

Master's Degree in
Women's and Gender
Studies

Feminism in London Conference

On October 25th GEMMA postgraduate students from the University of Hull attended the annual **Feminism in London Conference**, organized by the London Feminist Network and hosted at the Institute of Education. This year's theme was Positive Change for Women and Girls. In order to bring us closer to the issues discussed and the activities which took place, two of the students who went to the conference sent us this fantastic review of their experience and thoughts about this meeting:

“The **Feminism in London Conference** is organized annually by the London Feminist Network, and was hosted this year on October 25th at the Institute of Education. Thanks to funds from the GEMMA Programme, GEMMA postgraduates from the University of Hull were able to attend. We joined in exploring this year's theme, Positive Change for Women and Girls, through a variety of speeches, workshops, and panel discussions. These forums addressed an extensive selection of issues including female participation in government, reproductive rights, men in the feminist movement, colorism, and the need for LGBTQ safe spaces. The emphasis on activism, as opposed to a purely theoretical and academic perspective, provided us with practical insights and complemented our coursework nicely.



One of the main topics of the conference, pornography, sparked a debate among us that highlighted the conflict between feminist activism and theoretical feminism. **Gail Dines** gave the opening speech on her latest book, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*. She argued that feminism had to be anti-porn and that anything otherwise was not feminism. She criticized the current trend of multiple “feminisms” and the beliefs of “pro-sex” feminists. She made a good point, but many of us were left uneasy because we believed her argument

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alienated a substantial group in the feminist movement that has different views about pornography. We were left with this question:

How do you practice feminism that is inclusive of individual women's experiences but still shares a common set of ideals and aims capable of mobilizing individuals to promote positive change for women as a whole?

This seemingly problematic contradiction was the strongest reoccurring theme that linked together our discussions following the conference. How do we bridge the gap between the ideological feminism of the second wave and the tendency of third wave feminism's focus to become too vast and scattered in its inclusivity? A limitless definition of feminism, or too many separate "feminisms", could render it useless and dysfunctional as a mode to encourage positive progress. In contrast, no one can deny the importance of extending feminism to encompass diversity. It is essential that feminism gives voices to the voiceless, asks new questions, and works to shake up the dichotomous male dominated frameworks that prevail.

Maybe these two seemingly irreconcilable concepts work to our advantage. Maybe this tension is what makes feminism so strong and constantly evolving. We like the idea of feminism as a collective consciousness that can be called on to best address the situation at hand, to be considered in theory, activism, and the relationship between.

The conference also reminded us that women are not only victims or survivors. Women are fighters, actively working for equality for everyone. It was a privilege to attend the conference, meet such powerful women, and see their work. Our group left with plenty to contemplate and debate. In our opinion, there could be no better mark of the conference's great success."

Review written by **Lindsay Ulrich** and **Milada Belohlavek**.