Issue 1: Feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society

Warwick Sociology Journal

Editorial team:
Olivia Boulton
Elliot Bullock
Rosa Coleman
Claire Corp
Adam Gayton
Warwick Sociology Journal

Issue One: Feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society.

(Eds)
Olivia Boulton
Elliot Bullock
Rosa Coleman
Claire Corp
Adam Gayton

University of Warwick
2013/2014

This journal has been granted the licence to publish the authors’ work; to reproduce and distribute the submissions in printed, electronic or any other medium. In return the author(s) assert their Moral Right to be identified as the author, and we promise to respect their rights as the author(s); that their names will always be associated clearly with the submissions; and that while necessary editorial alterations will be made, the substantial body of the piece will not be changed without consulting the author(s).

Copyright remains with the author(s).

Any queries should be directed to: SociologyJournal@warwick.ac.uk
Issue 2: Feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society

Editorial Introduction  
Adam Gayton

Sex workers: The breadth of feminism  
Adam Gayton

It’s hard out here for a bitch! A call to rebrand feminism  
Elliot Bullock

Can women conquer mainstream British sport?  
Harinder Dhillon

Marital, sexual and reproductive rights of men and women in the Soviet Union and China from 1949.  
Sharon Lin

High heels and hijackings: An examination of the place of women in terrorism  
Claire Corp

Dangerous laughter: the mocking of Gender Studies in academia  
Maria do Mar Pereira
Editorial Introduction

This academic year (13/14) saw the introduction of the Warwick Sociology Journal. We are a student run journal born from the idea that students at all levels and of all disciplines should have better access to publishing their own work. We believe that sociology is a topic that can interest anyone regardless of degree-choice and encourage submissions from people from a broad range of backgrounds.

The first issue is based on the theme of feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society. Feminism and gender studies are such a core area of sociology as they look at the relationship between gender, sex and greater society. In a time where the word ‘feminist’ is polarising and men and women are treated differently, it is important to raise these issues and look critically at society. We received a great range of submissions, from the mocking of gender studies to the role of women in terrorism to the question of whether women could ever conquer mainstream British sport and have put together a collection that we believe shows some of the great work that Warwick students can offer.

The first piece works to put the term ‘feminism’ into context. It touches on different sources to look at reactions to the term ‘feminism’ and explores a reluctance to identify as one. While looking at the way feminism is portrayed in the media and reading around the Sex Wars of the 70s and 80s, this piece serves to highlight the great breadth there is in the field of feminism; that it isn’t a one-size fits all theory but a central idea that can be applied and come out with numerous different views about a certain topic. To serve as an example, this piece uses the rights of sex workers due to the recent case of Bedford v Canada.

The next two articles are comment pieces from current students. The second piece, by Bullock, focuses on popular media and follows on well from the piece by Gayton. Bullock analysed a new music video and song by Lily Allen in response to the objectification and sexualisation of women in the music industry – especially in the Hip Hop genre. Moving on from this, Bullock asks the question of whether it is necessary to rebrand feminism; whether rebranding would capture the interest of the masses and lead to reform. The third article, written by Dhillon, served to highlight the importance of sport in society and the sense of pride that it provides to the people; he stressed the
rarity of well-known female athletes and moved on to tackle the question of whether women will ever be able to conquer mainstream British sport.

The fourth piece, by Lin, looked at the power of the state to intervene on the reproductive, sexual and marital rights of the individuals – contrasting the rights of men and women and the importance of the rights to the state. Lin looked primarily at the Soviet Union and China in the latter half of the twentieth century; linking population policy to the reproductive rights of individuals – largely women.

Corp’s essay exploring the role of women in terrorism is next. Corp highlights the problem of gender norms and applies them to criminology: the fact that women are perceived to be passive and feminine means that people are reluctant to see them as violent in any way. Applying this to terrorist activity, Corp argues that the fact women are portrayed as unthreatening means that there has been a growing number of women committing or contributing to terrorist acts, and that terrorism policies need to be reconsidered to meet this change.

The final piece was written by Maria do Mar Pereira, an academic within the Department of Sociology at Warwick; it focuses on the perception of gender studies within academic. There is a view, writes do Mar Pereira, that gender studies does not constitute ‘proper’ knowledge, that it is somehow soft, with academics in the area being seen as “unscholarly,” “unprofessional,” or “dykes”. Pereira then moves on to consider the role of laughter and humour surrounding the topic, focusing on how humour can be used to dismiss feminism.

We received submissions on a great range of different topics and wanted to thank everyone who sent something in – sadly we could not include everything that we received. Putting this journal together has been great fun and we would like to thank the department for their help and support in making it. Lastly, thank you very much for taking the time to read through our first issue.

Adam and the Journal team
Sex Workers: The breadth of feminism

Adam Gayton

Why are people so reluctant to say they are feminists? Looking at articles from 1992 (Gibbs) up until now with Freeman 2013, there seems to be this reluctance to be termed a feminist. Gibbs wrote about a poll reporting that only 16 percent of college women “definitely” considered themselves to be feminists. Freeman took a different approach and looked at celebrities, with quotes from Beyoncé saying “That word can be very extreme ... I do believe in equality ... But I'm happily married. I love my husband” and Lady Gaga’s “I am not a feminist – I hail men, I love men. I celebrate [the] American male and beer and bars and muscle cars”.

Freeman interviewed actress Ellen Page, who highlights why there is this reluctance, “feminism always gets associated with being a radical movement” and goes on to talk about the severe sexism in Hollywood, and how “If you’re a girl and you don’t fit the very specific vision of what a girl should be, which is always from a man’s perspective, then you’re a little bit at a loss.”. The problem seems to be entirely the term “feminism” as opposed to women’s rights, of which Gaga and Beyoncé are proponents; the fact is that the term is so associated with this idea of “the man-hating, hairy-legged lesbian” as talked about by Duz and Simic (2008), that people want to get as far away from the word as possible. Feminism is a wide term, covering lots of different views; this piece of writing just serves to highlight the great breadth that there is in the field of feminism; as an example I will be focusing on sex workers.

With the recent unanimous decision in the case of Canada v Bedford [2013], the decades-old debate within feminism over sex work has come to the forefront in the news. In Canada, the act of prostitution has always been legal just as it is in the UK, however, it has been heavily criminalised and is subject to lots of constraints making it difficult to practice. Some of these constraints can be seen in sections 210, 212(1)(j) and 213(1)(c) of the Criminal Code, which makes it an offence to keep or be in a bawdy-house, prohibits living on the avails of prostitution, and prohibits soliciting in public respectively. The Supreme Court of Canada has found that these provisions infringe on the sex worker’s right to life, liberty and security of the person, as set out in section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a complete deregulation of prostitution laws would be harmful, the judiciary suspended the effect of their declaration for a year, in which time the Canadian Parliament can debate and create a new approach to prostitution. There are multiples ways in which
this can be done, from making prostitution illegal to legalisation with formal regulations (to make prostitution just like any other career); from removing the area from criminal law to criminalising the purchase of sex rather than the selling (to criminalise the men who visit sex workers). Throughout the next year, this will likely be a heavily debated topic and should be considered from many different angles so as to make the law as effective as possible.

The Sex Wars of the 1970s and ‘80s were a very divisive time within the field of feminism: where debates over pornography, prostitution and the role of women in sex were fought, with some describing it as feeling “like a war” (Duggan, 1995:6). During the 70s and 80s, most could be put in one of two sides, anti-pornography feminists and sex-positive feminists. This was a very polarising issue, but as time has passed and third-wave feminism emerged, there was a greater focus put on individual cases rather than a universal rule. The fact that the law must take a solid, consistent view, means that this topic will receive a lot of debate in Canada.

Anti-pornography feminists were opposed to sex work due to what they saw as the objectification and exploitation of women. A study by Farley (2003) found that “violence is the norm for women in prostitution” with Anderson (2002:748) stating that “prostitution plays a key role in sustaining the social inequality of women. It does so by defining women in general as sexual objects, available to any man who desires them”. Anti-pornography feminists believed that sex work was harmful to the woman, both the woman who was suffering the abuse of unwanted sex to and the more general womankind due to porn perpetuating the objectification of women. Writers such as MacKinnon pointed out that prostitution wasn’t a choice made by people, it was done out of necessity, going further to say that the use of money acted as a force: drawing parallels to the physical force used in rape. Feminists who agreed with this general approach would almost certainly argue in favour of making prostitution illegal.

The sex-positive feminists approached sex work from a different view, believing that sex work isn’t inherently exploitative, and that if it were approached in the right way, so as to remove stigma and impose regulations, or at least remove some of the constraints that stopped prostitutes from being able to protect themselves (such as not allowing them to solicit in safe, public places where there isn’t likely to be any violence), that prostitution is a viable career. There is an argument that feminists who oppose prostitution do so based on theory and outdated experience; that they don’t take into account the women who are actually engaged in sex work (Nagle, 2001:21). Pro-sex feminists such as Klinger (2003) also invoke the argument around autonomy, women have the right
to decide what they want to do with their lives: they have a right to work as a prostitute. There was
the underlying idea that sex can be liberating and enjoyable, and that anti-pornography feminists
were close minded or prudish in a way. Sex-positive feminists do see problems with the current
prostitution laws and have recommended different approaches such as legalisation or
decriminalisation; a proposed reform would be criminalising the buying, so the men would face legal
action rather than those trying to earn a living.

Throughout the 80s until now, more people have begun to move away from these two ends of the
debate, occupying the middle. The emergence of third-wave feminism has led more people to focus
on the individual: the fact that one universal theory doesn’t work; that women are many colors,
ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds. Applying this to the case at hand,
maybe it is legitimate to be a sex worker in some situations. Teresa de Lauretis wrote in 1990 that
the fact that there are such a range of different view within society when it comes to topics like this
embodies the difference talked about in third-wave feminism; that these views should conflict and
compete as feminism is not one way to look at the world, it is dependent on the person thinking and
the topic they are thinking about.

The point of writing this is to highlight the fact that feminism is broad: it seems foolish to say that
the same theory can be applied universally, no matter what age, sexuality, class or country they are
from. There is no such thing as a typical woman. Just like with sex workers, there is no set feminist
view to take or criticise, as there are countless different views and approaches that can be taken.
Feminism is the “advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and
economic rights of the female sex; [and] the movement associated with this” (OED 2012) and can be
applied however an individual wants.
Bibliography


de Lauretis, Teresa (1990), "Feminism and Its Differences". Pacific Coast Philology, Vol. 25 .


It’s hard out here for a bitch! A call to rebrand feminism

Elliot Bullock

I would highly recommend watching Lily Allen’s new music video ‘Hard Out Here’, not only because it provides a humorous mockery of the distasteful objectification of women in the music industry but also because it sends a clear message to both men and women about a choice they can make about the future. A choice, to stop living in a world where respect and overbearing expectation is automatically assigned to people on the basis of their gender.

Despite being creative and a breath of fresh air for the feminist cause, Lily Allen's concern over the state of gender equality in contemporary society has been met with a stream of criticism. Commentators such as Ellie Mae O'Hagan (2013) have argued that her song is problematic in the sense it cannot stand independently, in that it will be seen to be as an expression for all feminism - and by extension all women. The implication of this O'Hagan argues, is that the fate of feminism rests on the strengths and weaknesses of one music video. Whilst I can appreciate the point she makes, at a time when a recent report 'Equality for Girls' claims "sexism is so widespread in the UK that it affects most aspects of the lives of girls and young women," (Burns, 2013) can we really afford to discourage any feminist expression made in the public sphere on the basis that it does not reflect the interests of the entirety of the group? I, for one, am not sure we can.

More findings from the report, based on a survey of 1200 girls and young women aged 7 to 21, reveals that some 87% thought women were judged more on their appearance than their ability. It is clear that both cultural misconceptions and media stereotypes are deeply ingrained in our culture and are the major barriers to equality. While the changing of laws has brought some progress, the real hard work has to be done in changing the very perception and attitudes of those who do not share a vision of a fair and equal society, where anyone can flourish and fulfil their true potential irrespective of their sex, age, race or disability.
Therefore it begs the question, is it time to rebrand feminism and renew a wave of activism for a new generation of women?

Clearly any notion that feminism warrants a makeover implies the term is rather unattractive and unpopular. Whilst there is undoubtedly an element of truth in this, it is nevertheless questionable as to whether attempts to rebrand feminism will ever capture a modern woman's interest and inspire them to demand reform. A notable and recent effort has been made by the beauty and fashion magazine ELLE, which argued it wanted to move the term away from the burden of being associated with 'complications and negativity' (Swerling, 2013). However, as journalist and feminist activist Laurie Penny (2013) notes, the main dilemma is that we can only go so far in smoothing the term out or sexing it up, before losing sight of what progress is and subsequently what it entails.

Certainly a more pretty and pleasing alternative to the uncomfortable bits of women's liberation, might attract a wave of new supporters but it won't necessarily inspire women in the day to day battle of challenging anyone invested in male privilege. By no means do I suggest this is a new line of argument, the early suffragist and civil rights campaigner Susan B Anthony also captured the need for a radical element in the politics of change:

"Cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputation or social standards never can bring about reform. Those who are really in earnest are willing to avow their sympathies with despised ideas and their advocates and bear the consequences."

So what can be done from this point forward? I suggest, make an important choice for the future and whether you can support the courageous women who have voiced, and continue to voice the prevalent inequality that exists in our society today.

"Inequality promises that it's here to stay.
Always trust the injustice 'cause it's not going away" (Allen, 2013)
Bibliography


Can Women conquer mainstream British Sport?

Harinder Dhillon

Sport in Britain, in one sense or another, is successful, lucrative and a centrepiece to our national identity. Whilst our success, nationally, in some of the most popular sports such as football, cricket and rugby might not great, the interest and involvement garnered in this country is huge, and this can be seen by the fact that the Premier League, comprised of male footballers, generates multiple billions in Television deals with significant attendances compared to other European leagues. Add to this the large interest in Formula 1, ardent Rugby following and the consensus that Wimbledon is the most exciting tournament of the Tennis calendar, and what can be derived is that sport and these sports in particular, both in terms of competitors, and a structural sense, are an essential piece of modern British culture, but notably, dominated almost entirely by men.

By comparison, in these most covered and reported, by mainstream media, sports in Britain, the respective female versions scarcely compare. In fact, bastions of such sports such as Kelly Smith and Charlotte Edwards are largely unrecognised names, and the majority of the British public would probably struggle to recognise them in the street, despite their relative successes as captains in their respective sports. To put the difference into perspective, the FA Cup football final, one of biggest events of the sporting calendar, took an attendance of 4,988 in the Woman’s final, (Leighton, Guardian, 2013) compared to 86,254 in the Men’s final, (BBC, 2013) in fact, the FA Vase final, contested by men’s non-professional teams, got 16,751 in attendance, still significantly higher than the pinnacle of the Women’s game. (FA, 2013) It does seem therefore, that the female versions of these sports cannot compete holistically with the male ones, not necessarily in terms of quality or competitiveness, but the money generated, availability, interest and the viewing figures both in television and live attendances suggest that there is a chasm of gender difference within these sports.

The 2012 London Olympics might attest to how Women are finally being allowed to make an impact and receiving recognition in sport as we saw athletes such as Jessica Ennis, Rebecca Adlington and Laura Trott dominate in their respective sports and subsequently become national sporting heroes as notorious as their equivalent male achievers. However, despite a recent upsurge in cycling, the widespread coverage and attention to Swimming, Athletics and Cycling is minuscule compared to Football, Cricket and the many other notable lucrative sports as named above, even in the male carnations of the sports. As, apart from a handful of females, even some of the best sportswomen
struggle to earn even a fraction of the money that a relatively average footballer, male boxer or race-car driver may earn. Thus giving credence to an argument that even in their success, superlative sportswomen in their field are still struggling to really penetrate the mainstream sporting structure, both in a financial sense and in terms of recognition.

Whilst we’ve seen how successful sportswomen struggle both in the mainstream sporting field and in the more niche competed sports such as those that gain most coverage during the Olympics, neither particularly ensure that women receive or hold much in their way of money, or the recognition or stature that they probably deserve. The stronghold and interest of the male dominated Premier League is therefore potentially one of the most viable options for women to at least make an impact and earn and compare to men, as things stand. Although women cannot compete, no such actual barriers exist from females officiating, managing teams or working in the business structure, or being the face of media coverage of some of the biggest sports in Britain. Examples of women who have broken such barriers are Karen Brady and Gabby Logan, who are Chief executives and presenters respectively. However, more so than just being rare presences in the male dominated premier league structure, both have a well-documented history of marginalisation and attempted belittlement of their credentials for the simple fact they are women in what is perceived to be a man’s game and industry. Furthermore, one of the first Women to officiate in the Premier League, lineswoman Sian Massey, was singled out and judged by TV presenters, before a ball was kicked on her debut, simply for being a woman instead of judgment based on her capabilities as an official as they would judge any male working at any level within football. This is yet another example of the difficulties women have and continue to face in working within the mainstream British sporting structure.

To address this obvious problem that is systemically inherent within the British sporting structure, Parliament have initiated an enquiry into ‘Women in Sport’, with a key aim to analyse why female participation is dropping, media coverage on women’s sport, the financial support within women’s sport, and the availability of facilities for Women. (Parliament.UK, 2013) All this being declared and set just under a year after the London 2012 Olympics, which should have broken some barriers for women as part of its much emphasised legacy.

Perhaps, one route towards change is to change the perception of sports, and perceptions of women, an example is when the media and commentators so ruthlessly and effortlessly refer to football as a ‘mans’ game. Rather than blankly stating the obvious when commenting on a match in
which the competitors are men, there is a denotation of physicality being distinctly male, suggesting that, and relating to a perceived deficiency and problem within a game, by inference, as feminine and weak and incorrect. This may not literally be a massive roadblock from women competing in the sports of their choosing, but it does reinforce a misguided stereotype, and serves to further oppress and devalue women’s aptitude and ability, by extenuating, through invalid perceptions, (lack of physicality in a tackle may more aptly be attributed to inferior desire, effort or courage rather than an inherent gender difference) women’s ‘inferiority’, and ignoring the utility, on a superfluous basis, that women can add to football, and a sport in general.

Moreover, beyond changes simply to our attitudes, the imposition of some kind of affirmative action and requirements could be advisable and fundamental in changing the sporting infrastructure. An example that can be referred to is the ‘Rooney rule’, which was introduced in America to tackle the problem of a lack of black coaches in American football, where it was commonplace for white coaches with minimal experience to get jobs ahead of more qualified and experienced black coaches. (Ingle, Guardian, 2013) The imposition and changes introduced ensured black coaches were given a far more level playing field, with the amount of black coaches increasing significantly since then, who have gone on to perform very well, justifying the rule itself. (Ingle, Guardian, 2013) This could be applied to Women within the sporting layout, obviously not competing in single-gendered sports, but working at clubs, holding boardroom and coaching roles, and being on major governing bodies decision making panels, such as at the FA, FIA and RFU for example, so the foundations can be laid to perhaps a more level playing field for Women in the future.

What is most clear is that in modern sport in Britain, for British sportspeople or even sports people from other countries who ply their trade here, the representation, presence and stature of women is significantly undermined and restricted, with women, and good sportswomen in particular, on a larger widespread scale and barring a few exceptions, failing to have the equivalent recognition or spotlight to their male counterparts. It does not take a feminist to realise that Women in British Sport, as is the case in many foreign countries, are undermined and underrepresented, as the Forbes list of top earners in sports in 2013 indicates, where only 1 woman, Maria Sharapova, is amongst the top 50 highest paid athletes with her ranking of 22nd and only a further 2 in the top 100 in the form of Serena Williams and Li Na, all three of whom are tennis players (Forbes, 2013).

Despite a long, effective and relentless feminist movement achieving much in the world of politics, the law, economics and employment, feminism still has not, and women still have not attained any
comparison to Men within the sporting layout in Britain, and with the many factors that dictate and
influence why Men’s competition, in the most popular and lucrative sports such as Football, Rugby,
Cricket and F1 is so drastically preferred and more followed, it seems as though penetrating British
sport, and the route to women conquering British sport is one of the sternest tasks, and could
potentially be the mightiest achievement at least in modern times, of any feminist movement.
Marital, sexual and reproductive rights of men and women in the Soviet Union and China from 1949.

Sharon Lin

Nowadays, society interprets marital, sexual and reproductive rights as a freedom that all should be able to enjoy. It combines a freedom of choice and rights towards being educated on a matter, and able to have a freedom of expression without discrimination, coercion and violence (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2011; IPPF, 2009). To be repressed and limited upon these freedoms would be considered a violation of basic human rights. However, this was exactly the case in the Soviet Union, and still is the case in China, where there were many state policies that placed limitations on certain individual rights. This essay will be examining the various policies implemented, focusing particularly on marital, sexual reproductive rights of both men and women.

Particular focus has been placed on the Soviet Union (1917-1989) and China since 1949 as these two nation states are known socialist states. They lie on this in-between realm of communism and capitalism (Charles, 1993), where there was/is great need for social stability to strengthen the country, as well as ending the overbearingness of patriarchy and feudalism. The states saw the implementation of social policies as means to achieve: a population increase, countering the loss from war for the Soviet Union; and reducing population growth rates for China. Policies were however frequently masked beneath words that suggest ‘woman’s emancipation’ or liberation from a ‘private sphere’ into a ‘public sphere’ in attempts to package their proposals. In regulating rights through state policies, it automatically makes it an obligatory civilian duty towards the state.

MARITAL RIGHTS

For the longest time, marriage has been viewed as the legal joining of man and woman, to enable a site of reproduction for continuing the next generation. China however, saw it as too efficient as means of reproduction that marriage ought to be delayed as means of controlling population. The campaign for later marriages was particularly established through the 1950 Marriage Law (Chu, 1997; Curtain, 1975). The Law required a woman had to be at least 18, and a man 20 years of age to marry (Croll, 1974:107), as opposed to marrying at 15 or even younger, as would be a social norm in the past. Government also endorsed magazines such as Youth of China and Woman of China, which ‘devot[ed] many pages to[wards] explaining the advantages of late marriages’ (Chu, 1997:55). These methods were some efficient means of manipulating the Chinese into later marriages.
The Marriage Law was accompanied with various marital policies. It includes giving ‘women their rights... [with] free choice in marriage, divorce and custody of children’ (Curtain, 1975:34; Charles, 1993). It could in fact be said that China’s policies meet modern day marital expectations, ensuring ‘full freedom of marriage’ and ‘free choice of partners on monogamy’ terms (Curtain, 1975:35). This gives Chinese women greater liberty in marriage, displacing feudal Confucian ideologies and arranged marriage concepts (Charles, 1993).

Marital policies in the Soviet Union, were by degree, a contrast to China. The state too enabled equal marriages, but instead had many public articles publishing the advantages of early marriages (Juviler, 1985; Buckley, 1981). These were means of encouraging population growth. In fact, it could be said that the purposes of marital (dis)encouragement in China and the Soviet state were the same, done in the name of stabilising population growth. These policies enabled the prediction of population growth and change, and hence greater efficiency in economic planning and management.

Nonetheless, both states covered the matter of divorce in a much lighter manner. Although opposing the process, rather than condemning it, they legalised divorce seeing it to benefit society in the long run. China itself dedicated 6 articles upon divorce and its subsequent mannerisms in the 1950 Marriage Law (Croll, 1974:109-112). Divorce was ‘granted... [if] desire[d]’ by both parties upon failure ‘to bring about reconciliation’ (Croll, 1974:109). Similarly, the Soviet state implemented divorce legislations in the Family Code of 1918 (Charles, 1993:108). The process of divorce did however take a stumble in the 1936 Family Law with ‘more complex requirements for divorce registration’ (Nakachi, 2006:44), prolonging and discouraging the act. Coincidentally, this was more for reproductive purposes, because at the same time, in enabling divorces at an earlier stage, encourages future remarriages and births (Buckley, 1981). It could be said, marriage is especially desirable in these socialist states; it promotes social stability through future offspring, which is why freedom of marriage is essential. However, when reconciliation is not possible, the sates viewed the state’s welfare to be most important, and for the Soviet Union, it could especially benefit in the long term to legalise divorce.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
Reproductive rights tie in closely with the marital rights above, with state policies mirroring similar contrasting patterns. In China, numerous legislations were placed in the 1970s, starting with the ‘later, longer, fewer’ slogan (Yi et al, 1985:730). This was used propaganda to encourage couples
into: 1) having later births, 2) longer durations between respective children and 3) have fewer children. Of course, China later saw the implementation of the One Child Policy in 1979 (Benson, 2002). Nonfulfillment of such policies left couples facing fines and public scrutiny in abortion or sterilization (Chen and Summerfield, 2007). This sort of state policy could be said to be of great interference with personal liberty on reproductive opportunities.

The Soviet Union took their reproductive policies in the other direction by encouraging the birth of more children. In 1936, under the name of population stability, government aid was provided for mothers upon the birth of a third child (Nakachi, 2006) as means towards larger families. This form of policy evolved into ‘convincing small families...to have just one more. Nonfulfillment of... participation was subject to...taxation’ (ibid. 46). In a sense, monetary penalisation also became the limiting factor of liberty in reproductive rights rather than a disciplinary act.

However, the Soviet Union also introduced, what would be seen as controversial in modern society, ‘two legitimate sites for reproduction’ (ibid. 46). It was an extreme form of pro-nationalist policy promotion, authorising reproductive acts between couples with registered conjugal relationships as well as women willing to be single mothers. Child rearing responsibilities would fall under the couple for the former, and the latter would be the mother with state aid assistance as the man would not be held with financial responsibilities. Yet paradox lies with the ‘sanctioning of adultery’, the Soviets became undermining of family stability (ibid. 47). This in turn challenges social stability and possibly population growth.

The Soviet Union also enforced reproductive roles upon both sexes. Females were responsible to give birth to at least one child, preferably two or more, and sharing the responsibility of rearing that child. For males, this would be raising his children with his legally recognised wife, and even impregnating future state-aided mothers. Failure to reproduce would face tax penalties. The Soviet’s also attempted to combat the single-mother stigma by drawing legal laws for those openly discriminating against them (ibid.). The extent of legal policies imposed upon a traditionally female responsibility reflects upon the state’s urge for increasing population growth.

Nevertheless, both socialist states also created similar incentives to encourage the reproductive policies. Mothers were provided with generous paid maternity leave, as well as being able to return to former jobs and periodic paternity breaks from work (Charles, 1993; Robinson, 1985). These were means of protecting their mental and physical health, aiding the mother’s recovery eases their
double burden of maintaining the public and private sphere. This was further assisted through child-care facilities and crèches, establishment of diners and laundrettes (Charles, 1993; Curtain, 1975; Lokar, 2002). Housing benefits were also provided in both states. This became a major draw especially in China, where housing in urban areas was difficult to acquire (Robinson, 1985; Buckley, 1981). In other words, abundant grants were available, compelling couples into following their state’s reproductive policies.

Further along the lines of reproductive rights is the use of contraceptives. Under the state policies, the use of contraceptives was regarded as means of controlling birth rather than a health and safety measure. In the Soviet state, penalties were given for those that produced or provided contraceptive means, as it was seen as an ‘anti-reproductive behaviour’ (Nakachi, 2006:50). China on the other hand, as means to control their population, had the duty tax removed from imported contraceptives in 1962 (Chu, 1997). These measures, though not implemented as means to protect those engaging in sexual acts, do reflect upon the state’s population stability policies.

This pattern is also evident in abortion rights. Both nation states however do stress the legalisations are for the child-bearer’s health purposes. In the early stages of the Soviet state, it was a woman’s right to undergo abortion if desired (Lokar, 2000). However, by 1936, abortion was rewritten as a criminal offence unless carried out for health purposes. Those who carried out the abortion faced imprisonment, and the mother fined 300 roubles (David, 1974). This had thus made abortion increasingly more difficult to access, let alone the scrutiny of not partaking in the Soviet nation-building role.

In China, to facilitate the population reduction measures, medical abortion was readily available (Chu, 1997). Yet, this was carried out mostly in the more progressed, urban regions, as abortion was still viewed as a backwards act in rural areas. This only created a self-induced abortion culture, especially with a recomposed male bias under the One Child Policy. It could be said although abortion was a viable option to the woman, neither countries fully embraced the true individual liberties for a woman’s choice.

SEXUAL RIGHTS
Under the puritan societies that the Soviet Union was and China currently is, there are considerably contrasting state policies regarding sexual rights. That is provided that state polices strictly regarding sexual rights were virtually non-existing. Nevertheless, as of any more conservative society, the
expression of sexuality in a woman, though not an official policy, is frowned upon. In China repression for female sexuality is key. And despite of the rights to contraceptives and abortion in China, those measures were to be ‘strictly used in the context of population planning’ (Curtain, 1975:78-79). Yet the same is not said for a man’s expression of sex (ibid.; Lipovskaya, 1994). In the Soviet Union, Lipovskaya comments that regardless of the sexual liberation period, ‘the image of woman as whore, or lascivious seductress, is... proceeding with difficulty’ (ibid. 130). Thus suggesting both societies’ reluctance in accepting the equality in sexual expression possibly because of a lack of policies liberating women from it.

As touched upon earlier, extramarital relations contrasted greatly with the two states’ policies. For men in the Soviet Union, the sanctioning of the act through the Marriage Laws, provided a man’s liberty of sexual expression towards other woman even within a marriage as a fulfilment of their civil role (Nakachi, 1996). China on the other hand viewed this as misconduct. Under the Chinese 1950 Marriage Law, ‘concubinage’ was strictly forbidden (Chu, 1997; Broyelle, 1977). In other words, China remains with a traditional standpoint on extramarital sex, whereas the Soviet Union took a broad approach as means to expand their population growth efficiently.

CONCLUSION
It is clearly evident that these two socialist states have policies that enable the rights and liberties of men and women in certain aspects of marriage, reproduction and sexuality. However, at the same time there are restrictions and limitations towards certain rights. This seems very much like their socialist stance, they are neither communist nor capitalist; neither conservative nor liberal with state policies. Nonetheless, it is clear that the policies reflect upon the state’s desires of population stability through increasing or decreasing their respective population growth.

This essay could be furthered with research into other policies regarding the various rights addressed here. One particular area of focus would be the right of expressing homosexuality. Contemporary literatures such as those written by Honig (2003) and Zhuk (1994) have reiterated the downplay of the topic by society as taboo, but have not denied the acts being present in the culture. It would be interesting to see whether or not policies were in fact implemented on the matter, as it would involve further policies addressing marital and reproductive rights for homosexual couples.
Bibliography


High heels and hijackings: An examination of the place of women in terrorism

Claire Corp

This paper aims to discuss the role of women in acts of terrorism, and how these women are portrayed and perceived in comparison to their male counterparts. The place of women in terrorism challenges our most basic perceptions about gender and femininity; namely that of non-violence. It has been speculated that in the media the female terrorist is often glamorized and attributed with softer characteristics; reflecting the general perception of women in wider society. The message typically conveyed in the mass media is simply that women do not fit the terrorist profile, and consequently are not perceived as a real threat. This has led to women being involved in terrorist acts to evade security checks, with devastating effects. The social context surrounding women in terrorism is examined, and it is argued that by improving social conditions for women will reduce their involvement in terrorist activities. This paper concludes by arguing that counter-terrorism policies need to be reassessed in order to take into consideration a more accurate portrayal of women’s roles in terrorism.

Contrary to popular belief, the presence of women in terrorism is not a new or uncommon phenomenon. Women have been involved in a range of roles, working for a diverse range of political causes the world over for a significant amount of time. This includes involvement in high-profile cases, and even a high level of undertaking missions of martyrdom. For instance, between the years of 1985 and 2006 there were reportedly over 220 female suicide bombers, meaning women accounted for roughly 15% of all such attacks (Bloom, 2012). Whilst it contrasts with common beliefs of the demographics of terrorism, many high profile groups and cases have fronted or led by women. Notable female terrorists include the infamous Leila Khaled, notorious for her involvement within the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, responsible for hijacking an aircraft in 1969. Another prominent female figure who rose to high levels of fame was Wafa Idris, a young female suicide bomber who detonated a bomb in Jerusalem in 2002; the first of her kind in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The case of Wafa Idris raises the question as to whether females involved in acts of terrorism are granted more coverage in the media, simply because of their gender and the shock value this inevitably provokes. Whilst women are intrinsically involved in acts of terrorism, their positions and status within these groups often reflect the values concerning gender in the surrounding society, which invariably influences the kind of roles they are permitted to fulfil.
A study by Nacos (2005) shows that whilst male and female terrorists are typically recruited in the same ways, and similarly dedicated to their cause, the types of roles they are given are often not of an equal status. The positions range from moral and logistical support, through to executing attacks and achieving leadership status. The types of roles that women can adopt in terrorist groups are largely dependant on both the values of the group, and those intrinsic to the surrounding society. Social aspects such as religion, tradition, and political orientation all have a strong influence. Expectations of femininity and demands of conformity to accepted gender stereotypes inevitably shape internal social hierarchies of terrorist groups. Typically, in extremist right-wing groups which promote conservative values, women are typically relegated to support roles and similar positions which conform to these expectations. This enables them to still fulfil their primary purpose as wives and mothers within the conservative patriarchal hierarchy. This is evidenced in the modern day Ku Klux Klan group, where whilst women account for a significant proportion of the movement, their involvement is generally indirect which is shown in a study by Blee (2005). However in right-wing groups where religion is the primary motive, women have become increasingly prominent in active roles due primarily to logistical demands. Whilst participating in similar tasks to the men, the women are portrayed in a different way to their brothers; instead being pictured in a manner that conforms to the necessary demands of gender. For instance, the female suicide bomber will be praised as a martyr, acting entirely out of selflessness and purity. On the other end of the political spectrum, left-wing political organisations often feature female leaders and women who can actively participate. This can be credited to their political orientation, and their often desired aim of social change. For instance, the American Weather Underground who were active in the 1960s and 70s aimed to create a revolution to overthrow the US government, and featured many women in prominent leadership roles. The more liberal attitude found within these groups allows women to defer from expected gender roles, and assume leadership positions. Therefore it can be seen how the rigidity of gender stereotypes can massively influence an individual’s involvement in acts of terrorism.

The societal context is an important factor to take into consideration when examining the motives of women to join terrorist groups. Societies which are undergoing periods of social upheaval, or which do not offer opportunities and safety for women can be seen to be conducive to greater involvement in terrorism. Cunningham examines the link between periods of social unrest and heightened female participation in acts of terrorism, noting that in Italy in the 1970s, “women who participated in terrorist organizations were overwhelmingly drawn to leftist and nationalist organizations. This corresponded to a general period of social change, evidenced by movement in areas such as divorce, abortion, education, and employment.” (2003: 176). This was particularly
evident Italy’s Red Brigade, who in their aim of creating a revolutionary state committed many violent acts including kidnapping. The left-wing group featured a significant proportion of women, reinforcing the theory that periods of heavy social change allow for women’s empowerment, which can manifest as a greater involvement in acts of terrorism, particularly within groups with a liberal orientation.

Rapid social change is not the only significant factor which can influence motivation however; oppressive social conditions can also spark high levels of involvement in acts of terrorism. In societies where opportunities for women to receive an education or to gain any kind of power are extremely limited, they may be more persuaded to join political organizations which offer these perks. Greater social status, the potential for social mobility, protection from domestic violence and an education can all be strong motivational factors which may attract women to violent political groups.

A case study of women joining the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia found that freedom from violence and oppression, and desire for better opportunities were significant motivating factors. Upon entering the group the women are given new roles and responsibilities, which validate their potential in a manner that civilian society could never offer (Stanski, 2013). Sutten (2009) raises an interesting question as to whether the improvement of social conditions for women may actually slow or decrease women’s involvement in acts of terrorism. She states that programs that encourage gender equality would discourage women from participating in terrorist activities, as they would no longer need to turn their backs on civilian society to receive these benefits. This would ultimately both stabilise unequal social conditions, and reduce levels of terrorism in these social contexts.

Whilst both male and female terrorists commit equally damaging acts, the two groups are portrayed in very different ways in the mass media. Women participating in violent forms of terrorism are often considered as shocking as it breaks all the standard norms concerning gender and power relations (Ness, 2005). The typical expectation is for the woman to be the victim of violence, not the perpetrator. Cunningham (2003) states that this sense of shock means that female terrorists may receive a disproportionate amount of media coverage, due to their challenging of social conventions and security assessments which ultimately heightens the fear factor. To deal with these challenges, the media will often focus on overtly feminine characteristics such as appearance. Whilst studying the way Irish female terrorists were portrayed in the news, Steel (1998: 274) notes that; “a curious
thing about the press in the United Kingdom seems to be its expectation and demand that female terrorists be young, beautiful and sexy.” Being typecast as the *femme fatale* character or focusing on typically feminine traits allows us to once again conform these deviants to our original expectations. For instance, an article (by Bennet, 2002) in the New York Times concerning Wafa Idris describes the suicide bomber as “a volunteer medic who raised doves and adored children” and being described in a photo as “composed, her chestnut hair curling past her shoulders, a rose and her [Red Cross] certificate in her right hand”. This softens the characteristics of the perpetrator, and reduces the sense of threat.

This is a tactic never observed when describing male terrorists who are instead attributed with negative characteristics not associated with ourselves; such as being evil, irrational or monstrous. Conversely, female terrorists are attributed with much more positive characteristics such as bravery, determination and strength. For example, an article (Myers, 2002) from the Telegraph concerning the Black Widows, the female Chechen terrorists who were responsible for the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in 2002, focuses on the feminine and likeable traits of the perpetrators. The article describes the women as “uncontaminated by selfishness of any kind” and being driven by motives “so absolutely pure, so uncompromised by either temporal or eternal desire”, all whilst “some, touchingly, wearing high heels”. This portrayal indicates the media’s inability to reconcile conventional standards of gender with women acting as perpetrators of terrorism. Instead an attempt is made to fit these women to conventional moulds of femininity, thereby undermining their capacity as figures of violence. This attempt to portray them in a more positive light is not something that would ever be applied to male terrorists, and this kind of reflection can have very serious consequences. Interestingly, the way in which the media paints female terrorists are remarkably similar to the way in which terrorist groups want to portray their female activists. Ness (2003) wrote that terrorist groups are keen to portray female suicide bombers as chaste, modest and as committing an act of personal sacrifice, so she can still conform to culturally accepted gender norms, and act in a way that is palatable to the surrounding society.

It can be argued that it is extremely dangerous to portray the women in this way, as it insinuates that they are less of a threat. Their supposed non-violent nature can mean that they are simply not regarded as important enough to warrant any manner of investigation as written by Cunningham (2003: 171). Those working in security positions will be affected by these biases, and will seek out those who fit the stereotypical demographics of a terrorist, and ignore those who do not. An example of this is the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a woman who supported the
Liberation Tigers of Tamil. The woman involved approached the politician, laid a garland of flowers around his neck, bent down to ostensibly touch his feet, and then detonated the bomb concealed beneath her dress. These perceptions of femininity and non-violence can allow women in terrorist organizations to bypass security checks, and consequently cause damages that their male counterparts would not be able to achieve.

In many traditions and cultures it is not considered acceptable for a man to conduct physical searches on a women due to how it would affect her reputation, and as such often go unsearched at checkpoints (Sutten, 2009). Women can therefore be a valuable asset to terrorist groups, simply by virtue of their gender. A tactic frequently taken advantage of is their ability to get pregnant, which can aid concealment of explosive devices and other weapons by hiding them under maternity clothes. Strategies such as this can often allow them to access buildings or social circles that the men cannot. For instance, in 2006 (BBC News) a female suicide bomber in Sri Lanka was able to enter a heavily guarded army hospital building under the guise of being pregnant, and kill and injure 8 people, including the army chief. By using those who are considered the least likely suspects, terrorist groups can extend the reach of their influence.

Mia Bloom (2012) speculates that a tactic that is becoming more frequent is the use of children in acts of terrorism, for similar reasons. Children are undoubtedly the least likely candidates for violence, they maximise shock value, and security officials are understandably more hesitant to attack them. It can therefore be seen the way in which terrorist groups can use common perceptions of those who are considered weak and powerless to their advantage. It is therefore crucial that such problems need to be tackled by altering our perceptions of those who commit terrorist acts, and respectively reforming counter-terrorism strategies.

Current counter-terrorism practices are failing in the regard to take gender into consideration, and to consider female terrorists as a viable threat. This problem can be directly linked to the above mentioned way in which the media frames women in terrorism. As Nacos (2005: 446) explains, because the clichés the media employ “tend to cue readers, viewers, and listeners to resort to deeply ingrained gender stereotypes in order to process and make sense of the news, they are likely to affect the opinions and attitudes of the general public and people charged with fighting terrorism as well”. On all levels of society- the government, the military, the media and the general public, perceptions regarding the demographics of terrorism must be reassessed (Sutten, 2009). Such reappraisal of our stereotypes is crucial in order to gain a more accurate and efficient approach to
counter-terrorism. On a pragmatic level, there are relatively simple solutions which can be implemented in order to tackle these problems associated with gender and terrorism. The Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe made a report in 2013 arguing that more female guards need to be present at security checkpoints in order to screen women without damaging the society’s culture or traditions. In 2008 a female suicide bomber in Iraq was able to kill 18 people; an act which the commander of the local police attributed to the simple fact of their inability to conduct searches on women (Robertson, 2008). Basic preventative measures such as these could have a significant positive impact on the way in which counter-terrorism is conducted.

However, while a small amount of action has already been taken to implement these plans, they have faced resistance due to cultural standards of gender. In 2008, Zavis wrote, in Baghdad a number of female guards were stationed at security checkpoints to tackle these problems, but these methods have been criticised by the local population. The traditional communities opposed the move, stating that the work was not appropriate for women, and demanded their removal. Therefore it can be seen that cultural and societal standards of gender can be a massive hurdle in the implementation of gender-specific counter-terrorism. As mentioned above, the most effective preventative measure would be to focus on the societal conditions, and increase women’s living standards in order to dissuade them from becoming involved with acts of terrorism. Improved education, freedom from violence and oppression, and the potential for social status would have a massive impact on women’s involvement in acts of terrorism. However, achieving such a thing would not be a simple feat, and therefore must be tackled in conjunction with counter-terrorism practices.

As terrorism takes many different forms and for many different causes (racist, environmental, nationalist etc), it is difficult to create generalisations which will apply to all women. A critical perspective towards terrorism is considered throughout: the author acknowledges that terrorism is not an objective fact, and factors such as power relations and societal context must be taken into consideration. It also must be noted that this paper only covers non-state actors, and does not explore the concept of state actors as participants of terrorist activities. A deepening of the field of terrorism studies is pursued, whilst at the same time advocating a problem solving mindset typically present in more orthodox approaches.

This essay has discussed the different ways in which male and female terrorists are portrayed in the media; namely that women are considered are much less serious threat. This is problematic due to the fact that many women play active roles in leadership positions in terrorist groups, and are active
in missions of martyrdom. Consequently, this perception is adopted by those implanting counter-terrorism policies, which allows women to bypass many security checks to a devastating end. This paper calls for a re-evaluation of our perception of women in terrorism, and to implement gender specific strategies that will tackle these problems.
Bibliography


Dangerous laughter: the mocking of Gender Studies in academia

Maria do Mar Pereira

published in 'openDemocracy 50.50' [www.opendemocracy/5050]

During the last decades and in several countries, there has been significant growth in the number of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) scholars, departments, programmes, journals, books and conferences. It is now an established and vibrant field of knowledge production, making significant contributions to our understanding of how societies’ norms about gender shape the experiences and identities of women and men, constrain the opportunities and resources that each can access, and continue to produce pervasive and damaging forms of gender inequality on a range of levels.

The field’s contributions to the advancement of knowledge (and to progressive social transformation) are numerous and undeniable; and yet, since its inception it has had to deal with a constant and persistent questioning within (and also outside) academia - is WGS really ‘proper’ knowledge?

In 1973, the influential feminist author Adrienne Rich wrote that in the US ‘women’s studies are [considered] a “fad”; (...) feminist teachers are “unscholarly,” “unprofessional,” or “dykes”’. More recent analyses of the status of the field indicate that WGS continues to be seen as less credible or relevant than other academic disciplines. Studies have shown that WGS is perceived by many scholars and students as too ‘trivial’ (Marchbank and Letherby, 2006), ‘not very academically demanding’ (Griffin and Hanmer, 2002:38) and too ‘soft’ (Stacey et al, 1992:1), or nothing more than consciousness-raising. WGS scholars with dazzling CVs and best-selling books report being dismissed by colleagues as not properly qualified or academically sound, and hence not worth reading or quoting. This dismissal of WGS occurs in different ways and degrees in each country, discipline or institution, but the overall picture is a clear one: WGS is not always taken seriously and this limits the opportunities for the study of gender and has a detrimental impact on WGS scholars’ career progression and access to funding and publishing opportunities.

If one considers only the claims made about WGS in public spaces and official speeches or documents, such an assessment of the situation may seem harsh and disproportionate. Indeed, most contemporary universities describe themselves as spaces of equality and of open and diverse academic inquiry, and in many Western academic communities explicit and unequivocal public denigration of WGS has become rarer and less acceptable (although it regularly surfaces in the
media in the declarations of religious authorities, politicians and other public figures). And yet, this public climate of openness does not always match what happens in university ‘corridor life’, as I discovered in a recent study (Pereira, 2012).

Through ethnographic observation of academic work and interaction in Portugal and the UK, and interviews with 35 scholars working within and outside WGS, I found that claims that WGS is not proper knowledge are frequently made informally and in humorous tone, creating what one of my interviewees called a ‘culture of teasing’ around WGS. A senior WGS scholar explained to me that ‘colleagues will sometimes make teasing remarks and laugh at me and my colleagues. Feminism is seen as something which is ridiculous, something that is laughable, that does not have academic quality.’ Scholars in other institutions reported very similar experiences. One junior scholar in another institution told me: ‘My colleagues make jokes about our Gender Studies degree all the time. Whenever I invite a Gender Studies scholar to speak at a seminar, one of them says “there comes another one of your feminist friends. I wonder if she shaved?”’. He’ll describe this as just a joke, nothing to take seriously, just innocent teasing, but this shows that they attribute less importance and value to Gender Studies than to other fields, which are never the butt of these kinds of jokes.’

This interviewee notes that the teasing is often described as ‘nothing to take seriously’. This is a recurring feature of this culture of teasing across institutions, and one that I and other authors would argue plays an important role. The social psychologist Michael Billig (2005: 25) has noted that the disclaimer that one is ‘just joking’ can enable the making of problematic or offensive claims that sidestep criticism and accountability. ‘A “friendly tease” seems to deny hostility. (...) The rhetoric (...) can be used to dissipate the negatives, like an air-spray freshening up a bathroom. (...) [It is a] “Tease-Spray”. Just squirt on your own humorous talk, and (...) nasty, critical names will become undetectable’, he wrote in his book Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour, published in 2005. This culture of (so-called innocent) teasing means that even when it is formally institutionalised as an equal field, WGS can be invested with a halo of unscientificity, lack of credibility and ridiculousness that works to position it as inferior to supposedly more serious fields.

Laughter and humour are also used in public to dismiss feminism. While conducting this research project, I attended a lecture for an undergraduate social science course in a British university and listened to a non-WGS lecturer describe a range of theories put forward to explain a particular social phenomenon. At the very end, he mentioned WGS approaches. These are approaches which have been recognised by many scholars as indispensable for a full understanding of the nature and effects
of the phenomenon in question; however, that was not how they were presented. One Powerpoint slide summarised how WGS scholars theorise this phenomenon; the next slide had the title ‘Maybe, but...’ and offered two points that framed those theories as limited and easily dismissible. Each point was introduced with a sexist and heteronormative joke that elicited much laughter from the students.

The lecturer’s jokes work to portray WGS as risible, something that the students should not take too seriously, in contrast to the other approaches mentioned, all of them presented in a balanced, admiring and non-mocking tone. In this and other similar situation humour plays a powerful role. As anthropologists John Carty and Yasmine Musharbash (2008: 214) suggest, ‘laughter is dangerous. Laughter is a boundary thrown up around those laughing, those sharing the joke. Its role in demarcating difference, of collectively identifying against an Other, is as bound to processes of social exclusion as to inclusion. Indeed, the two are one’.

Understanding the current status of WGS within the academy therefore requires an examination of humour. It requires analysing how humour makes it possible to maintain old prejudice in apparently modern and progressive institutions. It requires asking how it enables scholars to ridicule WGS in conferences, classrooms and corridors, while at the same time claim that they accept WGS and that the problem is feminists themselves, who ‘just don’t have a sense of humour’. It requires thinking of humour as something with powerful, and extremely problematic, social and political effects. It requires taking these powerful effects of academic humour very seriously indeed.
Bibliography


