



Conference Report

Women's Spaces and Feminist Politics; yesterday, today and tomorrow

*Organised by Rooms of our Own, Women's Studies without Walls
and London Women and Planning Forum*

*Held at Queen Mary University of London
May 16th 2014*

Rooms of our Own is a social enterprise established as a company limited by guarantee in September 2012. At one time there was a Women's Centre in nearly every London Borough, but sadly many have closed due to lack of funding. Rooms of our Own has a business model which proposes to establish Women's Centres funded through housing and commercial uses. However we were concerned as to whether there was still a demand for actual Women's buildings. Perhaps in the days of the internet connecting via social media was sufficient?

We therefore decided to organise this conference in partnership with London Women and Planning Forum and Women's Studies without Walls to gauge the appetite for women's spaces.

We were extremely fortunate to secure a whole range of excellent speakers from Women's Centres past, present and future.

This is a snapshot of the event ... captured in great photographs by Stephanie Waterman <https://www.facebook.com/stephanie.waterman.37?fref=ts>



Alison is Professor of Geography at Queen Mary University of London and her research interests span geographies of home, empire, migration and diaspora. Alison chairs the London Women and Planning Forum, which was established by Women's Design Service and then moved to QMUL in 2002.

Professor Alison Blunt opens the conference



Lynne Harne lectures at the University of Bristol. Lynne is a feminist activist of long-standing. Her current research is focused on the issues of violent fathering.

Dr Lynne Harne *"All the women left the 1971 Skegness conference and reconvened in the canteen"*



Julia Long is a radical lesbian feminist. She is the author of 'Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism' and is a lecturer in Sociology at Anglia Ruskin University.

Dr Julia Long “We are losing our understanding of why we need women only spaces”



Pragna Patel is a founding member of the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) and Women Against Fundamentalism, and is currently the director of SBS. Pragna has been centrally involved in some of SBS' most important cases and campaigns around domestic violence, immigration and religious fundamentalism.

Pragna Patel “The government is reaching out to muslim men, who may be politically moderate but are not moderate about women’s rights”



Franki is the Press Officer at national domestic violence charity Women's Aid and a Director with Rooms of Our Own. With a background in charity communications, her role is to raise awareness of domestic violence, its causes, and how it can be stopped. With experience of both mixed- and female-only spaces throughout her education and employment, she has a keen interest in how women-only spaces can be vital to women's safety and wellbeing.

Franki Hackett “Mental safety is as important as physical safety”



Ruth has worked in and outside academia. Her academic work focuses on violence, especially domestic violence, and feminist activism, including women-only space as a strategy for feminist activism. Ruth has been active in feminist politics for decades, including being a trustee of domestic violence charities and a member of the NE Women's Network and the NE Feminist Gathering.

Dr Ruth Lewis “ Women at NE Feminist Gathering reported feeling EUPHORIC JOY in women only spaces “



Gail is a long-term community activist and organiser and is currently chair of the Feminist Library.

Gail Chester “If you accept their funding you have to do what they want you to do”



Marian Larragy worked at Voluntary Action Camden from 1991-2003 and at London Civic Forum from 2003-2009. Marian was involved with the making of the film, *Breaking Ground, the Story of the London Irish Women's Centre* which came out in 2013, a year after the centre closed the door on its 28 year history. She has also been involved with 'Women's Studies Without Walls'.

Marian Larragy “There are lots of different sorts of feminism”



Ego Ahaiwe is a London based Heritage consultant and Community worker. Ego is currently researching the creative use of archival practice and how it can be used to give a voice to the experience of often marginalised or hidden groups

Ego Ahaiwe *“If I had £1 for every time we’ve been asked about space, I would have been able to save Lambeth Womens Project”*



Rhuksana Chishti runs the West Hampstead Women’s Centre which has been working since 1984 to empower women. The Centre offers information, advice and advocacy on domestic violence, sexual abuse, housing, fuel poverty and welfare benefits as well as skill based classes, alternative therapies and volunteering opportunities. The recession, benefits changes and public service reductions have hit women and children hardest so services are in more demand than ever.

Rukhsanda Chishti *“You have to believe and keep fighting”*



Melanie has had a varied career and has always been involved with women’s rights. In 2011, she took on the role of Centre Manager at Nottingham Women’s Centre - one of the oldest and largest women’s centres in the world.

Melanie Jeffs *“we have a “man-sitting” policy; any men in the building have to have a woman with them”*



Anne Neale is the Peer Support & Volunteer Co-ordinator at the Crossroads Women's Centre where over 15 organisations are based. She is a long-time activist for women's rights, working particularly in the anti-rape and anti-deportation movements since the 1970s, and is a founding member of Queer Strike.

Anne Neale “We have managed to buy our building”



Wendy Davis trained in architecture and urban design and most recently was director of Women's Design Service. Currently Wendy has established a social enterprise, Rooms of our Own, which seeks to provide spaces for women's charities and businesses. Wendy has been involved in numerous feminist and other organisations.

Wendy Davis “Maybe social enterprise is the way forward now”



Emma is Director of Rights of Women, a voluntary organisations committed to informing, educating and empowering women concerning their legal rights. Emma is also a Director of Tindlemanor.

Emma Scott “Tindlemanor is one of the few affordable places in London left”



Nadia Baksh *“Having women only events allows all women to dance”*



Nabila Pathan *“For some reason I was always excluded from male conversations”*



Louise Pennington *“When men forced their way into Mumsnet discussions, women stopped contributing”*

Vivienne Hayes is the Chief Executive of the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC). Viv was sadly unable to join us due to illness.

Nadia has volunteered with Waltham Forest Women’s Network since 2009 and has been Chair of the Network for 2 years. Nadia works with BAMER women and girls in Newham experiencing or at risk of domestic and sexual violence.

Nabila Pathan is a Founder and Chair of The Full Picture Club, a monthly news club where women gather to discuss the issues making headlines on a national and global scale. She is a former trustee at Muslim Youth Helpline and has recently joined the board of Directors of Rooms of Our Own. Nabila has previously hosted Press TV’s flagship discussion series *Women’s Voice*; and has presented on community radio series *Talk Back*.

Louise Pennington is a radical feminist writer and activist who writes on male violence, celebrity culture, rape culture and radical feminism. She is the founder of A Room of our own: A Feminist/ Womanist Network.



'Lucy-Anne Holmes is a writer and actress. She started the campaign No More Page 3, after she bought a copy of The Sun during the 2012 Olympics and found she couldn't stop thinking about the fact that the largest female image in the most widely read newspaper in the country was of a young woman showing her breasts for men, even though Jessica Ennis had just won her tremendous Gold medal.

Lucy Anne Holmes “My favourite place is my virtual office”



Jane was the first voice on Radio Five Live when it launched at 5.0am on 28th March 1994 and became well known as the presenter of the Breakfast Show. Jane is now famous for her presenter role for BBC Woman's Hour, a position she shares with Jenni Murray.

Jane Garvey kindly consented to chair our final session of the day





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