



## How to create a feminist future

UK Feminista's 'suffragette school' gave budding activists the tools they need to build a fairer world



At the UK Feminista summer school: Aisha Mirza from UK Uncut, Cath Elliott, blogger and activist, and Anna Bird of the Fawcett Society. Photograph: Sarah Graham

School's out for 500 activists as they graduated yesterday from UK Feminista's second summer school. With interest in feminism sparking across the UK, this weekend's "suffragette school" in Birmingham aimed to equip budding activists with a toolbox of techniques for building a feminist future. With attacks on abortion rights, the relentless objectification of women in the media and the assault on women's economic independence through public sector cuts, there's certainly no shortage of obstacles to creating it. Hence "lessons" at summer school included everything from suffragette-era tactics of direct action to the rather more modern approach of mobilising the masses through Facebook and Twitter.

Teachers included Karak Mayik, Women for Women International's country director for South Sudan. Speaking live via Skype from the world's newest nation, Karak described the challenges women's rights activists there face after decades of conflict and how, despite brutal poverty and high HIV-rates, they are still managing to bring about monumental changes in women's daily lives.

Back in Birmingham, UK Uncut activist Aisha Mirza shared strategies for fighting the cuts, which include "making origami swans inside Fortnum & Mason and filling banks with babies". Object campaigner Anna van Heeswijk revealed how activists are embodying the ideal that "a revolution without dancing is not a revolution worth having" – with the novel approach of doing the conga round Tesco.

Important questions were also asked about the future of feminism. With women's lives

being so diverse, and the impact of sexism refracted by the many aspects of their identity – class, race, sexuality and disability – how can we work to ensure the strategies and solutions reflect this? And given that bringing about real progress will also mean fundamentally changing what it means to be a man in this society, how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the "masculinity trap"? Those conversations and the search for solutions need to continue, because feminism is a movement, not a club. Everyone has a vital part to play in it.

A key principle emerging from activist communities across the UK and embedded in the summer school is that this is a movement that neither has nor needs leaders. The [feminist resurgence](#) is following the trajectory that the second wave took, which, according to Gloria Steinem, "happened not so much by organisation as contagion". Activists across the UK are organising autonomously and deciding their own agenda. Why? Because no one person can lay claim to knowledge of what the one priority or single best tactic is. Because they don't exist. The issues confronting feminists are so complex and wide-ranging that autonomous organising on multiple fronts and in multiple ways is the only approach that stands a chance.

Feminism is returning to the streets, and that's where it belongs. Progress towards a world where women and men live equally won't be achieved solely by small groups of policy-makers behind closed doors. It takes ordinary women and men to stand up and make their voices heard. It requires people to believe in an alternative and imagine a world where women and men are equal. Over the coming year we'll see summer school graduates and activists across the UK stencilling that world on billboards, describing it in meeting rooms and holding up directions to it on placards as they march through the streets. We'll see them creating that other world. [Join them](#).

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**Gigolo**

16 August 2011 2:59PM

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*"And given that bringing about real progress will also mean*

*fundamentally changing what it means to be a man in this society, how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the "masculinity trap"?"*

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I'm quite happy as I am, thanks all the same. i don't agree to change or be changed by anyone. So I guess **on your terms**, I'm against it.



**[crookedrib](#)**

16 August 2011 3:25PM

great blog! glad it was such a success. it all looked and sounded amazing.

if you're a feminist inspired by all that happened at the weekend, and live in the south west, then get involved in Bristol Feminist Network, we've been going for four years and our events calendar this year is packed - [www.bristolfeministnetwork.com](http://www.bristolfeministnetwork.com)

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**[mathmodave](#)**

16 August 2011 3:51PM

'the assault on women's economic independence through public sector cuts'

Surely cutting the public sector is a step **forward** for women's economic independence. If women are receiving **less** from the state than before then they are **less** dependent on the state and hence more independent.

What you mean is that women are now able to force men to pay them less than before via the tax/benefit system.

But since feminism is about equality rather than being a self-interested group of egotistical women selling their freedom and the freedom of their families for some money from hard-working taxpayers that would seem contradictory.

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**[connieandraymond](#)**

16 August 2011 5:57PM

@mathmodave

Cutting the public sector is not a step forward for women's economic independence. If a group of people are **dependent** on the state for something - in this case, for example, cutting Sure Start programmes or reducing child care options - then that doesn't leave women thinking "oh great, thank god I don't have those options anymore. That's given me the incentive (because it was always a choice, not a necessity) to go and be financially independent. Jeez, why didn't I think of that before". These are very necessary resources for a lot of women, and the complex nature of society means it's too reductionist to simplify these things as just making a lifestyle choice.

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I'm not entirely sure about the confused point you're making underneath, so I'll leave that.

On the final point, you seem to be caught up in a common myth about feminism. Ultimately, those that call themselves feminists - both women and men - do so because they believe in equality and human rights. Don't misinterpret the term as one group favouring themselves over another - it's a common mistake, and one that needs to be changed in society. As Kat Banyard mentions in the article, feminism is a movement, not a club. Again, I'm not too sure what you mean by "women selling their freedom and the freedom of their families for some money from hard-working taxpayers" but it'd be interesting if you explained yourself.



**MensRightsVideos**

16 August 2011 6:20PM

Feminism is at best obsolete (women have all the rights they could want);  
at worst Anti-Men and rife with narcissism (witness: SlutWalk).

Feminists are the only people who are disappointed upon hearing that they have equal rights.

Such is the intoxicating nectar of "Lifelong Victim Mentality". Feminists seem to delight in the narcissistic fantasy that "every man is out to get them", much like the tinfoil hat conspiracy theorists who delight in imagining that the CIA is spying on them... an validation of their own delusions of grandeur.

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**MaryTracy9**

16 August 2011 8:42PM

this is a movement that neither has nor needs leaders

Not so sure about that. Whenever the topic of feminism is picked up by the media, only a couple of faces are interviewed. And they are always the same faces.

Surprisingly enough, it's never been me. Or anyone I know.

So if feminism doesn't have any "leaders" it sure as Heck has a few "spokeswomen" doing all the agenda setting. At least in the eyes of the media.

This explains why the issues brought up are always the same ones, seen from the same angles. Because it's the same women giving their views, over and over again.

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**mathmodave**

17 August 2011 9:43AM

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**francoisP**

17 August 2011 10:44AM

how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the  
"masculinity trap"?

What is that supposed to mean? Genuine question, because it  
has mean somewhere between perplexed and amused

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**R042**

17 August 2011 11:19AM

What is that supposed to mean?

If I understand correctly it's trying to do something about the  
culture epitomised by people like those football pundits who got  
in hot water, the promotion of the ideal female as that of  
pornography as a sexual ideal for young boys, tabloid  
newspapers and magazines for young men.

Not trying to end sexual freedom of choice, but trying to change  
the view of sexuality from the "woman-as-object" to a more  
equivocal ideal.

Essentially getting rid of the "I'd smash it/hang out the back of  
it/roasting" culture which really does men no favours and is  
often accompanied by rudeness and disrespect.

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**Binty**

17 August 2011 11:27AM

@mathmodave

Public sector cuts are hitting women harder than men - because  
a disproportionate number of women \*work\* in the public sector -  
and are facing redundancy / cuts in hours etc. Public sector  
doesn't just mean teachers and nurses though - I've worked in  
the local council admin side and the majority of the employees  
doing such admin jobs are female.

In addition to this things like child care centres and childcare  
vouchers which are council run shutting down - there isn't a  
sudden increase in affordable private sector childcare. Add into  
this the fact that in some areas 54 people are competing for the  
same job which means a disproportionate number of women will  
end up out of work and unable to find a new job due to the lack  
of job opportunities.

You're quite right in that laws exist to attempt to ensure that  
people are not discriminated against due to their gender (as well  
as sexual orientation, ability etc.). When they actually start

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working then feminists will be happy. We're after equality for all - and this actually includes the men who can be discriminated against (although generally this isn't for their gender but because they're part of another minority group.)



**scarasta**

17 August 2011 11:34AM

These comments make some amazing reading.  
'Mathmodave', your nonsensical vitriol was quite eye-catching.  
My favourite of your assertions was that '**women are now able to force men to pay them less**'.  
If that is how you are choosing to interpret the pay gap between men and women, then you have just wonderfully elucidated the need for a second wave of feminism.

Whilst I'm at it, 'MensRightsVideos', '**femenism is, at best, obsolete?**' Please, please, explain further. I'm assuming you have some sort of special insight into the lives of all men and all women. I really would like to know why you think it's time to wrap up all this equal-rights stuff and move on.

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**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 11:42AM

Binty

17 August 2011 11:27AM

@mathmodave

Public sector cuts are hitting women harder than men - because a disproportionate number of women \*work\* in the public sector - and are facing redundancy / cuts in hours etc. Public sector doesn't just mean teachers and nurses though - I've worked in the local council admin side and the majority of the employees doing such admin jobs are female.

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You're correct about the proportion of women to men in the Public sector , however , I don't think we should be concentratiing on more women etc etc as currently male and females are losing their jobs all over the place to concentrate on just gender is polarising

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**holdingonfortomorrow**

17 August 2011 12:30PM

@mathmodave

**No. Feminism is not about equality. Women have equality. Point out to me the law which favours men over women.**

Surely you can tell the difference between de jure and de facto?

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**mathmodave**

17 August 2011 12:41PM

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@Binty

I agree entirely with your first two paragraphs except the bit about blaming it on lack of job opportunities rather than the real issue of a lack of incentive to find work.

You're quite right in that laws exist to attempt to ensure that people are not discriminated against due to their gender (as well as sexual orientation, ability etc.).

With the notable exception of when it's to fill a quota.

When they actually start working then feminists will be happy.

What do you mean? They ARE in law.

We're after equality for all - and this actually includes the men who can be discriminated against (although generally this isn't for their gender but because they're part of another minority group.)

I wouldn't normally bring men's issues into this because it's not feminists' responsibility to fight for men but since you have raised that men are generally only discriminated based on factors other than gender I feel obliged to inform you otherwise: Men have less reproductive, parental, employment, pension, medical rights vs. women. This is fact. The law discriminates against men all the time.

@scarasta

I notice you fail to actually counter any argument I have given only restate them with your disapproval. Why is that I wonder?

I am not referring to the 'pay gap' which exists between men and women like it does between graduates and non-graduates (for a reason) but the fact that men (who pay most of the taxes) will now be paying less to women (who claim most of the benefits).

I welcome the second wave of feminism. The more you push beyond the already ridiculous misandrist society we currently live in the stronger the backlash will be.



**Ronia**

17 August 2011 12:47PM

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how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the "masculinity trap"?

What is that supposed to mean? Genuine question, because it has mean somewhere between perplexed and amused

To me, it means changing our culture to accept that some men don't want to be the macho, beer swilling, go out and provide for a family type of man. Some men want to work in childcare. Some men want to stay at home with their children.

Crucially some men would like to take longer paternity leave (or any paternity leave) or be able to be the one to leave work and go home to look after their children if they're ill. At present this is considered at best unusual, at worst unmanly and feminine - they're not real men.

Escaping the masculinity trap offers men choice as I see it. They can stick to current gender roles if they want to and that's where they're comfortable and what works in their relationship, but can also accept those men who don't as also 'normal'



**onewayforme**

17 August 2011 1:11PM

**Feminism is returning to the streets, and that's where it belongs**

What a load of crap.

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**Gigolo**

17 August 2011 1:37PM

**Ronia,**

It's a pity so few people have commented on this article so far. However, the full quote is:

*"And given that bringing about real progress will also mean fundamentally changing what it means to be a man in this society, how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the "masculinity trap"?"*

You only gave the second half of it, but the first bit you missed out crucially appears to involve a rather unpleasant element of compulsion. (What if most men don't want to change and are already happy, like me, with their identity and gender role? Who and their army is going to make us change?)

What you go on to say about roles being voluntary is fine, but I would point out that there is absolutely no compulsion whatever even now on men to be "macho" (your word) or "swill beer" (your description). Men who work in childcare are often suspected of being paedophiles - by children's mothers. (So you can start to change that, yes?)

BTW, I have always been the one to take time off when my 14 y.o. daughter is ill. (When he was younger, I virtually always did the same with my son). It just happens that my wife's employer is considerably less understanding about these things than mine (I should say here that I earn more than 4 times her salary in the

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macho oil industry). I know several other men who do the same wrt looking after their children, so I suspect you are simply re-circulating ancient myths, or simply reflecting what YOU think that men think, without actually asking any of us, (a fairly common female trait in my experience). On the other hand, if you believe what I do is "unmanly" - again, your description, think again about your own beliefs, but either way, I don't care. :)



**mrsmooseface**

17 August 2011 1:52PM

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I'm getting a little bit tired of Guardian blog posts that are so poorly written no one except a few insiders has a clue what they were intended to be about, leaving us to fight out the question of what was meant in the comments.

I clicked on the headline intrigued to know what a 21st century 'suffragette' is, what they are being trained to do and why. I didn't get any of that information from the post. I certainly didn't get any clues as to what a feminist future is supposed to be and how to get one.



**Ro42**

17 August 2011 2:15PM

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I would point out that there is absolutely no compulsion whatever even now on men to be "macho" (your word) or "swill beer" (your description).

Perhaps there is no compulsion you are aware of.

But I recommend looking at things like FHM, Nuts, the Gray/Keys debacle, the behaviour of Premier League footballers (male role models for young people), and then getting back to me on whether the "lad" archetype is completely dead.

Actually look at the sorts of things young boys and teenagers are being introduced to, the mindsets their role models are promoting, and the sexual ideals that pornography is promoting during a time of sexual discovery, and then engage your brain.

Good on you that you're above all that and your friends and acquaintances are. However, the plural of anecdote is not data.



**martindufresne**

17 August 2011 2:16PM

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The success of the UK Feminista summer school is great news. Thank you for reporting on it so positively. I do think that - much as spontaneity and autonomy are important features - a movement strong enough to defeat the Conservative/fundamentalist backlash that gives us "men's

rights" advocates -- and the occasional Andres Breivik -- needs to find, grow, plebiscite and support leaders, and doesn't need to be curtailed by veiled imperatives such as "not being a club" and not needing to agree sometimes on common principles, which would force it to bow to anyone on their terms, regardless of their positions. e.g. sex industry and other female submission apologists. Antifeminism takes many forms these days.

As for the hostility shown by some men here to the notion of gender equality, it is indicative of how much work remains to be done to uproot a system based on gender INequality, i.e. male domination, a system that many men do NOT see as "a trap" but have fashioned as a boon and will predictably go on fighting to protect and indeed, if we let them, take to further heights of gender privilege.

There are men who care more for equality and justice than virility and "the way things were," but they and we need to be clear about their \*dissident\* status and their need to work toward accountability to feminist leadership rather than more clamoring for power. (Interesting blog entry about this here: <http://madamjmo.blogspot.com/2011/08/what-about-mens.html>)



**R042**

17 August 2011 2:16PM

And I say that as a man.

Even outside of the childcare/roles aspect, and knowing full well this is only an anecdote and so of limited value, I would say that women I have spoken to say that it is uncommon for men to express desire in a sincere way beyond simple physical attraction.

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**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 2:19PM

martindufresne

17 August 2011 2:16PM

Antifeminism takes many forms these days.

As for the hostility shown by some men here to the notion of gender equality,

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What " hostility " ?

And beware of assuming those that disagree must be men as there is no clue given to gender by an avatar



**mathmodave**

17 August 2011 2:19PM

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@holdingonfortomorrow

So equality in law is not good enough? I thought so.  
How do you propose to gain your version of 'equality' then?

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**[martindufresne](#)**

17 August 2011 2:46PM

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*"the plural of anecdote is not data."* Great quip!



**[martindufresne](#)**

17 August 2011 2:51PM

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"beware of assuming those that disagree must be men as there is no clue given to gender by an avatar"

I did no such thing, but some commenters were clear that they spoke as men. As for "polarising", it seems to me that it is male culture that has gone out of its way to polarise society along the gender line, for its own material or symbolic benefit. It would be a pity if women were chastised for pointing it out and opposing that form of bias, escalated by public sector cutbacks.



**[BkAv](#)**

17 August 2011 3:02PM

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Good on you that you're above all that and your friends and acquaintances are. However, the plural of anecdote is not data.

*Thank you.* I truly hate the inevitable comments that pop up every time certain issues (particularly feminist ones) are discussed. "Well I haven't personally encountered this problem, and neither has any member of my particular circle of acquaintances, therefore I refuse to acknowledge the existence of said problem". Even if one chooses to believe that there is complete gender equality in Britain (there isn't), one must acknowledge the quite frightening sexism that exists in other parts of the world. I really don't know how people can look at maps like [this](#) and still think that feminism is a pointless pursuit.



**[Ghostworld](#)**

17 August 2011 3:03PM

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[martindufresne](#)

17 August 2011 2:51PM

"beware of assuming those that disagree must be men as there is no clue given to gender by an avatar"

I did no such thing, but some commenters were clear that they spoke as men. As for "polarising", it seems to me that it is male culture that has gone out of its way to polarise society along the

gender line, for its own material or symbolic benefit. It would be a pity if women were chastised for pointing it out and opposing that form of bias, escalated by public sector cutbacks.

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Well you kinda did really , however , Lets not quibble

Could you expand on and qualify the rest of your post please



**Gigolo**

17 August 2011 3:08PM

**RO42**

I could say the same thing back to you, twice over. Again, where is the compulsion to behave in a certain manner? Lads mags and football commentators? That's the best you've got?

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**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 3:22PM

martindufresne

17 August 2011 2:51PM

. It would be a pity if women were chastised for pointing it out and opposing that form of bias, escalated by public sector cutbacks.

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As has been established above the Public sector does employ more women , however , as cuts to public services are happening , are you saying it is mens fault? as i am somewhat confused as to what you're actually trying to say.

Everyone is facing cuts currently whether that be male or female , i am sure that somewhere there is an organisation that may possibly have more men losing their jobs than women ..... Are we really arguing over which gender is more affected



**Ronia**

17 August 2011 3:25PM

@Ghostworld

Are we really arguing over which gender is more affected

There's no argument about which gender is most affected by the government's cuts.

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1235>

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**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 3:28PM

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Ronia

17 August 2011 3:25PM

@Ghostworld

Are we really arguing over which gender is more affected

There's no argument about which gender is most affected by the government's cuts.

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1235>

Sorry Ronia , not interested in Fawcett Society dodgy states they have been ripped apart on here more times than i care to remember

If as we say more women work in the Public sector and the public sector are having big cuts then logic follows it will be more women losing their jobs or do you think there is some male conspiracy to get rid of women ?



**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 3:29PM

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@ Ronia

Sorry forgot to add , so to halt the cuts to Public sector jobs what is your answer?



**Gigolo**

17 August 2011 3:34PM

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**Martindufresne**

*"There are men who care more for equality and justice than virility and "the way things were," but they and we need to be clear about their \*dissident\* status and their need to work toward accountability to feminist leadership rather than more clamoring for power."*

Thanks for the link: it's quite beyond parody. Hilarious. Thanks for the best laugh I've had this week. Honestly, you are wasting your time.



**auntiebee**

17 August 2011 3:48PM

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men and boys are oppressed all the time by phrases such as man up and grow some balls. these let everyone one know that certain behaviours are attributed to a gender group and not dispaying them makes you less of that group.

I've grown up being able to wear as i like skirts dresses trousers jeans for the most part I have escaped being dictated on gender appropriate dress, or seen as crossdressing or trying to take on mascaline tendancies, (i say most part there are some noticable exceptons which persist) As a man the same is not true.

As a woman i am in control of my fertility and family planning to a level a man cannot automatically have - even over his own body. (vasectomies on the NHS are for a certain type of "life stage" only, imagine a womena being tld she can only have full autonomy over her fertility when she has had a certain number of kids and is deemed unlikely to want more should she start a new relationship)

paternity leave and custody and access along with maintainance are a continuation of this idea that children and their issues are a womans thing.... which is also i think why the cuts tend to hurt women more (it's a feeling i have rather than backed with any knowledge).

ideas of body image and expected roles within society and relationship persist. and i argue are as oppressive for men as for women.

These seemingly trivial things are symptomatic of a lack of equality, a lack of equality for men and a lack of equality for women.

No one is free until we all are free. and i don't understand why anyone would want to settle for less. while you may not choose to wear a floral skirt on a hot day you having the ability to, without it even being a thingt, is a step closer to liberation for all.



**dfic1999**

17 August 2011 4:21PM

martindufresne:

There are men who care more for equality and justice than virility and "the way things were,"

Yes, but they can do that through any number of progressive organisations rather than through the feminist movement/club/whatever - and still address issues of gender inequality while doing so.

but they and we need to be clear about their \*dissident\* status and *their need to work toward accountability to feminist leadership* rather than more clamoring for power. [emphasis added]

First, Banyard argues that feminism has no 'leaders' (debatable, but then she ought to know, right?). However, even if you mean 'leadership' in terms of running organisations, I refer to my previous point, as well as noting that plenty of men are used to having a female (if not necessarily feminist) boss.

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That said, if your point boils down to 'Men! Kneel before Ms Zod' I don't think there's much appeal for men in being 'accountable' in a permanent second-class status to a women-only leadership caste that claims to know/have the right 'line' on gender issues, let alone on masculinity (women got fed up with male-dominated politics for similar reasons). The idea of 'working toward accountability' sounds horribly like 'second-guessing what will best please the leadership' - not the best use of male intellectual and political energy, perhaps. If feminism is truly a movement, then it can't treat men as party hacks led by an all-female Politburo.



**dfic1999**

17 August 2011 5:02PM

One further thought...

I'm sure there will be those thinking that the thread has been derailed into yet another *whatbouthemenz?* flame war. However, I wonder whether this is indicative not of solely 'anti-feminist' hostility, but of a failure to 'sell' feminism even to sympathetic men.

Banyard writes:

And given that bringing about real progress will also mean fundamentally changing what it means to be a man in this society, how do we mobilise men and boys to escape the "masculinity trap"?

According to the [report on UK Feminista](#) in the *Guardian*, barely a handful of men turned up alongside 500 women. So what went wrong? If martindufresne's model is any guide, the women will somehow 'lead' the men out of the 'masculinity trap'. There is an echo of this in the Banyard quote above: men and boys will be 'mobilised' (a curiously militaristic term) - by whom exactly? A handful of men who hate porn even more than some feminists do, as indicated by the report? By an activist conference that is over 90% female and understandably concerned about issues affecting women rather than men? If Banyard and other feminists really do believe that 'feminism is a movement, not a club. Everyone has a vital part to play in it', perhaps the question should really be *whereareallthemenz?* instead.



**Gigolo**

17 August 2011 5:34PM

**dfic1999**

Good posts, my thoughts exactly.

I mean, short of an armed uprising, exactly how will feminists wrest away the power from and defeat the patriarchy (men like me?) They can either wait for us to die off (a long wait) or they

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will need our active co-operation. This guff about how feminists "don't need" men is only true if they are 100% lesbians (and even then only in a strictly sexual sense). It has otherwise been proved wrong time and again. For example, women were granted the right to vote in 1918 by a male Parliament. *Teh menz* could have continued to say "no" as before the War but chose not to. Feminists need to understand that just like everyone else, they'll get further with honey than with vinegar.



**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 5:36PM

dfic1999

17 August 2011 5:02PM

One further thought...

I'm sure there will be those thinking that the thread has been derailed into yet another whatbouthemenz? flame war. However, I wonder whether this is indicative not of solely 'anti-feminist' hostility, but of a failure to 'sell' feminism even to sympathetic men.

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I don't believe ( personally ) that it has been derailed at all , some pertinent questions asked for sure , but that is just natural. I also don't believe (IMHO) that many posters who question this topic or other related are anti feminist ( i know i am not ) it is just as i said on another thread i find some feminists attitude rather arrogant and superior and some that would contemplate the fluff in their own navels and find a male conspiracy.

some aspects of feminsm may be hard to sell to men , in much the same way it is hard to sell to many women also



**dfic1999**

17 August 2011 5:46PM

Ghostworld:

I don't believe ( personally ) that it has been derailed at all , some pertinent questions asked for sure , but that is just natural. I also don't believe (IMHO) that many posters who question this topic or other related are anti feminist ( i know i am not )

I was alluding to the kind commenter that assumes - wrongly - that any criticism of feminism is a form of violent misogyny against women and must be stopped/moderated/banned by law/whatever. You've probably encountered the type BTL.

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**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 5:51PM

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@ dffc1999

I know what you meant , sorry if it came across otherwise.

Yep certainly know the type you mean

Good posts by the way



**OliviaOSullivan**

17 August 2011 5:59PM



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Gigolo

It has otherwise been proved wrong time and again.  
 For example, women were granted the right to vote in 1918 by a male Parliament. Teh menz could have continued to to say "no" as before the War but chose not to.  
 Feminists need to to understand that just like everyone else, they'll get further with honey than with vinegar.

I think honey is only sometimes better than vinegar. Perhaps it is more appropriate now that gender inequality is more of a social issue than a legal one, but in the past it certainly wasn't. And Feminists might fall into that trap to which many social movements are prey - constantly trying to please and appeal to people who were never going to agree with them anyway. Like the Democratic Party, say. To take your example, the men in Parliament in 1918 were somewhat forced into their position weren't they? They didn't hand down rights to women because women were being appealing and conciliatory. They had the prospect of quite serious social unrest on their hands if they didn't grant the vote. This was because suffragettes had been demonstrating for years by that point, with tactics we would even now consider shocking - ever read an account of a hunger strike, and the way women were force-fed in British prisons? Voluntarily undergoing that kind of treatment seized public attention and forced the government into a stark moral choice. Emily Davison *killed herself* for the vote. She didn't say 'please'. That comes under 'vinegar', to me. This is to say nothing of all the women who worked in traditionally male roles in the war, demonstrating their abilities and their right to the franchise.

Just a historical point I thought it was worth making - social and legal change happens because a lot of factors come together, and because a lot of people work hard. It's not that women just aren't being nice enough, and it's not even a question of men choosing to hand women rights - as the many posts in this thread point out, gender inequality is a social phenomenon that affects both sexes.



**dfic1999**

17 August 2011 6:12PM

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@OliviaOSullivan - I agree with much of your post, but with the proviso that there must have been some attempt to build a base of support - male as well as female - rather than simply kicking up a fuss until granted whatever changes is being demanded. Both honey *and* vinegar, nor either/or.



**OliviaOSullivan**

17 August 2011 6:51PM

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dfic1999 - agreed. Honey *and* vinegar. I think I came across a little too pro-vinegar, but I just wanted to balance out what I think is a tendency to make all historical social change sound like a smooth and foregone conclusion, when it rarely happened that way, in my opinion. But you're right, I think - there was a groundswell of support for women's votes from many men, especially in the sense that it was sort of an idea whose time had well and truly come in terms of liberal political thought. So suffrage wouldn't have been accomplished without that either. You need both. I'm on stronger ground with history than with modern feminism, I have to say, but I'd imagine now that inequality is much less severe and far more de facto than de jure, a conciliatory approach that builds support is more appropriate. Just not an approach that chases approval from everyone, is my point.



**Ghostworld**

17 August 2011 7:16PM

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@ Olivia

Like your posts , be good to see you contribute to posts BTL on these sort of subjects more often.



**Gigolo**

17 August 2011 7:39PM

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**Olivia O'S**

I take your general point, but *historically* you are wrong. The Suffragettes and their kind achieved very little before 1914. What did it was the fact so many jobs previously done by men were competently handled by women during the World War, (and a quite a few women risked their lives very near the Front). These included surgeons, police, transport and communications and military dispatch riders.

That made the case for women's suffrage unarguable. (During

the war, despite not having the vote, Emily Pankhurst became a pro-government, anti-German agitator, using her considerable powers of oratory to persuade men to join up to the slaughter).



**Ghostworld**

18 August 2011 9:51AM

@ Gigolo

Could be completely wrong but wasn't it Pankhurst who handed out white feathers to those poor sods who refused to get their brains blown out for queen and country ?

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**OliviaOSullivan**

18 August 2011 11:14AM



Gigolo - See, now you've got me digging for my university notes, and this is a thread about feminism, not history - but what I can say off the top of my head is that, while the idea women got the vote because they proved themselves as workers in the war has been around for a while and is what most of us learnt in school, I know many historians don't think that was the whole story, and I don't either. I know the suffragettes actually alienated some people with some of their tactics (and also that several Pankhursts subsequently went a mite crazy, but they're not the whole suffrage movement are they?) before the war. But they also put serious pressure on the government. The jam the government was in was that they wanted the suffragettes' campaigns to end, because they were threatening and embarrassing to them, but they didn't want to be seen to concede to violence or shocking tactics. The women of the war gave them an excuse - they could concede without losing face. I did mention the women workers in World War One, but they're only part of the picture - they were the carrot, if you like, and the suffrage movement was the stick, which brought the required pressure to bear (now we're mixing carrots, vinegar, honey and sticks, I should probably stop, but you get the idea). The historian I can remember who wrote about this is Deborah Thom, but there are others - I'll let you know if I recall them. Anyway, I'm of the opinion that the whole 'women were so wonderful in the war we just spontaneously felt moved to \*reward\* them with the vote' argument is too pat. I think governments need to be both pressured and given an avenue to concede with honour. But, of course, we're not going to establish historical truth in this thread, so feel free to disagree :)

Ghostworld - thank you!

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**derrington**

21 August 2011 12:36PM

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Until there is an end to domestic/gender violence, rape, paedophilia, disenfranchisement and other human rights abuses there will always be a need for feminism as most (didn't say all for the flame throwers) men seem unable or unwilling to police or even admit to certain predominatorily male behaviour.

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