Saville and other high-profile men accused of historical abuse has uncovered a profound resistance to the notion of the well-documented prevalence of child sexual abuse. Throughout the critique of journalistic standards the post insinuates that false allegations of abuse are an everyday occurrence, that statutory agencies respond immediately and fully to disclosures of abuse, and that believing disclosures is “a bad thing”. So far, a typical reactive rant, but the author of this post is a lecturer in social work who is responsible for preparing social workers for practice, writing for a publication funded by an august funding council.

The main thrust of the post is that the 30 minute programme presented previously known facts as new evidence thus exaggerating the extent of Saville’s perpetration of abuse and fuelling the moral panic. “Giving Victims a Voice” (2013) reports the findings of police officers experienced in investigation of paedophile and serious crimes. In their, I would suggest expert, view they found the evidence painted “a compelling picture” of widespread sexual abuse. So compelling, they were convinced that those who came forward to accuse Saville were “victims” rather than “complainants”. No exaggeration required.

In addition to querying the evidence, the post questioned the reliability of programme contributors. This included survivors of abuse and the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), an organisation well placed to contribute to the debate. The programme introduction stated that it would explore Saville’s use of power to provide protection for his actions and unsupervised access to potential victims. To illustrate this they interviewed former employees of Broadmoor who commented on the institutional culture, barriers to disclosure of abuse and the power and freedom Saville had there. The post, apparently missing the point about power and vulnerability suggests that as the interviewees had not witnessed sexual “impropriety”, they were irrelevant.

The post states that lawyers are often the first port of call for victims of historic abuse, implying that victims construct allegations for financial gain and that delayed disclosure should arouse suspicion. This unfounded observation is surprising as the first survivor interviewed in the programme had disclosed to his parents and school at the time and in adulthood to police when they contacted him during their investigations. The wider evidence suggests that many victims of historic abuse disclose soon after the event to carers, parents, health workers and police who clearly did not “just accept every account, no matter how implausible, without question”, but instead blocked further disclosure and exposure of the perpetrator.
In highlighting insufficient journalistic evidence, this academic post omitted to provide evidence for their own comments or to reference the wider social and research context; that sexual abuse of children does happen, that it is not always disclosed immediately (or ever) and that disclosures not taken seriously, or fear that they may not, silences victims.

The Saville case has generated speculation, headlines and discussion in a society that is increasingly confronting sexual violence. Early evidence from support services suggests that this has enabled some disclosures. Rather than create a panic, I wonder if this case has simply struck a chord with a society that is affected by this issue, and is increasingly knowledgeable about, and prepared to discuss, sexual abuse. Rather than inflating and conflating issues perhaps we are becoming aware of the extent of abuse.

If anything, the failing of reports of Saville's alleged abuse are guilty of revisiting “stranger danger”, a single monster lurking outside our homes and communities. Recognition that the majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are already known to their victims would have made the media's reports more accurate, but that story may not have sold so well.

Following the “related” links from the post suggests a focus on minimising the extent and consequences of abuse in our society. Given the nature of twitter and blogs it’s not clear how supportive of this thinking the University of Edinburgh’s Social Work Department is, but the posts do share disbelief in the prevalence of sexual violence and attempt to deflect attention from perpetrators to victims.

It is important to state that disclosure is rarely an easy process. Evidence does not support the notion that false accusations are common. Statutory services have a duty to respond to disclosures of abuse and to ensure that responses are evidence based. Much work has been (and continues to be) done to improve the response to people who have experienced sexual violence in childhood and in adulthood, and third sector agencies have used the evidence they gather from those who have experienced abuse to provide advice and direction in this work. In Scotland, the majority of practitioners want to listen to victims and support them to address the consequences of abuse. I suspect that this post and any positive response to it will be cited as further evidence of the “panic”. Go ahead, panic.

Clare McFeely is a researcher and lecturer with a specialist interest in Gender Based Violence. This post represents the view of the author and does not reflect the view or opinions of any institution with which they are affiliated.

*Originally published on Engender.org 20/6/2014*
THE BEST RAPE PREVENTION: TELL MEN TO STOP RAPE - LOUISE PENNINGTON

Last week, New York defence attorney Joseph DiBenedetto made headlines when he used the phrase “I’m not saying she deserved to get raped but” live on Fox News. The comment was a response to a question about the rape of teenager Daisy Coleman in Maryville, Missouri. The case hit the national press because of how the criminal justice system in Missouri handled the aftermath of the rape rather than the rape itself; rape being such a common crime that it very rarely makes headline news.

Comparisons have already been made between the Maryville case and that of the rape of a young girl in Steubenville as both cases involve high school athletes, charges were originally dropped and the online harassment of both young women has been horrific. As with Steubenville, it has been public campaigns, which have resulted in the case being investigated by a Special Prosecutor.

The reaction to DiBenedetto’s comment has been one of outrage, which is interesting because DiBenedetto has not said anything different than many other people.

Victim-blaming is endemic in our rape culture. It is the cause of West Mercia Police’s “advice” for women that blames women for drinking alcohol rather than men for committing rape

“Don’t let a night full of promise turn into a morning full of regret”, says the headline on West Mercia Police’s web page dedicated to tackling rape. “Did you know”, they ask “if you drink excessively, you could leave yourself more vulnerable to regretful sex or even rape?”

DiBenedetto’s comments aren’t new either; neither is his suggestion that Coleman has made a false allegation. The public’s reactions to these comments are new. The widespread condemnation of DiBenedetto’s comments is new.

We are at a turning point: we have the power to end rape culture and victim blaming.

Only last week, the CPS published new guidelines for the prosecution of child sexual abuse in England/Wales that actively challenges the existence of rape myths in trials. These new guidelines were in response to feminist activism and, whilst they aren’t as strong as they could be, they are an important start.

However, we need to do more and we need to start with more anti-rape campaigns which put the focus on the perpetrator rather than that victim, like Vancouver’s Don’t be that Guy campaign. We also need a fundamental overhaul of our justice system:

1. Anonymity for rape victims must remain a fundamental tenet.
2. Rape victims should never be required to testify in open court.
3. Rape victims should never be required to testify in front of the accused.
4. Rape victims should be entitled to their own legal advisor to protect them.
5. Rape myths must be legally prohibited from being used as a defense tactic.

6. The CPS and judiciary must undergo constant (re)training on rape myths.

7. Juries must be giving training on rape myths before the trial starts which includes the real definition of what a “false accusation” actually entails [since we consider rape victims who withdraw their complaints as “false accusations” this is absolutely necessary].

8. The “sexual history” of a rape victim must be banned. The defense should have no legal right to undermine the credibility of the victim by discussing their “sexual history”.

9. The press should be prohibited from publishing the specific details of the rape. It is enough to say: X has been charged with child rape.

10. Anyone who attempts to identify the victim should be prosecuted.

Rape has a purpose in our culture, as does victim blaming. We will not end rape culture, victim blaming or the oppression of women by continuing to focus campaigns on rape prevention that hold victims responsible for being in the presence of a rapist.

Most importantly, this change needs to start with a message to men: rape must stop. Men must take personal responsibility for their own perpetuation of rape culture and men need to call out other

We all have the power to change rape culture, but we need men to take a public stand now.

The legal definition of rape in England and Wales requires the insertion of a penis without consent. Men and women can be, and are, convicted of sexual assault that carries the same tariff as rape. See Rape Crisis Glasgow for the definitions of rape and sexual assault in Scotland.

*Originally published on Huffington Post.com 21/10/2013*

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**ABUSE DOESN’T EXIST IN A VACUUM: ROTHERHAM IS NOT ABOUT RACE - ELLI WILSON**

Alexis Jay’s report on the abuse of over 1400 children over a 16 year period in Rotherham, and the “collective” failings of the police, social care and the local authority makes for tragic, uncomfortable reading. Unfortunately, whilst the scale and extent of the victims’ suffering and the authorities’ failures were certainly shocking, they did not surprise me. Britain today is still a deeply prejudiced country in which sexism and classism run deep, social services are underfunded and overstretched and young, underprivileged victims are likely to be dismissed as ‘unreliable’ or even complicit in their own abuse. In such conditions, it is hardly astonishing that vulnerable children and young people are abused and then failed by those meant to help and protect them.
With so much public anger and disgust over what happened in Rotherham, there would seem to be no better time than the present to start a national conversation about what causes rape and sexual abuse and how it can be prevented. However, in a depressingly predictable state of affairs, much of the coverage of the horrific abuse has focused on the fact that the perpetrators were predominantly British Pakistani and most of the known victims were white working-class girls.

In reality, perpetrators of sexual crimes in Britain are predominantly white. The only trait that almost all perpetrators of rape and sexual abuse share is their maleness. Sexual violence is not a crime committed by one ethnicity against another; it is a crime of male violence against women and children. Alongside class, gender is the overriding factor in the Rotherham abuse case, as with all other incidents of sexual violence.

By focusing on the ethnicity of the perpetrators in Rotherham, there is a danger that the threat of rape and sexual abuse will be othered and obscured. It is far easier and more comforting to think that such horrifying crimes are only a problem for certain sections of society, than to face the fact that in 21st century Britain children – primarily girls – are abused and exploited across all socio-economic groups and by men of all races. This is not a problem that we can safely categorise as belonging to one section of society whilst shaking our heads disapprovingly; the causes are deeply rooted in our attitudes and our establishment.

This is not to deny that different communities have different challenges in the fight to tackle abuse. For instance, Ruzwana Bashir eloquently described the culture of shame that can make it difficult for British Asian victims of abuse to seek help and justice. However, it is not as if survivors from all backgrounds don’t encounter disbelief and victim blaming attitudes. This is precisely the problem with the media’s fixation with ethnicity in relation to systemic sexual abuse; it hides the fact that the factors which contributed to the Rotherham scandal are not specific to a certain sub-culture but rather permeate all levels of society.

The scale of the abuse in Rotherham unmasks the toxic misogyny and classism that intersect to create an environment in which underprivileged girls can be raped, and then held in contempt by those meant to help them. Whilst the details of the Rotherham scandal may be particularly shocking it is important to remember that such abuse does not exist in a vacuum. If we do not engage in serious work to change attitudes of the public and those in power, and to end misogyny and victim blaming, then many other girls will be the damage of society’s collective failure.

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IS SEX WORK REALLY EMPOWERING? – CHRISTINA O’NEILL

“The first time you have sex for money, it’s like losing your virginity. Something inside of you breaks. It’s not physical, you can’t feel it, touch it or explain it, but a part of you is no longer there. After that, you just grow numb to it.”
Justine Reilly is a former prostitute (I was scolded for referring to her as a ‘sex worker’; “it’s too normalising,” they said). She is warm and friendly, speaks with a thick Dubliner accent and has long, bleach blonde dreadlocks and immaculate make-up. Her youthful mannerism belied the horrors that she experienced as a prostitute for fourteen years, which started only so she could raise money for her girlfriend’s education.

“I had come from the country, you see, from a nice, normal family and had a normal life. I got into prostitution because my girlfriend wanted to go to college and I knew no better. I had such low self-esteem that I thought my life was lesser than hers, so I wanted to help her live her dream. I was so naive that I thought being an escort was going out for dinner with men, accompanying them to parties. That night, I realised that I was being used as a human toy, and men would pay to empty themselves inside me from there on in.

“When I came home to my girlfriend and told her what happened, she just said:

‘No one has ever loved me as much as you.’

“We never really spoke about my job ever again. It just became the elephant in the room.”

Sat beside her is Rachel Moran, who was also a prostitute in Dublin for seven years when she was homeless and destitute.

She seemed slightly cold towards me at first, holding herself with the gravitas of a woman that has seen the darkest side of humanity, yet managed to pull herself out and write about it all. She spoke, matter-of-factly:

“You can never erase the damage of being a prostitute. It will always stay with you. People always say to us ‘you could have walked away,’ but my choices were so constrained, between sleeping on a park bench or selling my body, that they weren’t really choices. A lot of girls who get into it were abused when they were younger, so they genuinely see it as a step up for themselves. They feel empowered by it. One girl said to me: ‘my stepfather used to take it for free; at least this way I’m getting paid for it.’”

Justine nodded her head, saying: “I’ve been sexually abused. Most of us have. You DO have a sense of empowerment relating to that, because you are no longer being abused for free. You call the shots. You can say ‘pay me, and you can abuse me in this manner and that manner.’ But no woman should ever be abused in any manner. That’s what we’re saying.”

Rachel and Justine are speakers for the Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment (SPACE) charity based in Ireland. To raise awareness during the sixteen day ‘End Violence Against Women’ campaign, they are working with the Women’s Support Project in Scotland to train public sector staff to better help sex workers. They both have a shared 25 years of experience in the sex industry during the thriving “Celtic Tiger” economy of Dublin in the Nineties. As the city began building huge apartment complexes and attracting people to the City, the sex industry exploded – with girls and women from Eastern Europe,
Africa and Asia drawn to the city’s wealth. But when the Sexual Offences Act was introduced in 1993, they were all driven into brothels – a cut-throat environment where jealousy grew and bitter lies and accusations were thrown around as some girls got more clients than others. Justine laughed as she told us about the delusions of grandeur she had working in the brothel.

“They were just normal apartments, but when us girls sat and talked in there, we felt so sophisticated. We saw ourselves as ‘escorts’. The women that worked on the streets were just ‘whores.’ There was an actual division! We would be like, ‘Oh my God, there is no way we would end up on the street.’” She turned around. “So you would have been a whore, Rachel!” We all laughed for a brief moment, revelling in it before we were to discuss the horrors of the sex work industry in further depth.

Having spent years believing verbal abuse and sexual violence were merely an occupational hazard of being a sex worker, the women would like to see the trade abolished altogether – but not without an exit strategy for the women involved in it. The Women’s Support Project offer a Routes Out scheme for sex workers to develop their skills, find new jobs and lead a normal life. In Justine’s case, she left her girlfriend after fourteen years, living in a van in the park until she got help from Irish support network Ruhama. She began taking courses in pottery and jewellery-making before becoming an actress, realising that her talents lay in creativity. But Rachel didn’t have any support when she decided to leave prostitution behind in 1998, as she had no idea that there were people or organisations that could help her out of it.

“By the time I realised I had to leave, I was heavily addicted to cocaine. I was accidentally overdosing on it a lot, having convulsions, falling around. Certain things converged at the same time in my life. I had a son who was 4 and a half, and about to start school. I knew that I had to get off cocaine, because I would just end up in hospital, in jail or dead. I definitely would have lost my son, because I wouldn’t be able to keep to the necessary routine for a school-going child. You can just about hold it together with a toddler, but not when it’s at that stage in their life.

“So I packed myself and my child up and I moved to the next county. I had to cut ties with everyone in my life- at that point everyone I knew was a prostitute, pimp, drug dealer or some combination. I had to get away from that completely. I was very alone at that point, and it took me a long while to rebuild my life.”

As she spoke, I couldn’t help but notice that she was so eloquent and well-versed as she described her life to me. So I wasn’t surprised when she said that she went to study Creative Writing at college, and has now written a book called Paid For. She stared at her cup of tea, looking vulnerable for a moment, as she thought about how different her life would have been if she stayed.

“When you sell your body for sex for a living, you forget about what life used to be like. You forget about the things you enjoyed doing, your talents and passions as a human being. I had loved writing since I was a child. I used to write verse poems and song lyrics in my spare time, when I wasn’t working. One time, I was stopped on the street by a Vanguard [a female police officer] who was searching my bag for drugs. She had a fistful of receipts, crumpled bits of paper with my writing on them. I was mortified, waiting for her to laugh at all these poems and lyrics, my thoughts. She read them, looked at me and asked me if I had written them. I said yes.

“Then she just looked me dead in the eye and said: ‘What the hell are you doing on these streets?’”
She smiled, continuing: “I felt incredibly sad because I thought about how I’d thrown my life away. But I’m here now.”

Despite that they have escaped their former lives and want to help other women do the same, their efforts have aggravated the pro-sex work camp, who strive for employment rights so they can work safely in the industry, not so they can escape it altogether. Justine said they met some campaigners as they were walking into a conference, who all began shouting at them.

“There was one girl who was around 24. She said: ‘fuck off and mind your own business. At least we still have fresh skin!’ It just saddened me because these women define themselves only by their youth and their looks. They fully acknowledge that prostitutes have a shelf-life.”

Justine cut in – “It is true though. You are more popular with clients when you are fifteen. Even by the time I got to nineteen I was already losing clients. But when you are older, men expect you to do more and more and more with your body.”

As Edinburgh is possibly closing its saunas after decades of tolerance to the city’s thriving sex trade, the topic has been a particular bone of contention in the media. It is hoped that the potential introduction of the ‘Swedish Model’ into the sex trade – where clients are criminalised rather than the sex workers – will reduce exploitation and make it safer for sex workers, particularly those who are fighting for a Trade Union and employment rights for those in the profession. However, Rachel and Justine hope that it will help abolish the industry altogether. Rachel said:

“I’ve never seen the sex trade as an inevitable part of society. People think that if it’s legalised and regulated, that it is safer – but you can’t truly regulate prostitution. It just expands, like in Switzerland, Amsterdam and Thailand. Human trafficking has risen in these parts. Whether it is tolerated in the law or not, prostitution is a monstrous human rights violation. One day, when people can see it for what it is, I think these countries will be held accountable.”

Justine slowly shook her head. “What’s worse is the way the world sweeps prostitution under the carpet. People see the sex industry as a way of “containing rape” in our society – as though these vulnerable women are a human shield for sexual violence. Prostitution is a training ground for misogynists - rapists hone their skills in this trade.”

Treading carefully, I asked Justine and Rachel what their worst experiences were as sex workers. They sat in silence for a moment, looking at each other, as only they could truly know what it was like to sell your body for sex, each and every day. As I began to regret triggering their deepest, most painful memories, Justine spoke.

“It would be very hard to choose. I think after exiting prostitution and looking back at everything, the worst thing I remember are the assholes that told you it was empowering to sell your body. They would sit there and tell you that ‘sex work’ is a normal job. But how many secretaries do you know that are extreme alcoholics and drug addicts? How many secretaries do you know that self-abuse?

“To look back at the degradation of my past is my worst experience. My sisters are still caught up on it all. They are deluded and lying to me about how good they’ve got it. Just look at what you’re saying is your job. My sister went to a client’s hotel room once. Fifteen men tied her down and raped her, taking turns on her. Do you go to work every day and think ‘I hope I don’t get raped and beaten up today?’ You don’t. In the sex work industry, rape just means that you didn’t get paid.”
As Rachel got up to go to another interview, Justine sat with me for a while longer. We spoke about how things could change for the better, starting with mainstream culture. Though prostitution and human trafficking are in the dark underbelly of society, we both agreed that rape culture and misogyny, normalised objectification in the media such as ‘Page Three’ add fuel to the fire. With her legs tucked up on the chair, Justine spoke at length about the importance of moral values, declaring that the state should take some responsibility in instilling them.

“The government should do more in promoting equality and stopping women from being treated as pieces of meat. I know wanting to stop prostitution isn’t cool or radical. We will never be the cool ones. We don’t believe that women are empowered when they sell themselves to men. So when I speak to people who think it’s acceptable, I tell them to ‘take it home with them’. Would you want your sister or mother to sell her body for sex? Would you happily tell people what she did for a living? If something doesn’t feel right like that, that’s because it isn’t right. We need people to wake up and look at prostitution for what it is.”

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THE WRITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AWARDS
BEST STUDENT ARTICLE
Being ferociously trolled on Twitter seems to have become a rite of passage for every feminist journalist. With death and rape threats apparently constituting the standard response to the work of any feminist columnist, it was with a disappointed sense of inevitability that I watched this week as Jessica Valenti became the latest target. The Guardian columnist attempted to crowd source an answer for an article she was writing about the availability of free or subsidised sanitary products around the world. In the UK, sanitary products carry a 5 per cent tax rate, whilst ‘exotic meats’ are inexplicably classed as tax free ‘essential items’.

Jessica Valenti’s simple question: “Anyone know a country where tampons are free or somehow subsidized?” was met with a stream of vitriol. Tamer tweets included suggestions she have her ovaries removed, or that she should get her husband to pay for her tampons. Amongst the torrent of furious abuse it became clear that most respondents felt that this was a ‘first world complaint’ being made by a privileged, white feminist. The suggestion that there were more important issues across the globe was a recurrent theme running throughout the responses Valenti received, with many people reminding her that ‘women are being stoned to death’ in some nations. Appallingly, many of these responses came from other feminists, who appeared to be disgruntled by Valenti’s decision to write an article about such a ‘minor’ issue, when other startling atrocities are carried out against women every day.

It’s undeniable that the reality of women being stoned to death for adultery, brutally gang raped for travelling on a bus at night, or banned from driving due to their tendency to ‘distract male drivers’ are inexcusable examples of misogyny. However, the severity of these injustices does not illegitimate Valenti’s point about access to free or subsidised sanitary products. Whilst it may be problematic to suggest that access to tampons is as significant as forced marriage, it is clear to see that all of these issues feed into a superstructure of misogyny and injustice. Dismissing certain issues as unimportant destabilizes feminism entirely. It is impossible to achieve true equality if ‘lesser’ issues are removed from the bargaining table. Whilst it is a matter of urgency to address the crimes brought against women in overtly patriarchal states, sexism is also stealthily embedded in all developed nations. Unless we root out sexism wherever we find it, true gender equality will never be achieved.

Whilst access to sanitary products, contraceptives and comprehensive sex education may seem unimportant in the grand scheme of female liberation, the rejection of any of these issues contributes to the idea that women are lesser than men. Big or small, all cases of gender discrimination act as obstacles to female empowerment. Much like Richard Dawkins’ recent attempts to justify the claim that ‘some rape is worse than others’, attempts to quantify what counts as female suffering simply fall flat

Of course it is important to acknowledge privilege. As a white, cisgender feminist living in a developed nation, I have access to free contraception and will never face the horrors endured by women in worse
circumstances than myself. However, despite my unquestionable privilege, I will face obstacles to equal
treatment later on in life, such as access to affordable childcare and equal pay in comparison to my male
counterparts. I am not suggesting the disadvantages I will face are comparable, however, I am asserting
that all of these experiences contribute to the resounding reality that women are treated as inferior to men.
Whilst men can brag about their sexual exploits openly, women discussing menstruation are chastised
as disgusting and vulgar. This all harkens back to the archaic notion that menstruation makes women
unclean, and serves to place them in an inferior position. Jessica’s right – the cost of a product that half
the world’s population needs multiple times a day, every month for approximately 30 years, is simply too
much

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IN DEFENCE OF ‘ANGRY FEMINISM’: WHY ‘WOMEN AGAINST FEMINISM’
MISSES THE POINT – EVE LIVINGSTON

As a woman who has – shock! - dared to be vocal about misogyny on the internet, I’m painfully familiar
with the clichés that my ‘aggression’ is detrimental to the cause, or that it’s feminism’s failure that women
don’t want to associate with the ‘hairy lesbian’ stereotype. While my instinctive reaction might be to
sigh, or downvote the comment, or slam my head against my keyboard on a particularly bad day, I also
recognise that feminism is a journey and I’m forced to think back to when a younger me might have
peddled the same rhetoric, unequipped with the learning I’ve done since. Learning that’s allowed me to
think critically about these ideas through a lens that recognises my privilege as a straight, white, middle-
class woman, and sees these accusations as symptoms of a patriarchal society rather than blueprints for a
feminist success story.

The way I see it, feminism is a movement trying to make change, and so should by its very nature be vocal,
angry, and threatening to those it attempts to challenge. It isn’t just about equality for the sexes (not only
because not everybody fits neatly into the gender binary this implies) but also a recognition that this isn’t
even possible until women are brought anywhere close to the level of men, and that we’re not going to
manage that by smiling quietly in a corner and asking our bosses politely to please pay us the £5000 extra
per year that men make in the same job, please.

It’s no coincidence that the proponents of a gentle, polite feminism are overwhelmingly white, middle-
class, able-bodied women born as women; in short, the very class who have benefitted from feminism
without ever having to shout or resort to aggression to do so. As someone who ticks all the above boxes,
I get that never bearing the full brunt of inequality means that reactions of hatred and ‘misandry’ might
seem alien, but I also understand that if your existence is defined by your oppression, it’s a perfectly fair and
valid response. One that will never have the effects that misogyny does so long as we live in a patriarchal
society. I can shout and shout about how much I hate men but aside from bruising a few male egos, I’ll
never provoke the fear or distress that a woman-hating man can by virtue of an uneven power balance
tipped in his favour. If reclaiming men’s cries of ‘misandry’ seems aggressive to you, well I’m sorry, but in
the face of very real daily aggression against women (2 of whom will die this week at the hands of a man*)
I find it a little hard to care.
When privileged women talk about a feminism that doesn’t represent them, they fail to realise that for too long its dominant face has represented nobody else. While white middle-class women have gained in the workplace, domestic sphere and public life, women of colour, queer women, disabled women and those outside of the gender binary have taken the fall for it. Smashing the glass ceiling isn’t much use if you can’t even make it through the front door. Privilege allows us to bargain politely and quietly, to challenge sexism without the fear of repercussions, to celebrate our successes whilst never asking whose voices we aren’t hearing; we exclude women who aren’t like us and then we’re shocked when they shout to be heard.

Appealing to the masses, then, is shorthand for appealing to the dominant voices in society, because they are the ones who set norms and values, the ones whose dominance feminism is meant to challenge. When I’m told that I won’t achieve anything by being too vocal and assertive about these inequalities, I don’t quieten down and write a polite letter instead; I see more clearly the need for a society that accepts assertive, vocal women as standard. When the “I’m a feminist but” brigade lament the ‘hairy lesbian’ trope, I don’t sympathise with them and evangelise about why it’s just a stereotype; I question why a message championed by a hairy lesbian should be any less valid in the first place.

At the end of it all, we’re all benefitting from the “aggressive” and “militant” women’s movements of the past. Women wouldn’t have the platform to lament the aggression and militancy of feminist spaces if it weren’t for the aggression and militancy of women who fought for their right to be heard in the first place. The feminism I want to see isn’t one where everyone feels cosy and at home, cooing compliments at each other in an echo chamber. The feminism I want to see is one where those who have traditionally been excluded have a voice, one where we challenge patriarchal notions of how women should conduct themselves rather than pandering to them. A feminist movement can’t be comfortable and palatable because the reality for many women is neither. As a woman and as a feminist, I have no desire to be liberated by changing my message to placate my oppressors. After all, that’s no liberation at all.

Originally published in the Journal online 28/7/2014

IT’S TIME TO GET SERIOUS – STACEY DEVINE

When news came through that Bill Walker had finally resigned my first thoughts were of relief, elation and that justice was finally being done. I was also immensely proud of all the women and groups who had fought so hard to achieve this outcome.

Sixteen days after being found guilty on 23 counts of assault against women, Walker had finally given in to the pressure and resigned as an MSP.

Those sixteen days had seen a storm of press coverage kicked up by women activists across the country. Activists brought together in outrage that Walker apparently had no intention of resigning.
When Walker was found guilty, it was a story in the press, but not a big one. Thanks to you signing the petition, drawing attention to the case on social media, getting MSPs to condemn him, and attending the protest outside parliament, it became one of the biggest stories of this year.

In his resignation statement Walker said that it was the “media onslaught” that had made it impossible for him to continue. In other words he resigned because of you.

Who says we can’t make a difference right?

But, as the dust settled, I found myself asking other questions. How did we get to this position in the first place? How on earth could someone convicted of such serious offenses be allowed to stay in their job, representing the people of Scotland?

The explanation says an awful lot about our supposedly “fair and equal” society.

UK Parliament rules state that you have to be sentenced to over a year in prison before you can be automatically removed from your position as an MSP. Walker, however, was tried in a “summary court”, which is used for offenses deemed “less serious” by the Crown Office, and have a maximum sentence of one year.

This was a man charged with 23 counts of assaults against women. One involved hitting a 16 year old girl over the head with a cooking pot. And yet this crime was deemed “less serious” exactly how many times do you have to assault a woman before its deemed “serious”?!?!

The fact that a summary trial was even considered is an outrage. It’s disgraceful that anyone charged and convicted with multiple assaults against women can get away with the insignificant sentence that Walker will receive.

I want to say again how proud I am of the way this movement, the parliament, and women across Scotland came together to speak out against Walker and force his resignation. We should have pride in what we have achieved be, but we need to keep going.

We need to use this case to ask serious questions about a justice system that doesn’t consider repeated and continuous violence against women as a serious offence, and a political system that allows someone to be convicted of multiple assaults and still be deemed fit to represent the Scottish people in parliament.

Whatever happens on 20th September, Bill Walker will the full and proper escape justice he should have faced. We have to draw attention to the circumstances that led to this, continue questioning those who thought that a summary trial was acceptable, and ensure something like this never happens again.

If we ever want to seriously challenge violence against women, if we want to change society for the better, and if we want to inspire victims of domestic violence to come forward, we have to show them that true justice is possible.

It really is time to get serious.

*Originally published in the NUS Connect 10/9/2013*
WHAT’S NEXT FOR EDINBURGH UNI? TALK STRAIGHT, NOT DIRTY – LAURA ANNE BROWN

The reverberations of Edinburgh University Student Association's decision to ban the infamous ‘Blurred Lines’ have been felt across the UK. Six universities have already supported EUSA in their decision, rejecting ‘rape culture’ and Thicke’s skipping sexualisation of the female body.

Where will it end? Recently, Journal writer Sukey Scorer praised EUSA’s decision, stating that it was “a step in the right direction” for university unions. A step it is indeed, yet the rungs on the music ladder are regularly riddled with inequality.

Banning ‘Blurred Lines’ is a substantiated stab at the popularity and proclamation of a perverse piece. It does not however, completely obliterate the sexualisation of campus society. By dismissing Thicke, do we also condemn Justin Timberlake, Jason DeRulo, even the female entrepreneurs of sex, Rihanna and Miley Cyrus?

Take one of the United Kingdom’s most recent Number Ones. Jason DeRulo’s chart-crawling offering ‘Talk Dirty’ raises deeper questions than ‘simple sexualisation’ of the female body. With 19.5 million views on YouTube and a continued British chart presence, DeRulo’s brassy beats provide another infectious hit, acclaim which owes more to its musicality than its lyrics. Yet what DeRulo’s ‘Talk Dirty’ offers is a radical opinion of the foreign female body as an even more accessible object than the native.

The song’s premise is that of language and the barrier it presents (or doesn't, in this case) to those demanding sexual affairs. DeRulo’s argument is that a “booty don’t need explaining” and linguistic incomprehension is a mask for desire. Underlying this is the expectation that foreign females unceasingly “talk dirty,” rendering even their rejections as come-ons.

Like Thicke’s Blurred Lines, DeRulo’s piece also features a rapping interlude, in this instance from 2 Chainz. Previously known by the alias ‘Tity Boi,’ his sexual offerings to the song are hardly surprising. Explicit and disgusting, his female foreigner (who remains nameless - ‘Big Booty’ is hardly a justified definition) is told to pleasure him orally before he complements her physical flourishes.

The sexuality of this song is just another example of the continual imagery inherent in the current charts - writhing, naked, available bodies are a given. Yet ‘Talk Dirty’ also lords the domineering anglophones over the ‘stupid’ foreigners they control.

Both the official video and radio cut conclude with the racist portrayal of an Eastern female stuttering: “What? I don’t understand!” The continuity of stupidity and race is exemplified in DeRulo’s YouTube video which sees barely-clothed dancers sporting Spanish skirts and native feathers. The underlying implication is that non-anglophones are ‘game’; they may not “speak the [English] language” (though the musicians don’t speak theirs either) but their status as the ‘inferior’ race undermines their female assertiveness. Even if they repeatedly denied their superior’s advances, their speech would be classed as ‘dirty’, not pure, not English, incomprehensible, then sexually converted to engage the male desires.

Blurred lines, curved lines, backwards lines. The University of Edinburgh, along with its mirroring compatriots, is taking a vital step. This cannot be denied. How else to defer the disgusting direction of the modern media? Questions of censorship aside, if establishments choose to boycott the musical
objectification of females, the inherent rape culture and the near-pornographic intent, go for it. It can only be contributing to a more equal view of society. Kirsty Haigh, EUSA Vice President Services (VPS) at the University, said, “[The ban] has sparked a debate which will hopefully readjust the boundaries of what is acceptable. This is the only song which has been banned in this manner.”

However, the prohibition of one melody - arguably the most infectious of the year - opens the unions to further examination. Attaining irrefutable equality means extending Robin’s restriction to Jason, Rihanna and all the other chart darlings who objectify women to garnish their own ‘dirty’ desires.

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THE WRITE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AWARDS