



FEM 05 – A National Conference on Women's Rights

POST-CONFERENCE REPORT SUMMARY

Introduction

On 5th November 2005 400 women and men came together in Sheffield for the eagerly awaited FEM 05 – A National Conference on Women's Rights. FEM 05 was the second in the series of 'FEM Conferences', and featured talks and workshops by leading women's rights organisations and activists, including The Fawcett Society, Amnesty International UK, and Women's Aid. The event was the culmination of 10 months work by a dedicated team of volunteers, and was even more successful than the team dared hope!

FEM 05 was a 'sell-out'. The six most popular words delegates chose to best describe the event were *interesting, enjoyable, valuable, well presented, motivating* and *stimulating*. FEM 05 was particularly successful in engaging young people: at least 220 of the registered delegates were students, coming from over 37 different schools, colleges, universities and student organisations. We were also delighted to see a significant number of men attending FEM 05 – reflecting in part the significant proportion of men who were involved in organising the event. This represents a widening and strengthening of the feminist movement; in the 21st Century every single man, woman, girl and boy needs to be engaged in transforming themselves and their society. Gender inequality affects us all – and we must all take responsibility for tackling it.

I started the FEM Conferences in my spare time at university in the hope that they might encourage others to get active in the campaign for gender equality. The FEM 05 'headquarters' were a corner in my living room. Yet, come FEM 05, 38 dedicated volunteers had poured in significant time and energy, 25 speakers had offered to take part and give their time for free, and 400 men and women had dedicated a day to travelling to Sheffield to attend – and all in the name of feminism. FEM 05 demonstrated that every individual has the power to effect real and substantial change. *You* have that power.

Above all else, FEM 05 highlighted the huge wealth of fantastic and exciting feminist activity that is currently taking place in the UK today. Students are organising on campuses, employees are organising through trade unions, and the Fawcett Society is pulling this activity together in a new, diverse feminist movement for the 21st Century.

The future of feminism looks bright!

Kat Banyard

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Chair, FEM 05

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About the conference

There were 7 key features of FEM 05:

1. Talks and Workshops

FEM 05 featured a variety of workshops and talks by leading women's rights organisations and activists. The four central themes at the conference were: *women in the workplace*, *violence against women*, *multiple identities*, and *feminism*. In total, 24 speakers took part (listed below).

- Annie Neligan, author of 'Sleeping Warrior'
- Cath Lambert, University of Warwick
- Darlene Corry, Women's Resource Centre
- Deborah McIlveen, National Policy Officer, Women's Aid
- Diane Grant, Liverpool John Moores University
- Finn Mackay, WILPF & founder of the London Feminist Network
- Fiona Gell, Oxfam
- Georgina Waylen, University of Sheffield
- Helen Jackson
- Hildegard Dumper, researcher & consultant on refugee issues
- Jan Wilson, Leader of Sheffield City Council
- Jeff Hearn, Swedish School of Economics, Finland
- Jennifer Drew, Chair of Object
- Jenny Westaway, The Fawcett Society
- Jo Salmon, NUS Women's Officer
- Kat Stark, President of Warwick University Union of Students
- Kate Allen, Director, Amnesty International UK
- Kristine Ziwica, Abortion Rights
- Rebecca Gill, Women's Policy Officer, TUC
- Sam Lyle, Warwick Anti-Sexism Society
- Sheila Wild, Equal Opportunities Commission
- Sian Davies, Students With Disabilities Officer, NUS
- Vivienne Hayes, Director, Women's Resource Centre
- Zlakha Ahmed, Apna Haq



2. Exhibition Area

The following organisations showcased their work and services in the Exhibition Area:

- FEM Conferences
- Feminist Archive North
- Homeworkers Worldwide
- National Alliance of Women's Organisations
- Object
- Hallam University Union of Students
- Sheffield Women's Forum
- SOVA Women in to Work
- The Agency for Culture and Change Management
- The Fawcett Society
- The Women's Library
- University of Sheffield Union of Students Women's Campaign
- Women's Resource Centre
- YWCA



3. The FEM 05 Raffle

Prizes included: signed books by Rosalind Miles (*The Women's History of the World*) and R. Cook, B Dickens & M. Fathalla (*Reproductive Health and Human Rights*); a replica brooch, donated by Germaine Greer, of the Filipino charm that Germaine photographed for the cover of her book, *The Whole Woman*; and a year's free membership of the Fawcett Society. The winners were announced at the end of the *Feminism* plenary at the conference.

4. Networking Space

There was a timetabled networking 'space' at the conference. This gave delegates the opportunity to network effectively with other individuals and organisations in a designated area.

5. Films

Vera Media, a Leeds women-run media production and training organization, showed some of their films on the big screen in the Auditorium from 9.30 – 10.30am, and again at lunchtime (1.00-2.00pm). The programme included:

- ***Never Give Up – Women Against Violence Against Women*** (35 minutes): the dramatic campaigns against violence against women from the early 1970s to the present day, focusing especially, but not exclusively, on West Yorkshire. Informative, moving and inspirational.
- ***International Women's Day*** (13 mins): for one day out of 365, women all over the world celebrate International Women's Day. This documentary explores the history of the day, and highlights activities organised around March 8th in the late 1980s, focusing especially on events in Leeds.
- ***Yorkshire Women of the Century*** (24 mins): Suffragettes, social reformers, actors, athletes, trailblazers ... this entertaining and thought-provoking film portrays the pioneering campaigns and achievements of 20th Century Yorkshire women, against a backdrop of world and local events and community change.
- ***Get It Off Your Chest*** (12 mins): "spent all day talking – tits, boobs, bust, breasts or bosoms?" Filmed at an International Women's Day event, this celebrates something very close to every woman's heart.
- ***Video 28*** (20 mins): a celebration and a record of some of the many fightback events against Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Bill, which forbade local authorities to "promote homosexuality", focusing especially on events in the North of England. Made by lesbians from Leeds and Bradford.

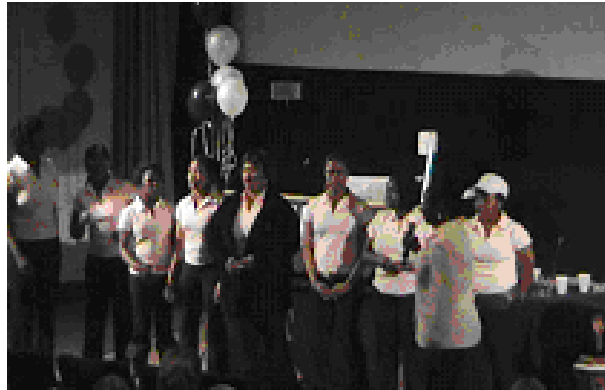
6. Book Signing

Annie Neligan sold and signed copies of her book: *SLEEPING WARRIOR: Women, Self Defence and Feminism*.



7. Entertainment

FEM 05 finished with a fantastic performance by Zeela – a Sheffield-based women's singing group.



Feedback from FEM 05 delegates

These results are drawn from the 86 FEM 05 Evaluation Forms that were completed by delegates:

- The most popular rating chosen by delegates to best describe their overall impression of the conference was '**Very Good**' – the highest available rating.
- Delegates were given a list of positive and negative words to choose from to best describe their feelings about the conference. The six most popular words chosen were:

- *Interesting*
- *Motivating*
- *Stimulating*
- *Enjoyable*
- *Valuable*
- *Well Presented*



Quotes from FEM 05 delegates:

“Excellent conference. Very refreshing to see so many young women (who said feminism is dead?!). Good to re-visit so many feminist issues. The struggle goes on!”

“I’ve really enjoyed today! There’s been so much to hear about and get involved with, I wish we could have had longer! I’m really enthused and determined to go out and look up and learn more about some of the new issues I’ve been introduced to today. Thank you! X”

“I got loads of info to read and share. I feel more empowered and stronger, less like a freak for calling myself a feminist 😊”

“Well organised and very grateful for all the hard work. Amazing that such an interesting and dynamic event should be free and accessible to all.”

“A fantastic day. Got me thinking again! It’s great to see so many young women motivated to fight the battles that we thought we were overcoming back in the 1970s. Congratulations to all who’ve helped organise today.”

“Wonderful to find so much feminism. Thank you.”

