



Women and Power

“Feminism isn’t about making women stronger, women are already strong. It’s about changing the way the world perceives that strength.”

G.D. Anderson

Power can often be an invisible force that provides resources and opportunities to particular sections of society, at particular times and in particular spaces. For women the power differential with men not only restricts their opportunities, but their lack of representation throughout society can actually reinforce this lack of power.

Areas where women are under-represented can be the very area where women experience some of the worst oppression, e.g. business, politics and criminal justice. Pay inequality and inadequate employment conditions, political decisions, such as austerity, all disproportionately affect women. Women receive higher custodial sentences for lesser crimes reducing women’s access to the vote, care of their children and to employment opportunities.

“Offending and imprisonment for women means more than failing to meet the standards of law; it also means failing to be a “proper woman”. The damage inflicted as a consequence of removal from their children, their families and their communities is immeasurable.” (Helena Kennedy (2004), “Just Law”)

Voder and Kahn (2016) highlighted that “definitions of power should center around the distinction between ‘power-over’, the domination and control of one person or group over another, and ‘power-to’ or personal empowerment”.

Within the context of women’s experience, such as male violence and abuse, resources and opportunities are extremely restricted. Furthermore the societal pressure to “avoid” the threat of male violence and the knowledge that if you do experience it you will be seen as being at least partially responsible, influences girls and women throughout the lifecycle.

In the UK women represent;

- 22.7% of government ministers.
- 30% of FTSE Company Directors
- 29% of Judges in UK

“Sexism contributes to fears, pressures and expectations that do little to help us flourish. It quietens our voices. It removes rights and impacts the representation of women in public and private sectors”.

(Georgina Webb, Young Women’s Trust (2019))

This does not mean women are without power in society. As carers and educators women are central to the development of our society. Evidence of this can be seen in the Women’s Aid movement, political activity, such as Equal Pay campaigns, and in the development and delivery of support services for the most vulnerable in our society, heavily staffed by women, paid and unpaid.

Recognising who is valued in society and why is essential to begin to redistribute the power centralised around white, heterosexual males. Developing a society based on health and wellbeing of all is essential if we are to recognise the contribution of women, not only to ensure they have access to positions of power, but that those positions themselves are reviewed and adjusted to reflect and promote a more equal society.

EVENT RESULTS

THEME: There is so much in the media and society's attitudes which discourages and frowns upon women being together, sharing their wisdom and knowledge, empowering each other to feel good about themselves. What makes women supporting other women so special? What do we learn from each other? What do we do to nurture ourselves the way we look after others?

PARTICIPANTS: 36 women from local communities, representing a wide range of backgrounds, convened 8 break-out groups on issues with 25 proposed actions. **(May 2016)**

TOP SIX PRIORITIES VOTED BY PARTICIPANTS (NUMBER OF VOTES)

- No means no!! **21 votes**
- Be positive about yourself. Find ways to re-evaluate what you think about yourself e.g. go to self-confidence or writing groups. **20 votes**
- You have the ability to believe you can make change (believe it). Take responsibility for your own well-being. **20 votes**
- Practice self-care (diet, rest, exercise, fun relaxation). **15 votes**
- Confidence and self-belief (positive self-talk). Be true to yourself. Look for role models in history or literature. **14 votes**
- Show yourself compassion. **14 votes**

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

- Individual action/mind-set change. **181 votes**
- Awareness raising. **18 votes**
- Organised action/Support groups. **9 votes**

DETAILED RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS

- No means no!! **21 votes**
- You have the ability to believe you can make change (believe it). Take responsibility for your own well-being. **20 votes**
- Be positive about yourself. Find ways to re-evaluate what you think about yourself e.g. go to self-confidence or writing groups. **20 votes**
- Practice self-care (diet, rest, exercise, fun relaxation). **15 votes**
- Confidence and self-belief (positive self-talk). Be true to yourself. Look for role models in history or literature. **14 votes**
- Show yourself compassion. **14 votes**
- L'Oreal – believe you are worth it. **14 votes**
- Surround ourselves with people who will lift/support us – sincere people. **13 votes**
- Giving encouragement and support to each other to lead to success and power. **11 votes**
- Different friendships bring different lessons. More balance – able to assess relationships. **10 vote**