Women’s Liberation group night activity

Discussion

Have a look at some typical women’s or men’s magazines (whatever you think is appropriate) as a starting point for discussion about female objectification and stereotypical ideals of beauty. Here are questions they could think about...

How are women represented? How are men represented in relation to women?

How are the adverts trying to sell their products? Who are they aimed at?

Who’s making money from these images? Who’s making the most money? Who owns the magazine?

What is objectification? Do you think the women in the magazine are being objectified?

What are the articles trying to say? How do the pictures relate to the articles? Are the pictures relevant?

What ideas of beauty are being shown? Do you think lots of different ideas of beauty are being shown? Do you think women should aspire to this? Do you think it’s right that a lot of women do?

Do you think this is liberating?

Activity

Form an imaginary ‘percentage line’ with 0 at one end and 100 at the other and read out the questions below, getting them to stand at the place on the line where they think the correct answer is. (Some of the statistics are only rough estimates, but are still useful to get them thinking about global inequalities between men and women)

Roughly, what percentage...

- Of the population are women? - 50%
- Of the world’s wages do women earn? - 10%
- Of the world’s property do women own? - 1%
- Is the difference in pay between men and women in UK? - 17%
- Of MPs are women? - 18%
- Of reported rape cases lead to conviction? – 6%
- Of cosmetic surgery is carried out on women in the UK? – 89%
- Of women in the UK is it estimated will experience some form of domestic violence in their lifetime? – 25%

Women’s Movements in history - role plays

For this you will need the role play cards on the next page.

This is an activity to highlight the role of women in key social movements throughout the 19th and 20th Century.

Split them into groups (which ever size groups you think would work best) and give a role play card with a description of the different events to each group. Ask them to create a short role play of the event and have them display it to the rest of the group.

At one Venturer night where we did this activity, we split them into two groups. One group had someone narrating from the role play card about the suffragettes whilst the rest acted out what was being said, and the other group chose to act out the Rosa Parks scene with an improvised script, with one person at the end explaining the significance of the event and the importance of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the civil rights movement.
Role Play Cards for “Women’s Movement in History”

Women in the Civil Rights movement

In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to obey the bus driver’s orders that she give up her seat to make room for a white passenger. Her action was not the first of its kind. Irene Morgan in 1946, and Sarah Louise Keys in 1955, had previously won court rulings in the area of interstate bus travel. Nine months before Parks refused to give up her seat, 15-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to move from her seat on the same bus system. But unlike these previous individual actions of civil disobedience, Parks' action sparked a mass boycott of buses in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks was one of very few female civil rights activists who are widely known, even though women were pivotal in the battles for racial equality at the time.

Dagenham 1968

In 1968 300 women sewing machinists from Ford's Dagenham plant went on strike for a total of 3 weeks, resulting in a halt to all car production. It was in protest against plans to reduce their pay by 15%, so that they would be getting paid significantly less than men doing similar jobs at the plant. In the end their wages were still cut by 8%, however, their actions paved the way for more protests and eventually the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970.

Greenham Common 1981

5th September 1981, the Welsh group “Women for Life on Earth” arrived on Greenham Common, Berkshire, England. They marched from Cardiff with the intention of challenging, by debate, the decision to site 96 Cruise nuclear missiles there. On arrival they delivered a letter to the Base Commander which among other things stated ‘We fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life’.
Women at Rosenstraβe, Belin

This was a non-violent protest in Rosentraβe (“Rose Street”) in Berlin in February and March 1943, carried out by the non-Jewish wives and relatives of Jewish men who had been arrested for deportation. The protests escalated until the men were released. It was a significant instance of opposition to the events of the holocaust and was the only successful, public non-violent protest against deportations.

“Well behaved women seldom make history”

In 1898 Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women’s Social and Political Union, an all-women suffrage organisation dedicated to “deeds, not words”. The group was separate from – and often in opposition to – political parties. They quickly became infamous when members smashed windows and assaulted police officers. Pankhurst, her daughters, and other WSPU activists were sentenced to repeated prison sentences, where they staged hunger strikes to secure better conditions. The government at the time didn’t want the women to become martyrs from the hunger strikes, so released them until they recovered only to arrest them again, beginning a cycle of ‘cat and mouse’, as it was called at the time. The right for all women over 21 to vote in the UK was not given until 1928.
Feminist History Time Line

This is a useful activity to explore the history of feminism. You can ask your group to put the cards in order of what happened, each card they pick up should be read out and then you can discuss the ideas about each stage of feminism.

To make it more fun you can ask people to design a logo or crest for each stage of feminism. The logo should represent the essence of the time period and can be as creative as you want. Stick the logos up around the wall.

1. **Protofeminism** (15th Century)

   Describes the period when people discussed women's issues before existence of the feminist movement. Important woman who marked this period is Christine de Pizan, an Italian writer and the first woman to write about the relation of the sexes, and the author of Epitre au Dieu d'Amour (Epistle to the God of Love). In her work she shows the importance of women's past contributions to society. She also tried to teach women of all estates how to fight the growth of misogyny.

   Some scholars, however, criticize the use of this term and argue that it diminishes the importance of earlier contributions, while others argue that feminism does not have a single, linear history as implied by terms such as protofeminist or postfeminist.

2. **The Age of Enlightenment** (18th Century)

   Was marked by secular intellectual reasoning, and a blossoming of philosophical writing. Many Enlightenment philosophers defended the rights of women. Jeremy Bentham (1781) spoke for a complete equality between sexes including the right to vote and to participate in the government, and opposed the strongly different sexual moral standards for women and men.

   Marquis de Condorcet (1790) was a fierce defender of human rights, including the equality of women and the abolition of slavery, already in the 1780s. He also advocated women's suffrage for the new government.

   Mary Wollstonecraft published one of the first feminist treatises, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), in which she advocated the social and moral equality of the sexes, extending the work of her 1790 pamphlet, A Vindication of the Rights of Man. Her later unfinished work "Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman" earned her considerable criticism as she discussed women's sexual desires. Wollstonecraft is regarded as the grandmother of British feminism and her ideas shaped the thinking of the suffragettes, who campaigned for the women's vote.
2. **First-wave feminism** (19th/20th Century)

Refers to a period of feminist activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries especially in Europe and the Anglosphere. It is focused primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage, the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards. The fight for women's suffrage represents one of the most fundamental struggles of women for legal representation.

The Sex Disqualification (removal) Act 1919 opened professions and the Civil Service to women, and marriage was no longer seen to legally stop women from working outside the home. Women gained the right to sit in parliament, although it was only slowly that women were actually elected. Women started serving on school boards and local bodies, and numbers kept increasing after the war. A Matrimonial Causes Act in 1923 gave women the right to the same grounds for divorce as men.

Virginia Woolf wrote her essay *A Room of One's Own* based on the ideas of women as writers and characters in fiction. Woolf said that a woman must have money and a room of her own to be able to write.

4. **Women's suffrage in New Zealand**

The Electoral Bill granting women the right to vote was given Royal Assent by Governor Lord Glasgow on 19 September 1893, and women voted for the first time in the election held on 28 November 1893. In 1893, Elizabeth Yates also became Mayor of Onehunga, the first time such a post had been held by a female anywhere in the British Empire.

From 1887, various attempts were made to pass bills enabling female suffrage; each bill came close to passing but none succeeded until a government strategy to foil the 1893 bill backfired. By 1893 there was considerable popular support for women's suffrage, and the Electoral Bill passed through the Lower House with a large majority. The Legislative Council (upper house) was divided on the issue, but when Premier Richard Seddon ordered a Liberal Party councillor to change his vote, two other councillors were so annoyed by Seddon's interference that they changed sides and voted for the bill, allowing it to pass by 20 votes to 18. Seddon was anti-prohibitionist, and had hoped to stop the bill in the upper house.

Both the Liberal government and the opposition subsequently claimed credit for the enfranchisement of women, and sought women's newly acquired votes on these grounds.

5. **Women at Rosenstraße, Berlin**

(February/March 1943)

This was a nonviolent protest in Rosenstraße ("Rose street") in Berlin in February and March 1943, carried out by the non-Jewish wives and relatives of Jewish men who had been arrested for deportation. The protests escalated until the men were released. It was a significant instance of opposition to the events of the Holocaust. It was the only successful, public nonviolent protest against deportations.

Just after the German defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad, Gestapo had arrested the last of the Jews in Berlin during the Fabrikaktion. Around 1,800 Jewish men, almost all of them married to non-Jewish women (others being the so-called Geltungsjuden), were separated from the other 6,000 of the arrested, and housed temporarily at Rosenstraße 2–4, a welfare office for the Jewish community located in Central Berlin.

Once the process of selecting new officials for the Jewish organizations had been completed, the men confined were released, giving rise to the incorrect impression that their release had been due to the women's protest. Almost all the released men survived the war.

Addressed a wide range of issues: unofficial (de facto) inequalities, official legal inequalities, sexuality, family, the workplace, and, perhaps most controversially, reproductive rights. It also tried and failed to add the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. Many feminists view the second-wave feminist era as ending with the internal feminism disputes of the Feminist Sex Wars, over issues such as sexuality and pornography.

It came as a response to the experiences of men in World War II and their interactions with women and families upon their post-war return home, the late 1940s post-war boom, an era not only characterised by an unprecedented economic growth, a baby boom, suburban expansion and the triumph of capitalism, but also an era marked by a consistent effort to re-establish pre-war patriarchal social trends.

This fact was clearly illustrated by the media which idealised domesticity, placing women in a closed sphere where they were only expected to fulfil the roles of housewives and mothers.

The period was strongly marked by Simone de Beauvoir's book "The Second Sex" (1949), where she examined the notion of women being perceived as "other" in the patriarchal society. She concluded that male-centred ideology is accepted as a norm and enforced simply by the ongoing development of myths, and that the fact that women are capable of getting pregnant, lactating, and menstruating is in no way a valid cause or explanation to place them as the "second sex."

7. Reproductive rights (1960)

One of the main fields of interest was in gaining the right to contraception and birth control, which were almost universally restricted until the 1960s. With the development of the first birth control pill feminists hoped to make it as available as soon as possible. Many hoped that this would free women from the perceived burden of mothering children they did not want; they felt that control of reproduction was necessary for full economic independence from men. Access to abortion was also widely demanded, but this was much more difficult to secure because of the deep societal divisions that existed over the issue.

Many feminists also fought to change perceptions of female sexual behaviour. Since it was often considered more acceptable for men to have multiple sexual partners, many feminists encouraged women into "sexual liberation" and having sex for pleasure with multiple partners.

These developments in sexual behaviour have not gone without criticism by some feminists. They see the sexual revolution primarily as a tool used by men to gain easy access to sex without the obligations entailed by marriage and traditional social norms. They see the relaxation of social attitudes towards sex in general, and the increased availability of pornography without stigma, as leading towards greater sexual objectification of women by men.

8. Herstory (1960)

Herstory is a neologism coined in the late 1960s as part of a feminist critique of conventional historiography. In feminist discourse the term refers to history (re-stated as "his story") written from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view.

During the 1970s and 1980s, second-wave feminists saw the study of history as a male-dominated intellectual enterprise and presented "herstory" as a means of compensation. The term, intended to be both serious and comic, became a rallying cry used on T-shirts and buttons as well as in academia.

In feminist literature and academic discourse, the term has been used occasionally as an "economical way" to describe feminist efforts against a male-centred canon.
9. Criminalisation of marital/spousal rape

With development of human rights, the belief of a marital right to sexual intercourse has become less widely spread. In 1965, Sweden altered its statutes so that husbands could be charged for raping their wives. In December 1993, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This establishes marital rape as a human rights violation. This is not fully recognized by all UN member States.

In 1997, UNICEF reported that just 17 States criminalized marital rape. In 2003, UNIFEM reported that more than 50 States did so. In 2006, the UN Secretary General found “Marital rape may be prosecuted in at least 104 States. Of these, 32 have made marital rape a specific criminal offence, while the remaining 74 still don't expose marital rape from general rape provisions. Four States criminalize marital rape only when the spouses are judicially separated.

10. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted without vote by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993. Contained within it is the recognition of "the urgent need for the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings".

The resolution is often seen as complementary to, and a strengthening of, the work of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It recalls and embodies the same rights and principles as those enshrined in such instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 1 and 2 provide the most widely used definition of violence against women. As a consequence of the resolution, in 1999, the General Assembly, led by the representative from the Dominican Republic, designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
Recommit to women's liberation

On International Women's Day we launch a manifesto for 21st-century feminism

http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/08/international-womens-day-manifesto

Lindsey German and Nina Power
Monday 8 March 2010

Today is the 100th anniversary of the birth of International Women's Day. First agreed at a socialist women's conference in Copenhagen in 1910, its aim was to campaign for the rights of working women. Today, the lives of women have changed beyond recognition compared with those of their grandmothers and great grandmothers. But the changes in work and personal life have been distorted by the needs of the market and have fallen far short of women's liberation.

The experience of work has been challenging and invigorating for a few, but for most women in the shops, offices, call centres and factories of 21st-century Britain it has been more likely to represent long hours, constant pressure, and growing attempts to squeeze more productivity and profit out of them. The big increase in the numbers of women working (more than 12 million today) has come from working mothers. But there has been no similar change in how the family and childcare have been organised.

So while mothers work outside the home, often full-time, they are also often expected to shoulder the needs of shopping, feeding and caring for their children. This is on top of sometimes long journeys to work, and of the demands of shift work for many. Whereas the old sexist dichotomy of the 50s was that women could either have looks or brains, now we are expected to have both, plus cooking skills at least to the level of Come Dine With Me, and an all-seeing eye to ensure that children behave at all times.

Women are expected to juggle all aspects of their lives and are blamed as individuals for any failing in their work or family life. The only people who can begin to succeed in doing this are those who can afford to pay others (usually women) to carry out some or all of these tasks. So an army of working-class women cook, clean, care for children, do ironing and washing, work in supermarkets, wait in restaurants, perform personal services, all to ensure the easier life of those women who "have it all". Often in the process they neglect their own families to do so.

The way in which women's working lives are portrayed reflects this. There is much talk of glass ceilings, but little about those women who are falling into the basement, struggling to work and maintain families on poverty wages. The life experiences of women (and men) are radically different, with a small minority sharing in the profits made by working-class men and women.

Alongside work has come increased sexualisation of society – now greeted with horror by respectable middle-class opinion, but much encouraged by advertising, the media and the profit motive itself, where porn and lap dancing are now big business. The other side of this sexualisation is the continuing high levels of rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse. We are still a very long way from women controlling their own lives and sexuality.

This International Women's Day we should recommit to a women's liberation which is connected to a wider movement for human emancipation and for working people to control the wealth they produce. That's why women and men have to fight for liberation. We won't win without a fight, because there are many vested interests who want to stop us. But more and more people are beginning to connect campaigning over climate change, war and inequality with fighting for women's liberation. That's why we are launching a manifesto for 21st-century feminism to begin to organise for real equality.