

SCARLET WOMEN

1982-2019
WHERE ARE
WE TODAY?



FEMINISM
BACK BY
POPULAR
DEMAND



Many thanks to the members of North Tyneside Women's Voices who put the issue together, to all of the women who contributed articles and pieces, and to Sail Creative, for their fantastic design

The content within this publication was independently created by women in North Tyneside, as a contribution to the Women of Tyneside project. The views expressed within the publication are those of the women involved and do not reflect those of Women of Tyneside or Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums. Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums hereby disclaims any liability to any party for any loss or damage caused by error or omissions whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident or other cause..

EDITORIAL

CONTENTS

1 SOCIALIST FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE / 4-10

2 LOCAL FEMINIST ACTIVISM / 11-17

3 CHALLENGING STRUCTURES & ASSUMPTIONS / 18-22

4 ON BEING A YOUNG WOMEN TODAY / 23-28

5 LOOKING BACK / 29-33

6 THE ONGOING STRUGGLE AGAINST MALE VIOLENCE / 34-39

This issue of Scarlet Women has been produced as a North Tyneside contribution to Tyne & Wear Archives & Museum's Women of Tyneside project. The project theme for this borough was 'Power and Influence', chosen because North Tyneside has had more female MPs and women in locally powerful positions than any other borough in Tyne and Wear. (1).

Scarlet Women was a national newsletter produced from 1976 – 82 from North Shields at the height of the Women's Liberation Movement (2). It came out of the 1976 WLM conference in Newcastle where women from a local group raised their frustrations about the difficulties women who identified as feminists and socialists were facing to convince the men on the left that their issues should be taken seriously (3). For this issue we have asked women who live or who have worked in North Tyneside or whose work has impacted on women here to contribute their experience and/or thoughts about 'What has changed for women over the past 35 years?'

There's no way we could have covered all the relevant topics but the contributions which came in fall into several categories: employment and social mobility, work with women and girls both here and in Newcastle, current pressures on young women, political activism and theory, the continuing violence against women, and current concerns about women's access to their specific health care needs. The illustrations included here are from the original issues of Scarlet Women (which were all hand produced) or from a collection of posters from the 1970s and 80s held by one of the original members of the Scarlet Women Collective.

Has much changed in the last 35 years? In some ways yes – women have gained control over and advanced in many areas of life, including uncovering and bringing into the open many issues which back then were still hidden and not talked about. But on the other hand we have more poverty in our communities now brought about by the long years of austerity which have hit women and children in particular, and the normalisation of sexualised images and expectations of women generated by pornography and the sex industry are having an undoubtedly negative and troubling effect on young women in particular.

We hope that readers will find the articles stimulating and thought - provoking – and ideally encourage you to get together to bring about change yourselves in some way, become women of power and influence in your own right!

(1) MPs: Margaret Bondfield, Irene Ward, Grace Colman, Mary Glindon; Elected Mayors: Linda Arkley, Norma Redfearn, Penny Remfry, member of the original Scarlet Women Collective and North Tyneside Women's Voices (2) Unfortunately Scarlet Women has not been digitalised. However all issues can be found in the Ann Torode Collection in the Feminist Library, Leeds University (3) see article in this issue: Scarlet Women: Why? Who? What?

This issue of Scarlet Women is dedicated to Ann Torode (1943 – 2017) who was the inspiration and intellectual energy behind the Scarlet Women Collective. Ann was born in London and came to live in Whitley Bay from Leeds in 1972. She was a founder member of the Coast Women's Group and with others established the Women's Aid Refuge and Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre. Ann was a passionate feminist and a lifelong campaigner against oppression and exploitation in all its forms. She would have been so happy to see Scarlet Women brought back to life in this issue.

SCARLET WOMEN

WHY? WHO? WHAT?

The 1970s were a time of political upheaval – the first miners' strike in the early 70s under a Tory government led by Edward Heath which led to the 3-day working week because of lack of coal for the power stations; ongoing trade union demands and strikes for higher wages and better working conditions; the Wilson Labour government which promised social transformation through development of technology but ended with indebtedness to the World Bank; and economic austerity and finally the re-election of a Tory government under Margaret Thatcher.

The Women's Liberation Movement was born in the UK into this politicised environment. In addition to talking to each other about the discrimination they faced as women in most aspects of their lives, many women were also involved in left-wing organisations (eg Communist Party, Trotskyist groups and left factions within the Labour Party). These were working in the unions and at the (paid) workplace to raise awareness about capitalism as the source of workers' restricted lives and the need to overthrow it in favour of a society which was controlled by and organised in the interests of the working class.

The programmes of the left groups although differing in (much fought over) detail of theory and approach all based their political understanding on Marx and Engels' analysis which focussed on the importance of the working class as the instrument for the overthrow of capitalism. Although Engels developed a theory about the oppression of women within the family – and wrote a book about its origins - he concluded that only by becoming part of the paid labour force would women be able to throw off their oppression.



Women who were beginning to identify as feminists, but also working in these left groups, were frustrated because their male comrades were not taking seriously the issues which affected women. They were told that women would have to wait until after the revolution for their concerns to be dealt with. The women felt that they needed a theory about the oppression of women which would show that taking up issues affecting women was as important as working to change society in the interests of workers.

The Tyneside Coast Women's Group had started in 1973 as a breakaway group from the Newcastle Socialist Women's Action Group (SWAG). SWAG was made up of women friends/partners of men who were members of IS (International Socialists) who met downstairs in the Bridge Hotel while the women met upstairs. Difference of opinion soon became evident between those women who took the 'left' position regarding women (eg price rises were the major issue) and those who believed that women had interests specific to them which women should take up and campaign about. In particular at the time, the issue of a woman's right to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy was particularly important, because the 1967 Abortion Act was under threat from a Private Members' Bill (and continued to be threatened throughout the decade with another 2 bills being brought to parliament to amend the same Act.)

Within the new Coast Women's Group many of the members were or had been active in left groups. In addition to developing our feminist consciousness through personal discussions and sharing experience, campaigning locally and engaging in some political education, we also talked about the difficulties of being feminists within the left – wearing two hats we called it. We wrote a paper about it and took it to the Women's Liberation Conference in Newcastle in 1976. The workshops held there were very well attended and resulted in agreement that a network should be set up with a newsletter so that women who identified as both feminists and socialists could keep in touch, share information and develop the feminist theory and practice needed to augment the limited socialist analysis. The Coast Women's group agreed to be the contact for the network, some women agreed to be regional contacts and other women signed up at the conference to be part of the network and receive the newsletter.

Scarlet Women produced 14 issues over the next 6 years; a final one in 1982 never got printed. Over this time a national editorial group was formed and a statement about socialist feminism was agreed:





“Socialist Feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. By the patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed, an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex (sic) although working class men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working class women. Sisterhood is our defence against oppression, and as such is part of our revolutionary consciousness.”

Socialists sometimes see the struggle as being about a change in the economic structure alone. For us the struggle is about a change in total social relations. We are concerned to develop an understanding of the real relationship between male supremacy and class society... What we are looking for is nothing less than a total redefinition of socialist thought and practice. We are working towards a socialism which seeks to abolish patriarchy.”

The statement went on to say that Scarlet Women will “publish papers, letters, articles, ideas that develop the thought and effectiveness of socialist feminism” but only if “contributions are based on the belief in an autonomous Women’s Liberation Movement and also on the belief that autonomous movements have the right to define their own oppression and the struggle against it.”

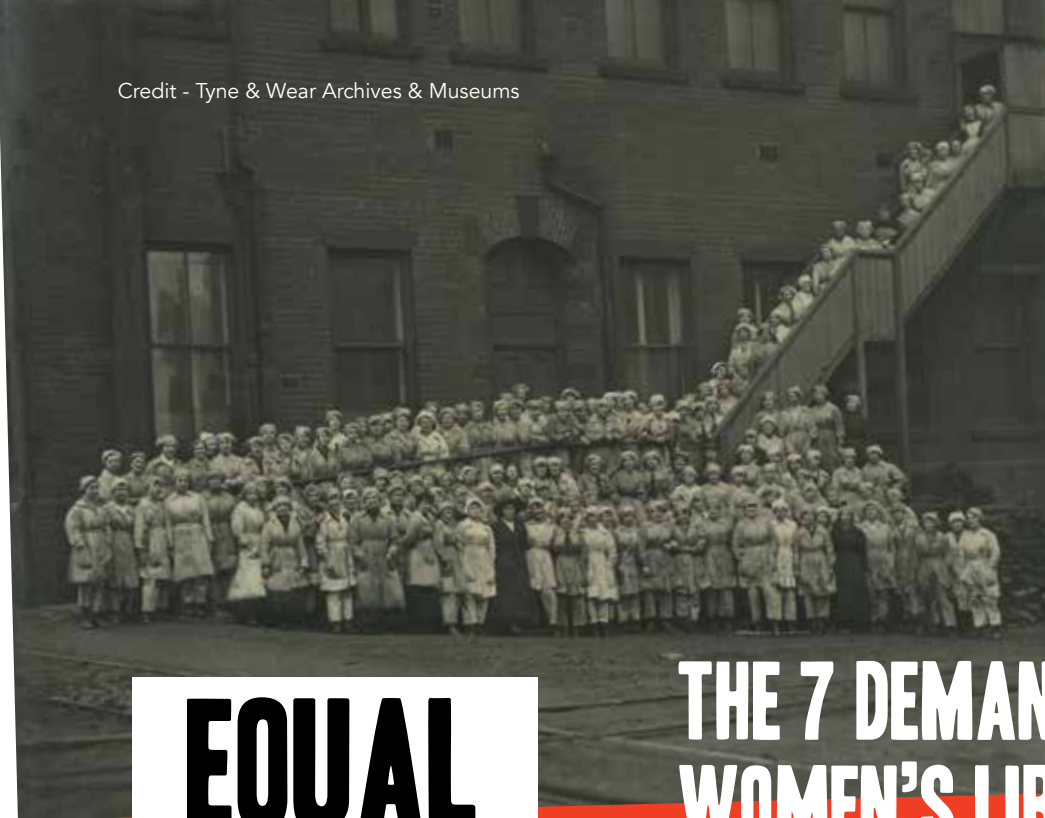
While all the issues contained a mixture of articles, reports from groups and information on activities, the newsletter soon began to focus on topics. Articles from different perspectives were included in order to develop a feminist socialist analysis and guide to action. For example the August 1978 edition focussed on the issue of housework and the demand for an independent income for women.

It included articles from Wages for Housework (self-explanatory), the Claimants Union which was demanding a guaranteed minimum income for all, critiques of both, and a left group arguing for taking housework tasks out of the home and into the public sphere through day-care for children, launderettes and cooked food places – all collectively owned and run by the community. Other topics included: the Working Women’s Charter campaign (how feminist was this campaign?), reproduction (women’s power to have children and how patriarchy controls it), working with the left on anti-racism and anti-fascism (in response to the rise of the National Front), Northern Ireland (should feminists support the Troops Out! movement or did they have their own interests to campaign on?), Sexuality (how patriarchy defines and controls it), Imperialism (how it oppresses women not just in this country) and New Technology (what impact will this have on women?). The one that never got printed was concerned with war and peace and contained interviews with women at Greenham amongst others.

Why did the newsletter come to an end? I think we ran out of steam and the various members of the editorial collective were getting involved in other things. In North Shields the Coast Group women were increasingly involved in providing a service locally for ‘battered’ women – a local housing association finally provided a building for a refuge in 1982 but a helpline had been set up several years beforehand; and some members were also involved in the development of the Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre (est. 1978). Discussions about theory were put on one side in the interests of undermining the power of patriarchy through setting up support groups and services to enable women to get more control over their lives.

Penny Remfry

Credit - Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums



EQUAL

PAY

FOR

EQUAL

WORK

THE 7 DEMANDS OF THE WOMEN’S LIBERATION MOVEMENT 1971 -78

The first Women’s Liberation Conference was held in Oxford in 1970 at which the first 4 of the demands were formulated (they were adopted the following year at the Skegness WLM conference). There had been feminist activity before this – the Dagenham womens’ strike for equal pay had been in 1968 and women’s groups had been sprouting up all over the country, but the Oxford conference was the first to bring women together to talk about their issues. For more information on this see: <https://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/articles/womens-liberation-a-national-movement>

Two further demands were adopted at the Edinburgh conference in 1974 and the final demand was agreed in Birmingham in 1978. It is worth noting that the first demands related essentially to women’s role in the workplace – their class position - but over time discussion at conferences became more concerned with women’s experience in relation to patriarchy – the need for financial independence from men, the right to determine for ourselves how we express our sexuality, and finally – not until 1978 – freedom from violence perpetrated by men against women in all its forms.

The Seven Demands as finalised at the National Women’s Liberation Conference held in Birmingham in 1978. The women’s liberation movement asserts a woman’s right to define her own sexuality, and demands:

- Equal pay for equal work
- Equal education and job opportunities
- Free contraception and abortion on demand
- Free 24-hour community-controlled childcare
- Legal and financial independence for women
- An end to discrimination against lesbians

Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence. An end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men’s aggression towards women.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF THEORY?

Back in the 70s we had something called 'Grand Theory'. Grand Theories explain those basic questions that we as human beings are prone to ask, like: why are we here, what is our purpose, what's the point of it all, why is life so difficult? Historically grand theories have been based on religion: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. They helped us to understand our situation in life and, mostly, put up with its difficulties.

And then Marx came along in the mid-1800s and came up with a new Grand Theory which was not based on religion but the economy. According to Marx it has been economic activity which has determined the form of society. The accumulation of wealth by some has generated the class society we are familiar with today in which some people - those who own the means of production - have lots of wealth and power and the rest of us do not. Marx argued that society did not have to be like that, and because the workers are the source of the wealth others own they are able to change the way the wealth is distributed by taking over the means of production through strikes and other forms of collective action.

The Labour Movement in this country - trade unions and the Labour Party in particular - took on this 'grand theory' as its guide in their vision of socialism and how to achieve it. The working class were seen to be the engine of change through organisation at the workplace. Women generally were not seen as part of the working class but were expected to support their menfolk in fighting for change. Hence feminists in the WLM in the 70s were concerned to identify and name the separate oppression they experience in this society, mainly at the hands of men (indirectly and directly). Some argued that sex was a 'class' in the same way as the working class, but the target of their struggle for change and equality was patriarchy - male power embedded in the social structure. Socialist feminists argued that patriarchy was not separate from capitalism but the form of social structure generated by it. While capitalism denotes the form of economic production, patriarchy denotes the form of social reproduction - that is, the reproduction of both labour (children) and labour power (the capacity and willingness of labour to engage in economic production). Hence both patriarchy and capitalism had to be overthrown.

This grand theory, or Marxist analysis, and the understandings which went with it - the importance of collective action, solidarity, co-operation, the notion "Together we are Strong" for example - has been displaced with post-modernist notions of individual power. Along with Margaret Thatcher's government of the 1980s, and her famous assertion that 'there is no such thing as society', we saw the rise of neo-liberalism in the economy, the defeat of the miners and trade unions, and the increasing emphasis on the importance of the individual as the engine of change (and responsible for their own achievements). Along with this we have seen the development of 'identity politics' whereby individuals with specific characteristics which are seen to be outside of the 'norm' and subject to various forms of oppression and discrimination because of them have organised together and demanded - and in some instances gained - changes in social regard and legislation to ameliorate their disadvantages.

I think if the Scarlet Women Collective had continued to meet and produce the newsletter, our understanding of patriarchy would have taken on board these developments.

Credit - Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums



“THE WORKING CLASS WERE SEEN TO BE THE ENGINE OF CHANGE.”



Credit - See Red Women's Workshop

As our statement indicated (see article on Scarlet Women) we were very aware of the differences amongst women and recognised that the colour of skin, sexuality and class all affected women's experience of patriarchy. I think we would have come to a clearer understanding that just as male power is structured into the social dimension of capitalism, so also is whiteness, heterosexuality and able-bodiedness - and also, since capitalism arose in the west, is a Christian based value system. All those who do not fit into these categories are 'othered' and subjected to discrimination of various degrees.

Capitalism emerged from within European society and the structure of social relations at the time, and this did not change until women and minority groups started to challenge male privilege and control over women's reproductive capacity and sexuality, and white heterosexual and able-bodied privilege. I think we would argue further that while all class societies are patriarchal the way this is reflected as well as other aspects of the social structure will differ according to the particular history of any given society.

However I am sure we would continue to argue that capitalism is the power which dominates all our lives, generating now ever more inequality and poverty,

and that only by recognising each other's experience of oppression and supporting each other in our struggles against it will we together be able to bring about major changes in the distribution of wealth and power. The question we might be asking now, as campaigns against discrimination and exploitation of minority groups (including women) bring changes in the law and appear to be having some impact in changing social attitudes in this country, how much will this change in the 'social relationships of reproduction' affect the economic structure? Perhaps together we will create that new society in which we are all respected fully as human beings and wealth and power in society is distributed equally - or will we all find ourselves equally exploited by an ever rampaging capitalism?

Penny Remfry

FEMINISTS

BREAKING

THE OLD

FRAMEWORKS



Reading Scarlet Women

Reading through the pages of *Scarlet Women*, you get the sense of a group of women trying to work through a complex set of problems. What is particularly striking is the way in which many of the early articles are immersed in theoretical debate. In other words, while all these women were activists, they were also interested in ideas; they were well-read, intellectually engaged and steeped in the work of Marx and other influential thinkers on the Left.

While there's no showy name-dropping and while there is a distinct resistance to deploying theoretical jargon, the debates captured in the pages of the magazine provide the reader with a lucid account of socialist feminism in Britain. These debates point to the tensions between socialism and feminism, tensions that might not be resolved but that have the potential to stimulate social change. In other words, the women contributors do not see these tensions as a weakness but rather as a strength. They suggest that they can offer a way forward.

What I really enjoy about reading *Scarlet Women* is the sense of excitement here, a sense of the possibility of developing a new kind of approach to socialism capable of responding to all forms of oppression, not just the oppression of the working-class. There is a pioneer spirit as well as an optimism even as many of the articles offer a critique of the Left, not only the Labour Party and Trades Unions but also the non-aligned Left. Repeatedly, we hear feminists describing the experience of being in a meeting and feeling unable to ask the question, 'but what about women?' Repeatedly, the women complain that their views are side lined, that the struggle is seen to take place at 'the point of production' rather than at 'the kitchen sink'.

These old models of Marxism are, for the *Scarlet Women*, no longer adequate to explain fully the exploitation of women or indeed any oppressed group. These women activists offer an alternative that draws on the ideas of the left but also on radical feminism's consciousness raising techniques and on its valuing of women's experiences. The impression you get in many of the articles is a sense of relief when these women decide to organise separate meetings where they can speak openly, frankly and honestly about their experiences. While they realise that this might not be 'revolutionary' in the Marxist sense, for many of them it is revolutionary in the personal sense.

According to one article, 'our feminism broke that old framework apart'. And the point is – it did.

The arguments recorded in the pages of this magazine point to many issues that are central to an understanding of how inequalities are reproduced at a structural level and for this reason, they are as relevant today as they were in 1976.

Victoria Bazin

LABOUR WOMEN MAKE POLICY, NOT TEA



Credit - See Red Women's Workshop

Around 1984, Vicky Gilbert and Ylana First persuaded North Tyneside District Labour Party to include the creation of a Women's Committee in their manifesto. When Labour were elected, the chance to get it up and running fell to me. Greater London Council had a Women's Committee but there were precious few in the rest of the country.

We needed one. Women are the main users and providers of Council services, but the decisions about them and the allocation of resources are done by men. There were five other Labour women councillors, none of whom were feminists. Women sat on 'caring' committees like Social Services and Housing, not the resource committees like Finance.

I was welcomed to my first Labour Group meeting by a fellow councillor, a retired miner, with the words, 'In my opinion, women should be kept on a rope long enough to stretch from the cooker to the bed.' The more educated males whispered 'monstrous regiment of women' under their breath. For the first year I wore a badge proclaiming 'Labour Women Make Policy, Not Tea.'

The Women's Committee birth was laborious, blocked by councillors and officers. It took two hours to get the Chief Executive to agree that the committee was not going to meet a cycle behind every other committee, but would meet before other committees and make recommendations to them. He declared there was no spare committee room to hold it in, and was shocked when I announced we were going to meet in community centres, schools - out in the community so that women could attend. When he said he had no committee clerk available, I invited him to come and take the minutes himself.

We won.



All reports to every committee had to list the impact on women of the recommendation. That way, every officer had to think about women's issues and we avoided a ghetto for women's affairs. The Tory and Lib Dem women councillors were experiencing similar sexism and agreed to sit on the committee. Male councillors had to fill the places because we were so few.

The midwife of the Women's Committee was our first Women's Officer, Kate Howey. She was clever, committed and effective. We were aiming for a culture change in the Council, so that female officers could move up the structure to positions where they could influence services.

I believe that when you are given power, the first action is to give it away, so that you build a power base. Clutching power kills your effectiveness. We accessed funding to run a series of workshops called 'Getting Active in Public Life', again in community centres around the borough. We aimed to get more women councillors, magistrates, volunteers, entrepreneurs. My younger sister had become the youngest magistrate at the time to be approved by the Lord Chief Justice. She encouraged more young women to take the leap.

Many of the existing magistrates were the same councillors who saw no point in encouraging more and younger women to stand. We substantially increased the numbers of active women and not only from 'middle class' areas, but from our deprived parts of the borough.

My sister and I were single parents of young children and challenged other women to see that they could do it too.

We learnt from other women. There was a national network of women's committees - mainly cities in Scotland and England. North Tyneside was part of a network of European cities tackling domestic violence. The Women's Committee provided a forum where agencies could come together to tackle the wicked issues - wickedly difficult to understand and wickedly difficult to solve, which meant that we had to have multi-agency working to get to grips with them.

Sexism is as ingrained as racism and each generation of women needs to tackle it anew. Despite the support of the Northern Labour Women's Network and women in the community, the Women's committee on its own could not achieve all the aspirations of women across the borough. We managed to fund work with girls, to change the services for pregnant schoolgirls (at that time they were automatically excluded from school), fund services for women experiencing domestic violence.

I know the Women's Committee provided an entry for more women councillors. I hope that its legacy is their willingness to understand who is most affected by their decisions, why they need to promote women's issues, and that they need to actively take every opportunity to support women coming up behind them. The key challenges are still there. Women councillors were doing everything male councillors were doing, but also being carers and domestic goddesses. Creches became standard, but as Edna Bennett, a fellow councillor caring for her mother with dementia, said, 'You can't stick your mother in a creche'.

Her mother had been the first female councillor in Longbenton Urban District Council. Women councillors have passed on a torch to today's councillors, and lessons that should not be forgotten.

Jean Laurie

GIVING GIRLS A VOICE



One of the many projects endorsed and supported by the North Tyneside Council Women's Committee was the North Tyneside Girls Team; a network of groups focused on issue-based youth work with girls and young women which recognised the limitations of traditional youth settings for young women and the inherent inequalities impacting on their lives. The work was facilitated by a team of women youth workers and was underpinned by a value led and principle-based practice aimed at creating opportunities, activities and events to explore and address these through group work and informal education. Anne Marron started working in North Tyneside as a qualified youth worker in 1987. She became the full time Girls' Work Development Officer in 1996 and went on to work at Durham University on the Youth & Community Work Programme in 2002 by which time the North Tyneside Girls Team was being dismantled due to short sighted changes in policy and withdrawal of funding for single gender work. The article below is taken from an interview with Anne.

(You have to remember) the political context of that time, mid '80s. Whole industries in the North East and North Tyneside specifically (were going) – the mines were closing, shipbuilding going, fishing industry restricted– (with) massive impact on local people, families and communities in terms of unemployment, isolation, mental health, poverty – so it was really important that young people had somewhere to go, somewhere they could meet with friends, have fun, learn and be challenged, and where they had opportunities to understand what was happening around them.

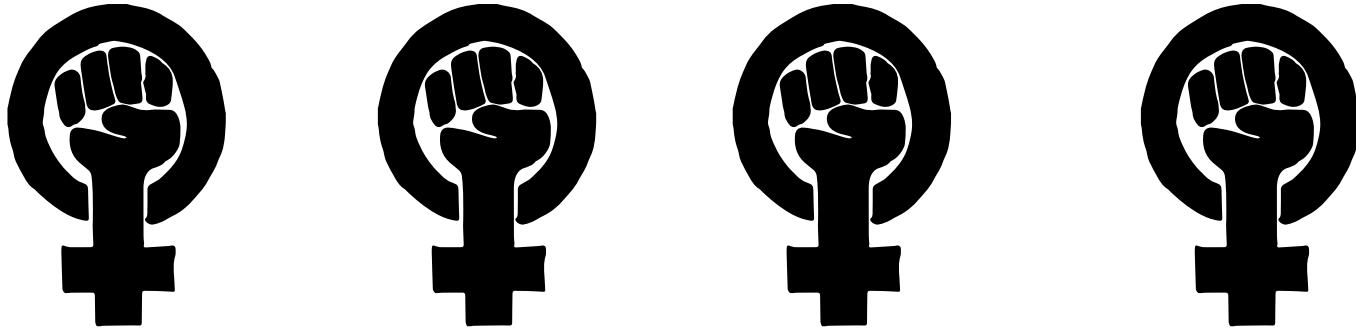
Girls work was part of that but also very specific in that it recognised the experience of young women and how these wider social influences were impacting on their lives, their families and communities during those times, and the opportunities they were prevented from having because of the expectations and roles they were undertaking.

As women workers we had also grown through that time and had our own experience of the political landscape, we all had issues and concerns we wanted to talk about, explore and understand; engaging in dialogue is a key component of effective youth work practice.

The work demanded that we reflected on our own lives as women, it gave us a sense of solidarity and the opportunity to join the movement of liberating ourselves and each other together. There was a real solidarity amongst the women workers but also a clear understanding of the importance of raising aspirations and creating opportunities for the girls and young women – and work towards preventing them from having to go through similar experiences. There was a very proactive, feminist, harm preventative, liberational agenda central to our work

At the height of the work there were over 20 groups meeting weekly in neighbourhoods across North Tyneside. We started developing work with girls from 11 – 14/15, recognising the development stages of going through puberty and the kinds of support that were needed during this time in the girls development and then the transition into young womanhood, approaching school leaving age, maybe developing relationships, and becoming an adult. So the girls would reach 14/15 and grow into young women's groups for 15-18 year olds, identifying and working with the specific issues of that age group. We recognised and learned about the diverse needs of girls in the borough and held neighbourhood groups as well as specific groups for young women within the Bangladeshi community, Southlands School for young women with learning disabilities, the Outline, which was an anonymous phone helpline for young women who were exploring their sexuality - in those days Clause 28 meant discussion about sexual orientation and identity was prevented in schools.

In those days we had the Women's Issues Committee, and Young People's Issues Committee to which we regularly reported. The Council were beginning to create the democratic mechanism through which they could take on board the issues that were directly affecting young people in their constituencies and throughout the borough.



And I recall through the Women's Committee, the Council at strategic level, we were able to start having a voice around issues such as mental health, drugs and alcohol, sexual health, sexual violence, domestic violence, by raising awareness of what was happening for children and young people. For example, we represented young people on the Domestic Violence Forum which also had representation from police, teachers, nurses, doctors, different professionals who were working with young people and the issues affecting them. We were able to advocate and bring the voice of young people, making changes around policing, looking at domestic violence as a safe guarding and mental health issue for those young people effected, and knowing that it would likely be impacting on their education, friendships, aspirations and relationships with parents, family and friends.

When I meet some of the girls as women now, and the women workers, they look back at this life changing time with enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunities and activities they were involved in and the events that we held, how they felt about the safe space provided by the girls' groups, the residentials we used to organise and how they were able to grow, learn and develop, make informed choices and develop their social skills.

They were so key to the organising; we would look at the issues but would also give consideration to the social skills the girls and young women needed in order to be able to articulate, to communicate, to relate and be able to act, to use their agency, to become involved and influence change for themselves. (For example) the girls who influenced the policy developments around residential care for young women, they were able to take their concerns and report to the Women's Issues Committee, so for them, to know that they had articulated themselves in a Council committee meeting, led them to become more confident in using their voices, to understand how to engage in the process of identifying their own issues and working towards making change, taking responsibility for the things that were related to their own lives and were at the same time of relevance to the wider community. and develop confidence, aspirations, self-esteem, all of the essential skills and awareness we need when it comes to using our voice and to be able to articulate and get involved, to represent themselves fully such as at interviews, when applying for work, negotiating in relationships and around consent.

The Perfect Woman

That was a project which developed at a time when some of the girls had concerns about their relationship with food and the wider issues around fashion, beauty, body size and image. They decided as a group to make an image of what they considered to be their Perfect Woman.

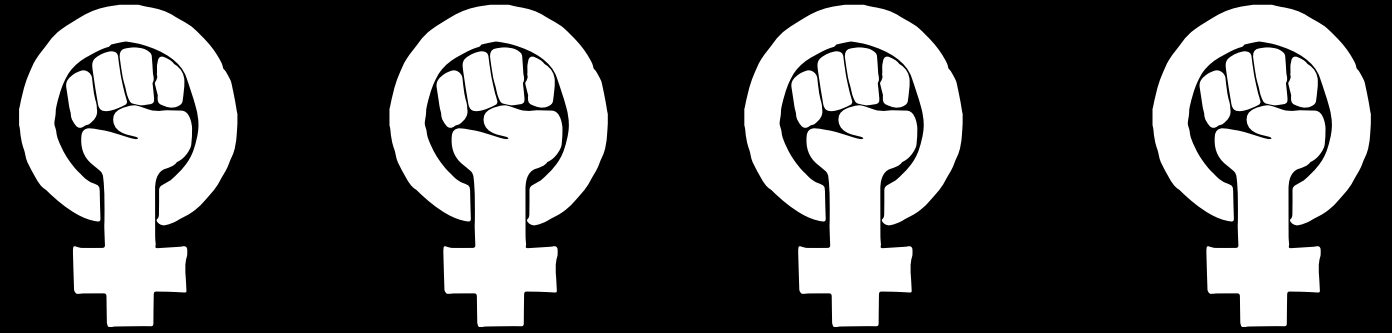
They created a sculpture out of mod rock (which probably wouldn't be allowed now) and made moulds of different parts of their bodies. They all 'donated' either their arm or a leg, hand, foot or a neck and pieced them together to create a wonderful sculpture of their Perfect Woman; the Perfect Woman was a lot of fun and made from of all of them together, she represented their different shapes and sizes, all colours and creeds.

The Perfect Woman was about recognising the woman in each of us and who we are, who they aspired to be and feeling comfortable and 'perfect' being the way we are. They drew a lot of strength and confidence from the discussions they had while creating the sculpture and acknowledging the power and influence of how others define women including the multi-billion beauty and fashion industries. They wrote a narrative about her and why they had decided to create her- how she had come about through their exploration and learning about their relationship with food, their ideas about image and body size, diets and then created something pro-active, informative and positive for themselves and others.

She went on tour of all the libraries where the public were able to see her and were given the opportunity to question their own ideas about what it meant to be a woman. That was early '90s.

North Tyneside work with women and girls is represented at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995

In '95 a conference was held in Beijing, the UN Conference on Women which looked at the position of women across the globe and recognized that similar issues and inequalities were experienced by women and girl children in far reaching countries, from Longbenton in North Tyneside and across the globe. The theatre group ProAct (founded and facilitated by two women and looking at issues of domestic violence and its impact) were able to attend with support from the Women's Issues Committee and fundraising and support from the women and girls' workers network.



A large banner was made, supported by ISIS Arts and women and girls' groups across the borough who helped to create it. It was taken to the Beijing conference and exhibited there representing North Tyneside Women and Girls, alongside others by women and women's groups from all over the world. The workers were able to feed back to us in North Tyneside and it was from there that we organised a local conference in Longbenton the following year, inviting women and groups from around the region to discuss the 12 areas of global concern highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, thereby relating the global to the local on Tyneside.

Beijing Greetings Banner

Batik, applique and fabric painting. Size 5'x 7'
A multi-cultural project with textile artist Helen Law and women's groups from North Tyneside and Newcastle upon Tyne. The banner was presented at the NGO Forum, United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995



The Chill Out Room

We held regular themed activity days throughout the year around e.g. World Aids Day, Mental Health Day, Holocaust Memorial Day. Often at these days we had a 'Chill Out Room' a relaxing space which gave the girls a place to be where they could relax and enjoy some much needed space just to be.

We usually had an aromatherapist offering very gentle hand massage, candles and some nice chill out music giving the girls an opportunity to relax and take time and a moment for themselves. Many of the girls had a lot of responsibility and caring roles at home, especially where they had younger siblings or where their mothers had passed away or there was parental divorce. The older girls were often looking after the younger children and as they rarely had any chance of relaxing, they needed a space of their own. They asked for copies of the music, and they loved the relaxing influence of the oils, they were keen to re-create that sense of relaxation and chill out in their own spaces and take away something they could do for themselves at home.

Because they were going back to their families, we recognised that whatever we did within the groups they returned home to their family and community situation, they were changing their attitudes and behaviour and they still had to contend with societal norms and expectations placed on girls and women however they were better equipped both together and as individuals to manage their decisions and make choices about their health, general wellbeing from a broader understanding of becoming women and informed through feminism.

This work did not happen in isolation, it developed due to the determination, commitment, insight and knowledge of the team of women workers in the voluntary and statutory sectors who were prepared to challenge the status quo and its inherent everyday sexism, prejudice and multiple layers of discrimination alongside the girls and young women with whom they worked with the aim of creating new opportunities and ways of being in a fairer, safer world for girls and women.

EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN SOCIALIST ACTIVISM



When asked about condensing the last 35 years into 1000 words about my take and personal experiences of lesbian socialist activism as a resident of North Tyneside, I was at a loss...My notes read more like an application for my next imaginative job as a union equality creativity officer. After all the personal is political.

So I had a severe editing task to do. 35 years is; nearly half my life, it's 20 words for every year. It's a whole life currently lived out by my niece and nephews. It's the time I've spent as an out lesbian.

In particular 1982 onwards was the prime time of my activism in youth and community work since living in Sheffield and moving to Newcastle and North Tyneside in 1984. Here was a challenge and the following is the result.

I identified as a lesbian after many years of exploring my feminism and issues being involved in the women's movement as a heterosexual. I became involved in many union action involving partnership with other women's campaigns and mixed groups and working class issues especially the miners' strikes in Sheffield's. Throughout my 35 year journey identity politics has been a common thread through my motivation to create change. I would loosely describe myself (to copy my great creative friend Sue Atkins thinking) as a very woolly socialist optimist lesbian feminist!

As a lesbian there have been many challenges to staying true to my feminism. This was sorely tested when working with gay men in repealing section 28. Continual debate around sexism and ways forward with gender politics has also been core to my job and identity.

I have made happen small solutions to problems I encountered. For example I set up with 2 others HEAT a training group to challenge heterosexism; a term eliminated from the then Council employers job description as it was thought too long a terminology to be useful!

A group of lesbians including me, set up lesbian and gay only Line Dancing monthly event at the Buddle in north Tyneside. The Line dancing organisers (all local lesbians) together with the talented local lesbian women's only band the Camp Vamps create the first Pride in the 90's.

Over the 35 years I have felt more aligned with the women's movement: going to Greenham common: attending reclaim the night marches in Sheffield that passed near in the very same spot the Yorkshire Ripper was later arrested.

I sat on many women's voluntary organisations manage committees keeping them afloat and with direction. It's interesting to note that the few lesbian projects such as lesbian line are no longer exist and the women's organisation such as women's projects Angelou Centre, Rape Crisis just keep their head above water. I also made links with campaigns for all disadvantaged Identity's and was central to the legitimising of the infamous Campaign for Black Direction.

My involvement in my union CYWU opened up more opportunities for women and women's issue to organise through the establishment of the women's 'caucus' a term and space dreamed up by a small group of us that wanted a more imaginative way to belong. We prioritised part time women workers issues and campaigned around any attacks on sexist responses to the work, the most significant being the sudden irrational closure of the National Girls Work Unit; run by two out Lesbians.

Then my peers became older and wiser and not so wise and settled into couples. The urge to create social spaces was being directed towards setting up small groups for house meals etc. and annual pilgrimage to Rock and Doris at Xmas time. Legislation for the first time allowed some to use their energies to adopt and foster and became Civil Partners.

However as the visibility and acceptance of lesbians became increased, they still had few central safe places mainly in Newcastle to organise and share ideas, friends and projects. I noticed this in particular in Whitley Bay so took it upon myself set up a LGBTQ stall at the local carnival where I launched a Facebook page for this purpose. Its development has been hindered by my lack of training around this technology and dedicating time to make it happen -perhaps my task for 2020?

I was inspired a few years ago to write a short condensed account of my thoughts regarding. Identity politics in the following poem. And I leave you with two big questions for 2019's how do we stop the gap between the rich and the poor getting even bigger and are Lesbian voices getting quieter?

Frankie Williams

'SOMETHING AMAZING ABOUT BEING WITH THAT MANY WOMEN': ENCOUNTERS WITH NORTH EAST FEMINIST ACTIVISM

I moved to Newcastle over thirteen years ago for work. I classed myself as a feminist academic yet was not much of an activist, other than perhaps in the lecture room.

In 2012, something interesting came on my radar: advertisements for contributions to a North East Feminist Gathering (NEFG). This was a DIY grassroots women-only feminist event in Newcastle. It was exciting and scary – I'd never participated in an event like this before. Would I fit in? I almost didn't submit anything. Then I talked with colleagues at university and two of us offered a session entitled 'Lesbians on Screen: How far have we come?' The session provoked some brilliant discussions and sharing from the participants.

NEFG 2012 was my first experience of women-only space (that is aside from 'incidental' spaces such as at the hairdresser!). For two days, there were workshops, creative sessions, talks etc, all led by women for women. Rarely had I been in such an honest and trusting space with a huge group of strangers. There was something very special about it, hearing from women involved in all sorts of work and activism.

Later, and partly inspired by the two NEFGs I went to (NEFG ran 2012-2014), I undertook research on the National Women's Liberation Movement Conference, 1976, in Newcastle (well, Ponteland, Northumberland, actually!). That WLM conference was the birthplace of what was to become Scarlet Women. I interviewed several organisers and participants, one of whom recalled of the WLM conferences that there was 'something amazing about being with that many women'. In a way, NEFG acted as a similar 'wow' moment for me. What I saw around me were strong, inspirational women.



Credit - Penny Remfry

I got to know some of the organisers and learned more about what was going on in my home town. I went on a Slutwalk, danced at the Monument for One Billion Rising, went on Reclaim the Night marches, a legacy of those 70s activists that is still needed. I helped out in Women's Zone at Pride. I heard the Friggin Little Bits (and later got to interview one member about her *not* attending the 1976 WLM conference). I went on Dyke Hikes, a walking group that has been running for over twenty years. I became a trustee at two charities that support women and girls. These were all started by women for women.

With colleagues I put on a 'Lesbians on Screen' season at a local cinema, learning first hand the hassle you get if you put on a women-only event! I co-organised Festivals of Feminist Ideas and Actions, and was thrilled to fill a room in the city library for a panel on lesbians in feminism.

Inspired in part by growing to know so many wonderful Tyneside feminist activists, I left academia 18 months ago. Part of my work now is running training and consultancy for organisations on gender and LGBT equality. We are still fighting for women's liberation – it's just that that doesn't look catchy on a business card!

Julie Scanlon

STANDING TOGETHER

I've spent most of my working life supporting people in communities and I have been exposed to many new ways of looking at issues of equality, as theorists and society has explored the way we interact and impact on each other. More recently ideas like intersectionality and privileged have begun to informing my understanding further.

The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory article by Brittney Cooper describes intersectionality, it is '.....represented as an analytical framework that attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society.' This idea was first identified in critical examination of the lack of consideration of race in the first wave feminists fight for women's equality. We see that 'third wave feminism notes the lack of attention to race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity in early feminist movements, and tries to provide a channel to address political and social disparities'¹.

I could add age to this list, I have experienced the disadvantage of older women in the workplace and in respect of pensions. I also see the complex impact identity has on my oldest daughter who is trans. She experience abuse from strangers who feel they have the right to make personal remarks to her face and is exposed to transphobic posts on social media.

The equality act 2010 detailed the nine 'Protected Characteristics' which had been covered by existing legislation. But what happens when different protected characteristics needs appear to be in conflict? Rather than looking for common ground and fighting the real enemies, those with 'privilege', there is in fighting which I feel is distracting energy away from the struggle for real equality women still face, whether gay or straight, whatever our racial and cultural background, whatever our ability or gender identity.

I am saddened to see women I considered great feminist showing a lack of understanding and empathy for a section of our community, trans women, affected by discrimination and abuse, something they have spent most of their lives fighting against. But there is hope, my daughters generation mostly seem to very open minded and embrace the many different identities women have.

We will achieve much more by standing together while understanding the complexities we each demonstrate, not one of us is 'just a woman' we have other identities, few of us are privileged, many of us experience negative power dynamics, discrimination and abuse.

Fixmer-Oraiz, and Wood, Natalie, and Julia (2015). Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, & Culture. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. pp. 59–60

A Mother's Tale

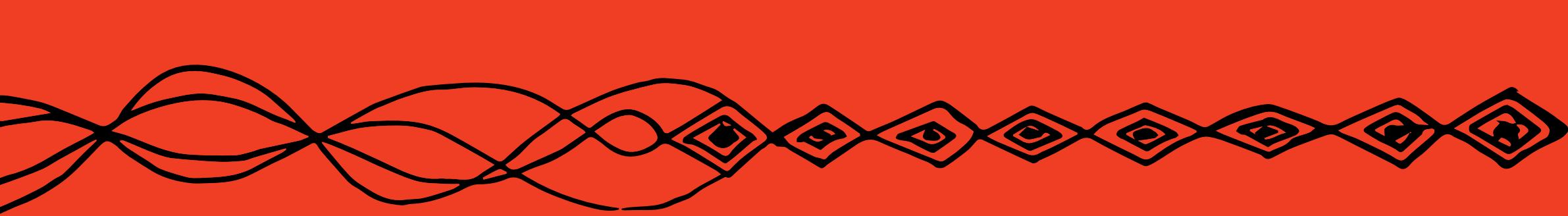
CHALLENGING STRUCTURAL RACISM IN NEWCASTLE



North Tyneside has a much smaller BME community than Newcastle, but community workers across Tyneside and Wearside used to have strong networks, especially those working with women and girls and around women's health issues. Hence issues and ways of working with women from the BME communities were shared across the region. Shamshad Iqbal is one of those women who over the years has challenged racist attitudes and lack of provision for BME women – and continues to do so. This article is based on an interview with Shamshad.

Shamshad came to Newcastle from Leeds with her young family in 1976. She had grown up in Harehills, a very racially mixed area of Leeds, and found Newcastle very white. She lived in Benwell to begin with where there were few Asian families, lots of poverty, poor housing – shared toilets at the back of the streets – and a lot of racism. She moved to Elswick which was better. She worked as a machinist at home for a factory in the city centre and had two more children (she already had two).

"What I found when I came to Newcastle, although it wasn't on the surface, there was a lot of....racism that was going on like in the ante-natal clinic and I would challenge that. There were things said that I felt were not appropriate, and....they were not looking at the religious needs and cultural needs, and I felt that, if that's what they are saying to me, what about the other women here?....And that kind of fired me up. (I thought) what's going on here? Where's the fairness in terms of equality, why is this happening?"



With children in playgroup, nursery and then school Shamshad quickly got involved. In the playgroup she got noticed by the leader for helping and supporting the other Asian mothers there and got recruited to continue to do so on as a volunteer. From there she enrolled in various adult education courses: “I wanted to do whatever would lead me into, not so much a job at the time, more about working in support of other women and children who had not been able to access, maybe not allowed to or didn’t know about it.” She began to get employment in running crèches and involvement in group work, she worked on play schemes for 6 years, worked at the Riverside Women’s Health project in Benwell and then Tyneside Women’s Health Project where she worked to develop BME women’s groups for 16 years. While there also did mental health support work for Newcastle MIND. During this time she was also a youth worker for 30 years.

There were other Asian women working in the West End at this time, and together they set up Roshni (Asian Women’s Centre) in the late 1980s and from that an Asian Women’s Group which led to a Black Women’s Health Project and a Carers’ Project. Roshni closed in 2008/9 because the local authority stopped the funding but the management committee of the Angelou Centre which had been set up in the early 1990s took over the building.

The Angelou Centre was initially set up to provide training and employment support for black women. Over time however in response to need their services have focussed more on domestic and sexual abuse. Shamshad now works full time at the Angelou Centre.

I asked Shamshad what she thought had changed for BME women since she had been in Newcastle.

“On a positive note I would say that there is more there for the young women to access, more information about, more professionals trained up to deal with the young women, more referral systems in terms of safeguarding set up, with more protocols there to say this is the need. So I would say that there is a big, big change. I would say yes there is internal racism and discrimination but then I am a person that’s looking at 1976 (when I moved) here to seeing here in 2019. I see a lot more developed in terms of rights, in terms of accessing them, rights for BME communities, for all communities.

(But) I think the impact of that (racism) has been very, very bad... had its toll on people where people might not have got into a job because of being discriminated against. Every time there’s an attack, (there’s a) lot of horrible stuff said to women. So that brings a lot of negativity into what you’re trying to build up.

And then that leads on to further issues as well because it leads into the future of the generations, you know, battling with each other. Going back to the riots that we had in Newcastle (1991), that was a horrible time. There were shops set on fire in Elswick area and they were running up the Westgate as well – young people trashing Asian Shops, and there were coachloads – that was just after the National Front had come in – because it was a planned attack.

You move 2 steps forward and then 3 steps backwards...It’s like for example the Angelou Centre. Angelou Centre is still working on the 2 strands, of the education and employment side and we’ve got the DV side. So we want to be doing what is needed. (But with) the services within the community you’re standing against barriers all the time, of internal discrimination, racism, all of that, all of the time, challenging. And then Islamophobia doesn’t help, and all of that stuff now. But you can see then at the same time when you are living and working in the community you can see the differences, yes.”

There’s Going To Be A P*ki-Bashing Day In School

“My oldest son – this was 1985 – was at school, it was his first year there. He used to come home all the time very upset over things, very different from what he was at primary school. So I asked him and he said, Oh, this is what is happening, the kids call me things like ‘another n*gger in our school, we’ve got another n*gger in, we’ve got this and we’ve got that’. He said there was a fight in the school, they were saying you n*ggers are coming in to clean our toilets and stuff. And I said WHAT! I was so shocked, so I said OK I would go and speak to the school and challenge that. They said, No, it’s him, it’s his anger, he’s got too much anger in him, he gets very annoyed at things and everything, so they brushed it off. So I went in and I talked to him and I talked to the teachers and I said, Right, I gave them my home phone number and I said if there’s a problem I’d like to come and talk to you because I don’t want my son to be affected by this.

So then that first summer, my son came to me and said, Mum, there’s going to be a P*ki-bashing day in school. I said, what? A P*ki-bashing day I said, what’s a P*ki-bashing day? He said, well what will happen is, all the Asian children and black children are going to be on one side and all the other children are going to be on the other side and there’s another school. Children are going to come from there and there’s going to be a fight between them. So I was really, really scared about it. So I said No, we’re not going to put up with that and I got into school and I talked to the teachers, even the police were called to monitor and keep an eye on what’s going on.”

They’ve Got Youth Workers Working, But No BME Girls

And then at the time I thought maybe, I don’t know what’s going on, I’ll try and find out if there’s a youth centre that he can go to because I know that he needs. So then somebody told me about this Youth Centre and then through the school, I came across the youth worker at Murray House. I took my son and got him to join there. So that was boys’ youth sessions. So, it’s got boys going there, they’ve got youth workers working, but no BME girls. So I said, What are you doing about it? And they said, we’ve got funding but we’ve never been able to recruit, and I thought, that’s a bit silly, you know. So I said How come? And they said this and that and so on. So I offered, I said I will do some voluntary work for you and set up a group for you and you recruit the workers. So they recruited 2 workers at the time, they started doing sessions there. Then, one of the workers left and I stepped in and then – after 30 years – I resigned, only because I ended up having youth sessions here (Angelou Centre). And I’ve gone on to do so much work with them women.

What happened in the end was that they wanted to move the group to Mill Lane and I didn’t feel that was right. They (Local Authority) said the cost was too much to manage the group here. I said OK you can go there, I’m not going because I didn’t feel that young women coming out in that area at 8 -8.30 at night, when the sessions would be finishing, would be safe. Because already there were issues taking place of Asian women being followed, their scarves pulled off, you know, names called.”

It’s A Very Bad Idea, A Black Women’s Refuge

When the Black Women’s Refuge was set up (in the 1990s), and we were putting in application bids for funding from the local authority and other charities were supporting us in getting the funding, our own so-called community leaders from our communities were very very against it. We had to go to a meeting at the Civic Centre and The community leaders turned around and said, “It’s a very bad idea, a black women’s refuge, it’s not the right thing to do, it should never be supported, it should never be funded” - and these were our own leaders, and the same from other communities. So we challenged them and asked them why, and one of the community leaders, he was sitting there and he said to me, “Look sister, it’s not right what’s being done because what you are doing is opening the doors for young Asian women to be leaving homes and not listening to their parents”. So I turned around at the full meeting and I said, “if these young women are going to leave, they are going to leave because things are not right.

If things are right nobody wants to leave, so I’m telling you I’ve done enough work now. But he said, “You’re only working with the women”, and I said, “Yes, that’s where I’m getting the message from”. I spoke and others spoke and that’s how we got the funding. (The black women refuge was taken over by Stonham Housing and closed a few years ago. The Angelou Centre secured funding recently to open another black women’s refuge in its place).”

People Were Really Horrible, Making ‘oo-err’ Noises

“I never used to wear a scarf. Wearing a scarf has given me a different light to not wearing a scarf. I travel by public transport, I’ve never driven. That gave me a different insight into what was going on with all the Islamophobia stuff and everything, you know. When the Manchester bombing in the Arena (took place), the name-calling on the buses! What really hurt at the time was – I was on the bus and there was another woman who was really being harassed with name-calling and the bus driver did nothing about it. So I challenged that once these people got off and I said to the driver: What you did was very very wrong. And he says, What do you mean? I said your job should have been (to protect her) - don’t tell me it isn’t because I know you have had training because we’ve talked to NEXUS about it and we’ve delivered training.

So I will take the bus number and the route that you’re on and I will inform my manager about this because you put that woman at further risk. And he said, How? He was really horrible. And some people were quiet and some people were really horrible on the bus, making ‘oo-eer’ noises, you know. (And) then you are worried about your own safety, thinking My God! They are going to follow me now, your heart’s pumping away. I got off and I did talk about it and everything”.

QUEERING FEMINISM

Born middle class, middle child, in the middle.
My political journey begins patriarchy, polarised gender,
men the enemy within and without.
Oppositional tensions and pulling dilemmas.
My personal is political, professional but
whose and how?
Feminism, Working with Girls a woman's
journey of identity
Influenced by women, incidents, chances
Changing colours, unions and outings.
Gender bending, blurring boundaries,
smudging spaces,
Only spaces, lonely constricted spaces.
Deconstructing gender, class, cultured concepts;
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

Does identity restrict, label, leave outsiders?
'In' or 'out', hokey kokey
Queer shakes it all about.
Puts sex in sexuality and unpicking masculinity;
Politics of pleasure – too personally political?
Are lesbians still showing? Is identity 'invisible'?
He thought: Foucault, Weeks and Kirsch
She feels: Kitzinger, hooks and me.
Queer debating, asking questions, thinning
lived experiences,
Queering the way we do things around here.
So has Feminism already Queeried?
Then is Queer already feminist? Mmm?

Frankie Williams

QUESTIONING

I am tangled. I am complicated. I ask myself every day; who am I? Trying to place myself in a world of extraordinary people who make an impact just by existing. Every decision I have ever made is me, but who is me?

Internalised power struggles. Constant evaluations and checking myself. Am I being true to myself? Is this authentic? Is this me? There is shame attached to being me, shame that I have built over the years that underpins all my experiences. I silence myself. I realise that I've silenced myself and I begin again. Why is so much of my identity and self-worth dependant on knowing myself and being true to myself?

These questions are ones that I have always asked myself. Now they have a different tone. Something has shifted. There is a sense of urgency to these questions. To these answers. As if I am accountable to anybody else but myself.

I am a lesbian. I am queer. I know it but still I question it. Is existing just enough right now? How do I own my truth? My sexuality is inherently bound up in my identity. I am a graduate, I am twenty-three, I am jobless, back where I was when I was eighteen. Progress has happened but why do I feel further away from knowing who I am?

I see other lesbians and they know themselves. They own themselves. They live and breathe confidence and power. The world was not built for them, yet they pushed through and built it for themselves. They took their feminine identity and made it their own instead of yielding to social standards and the patriarchy. They rejected. They fought. They won. Their reward is a powerful, true and unquestioning existence.

Did these women feel the same way that I do now? Do they continue to question their truth even after they knew what their truth was?

Self-defining. Self-exploring.

I'm reimagining what it means to be me. Leaving the path that I currently walk, exploring the undergrowth. Out of my control but within my reach. I am pulled onto a different path. I'm going the right way. I know it.

For now, I will allow myself to question. I will continue to set myself free.

What part of me do I explore next? Or do I not explore at all? Just live. It's not that deep.

I'm tangled. I'm complicated. Always learning.
Always unlearning. Always growing. I'm questioning.

Bethan Sproat

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

I never knew what to do with me voice. It always seemed like nobody cared about my opinions; my views.

I didn't know what to do.

Everyday, I would walk around school with my mouth shut and head down, petrified about the thought of having to speak. I just pretended to ignore the insults that were thrown at me.

Silence was my only friend.

GIRL KIND

Girl-Kind North East works with girls aged 12 – 16 across the region to support them as they turn their experiences, thoughts and ideas about growing up as a girl in the North East into creative interventions showcased at an International Day of the Girl celebration.

We founded Girl-Kind in 2017 as a response to negative representations of girls that pervade the mainstream media, while rarely hearing from young women themselves. The project, held annually, involves a series of workshops in schools which start with the question: what are the challenges and opportunities of growing up as a girl in the north-east of England?

Nothing is off-limits for the girls to talk about and creatively convey at the celebration. Every year a new set of girls explore a host of themes, producing insightful reflections on the things that matter in their everyday lives.

Slowly, I began to slip away: I was an outcast, simply something that was taking up space that others could be in.

From then on, misery encased my days, depression circled my brain like a cloud of thunder preparing to strike; I still never said a word. I remained in the shadows. However, one day, I was invited out of the shadows and into the light. I was welcomed by others who had also completed their own journey and made their voices heard.

Now it was my turn to do the very same. I had to embark on a journey of confidence and self belief.

Day by day, I noticed that I was changing. I wasn't afraid anymore. I would speak; I would laugh. The dark abyss of sadness I was trapped in had disappeared and was replaced by rainbows of happiness and joy.

I was no longer a shadow. In fact, I was the opposite: I was a bright light and guess what? I can only keep getting brighter.

Beth Hargreaves

A recurring theme has been the many injustices surrounding menstruation; lack of support and resources, dismissal and disgust from boys, and not taken seriously by adults. The picture below, created by one group who called themselves 'Fight like a girl', is a typical example of how clearly they are able to express their sense of unfairness.

Another group, who called themselves 'Sisterhood', wanted to make sure that girls always had access to sanitary protection if they were in need. They made colourful goody bags with tampons and towels, motivational quotes, sweets and other goodies to give out during the celebration event. Guests and other girls were so happy to go home laden with these period party bags.

These two examples characterise the articulate way the girls conveyed the mundane violence of being a girl, their righteous sense of injustice and the strength and care of their response to these experiences.

Dr Sarah Ralph, Senior Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Northumbria University

Dr Sarah Winkler-Reid, Lecturer in Social Anthropology at Newcastle University



FREELANCING

When I began my career in the arts and cultural sector, I was encouraged to say 'yes to everything' from so many industry professionals and struggled to rebel against this.

Within the first 3 months of a career in freelancing, it felt like the complete norm to be working 7 days a week, which I found completely exhausting. But, I was determined to make a name for myself within a pathway I loved (contemporary dance), without getting stuck in the motions of struggling to find work. There was something about the hustle of the freelance lifestyle (which I feel is rather common for my generation today) that really resonated with me having always been a very active person. However my intuition signalled that it wasn't a healthy state to continue such manner.

After around 6 months of freelancing and developing a wider skillset in dance education and communications, a 30 hour per week contract surfaced at a company I wanted to work at for years, so I made the decision to move further south. Initially, I thought that having a part time contract would give

me a little more work- life balance which in the beginning, it did. I worked four days a week contracted and 1 day a week freelance. It also allowed me to have two days off (which was bliss compared to the previous 6 months of freelancing), afford a place of my own and receive a sustainable income each month. But as time progressed my part time contract required me to work over my normal hours and I began to feel more lonely and homesick. So I started to search for opportunity as a distraction from stress and to fund more regular train tickets home.

Unfortunately, my freelance work during certain seasons would decline and I had gone from being handed opportunities to having to build new relationships with people I had no network with. Of course this was a consequence of re-locating. However I felt in order to progress that I needed to move to a city in which more than one salaried job (within the creative industries) was on offer.

Luckily, I met some incredible women who signposted me to a yoga company who valued my time and were flexible with the work they could give me, as my part time contract required me to work weekends and some evenings. From then, I successfully started to build more resilience in applying for freelance jobs in other organisations.

However, during this time I became extremely poorly and my mental and emotional health really began to suffer. My contracted employment suddenly came to an end, leaving me with no option but to move back home, which in hindsight couldn't have come at a better time. Although it was disappointing having to leave a place where I had finally begun to find my feet, I couldn't have been more grateful to have time to re-consider the pathway I was going down and put my time in the south to rest.

After some well needed professional and personal support from trusted networks, gaining my old job and some freelance work back, as well as a month of self-care, I made the decision to commence a Master's programme to broaden my understanding of creative enterprises, the management of creativity and what freelancing in today's media and culture means for my generation moving forward.

After feeling so lost and low when I first moved back home, it's recently dawned on me the importance of caring for the whole of one's self whilst pursuing a freelance career. My time to reconsider pathways and support from so many people who continue to empower me has allowed me to develop a recognised worth for myself and has encouraged me to use my voice, to continue a resilient and robust career in an ever changing creative sector.

Reflecting on this time building a career within the arts and cultural industries, although I do believe that you learn from experience, I would have most definitely safeguarded my health by being more honest and open with people who could support me in the trauma I was experiencing. Therefore I action that those considering a freelance career in today's climate, firstly consider themselves to be able to support others in a somewhat demanding culture.

Pippa Kyle

RADICALS IN BLUE



It was Saturday 24th February 1990, and as a 16-year-old Ranger Guide I found myself in full Ranger Uniform on a coach heading from my sleepy Northamptonshire market town to London for the Thinking Day Service at Westminster Central Hall. Thinking Day is the biggest day in the Girlguiding calendar. The certainty of my younger teenage years was fading, and the anxieties of my older teenage years were growing. The journey gave me plenty of time to ponder: whilst being a Ranger enabled me to rebel against the conformities of rebellious adolescence, surely I was still conforming by being a Ranger? How could I be an individual in a uniformed organisation? As a newly identified atheist, how could I fulfil the part of the Guide promise I had made “to love my god”?

Whilst I was in deep thought about my future as a Ranger, there were very vocal debates going on around me about the future of the Girl Guide Association, as the Scouts had just announced they were going to allow girls in to all sections. There were the pessimists arguing it was the death knell for Girlguiding, the optimists saying it wouldn't be a problem, the pragmatists acknowledging Girlguiding always evolved to meet the needs of its members. Guiders with facts at their fingertips were hypothesising that Scouts had made this move because their membership was shrinking, but they felt Girlguiding membership was thriving and believed there were more Girlguiding members than Scouts.

That day in 1990 held a number of firsts for me; it was the first time I had travelled to London without family; as I walked through swaths of women in Guide Uniforms and thought about sisters in Girlguiding across the world, it was the first time I understood that I was truly part of the largest female organisation in the world, and I was starting to realise the impact such an organisation might have upon a patriarchal establishment. As badges were swapped, and friendships formed, I felt a female solidarity without having my individuality squashed.

I'm pleased to say that despite my teenage angst, and Scouting inviting girls into its fold, nearly 30 years later I am still very much part of a flourishing girl-only Guide Association. And what an exciting 30 years of development it has been, on a personal and national level.

Personally, Girlguiding is embedded in who I am. I no longer feel a hypocrite after the promise change in Sept 2013, “I promise to be true to myself and develop my beliefs”. Whilst Girlguiding has always been welcoming to all theists, this wonderful change in wording can be embraced by all theologies and none. I was awarded a place on a Girlguiding Overseas Linked with Development (GOLD) project in Bangladesh in 2003. During this life-changing experience I found out how Girlguiding can empower women to provide support and help in situations where primary health care and education opportunities are so limited. I have held my adult leadership certificate for 20 years now and thoroughly enjoy providing girls with a safe space for an hour and a half a week where they can explore all aspects of womanhood in a fun female-only environment.

In the 1990s Girlguiding worked with Jeff Banks to radically redesign the uniforms for all sections. In 1994 the Girl Guide Association was a pioneer in rebranding and began calling itself The Guide Association. In 2002, The Guide Association led in rebranding again by reverting back to Girlguiding UK, as they wanted to “put gender back into The Guide Association's activities”. Girl centred activities have returned with full force. Girlguiding have surveyed Girls Attitudes since 2009, and made sure the results are published, influencing Parliament.

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE SHOULD ROCK THE BOAT

In 2013 Girlguiding added its voice to a successful campaign to end the Sun's Page Three. More recently the Girlguiding Advocacy Panel condemned Daily Mail's “Never Mind Brexit, who won Legs-it” headline. Girlguiding's new programme, launched last year, is challenging girls to consider what it is to be a woman in today's society.

Six themes now run through all sections of Girlguiding: “express myself”; “be well”; “know myself”; “skills for my future”; “have adventures” and “take action”. Girlguiding now offers 72 badges for the girls, including an Aviation Badge, a Space Badge, a Saver Badge, and a Digital Badge. It works with major organisations across the UK to deliver these. This huge range of choice ties up nicely with the recruitment campaign “A woman's place is wherever she wants it to be”.

Clearly Society still needs to provide safe female-only environments, as demonstrated by the ever-increasing Girlguiding membership which currently stands at 501,509 (2017). There is also a requirement for mixed environments, as the Scout movement is now seeing an increase in numbers from 390,292 (2010) to 475,294 (2017), with girls making up nearly three quarters of new Scouts. As a result of Lord Baden Powell being asked in 1910 whether there was “Something for the girls?” Girlguiding was formed. It is now boys who lack a single sex environment to grow in. Perhaps they should follow where Girlguiding leads?

Dr Emma Bowers
(Guider of 4th Monkseaton Guide Unit)
Ann Elliot
(Archivist, Girlguiding North Tyneside)

CYCLES

Hello Darkness, my Old friend
I'm running on the female clock again
Period has caught me in his grip,
If it sees me he just laughs
If he has you, you will scream
He's forever running back to me
How I wish you weren't in me

Hello Darkness, my Old friend
I saw you on my friend's bed,
The embarrassment she went through,
All went back to you,
The pain she went through.
I'm dreading when you come to me
I'll guess I'll be seeing you soon.

Hello Darkness, my Old friend
How I wish for your existence to end
With my life you like to play
I'll see you in duration of 28 days
The pain, the mystery, the gloomy blood
Shame, confusion, all alone I'm shook
The life I want to live you took.

Hello Darkness, my Old Friend
They say it means I'm growing up
It stinks, its hurts, its rough.
Relief when the darkness finishes
The spell over my body and my mind gone
Guess I will be seeing you next month!!

Young Women's Film Academy
Saturday Club



NATURE

OR

NURTURE

If I were an enzyme, what would I catalyze?

The replication of a gene for colour in your eyes,

Or if I were a lipid, which function would I take?

A phospholipid in your membrane fluid and mosaic,

Or if a carbohydrate, which molecule to be?

The double sugar sucrose for the sweetest memory,

Biology my home from home, So long,

Farewell sweet chromosome.

Jan Thompson

WOMEN ON TYNESIDE

From April 16th 1945, aged 14, to January 1949,
I served an apprenticeship as a Lady Tracer
(no male tracers).

To explain the craft of tracing – it was to copy onto specially treated, extremely fine, see-through linen, plans of marine engineering parts which had been prepared by draughtsmen. This was at the Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Co. Ltd., on the River Tyne, where ships engines were made.

Special instruments were used, e.g. a drawing pen used with set squares for drawing straight lines, spring bows to describe tiny circles, compasses of different sizes for larger circles and trammels for extra large circles, all had to be filled with Indian ink using a pen with a nib; this pen was used to hand print the headings of each view of the plan, i.e. plan, front elevation and side elevation. The title was centred at the bottom using stencil plates and a stencil pen which also was filled with Indian ink. Paper Blue Prints were made from the Tracers' copies.

Perfection was required of the Tracer's work' if any work was deemed unsatisfactory by the Head Tracer (female), it was the apprentices' job to take it to the wash-room and wash all 'traces'! of ink and the special blue stiffening substance out of it, then dried. Knuckles were red-raw after this job. The now fine white linen was cut up to be pinned to our tracing tables to be used as ink rags.

In 1949 I took time off for marriage and the rearing of four children as it was still expected that women left work to look after their families.

In the late 1960's I obtained a job at British Ship Research Association, B.S.R.A., (now British Marine Technology), Wallsend on Tyne, where methods and instruments had not changed very much. Our work was then photocopied.

Early in the 1970's I moved over to C.A. Parsons (later N.E.I. Parsons), Heaton where ships' turbines were made. Here, instead of tracing linen, stiff transparent plastic was used, which had to be cut to the required size from the roll.



Some instruments were different, up-graded; pens, similar to fountain pens but with different sized tubular nozzles instead of nibs had to be filled with drawing ink and used for drawing lines and stencilling titles.

But 'here's the rub' – in 1981 the COMPUTER literally took over my job; Draughtsmen were first to use them, Tracers only needed only to do alterations to old work. The younger females were trained in the use of computers. I was given notice to leave and a computer was placed on my work-table.

It was "bye bye Freda Booth, you are no longer needed".

Freda Booth

1980'S O'-LEVELS, THE FINAL FRONTIER.

On a Monday morning, in the Summer of 1980, I started work for a local bank. It was my sixteenth birthday, and I felt so very grown up, working for the Bank with O'-levels under my belt. I was sporting smart new work clothes, funded with £60 courtesy of the DHSS.

A few friends stayed on into sixth form, but I was done with my crumbling High School in Wallsend. Anything was possible, because Mrs Thatcher said so, and, apparently high wages were abundant. My dad also said so, and it was made clear to me that a good career didn't require any A'-levels or a degree. Banks paid extremely well, so on subsequent paydays I availed myself of: Chanel No. 5; expensive clothes; a holiday abroad; a sheepskin coat; a car; and a curly perm. The boys who stayed on at school were seriously keen to meet up.

Two years earlier, when I was about fourteen, my dad became temporarily puce because I flatly refused to take night classes in short-hand and typing at technical college. "It served your mother well". My mother was the only mother, amongst all mothers whom I had encountered, who went out to work when her daughter was seven and her son was three. She also served dad's dinner promptly, at 6pm every day.

Instead of typing classes I elected to take home economics at O'-level. Dad took me to meet a home economics teacher, whose husband he knew. "Teaching cookery would be a good job for you" said dad. "Great holidays". Lee Harkins was the only boy in our home economics class. I wonder what he does now. I had aspirations to be a vet, so I also elected to take O'-level biology. Dad said "You don't need biology because you're not going to be a nurse, it doesn't pay enough".

At fifteen dad insisted that I would flourish in a bank, building society, or insurance company, because each offered great prospects. Dad took one fifth of my monthly wages from the Bank as 'board'. Mother had left home when I was eleven... perhaps due to her short-hand and typing skills.

My first Mortgage was obtained at age nineteen, which paid for a newly built house. I worked in a bank remember, so having a mortgage felt very ordinary. My friends, by now at University, were having a ball. I worked full time for four years, to find myself feeling utterly trapped by my working life, and owning further possessions suddenly seemed unimportant.

Every afternoon in the Bank, the youngest female cashier did the typing and stamped the post. The youngest male cashier, meanwhile, was trained to be lead cashier. I managed the daily typing perfectly well for four years and, after completing a business studies qualification, resigned from the Bank.

University beckoned, funded by a comfortable grant from the Education Department. Mrs Thatcher caused a 'housing boom', so I sold my house in 1989, for a profit of twenty thousand pounds and made a deposit on a marital home in Whitley Bay. I kept the house on after the marriage ended, whilst working my way up through the NHS. It was hard, working full time with two daughters aged 7 and 11, particularly when one hated every possible form of childcare.

Each consecutive promotion enabled a reduction in my working hours, to facilitate my attendance at the school gates, and bringing immense joy to both ends of my working day. By the time my girls chose their A'-level options it was practically compulsory to go to university with a student loan. By then their mother had an MSc, and subsequently became a Consultant in public health. As a consequence I have a good NHS pension to look forward to when I reach 60.

“ANYTHING WAS POSSIBLE AND, APPARENTLY, HIGH WAGES ABUNDANT.”

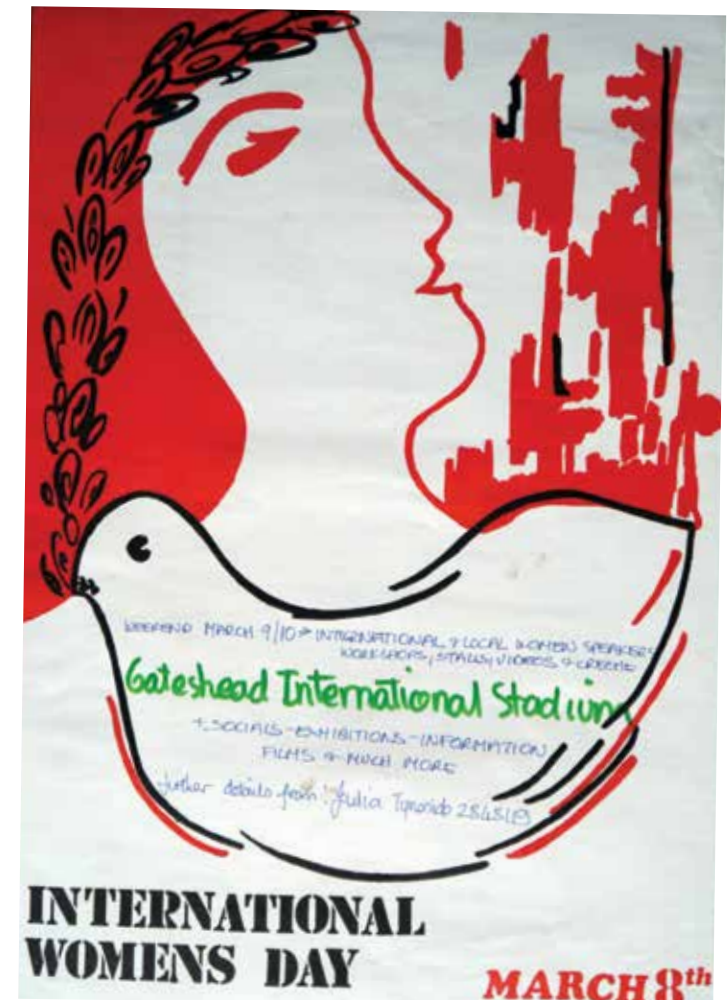


The work ethic is completely instilled in my daughters, as is the desire to stand on their own two feet, whilst doing a job that each enjoys. The decisions which my girls face seem similar to, yet so different from, mine. Aged 30 and 27 they face a world of zero hour contracts; gaps, and overlaps, between jobs; self-employment; time out to travel; and poor workplace pensions, yet they pick and choose what they do. Their networks are incredible.

If there is greater equality of employment opportunity, then this has surely been supported by a general downshift in both job security, and contract terms. Both daughters rent, perpetually work on multiple fixed-term roles, and neither has much pension provision. Their self-belief and attitudes are positive and confident, and they appear to be fearless about employment insecurity and the level of pay which they receive, whilst accepting and rejecting jobs with aplomb.

Meanwhile I plan the future with a mind to their future needs, and those of probable grand-children, as the socio-political and economic climate continues to influence my decisions. I'll leave it up to the reader to contemplate the extent to which women can extend their employment options and financial security, particularly in these times of austerity, individualism, and economic uncertainty. Looking back on my working life, I feel a deep sense of privilege, and great fortune. Did I mention that I retired at the age of 53? I did take a biology A-level, but it's probably too late to be a vet.

Jan Thompson



Credit - Penny Remfry poster collection

“A WORLD OF ZERO HOUR CONTRACTS; GAPS AND OVERLAPS BETWEEN JOBS; SELF-EMPLOYMENT; TIME OUT TO TRAVEL; AND POOR WORKPLACE PENSIONS.”

MENOPAUSE - ATTITUDES TO AND EXPERIENCES OF 'THE CHANGE' AND THE PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN TODAY.

We are all living longer; current average life expectancy for a woman is 83 compared to 55 in 1912 which means we now have more post menopausal women on the planet than ever before. Most women experience their first peri menopausal symptoms in their early to mid 40's and the average age for women to stop having periods is between

51 and 52, it can also be later. Menopause can happen earlier due to hysterectomy surgery including the removal of both ovaries, treatment for some types of cancer, some genetic or auto immune conditions or POI, premature ovarian insufficiency, some 110,000 women under 40 are currently living with POI in the U.K.

There are approximately 13 million women currently peri or post-menopausal in the UK, 75% of women will experience menopause symptoms and 25% describe their symptoms as debilitating. On average symptoms last for between 4-8 years so you might expect that in 2019 there would be some formal education or information programme available to prepare women for this time in their lives, you might think that all our GP's would be given a basic education in how to recognise and treat menopause symptoms and you might think that it would make sense to have workplace policy to support women throughout this time in their lives, as we do with maternity, but sadly in all three cases you would be mistaken.

Over the last few years women like myself have begun to ask very serious questions about the lack of information, education, advice and support available for women going through menopause as a result of our own poor experiences and becoming aware of just how many are suffering in silence. The rise and rise of social media has given us a platform to raise our concerns and campaign to call for change but also to offer support and factual evidence based advice to other women via online support groups.

I remain frustrated and amazed that a life stage that every woman will experience is not routinely taught to every GP and practice nurse during their training. For most women experiencing symptoms their GP surgery will be their first port of call.



The stereotypical view of menopause being all about hot flushes and periods stopping still pervades so when a woman presents with anxiety, disturbed sleep and difficulty concentrating it is still highly likely she will be diagnosed as depressed and despatched with anti depressants. For the majority of women the psychological symptoms of menopause will probably be the first to appear due to the way the hormone levels start to fluctuate.

In November 2015 NICE produced the very first guidelines on menopause, yes, you read that correctly, the very first. Sadly they are merely guidelines and many GP's are not aware of them and have certainly not read them. To be fair to them there are guidelines for every area of medicine but there are probably few that will affect half of the population. If Clinical Commissioning Groups throughout the country do not enforce the guidelines and the Care Quality Commission does not hold them to account the guidelines are worthless unless women read them and direct their doctors to them to ensure they receive the care they both need and deserve.

Many women say they had no idea that their symptoms were related to menopause and that's because we are never taught what those symptoms are but they can include; anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep issues, feeling tired or lethargic, feeling tense, feeling low or what you might describe as depressed, irritability, feeling angry, increased headaches or migraines, joint pain, itchy skin, dry eyes, loss of libido, urinary symptoms, vaginal symptoms, hot flushes, night sweats, changes in periods. There are many more but these are some of the most regularly reported. More information can be found via The British Menopause Society and Women's Health Concern.

The first line treatment for menopause symptoms should be HRT, Hormone Replacement Therapy; however, mention of HRT is often associated with myth and misinformation amongst the press, medical professionals and the public which can make it very difficult for a woman to make a decision. In 2002 the flawed Women's Health Initiative study resulted in many scary headlines related to an increased risk of breast cancer, this resulted in many women having their HRT immediately withdrawn by their doctors or the women themselves deciding not to continue with it. A paper released in 2017 demonstrated that the errors in the 2002 study had led to 15 years of unnecessary suffering for women.



The facts are that for most women the benefits far outweigh the risks and offer symptom control and improved bone, heart, brain and urogenital health.

Some women will choose not to use HRT and for a small number it will not be available due to a complex medical history but those women should also be offered other available options. The Nice guidelines are a useful resource for what a woman should expect which should include an onward referral to an NHS menopause clinic for those unable to consider HRT for medical reasons.

Women and the NHS simply cannot afford to keep waiting for GP education to improve; too many women are experiencing poor short and long term physical and mental health due to a woeful lack of professional knowledge. Many women have booked multiple GP appointments trying to find an answer to their debilitating symptoms and some have been referred for needless physical and mental health consultations at hospitals causing both distress to the individual and additional costs to a struggling NHS.

Menopause can have wide ranging effects on other parts of our lives including work and relationships. In a survey for Nuffield Health in 2014 25% of women had considered leaving work due to their menopause symptoms and the lack of awareness and support in the workplace; this corresponds with the 25% of women who experience debilitating symptoms. In November 2016 The Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) launched practical guidance on menopause in the workplace for both women and employers, whilst this along with a recent report commissioned for the government, menopause toolkits written for some unions and a raising of awareness in some organisations is a step in the right direction we still have a very long way to go.

Those women who do take the step of giving up their careers or leave the workplace due to a lack of support or feel they were performance managed out of the workplace face additional struggles with personal and family finances coupled with a reduction in their self confidence. For some women they come to rely on the benefits system for the very first time in their lives and struggle to get back in to the work place. Supporting women who wish to remain at work by implementing a few simple adjustments is not rocket science; employers need to recognise that menopause awareness in the workplace is a win- win situation. As an example I have supported four NHS nurses over the past few months, each of them had left their employment due to uncontrolled symptoms and a lack of workplace support. The NHS workforce is currently 77% women and the average age is 43, how many more nurses can the organisation afford to lose before it addresses this issue?

The effect of menopause can be felt and seen within families and particularly partner relationships, I have lost count of the amount of women and men that I have spoken to and worked with who, once they understand a little more about it, tell me they feel that menopause has led to the breakdown of their relationship. For a woman who doesn't understand what is happening to her it is impossible to begin to explain it to her partner.

Menopause is a feature of mid-life but it should not be something to be feared, we should be able to embrace living longer and look forward to the start of a new chapter. Having campaigned now for several years for better care and support for women it is clear that things are not changing quickly enough so we must take control and educate ourselves and encourage others to do the same. The key lies in factual, evidence based information and support and every woman deserves to have access to that to allow her to make informed choices about she navigates her menopause and the next stage of her life.

Diane Danzebrink

Diane Danzebrink is a psychotherapist and menopause expert who launched the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign in Westminster on World Menopause Day 2018 ahead of the first back bench debate.

You can find details of the campaign and a link to the petition at: www.menopausesupport.co.uk

URBAN LANDSCAPES AND SAFETY FOR WOMEN

“I’m out with a group of women friends. We get talking about walking home in the dark, on our own; how it feels, what we do. We all have our stories. The times we felt unsafe just because we’re on our own in the dark. The times we changed our routes, walking further, just to stay on the main road, where the CCTV is. The times we rehearsed in our heads the route we’ll walk, calculating risk. The times we crossed the street to avoid a man or walked faster because there’s someone behind us.”

As urbanists, and lovers of the city, architecture, places, spaces and people, we know that all those involved in designing and building places, have a huge role to play, in making our cities both beautiful and safe - something that practitioners often don’t consider.

Our professional opinions aside, in terms of fear and emotion and how a place can make us feel, we realise we do feel fearful in the city. In certain places as women, we feel vulnerable because of our gender and colour. We feel angry that we have this fear, that something has power over us to change patterns of movement, or emotional experience of a space. We feel angry at the time, energy and effort we women spend thinking and worrying about our journeys home, and at the extra work we do. Why is Reclaim the Night still needed after 42 years?

“The times we ran. The times we wore flat shoes when we know we’ll be walking home, ‘just in case’. A couple of us talk about the times we walk tall, with confidence, our heads up, calm; sometimes pretending, sometimes for real. The many times we’re asked: ‘will you be OK on your own?’. The many, many times we text our friends: ‘I’m home, all safe’. We don’t have to say we know we’ll be blamed if something bad happens to us.”
What is it that makes us feel so unsafe?

I begin to realise, that being alone in the city, or place or space, with no sound or soul, no beat in the night or day, no strangers at all to make me feel safe or like I’m in the company of friends...

I realise it is just me, walking all alone with no shield of my own to bring me comfort on my way, with no buzz or sound in the city lurks my fear of the who! and the what, the could be or could not...

Jane Jacobs argued that we need to create places that a closely knitted, smaller blocks with smaller streets, creating the hustle and bustle and opportunity for humans to interact and for buildings and people to have watchful eyes on the street. Building places that breed comfort not fear. Often is the possibility of coming across an “unfriendly face” that could cause us harm, that drives our fears.

However, it’s not just about being alone, or benefitting from passive surveillance, it’s also about the volume, diversity and mix of people. This combination feels different in different cities.

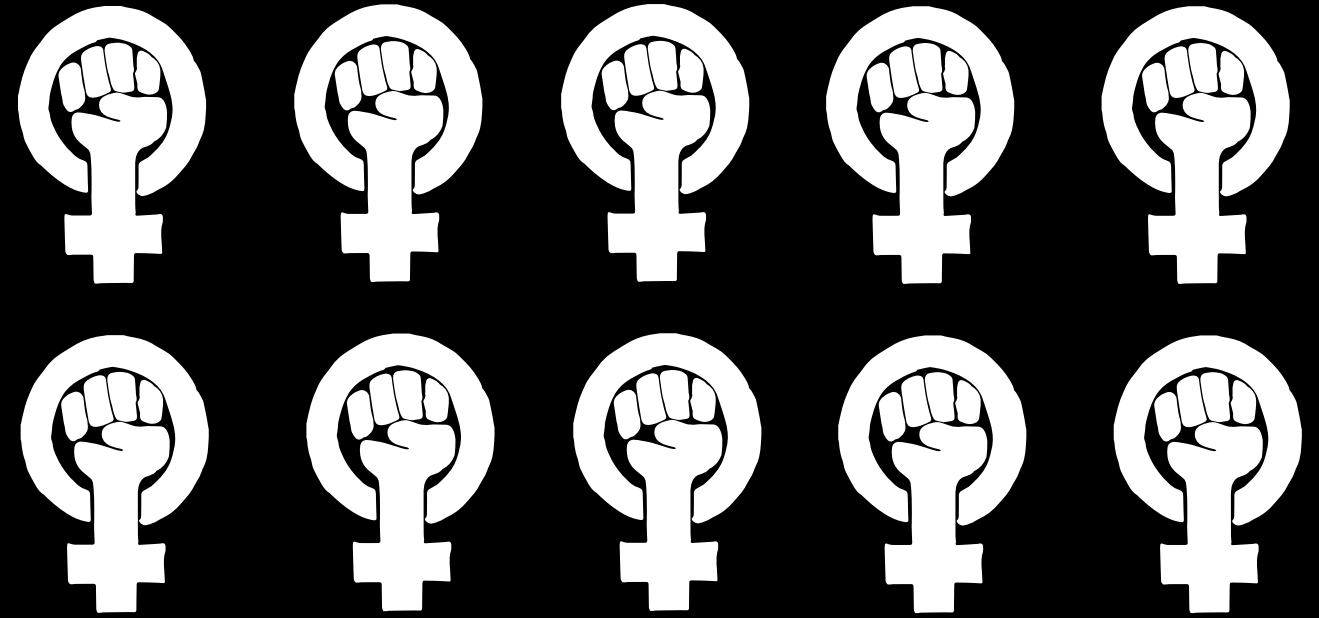
“Having lived in London, Manchester and Newcastle, I realise I feel more fear in less diverse and less populated spaces. This is despite the fact I have not necessarily received more or less threatening behaviour. The difference has been the number of people and the diversity of people that have been around me.”

The more we use our streets and the more eyes we have on the streets then the safer they will be and the safer they will feel.

“I determinedly use the city at night but perhaps not as much as I should.”

So, yes, ‘eyes on the street’ are important in curating a sense of safety, but what we really want is to feel empowered to be alone anywhere in the city.

“I think back to my 6 months travelling around Asia, having to make certain choices on where to go, or where to stay and whether to walk or take a taxi. I always carried this fear wherever I went having to have my wits about me in these wonderful new places, feeling vulnerable yet excited about the next new discovery.



I was driven towards well populated spaces although yearned to head off the beaten track and feared to do this alone.”

The look and feel of cities with over-engineered structures such as highways, huge curbs and barriers, can discourage movement and exploration and make places feel unsafe. Security features such as CCTV and defensible space can be both useful, and create a fear of crime which makes places feel more unsafe than perhaps they actually are.

“I think about the role engineers have played in designing for themselves no design, no consideration for safety of the users. Instead, isolating and slicing up cities like Manila and Birmingham even Newcastle. With underground poorly lit walkways serving out fear not function.”

Our collective professional experience of working in the urban landscape has taught us that there are range of issues that contribute to poorly designed spaces. This is our call for change to urban practitioners to build safe spaces for women:

- **Human centred design - co-creation and co-design with a range of users**
- **Feelings and emotions in a place – design with feelings in mind**
- **Moving and connecting places – think about how people move through places**
- **Empowering women to lead placemaking – addressing the male dominance of designing the urban environment**

“The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers”. (Jane Jacobs)

This is what we all should and want to expect from wherever we live.

I call to the city that I love, give me comfort and protection and the shield I so crave from the who and the what, the could be and the could not..

Make these places of fear full of light, the paths, and the trees, the buildings and shops, the streets and the squares, the alleys and lanes, the lights and the sounds, make them friendly as can be, just like in the company of good friends, so I can wander away through this city of mine feeling happy and strong with no fear in my mind...

If you would like to get involved in Urbanistas NE, a group of like-minded women who meet to share our thoughts and passion for all things urban; architecture, places, spaces and people, drop us an email at

urbanistasne@gmail.com

These are our voices, ideas and personal experiences we speak determinedly, but we think it is important to acknowledge that we by no means speak for all women.

Urbanistas North East
(Rozie Akram, Carol Botten, Stephanie Cole, Victoria Keen, Claire Margetts, Cathy Russell)

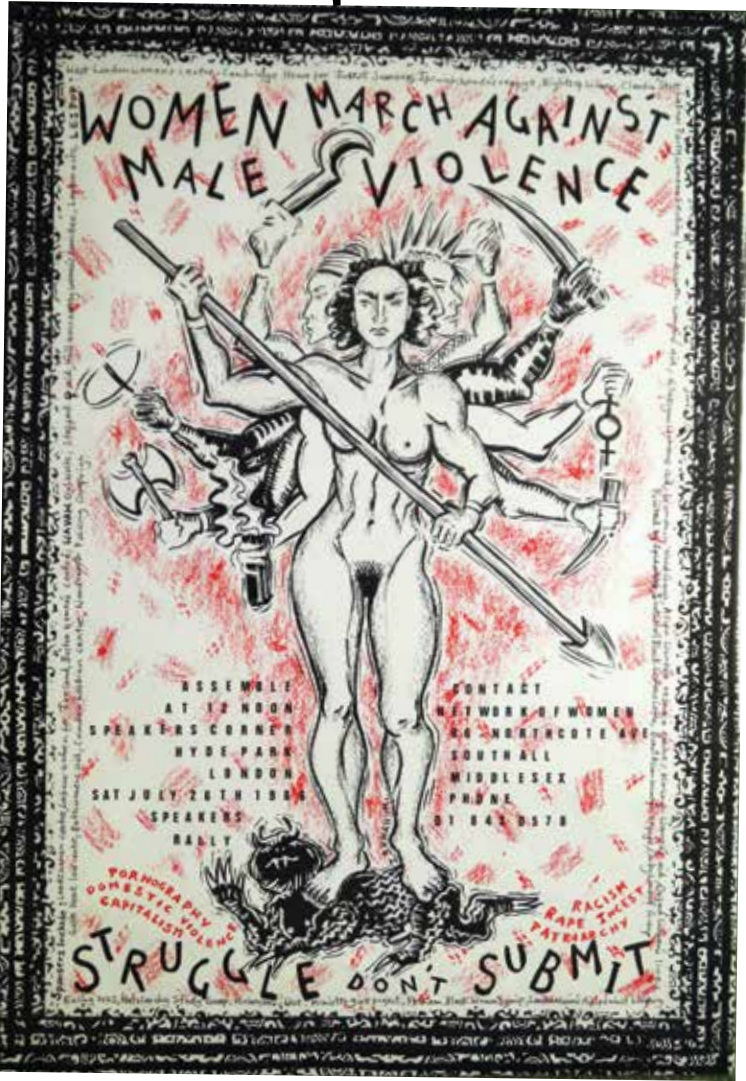
A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORK AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

In the 30-odd years I've been involved in work around violence against women and girls (VAWG), I've seen a lot of change. At school and with friends, I was usually a lone feminist voice speaking out about sexist attitudes and behaviours; fortunately I had a trio of sisters to learn from and bolster me and my feminism. University was a time to learn and understand more about the extent of men's domination and women's oppression. Studying domestic violence particularly helped me as I tried to make sense of the prevailing gender regime.

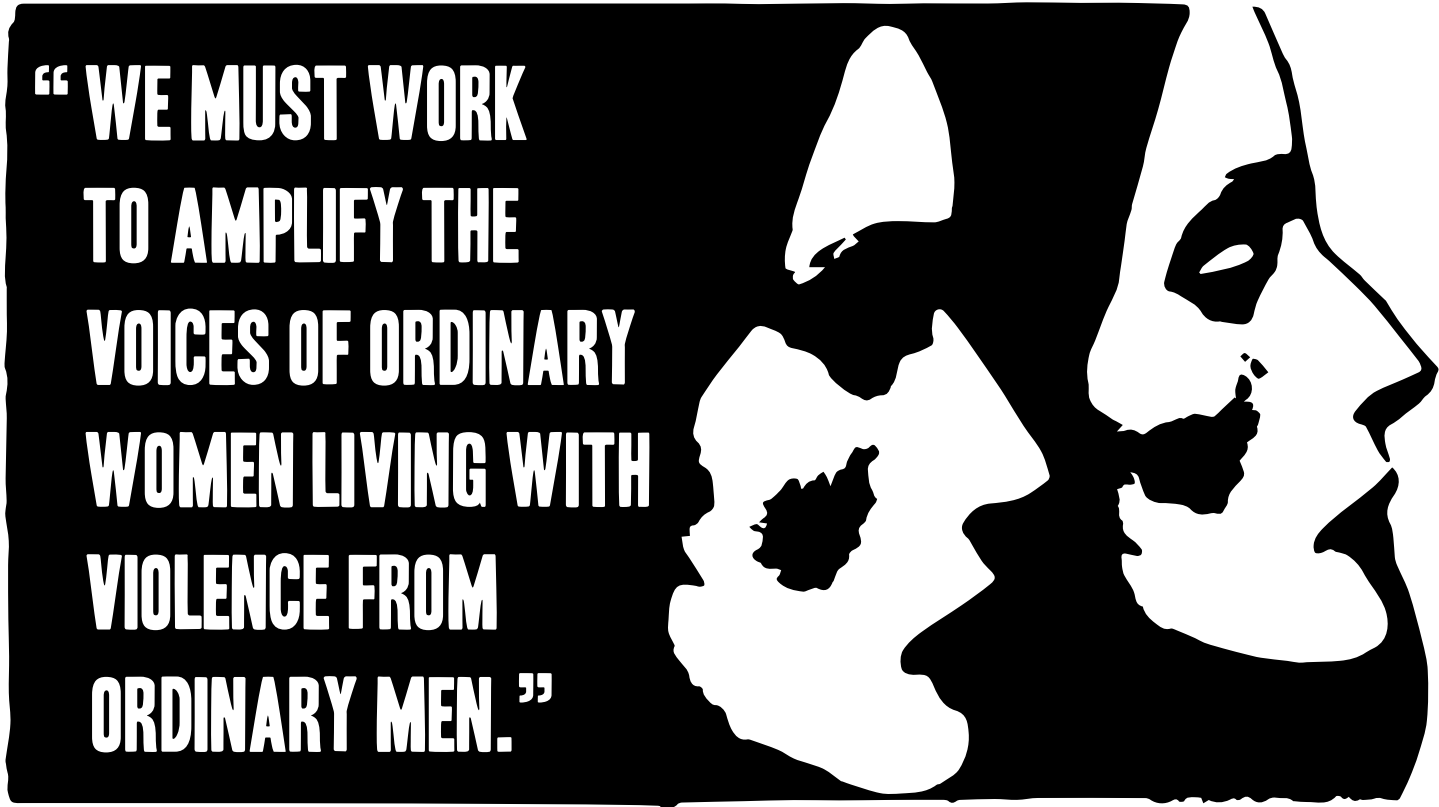
Immediately after University, in 1991-1994, I was lucky enough to work with some wonderful academics - Rebecca and Russell Dobash and Kate Cavanagh. Together we conducted an evaluation of the first perpetrators' programmes to emerge in the UK - CHANGE in Stirling, and LDVPP (Lothian Domestic Violence Probation Programme) in Edinburgh. Based on the Duluth module from Minnesota, US, perpetrators' programmes were based on a feminist, cognitive-behavioural approach and attendance was compulsory, as part of a court sentence. Within the UK domestic violence movement, perpetrators' programmes were hugely controversial.

Scottish Women's Aid were sceptical about the fresh interest in work with perpetrators at a time when they struggled on very limited funding to provide the services women and children needed so badly. And that scepticism extended to the people involved in work with perpetrators, despite Becky, Russell and Kate's great track record of feminist research, with their Scottish-based research for the brilliantly titled book, Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy.

At the same time as negotiating ambivalence - at best; hostility, at worst - from other feminists, we were also regularly fielding the familiar, tedious question 'what about men?'. Every time I spoke in public about domestic violence, people who knew little about it would ask about men - and they weren't asking about what we were doing about men as perpetrators. No, they were suggesting we were ignoring men as victims of intimate partner violence. In that way, nothing much has changed. There's still a level of disbelief that women don't perpetrate violence in the same ways and to the same extent that men do. Through the 80s and 90s, with both Thatcher and Blair, we were fed the lies that 'we're all equal now', 'all that's holding you back is your own ambition', so for ill-informed people it's hard to believe that in terms of intimate partner abuse, we are still very definitely unequal. [I could give a bit of detail and info about the different experiences of women and men here, if you think it's necessary].



Credit - Penny Remfry poster collection



Back in the 1980s and 90s a major part of the struggle around Intimate partner violence was to simply get it acknowledged as a significant social problem, a lived reality for so many women, and something that the state should pay attention to. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, it was communicated that those of us who spoke out about it were fanatics, biased, a bit unhinged. Sara Ahmed's idea of 'feminist killjoy' poignantly portrays that sense that we were deemed to be speaking out of turn, spoiling the fun, bringing into public things best kept hidden away. The popular stereotypes of the feminist were rolled out - we were 'angry', 'ugly', 'hairy-legged', 'man-hating' 'lesbians'. Well some of us were and we weren't going to let those sad old 'accusations' hold us back from standing up against women's oppression.

And we were not lone voices. In the early 1990s, in Edinburgh the Zero Tolerance campaign was launched. Originally conceived by Evelyn Gillan, Campaigns Officer for Edinburgh District Council Women's Unit and her colleague Susan Hart., the campaign comprised of ground-breaking, innovative posters around Edinburgh declaring that violence against women was never acceptable. Living in Edinburgh at that time, it felt profoundly validating to see posters on Edinburgh's Princes Street that demanded that the public, politicians and the legal profession confront their own prejudices about men's violence against women and take responsibility for eradicating it.

Campaigns such as Zero Tolerance and all the other activist work by so many women has paid off. While the rates of Intimate partner violence seem to have remained steady - still on average, 2 women a week are killed by partners or ex-partners - what has changed is the level of support available for women. Many key agencies have improved their practices - domestic abuse policies are more routine and more effective - and are more often held to account when they fail.

At the same time, women are speaking out, individually and as part of campaigns, about the many ways in which men control women through violence. Coercive control is now recognised as a crime. The #MeToo campaign has exposed men's routine sexual abuse and violence. Sexual harassment on the street and at work has been revealed as part of 'Everyday Sexism'. In 2019, it seems as if we are in the midst of a new global awareness and conversation about men's violence and abuse towards women.

While women, as individual victims and as activists, have always spoken out about men's violence, they are being listened to in a way that's novel; in fact, in a way that's astonishing to those of us who've have borne witness to decades of attempts to bring attention to men's violence against women.

But the long history of feminist attention to violence against women cautions us against believing that we are now on an inevitable road to a world free of men's violence. While stories of men's violence are circulating in a way they never have before, we have to consider which stories are being heard. There's been a lot of coverage of the abuse perpetrated by elite men in senior positions, in 'celebrity' worlds, and experienced by white women in their circles. These are men who've been subject to very little restraint, because of their socio-economic and cultural position. They haven't been policed in the way that working class, Black and other marginalised men have been and it's refreshing to see them finally brought to justice. But there is a danger that sexual abuse comes to be reconceptualised as something elite men do to women in their circles.

**THERE WILL BE NO
WOMEN'S LIBERATION**

**WITHOUT
REVOLUTION**



**THERE WILL BE NO
REVOLUTION
WITHOUT
WOMEN'S LIBERATION**

Child sexual abuse has been conceptualised as 'paedophilia', a problem of 'sex offending' by men who seek out and groom 'vulnerable' victims, rather than as a problem of ordinary men who abuse their daughters, nieces, family friends. Of course, child sexual abuse is both, but the way it has been 'framed' in dominant narratives means some victims, some perpetrators and some theoretical explanations get ignored. In the fresh attention to violence by elite men, we must work to amplify the voices of both women victims in these celebrity circles and ordinary women living with violence from ordinary men who are their partners, fathers, brothers and 'friends'.

Just as women are finding new voice - and encountering new ears that are listening - we are also confronted by the backlash. Men's Rights Activists have been coordinating attacks against feminists and feminism for several years. They are active on social media, where women, Black and minority ethnic people and people of marginalised sexualities receive disproportionate levels of abuse. They find support amongst high profile men such as Donald Trump, current US President, a self-proclaimed sexual assaulter who's been accused of sexual assault by many women.

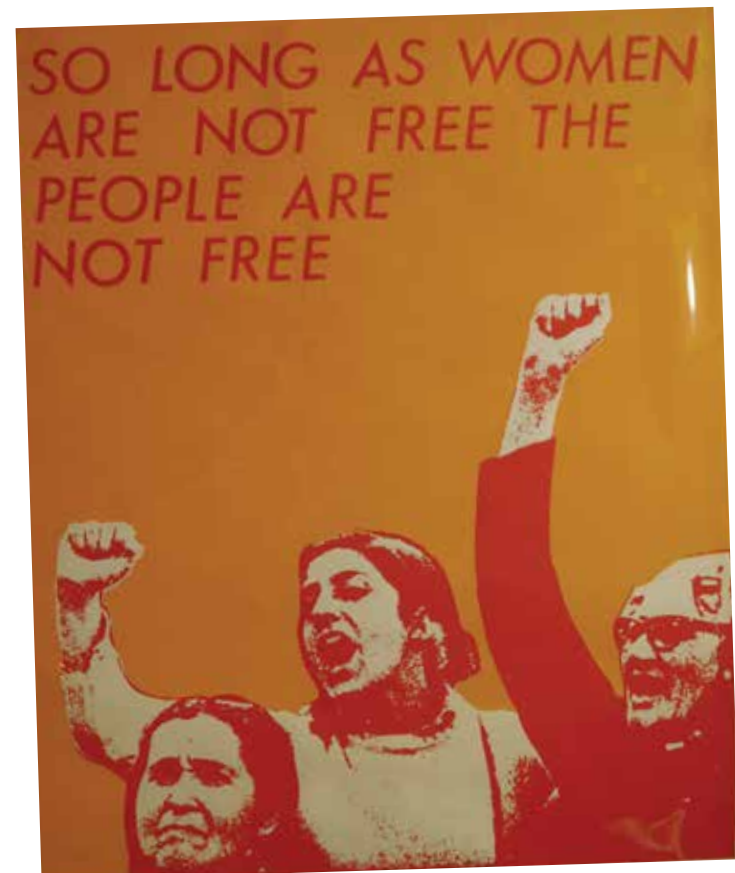
His support of another high profile man - Brett Kavanaugh, whom he nominated to the US Supreme Court - when Kavanaugh was accused of rape by Professor Christine Blasey Ford (and sexual misconduct by two other women) marked a new low. Even as feminism seems to make progress when stories about men's violence are finally being heard, it is also attacked by some of the most powerful men on the planet, whose social, cultural and political influence is profound.

In the time I've been involved in research and activism about VAW, I've seen that women have changed.

We are voicing our anger about men's violence more loudly, more consistently, through our individual voices and as part of activist organisations and campaigns. We've made services for women who are victimised by men part of the landscape of Britain, albeit they are too often inadequately funded. We have pressed for - and achieved - improvements in state and social responses. I see these differences reflected back to me by my students in the university classroom; they are far more familiar with the topic and the politics of VAWG than their counterparts were 10 years ago.

While women have achieved so much in our struggle against men's violence, what seems to be relatively untouched are men who use violence. The rates of lethal and non-lethal violence stubbornly remain at fairly steady levels. Regardless of wider social changes which mean there is lower tolerance of explicitly sexist attitudes condoning violence, the same proportions of men use violence and abuse to control and dominate women. Perpetrators' programmes can make a meaningful positive difference to the men and women affected by them, but they have not brought about the widespread change we hoped for. However, the current public conversation about VAWG means men's sexist behaviours - in the bedroom, the boardroom, the bus, the street, the workplace and the bar - are being challenged. Some men are rising to that challenge and aspiring to a different kind of masculinity. But far too many men remain untouched, perhaps even further entrenched in their hegemonic masculinity. The challenge for the movement against VAWG is to finish the project of social, political, economic and cultural transformation we set out to achieve. We must continue to imagine a future free of men's domination and strive to build that future.

Ruth Lewis



Credit - See Red Women's Workshop