

Task for *The Natural Way of Things*

Extract: *Damned Whores and God's Police* by Anne Summers, pp 12-13

Despite our claims to champion equality, and for all the progress we have made, we still punish women who are outspoken or contrarian, who step outside the modernised notion of God's Police. So who are today's bad girls?

You might argue that at a time when young women today march in Slut Walks, asserting their right to dress as whores once might have, this category does not make much sense any more. In fact the opposite is true. It seems that the numbers and types of women who are today treated as the **Other**, as transgressors, as modern-day whores, are large and growing.

It is women online expressing provocative opinions – or, often, even any opinions. It is women occupying public spaces and asserting their rights to define their issues and themselves. It is women campaigning to keep abortion rights, or arguing for equal representation in every area of society. In fact, perhaps the easiest way to identify today's damned whores is by the opposition they generate and by the sexualised nature of much of that opposition. 'Slut-shaming' – attacking women on sexual grounds, real or invented – epitomises the new weapon against women. It is new but it is also depressingly familiar to attempt to degrade women on sexual grounds. It confirms how entrenched the stereotypes still are. And how they have adapted to new realities; one of the most reviled groups of women in Australia today is those who cover their faces and their bodies. That the woman in the hijab or the burkha is, ironically, seen by many as more transgressive than the woman who walks semi-naked down the street to 'reclaim the night' is one measure of the persistence, and the evolution, of the 'damned whore' stereotype. The alarming increase in violence against women, so much of it fatal, is another measure.