



Women's History Month

"You feminists, you're not happy with equality, are you?" a male colleague grumbled to me in the staff room.

It was the perfect explanation of why we need International Women's Day and Women's History Month, right there. One sentence, that's all it took.

Maybe it would be easier to comment if we did actually have gender parity. On the surface, we have equal legal rights and women have theoretical access to the same educational and economic systems, at least in the UK, but there is far more happening beneath the surface – if anyone ever bothers to look that deep.

Perhaps we need to look at the cold, hard facts...

- * Only 1% of the world's land is owned by women
- * Women work 2/3 of the world's working hours, but only receive 10% of its income
- * Girls are twice as likely to be illiterate as boys
- * 70% of people in minimum wage jobs are women
- * Approximately 80,000 women experience rape or attempted rape each year
- * Only 23% of UK journalists are women
- * 30,000 women are sacked in the UK each year... just for being pregnant
- * 230 women are turned away from Women's Aid every day, due to lack of space
- * 1 in 3 teenagers in the UK experience sexual violence in their relationships

Does this indicate an equal society to you?

Why is fighting for the same dignity and freedom awarded to men seen as an insistence on female superiority? Why is it seen as pushy and unreasonable to speak out against injustice?

Women's History Month (and International Women's Day within it) is our chance to share the story. We get to celebrate the progress and the amazing legal battles that have been fought, but also highlight those areas of need. We get to show the world that it isn't as perfect as people might expect, get to raise awareness and sow the seeds of change.

Women's History Month gives us an intensive period of reflection and action, on issues that range from violence against women and girls, to gender stereotypes in children's toys. It gives us time to publicly commend women throughout history who are often forgotten in the shadow of their male counterparts, even when the forerunners of their field. It gives us the chance to shock, outrage, surprise and even amuse those people around us.

"But shouldn't every month be Women's History Month?" another colleague asked me innocently.

Having a dedicated time to celebrate women and act for change doesn't mean that we forget



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women the rest of the year. What it does mean is that women around the country (and around the world) can focus all their efforts and unite voices to make an incredible impact, to really make ourselves heard and get people thinking. It's a chance to ensure that every person – regardless of how they define their gender – hears of the journey and our needs.

I encourage everyone reading to think of the statistics, think of the people and women they know, think of the stories and journeys and souls... and celebrate. Raise your voice – and your glass!