



Smashing it

Hammer time

Spaces offering demolition as a form of therapy are on the rise... and women are first in line. *WH* looks at why

By Alex Davies

As the music blared, Lyndal Rogers swung the metal bar until it collided with the washing machine. Dripping in sweat, she soaked in the adrenaline rush before going back for more. After all, the 37-year-old radio announcer wasn't demolishing her own appliance. This one was part of a break room - and she was there to smash the contents up.

"It was amazing - I felt really uplifted afterwards," recalls Lyndal, who visited SmashLAB in Wollongong, NSW, with two girlfriends during a stressful time. "We thought it'd be a laugh to let off steam in a controlled environment." Controlled, it is. Head into one of the break rooms emerging worldwide - from Brisbane to Ottawa - and you'll be kitted out in full safety gear, given a baseball bat or similar, and faced with plates, vases, furniture and even electronics to destroy.

The appeal is undeniable, especially for women. In the second season of hit Netflix show *Sex Education*, one of the most empowering scenes saw the female characters bond and vent their frustrations via a sledgehammer and bats in a junk yard. Meanwhile, women make up 62 per cent of SmashLAB's visitors - a gender imbalance echoed by other venues. So, what's driving us to wreak havoc on inanimate objects, and is this activity actually any good for us?

Driving Miss Rage-y

That we're craving a fresh frustration outlet probably isn't a shock. Who *hasn't* felt that rise in their chest when they're talked over by a colleague, catcalled on a run or witness to any sort of injustice? Journalist Felicity Harley, author of *Balance & Other B.S.* (\$29.99, Allen & Unwin), says, "Women are facing unprecedented pressures as they juggle work, children, partners,

friends, ageing parents as well as other societal demands. Research and experts agree, there's constant pressure on women to be 'perfect' and effortlessly handle it all."

Harley cites an example of how this can sometimes manifest in her house: rage cleaning. "On one hand I'm envious my husband can sit there and watch the footy; on the other I am so frustrated he can't see the chaos," she says. "I storm down the hallway with the washing basket to put away the clothes, and I slam down the toilet seat and say, 'Oh sorry, was that a bit loud?'. I get cranky in a passive-aggressive way, whereas my husband would be more likely to verbalise his anger."

(Don't) Express Yourself Vibes

That word 'verbalise' is key here. A 2000 University of California study found that, compared to men, we're more comfortable holding in anger and can find the emotion shameful. "We're taught that women aren't meant to be angry," says clinical psychologist Amanda Gordon, director of Armchair Psychology. "When little girls have a tantrum, they're told that's not the way girls behave. Boys may be told not to have one, but it's not seen as antithetical to their gender." As for the workplace, Yale University research suggests women who show anger are - surprise, surprise - valued less highly than fiery blokes.

Nancy Sokarno, a psychologist for online service Lysn, says, "I see women try to bottle up and push aside their anger or frustration to avoid conflict, or because there are so many priorities ahead of these

feelings that they feel they have to always just keep it moving. I think women generally feel expressing their emotions may make them look weak or sensitive. They tend to find other outlets, such as drinking alcohol and withdrawing socially."

But give us a metal bar and permission to vent without judgement? It's no wonder that we're all joining the break-room bandwagon. "All expectations of how we're 'supposed' to behave are left at the door," confirms Lyndal.

A Wellbeing Breakthrough?

As for the health benefits of a crockery massacre, it comes down to what's driving you. "If you're smashing plates to have fun with friends, feel a sense of action and expenditure of energy, that's fine, but I'd hate for it to be instead of dealing with whatever is really upsetting you," says Gordon. "It's important to look at 'why am I angry?'" She suggests if you leave your frustrations behind in the room, great - but if they hang around, it's time to deal with the source.

Harley adds, "[Break rooms] are for a bit of fun, rather than an ongoing anger management tool. Your partner cheated? Smash the shit out of plates, then spend the rest of your money on professional help. Trust me, it'll be better for your wellbeing in the long term."

Talking to an expert or someone supportive, engaging socially, meditating, exercising and alone time can all be tools for managing anger and stress, says Sokarno. Gordon also suggests journaling as a way to spot patterns or triggers.

After her rumble with the washing machine, Lyndal left SmashLAB on a high, like she'd just done a workout. "I felt powerful," she says. And what's not to love about that? *wh*

Struggling with feelings of stress or anger? Contact a GP or organisation such as Beyond Blue (beyondblue.org.au) or Relationships Australia (relationships.org.au) for advice.

37

The percentage of break room visitors who fall into the 26-35 age bracket.

SOURCE: SMASHLAB, WOLLONGONG

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