

e-WAVES

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALL WOMEN'S ACTION SOCIETY(AWAM)

Issue No.1— JULY 2013



EXPLORING THE F-WORD





AWAM's Desk

Reviving WAVES really started because of our shared love of AWAM and the WAVES newsletter, which in the 90's courageously published articles about then-controversial issues like female masturbation, AIDs and sexuality. e-WAVES is really a tribute to the former editorial collective and the Malaysian feminist movement; how inspirational this movement is and how incredibly hopeful it makes us.

And now we've finally made it! We had a terrible fear that no one would want to write for us ("e-Waves? What? No, thanks!") but we received amazing pieces and came to the realization that there's a

writer in each and every one of us - we sometimes just don't have the right platform to express it.

As writers whose skills has largely been fossilised from disuse, it was such a delight to unpack our rusty old pens, throw them away, and use Microsoft Word again. Part of the pleasure came from writing about something that is relevant to the women, and hopefully is relevant to other women as well. We hope you pore over e-WAVES as excitedly as we have and that something in there inspires you to unpack your rusty old pens too.

It's been an exhilarating

journey from start to finish – but we feel like we've only just begun. We're already excitedly chattering about the next e-WAVES issue, scheduled for the last quarter of the year. We do hope that this publication will spur the women and men of Malaysia to start thinking deeply about gender and sexuality issues and how these issues can affect the women around them. Until next time, goodbye and enjoy reading our humble little e-publication.



Inside this Issue

MY FAVOURITE FEMINIST 3

Payal Sadwhani describes her favourite feminist for our first issue.

FEMINISM 4

FEMINISM- A ROSE BY ANY NAME?

FEMINIST POP QUIZ 7

REFLECTIONS ON THE CO-OPTION OF THE F WORD 8

FEMALE EXPERIENCE 10

INDRA'S FIRST POEM

A FUN, FANTASTICAL FEMAL EXPERIENCE: THE WOMEN DELIVER 2013 CONFERENCE 11

FEAR 15

WOMEN AND FEAR

THE THINGS WE KNOW AND THE THINGS WE TALK ABOUT 17

Syar performed this piece at AWAM's International Women's Day Event

F*** 20

A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST F***

DEAR JANICE 23

A regular column that features a letter to Janice- our imaginary feminist counsellor.

e-WAVES ISSUE JULY 2013

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The theme of the next newsletter is 'Women, Culture and Resistance'. e-WAVES welcomes contributions but reserves the right to edit these in the interest of clarity and brevity. Send in your contributions to e.waves.awam@gmail.com.

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ALL WOMEN'S ACTION SOCIETY (AWAM)

AWAM is an independent feminist organisation in Malaysia committed to ending gender-based violence and upholding equality and rights for all. We are a tax-exempt, non-profit organisation established in 1988.

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MY FAVOURITE FEMINIST

Payal Sadhwani works as a public relations consultant. Apart from wondering why she ever chose this career path, Payal spends the rest of her time reading and travelling (and editing for e-Waves!).

I have a confession to make.

Before I was invited to AWAM's open house (a get-to-know-you session for new members) I belonged to *THAT* group of people. *THAT* group being the one who thought that all feminists were men-haters and didn't shave their legs. So, after leaving the open house, I thought, hey, if I'm going to be a part of this feminist movement, I'd better do some research. Not only was I wrong about the men-hating, leg-shaving thing but now I actually have a favourite feminist! My favourite feminist belongs to the second-wave feminist movement. Granted feminists from this era aren't considered the 'pioneers' of the feminist. But to me, this group brought something to the table that distinguishes them from the first- and third-wave feminists— education and awareness that led to advocacy. This favourite feminist of mine has done it all – campaigned for social reforms, interviewed John Lennon, worked as a Playboy Bunny (all in the name of feminism, of course!). At this point, some of you may already have a hint of who I'm talking about. It's a little cheesy to say that I can relate to her, but when it comes to the topic of marriage, we have something in common. My favourite feminist did not marry until the age of 66. In fact, she had always viewed marriage as an institution of inequality. Coming from a background that believes women should be submissive, I could personally relate to that thought. Her marriage only took place when she believed that the institution of marriage had changed in favour of equality. One of her famous quotes is, and always will be, stuck in my head: **"Women can't be equal outside the home until men are equal in it."**

PROFILE

Gloria Steinem: Feminist, Journalist, Activist

Born: March 25, 1934

Place of Birth: Toledo, Ohio, The United States of America

Gloria Steinem is a pioneer of all sorts – she helped create *New York* magazine in the late 1960s; together with other prominent feminists, she formed the National Women's Political Caucus, which worked on behalf of women's issues; she was at the helm of launching the feminist publication, *Ms.* magazine; she was the founding president of the Ms. Foundation for Women, which supports grassroots projects to empower girls and women; and she also recently co-founded the Women's Media Center, which works to ensure women have equal opportunities in the media as sources, subjects and professionals.

Apart from being an advocate in women's rights, Steinem's work also tackles issues in other areas – she has produced a documentary on child abuse for HBO while her current work focuses on sex trafficking and indigenous rights. Backtracking to the time she completed her degree in 1956, Steinem received a fellowship to study in India, after which she returned to the United States and kicked off her career as a freelance writer. One of her most famous works was an undercover expose piece on New York City's Playboy Club, where Steinem worked as a Playboy "bunny". Under Steinem's editorial leadership, *Ms.* became the first national publication to feature the topic of domestic violence on its cover. Her Ms. Foundation for Women also created Take Our Daughters to Work Day, the first national day devoted to girls, which is now recognized around the world. Steinem has won countless awards for both her writing and activism.



Gloria Steinem – The voice and warrior for rights of girls and women all over the world. And *THAT* is why she's my favourite feminist.

Profile source: The Women's Conference (www.womensconference.org)

Feminism – A Rose by Any Name?

By: Susanna George

Susanna is currently testing her wings to take flight again...she's convinced that the more liberating, flexible and truly democratic our meetings and conversations are, the closer we get to the heaven we want to see on earth. Susanna plans to change the world one meeting and one conversation at a time! This piece is written to start a conversation...she'd be delighted to continue it over idlis and chai.

Of Rose Chan, the country's "undisputed queen of striptease," Cecil Rajendra, her lawyer and biographer says: *"She was probably the country's first feminist because she never let any man control her and did not look for some rich man to sweep her off her feet – she earned good money herself."* *The Star*, 20 June 2013, pg. 16

Whenever I read statements like the one above, a strange sensation passes over me. A part of me thinks, well, at least the person quoted is trying to engage with the concept of feminism. But the other part of me cringes slightly when I ponder upon what has come to be the street understanding of feminism today. Rose Chan, a performance artist, philanthropist and cancer survivor, undoubtedly cut a courageous image of a woman who knew her mind, and as she went through her different husbands and romantic liaisons came across as someone who was not a "kept woman" and "earned good money herself." But is that now what being a feminist has come to mean? Being able to hold your own in any situation, pay your own bills and do it ("it" can be substituted for any imaginable number of actions) as well or better than a man?

The joke goes that there are many interpretations of feminism as there are feminists – and certainly through my many conversations and things that I've read over the years, this does seem to be the case. While I think that diversity of thought and expression is the rich field from which ideas and creative action emerges from, I do worry about the lack of a common agreement on what feminism is and what we feminists are about. See, for me, feminism is NOT "the radical idea that women

are humans," and so many other clichéd sayings that we've become familiar with. It's for me an ideology that forms the basis of a political struggle to end patriarchal oppression and domination, exploitation and control on the basis of gender. It's not just about women battling men, male



bell hooks
Source:msmagazine.com

For me (feminism) is about getting at the roots of patriarchy and how it has become deeply and systematically embedded throughout all our institutions, from our governments to our families to our perceptions of ourselves.

privilege and sexism in individual men, and becoming "equal" to men. For me, it is about getting at the roots of patriarchy and how it has become deeply and systematically embedded throughout all our institutions, from our governments to our families to our perceptions of ourselves.

If we imagine patriarchy to be a huge banyan tree that is able to shoot roots down from its branches and keep creating ever more trees over centuries, then we cannot simply address the way in which all of our lives are affected by chopping at a couple of branches of the ancient patriarchal tree. The first thing we need to do in order to actually end this system of oppression and domination is to be able to see the whole tree with all the other trees that it has given life to. Seeing the whole picture of the entire system is critical, because without that, any campaign we launch may just end up with a bunch of us sawing away at a minor branch while the main branches of patriarchy remain intact and strong.

*There are very few jobs
that actually require a
penis or vagina. All other
jobs should be open to
everybody.*

~Florynce Kennedy

And what are those big branches of patriarchy that we have yet to address? Well, one branch that is like a giant is neo-liberal global capitalist systems of economy and governance which have us all completely in a bind. We can't address this branch if for us feminism is about achieving gender equality, because what that has meant is women of the middle and upper classes focusing on achieving "equality" with men of their own class without challenging the system of oppression that continues to enslave and leave impoverished the vast majority of poor and marginalised women and men. When the UN, national governments and multilateral institutions adopted "gender equality" and mainstreamed it into all of their programs, they took the revolutionary intention of the global feminist movements' assertions for gender equality and social transformation through development, and turned it into a toothless tiger that has done little to change the real equation of power globally. Power today still lies in the hands of the richest few, an elite set made up of men AND women, whose desires and greed continue to rob the world of its finite resources – and nothing that has been done in the past decades of "development" has fundamentally changed this.

And in the meantime, we have today a sort of "feminism lite" minus any revolutionary intent that has sprouted in every imaginable form and popularised through global (pro-capitalist) media....focusing women's attention on their personal, preferences, desires, bodies and individual human rights. In these diverse versions of feminism, if a woman exercises her choice and

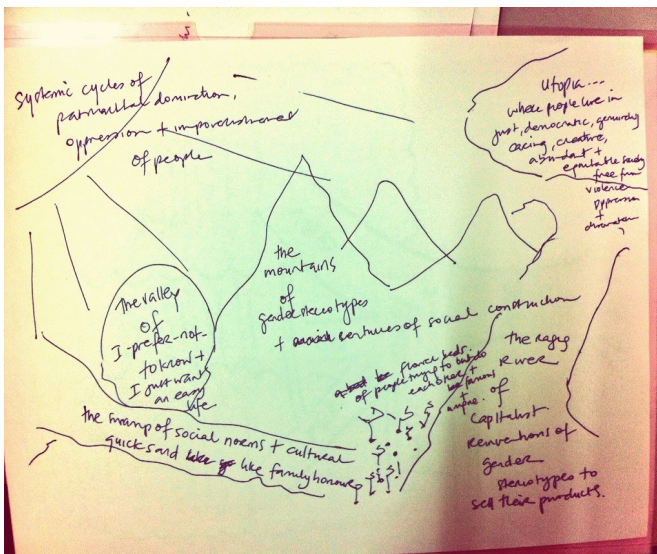
accesses her personal human rights, she is being a feminist. This sort of interpretation of feminism makes it possible for magazines like Oprah Winfrey's "O" to allude to cosmetic surgery (for women with no major physical or facial disfigurement) as being about feminist choice and expression. Once feminism becomes about personal choice, expressions and liberties, then absolutely anyone by simply exercising consumer, social, or political choice is deemed as "feminist-minded." There are many who would assert that they are "liberated" as women because they exercise choice and freedom, even when they are choosing between options that patriarchal-capitalist norms and priorities have been pre-chosen for them.

I know, I know...I hear the deep inner groans from many of my contemporaries who are doing their best to not alienate women and create space for whoever shows a desire to engage with feminism in any way at all. In a context where it's increasingly hard to find women willing to identify as with feminism at all, my GD (grim and determined) views expressed might be a turn off to the young and eager. However, I've understood over these past so many years of working with the women's movement that a feminism that focuses on personal autonomy and freedoms, and the attainment of equal opportunity with men, will not get at the roots of sexism and patriarchal domination. Our wheels will just keep spinning in the mud.

We will not actually move forward unless we stop focusing on men as the enemy and look at systems of domination and oppression and do a mapping of where actual power lies in every single context we work in. Advocating for women to take positions of power within the political, economic and social system and to be equal with men will not fundamentally change status quo. As we have seen, there is room at the top for a small handful of women to join the small handful of men of their class. Status quo is undisturbed, and all is well in Master's house.

bell hooks, whose writings inspired in this piece, writes about how the focus on feminism

as a set of lifestyle choices and identities is reflective of the class nature of the women's movement. While her thoughts are more reflective of the women's movement in the United States two decades ago, some of what she says could also apply to our context. She notes: *"It is not surprising that the vast majority of women who equate feminism with alternative lifestyle are from middle-class backgrounds, unmarried, college-educated...who are without many of the social and economic responsibilities that working class and poor women who are laborers, parents, homemakers and wives confront daily."* Many of us who seek out women's movement organizations and spaces often long for a sense of community, and find "safe spaces" in women's organisations where we believe we are understood and belong. Undoubtedly, the "feel good" factor of belonging and being amongst kindred spirits make it hard for us to actively question whether what we are about as a group actually makes a fundamental difference to the lives of women and men on the socio-political margins. bell hooks describes it this way: *"Often emphasis on identity and lifestyle is appealing because it creates a false sense that one is engaged in praxis. However, praxis within any political movement that aims to have a radical transformation impact on society cannot be solely focused on creating spaces wherein would-be radicals experience safety and support."*



How then would one take a step in the direction of feminism as political commitment rather than a lifestyle choice or exercise of personal freedoms? Well, bell hooks (being bell hooks) has a radical suggestion. She suggests that we avoid statements like, "I am a feminist" and instead state "I advocate feminism." By focusing on what we advocate, rather than on our personal identity, we move away from feminism as a choice, and towards feminism as an act of will. It also gets us away from stereotyped definitions of whom a feminist "is" or "should be" and directs attention away from ourselves (and other people's selves) towards our strategies and direction. This also then frees us from being boxed into other people's stereotypes of feminists as only being interested in women's rights, or women's issues. I imagine that it could do much to quiet down the name-calling and character assassination that often takes place when some choose to take moral high ground and judge others on some arbitrary (and usually self-defined) measure of who is feminist enough.

So many women are uncomfortable to say that they are feminists, undoubtedly affected by the bad rap and huge backlash that feminism has had over these past few decades. Until I re-read bell hooks' book, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, recently, I too maintained the view that it was important to be able to openly state, "I am a feminist" and was somewhat wary of women who for whatever reason could not stand up in a room and proudly state this. I see great value in shifting from the "I am a feminist" to "I advocate feminism" frame of thought. It could also create more room for women who work in the context of other social movements but who are concerned with feminism to express their support without having to give primacy to one set of concerns over the other. It could also remove the knots and gnarls around whether a man or transgendered person can "be" feminist, and stay focused on what actually matters – the political commitment to seek ways to end exploitation and oppression in the context of our lives.

1. **What do Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollantai and Rosa Luxemburg have in common?**
 - A. They were Marxists who fought for women workers rights in the early 20th century.
 - B. They were fashion designers who spoke up for plus-sized models.
 - C. They were women soldiers who fought in World War II.
2. **What was the name of the first leftist women's political wing in Malaysia?**
 - A. National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO)
 - B. Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS)
 - C. Joint Action Group (JAG)
3. **Name three pioneer women freedom fighters in Malaysia.**
 - A. Shamsiah Fakeh, Sakinah Junid, Khatijah Sidek
 - B. Marina Mahathir, Nicol David, Cecilia Ng
 - C. Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu
4. **I was an iconic feminist film in the 1990s. My two leading protagonists have since gone on to have further success in Hollywood. What film was I and why was I famous?**
 - A. My Best Friend's Wedding and I was a film that highlighted positive competition between women in order to gain the attention of men.
 - B. Thelma & Louise and I was the first mainstream movie that became a Hollywood hit featuring women who refused to live lives dictated by men.
 - C. Death Becomes Her and I portrayed women as not just beautiful sex objects but people with feelings.
5. **During the pre-colonial times, there were four queens who ruled the kingdom of Patani. Name them. Hint: They were colourful.**
 - A. Hijau, Hitam, Putih, Kuning
 - B. Biru, Ungu, Hitam, Putih
 - C. Hijau, Biru, Ungu, Kuning
6. **I am a very successful tennis player and have won more grand slam titles than any other male tennis star. Who am I?**
 - A. Serena Williams
 - B. Chan Chin-Wei
 - C. Martina Navratilova
7. **Who won the Yayori Award in 2011?**
 - A. Masumi Sakoh
 - B. Tahira Firdous
 - C. Saraswathy Muthu
8. **Which state in Malaysia has set up the equivalent of a state women's ministry?**
 - A. Penang
 - B. Johor
 - C. Selangor
9. **Which public university offers a gender studies course in Malaysia?**
 - A. Universiti Teknologi MARA
 - B. Universiti Malaya
 - C. Universiti Putra Malaysia
10. **When was the article in the Federal Constitution that upholds women's right to non-discrimination amended?**
 - A. 1979
 - B. 1995
 - C. 2001
11. **I am an activity that many women perform for free at home, but when men do the same in the public sphere, they get paid for it. What am I?**
 - A. Ballroom dancing
 - B. Cooking
 - C. Mathematics

Feminist Pop Quiz

BY tan beng hui

beng hui was involved in the original team that produced the WAVES newsletter of AWAM. she is happy that there is a brand new team at the helm of e-WAVES.

Reflections on the Co-option of the F-Word by STEPHANIE LUX



Source: leftycartoons.com/category/feminist

A few weeks ago, I was asked by an old and dear friend from Malaysia, to write an article on the topic of ‘the F-word’ for this newsletter. I was obviously delighted at the opportunity to share my thoughts with women who are geographically very distant from me – I am currently based in Cape Town, South Africa – and thus jumped at the opportunity.

The F-word? The ‘F’ more often than not being short for feminism. Now, this word causes me – someone who embraces the label – as well as many other people around the world, to shiver with discomfort, albeit for different reasons. To me, the word, philosophy and ideas of feminism have, like so many beautiful things around us, been co-opted by the establishment, the powerful, by political interests. It has been used to justify the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has been used to divide women through the increase in inequality, in opportunity and material wealth, in short: it has been used against us!

Many a times in the recent past, often while sitting at a table of one of the beautiful street cafes in Cape Town, observing the many interesting people around me, a terrible thought has invaded my mind: I need to drop this label, I need to stop calling myself a feminist!

Again, this is not because I am ignorant of feminism’s many achievements and of the great women who have come before me and helped to create a social world in which young women like myself have more opportunities than ever before. But I – and many young women around me the world over, who are to a certain extent, privileged, due to access to tertiary education – are burdened by this kind of feminism. All we can be now, should be now, is independent – financially and physically – free, strong, responsible for our lives and all our choices. We are supposed to be empowered even though this so-called empowerment often serves a country’s ruling elite and economy more than us. Empowerment is too many times measured in monetary terms and practiced through consumption. The current mainstream form of feminism is thus inextricably weaved into the fabric of global capitalism.

I refuse to embrace, accept this conception of feminism. To me, feminism is a broad social justice movement which aims to eradicate all forms of social oppression and exclusion. Capitalism as a system is built on inequality: between people and nations. A feminism which only aims to empower the top strata of women in every society is not feminism and we need to remember that. Writing these lines, I have become more and more angry the longer I typed. The world makes me angry. The injustices I see around me. The way women treat each other. The judgmental glances we exchange. The way we starve ourselves and are corrupted by the images of beautiful women we see around us in magazines, on TV and on billboards.

Yes, I am proud of being a woman, which to me means many things at once. It means that I am proud of living in a female body which has the power to create life, to me, the greatest power there is. I am proud of my achievements. I love looking and feeling beautiful. So don't get me wrong, I am not anti-everything. But I am against the co-option of feminism.

I know that like myself, many young women struggle to embrace or hold onto feminism, the F-word, whatever you want to call it. But I also think that holding on might be our only chance to make this world a better place for everyone; however, we need to hold on to a feminism that criticises and seeks to change current injustices, a feminism that is not only interested in the individual woman but in the community and relationships between women, a feminism that allows us to sometimes be dependent without appearing weak, a feminism that values internal empowerment more than external empowerment, a feminism that allows for contradictions.

I had initially set out to write a much less political text, rather, I wanted to write poetic and beautiful lines. However, these are the lines that came to me, that needed to be written!

**“I MYSELF HAVE
NEVER BEEN ABLE TO
FIND OUT PRECISELY
WHAT FEMINISM IS: I
ONLY KNOW THAT
PEOPLE CALL ME A
FEMINIST WHENEVER I
EXPRESS SENTIMENTS
THAT DIFFERENTIATE
ME FROM A
DOORMAT.”**

REBECCA WEST

Stephanie Lux is currently doing a Masters degree in Gender Studies with the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

She is also a militant blogger - themakingofanintellectualwoman.blogspot.com – reader, writer, beauty-seeker and loves cooking, thinking, listening to music and old things and dancing till the early hours of the morning.

The Good & loyal Daughter,
 The Dutiful wife,
 The bearable Daughter in law,
 the Kind, patient, ever loving mom

Every social situation we're in, we are Labelled.

We are looked at as providers,
 we are expected to cook, clean and love,
 we are a source of pleasure & desire
 we are looked at as sex objects

every step we take,
 we are watched,
 from head to toe,
 our waist-hip ratio crudely scrutinised,

If this ratio is desirable,
 those eyes dilate,
 the mind starts ticking,
 the desire starts arousing
 and the brain,
 stops functioning.

the beast within him unleashes
 he pounces on the woman,
 seizes control over her body
 takes possession over it,
 makes it his own.

forces himself on to her, in to her,
 and invades her deepest most private corners of herself.
 sometimes, he brings along his beastly friends,
 and they take turns,
 going at her
 using her body as an outlet for self satisfaction.

When will we women be looked at as people?
 As beings with emotions, senses and feelings.

When will we be looked at with love?
 When will we be looked at with kindness and compassion?
 When will be looked at with care?

Dear men,
 you are brothers, husbands, sons and fathers,

we ask, we plead, we beg
 Let us Be.

FIRST POEM

Indraveni.K is a businesswoman who is discovering the wonders of being a woman with each passing day. She is torn between being a businesswoman & traveling the world. But any time there's a cheap ticket, she's off discovering foreign lands. As a woman traveler, she loathes the thought of being harmed because of what her sex is.

A Fun, Fantastical Female Experience: the Women Deliver 2013 Conference

by Milan L. Sadhwani

Milan L. Sadhwani has denounced the feminist label in favour of a label that she feels is more inclusive: humanist. Having said that, she's always up for a conversation about gender and sexuality, not to mention breaking out randomly in song and dancing around in the AWAM centre. You may send any comments and feedback to milansadhwani@gmail.com.



I was going to write about the strategies I learned from the Women Deliver conference in Kuala Lumpur last month. In fact, I was in the middle of writing about Feminism and Fear when I received Susanna George's submission called Feminism – A Rose By Any Other Name and thought damn, that wily old advocate of feminism beat me to it! Then I realised that my Women Deliver experience had been much much more than just strategies and campaigns. Sure there were fantastic workshops, lectures and talks with great content but what really stays with me even until now, a month after the conference is the amazing people I met. I was touched by the countless women (and men) I met from all over the world while they convened for the first time ever in Asia. I was in awe and delight the whole time, like a small kid at Disney World, taking in the different sights, sounds and smells of an event of such pomp and scale. The organisers did a great job putting together the three-day conference that attracted over 4,500 experts and advocates from more than 160 countries. Activists, health-care practitioners, advocates and individual women who through their dedication and compassion serve their community by empowering women convened together to focus on on-going challenges to improve the health and well-being of girls and women.

I was inspired by AWAM's former president Dr. Mary Cardosa aka Chang's passionate talk about reproductive rights and her quest to bring this to our country. 'Chang', as she is fondly known to close friends and associates was the first woman to ever hold the position of president in the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), making history back in 2011. Listening to her talk made me understand how poorly abortion is understood in Malaysia and how pervasive the myth is that abortion is illegal over here.

I learned about digital story-telling and how empowering it is for someone to tell their story and take ownership of it. Stella Paul, award-winning journalist from India told us how she gave a sex-worker turned activist the peer support she needed to learn how to use a computer so that she could tell her story to Stella.

"It's not about slick gadgets or fast Internet speed, it's about spreading the technology to those who need to tell their stories," said Stella. Without Stella, Jayamma Bandari would not have been the warrior of dignity she had become; turning away from sex work to a life of helping sex-workers in her city – offering peer support, safe-sex counselling and assisting them in getting tested and treated for HIV/AIDS. She also helps these women open bank accounts.

Ahmad Awadilla, a Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Officer doing Refugee Assistance in the MENA region says that he is always aware about whose Voice is being represented in a story.

"I have to question my voice all the time – as a man," said Ahmad who blogs about gender and sexuality issues. "To be honest, I don't belong to those groups, so I'm very conscious. It's not easy to write about gender and sexuality issues in our (MENA) context – thus the very act of writing and journalism is activism," Ahmad concluded. Founder of Her Zimbabwe, an online portal that houses opinion pieces from Zimbabwean women, Fungai Machirori explains how even social media ownership is concentrated in the hands of few men, mirroring the structure of traditional print media.

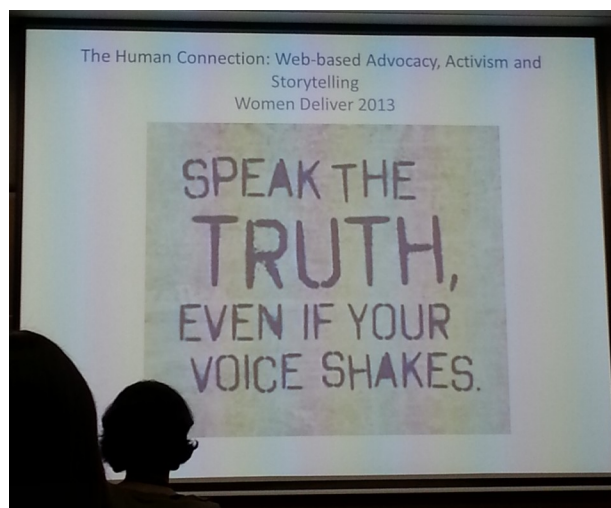
"Women are social media consumers but not the producers. Women are not visible properly in the media," Machirori says. The question to be asked, she stresses is who are these women who use social media? Are they the grassroots women, the one whom are frequently labelled illiterate, rural and have no access to resources? It really paints a bleak picture of the digital divide that exists between those who can access Google and Facebook versus those who can't. The truth is, Machirori tells us is that access to the Internet or social media platforms remains a privilege in Zimbabwe, especially if you are a woman. Women's issues and lives are poorly documented, if at all. Women, especially the younger generation are blogging to escape censorship issues and to promote social consciousness.

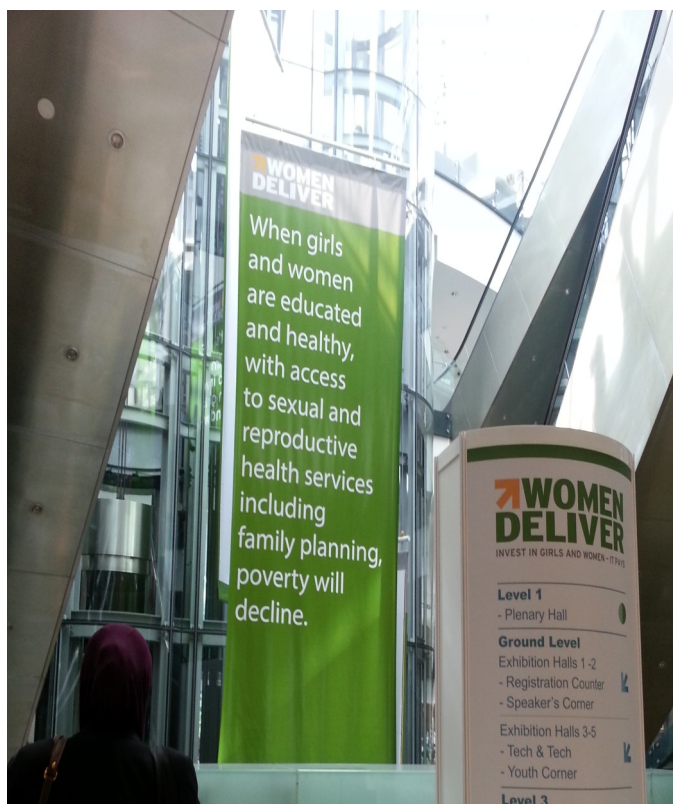
Her words gave me hope and made me imagine the possibilities of one day having a Her Malaysia webzine for young Malaysian women to pen their thoughts down to inspire a wider audience.

The plenary talk on the first day of the conference titled Women Lead Opportunities and Challenges made me think about transformative leadership.

The plenary was moderated by the gorgeous Ghida Fakhry Khane, famed News Anchor for Al Jazeera. Such a tough lady in a tough world! She left an impression on me with her quick wit, humour and powerful charisma while she effortlessly weaved questions and answers from the panel that consisted of philanthropist Chelsea Clinton, former president of Finland Tarja Halonen, Planned Parenthood Federation of America president Cecile Richards and former United Nations special rapporteur on Violence Against Women Yakin Erturk. Chelsea Clinton brought tears to my eyes when she shared stories of the hardship her grandmother went through as a child, born to teenage parents who could not afford a child thus leaving her abandoned twice before the age of eight. Chelsea related how her grandmother was put in a train from Los Angeles to Chicago with her two-year-old sister when she was eight. She was

**"JOURNALISM
IS AN ACT OF
REBELLION."
AHMAD
AWADALLA**





expected to survive on her own as an adult, which made her all the more determined to provide a better life for her future children and grandchildren.

"I share all this because she was so determined to create a life for her children that only existed in her imagination, to create a house full of love and support so that her children, particularly her daughter, could grow up and be anything she wanted to be in America," explained Clinton. "I think of my grandmother everyday – and I think about whether these women and girls have support and community with them. Do they have someone who believes in them?" Chelsea concluded and I nodded along with her, because I too believe that all it takes to empower a girl and a woman is to have someone believe in her.

My beliefs were confirmed the next evening when I sat down to catch the first ever live screening in Asia of the blockbuster movie called Girl Rising. I can spout the statistics for you – more than 200 million women around the world say that they don't want to have a child but are not using contraceptives. In Nigeria, 75% of girls are married before their 18th birthday. A girl with an extra year of education can earn up to 20% more as an adult. The estimated economic loss in countries that do not educate girls to the same level as boys is \$92 billion annually. I also know that "numbers count but people count more," something I learned from Women Deliver. I strongly urge every person to watch this film that was aired on CNN just a few days ago. It will inspire, move, educate and push you to realise the power that lies within, not to mention the power that is unleashed when girls have access to basic resources.



We get caught up in the idea of women having it all. Women have always done it all. What we are doing collectively is ensuring that women have a fighting chance. “– From the Plenary

Continued on next page

“Girl Rising” shows how messy and hard life can be, but it also captures the beauty of hoping and striving for change. Girls are not portrayed as victims or heroes, but rather the narrators of their own stories and truths.” – Kristi McCracken, author and teacher, courtesy of www.recordonline.com.

I also managed to escort author Michelle Goldberg to a forum in one of the grand ballrooms after I practically stalked her from an exciting morning plenary where she played the awesome moderator. Yes folks, there are fan girls even within the women’s movement. Yours truly disconcerted the famed author of ‘The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power and the Future of the World’ by gracefully squealing her name in a high-pitched voice upon meeting her face-to-face. Needless to say, I embarrassed myself thoroughly but it was worth it just to talk to her and ask her what it was like writing a book of such magnitude and depth. I deeply admire Michelle as a writer and I’m grateful to Women Deliver for giving me the opportunity to meet her. Michelle’s book gave me valuable insight into the politics of sex and childbearing while I was still a lost soul finding my way in the confusing and exhilarating world of the women’s movement.

While I was certainly taken by all the big and important people up on the stage and those who took to the microphone with such passion and conviction, I was nonetheless also inspired by the people around me, whom I had the pleasure of meeting face-to-face. I mingled with familiar faces, those who were as equally excited as I was to be there, albeit worn out from the intense conference schedule that had us walking briskly from room to ballroom, plenary to workshop, hopped up on caffeine and rushes of pure adrenaline. I also had the pleasure of meeting new people by walking around the exhibition halls that were set up for those looking for new opportunities. Remmy Shawa, the young man I bumped into who works at Sonke Gender Justice in Cape Town, South Africa enlightened me on what it was like to lead a

life of activism and working with non-governmental organisations in Africa. Later at the conference, Remmy was awarded the first ever ‘Rising Star Award’ by Women Deliver president Jill Sheffield and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation co-chair Melinda Gates. As he climbed the stage to receive his award, I was struck by a moment of pride and a beautiful thought came to me: We are all Rising Stars.

Aside from meeting famed writers, I was motivated to meet a wonderful young lecturer residing in America who had just finished her book entitled ‘Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here’ due for release this August. Karima Bennouna travelled the Muslim world to hear eye-opening accounts of heroic resistance to religious extremism from a diverse global community of writers, artists, doctors, musicians, lawyers and many more. I was inspired by her courage, determination and faith for pursuing this project to the end. Our encounter was brief but meaningful and I walked away determined to write my own book someday.

The Women Deliver conference, to me, was the ultimate female experience. It affirmed my belief of utilising and channelling your emotions and how you react to situations for the greater good. By using the anger, frustration, sadness and hopelessness you feel to drive you to do something that is bigger than your selves and the world, only wondrous things can happen. These women channelled their anger into useful endeavours and I was blown away by the results it produced. I’ll leave you with a quote that rang in my ears long after the conference was over: “It is only small pockets of courage that will lead to a revolution. It does not start overnight, but it starts today.”

By my own estimate, approximately 100% of Malaysian women suffer from a critical condition called Fear of the Man. The symptoms include, but are not limited to:

“...just a couple of months ago, I found my carefree, Fearless self sprinting from the office to the carpark, umbrella swinging menacingly from one sweaty palm and car keys forked like a claw in the other. And I realized that the Fear still lives on inside me.”

1. clutching your bag tightly whenever you leave your house, even when you are at a restaurant and eating a bowl of soup, which could easily spill onto your bag and leave a permanent stain

2. sweating profusely in an air-conditioned lift when you are alone with a bearded man

3. walking briskly from office to car/train station/ bus stop after work without making eye contact with anyone in case they take it as an invitation to follow you, rape you and kill you

Yes, that is the Fear. And many of us have been suffering the brutal effects of this condition from childhood. When I was just a little girl, I would ask my mother to drop me off at a tuition centre that was a ten minute walk from my house; Fear having crippled me because it was a ten minute walk from my house. When I was older, I got a little braver and made the journey on foot, accompanied by my maid, my brother and our dog, and although the adrenaline rush was akin to swimming in a shark tank, the ten minutes of constant vigilance on top of the sweaty exercise made me much too tired to learn about sums. Thankfully, when construction began on a nearby house, my mother promptly pulled me off the streets and back into the safe haven of the car.

After the breezy, devil-may-care university years, I thought I had recovered from the Fear, but just a couple of months ago, I found my carefree, Fearless self sprinting from the office to the carpark, umbrella swinging menacingly from one sweaty palm and car keys forked like a claw in the other. And I realized that the Fear still lives on inside me.

WOMEN AND FEAR

By Sumithra Durai

Malaysia is not the most comfortable country in which to be a woman. Sexual harassment is a daily cross women have to bear, be it in the form of lewd kissy noises from passing lorries or lecherous stares when you're sitting on the train. No wonder we are so paranoid about violent crime – who knows which icky wolf-whistler or starrer will actually move on to more illegal activities? However, having spent a great deal of time pondering over my next few lines, I have come up with three simple, if unorthodox ways to treat the Fear (note: these tips are not fool proof and you should not think of them as a safety jacket that will protect you from all crimes – these tips are not going to turn you into Wonderwoman or Oprah.)

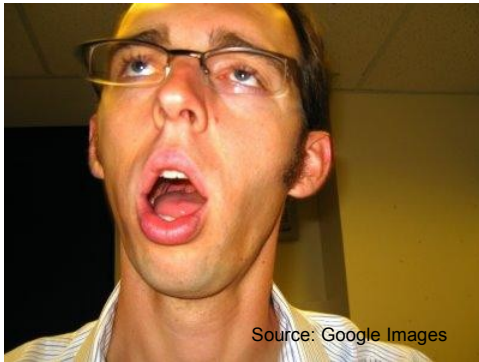
1. Practice makes perfect

Let's assume that a great number of petty criminals are repeat offenders – if they're not caught, there's not much that's going to stop them, is there? If so, then they have a great edge over you – they have a game plan. They know exactly what they're going to do and they've done it so many times, they're like ballerinas doing a dance routine. And the last thing a ballerina in performance is going to expect is a dance-off.

Instead of spending hours daydreaming about what you're going to have for lunch, take a bit of time everyday to think about how you're going to outwit the fool who tries to attack you. If you're a tough nut, think about what kick you will administer when he's got you in a chokehold. If you're not confident in your fighting abilities, rehearse falling down and rolling away. If you're alone, practice screaming. Have lots of back-up plans and try to imagine your reactions to a great variety of situations. Have these situations in your mind whenever you feel the Fear descend, and you will not only distract yourself, you will also be a little more prepared to react if anything should actually happen.

2. Face repellent

As a young, attractive student studying near a dodgy apartment block, I often felt a pang of fear walking around the area, which to me, was teeming with potential criminals. Luckily, my friend who also had high-risk good looks, and I discovered that we could make a variety of facial expressions that were repellent to men (as well as women, children and most animals). One was the 'Death Stare', in which you try as much as possible to look like a cast member of an American prison movie, very sneery and perhaps as though you are seeking revenge. Another was the 'Doofus', in which you let your face go completely slack, and then push your jaw back to produce a gormless, foolish expression.



I have found this one very successful with all men – so you can not only repel men on the streets with this, but men in bars, men in offices, even men online, if you take a photo. And finally, for extremely dire cases, there is the 'Demon'. My inspiration for the 'Demon' is Jack Nicholson in any movie – wild eyes, crazy grin, maybe a bit of cackling or hissing. It takes a lot of effort and skill to master a sufficiently scary Demon, but the effects are extremely impressive – try it for yourself!

I have found that applying these faces in public makes all people, criminal or innocent, feel extremely awkward and uncomfortable and desire nothing more than to get out of your line of sight. A trusty tool for the lone lady trying to make her way through a carpark!

3. Equip yourself

One confidence boost for your cowardly attacker is the fact that he thinks he's stronger than you, and perhaps that he has brought along some weapons. But one thing he has probably not considered is that your womanly charms can be quickly converted into your womanly arms. Find out which arm throws a better punch and always wear a ring on it. Make car key claws in car parks and swing your shopping around like a windmill. High heels, handbags and handphones can all be used to cause serious damage to a man's delicacies, while elbows, knees and teeth were made expressly for attacking would-be attackers.

Additionally, it wouldn't hurt to pick up a defensive sport or martial art – if anything, so you can work on your running, kicking and punching enough to be able to do it confidently. Imagine a big ripped guy walking down the street – he's not afraid of someone stealing his handbag! Now, be that guy.

Here is the antidote to the Fear: doing something about it. The fear we feel in dark, lonely spaces is completely justified, looking at the dark history of crime against women in Malaysia. However, if we just get used to being afraid and accept that these spaces are dangerous for women, we will never be able to shake the terror of simply being alone in a public place. We will be reducing ourselves to helpless children, needing women's-only train coaches and security guard escorts to save us from the big bad Man. Of course, looking at the bigger picture, women cannot shoulder the burden of crime-fighting all by ourselves, and it really will have to be a team effort that eradicates gender-targeted crime. However, walking boldly down a street as opposed to scampering timidly down it can make all the difference when there is no one but yourself looking out for you. Save yourself; grow a pair!

Sumithra Durai is looking to buy a waffle iron. Please get in touch if you have one to sell, or know where I can find one.

The Things We Know and The Things We Talk About

i have a body and i am full of desire
i have a body and i am full of fear

this fractured, divided truth
is a lump in my throat
a simmering froth of confused
exhausted anger, fizzy in my gut
helpless, frustrated, naïve and fuming
my body needs a break.

from the way i clutch it tight and rope it in,
the stiff way i navigate it in public places
the only ab crunches i do are the gut clenches
that happen when a foreign body
gets too close on the street
when the press of knuckles ghost against
the small of my back
the back of my neck,
the soft of my upper arms

when someone's eyes roam over me,

staring

staring

staring

i have a body.
i am a woman.
i am desire.
i am fear.
i do not want to be anybody's.

when i am alone i lock the doors
when i am alone i strap my bag across my chest
when i am alone i Wolverine my keys through my fisted fingers
when i am alone i slide my bag behind my legs on the floor
when i am alone i press my thighs together

when I am alone i look over my shoulder
and wait

for the other shoe

to drop.

sometimes i think –
i think, my life is a race in which
the only win is to die
without being violated.

(apparently)
(allegedly)
too much to ask

*slut whore skank bitch cunt hussy slag
prude nun frigid tease virgin queen ice machine
shrivelled bore give me more
baby girl sweetheart doll kiddo sugar honey babe
sexy hot yeah baby just like that
just like that
for me, for me, for me*

pulling on a cardigan, tugging at your hems
pulling up a collar, drifting down
over your collarbones, your chest
shifting a shirt to cover your belly,
your ass, the way the muscles shift
and move under the pair of pants that are
much too tight much too tight
you need better fitting clothes
how ill fitting the skin that
crawls over your breakable bones
how dare you have a body that breathes

what you own you will not keep
you will never have enough eyes
to catch all the shadows coming for you

ask your co-workers where you can buy
good pepper spray, a taser, some mace,
a switchblade that works, a big heavy bat
the knowledge of how to break a man's nose
pray to what you believe in that
you will have the nerve
when the day comes.

the stories flow
every where every day
someone somewhere close
never far enough away

and the promises come
 the take care's be safe's
 the handy tips, the buddy system
 everyone will walk you to your car
 everyone will make sure you get home
 everyone will wait until you get inside
 nobody will ever let anything happen to

you.

(apparently)
 (allegedly)

beneath every new story
 and every whispered word
 there is more than shifty-eyed,
 broken-hearted fear
 what is important is our anger –
 this anger, what a beast,
 what an unrestrained and feral beast
 caged and furious and exhausted
 how it bleeds through everything
 contained beneath glossy smiles
 contained beneath the training that comes
 from being

desire

and

fear

we are women
 undefined, *other, different, weaker*
asking for it

with our bodies
 what we are

we are asking for it.

with our bodies
 what we are

we are
 wondering what it must be like
 to not *be*.

Syar S. Alia is the social media and special projects manager for ISSUE Magazine (issuemagazine.wordpress.com) a collaborative, monthly theme-based online zine. She is also a writer, editor and human interested in poetry, feminism, electronic literature, music, science, justice, animals, shapes and feelings. Find her on twitter @syarsalia

A Feminist interpretation of the First F*** **(and how that disproportionately affects Females)**

Hew Li-Sha

is a law graduate with idealistic dreams to change the world. She is also the reason why there is no more food left in AWAM's pantry. Om nom nom. She hopes this piece will make you realise just how much the law and society defines even the way you love and have sex. (See? We're all products of this narrow, unfortunate social construction of whom we should be instead of whom we are.)

There is a cultural mandate that in order to be worthwhile, you need to be having sex. But there's another societal rule that implies that you should only be having sex at a certain age with a certain person of a certain gender after a certain ceremony. This piece intends to show that the term 'virginity' is a term that we must stop using as feminists because of how it detrimentally affects women, as well as limits the way we engage in the conversation about sexual intercourse.

There are many complications when trying to define that exact moment you are no longer a virgin. When does it really happen? When you get a blowjob? Give one? Give ten? When someone fingers you? Oral sex? Anal sex? Orgasm? What if your first time was with a girl? Would you stay a virgin forever? When do you cross the threshold from virgin to non? At what point is virginity, like your keys or your glasses, lost?

The concept of virginity bolsters up a highly hetero-normative hierarchy of what is and isn't defined as sex. You're technically a virgin if you've only had anal sex. It doesn't count. Fingering too, that doesn't count. I see. Let's be all heterosexist about sex now, shall we? Let's bow down before patriarchy and accept that sex can only occur when a penis penetrates a vagina. Even the way we see sexual intercourse is male defined! Why don't we see it as the vagina consuming the penis? It's somehow always difficult to define sex without including the phallus. In fact, when you have two men or two women who are doing something, it doesn't fit into the hetero-normative conception of virginity. What we understand about this concept of virginity, in a sense invalidates queer sex. Additionally, when we make the issue of virginity central to our ideas about sexuality and indeed, to being a human being, it completely marginalises those who don't actually see sex as that overwhelmingly huge factor of their lives.

I remember a conversation I had with my friends. We were all lazing around in the living room, as awkward and rebellious teenagers joking about sex, when someone went:

*"It must be really difficult for you girls, because you lose more when you have sex for the first time."
"What the hell do we lose?" my friend and I retorted.
He paused, "I'm not sure."*

Society has embedded within our minds that when a woman loses her virginity, she loses something – her worth, value and hymen. Historically, and in modern times, female virginity has been regarded as more

significant than male virginity. Teenage boys ‘get laid’, ‘get lucky’ when he ‘takes her virginity’ but teenage girls ‘lose it’. It becomes a subtle societal obsession: ‘When did you lose your virginity?’ ‘Who did you lose it to?’ ‘Are you saving yourself?’ ‘Did you know it was right?’. There is no word for the first time you kiss someone, the first time you bungee-jump, or the first time you step into a different country. But the first time you engage in heterosexual sex (consensual or not), you’ve lost your virginity. We call it a ‘gift’, and cherish cherry-popping stories, keeping them sweet and sentimental like old photographs in shoeboxes. All of this isn’t such a surprise of course when we remember that for centuries, women have been seen as property and not individual human beings. The concept of virginity reinforces this idea, that a woman’s worth is intrinsically linked to her sexuality.

Violations of girls’ and women’s sexual and reproductive rights and health occur every day in the name of protecting girls’ virginity or controlling the circumstances under which they lose their virginity. For example, forced child marriage, female circumcision and the deliberate withholding of information on reproductive and sexual health. The very concept of ‘virginity’ also affects political decisions and legislation. Just a few weeks ago, the Johor Religious Department whipped women and men for having sex outside of wedlock; young girls ‘dump’ their babies because they were told to have no sex instead of safe sex; only this year did the Supreme Court of India rule the two-finger-virginity test for sexual assault victims unlawful; sex workers are denied basic health care and rights because of the way society has labeled them – ‘whore’, ‘dirty’, ‘slut’.



"I can't decide what I'm going to be when I grow up--a good girl or a slut."

Source: lizadonnelly.com/cartoons

We focus intently on a warped idea of ‘morality’ that emphasises a woman’s chastity and purity, rather than her values like kindness and altruism. We forget values like compassion or courage, and instead talk a lot about vaginas and hymens. Aren’t we all more than our sexual parts?

As Jessica Valenti has correctly pointed out: *“the lie of virginity—the idea that such a thing even exists—is ensuring that young women’s perception of themselves is inextricable from their bodies, and that their ability to be moral actors is absolutely dependent on their sexuality. It’s time to teach our daughters that their ability to be good people depends on their being good people, not on whether or not they’re sexually active.”*

Feminism is about making the choices you want to make when you want to make them. It’s a philosophy that allows you to step out of the restrictive societal-norm box and to examine the culture’s influences on and reactions to your choices through these feminist lenses. Feminists need to recognise that sex has different levels of meaning for different people, and sexuality is not something that can be assumed in everyone. Participating in the dichotomy of virgin and non-virgin has nothing positive to give. It’s time to ditch the concept.

Dear Janice,

By Stephanie Lux

You don't know me and yet, I know so much about you. I know about the many disappointments you have experienced in your young years; I know about your eating disorder, your fear of being too fat in a culture that values thinness; I know about your inability to leave the house without make-up; I know about the sexual abuse you have suffered at the hands of a friend; I know about the many times he cheated on you and I know about your embarrassing acts of jealousy in public. I know all of this because he told me.

Please don't be mad at me; but I used to think you were crazy. I thought you embodied everything that is wrong with young women. If only I had known back then what I know now, I would have defended you, stood by your side. But then, I had not yet become intimately acquainted with the pain you feel inside: the slow and gnawing pangs of bitter feelings of inadequacy eating you up and transforming you into someone you don't want to be.

Seen through his eyes, you were just another woman who lost it. I cannot deny that it made me feel good. How compared to you, I had my life together: I was confident in my body; enjoyed my sexuality and my newly acquired status of being a single woman, which promised long-forgotten freedoms. Your misery elated me to the status of a queen in his eyes—a woman he could have fun with, a woman more similar to his male friends than to the young women all around him who seemed to want to suffocate him with their demands and expectations.

Yes – back then I was free, confident and fun. But a lot has happened since then. We are united now – my far-away sister. I hope you will accept my apology. I never meant to hurt you, take him away from you or make you appear hysterical in light of my togetherness.

I understand you now. I have taken over your role of the jealous woman, the pathetic woman, the mean woman. I know this because I can see it in the eyes of the women around me, their pitiful gazes which are void of empathy and filled with disbelief at my behaviour. I can feel the alienating quality of jealousy. They have not yet joined us in this sisterhood and hopefully they never will. They may be able to remain safe, have enough internal strength to fight off all the outside pressures. Erect fortresses around their minds and bodies before they are invaded by a need to compare themselves to other women, for one can never win: there will always be someone prettier, thinner and wittier!

I have not heard from you in a while, maybe you have gotten stronger or maybe you have fallen deeper into the abyss. You have entered my life without your knowledge. You came alive in the stories he told me about you. But he has left my life long ago and so have you. Ok, I have to admit, I sometimes still look at your Facebook profile. Still compare myself to you and am glad if I discover a flaw in your appearance. It makes me feel good for some time; but then, I feel disgust at the discovery of my viciousness. I don't know for certain what has made us this way. I became your follower and I know many young women will in the future.

How can we save ourselves and protect other women? When will we as women stop comparing ourselves? Stop exchanging ugly glances? Stop needing men's attention to feel confident and beautiful?

Again, I am sorry!

*Love,
Your sister*

Did you know?

Until the twentieth century, the colours were pink for a baby boy and blue for a baby girl.

Feminist Counselling is essentially client-centred in its approach. The goal is to provide clients with information, resources and support; to listen empathetically; and to help them develop more resources and support systems. In such a setting, the therapist and client work as equals.

AWAM provides counselling from Mondays—Saturdays, 10am– 4.30pm. Call our Telenita Line at 03-78770224.

Feminist Pop Quiz Answers :

1. A
2. B
3. A
4. B
5. C
6. C
7. C
8. A
9. B
10. C
11. B