



**REVISITING THE
GENDER AGENDA**

A VOICES REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2016

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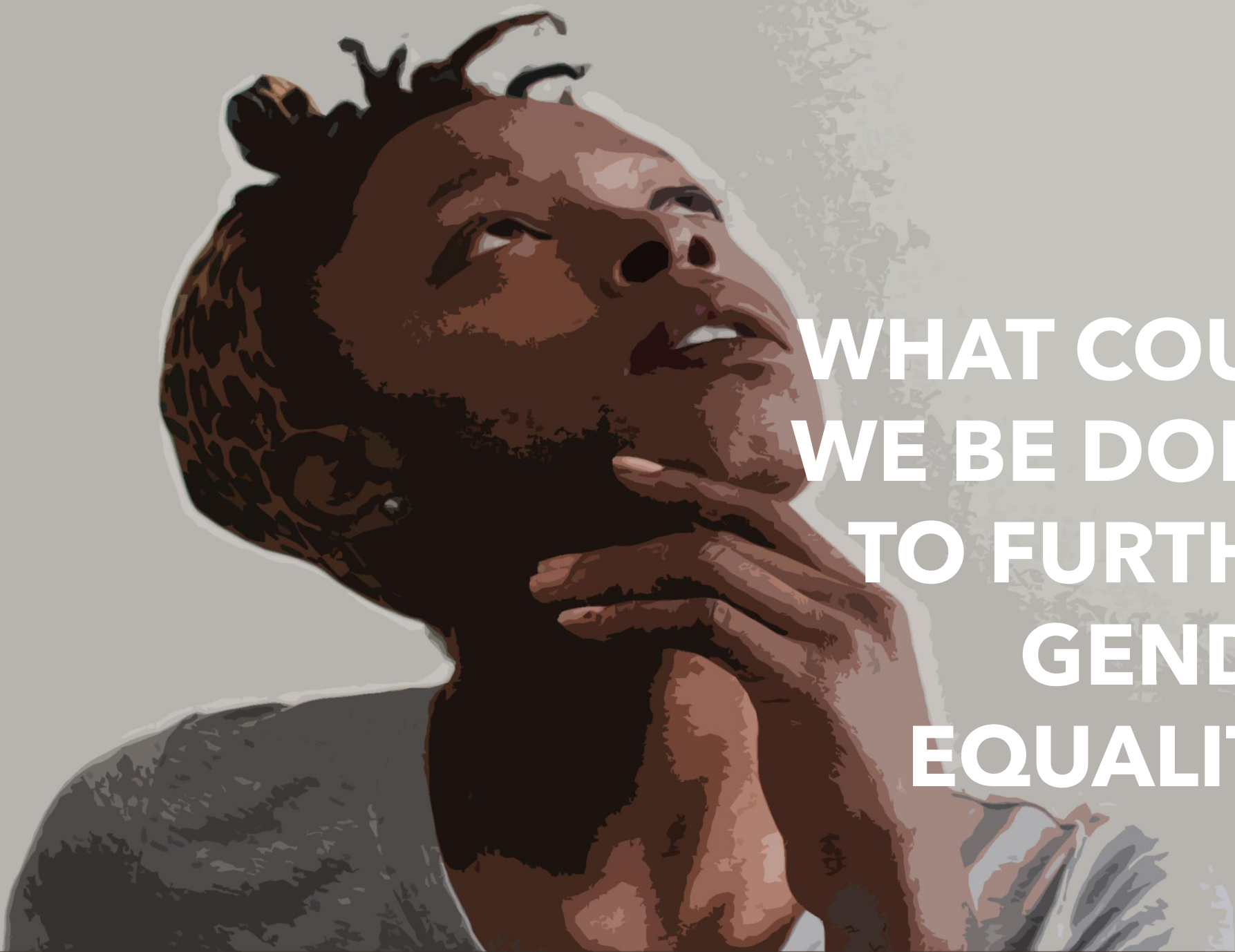
There's a growing realization that gender equality has slipped down the agenda. Many women still face a life where their choices, ambitions, and opportunities are constrained by expectations of gender roles.

Why? What do we need to do to further gender equality? Are there things that we have been doing that haven't made a difference? At a local level, what can we do differently (or more of) to make progress in this area?


In August 2016 we asked the above questions to women drawn from the worlds of business, social enterprise, and political and community activism. The session was held at Birmingham's newly opened Women's Hub and hosted by the Amirah Foundation.

This report is not a summary of the discussion. It's not even a snapshot. Instead, we've relayed a handful of comments participants made. Our hope is that by doing so, we'll spark further debate and conversation. Maybe not in the plush setting of the Women's Hub but, instead, where it really matters: in living rooms, in workplaces, on the bus, and in the street.

In the pages that follow there will be something you disagree with, something you agree with. Whatever it is, let us know. Let's have that debate. If a new approach is needed on this agenda, let's find it together.



**WHAT COULD
WE BE DOING
TO FURTHER
GENDER
EQUALITY?**

A woman with long dark hair, wearing white sunglasses and a red top, is seated at a wooden table. She is looking out a window towards a bright, hazy outdoor scene. On the table in front of her is a laptop and a tablet. She is holding the tablet with her right hand, which has a colorful beaded bracelet and a watch. A red mesh chair is visible behind her. The overall lighting is warm and bright, suggesting a sunny day.

GENDER EQUALITY IS SEEN AS SOMETHING THAT WOMEN DO. BOTH WOMEN AND MEN NEED TO BE EQUAL STAKEHOLDERS IF WE ARE TO SEE PROGRESS. WOMEN'S OWNERSHIP OF THIS AGENDA HAS ENABLED MEN TO ABDICATE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY. WE HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERPETUATING THE BELIEF THAT IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY!

'POWER', AND BELIEFS ABOUT WHO HAS IT AND WHAT YOU MIGHT NEED TO DO TO GAIN MORE OF IT, TENDS TO BE THE REASON BEHIND ACTIONS TO INCLUDE OR EXCLUDE MEN. 'WOMANISM' MAKES EXPLICIT THE VIEW THAT BLACK WOMEN AND BLACK MEN ARE TIED TOGETHER BY OUR SHARED EXPERIENCE OF RACISM. WE NEED MORE OF THIS KIND OF THINKING.

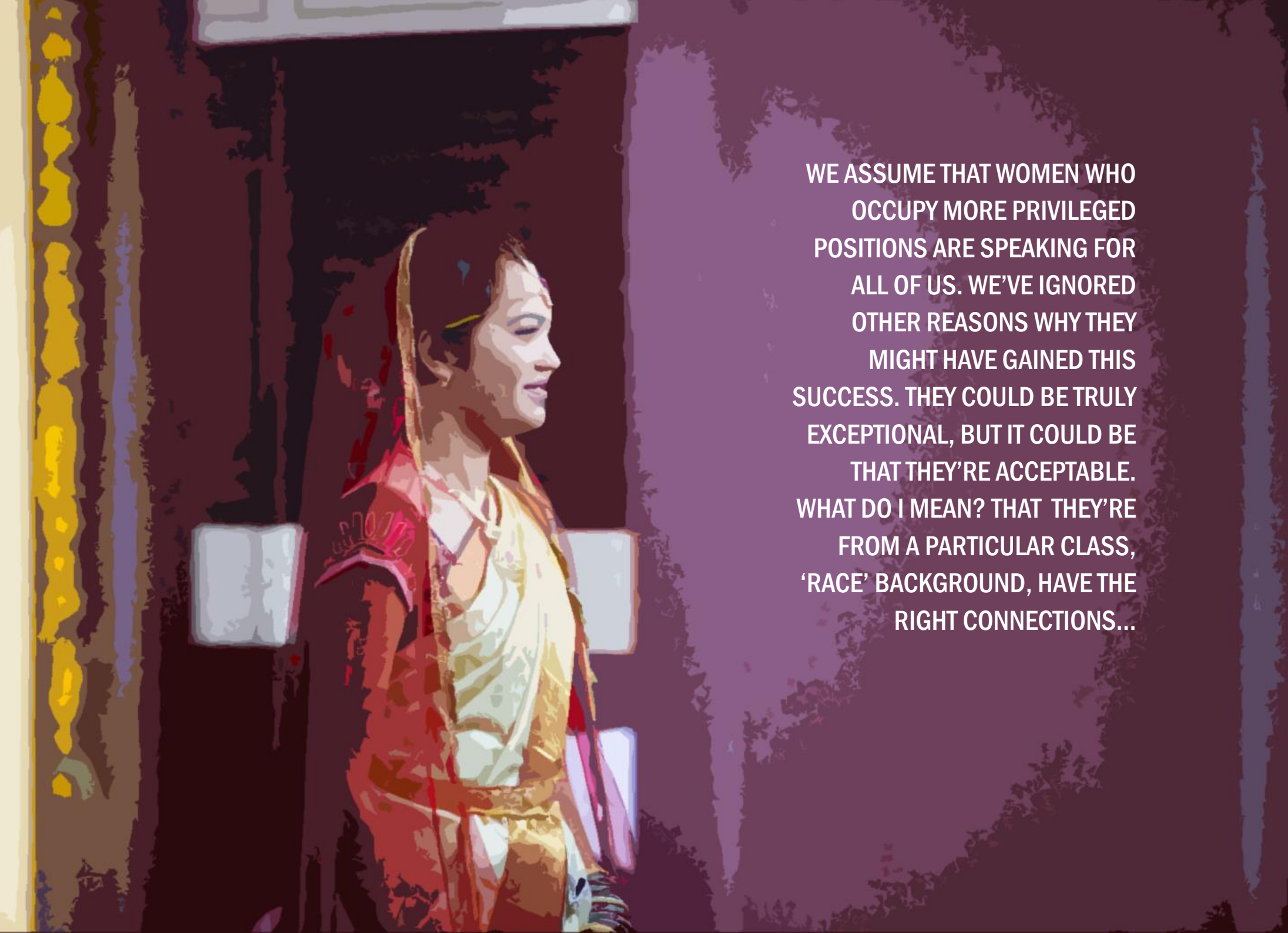




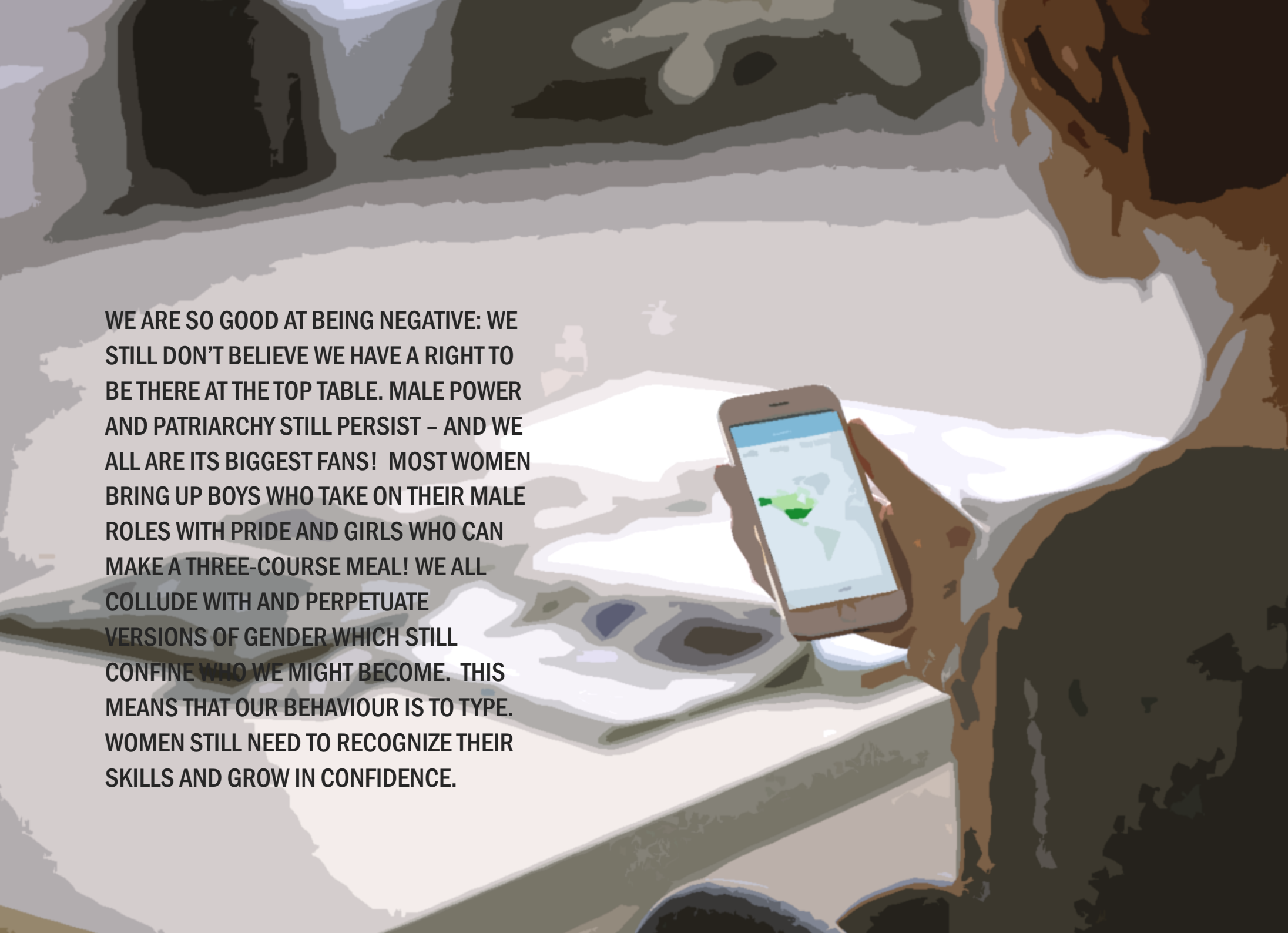
**WHAT HAS
STALLED
PROGRESS ON
THIS AGENDA?**

NOT ALL WOMEN ARE WONDERFUL MOTHERS. SORRY, BUT THIS IS TRUE. WE NEED TO HAVE A CHALLENGING DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW WOMEN THEMSELVES HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE STEREOTYPES THAT WE ARE TRYING TO DISMANTLE. WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT HOW LEADERSHIP WOULD BE MORE COMPASSIONATE IF MORE WOMEN WERE INVOLVED, OR THAT BUSINESS WOULD BE FAIRER, LESS AGGRESSIVE. THE ONLY THING THAT WE CAN REALLY SAY ABOUT HAVING MORE WOMEN INVOLVED IN ANYTHING IS THAT 'IT' WILL BE MORE DIVERSE. BY LABELLING THE WOMEN AS HAVING PARTICULAR ATTRIBUTES, WE ARE BUYING INTO THE SAME SETS OF STEREOTYPES WHICH OFTEN MEAN THAT WOMEN ARE NOT SEEN AS BEING 'FIT' FOR THOSE LESS TRADITIONAL ROLES. CAN SHE REALLY TAKE THE PRESSURE? CAN SHE MAKE THOSE TOUGH DECISIONS?



A woman in a red and gold sari stands in a doorway, looking to the right. The background is a dark, textured wall with a yellow decorative border on the left. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

WE ASSUME THAT WOMEN WHO
OCCUPY MORE PRIVILEGED
POSITIONS ARE SPEAKING FOR
ALL OF US. WE'VE IGNORED
OTHER REASONS WHY THEY
MIGHT HAVE GAINED THIS
SUCCESS. THEY COULD BE TRULY
EXCEPTIONAL, BUT IT COULD BE
THAT THEY'RE ACCEPTABLE.
WHAT DO I MEAN? THAT THEY'RE
FROM A PARTICULAR CLASS,
'RACE' BACKGROUND, HAVE THE
RIGHT CONNECTIONS...

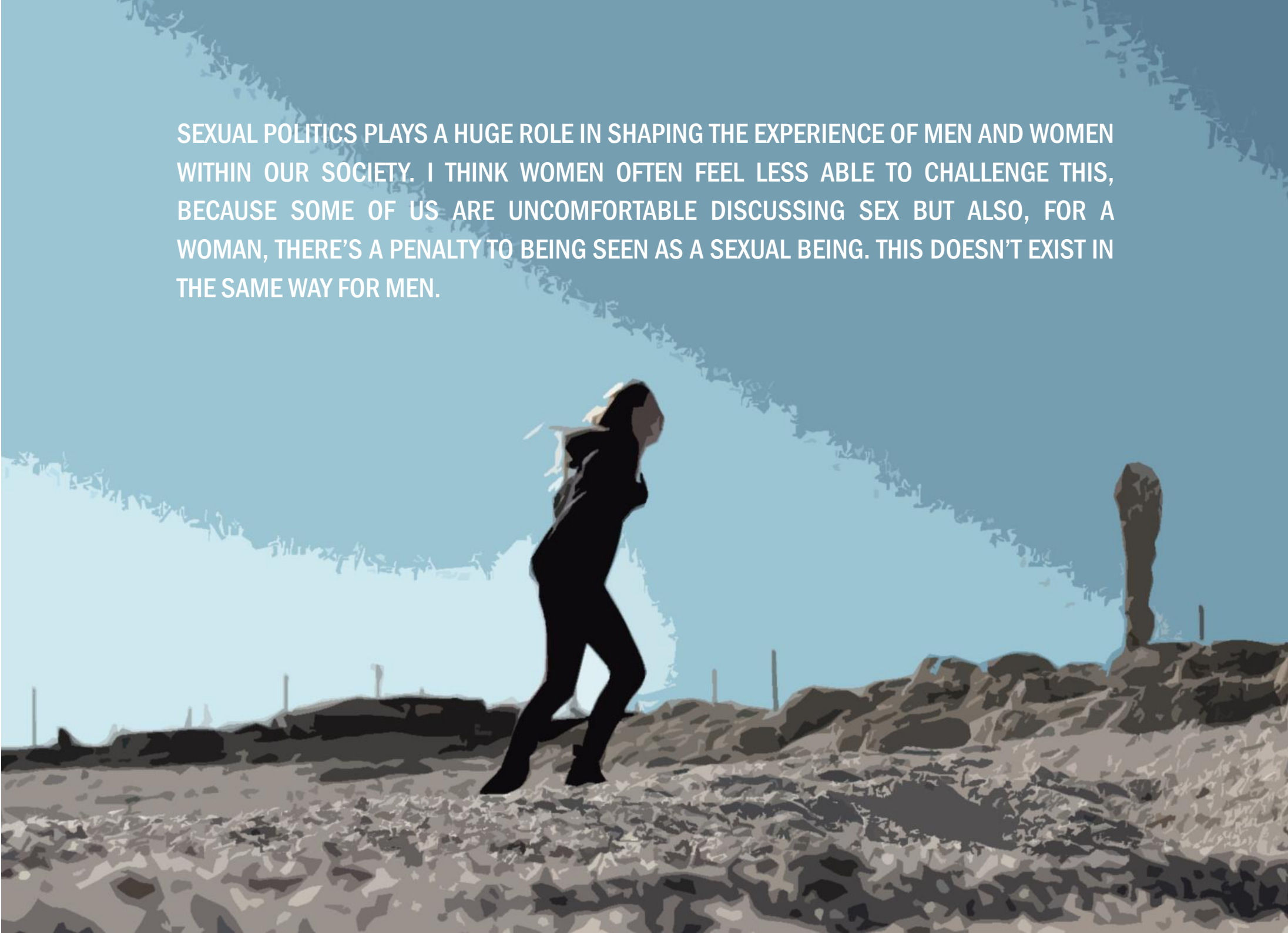


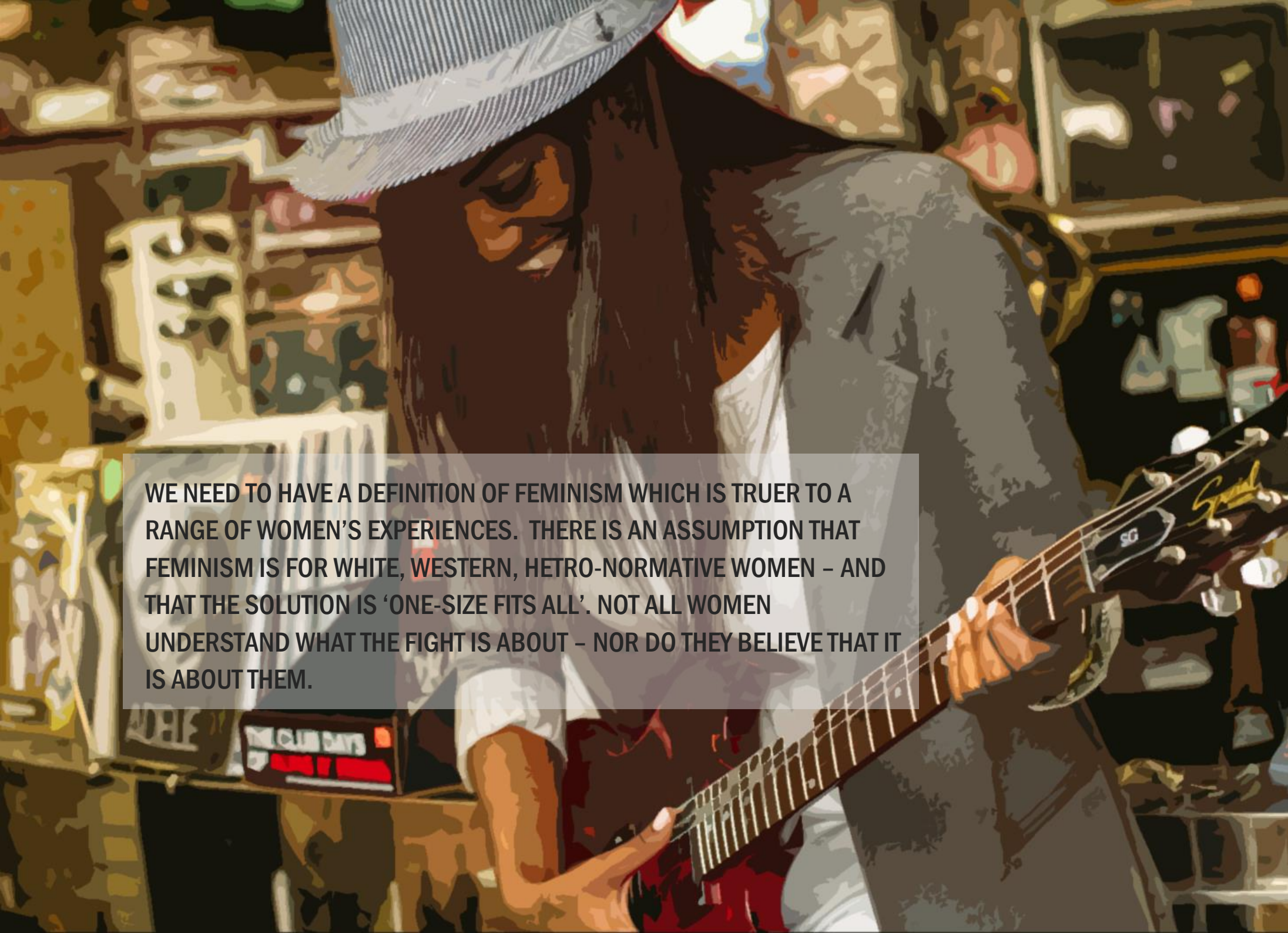
WE ARE SO GOOD AT BEING NEGATIVE: WE STILL DON'T BELIEVE WE HAVE A RIGHT TO BE THERE AT THE TOP TABLE. MALE POWER AND PATRIARCHY STILL PERSIST – AND WE ALL ARE ITS BIGGEST FANS! MOST WOMEN BRING UP BOYS WHO TAKE ON THEIR MALE ROLES WITH PRIDE AND GIRLS WHO CAN MAKE A THREE-COURSE MEAL! WE ALL COLLUDE WITH AND PERPETUATE VERSIONS OF GENDER WHICH STILL CONFINE WHO WE MIGHT BECOME. THIS MEANS THAT OUR BEHAVIOUR IS TO TYPE. WOMEN STILL NEED TO RECOGNIZE THEIR SKILLS AND GROW IN CONFIDENCE.

**SO, WHAT DO
WE NEED TO
FOCUS ON?**

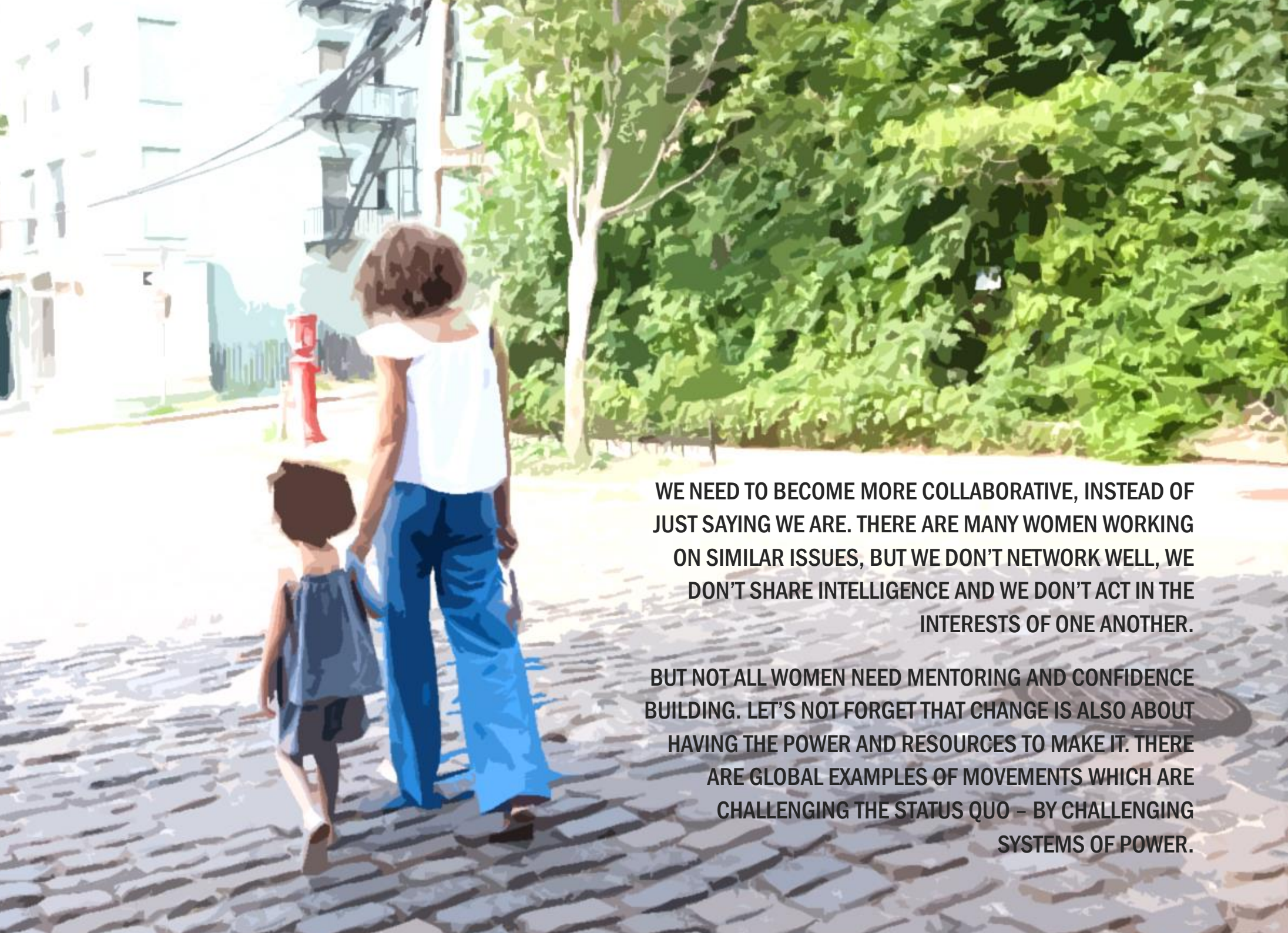


SEXUAL POLITICS PLAYS A HUGE ROLE IN SHAPING THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN WITHIN OUR SOCIETY. I THINK WOMEN OFTEN FEEL LESS ABLE TO CHALLENGE THIS, BECAUSE SOME OF US ARE UNCOMFORTABLE DISCUSSING SEX BUT ALSO, FOR A WOMAN, THERE'S A PENALTY TO BEING SEEN AS A SEXUAL BEING. THIS DOESN'T EXIST IN THE SAME WAY FOR MEN.





WE NEED TO HAVE A DEFINITION OF FEMINISM WHICH IS TRUER TO A RANGE OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES. THERE IS AN ASSUMPTION THAT FEMINISM IS FOR WHITE, WESTERN, HETRO-NORMATIVE WOMEN - AND THAT THE SOLUTION IS 'ONE-SIZE FITS ALL'. NOT ALL WOMEN UNDERSTAND WHAT THE FIGHT IS ABOUT - NOR DO THEY BELIEVE THAT IT IS ABOUT THEM.



WE NEED TO BECOME MORE COLLABORATIVE, INSTEAD OF JUST SAYING WE ARE. THERE ARE MANY WOMEN WORKING ON SIMILAR ISSUES, BUT WE DON'T NETWORK WELL, WE DON'T SHARE INTELLIGENCE AND WE DON'T ACT IN THE INTERESTS OF ONE ANOTHER.

BUT NOT ALL WOMEN NEED MENTORING AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING. LET'S NOT FORGET THAT CHANGE IS ALSO ABOUT HAVING THE POWER AND RESOURCES TO MAKE IT. THERE ARE GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF MOVEMENTS WHICH ARE CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO - BY CHALLENGING SYSTEMS OF POWER.



THANKS TO ALL OUR PARTICIPANTS

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 - EMMA BROWN, WAITS
- SHAHIDA CHOUDHRY, WOMEN'S NETWORKING HUB
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 - AYSHA AND KIRAN IQBAL, ODARA
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 - YVONNE WILLIAMS – SENIOR NATIONAL DIRECTOR, MARY KAY
- JOY WARMINGTON – CEO, BRAP

brap is transforming the way we think and do equality. We support organisations, communities, and cities with meaningful approaches to learning, change, research, and engagement. We are a partner and friend to anyone who believes in the rights and potential of all human beings.



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