

WE LOVE YOU

Understanding the male suicide epidemic

She's an elegant woman, in her late 40s. A tumble of black hair dips beneath her shoulders, her august form cloaked in a gauzy appliqué black dress. She makes a fitting detail of the dim bar of Trinity City Hotel; its ubiquitous purple velvet, her style owning a hip, soft, sensuality most 20-somethings would covet.

An entrepreneur and event organiser, the woman worked as a model throughout Europe in the 1980s and 90s. The fact lingers in her demeanour. Yet we don't talk about what it's like to live and travel in multiple countries, or the trappings of surface luxury. When we're together, often we discuss our shared experiences of life with acutely depressed men, men in Ireland suffering from addictions and suicidal ideation.

"You've got natural confidence, Clara Rose," she says. "You belong in the public eye and it's obvious. But of course you're human, and you're vulnerable, and please don't fault yourself for that."

I'd been intimating how guilty I occasionally feel, being a feminist speaker and activist preaching strength, who immediately into my time in Ireland got wrapped up living with a man whose mental illnesses consumed my life such that I developed a depression of my own, affecting the career and expat identity I was working hard to build.

Her ex-husband of 14 years had also suffered. An Irish history enthusiast, her steadfast beliefs sometimes being fact and sometimes ideology, she said, "We can barely help it. The starvation produced by The Famine caused mental illness in our DNA".

Through no desire to insensitively nor incorrectly comment on the nascent scientific theory of epigenetics and the Great Hunger, which Oonagh Walsh presented to Science Week at Institute of Technology Sligo in 2013, I'll leave it to another writer.

What the comment did, though, is cause a rush of memories of my ex-partner's world to return. Of his

threats of suicide on the phone when I left to perform or cover an event as a journalist, which I learned were part of involuntary emotional manipulation patterns due to his personality disorder. Of the story of the one very real time he came close to suicide, years before we met, on New Year's Eve when he considered cycling his bike onto train tracks. Of how the attractive, hardworking, 30-something man, whom many would regard as having a lot going for him, could shout, 'I hate myself!' as the reason for his behaviour during our many rows.

Of the nebulous cloud of pain after a beloved friend in the poetry world recently took his life, hung by a belt from the doorknob of his childhood bedroom. A sinewy exemplar of genteel, intellectual masculinity, an artistic powerhouse: the world of people who'd had any proximity to him wandering through a daze of dumb-founded ache.

Of how two women whom to a passerby surely look posh, happy and put together in their lives, throwing shadows on purple velvet with a fancy coffee and Malbec, are in fact laughing so they don't cry, remembering the cycles of depression, addictions and suicide of several loved ones, and the only people they've spoken of are men.

Cisgender male suicide happens three times as much as cisgender female suicide, as a global average. Transgender suicide rates are higher than both, with trans men consistently higher than trans women, by 4 per cent.

Being a feminist today among much misunderstanding of what the term means (simply 'I believe women and men are equal'), I get into frequent conversations with angry men who denounce the ideology as demonising maleness, and ignoring hardships associated with masculinity. These discussions happen at a higher rate with men from working class or poor backgrounds, who see their economic second-class citizen-

ship and growing up with a lack of a sense of potential nor outside investment, as preventing the supposed life benefits feminism points to. Terms such as 'toxic masculinity' are misunderstood.

The fact men around the world at each class level in every culture and nation decide to no longer live, at a rate three times that of women, is a shattering testament to the horrific wrong done to men by governments, various people in control and the forces that are supposed to care for them, including the brain chemistry that can betray them, as it can us all. Even more a prevailing issue is the anguish experienced as a result and the often inability or unwillingness to meaningfully discuss the mental, emotional and spiritual pain.

The inability or unwillingness is not because men are 'toxic'. It's because the enforced ideal of masculine essence — the world over — includes fabricated definitions of 'weakness'. 'Weakness', in this illusion, should not belong to masculinity. Only to femininity. Therefore 'masculinity' can rule over 'femininity'. Gender restrictions and ingrained gendered treatment are one of the many power systems that run along a false binary: rich/poor, white/black, straight/queer, cis/trans. Men suffer direly under patriarchy, as well. Without unlearning, they will unconsciously lean toward 'toxic' practices of closing off their feelings of worthlessness, mounting troubles and mental illness. Think of the replicated toxicity as emotional cancer.

As a society, we currently enter, willingly and self-made, a state of rebirth. This shift can be brought into the home, into everyday paradigms in thinking of how we connect, and what is available to each of us from those circling our environments. Women adore men, cis and trans. You are our fathers, our brothers, our partners, our indispensable teamsters, our uncontrollable laughs, our bear arms at night, our inspiration, one-half of the human species' life-giving team.

We do not want you to bear the weight of 'providing' and feel unalterable shame when you cannot. We do not want you to sit, head buried, within the cauldron of abuses inflicted upon all of us, terrified of more physical or sexual violence from peers if you utter it. We feel the same inadequacies. We feel the same lack of life. And many, many of us were born literally to help you relieve it.

Please, beautiful man, find us when you are ready.

