

THE FEMGUIN

a feminist newsletter



AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURA CORYTON

Find out who she is, why she's such an inspiration, and her favorite type of penguin (pgs 13-16)

IN A BARBIE WORLD

Come on Barbie lets go deconstruct some social norms, ooh ah ooh ah! (pgs 3-5)



IT'S ONLY A BLOODY PERIOD.

CHARITY OF THE MONTH

All about Bloody Good Period and how they help (pg 17)

Table of Contents

03-05

In a Barbie World

06-07

Male Feminism

TW: Sexual Assault, Suicide

08-09

"I'm Not Like Other Girls"

10-12

That Time of the Month

13-16

An Interview With Laura
Coryton

17

Charity of the Month

18

Note from the Editors

In a Barbie World

By Elle

Malibu Barbie. Superstar Barbie. Pilot Barbie. Sweetheart Barbie. The list goes on for miles. For a toy that was created in 1959, she sure has stuck around for a while. First created by Ruth Handler and manufactured by Mattel, the company has sold over a billion of the toys which makes it their most profitable line. Despite the love the public has for the blonde bombshell (and family), however, Barbie has also been involved in many, many controversies.



The doll is popular all over the world, which has inevitably led to some deserved negative feedback surfacing. Namely about her appearance. When you create a toy with a slim figure, 'perfect' proportions and flawless skin, it doesn't really come as a surprise that children that play with it have lower self-esteem and increased desires to always be skinnier. Barbie has a completely unrealistic body, unattainable for the vast majority of us who can't afford hundreds of plastic surgery operations. For the impressionable children who see Barbie as somewhat of a role model, this doesn't cross their minds. Not only is Barbie impossibly proportioned, the vast majority of the dolls produced under the Barbie name are white. Whilst Barbara Roberts is white, Mattel does create many other dolls that are not Barbara Roberts and these other dolls have a bad habit of being

almost carbon copies of her. When Mattel does manage to create Barbies of other races, they are predominantly African-American and also priced at a higher price than the white versions of the very same doll. It isn't entirely clear whether this is due to Mattel pricing the Barbies of colour higher or the stores selling them at a higher price, either way it's not okay.

But what if Barbie isn't quite as bad as she initially seems? Now I'm not saying that her practically perfect body or the fact that Barbies are predominately white are completely irrelevant points in this conversation, but maybe it's time to look past her appearance and focus on the other message that she promotes: "Be who you wanna be". Barbie has been taking male-dominant jobs for her entire lifespan, 'Astronaut Barbie' came out two years after Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space and twenty-six years before Helen Sharman became

the first British woman in space. 'Surgeon Barbie' came out when only 10% of doctors were female. There hasn't been a female US president yet, but there has been a 'President Barbie'. It's also important to note that the entire reason 'President Barbie' was created was because the people in the 'Whitehouse Project' suggested it to Mattel. Mattel listened, giving Barbie yet another job that continues to inspire all that love her. Not only does she promote her slogan by taking on all of these jobs, she's remained feminine whilst doing so.



Many forms of media seem to despise even the idea of a 'girly girl' taking on 'manly' jobs and succeeding - women need to have a very traumatic backstory to be a powerful character, they need to have short hair and only wear masculine clothing if they want to be anything that isn't a model or princess. Barbie, however, shows kids that they're allowed to be feminine and successful, they're allowed to have pride in their appearance and be powerful, they're allowed to wear dresses and makeup and be feminists.

For a toy marketed at young children, it's important that Barbie is the best role model she can be. And whilst there are some very important points Mattel needs to work on, not everything about Barbie is bad. Even her movies are fun forms of entertainment despite the occasionally terrifying animation. Barbie isn't perfect, not by a long shot, but neither is society.

We all have a long way to go, and expecting a toy to be further ahead in progress than society is a bit too optimistic. At least Mattel is accepting constructive criticism! So maybe before we rise up to cancel the toy, once and for all, we should think. Would you rather have a toy (company) that listens to constructive criticism and evolves as we do, or one that stays stuck in 1959?



Male Feminism

By Anonymous

Have you ever heard the phrase 'men get assaulted too'? It was likely that this phrase was used as a rebuttal in an argument about sexual harassment against women. Unfortunately, that's how society views men's rights: a way to shut down feminists. No one tends to look any further into the struggles of men than to use it as a point in an argument. After that, the wellbeing of men simply gets swept under the rug.

The true goal of feminism has been lost, leading many people to believe that it aims only to help women, and portray them as the 'better sex'. In reality, the goal of feminism is to achieve equality between all genders. That includes men. Yes, though it may be hard to believe, gender roles and stereotypes affect everyone, not just women.

For example, society has placed men as a whole on a pedestal, expecting them to never cry or express emotions, be the main

breadwinner of their family and always be a bubbling fountain of masculinity and testosterone. According to a study conducted by the Office for National Statistics in 2018, the differences in the number of suicides in Europe between men and women is 4:1. That means that 80% of all suicide victims are male.



Men often feel burdened by society's expectations of them, but are also expected never to show it. Men suffering from mental health disorders such as

depression, feel pressured not to seek professional help, and thus end up committing suicide as they see no better way out. The fact that, as a society, we have forced some men into feeling like they have no more options is disgraceful.

Of course, it is important to mention that gender isn't the only factor that plays into these statistics. Race and ethnicity, as well as sexuality affect these statistics, as the prejudice these men face heavily impact their lives.

Another misconception held by many people is that men cannot be sexually assaulted. They think men can only be the perpetrator and never the victim. Even though there are fewer male victims than female, male victims do exist, and can feel ignored due to the lack of awareness surrounding the topic.

As previously mentioned, men feel pressured to act and dress masculine, and any man who dares step outside the realms

of masculinity is frowned upon. This includes men who use makeup, wear skirts, use skincare products and just act in a manner that society perceives as overly feminine. These men are often stereotyped as gay and are seen as 'weak' and 'less manly'. There is no right way to be a man, and the idea that all men should look and act a certain way is harmful and repressive.

This phenomenon is better known as toxic masculinity, and is deeply rooted in sexism and men being perceived as the 'dominant sex'.

We all know that the feminist movement is important for fighting for change and equality, but it is important to not let men's issues be ignored, as they also face problems inflicted by society. We need to take a step back and realise that at the end of the day, we won't make any changes if we can't stop talking over each other.

"I'm Not Like Other Girls"

By anonymous

For those who are unaware of what this infamous phrase means, "I'm Not Like Other Girls" means exactly what it states. And yet, whilst this seemingly innocent remark has now become a widespread subcultural phenomenon, the phrase itself carries many heavy connotations regarding femininity and gender stereotypes that create a toxic mentality among our generation.

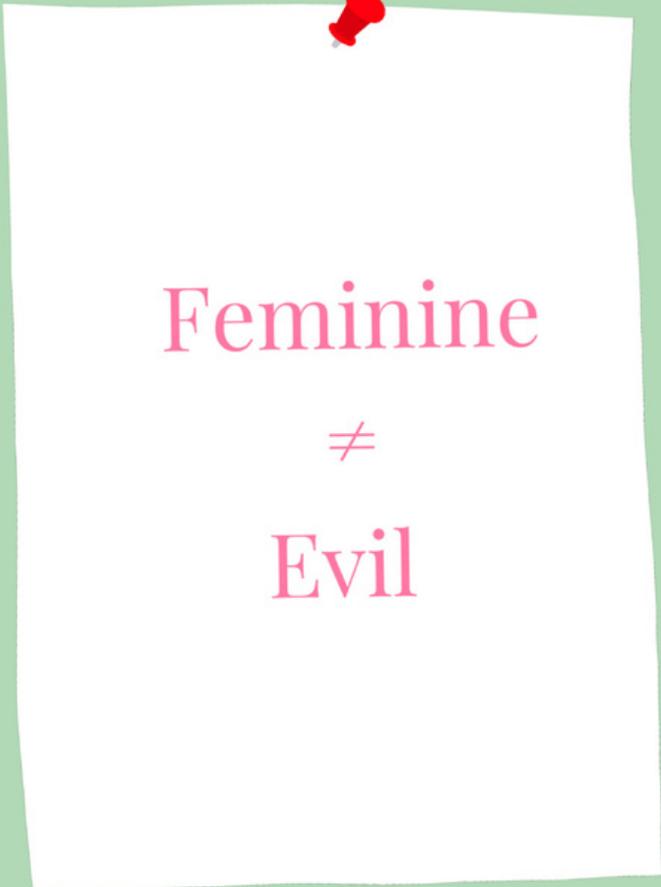
The embodiment of the phrase can be said to first originate in the 20th century, varying in form. It was a protest to the stereotypical feminine archetype and was also a protest to society and its construct. Soon it became ingrained into the minds of young women, who believed that because they had different interests, different personalities to the girls surrounding them, they were special and unique.

Around the early 2000s, a common theme started to arise -

that being the extreme demonisation of femininity. A famous example of this is the movie 'Mean Girls'. The antagonists in the film are 'The Plastics' - they are everything that comes to mind when someone mentions femininity and it is through this movie and the characters that Hollywood manages to create the correlation between liking pink and being a villain. And it's not just a coincidence - in the following years, movies such as Twilight and The Hunger Games were released, with their main characters being self-proclaimed relatable girls who just so happen to hate anything feminine.

This condemnation can be reflected throughout mass media and impacts both those who conform to the trend and those who don't. It invalidates other women's views and choices by implying that if one acts feminine they are giving in to the patriarchy that propels our society, creating severe

damage to the mental health of many. Growing up, girls are belittled and devalued because of their preferences and led to believe that what they like is considered an insult. The mentality created from this trend deeply impacts the perception that young girls have of themselves, leading to self-doubt and self-hatred.



Feminine
≠
Evil

The association between femininity and patriarchy also explores the ubiquity of internalised misogyny, which in turn perpetuates this trend. Women who state that they are different from the rest of their gender for whatever reason ironically fall into the gender stereotype that has become integrated into our society today. Because by saying that they are not feminine, which apparently sets them apart and 'not like other girls', it automatically suggests that girls are meant to like pink and act girly, and boys, the opposite.

Society must start accepting the fact that girls are able to like pink and wear dresses, without falling into a specific stereotype and deemed as high-maintenance or needing masculine validation. The same applies to women who prefer to present as more masculine than others. It's these very actions that perpetuate the segregation of men and women in our society and prevent us from breaking the barrier to equality.

That Time of the Month

By Olivia

The average woman spends 35,000 days on their period in total - that's almost 10 years. But the world we live in is still one that stigmatises and ignores a natural process which affects around half of the world's population.

Aunt Flo, Time of the Month, Shark Week, Crimson Wave... the list goes on. There's thought to be over 5000 euphemisms for the word period. Once when I was asked by a male relative if I was on my period, he came up to me, lowered his voice so he was basically whispering, cleared his throat to try and make it sound slightly less awkward and said, "is it... you know... thattimeofthemonth?" I, to his horror, shouted very obnoxiously, "YES I AM ON MY PERIOD THANKS FOR ASKING". He was mortified, but I felt victorious; why should it be my problem that my 'problem' is too problematic even to name?

The idea that the word 'period' is some universal trigger that will launch a nuclear bomb, or for whatever reason that no one seems to be able to say it, is essentially just the beginning of period stigma.



Although companies, charities and campaign groups are desperately trying to change this, ancient traditions and myths surrounding women on their periods continue to run rampant, these include ideas that women on their periods are 'unclean', and many communities still shun women and exclude them from society for a week until they are properly cleansed and ready to return.

But the stigma is not only frustrating for me and my wild feminist/period hormones, but it also has actual huge impacts on women in wider society. Period poverty is still a huge issue, and although it seems a far removed, according to Bodyform UK, 1 in 10 women in the UK live in period poverty, meaning thousands of women struggle to afford sanitary products today. And that's in a country where everyone is supposed to have access to free medical assistance. In the US, over 35% of women are thought to live in period poverty. Period poverty encompasses all the aspects of the shame, discomfort and fear that comes with simply not being able to prevent blood from going all over your clothes. It leads to huge economic and social disparity: preventing women from going to work and school.



Over 137,700 girls in the UK were thought to have missed some school from period poverty in 2017, according to a study conducted by Free Periods. If that figure doesn't disgust you, I genuinely have no clue what will.

If 137,700 children couldn't afford a plaster for a cut on their knee and they had to miss school for it, there would be national outrage about the price of plasters. But the taboo surrounding bleeding uteri has meant that very few people for a very long time have said anything. In fact, it's so stigmatised, that it only got added to the national curriculum to be taught in secondary schools in 2020.

Periods have been plunging people into poverty, with the average woman in 2018 having to spend £500 a year on period related supplies. Until January 2019, tampons weren't excluded from VAT, as they were deemed non-essential items. By the way, crocodile steaks are excluded from this tax.

Clearly, menstrual health is less important than eating an animal for dinner. Whoever it was who made that decision, sitting on their fancy chair in the European Parliament, had clearly never menstruated. It's not a luxury item. It's a necessity, and for millions of women across the globe, it's an unaffordable one.



But despite the pretty bleak picture I've painted, I think it's time to recognise some of the amazing people and work that has been done that is starting to turn this all around. Laura Coryton, for example, created the #StopTaxingPeriods campaign to get rid of the VAT tax on tampons. After a long time and a lot of campaigning she got the result women across the country were waiting for; tampons are no longer taxed.

Coryton also runs the social enterprise Sex Ed Matters, starting honest conversations about consent, LGBTQ+ Rights and period education, to get rid of a long-standing taboo.

Other foundations such as Bloody Good Period (see page 13), highlight the importance of conversation and fundraising to help prevent period poverty. I have included some links below for more resources, charities and ways to get involved and help fight an outdated set of ideas that has fundamentally undermined women's equality for thousands of years.



An Interview with Laura Coryton

Laura is a feminist activist and campaigner who was successfully able to get tampons excluded from VAT. We were incredibly excited to get this interview with her!

Are you a feminist, and if so, what was your 'feminist awakening'?

I've always been a feminist because it just makes sense. Anyone of any age should feel able to call themselves a feminist. You don't need to be a woman, or an activist, or young. You can be yourself, whatever that looks like, and still be a feminist hero. That's one thing that transcends everything else. It's one thing that should connect everyone.

As I didn't have a feminist awakening as such, instead, I had my activist awakening at university, when I learnt the history and technique of campaigning and making change. That's when my campaign to tackle period stigma began.

Can you tell us a little bit about your period campaign: what it is, and how it all began?

In 2014, my friend Verity shared a buzzfeed article with me, listing all the items taxed as luxuries. Nestled amongst this list was period products! I was in my second year of university, desperately trying to

avoid revising for my summer exams, and this seemed the perfect excuse. So, I started researching our tax system.

Soon, I found there are heaps of menial items which escape tax altogether because they're considered essential, including maintaining our private helicopters and eating alcoholic sugar jellies. At this point it seemed blatant what kind of person wrote taxation legislation and what kind of person was left out of the consultation process altogether. Tampon tax was established in 1973, when there were merely 19 female Members of Parliament (MPs), to 631 male MPs. No wonder their ability to influence legislation was limited.

I didn't want to pay into a system which actively capitalised from misogyny, so I went to sign a petition to end tampon tax. Only, I couldn't find one. So, I started one of my own, which I shared with a few friends online, who shared it with their friends, and suddenly complete strangers were sending supportive messages! Soon, we got a

few hundred signatures, which turned into thousands, and 318,000 signatures later, we change UK law and the tax was axed.

How did you start championing your cause?

Through loads of means! The trick to campaigning is to be creative. We shared the petition online, held protests in and around parliament, got my Student Union involved with printing stickers and posters, met with MPs, organised mass emailing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and so much more.

Additionally, we started a global movement. Today, there is a tampon tax petition in every continent, spanning countries such as Tanzania, Japan, states all across the USA and Australia, France, and countries have won including India, the UK and Canada.



We are all connected which is great as we can learnt from and strengthen each other.

What do you believe are the reasons that tampons weren't excluded from VAT earlier?

I think online campaigning was key. When I went home to Devon in 2015 when the campaign was still quite small, my friend's mum Gill said she signed my petition because she campaigned to end tampon tax when she was my age. Similarly, when I met with Stella Creasy MP to discuss the campaign, she also said she campaigned for the exact same goal when she was at school.

While politicians could easily ignore a group of women in Devon, or a schoolgirl in Hertfordshire, it is much harder to cast aside a petition with hundreds of thousands of signatures from across the country.

Moreover, sites like change.org give us organisational tools we never had access to before. I can email all 317,778 petition signers, asking them all to write to their MP or tweet the Chancellor about one very specific thing, and many will do so to support. That kind of organising really works. That's why online activism is helping widen the political arena, as it gives people a

voice who may never have been taken seriously before.

Have you ever faced sexism: at school, university, or broader life in general?

Yes of course. Everyone has faced sexism, whatever their gender, age, race or circumstance. We're all held to certain expectations shaped by what we look like and how we present ourselves, and part of that is down to sexism.

Nobody wants to be judged against expectations constructed before they were even born. It feels limiting and unfair. However, it also feels like it connects you to generations before us who faced more deeply ingrained sexism and sparks motivation to create change for the generations to come.

What is your biggest piece of advice for girls who want to campaign and get their voices heard?

Be ambitious! I was on a panel with Gina Martin once, who made upskirting illegal, and she said her one regret is she hasn't been ambitious enough. Hearing her say that was shocking because she's one of the most ambitious people I know! Yet in her mind, she was still constrained by seeds of doubt. Those seeds are completely natural

and normal, but they're important to recognise so we can minimise their impact.

Also, be collaborative when you can, rather than competitive. Working together with others, especially people who don't look like you or come from the same background, will always get you closer to your goal.

Do you have any feminist role models or inspirations?

So many!! It's so hard to choose but if I HAVE to choose one it would be bell hooks. I would recommend everyone read 'All About Love', her academic exploration of relationships and what it means to be truly caring. She argues relationships cannot be coercive and caring at the same time which is so obvious and clear and yet, it goes against everything we learn about relationships in pop culture. In TV, film and pop songs, relationships are sold as sexy when they're explosive and dangerous. Really, hooks argues, that assumption is just modern-day misogyny, as they paint women to be irrational and in need of controlling. That's in part why I co-founded Sex Ed Matters, through which we deliver relationships and sex education workshops to UK schools, specialising in consent and periods.



What still needs to be done to combat period stigma and poverty in the UK and abroad?

So much! There are tampon tax sister petitions you can sign across the world, but also please see more petitions below:

1) Gabby Edlin, founder of 'Bloody Good Period' is campaigning to make period products free across the UK: www.change.org/bloodyfree



2) Sex Ed Matters, The Eve Appeal and Sevenoaks School are campaigning to keep the tampon tax fund, which supports female-focused charities: <http://chng.it/RYYLLDZD>

3) Ella Daish wants all period products to be plastic free: <https://www.change.org/p/make-all-menstrual-products-plastic-free>

4) Make sure your school has opted in to the government's free period scheme. Make sure they know that they can get free period products via PHS Group as a means to end period poverty amongst their students -

(and teachers!). Thank you Free Periods for your campaigning on this issue!

4) Wuka believes that reusable period pants should be taxed in the same bracket as all other period products, now at 0%: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/323297>

And finally, what is your favourite type of penguin?

Can I choose Penguin Books?



Charity of the month

This edition's charity of the month is Bloody Good Period! Campaigning for "fair treatment for people who bleed", Bloody Good Period want to educate the public about sexual and reproductive health as well as fighting to eradicate the stigma around menstruation. They have over 100 partners across England and Wales, including organisations supporting refugees, charities for the homeless, food banks, and more. Bloody Good Period are campaigning for so much, including the very prominent issue of "period poverty".

In the current world many people cannot afford to buy period products, so for 5 years Bloody Good Period has donated period supplies to those who need them. The charity was set up by Gabby Edlin in 2015 when she called out for menstrual products on Facebook, and now Bloody Good Period helps many people living in poverty access period products. As the Bloody Good Period website points out, in the UK asylum seekers receive £39.63 to live on each week and pads and tampons can cost around £2.50. As well as this, Bloody Good Period run sessions and workshops to support menstruating asylum seekers and refugees, helping them to understand more about their bodies, sexual and reproductive health. This is why the charity is so crucial as period poverty and lack of menstrual education is a serious problem that needs to be fixed.

In order to help Bloody Good Period achieve their goals you can either donate money to the charity or, if you don't have money to spare, educate yourself by looking at their website, and work to de-stigmatise menstruation because it is a natural biological thing that half the population goes through.



<https://www.bloodygoodperiod.com/>



A Note From the Editors

By The Editors



Hi there! It is us, the editors (believe it or not). We hope you enjoyed the third edition of The Femguin! It took a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to get this to you, so if you've read this far, you're really cool and should write us an article :)

A huge thank you to all our illustrators (Freda, Cadence, Sophia and Lara) on this issue! This is our first edition that uses student-draw graphics, and we couldn't be happier with how it turned out.

We're also looking for some illustrators, so if you are interested in that position please enter your email address in the relevant space in the form below.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could fill out this anonymous form, to give us some advice and feedback for future issues!

If you would like to submit an article for the next issue, there is also an option to do that, and we will get back to you - just remember to include your name and email address (otherwise it would probably be a tad difficult to find you considering the form is anonymous)

<https://forms.gle/VYyo6YGm>

WS4vTSMAA



Bonus Challenge: find the hidden frog! HINT: It's not on this page!