The Womens' Issue

The more things change, the more they stay the same

International Women's Day has come around again—one day out of the year to celebrate and vindicate the liberation and ongoing empowerment of another 'special interest' group (this one happening to comprise 51 per cent of the world's population). With it we bring you another edition of *the Ubyssey* Women's Issue. We hope you enjoy it.

It seems that as time passes, issues stay the same while public attitudes change like the seasons. Unequal pay rates and employment opportunities, abortion, sexualised violence, child care support, objectification, and body image distortion continue to remain largely "women's problems," while any person with their eyes open understands that these problems are systemic, both caused by and affecting the community at large. They don't go away because they're part and parcel of so much more than a 'special interest' issue—they are symptoms of dated lessons we are taught as children, false truths we internalise before we are old enough to question them.

With this edition of the Women's Issue, we hope to shed light on how the current state of affairs is, as ever, in a turbulent flux of achievement and struggle. Women are now able to explore careers and lifestyles like never before, through avenues paved with the sweat and tears of our predecessors.

But opportunity is far from equally spread or stable. Some privileged women can truly have it all, career, prestige, and family, while the needs of others remain neglected. Some single mothers are simultaneously enjoying academic tenure and autonomous parenthood. Sex trade workers on the other hand, aren't even allowed to keep a roof over their heads or support their dependants. While some women actively support the closure of 'useless' Status of Women offices, Status of Women is in fact the department that funds much-needed reports on issues like the rights violations of Aboriginal women. Some women are pulling ahead; others are getting left behind.

Because of the growing disparity between those with privilege and those without, "women's issues" has started taking on an extremely nebulous identity. Those of us with access to money and education can cease to see what there still is to fight for. Post-feminism, in its bastard sense, is pretty widespread; one can often find women who will say emphatically that they are *not* feminists, whatever that means. We assume these women don't mean that they're *not* in support of women voting, learning, and making independent choices, but perhaps that they do not identify with the esoteric academia or hardline radicalism most people attribute to "stereotypical" feminism.

So we hope this issue brings with it a sense of unity, empowerment, and accessibility to everyone, men as well as women. Because real improvement of real problems will only occur when the lines of communication are open and active. Let's get talking about these issues, because it looks like they're not going away anytime soon. ♀

—Momoko Price and Mary Leighton
Women's Issue Coordinators

'tweens

Arab Latin Fiesta
Mona's Lebanese Cuisine (1328 Hornby)
March 9
Come see what happens when you mix Middle Eastern belly dancing with Latin dancing.
Tickets $7 with reservation, $10 without, and $25 for a Lebanese "feast"

Spring Fling
March 10, 5:30pm
Ukrainian Cultural Centre (805 E. Pender)
The Association of United Ukrainian Canadians presents a concert, dinner, and dance featuring the AUUC performing-arts groups, the Vancouver Folk Orchestra, Barvinok Choir, Dovbush and Yalynka Dancers, Reeltime, and pHRockets.
Tickets $15/10

Birth Fest
Britannia Community Centre (1661 Napier)
March 10, 10:00am-3:00pm
Event celebrating pregnancy and babies, featuring info and resources, crafts and locally made products, and family activities and performances.
Free

Socialist Education
SFU Harbour Centre (515 W. Hastings)
March 9, 7:00pm, March 10, 10:00am–2:00pm
Discussions on topics such as Cuba, Venezuela, and indigenous rights.

UBC Film Society SINCE 1935
March Movies
March 9
8pm
Borat Beer Garden
Rated 14A, 84 minutes
March 10 - 11
7pm: Borat
Rated 14A, 84 minutes
9:30pm: The Good German
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Membership: $10 (students)
For more info, call 604 822 3697 or visit www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/filmsoc

Classifieds

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UBC GOLDEN KEY
Academic committee proudly supports: The UBC INFORMS (Institute for Operations Research and Management Sciences) Student Chapter's Management and Operations in Health Care Mini-Symposium. Time: 1-5 PM, Friday, March 16, 2007, in Room 102, Michael Smith Laboratories. Cost:
FREE! Stamp points: 40. Please RSVP by March 14 to informs.ubc@gmail.com.

IN PERSON MIKE FARRELL
of M*A*S*H Talk & Book SigningWednesday, March 21 at 7 PM, Chapters Robson

Callboard

ARTISTS! CALL FOR
submissions. Realities of Race Week Organizing Committee is holding an art exhibit in the SUB art gallery in conjunction with the week of events on the theme: Articulating the Invisible: Voice, Power, and Politics of Experience. The exhibit will show March 19-23, 2007 Submission forms available: www.myspace.com/positivegraffitiproject. DEADLINE March 9, 2007.Volunteers also needed! Contact Ria w/submissions and to volunteer:riakawara@gmail.com

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Friday, 9 March, 2007
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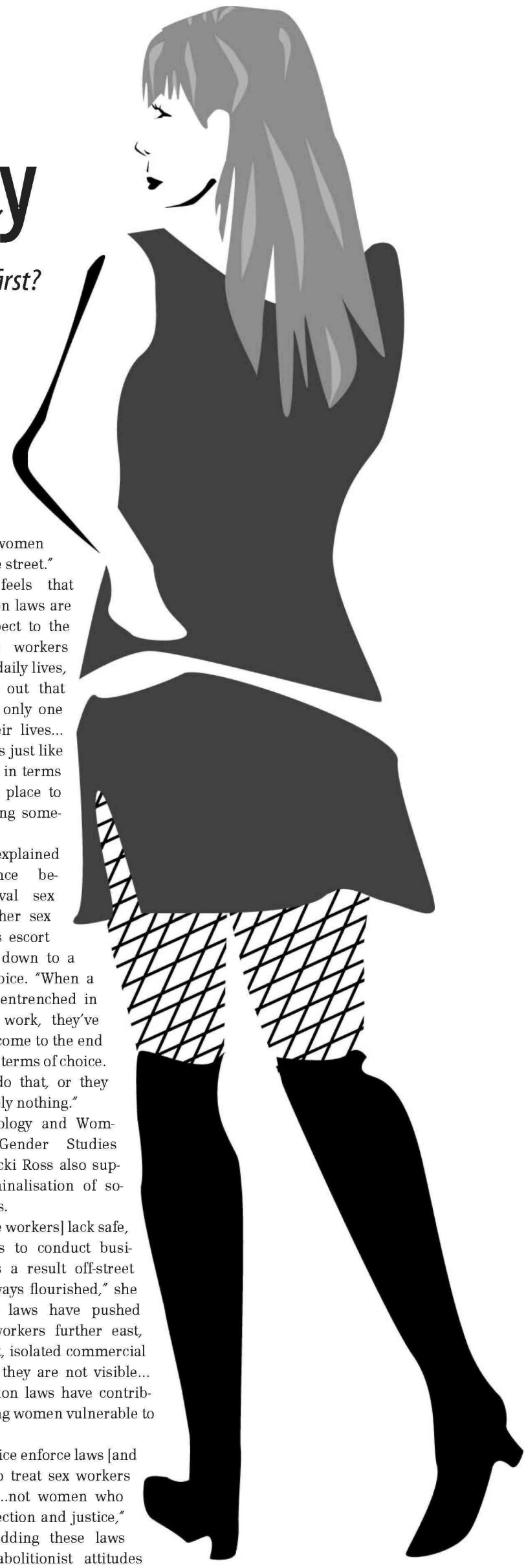
Sex trade laws standing in the way

When it comes to street-level sex work, why don't our laws put safety first?



by Amanda Stutt

With media attention firmly focused on the trial of Robert Pickton, charged with the murders of 26 women on the Downtown Eastside—most of whom were sex trade workers—it's hard not to get unsettled by the grisly details unfolding, the courtroom drama of the trial itself, and become distracted by the sensation. However, the attention is focused more on Pickton himself rather than the women he is accused of killing.

What has escaped scrutiny is an analysis of the archaic laws that restrict sex trade workers' freedom and their ability to protect themselves from possible harm. These laws reveal a system built upon a paradox: prostitution itself is legal, but everything surrounding it is illegal. In the solicitation portion of the Canadian Criminal Code , the "communicating law" (Section 213) makes it illegal for a sex worker to communicate or negotiate any details of an exchange in a public place, including a car. The "living off the avails of prostitution" (Section 212) makes it illegal for the dependants of sex workers to benefit from money earned from sex work, and the "keeping a common bawdy house law" (Section 210) makes it illegal for a sex exchange to take place a sex worker's home. According to some experts, the applications of these laws are not protecting women working in the sex trade, but are instead placing them in direct danger.

New Democratic Party MLA for Vancouver East Libby Davies believes the communicating law "creates a very dangerous situation in that sex trade workers are, in effect, making split-second decisions about whether or not to get into someone's car...because they are under threat of enforcement."

"I don't know of any other activity that is legal, but you can't communicate, you can't do it anywhere. It creates a very untenable situation," she said. "It's a strange debate because we're not addressing the issue. What we should be addressing is whether a harmful or dangerous situation is taking place. Most politicians don't want to deal with these laws. They consider them too controversial, but I think it's incredibly urgent."

Davies believes that the laws marginalise sex trade workers because "many women in Vancouver are involved in what we call the 'survival sex trade,' so they're not necessarily there by choice. So to criminalise these women and to place stigma on them and make it completely untenable for them to have sort of safety or rights is extremely problematic."

Davies explained that a parliamentary sub-committee was set up to review issues pertaining to prostitution, with a motion set forth to decriminalise portions of the solicitation laws, but the committee concluded in December 2006 without solid consensus for recommendations for decriminalisation.

According to Davies, "the report didn't go nearly as far as I wanted it to go because I do support decriminalisation...At the end of the day the Conservatives on the committee took their own position, which was more of a stronger prohibition, which I think is [a] completely untenable position."

"These laws are a complete failure," she said.

"The government...can't hide behind the contradictions in these laws," added Davies. "We focus on street prostitution and turn a blind eye to everything else. The whole basis for [the] laws is very contradictory as it exists now."

Davies believes that criminalising sex trade activities has not helped either sex trade workers or local communities, but has actually created a more dangerous situation. "Not only with the missing women but generally with the sex trade across Canada, the evidence [to support] that is so compelling... that I don't know how anybody could refute that," she said.

Davies said most public attention and law enforcement is directed at street prostitution because that's where it is most visible and "it has nothing to do with supposedly helping these women. The evidence will show that enforcement is creating a lot of harm, not good."

"If they were designed to protect individuals in the sex trade or local communities they've failed on both counts. Not only are the laws not working, they're actually harmful."

Davies explained that while there was not a recommendation in the report for decriminalisation, there was a call for law reform, and a conclusion that the state should not be prohibiting consenting sexual activities between adults. "We need to provide better exit services and programs and there are recommendations in the report on that."

According to Davies, the key issue is separating what is consenting and what is not, and the law needs to be applied to areas that deal with violence, exploitation and coercion.

Kate Gibbson, Executive Director of the Women's Information Safe House (WISH), said "with the trial on we have an opportunity to let people know via the media that women are still facing violence every day. They are still out there on the street, still vulnerable to predators and victims of discrimination and [they] feel isolated."

Gibbson explained that sex workers face a plethora of barriers, including access to healthcare and housing, and emphasised the difficulty sex workers encounter when attempting to access housing.

"For them to approach someone about housing and negotiate when they can move in, what they can and can't do there." she said. "They face a lot of barriers...that's one thing that's not discussed. They don't have a safe place to live and we don't have enough services for women [to get] off the street."

Gibbson feels that the solicitation laws are only one aspect to the barriers sex workers face in their daily lives, and pointed out that "Sex work is only one aspect of their lives... They live lives just like the rest of us in terms of needing a place to live or needing something to eat."

Gibbson explained the difference between survival sex work and other sex work such as escort work comes down to a matter of choice. "When a woman gets entrenched in survival sex work, they've pretty much come to the end of the road in terms of choice. Either they do that, or they have absolutely nothing."

UBC Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies Professor Becki Ross also supports decriminalisation of solicitation laws.

"[Sex trade workers] lack safe, secure places to conduct business, and as a result off-street trade has always flourished," she said. "These laws have pushed street-level workers further east, into poorly lit, isolated commercial zones where they are not visible... anti-prostitution laws have contributed to making women vulnerable to predators."

"[The] police enforce laws [and are] taught to treat sex workers as criminals...not women who deserve protection and justice," said Ross, adding these laws reflect the abolitionist attitudes of media, politicians and urban planners who have "long constructed sex workers as...a public nuisance."

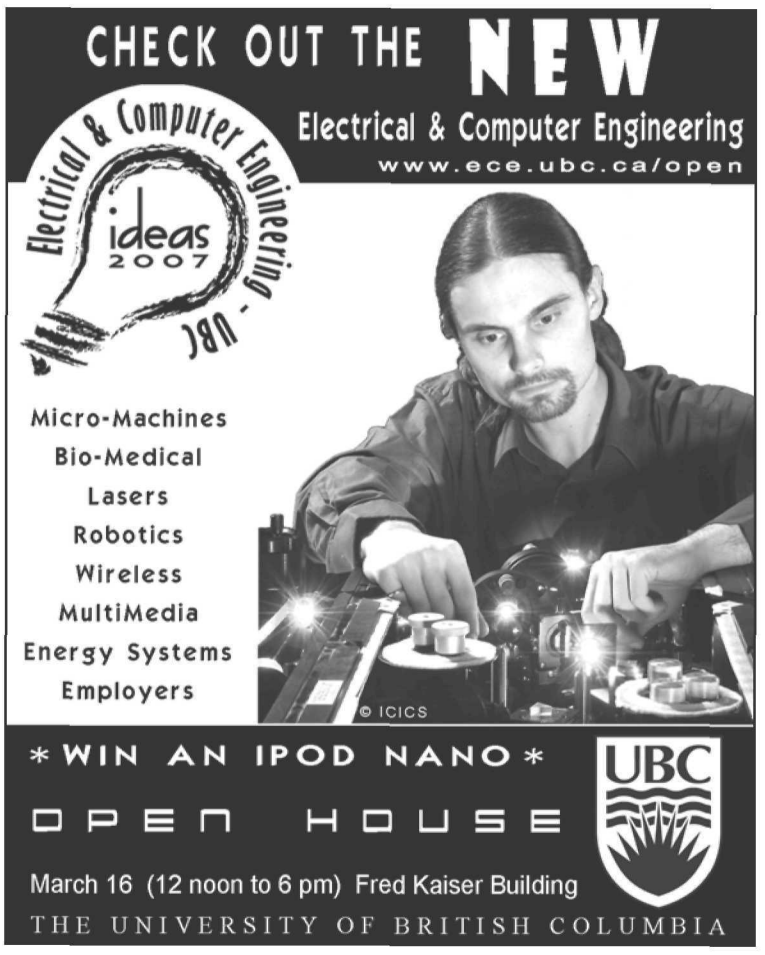
Ross also pointed out that the deaths of the women on the Downtown Eastside are not isolated incidents, but are part of a larger framework of violence targeted against women in the sex trade, citing notorious murder cases as examples that range from "Jack the Ripper" to Gary Ridgeway, the "Green River Killer," and recently the murdered prostitutes of Ipswich, England.

Ross emphasised the absurd and arbitrary nature of the solicitation law, "The solicitation law is troubling because everyone solicits—capitalism depends on it."

Ross also believes the laws won't solve the broader issues of poverty, homelessness, addictions and racism facing many survival sex workers.

According to Ross, one solution is that sex trade work needs to be "reconfigured and understood as work, just like other facets of service work."

Sex work, she argued, needs to be decriminalised and revalued. Sex workers need choices and rights granted to other workers "such as freedom from violence, access to legal recourse, health care and social services, and the right to communicate without fear of reprisal or police intimidation." ♀



volunteer for the ubyssey sub basement 24

Pay more for your kids

Child care to lose $455 million over the next three years, but help may arrive

by Levi Barnett

April showers bring May flowers, but for BC parents, the new month will also lead to increased costs. On March 31, the federal government will reduce child care payments to the provinces, leaving British Columbia with $455 million less over the next three years.

Currently, BC Child Care providers receive a subsidy of roughly $40 per month per child from federal monies, as part of the Child Care Operating Fund (CCOF). The CCOF financially assists licensed child care providers to keep their doors open. When the federal subsidy ends these providers will take a hit, forcing them to raise their rates to parents.

According to Katherine Millar, Student VP of Advocacy for the UBC Daycare Parent Council, "Everyone's raising fees since they're subsidised now."

Millar adds that at UBC the lack of child care payments by the federal government will translate into an increase of $55 more per month for parents. The new rate will begin on July 1 when the province implements its new budget, reflecting the federal funding reductions.

Help may be on the way, however. While providers' fees will go up, the Conservative government now offers a $100 monthly payment to all parents per child under six, regardless of income. Known as the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), the program, operating since July, shifts government support from providers directly to parents. Unlike a previous allowance offered by the federal government, the benefit is taxable, meaning that its real value for parents is lower than the implied $1,200 per year.

Even with the UCCB, child care fees charged for those living near UBC are far higher than the allowance.

"[Child care] costs over $900 a month on average on Vancouver's West Side," explains Millar, referring to the cost of full-time care for infants and toddlers.

The government claims that the program allows parents greater flexibility in choosing child care options. Critics argue that this undercuts public-oriented non-profit child care providers.

Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, says of the UCCB, "It is a family allowance, but it's not child care. Parents have no child care...this is only getting worse." Because intake into the provincial CCOF program will be capped, less incentive will exist for affordable child care centres to open.

At the same time the UCCB was announced last year the federal government claimed it would be creating 125,000 new child care spaces over the next five years. According to a public letter from BC Minister of state for child care Linda Reid, the province can't act on this plan until the federal government releases more details.

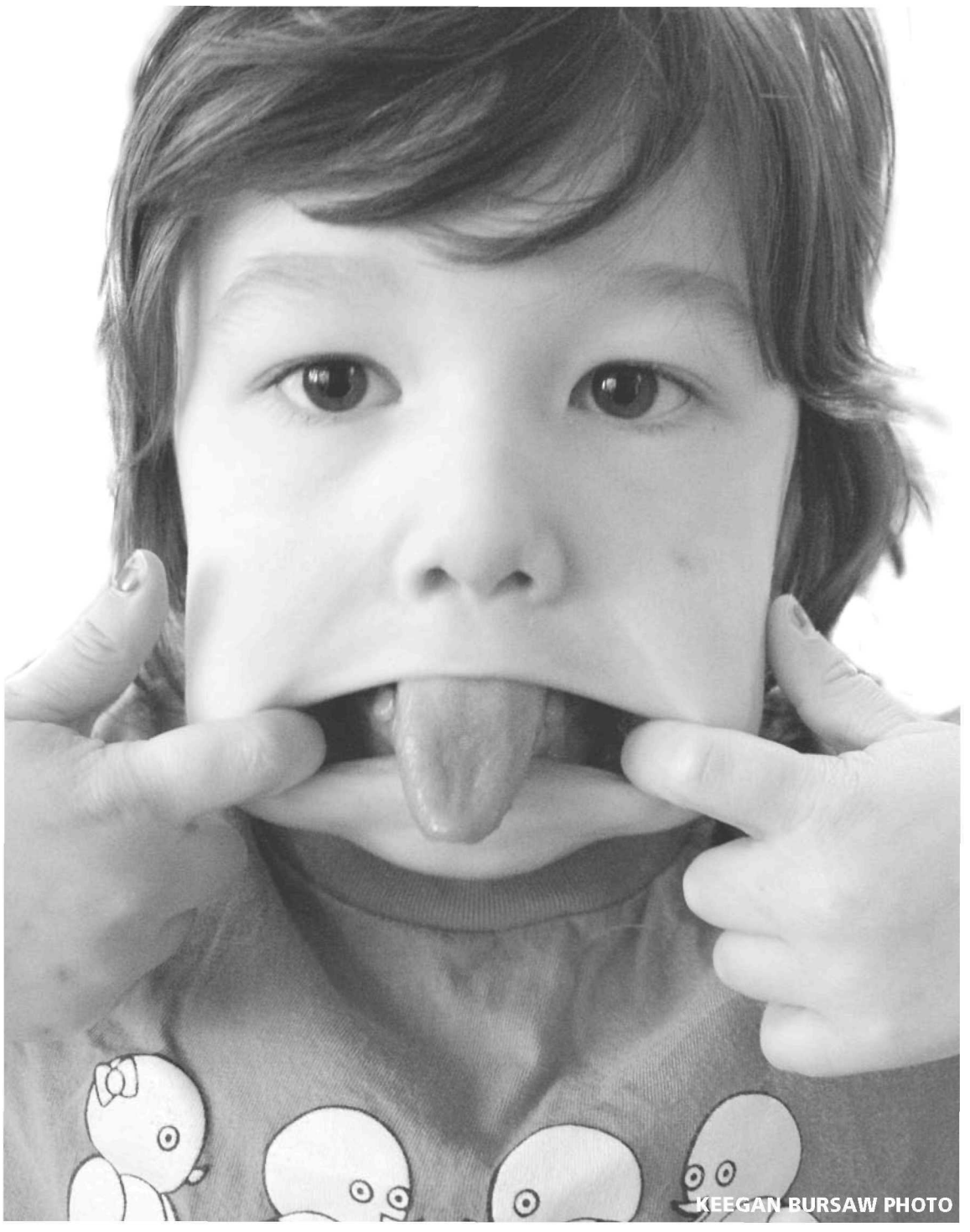
"It's all a great mystery," says Lysack of the situation. "[The federal government] committed to announcing a plan beginning April 1. They have yet released not a word. Government ministers are very unhappy and kept in dark. All other provinces are trying to plan their budget, but they don't have enough information to work with."

Despite impending cuts, the province will continue to fund its portion of the CCOF and other early childhood programs.

Additional money will continue to help low-income parents to the tune of up to several hundred dollars per child per month, said Reid. "We as a province have placed an incredible priority on vulnerable families so we are maintaining at its enhanced rate subsidies to 25,000 families, sitting at about $126 million annually."

While overall BC funding for child care is set to decrease by July 1, critics such as Lysack's group say that the province's projected surplus of $2 billion could be used to fill the gap.

"BC chooses where it spends its money...they're not getting the money Federal Liberals promised, but they decide how to spend the money they have," says Millar. ♀



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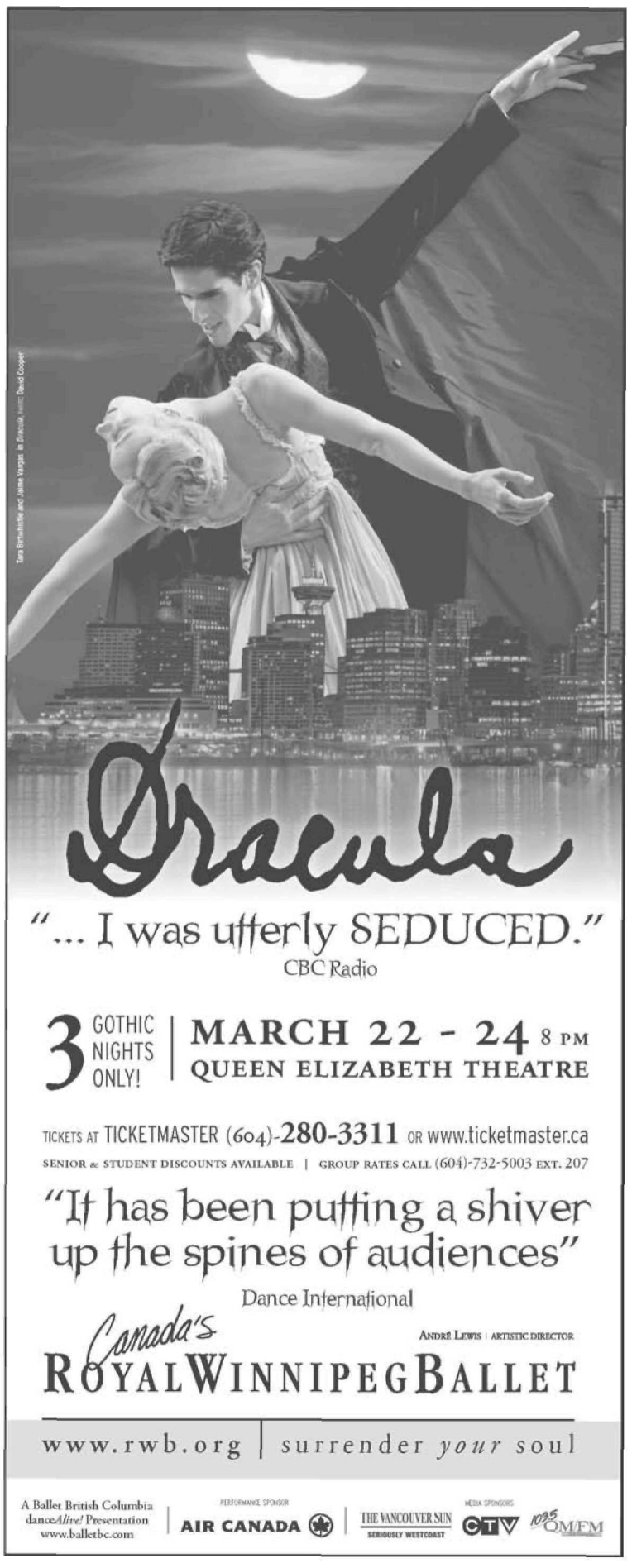


Activists unimpressed by Status of Women funding

by Isabel Ferreras

A shock to the system, a shock to women, a shock to all: Stephen Harper's Conservative government has promised an additional $5 million to go towards establishing new funding for Status of Women Canada.

This new funding comes after the federal government announced on November 30, 2006 that they planned to cut $5 million in order to increase administrative savings. This meant that 12 out of the program's 16 regional offices would be shut down by April 1, 2007. Though a promise was made that the money would be reinvested in programs for women, this was not enough for community activist Fatima Williams and her peers.

Following news of the cut on January 18, Williams and her fellow activists began a protest outside the Vancouver office of Status of Women Canada. Doing this wasn't enough to garner a strong effect. Members of the group took action by occupying the office, starting at 1pm. They demanded a meeting with Canadian Heritage and Status of Women minister Beverly Oda. At approximately 10pm, Oda scheduled a meeting with their advocacy representatives for March 3.

The group of 14 activists prepared presentations arguing that keeping the offices open should be a priority.

"We had met Oda's demands, for size of the meeting, and time of the meeting," said Williams. "She pretended to listen to our recommendations and did not change her position one bit, despite the brilliant presentations she had taken the time to watch."

Status of Women Canada was formed in 1967 with the mandate to focus on three areas: improving women's economic autonomy and well-being, eliminating systemic violence against women and children, and advancing women's human rights.

As of April 1, four Status of Women Canada offices will remain in operation: Edmonton (serving British Columbia, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan), Montreal (serving Québec and Nunavut), Moncton (serving the Atlantic region), and Ottawa (serving Ontario and national organisations).

This could result in Canadians having considerably less direct access to the resources they need to get their women's advocacy groups running the way they should, according to Williams.

"Organisations count on the reliability of the Status of Women offices so that they can gain proper advising, proper guidance, and proper funding," she said. "Without that, what will happen to them?"

Nancy Jean-Waugh, assistant deputy director of Status of Women Canada, believes these changes will have a positive outcome.

"Due to unnecessary costs, we are formulating a much more efficient way of funding our women's advocacy groups across Canada," she said.

It was announced March 7 that the federal government would be putting $5 million back into the budget for Status of Women to establish two new sectors of the program: the Women's Community Fund and the Women's Partnership Fund. The Women's Community fund is intended to aid organisations at the local, regional, and national levels in order to foster the full participation of women in all aspects of Canadian life.

The Women's Partnership Fund, meanwhile, intends to enhance the already existing grant program, serving such organisations as the Native Women's Association of Canada. This is intended to facilitate engagement with the organisations, as well as any public institutions seeking grants.

According to Williams, this declaration has some underlying details that have not been published.

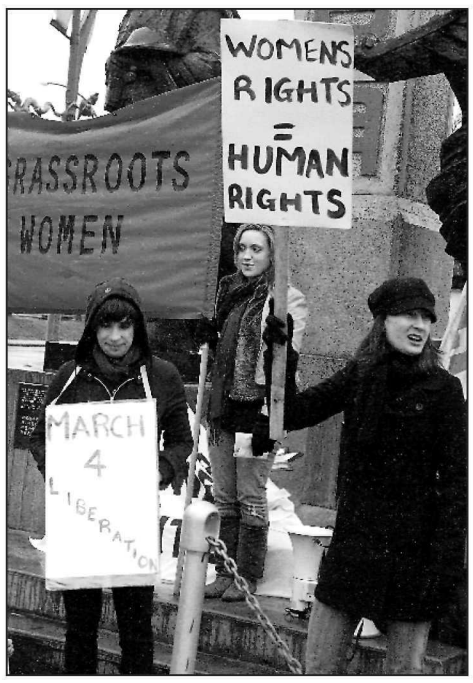
"Though the budget has been replenished with the $5 million originally cut, we are being misled," she said. "Yes, the budget is at its highest level in history, sitting at three percent more than what we started with before the cuts."

"What Canadians won't realise when they see this news report is that the government is now allowing their funding to go towards private for-profit organisations and groups, as opposed to prioritising serving those who most need the funding...the non-profit groups."

"We are now in an even more difficult position than we were when the funds were cut. They will be competing with these private companies for government funding."

Shauna Paull, another advocate for sustaining the Status of Women program, is angry over the difficulties of access to the offices.

"We can't access the assistants in the Status of Women office unless we live in one of their four respective cities," she said. "Women can't exchange information as easily, they can't form coalitions as easily, and our ideas will not be shared as easily." ♀



"Stop the violence!" Women protest under dismal conditions

Women gathered in Chinatown to speak out against violence against women. The skies were dark, but their spirits were ignited as they voiced concerns on a wide range of topics, from the Palestinian conflict to issues of Aboriginal homicide and the sex trade. **KELLAN HIGGINS PHOTO**

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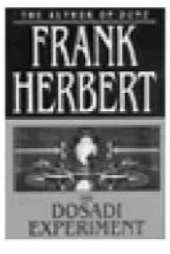

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The possibility of polyamory

PLENTY TO GO AROUND? The potential of polyamory.
OKER CHEN PHOTO

by Momoko Price

Jillian Deri is an SFU graduate student who studies what many of us might consider a dream subject: polyamorous relationships. But spare her the standard, exoticised envy, the "lucky you's" and the "what I wouldn't give's." Deri stresses about her work like any other PhD student, perhaps more so, because not only is it her work, it's her life.

Deri has been actively practicing and studying queer polyamory for the past six or seven years. At the age of thirty, she is currently involved in her first long-term relationship of three years, and over the course of this partnership has explored and sustained numerous shorter, open relationships with other people. Polyamory does not mean swinging: it's about sustaining real, emotional relationships with your partners, not just "free love," so to speak. It's the path Deri's chosen, and like anyone else, she works to keep it as functional as she can, to be as responsible as she can.

Personally, she never gets involved with more than two people at any given time, but she has known people who somehow manage to balance several partners simultaneously. She even dated a woman who at the time was juggling seven consensual, sexual relationships at once.

Sounds hedonistic, impossibly fulfilling lifestyle? Don't get carried away. Deri warns against casting polyamory or polyamorous people in any kind of superior light, though many in the community may occasionally do so on their own. Polyamory is certainly not for everyone. "If you tend to get jealous easily then clearly it would suck," she quips pragmatically. "You'd be miserable."

In her experience, embracing polyamory is akin to embracing any other sexual lifestyle. You accept and identify with it because it reflects what works best for you and what you prefer. Polyamory is no more universally evolved or "better" than monogamy than being queer is universally "better" than being straight (or vice versa).

But while we would intuitively acknowledge that polyamory is obviously "not for everyone," why is it that so few people actively question the institution of monogamy? "Celeste West once said that we live in a world that embraces 'monogamy with a wink,'" Deri said. She went on to explain how in conventional society, we tend to accept monogamy as the "ideal," or "more serious" kind of relationship, the one we are ultimately in pursuit of, in spite of the fact that it fails dismally for so many of us—repeatedly. When it does fail, we tend to blame our own personal shortcomings instead of questioning whether or not the rules really work for us. How many of us have had a relationship fail because one person or both started feeling stifled and cashed in their chips? How many of us felt guilty about it?

Poly, as it's called by those familiar with it, has been around for quite a while, though historically it's been far more readily embraced by the queer community than by the Western heterosexual world. Why? Because queers have been disqualified from the institution of hardcore monogamy, otherwise known as marriage, until very recently. "Because queers were denied marriage, they were free to think critically and reflexively about monogamy and think of what works for them," Deri said.

But, queer or straight, polyamory takes work. In the past decade or so a kind of how-to industry has grown, comprising books, like Dossie Easton's *The Ethical Slut*, meetings, podcasts, and workshops on how to address the obstacles to healthy poly, namely issues like jealousy, honesty and negotiation. Though poly certainly is an alternative to monogamy, it requires substantial reflection to deal with the negative feelings that tend to spawn when deviating from the conventional norm. Deri says part of this process is thinking about these feelings practically. Instead of being ashamed of jealousy and denying its existence, a healthy way to deal with it is to accept the fact that sometimes one has the right to be jealous.

It becomes apparent talking to Deri that polyamory is obviously a real option for many women in current Western society, though it's generally swept under the rug by mainstream culture. And while many of us might be better off monogamous, perhaps polyamory has potential for some of us who haven't considered it simply by virtue of the fact that we didn't know it was possible. ♀

Dyke porn: it's all about us

by Candice Vallantin
Photo by Oker Chen

"Good Dyke Porn, you'll know it when you see it." But have you ever heard of such a thing? Chances are you haven't, because there simply isn't a whole lot of good material out there.

Brenda Robbins, an up-and-coming pornographer in her 40s, is bringing women together on the silver screen in the hopes of broadening the limited selection of erotic entertainment available for women. It's a unique attempt to launch a new niche in the thriving adult entertainment industry that consistenly excludes women from working behind the scenes.

Robbins majored in film studies at the University of Manitoba before moving to Vancouver to become a firefighter. But her ambitions as an independent filmmaker were never put to rest.

"My plan all along was to be a fire-fighter and to do porn on the side. So I'd been wanting to do porn for years and years," she says. But after a year or so of trying to get hired by the firefighting department, Robbins finally cracked. "I decided, screw that. If this is what I really want to do, I'm going to pour all my energy into it and make it my job. So that's what I'm doing. I'm starting my own business, I'm dedicating my life to it."

Six months into the project, Robbins has already shot a few scenes and begun developing her website, gooddykeporn.com. So far, there are only a few teaser pictures available foreshadowing things to come, but Robbins hopes it will become a "sex-positive online community" that will be more than just a source of dyke porn.

Growing Pains

While pornography for lesbians certainly isn't widespread, it isn't entirely new either. In 1985 Nan Kinney and Debi Sundahl, producers of Fatal Media, created the first lesbian erotic film, *Private Pleasures and Shadows*, created by women, for women.

Although Fatal Media continues to create erotic films, this daring new genre lost momentum in the mid 90s until SIR (Sex, Indulgence and Rock'n Roll) Video, produced by couple Shar Rednour and Jackie Strano, began creating more erotic lesbian films with a slightly educational appeal. In January 2001, their feature film *Hard Love and How to Fuck in High Heels* was awarded the best all-girl feature at the AVN (Adult Video News) awards in Las Vegas, otherwise known as the Porn Oscars. This was a surprising victory for a woman-produced film intended for a female audience, since this category is often reserved for traditional "girl-on-girl" movies featuring blond plastic babes fondling each other for a male intended audience.

Most recently though, Pink and White productions, a one woman operation run by Shine Louise Houston, has dominated the dyke porn scene since it released *Crash Pad* in 2005. Robbins says it is pretty much the only dyke porn movie most rental stores will have. "It's become synonymous with dyke porn," she says.

Some are simply unhappy with this narrow selection of erotic female oriented films. When contrasted against the extensive proliferation of male-oriented hetero and homosexual porn available, this handful of movies certainly isn't something to get overly excited about.

Hey ladies, I mean, guys...

One challenge that has perhaps stunted the growth of the dyke porn industry is its rejection by both the mainstream world of adult films and that of radical feminists such as Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who promoted anti-porn legislation in the 90s. As a result, pornography has been categorised by some as a form of entertainment that harms vulnerable women through coerced subordination, and sexual abuse.

But Robbins argues her films are a form of empowerment rather than one of oppression.

"That's my goal, to show that women do have sex and women love to have sex and it's empowering to be public about it within our community," she said.

In fact, Robbins's concept was so appealing to some that she received ten replies within a day of posting a request for models on superdyke.com, an online lesbian community.

Shay Kingston was the first to reply to Robbins's request and so far she has already shot a couple scenes. Tall, outgoing and feminine, Kingston, who was once a professional model and dominatrix, wanted to participate in the project," because I'm an exhibitionist and I just wanted to try something new."

She filmed her last scene with her transgendered boyfriend Oliver, a cute blond and blue-eyed boy with a *Dennis the Menace*-type smile last Saturday. The two met on superdyke a couple of months ago and have clearly been infatuated with each other ever since. Although they agree that shooting scenes in complete silence with four other people in the room focusing cameras and booms on you can be a bit awkward at first, they both emphatically agree that coercion nor abuse plays a role in such a project. "Everybody is going out of their way to make sure everyone is comfortable. The actresses come up with their own scenes, and Brenda is just the director of photography really," Kingston says. She smiles and looks at Oliver and they laugh, "besides, no one is signing up for the money, because it's really not that fabulous."

Both of them seem excited about contributing to the creation of something new, especially in a genre that lacks lustre. "What I don't like about dyke porn is that it still feels like it's been directed by a man. You see the same penetration close ups you would see in a mainstream girl on girl."

Oliver chimes in, "and when you have feminist politics involved, it tames it down a little because you can't have anything that qualifies as being submissive to a man."

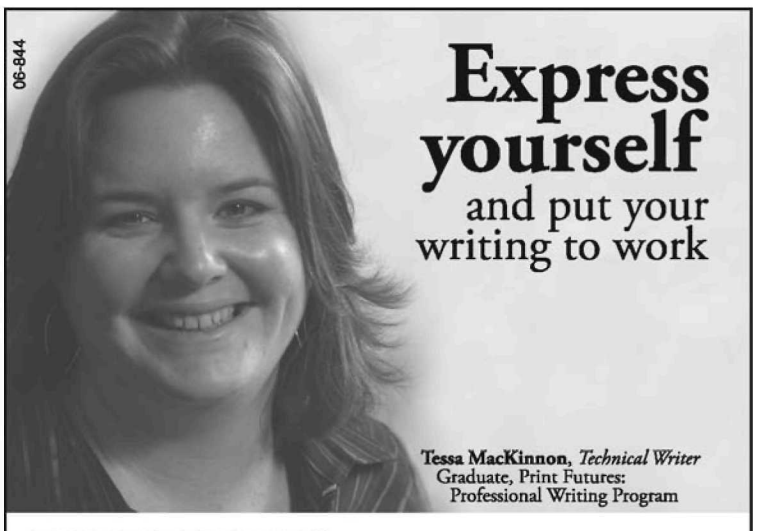
Robbins's project differs from the dyke films of the 80s and 90s because it isn't explicitly political and it is more inclusive of the whole queer community, including those who, like Oliver, identify as a man rather than a woman.

And while Robbins emphasises that she encourages anyone to model for her films, Kingston and Oliver hesitatingly admit. "The problem with the stuff from the 80s and the 90s is that they're really into real people with real bodies and well...some of them just aren't that attractive. You can't pick up on their fantastic personality so all you have is the visual."

And...Action!

Breaking from the traditional mold created in San Francisco, "the Mecca of dyke porn," Robbins hopes to fulfill her goal of providing an entertaining, sexy alternative for lesbians looking for erotic films. She is currently toiling away in the hopes of meeting the April 16 deadline for the Queer Film Festival.

"I'm hoping they'll want to show it, but there are no guarantees so I'm going to do the best I can and make something to be proud of." Although she is only in the early stages of production, she is looking forward to launching her full website in August of this year and is crossing her fingers, hoping for a full film release at the Festival in October. "Either way, I'm going to be launching it at that time and I'll have a big party anyways." ♀



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WOMEN'S WORDS

"Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission."
—Eleanor Roosevelt

"The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it."
—Roseanne Barr

"I'm tough, I'm ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a bitch, okay."
—Madonna

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

"Women are not inherently passive or peaceful. We're not inherently anything but human."
—Robin Morgan

"There is more difference within the sexes than between them."
—Ivy Compton-Burnett

"In passing, also, I would like to say that the first time Adam had a chance he laid the blame on a woman."
—Nancy Astor

"Women need not always keep their mouths shut and their wombs open."
—Emma Goldman

Packaged Women

by Katherine Kerr

Most women are introduced to sex in confrontational and violating ways; many before they are ready. Women's and girls's bodies are sexualised, objectified, and commoditised.

I took this photograph in a department store. I was going there to pick up paper for an upcoming project when I found these naked women hanging in bags. I felt haunted and repressed. The packaged women mocked me with their long legs, made-up faces, male gazes, and ready-to-go attitudes. They are plastic, the simulacra that we all try to be... a copy of an original that never existed.

If Barbie were a woman she would be 7' tall with feet so small and breasts so large that she would fall forward under the weight of her own composition. But it's not her fault she's plastic.

I don't want to be plastic...or do I? They represent her as the excuse for sexual violence against women. All around us, the media, ads, and even in our socialised minds, the normative expectation perpetuates. She's always sexy, and that makes men hot. But if it's this hyper-sexualised image we seek to attain, and they hold the power, then how will he know not to rape her?

It's all learned; soldiers for sex. We sell, you buy. I always want to be beautiful, and that's ok, but my beauty and sexual liberation has to be according to my standards, not yours. You created my hegemony and put silicone in my breasts. You told him to think with his penis and the media will do the rest.

They hang in bags, ready for purchase, our department store red light district. They say it's her fault, 'she was asking for it.'

But if most rapes are planned then whose fault is it? @

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Womyn: why the Y?

by Jesse Ferreras

Writing about this subject isn't easy for me. Unaccustomed to feminist literature that I would later be taught to analyse and pick apart in third and fourth year theory courses, as a second-year student at UBC, I first looked upon the spelling of "womyn" when walking past the AMS Social Justice Centre. I felt a twinge of discontent against what I thought was a pretentious move by only a few individuals in the AMS to appropriate a well-ingrained word in the English language and make it their own. Three years onward, after gorging on feminist theory and history in film and classical studies courses, I'm still divided as to what I think about it.

The Wikipedia entry about "womyn," citing the Oxford English Dictionary, sets one of its earliest uses in 1975, in reference to a "womyn's festival" described in a lesbian publication. In the *Ubyssey* women's issue from 2005, writer Milena DeVito explains the term as a way to distance its significance from a patriarchal social construct. In reference to the AMS Womyn's Centre she writes, "we believe that people have the right to choose their own gender expression."

One can deduce from these definitions that the motivation to spell "womyn" with a "y" in place of an "a" or an "e" is similar to that behind Laura Mulvey's landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Ms Mulvey speaks of the construction of the feminine in cinema as a construct of the "male gaze," suggesting that this gaze functions to dilute the feminine in narrative cinema and turn the female figure into an object of pleasure, a tendency motivated by what the author calls a "castration complex."

It's constructs like this that "womyn" rebels against, but I'm still a little skeptical about using "womyn" if we are to assume that it's being used as a way to achieve gender equity—that's something I believe unconditionally. Using language to differentiate oneself I think is more isolationist than it is egalitarian. I'm not certain the attempt to bring an alternative spelling into common parlance will catch on. Additionally, I feel it promotes separation completely between male and female, rather than interaction and dialogue. Egalitarianism advocates suggests connection between the two parties, not alienation.

Nevertheless, that the word even exists is symptomatic of an ongoing uneasiness with the state of gender equity. It is terribly unfortunate to think that there are some who feel so subjugated that they would need to change their own language to show it. As an expression of frustration, I support the spelling of "womyn." I equally support it as a sociological method of re-appropriating the word from what has been seen as a patriarchal construct. But I worry that its use will serve to alienate, more than equalise the genders—and isn't equalisation something that feminist movements have been attempting to achieve in the first place? ♀

Stick it to the system, not just the man

by Matthew Jewkes

Let's say that men are as oppressive as the most hardcore feminist would claim. The paradox of this is, the more I, as a man, am oppressive, the more oppressed and distorted I become as a person.

Take an oft-used example: Perhaps I am unable to relate to women as anything other than as sex objects. Certainly this is going to have a horrible impact on the women I encounter. However, it is also going to have a significant impact on me. Unable to relate to women as full, whole, human beings, I am going to become a significantly warped individual.

It is from a perspective like this that I would argue that the "patriarchal system," or the patterns of power that men both possess and use over women and the culture in general, is as distorting and abusive to men as it is of women. Not that I am apologising for abusers. If one person is abusing another, then the first priority is to take care of the victim—to get them out of the situation and into a safe and supportive environment. But I think that for feminism to continue to be effective today, it is going to have to take into consideration the fact that the "patriarchal system" which feminists are so fond of attacking is as distorting and abusive to men as it is to women.

Certainly, over the past century or so, feminism has created many opportunities for women within our culture. Gone are the days when a woman in Canada was not supposed to go to university, or when a woman doctor or lawyer was considered scandalous. But it should not be forgotten that there is still so much violence, oppression, and injustice against women. Violence by intimate partners in the US is the country's leading cause of injury for middle-aged women.

It seems like the feminist "movement" is fading. Recent closures to women's centers around Canada, and the questioning of whether there even needs to be a committee for the status of women are two large-level indications of this. The support from men, too, is diminishing. In the 60s and 70s the response from many young men was basically pro-feminist. More recently, however, there seems to be a growing backlash among men against feminism for being "anti-men."

It is therefore quite clear that feminism needs to take a different tack. Up until now, its focus seems to have been to fight for women's rights within the "patriarchal socio-cultural system." By asserting themselves *against* men, women have, to an extent, been able to assert their rights. Now women can fly fighter planes, argue in courts of law, and manage billion-dollar companies.

But one question feminism originally posed, and one that remains quite valid, is "should we have fighter planes, courts of law, and multi-billion-dollar companies?" In asserting themselves against men in the men's system, women have found some power within that system. But perhaps it is time for feminism, and women in general, to both oppose these things and try building an alternative.

The funny thing is, if women were to take this approach, chances are that they would find many willing men on their side. Because there are likely as many men as women who, deep down, want out of the "patriarchal system" which is so destructive to us all. ♀

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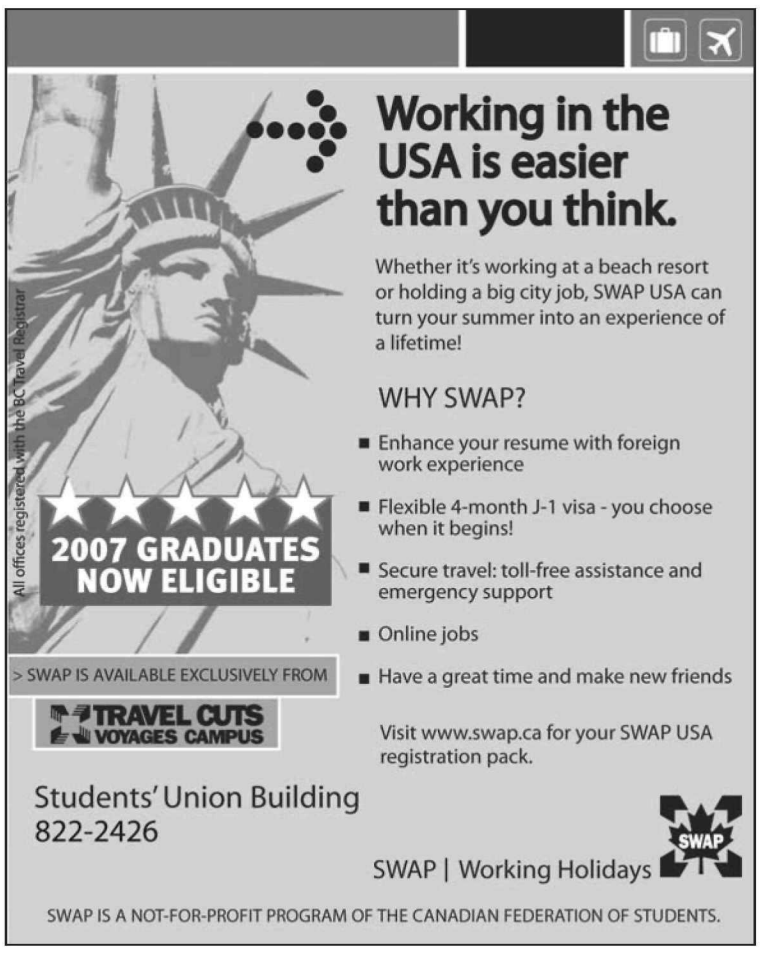

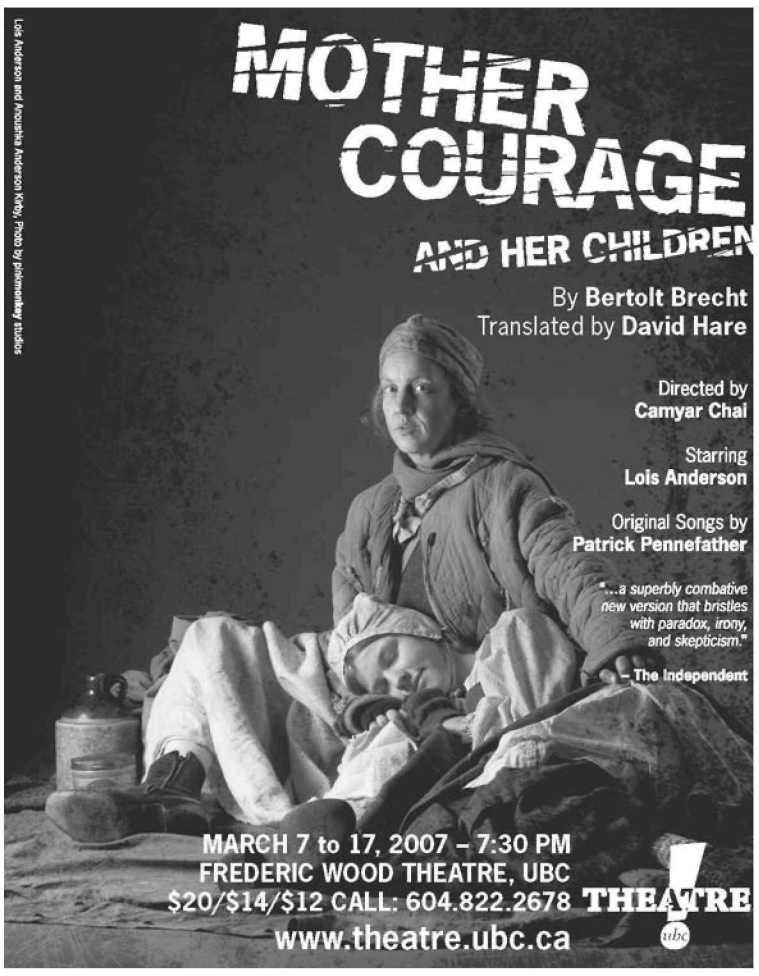

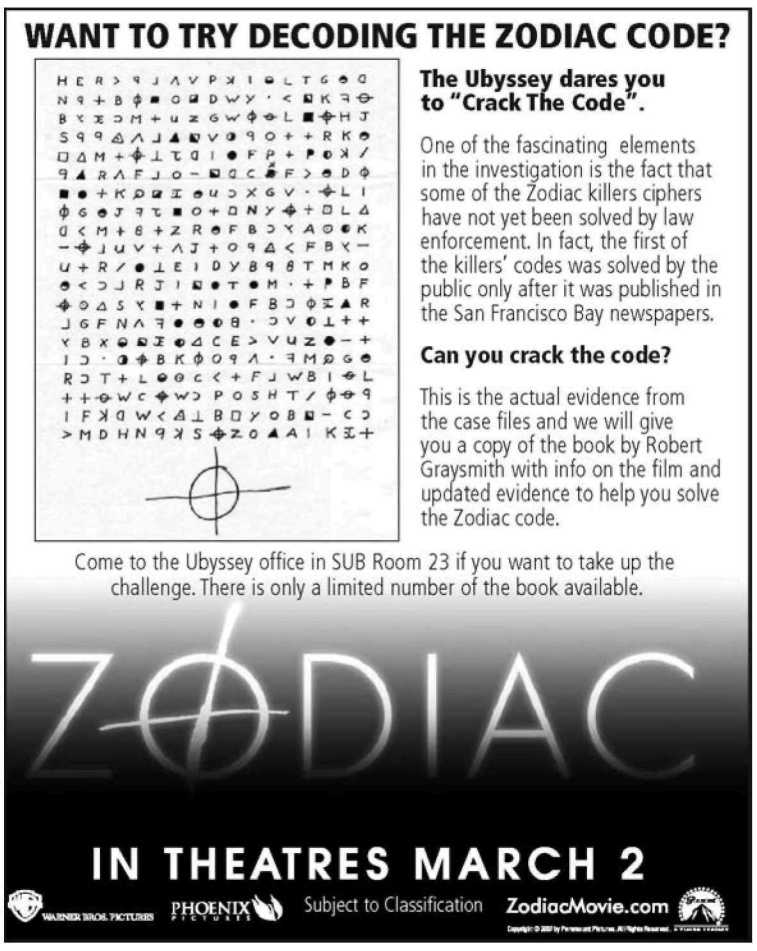

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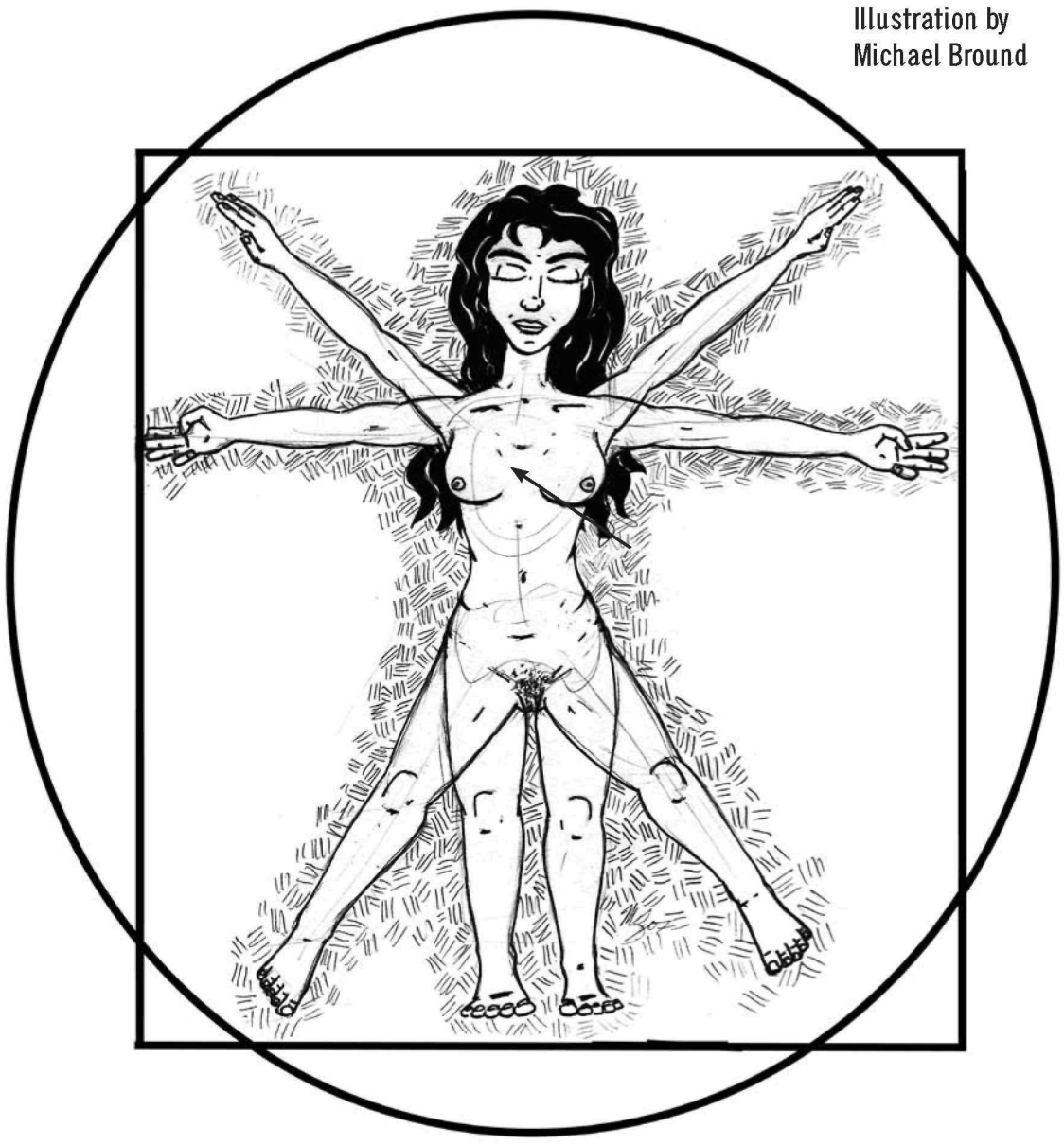
Listen to your elders

Lessons women wished they'd been told

Illustration by Michael Bround



"Men are pricks...Get your mammogram done. Many people don't."
—Susan, 52, sales representative

"When it comes to men, you can't change him."
—Rhona, 42, sales representative

"Finishing your degree, that's important...That's what I regret the most."
—Stephanie Ross, 64, UBC employee

"One of the concepts that I wish I would have gotten about boys is: just because he likes you, do you like him?...I think it speaks to women in general, what do you really want?"
—Lisa, 36, vendor

"First of all know your generic culture. I find that young women in Canada lack generic culture...It's a way of explaining that they should know more history, travel more, being in contact with different cultures, be exposed to women around the world and get more exposure and that I think helps to understand better what women need and help women better to choose their career because some younger women don't know what to do so they chooses something like literature that they don't go anywhere and I won't say it's not good but there is so much need of women in other professions."
—Syliva Bascou-Vallarino, 50, Language professor

"Think about what your values are and realise that... sometimes there is a big tradeoff [for them]."
—Sarah Parry, 45, sessional instructor

"Learn how to be happy with yourself. If there is anything investment you can make at your age find a passion, something that fills you up almost as much as that call from that guy, or that girl, whatever you're into, because when you're all caught up in that you have nothing left to put into your passion but if your passion is first you'll carve a space for it."
—Carol Naylor, 42, UBC employee

"Don't be afraid, take some risks, and step out of your comfort zone."
—Paula Korby, 42, High school teacher

"Nellie McClung, a pioneer of women's right to vote, advised women in the early 1900s—'never apologise, never explain.' A hundred years later there is still truth in her message. Women should never apologise for who they are and what they believe in. For women entering politics this is especially true. For everyone, standing up for what you believe in, needs no apology or explanation."
—Catherine Evans, Candidate for Nomination, Liberal Party of Canada, Vancouver Quadra

"It would be the same advice I would give to anyone...be compassionate and just, live your life for others."
—Dr Jennifer Wade, 60+, Member of the Liu Institute

"Think in terms of people. We don't just push for women. We have so many possibilities. What you can do in your work, in your life, it's important to give something."
—Dr Merva Cottle, 78, Physiologist

—coordinated by Champagne Choquer and Colleen Tang

Where the sun don't shine: Anal insight

OKER CHEN PHOTO

by Kathryn Stewart

If you've been in a relationship for more than two years, you've probably had anal sex. This has been a long running theory, supported by unsubstantiated evidence—the majority of which has been uncovered from friends while they were less than sober.

The theory, however, is not completely off base. A recent Center for Disease Control National Survey of Family Growth found that 38.2 per cent of men between 20 and 39 and 32.6 per cent of women aged 20-44 have engaged in heterosexual anal sex. Compared with the stats of the same survey done in 1992, showing 25.6 per cent of men and 20.4 percent of women engaging in anal intercourse, it becomes clear that something is going on in the bedrooms (or elsewhere) of hetero couples, more distinctly, married or co-habitating hetero couples—the highest engagers in anal sex were shown as those that live together and are currently in a long term relationship. Durex, which also conducted a survey in 2005 and found similar results, with 35 per cent of people in similar age brackets as engaging in anal sex.

While the basis of the original theory was based on the experiences of young women, it did not provide a reason as to why anyone would want to have anal sex. Most women, it seems, had anal sex because their boyfriends wanted to and being the open-minded young women that they are, they allowed them. A random survey of 20-something men (which was also conducted by myself and was by no means official) suggested two reasons for this growing desire of straight men to "plunder the booty" of their mates. They want to go where no man has gone before. If interpreted beyond these surface reasons and on a psychologically deeper level, anal sex can be an act of physical domination and control.

Sue Johanson, of the *Sunday Night Sex Show*, and a popular lecturer to the junior residences of UBC, theorised that anal sex is gaining in popularity because of its facility to become an act of power, control or domination. This is especially because the partner on the receiving end is much more vulnerable to pain and injury than the partner on the giving end. Of course this interpretation is not all encompassing. Anal sex can also be put into the same league as sex in a public place or a threesome, as a taboo sexual act, people enjoy being naughty and going against cultural sexual norms. Anal sex is also pursued as an act of general sexual curiosity.

While Johanson doubts claims of loosened rectums and the growth of "piles" (hemmoroids) due to anal sex, there is a menagerie of stuff that could go wrong, enough to entice any pirate away from their potential booty. Aside from the heightened risk of STIs when engaging in unprotected anal sex, serious physical injury is also a relevant concern. The anus does not produce any form of lubrication. The rectum and anus were designed for waste to come out, not for foreign objects to go in. Thus, due care and attention to matters of force and lubrication are pertinent or rectal tearing will occur. This is bad. The most gruesome of potential physical ailments associated with rectal tearing is the fistula. A fistula occurs when a fissure develops within the anus and becomes infected. This infection may extend through the bowel wall and form a channel from the rectum into the vagina. What eventually occurs is that all excremental needs are met through a single orifice.

If so many things can go awry with anal sex, then what do people who engage in anal sex on a frequent basis do? A UBC student who requested the pseudonym Gay Cowboy was a good source from which to start. As both an initiator and receiver of anal intercourse he shared common sense information on the subject. He surprisingly commented that, given a sexual alternative, he would probably do something other than anal sex. While he did suggest that he is very particular about the abilities of his partners, anal sex was not the be all and end all of his personal sexual encounters. However, if engaging in anal intercourse, he proscribes a towel and an anal douche. The anal douche (which looks like turkey baster) functions like a mini enema. In his words, "it will get everything up there... out." A round with the anal douche prior to attempting anal sex will give assurance that nothing "up there" will come out on your sheets, floor or sofa. Also, after engaging in anal sex the rectal muscles will loosen and it does become momentarily difficult to maintain control. A towel is recommended just in case. Not a white one though.

On the other side of the fence, what about heterosexual anal sex in which the female is penetrating the male? Just as anal sex in itself has been enjoying recent popularity, businesses such as the Love Nest has indicated an increase in the female usage of strap-ons to penetrate their male partner. The thinking, of course, is what is good enough for men is good enough for women. It is easy enough to imagine a deal being made between partners that if the man will allow himself to be penetrated he can then penetrate his female partner. Equal rights. Beyond coupled activities it may seem that hetero men are not only becoming more interested in the backside of their significant others, but also in their own. The Aneros, a prostate simulation device that promises to stimulate the prostate or "P-spot" has been doctor and FDA approved, accorded with the newly linked benefits of prostate stimulation and the prevention of prostate cancer. Offering a non-ejaculatory orgasm, the device has branched out from the original model and now offers multiple sizes and shapes.

What follows is that it seems more socially acceptable for men to both talk about anal sex and engage in anal sex with their partners. While many hetero men may as of yet become squeamish about having anything put into their bum, many have no qualms about discussing and attempting to penetrate their significant other's rear. While female initiated anal sex does occur it seems, from this perspective, as more the exception than the rule. Although there are women out there that undeniably enjoy anal sex, they are somewhat difficult to locate, and even more difficult to get a sober commentary from. Women are in a vulnerable position with their partners during anal intercourse. It is well within her range for a woman to feel dominated. While the modern woman demands respect and equal footing within her relationships, anal sex can turn it all on its head. This act has the potential to remove women from their equal status and into a position of vulnerability and submissiveness.

Johanson identifies seven "rules" if engaging in anal sex. In sum, gentleness, good lubrication, protection, respect for the word "no," and respect for the words "never again" are a must.

While sexual experimentation can occur within a wide array of situations, pursuing anal sex requires a great deal of trust, be it with someone you've known for ten minutes or someone you've been with for ten years. Anal sex creates a difficult conundrum for women, especially when doing "it" for someone else. With questions of sexual liberation, domination, submission and experimentation swirling around this practice, consider the old Planned Parenthood motto: Know what you are doing, think ahead, plan ahead, and never let sex just happen. ♀

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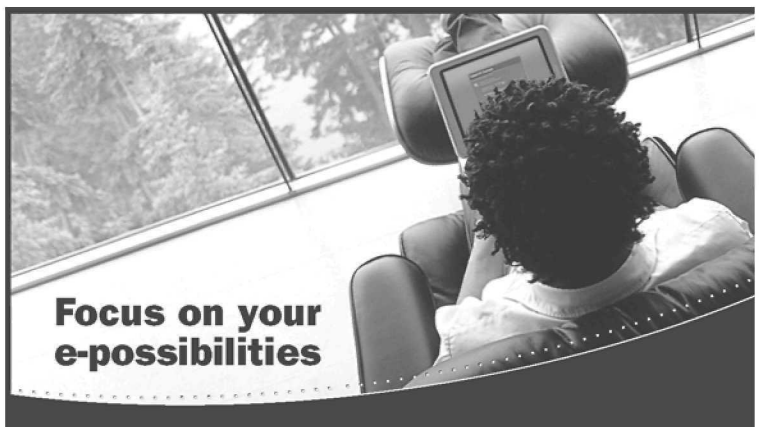

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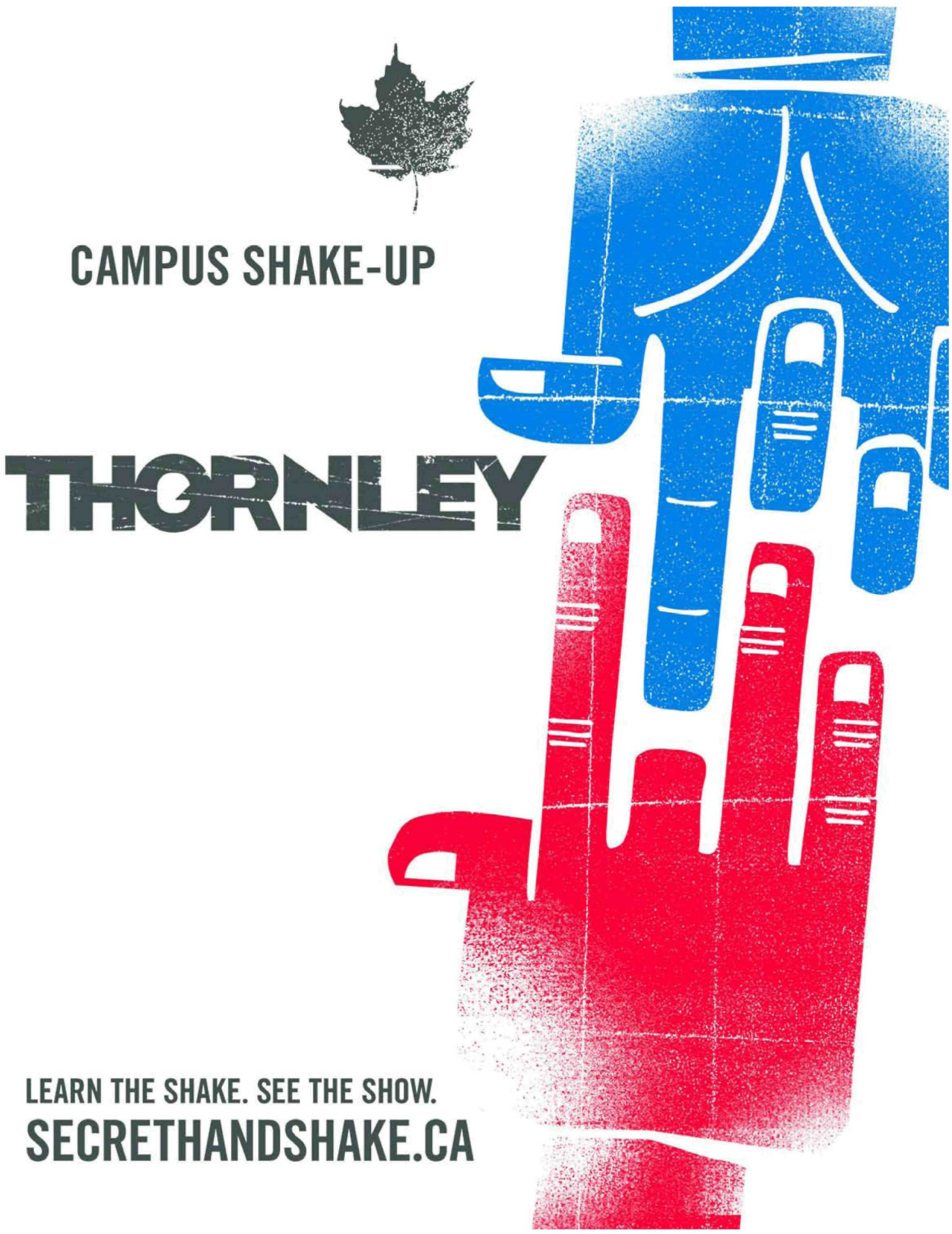
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