COBWEBS AND DIY FEMINIST MEDIA OF THE ’80S AND ’90S
• mid 1960s–mid 1980s
• questioned traditional women's roles (housewife, mother, etc.)
• equal pay, education, bodily autonomy
• critiqued beauty standards
• consciousness raising
• activism and protest – intellectual and physical
• literature
At least 600 feminist magazines and newsletters are estimated to have circulated in the UK during the 1970s. Most had a DIY feel - low-budget, hand-drawn, compellingly messy. What caused this explosion of grassroots feminist media?

- Technological development
- Need for a young perspective
- Dissatisfaction with mainstream magazines
- Second wave feminist literature and ideals
- Punk zines
SHOCKING PINK - EMERGENCE AND AIMS

"we want a magazine that looks at fashion, music, books... all the usual subjects, but from a... realistic viewpoint... we also need a magazine that looks at issues which really affect us, like contraception, abortion, sexuality... all aspects of women's rights"

- ran 1981-82, and 1987-92
- produced by young women's collective - first gen - around ten women aged 16-20.
- came out of workshop at Young Women's Conference 1979
- first edition - only £800 to produce, 20p to buy
SHOCKING PINK' - CONTENT

- vivid, DIY production with collage elements
- largely humorous, fun, rebellious tone
- explored typical girls magazine topics - fashion, love, friendship with a feminist viewpoint
- community formation - particularly for more marginalised women - young, lgbtq+, POC
- only female-identified contributors
- encouraged feminist activism
- spoke about political issues in a range of ways - cartoons, photo stories, traditional articles etc. - always accessible
Cobwebs aimed to be a place for women to "express themselves both politically and culturally" when given the space to

- ran 1986-87
- the 'brainchild' of student Kim Hill, the 'driving force' behind the magazine
- 'student activist' era
- a newspaper aimed (primarily) at feminist women students
- influenced by male dominated campus environment, lack of understanding of feminism among most students
- named Cobwebs due to historical and contemporary associations with feminism, and links to core aims eg 'web weaving'
- partially inspired by DIY punk culture and feminist magazines like Spare Rib and Shocking Pink
"It had an open and collective approach and came together with remarkable ease and cooperation."

- Self-admitted: little knowledge about magazine production – DIY feel
- Incorporation of both print and handwriting
- Mostly black and white, though reds and purples used on covers and occasional pages – bold feel
- Small layout team
- Low-cost production and selling price (student friendly)
- Printed with help either from women in the General Office for typing or members of the team

"There were no mobile phones and no computers, just two word processors in the library."
COBWEBS' CONTENT

- Primary focus on issues faced by women – male privilege, sexual violence, beauty standards, abortion, societal expectations re: marriage,
- Campus focus
- Discussion of politics – anarcho-feminism, peace protests, etc.
- Current events commented on through feminist lens
- Poetry, drawings, creative writing
- Reviews of feminist works - 'recommended reading'
- Articles about prominent feminist figures – Alice Walker, Simone de Beauvoir, Rosa Luxemburg
Cobwebs was characterised by its creativity - art, poetry, and creative writing were used both to protest sexist narratives, promote self expression, and vent frustration. Unfortunately this can't fit onto a small page like this - to explore further, see my bibliography, which links to the digitised Cobwebs archives.

"I got a lot of anger out of my system via the art works I made"
Perhaps above all, Cobwebs inspired a feminist community to come together across Warwick's campus. There were frequent calls to join in with a mixture of educational, political, and social activities. Some were women only, while some welcomed both men and women.

- Access to practical support eg women's mornings at doctors, local sexual assault helplines
- Films - eg screening of Rosie the Riveter
- Information about visiting feminist speakers
- Parties and discos
- Links to societies and committees eg lesbian society
- Open political discussions
- Trips and days out - eg to Greenham
Unfortunately, Cobwebs has received little scholarly attention despite its relevance to the ever growing field of feminist media studies, and its particular uniqueness as a student newspaper. However, it positively impacted those who worked on the project politically, personally, and professionally.

"I've been passionate about gender-based (in)equality ever since."

"I'm now a writer and editor, and Cobwebs gave me my first experience of magazine production."

"Being a part of [Cobwebs]... offered a space for exploration and discussion."

"The production of Cobwebs represents a massively important time in both my life and those of my friends... I'm very proud of it."

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE COBWEBS ALUMNI WHO TOLD ME ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES ON THE MAGAZINE, WHICH PROVED INVALUABLE TO MY PROJECT.
we are in the midst of a digital age, but does this mean the end of print media? Certainly, we’ve seen blogs, social media, and ebooks rise rapidly in popularity. However, there is an indisputable dynamism inherent to print media. During my research, I went to the archives at my university, and looked at physical copies of *Cobwebs*. Although looking through the magazine digitally was interesting, the experience of holding the tangible product was arresting. The experience was not merely visual but tactile - physically turning the pages, noticing the colours and the type, flipping back and forth to take notes. Alison Piepmier speaks of a similar experience - teaching a class about zines, she described the excitement that both she and her students felt when they could examine a physical copy: she noted that her students were often inspired to make their own zines when they’d flicked through a paper zine, to a much higher extent than digital copies. Because of that, she believes that print media will never completely die out. There’s something so magical and dynamic and fun about these creative projects, down to the imperfections; yellowed paper, little tears in the page, smudged ink. In my own experience, creating handmade projects has been therapeutic in a way creating the same projects digitally has felt - there is something magical in the tangible. It’s a regret of mine that my handwriting is too illegible to have created this zine physically. Print media is lovely and unique - I hope it never fades away.