



STATUS OF YOUNG WOMEN
IN SCOTLAND 2015



GENDERLIGHTBULB



@youngwomenscot



“

I'M SICK OF HEARING ABOUT
THERESA MAY'S SHOES.

”



STATUS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN SCOTLAND 2015

Young women's voices on gender equality in Scotland.

Produced by YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, please contact us at hello@ywcascotland.org

About Us

YWCA Scotland is a feminist organisation and part of a worldwide movement of women leading change.

Our vision is a world where every woman can shape her own life journey and fulfil her potential, where the voices of women are heard, respected and celebrated.



www.ywcascotland.org



@youngwomenscot



“

I FEEL LIKE I'M DOING REALLY WELL IN MY LIFE; IN MY STUDIES, VOLUNTEERING, MY JOB AND MY SOCIAL CIRCLE. BUT ALL MY FRIENDS ASK ME IS 'HAVE YOU GOT A BOYFRIEND YET?'

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FOREWORD

FOREWORD

As a woman in public life the responsibility to inspire and to encourage young women to fulfil their ambitions and to live out their dreams is one I am keenly aware of.

When I first thought about entering politics, seeing other women blazing a trail encouraged me to believe I could do the same. What aspiring female politician growing up in Scotland could help but be inspired by Winnie Ewing or Margo MacDonald?

Now that I am not just a serving politician, but also have the privilege of being First Minister, it is so often the women and young girls I meet in this job who inspire me.

We have made progress on improving female representation in our politics but there is more to do.

As one of three female party leaders in the Scottish Parliament it can be easy at times to forget, looking around parliament at First Minister's Questions, that whilst women have come far in politics it is less than 90 years since all women in the UK were granted the right to vote.

We have a lot more work to do on improving positive role models for young women and in encouraging young women to look beyond traditionally female careers to believe and know that they can pursue any career they want to.

Fully empowering women is a huge benefit to everyone in society. It's probably the single simplest way in which we can sustainably increase our productive potential and significantly boost our economy.

I don't believe we can continue to underuse the talents of half of our population. Equality isn't just women's problem, it's a problem we all have to solve.

I am confident that by working together we can give everyone an equal chance to fulfil their potential and realise their dreams.

I hope that young women in Scotland feel that they have a platform to succeed and to make goals to be the best they can be. That's why research such as the Status of Young Women in Scotland is important as it shines a light on the issues still facing young women in Scotland and where we must do more to make sure they can maximise their potential.



We are a forward looking country and the world is now waking up to the potential of women.

We need to grasp every opportunity, become the decision makers and excel.

Nicola Sturgeon
First Minister of Scotland

INTRO

We started the Status of Young Women in Scotland (SYWS) report in order to listen to and learn about the lives of young women living in Scotland in 2015.

We enjoy reading thought-provoking research on women and young people in the UK and around the world. Yet over and over again we've found a gap in research into the different and varied life experiences and perspectives of young women in Scotland. Young women so often miss out on the opportunity to share their own thoughts, ideas and opinions on life from teens to early thirties and on gender equality.

This report was written, produced and designed by young women.

Edinburgh-based social researchers The Lines Between carried out face-to-face interviews with over sixty young women aged 16-30. The diverse voices of these women form the heart and soul of the Status of Young Women in Scotland report. We recognise that gender is a spectrum, and this report does not attempt to be representative of every young woman in Scotland but to act as a talking point for wider discussion on the ways that our gender affects each of our lives.

The SYWS themes – Education, Employment, Family & Relationships, Health & Sports, Media & Stereotypes, Politics, and Safety – emerged from our #GenderLightbulb blog; an online space where self-identifying women across Scotland shared with us their real life experiences of being treated differently based on their gender.

The statistics in the SYWS infographics are based on a mini literature review carried out by a team of six volunteer researchers who took to Google and our networks to investigate the status of young women in Scotland.



We've tried to include as many young women's voices and opinions as we could in this year's report and hope you will find their words as powerful and motivating as we do.

Kara Brown, Innovation Co-ordinator

YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement

GENDERLIGHTBULB



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WHAT DOES 'GENDER EQUALITY' MEAN TO YOU?

Of the young women that we interviewed, a number initially stated that they believed equality had already been achieved in Scotland; explaining that they had “never experienced” a gender-related barrier. Scotland’s legal framework for equality, including equal pay legislation, was frequently referred to in support of this statement.

| *“I can’t think of an example of gender inequality affecting me.”*

However, it is notable that almost all of these young women reconsidered their opening thoughts on equality during the more detailed discussions that followed. Participants described experiencing gender-related barriers and sexism in a number of areas of life. Throughout the interviews, most participants expressed a view of there being “some way to go” until gender equality is fully achieved in Scotland.

Participants were asked to describe any initial thoughts or associations that immediately sprang to mind on hearing the term ‘gender equality’. The most common first response was “equal opportunities”.

| *“Same opportunities in all spheres of life, in employment, in achievements... everything.”*

Many emphasised that this was not to be interpreted as “having to behave in the same way as men.”

| *“It’s about valuing women to the same degree; not just saying we have to be the same as men.”*

One strong message that came out of the interviews was that young women’s experiences and views can vary greatly depending on their situation and factors such as age, ethnicity, class, poverty, health, locality, learning and physical disabilities etc. The participants raised a need to understand different cultural contexts in discussions about gender inequalities.

| *“We enjoy a certain level of gender equality today but we need to make breakthroughs for the next generation, to re-examine post-feminist society for disadvantaged women, examining inherent hierarchies, the economics of gender and how austerity has disproportionately affected women.”*



“

I SUPPOSE I'VE MADE KEY LIFE DECISIONS EARLY ON
BASED ON GENDER. THERE'S A TIMETABLE IN MIND.

”



HOW DOES YOUR GENDER AFFECT YOUR LIFE?

GENDERLIGHTBULB



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“Gender issues were so normalised and accepted that I didn’t see them.”

During the interviews many young women shared anecdotes about their first experiences of becoming aware of gender inequality. They frequently linked the process of realisation to having had conversations with friends about gender equality or to having heard about or joined feminist movements such as the 50:50 campaigns, No More Page 3, the Everyday Sexism Project, Lean In, and Ask Her More.

“Reading the book Lean In woke me up to gender equality issues – I suddenly noticed other women’s behaviour, stopped sitting there and taking it – started being more conscious.”

Others said they became aware of gender barriers at transition points; for example when they left home, started university or entered full-time employment.

“Didn’t think about feminism until an enlightening module at university; it changed the whole way I have seen the world since.”

“I’m grateful for a very inspiring gender lecturer.”

Several noted the impact that an awareness of gender inequalities had made upon their lives.

“I was brought up on a scheme and used to only see social issues through a class lens, gender issues were so normalised and accepted that I didn’t see them.”

“I came to feminism quite late and it’s made a massive difference. It’s not so much the external impact – it’s more that, once I started thinking about it, it made me look back on my own behaviour and think differently about some of my own attitudes and things I put up with.”

“Before discovering feminism I used to want babies by 25, now I have different priorities.”

Almost every young woman who took part in the research recounted at least one experience of being affected by gender inequality.

EDUCATION

Many young women mentioned their experiences in education, discussing gender-related barriers that they had faced or were facing in school, college or university settings. These barriers often came in the form of external attitudes from other pupils, teachers and parents. Several young women discussed having been discouraged or prevented from engaging in sports or subjects of interest on the basis of gender, or having faced sexism within areas perceived as being for boys or men.

“I wanted to play the saxophone but my mum said that it is a boy’s instrument.”

Some of the young women discussed the gender bias of particular courses, most notably in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects.

“In some of the male-dominated courses like engineering or farming it’s very obvious that women are not welcome. There are some courses with only one girl in a class of 20 or 30 students. We hear lots of stories of wolf whistles, sexual chat or being made to feel uncomfortable. Normally it dies down when a lad decides the girl is ‘one of the boys’ and there’s some signal that she’s been accepted in the fold.”

“At my school science lessons were really gendered; girls encouraged to do biology and boys to do chemistry and physics.”

“I’m doing a male-dominated science degree and I’ve noticed that my lecturer really doesn’t listen to me when I talk up, but nods, agrees and engages when my male classmates do the same.”

Some participants talked about being held back in sports at school due to teachers’ perceptions that they would get hurt.

“I was the only female player in the school’s football team. When we got to the final I wasn’t allowed to play in the match. The teacher said it was because ‘we don’t want you getting hurt’.”

“My female PE teacher encouraged me to play down my strengths, I was ‘too good’ at throwing to be with the girls but discouraged from playing with the boys as I’d ‘get hurt’. Felt like I didn’t fit in anywhere.”

Others discussed the gendered nature of employment aspirations:

“I’ve noticed that the workplace aspirations of some young people – typically children who have left school with few or no qualifications – are very gendered. Girls want to do things like being a carer or hairdresser and boys want jobs where they will learn a trade. They are often quite surprised when we talk about the range of jobs they might consider; quite open-minded when we have the conversation, but it seems they’ve not been encouraged to think like that before.”

“I want to be a film director but my mum said only men get to be directors.”

EMPLOYMENT

Many young women talked about gender inequalities in employment, discussing stereotypes, barriers to career progression, maternity issues and sexism in the workplace.

“Part of my role is to get young people into employment; working with a range of organisations. The majority are fine but in a few instances we’ve had gendered responses from some potential employers; for example a mechanic and a bricklayer said that they would not take woman on the course.”

“In my first job as a chef I was told I wouldn’t survive in the kitchen because it was a ‘man’s place’.”

Some participants talked about self-censorship of their ambitions, feeling unrepresented within decision-making structures; and expecting their chances of rising to a senior level within a particular career to be limited because of male dominance in the profession.

“I worry about the future; thinking about looking for work in the private sector despite the fact I’d love to stay in academia. But I’m ambitious and I know that only a very small percentage of women are professors.”

“I’m very conscious that everybody at an executive level in my organisation is male and they make all the decisions.”

Several young women focused on maternity issues, discussing making career decisions that factored in maternity terms and conditions; or “putting off” becoming a parent in the belief that their career would stall after having children.

"I'm conscious that my current employer has a rubbish maternity policy – thinking about moving soon so I don't arrive at a new job and have a baby immediately. Not sure what that will mean for my career though. Would I take a lesser job because it has better maternity conditions? Maybe. I know my boyfriend's certainly not thinking about these things."

"I'm certainly going to put off having children until I've reached a managerial level; I'll need to go part-time because childcare is expensive and it makes sense for my husband to work because he earns more than me – perhaps that's a legacy of the pay gap. It's well known that women who return to work 'plateau', certainly in my field anyway, so if I've any hope of progressing I need to do it before children because it's my only chance really."

"I'm conscious that employers might interpret my relationship status in a negative way – i.e. if you don't get married, does that show you are a person who is unstable or won't commit – or if you are married, does it mean that you are going to leave to have children? I don't think men worry about these things."

"I'm in my late twenties and I'm married. I only recently got this job and was conscious in job interviews that employers might just see me as a ticking time-bomb, a pregnancy waiting to happen."

"I was given some well-meaning careers advice: in an interview a woman should try and project that they are not interested in relationships or family life – signal that they are 'career-focused', willing to work late and unlikely to leave to have children. Whereas men should 'beef up' their relationship status and imply they want to settle down and have children soon if they haven't already got them – employers will interpret this as them being responsible and likely to stay for a long time."

“Perhaps body clock is responsible for early career success of young women – they feel like they have less time in their life to get ahead in their career.”

Participants also talked about struggles with confidence or assertiveness within work environments and being undermined by colleagues. Several suggested that the insidious nature of sexism at work encourages self-doubt as to whether or not there are gender imbalances at play.

“I wonder if it’s my fault for not being assertive if I’m spoken over in meetings or being immediately contradicted... whereas male colleagues aren’t.”

“I had a really good internship post, but felt reluctant to push myself forward to be upfront and to say ‘I want a job at the end of it’. It felt too pushy... like I would be perceived as being too forward but my male counterparts had the same role as me, they were much more upfront and they both ended up with paid employment at the end.”

“I find it hard to be ‘in your face’. And I don’t think men have those same feelings, but I don’t want to generalise; as it might be just me.”

“The senior women in work are unpopular – whereas the senior males are popular. While it could be personality issues I think it might be because women have to fight more in the workplace... so they have a ‘don’t mess with me’ attitude, performing these ‘Devil Wears Prada’ characters. You have to be stronger to get noticed.”

Some participants also noted instances of sexism that they had encountered from colleagues.

“A senior male manager frequently asks me to do things that aren’t in my job description; tasks that you might ask a secretary or a personal assistant to do and, in some cases, things that aren’t even related to work. I plan to have a quiet word with him about it but will couch it in terms of my job

description – I won't mention gender because I think that he will laugh it off and accuse me of being 'sensitive' and undermine me. But actually, I think he asks me to do these things because he's sexist. There's a junior male member of staff who would be the person to ask for the administrative tasks he's asked of me."

"I was the sole female speaker at an international conference and I asked for feedback from the audience. I only received one piece of feedback – from a woman – who said she thought my dress 'distracted' from what I was talking about."

"I was the only woman in a new team of staff who were all appointed to the same role at the same time. We were offered the same starting salaries. A few years later, I discovered that every single one of my male colleagues had turned down the offer and negotiated a higher salary! It didn't even occur to me that was possible. Why did all the men know that, but not me? Was it ignorance, or lack of confidence on my part? Or is it something to do with culture?"

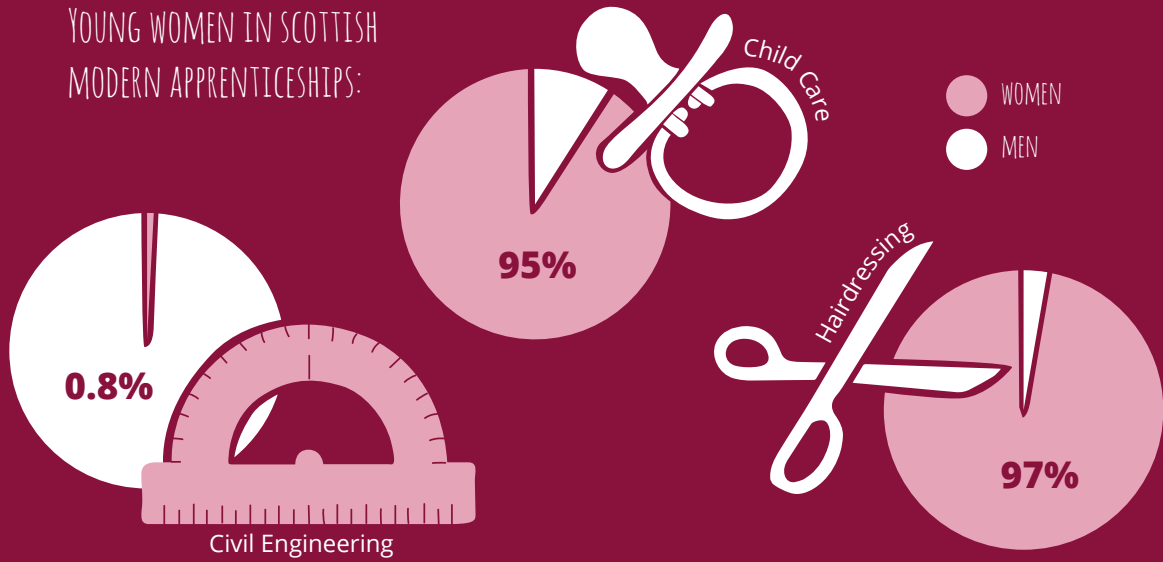
FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Gender roles at home

There were mixed views about gender equality in the home. In terms of actual experiences, many participants felt they had equality within their household. A minority said they had directly experienced or observed gender inequality in domestic settings, mentioning issues such as an imbalance in housework, cooking, childcare or other caring responsibilities. Some discussed the influence of cultural expectations around gender roles.

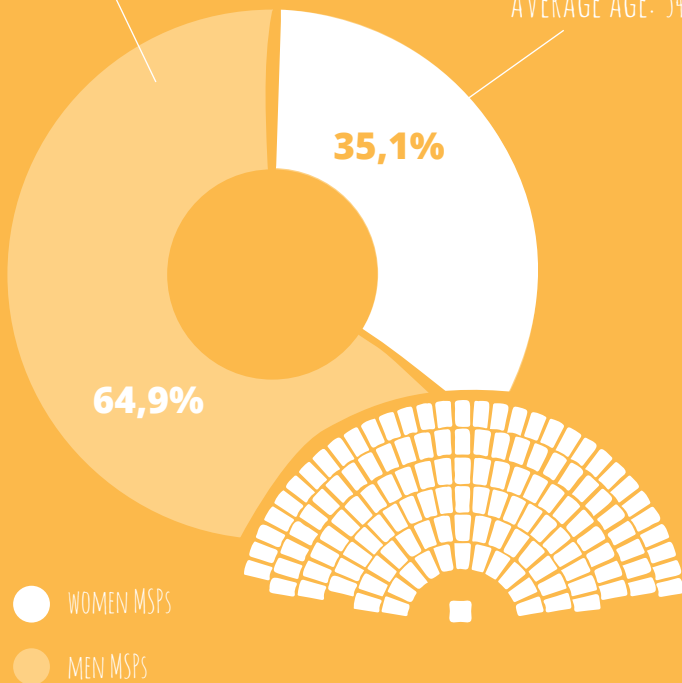
- | "It's my mum and my aunties who do all the domestic work in my family."
- | "In my parents' house, if a man comes in the room, women leave the room. Culturally, that's just the way it is."
- | "My mum tries to get me to make food for my brother, when he's just sat on the sofa – he's older than me and he can do it himself."
- | "I've just come out of a four year relationship as it felt so unequal – he had the idea that it was a woman's job to do all the work. I'm studying a full-time course and working part time but it was expected that I would come home and do all the cleaning and cooking too."
- | "My husband's family has very different attitudes to mine. They feel that a woman should be 'kept busy' all the time and serve him in the house; do the cooking and cleaning even if she's tired or sick."
- | "Our families don't understand that we live in a different society to the one they were brought up in. I don't want to have children right now, because we can't afford it, we're not ready and we don't have our relations nearby to help us with childcare. But there's definitely an expectation."

YOUNG WOMEN IN SCOTTISH
MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS:

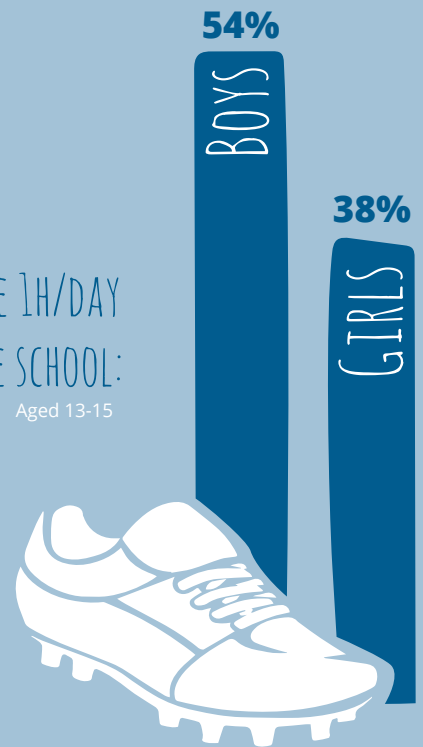


AVERAGE AGE: 53

AVERAGE AGE: 54



EXERCISE 1H/DAY
OUTSIDE SCHOOL:
Aged 13-15

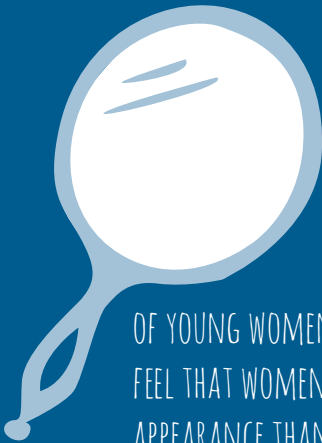
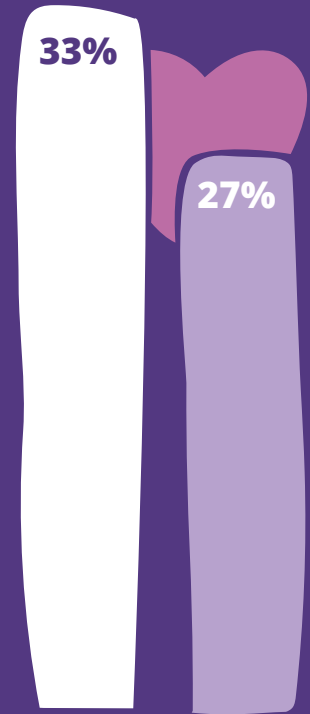


50 TIMES MORE...
...THAN THIS



- MEN'S SPORT COVERAGE IN MEDIA
- WOMEN'S SPORT COVERAGE IN MEDIA

YOUNG WOMEN WHO
VOLUNTEER:



87%

OF YOUNG WOMEN AGED 11-21 IN SCOTLAND
FEEL THAT WOMEN ARE JUDGED MORE ON THEIR
APPEARANCE THAN THEIR ABILITY.

AGE 16-24 AGE 25-34

SEXUAL



AND 16% OF BOYS

EXPERIENCE OF
PARTNER VIOLENCE:
between ages 13 and 17

PHYSICAL



AND 18% OF BOYS

“People get treated differently: my uncle’s an unmarried doctor in his forties, he gets revered and praised within the family, unlike my aunt, also unmarried in her forties with a good job, she is pitied, like she hasn’t fulfilled her role or so mething – it doesn’t seem fair.”

“It’s like the list of things that women have to do has got longer; study, work AND do all the domestic stuff.”

Others took a broader perspective of gender-based inequality of domestic matters, reflecting on the roles of women in the labour market.

“There’s the issue of our ageing population and we need to think about what this means with the prevalence of women taking on carer roles.”

“Think about the predominance of women in the domestic economy.”

“There’s been a change in breadwinner roles with many women earning more than their partners, however this hasn’t translated into change in who does the household chores.”

Relatives

Many young women mentioned their parents’ or grandparents’ importance as role models who encouraged them to think about gender equality. In some cases these family members were active in the feminist campaigns of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

“It’s a legacy or link with history. I know the struggle that my mum’s generation went through – we need to continue to work, make more progress and also – crucially – make sure that things don’t go backwards.”

“My Dad is very politically active and he’s raised us to be confident children. From an early age we’ve been encouraged to have a voice, debate and to share our opinions – not just in the family but in the local community.”

Relationships

“Guys ask girls out; if a girl does it she’s considered desperate.”

A few of the participants commented on gender inequality and relationships and this theme was particularly strong in discussions with young women aged between 16 and 20. Much of the focus was around the influence of stereotypes; several young women felt that they lacked the freedom to express romantic interest or to make decisions about relationships.

“There was a bit of a scandal when a girl asked a boy to the school ball. It’s silly when you think about it – but no, I wouldn’t ask a boy.”

“Girls are complicit in embedding the male chivalry role.”

“There’s also more pressure in teenage relationships for girls to be sexually available and behave in certain ways. All the magazines talk about is how to be a good girlfriend and how to get a man.”

“I’m used to asking and pushing the agenda, just frustrated that I’ve got to wait for the marriage proposal.”

“My parents want me to do well at school – to get a job and stuff, but every now and then remind me that I’ll need to get married at some point. I’m not so sure though.”

Several of the young women gave examples of gendered responses to their relationship status, including:

“I feel like I’m doing really well in my life; in my studies, volunteering, my job and my social circle. But all my friends ask me is ‘have you got a boyfriend

| yet?' Followed by "we need to get you a boyfriend'. Like that's all that matters."

A strong theme in discussions with some of the women was a feeling of pressure about timescales, linked to societal and self-imposed expectations about the age at which they should be in a significant relationship, or have a child.

| "In our families women get married around 25/26, so we really need to meet a man at 19/20. I definitely have a timescale in mind and I'd say that most women do; my friends and I have discussed this. There's an emotional impact when you pass milestones that you thought you'd meet. I'd like to have met someone by now and I sometimes I think 'oh god what's going to happen to me'... Boys certainly don't think of themselves that way; that their value is diminished because they are not in a relationship. There's less pressure on them."

| "I suppose I've made key life decisions early on based on gender; there's a timetable in mind i.e. if I want kids by then, I'll need to be married by X, and I want to be engaged for a few years before marriage... so I'll need to settle on my choice of partner in my twenties."

MEDIA & STEREOTYPES

Objectification of women

Many young women described a sense of discomfort about public scrutiny of themselves and other women, with frequent references to the attention paid to women in public roles. They cited the message, reinforced by the media, about there being a link between attractiveness and success; and gave examples of the focus on appearance from a range of groups including peers, partners, magazines and employers.

| "A lot of indirect messages are targeted at women – for example magazines aimed at working women focus on 'dress for success' and by success they mean groomed; nice hair and make-up."

| “It’s like they’re selling the woman not the product, it’s dehumanising. Are we supposed to copy it? ... I don’t see myself represented in any of these images.”

| “There’s such pressure to look like celebrities that you find ordinary girls resorting to Photoshop, or wearing professional levels of make-up, or asking for surgery for their birthday.”

| “My boyfriend is critical of the way I dress at work, he makes me feel like I’m giving the wrong impression or trying to attract attention.”

“I can’t think of many famous women who aren’t attractive.”

Sexual freedom and sexualised experiences

Many of the younger participants described feelings of confusion, pressure and discomfort around sexual identities and behaviour. In these discussions the influence of social media was frequently mentioned, with several young women suggesting that social media presents challenges that they don’t know how to deal with.

| “There’s a pressure to be ‘sexy’ and I did some of that, despite feeling uncomfortable; posting sexual pictures of myself anonymously. The pressure came from my female friends mostly, because we thought boys would find it sexy. It was almost a competition.”

| “I think it’s got worse; there’s so much porn everywhere that young women start to think that’s how you’re supposed to act.”

Several participants said that during teenage years there are clear differences in experiences, based on gender.

| “Just imagine a 14-year-old boy walking down the street and being honked at

| by some 20-something girls driving along.”

| “I started having troubling experiences – feeling self-conscious, getting comments about my body younger than my peers because I was one of the first in the class to develop – I was 11.”

A few young women commented on sexual culture. Some talked about the influence of celebrities and magazines in terms of normalising sexual images of young women.

| “It is really interesting when you think about how things have changed. Before, women weren’t allowed to be sexual; they were supposed to be demure and virtuous and those qualities were praised – society punished them and made them pariahs if they were sexual. Now, it’s all about being sexual, we’re pushed into it but there are still certain invisible parameters – cross them and you’re punished for that too; called a slut or a slag. It’s like there’s ‘just the right amount of sexy’ and women don’t get to decide how much that is.”

POLITICS

We asked young women for their thoughts about women in politics and whether they had any views about gender equality during the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum process and 2015 UK General Election.

We found different levels of political engagement across the young women interviewed. While most were politically active (including one participant who had been nominated as a candidate for a political party) a minority expressed no interest in politics and had not voted in the Referendum. Several participants mentioned belonging to the Women for Independence movement; noting that this had been a good source of political information.

Scottish Independence Referendum vs. UK General Election

“[The Scottish Independence Referendum was] a beautiful experience, it included women more than the UK General Election which is GRIM!”

The young women we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive about the Scottish Independence Referendum process; both in terms of political experience and due to their excitement at being the first generation able to vote at the age of 16 and 17.

Across the interviews there was a commonly-held view that, from a gender equality perspective, the referendum experience was “different” and “better” than the 2015 General Election. Young women offered different explanations for this. Some focused on the nature of the political discourse, noting that women were considered a key voting group and thus campaigners did their utmost to engage and appeal to women voters. Others suggested that – unlike typical general election campaigns in which people are often quiet about their voting intentions – the referendum sparked great public and private debate, with extensive conversations among friends, within households and across communities. They felt that this grassroots approach was more inclusive than typical political campaigns, which often focus on party leaders, manifestos or the views of particular newspapers. Some suggested that the referendum had a better gender balance simply because more of the senior political figureheads in Scotland are women, compared to the male-dominated parties at Westminster.

“I felt in the referendum there was a lot of effort to involve women and I think that was the result of it being more of a grassroots campaign; from a gender equality perspective the involvement was far better than the general election – it was very participatory, involved conversations on the streets between people as opposed to conversations between politicians which is what the current election feels like.”

“There were lots of female participants in the independence debate – Elaine C Smith, all the female party leaders – it just felt very different to the UK

| general election.”

| “The referendum was unusual in the way that politics was done. It reflected the ground-level needs – not the needs of the political elites. Able to engage a much wider demographic, it asked more questions rather than talked at people.”

“It was an inclusive campaign that will see my generation continue to be politically engaged. I think, in school, girls seemed to sway more and take their time with deciding their vote, where boys seemed to make quicker gut decisions.”

| “Women had a central role in political discussion during the referendum and that will have a legacy – for example, Women for Independence have put childcare on the political agenda.”

| “There was much discussion at school, the referendum opened politics up to girls more, where before it was more something boys would talk about.”

| “I went around asking if other students were planning to vote. My impression was that the girls were more proactive – they had already registered – boys needed a lot of reminding and encouragement. There was lots of discussion among female students about the importance of voting one way or the other, even if they weren’t sure about which way they planned to vote – to express ‘thanks’ for the women who had fought for their right to vote.”

Gender balance and portrayal of women in politics

In our conversations about politics, many young women expressed concerns about the lack of gender balance in decision-making positions.

“There’s a complete lack of gender balance in political representation at Westminster.”

Some attributed women’s lack of representation in politics to a belief that women are discouraged from entering politics; citing examples of sexism, scrutiny and personal attacks.

“Female politicians get berated, chastised – if people don’t agree with their ideas it’s usually mentioned that they’re a woman and there are comments on their appearance. Errors are understood as because she’s female, not because she’s human.”

“In politics women are unwelcome and treated as caricatures; for example almost all the coverage about Nicola Sturgeon’s appointment as First Minister included commentary about her appearance. One newspaper portrayed her as Miley Cyrus, in a tartan bikini, astride a wrecking ball.”

“I’ve seen some female politicians portrayed in the press in ridiculous ways – remember that fashion parade of female Ministers in Westminster?”

“The attacks on Natalie Bennett were terrible. Ok, she messed up her interview. But she was nervous – which happens to us all – and she’s trying to do good. Whereas Nigel Farage gets applauded for doing interviews while he’s drinking in a pub.”

“I’m fed up of hearing about Theresa May’s shoes.”

“I think women can be reluctant to enter politics because of the level of scrutiny over their appearance and the value judgments made about them.”

During the discussions, mixed views were put forward on the use of quota systems to reach a better gender balance in politics. Some young women saw quotas as a valuable “means to an end”; some said they are a way to “redress imbalances in history”; while others felt that quotas are “unhelpful” and create tensions.

"50:50 is a good idea – needed as we haven't learned to hear authority in women's voices."

"Impressed by Sturgeon's 50:50 cabinet. We've got the potential here in Scotland to be so much more representative than the UK. Westminster doesn't represent me, there are no politicians there who are anything like me; how can they understand me?"

Targeting women voters

There was a general sense of dismay at efforts to engage women voters. Several young women said they felt patronised and "affronted" by recent political campaign strategies.

"What do I think of when I think about women in politics? Labour's pink bus springs to mind. And I'm not keen on that as a move to engage with the female electorate."

"[They] said they [would] appeal to female voters [but] immediately talk about things like childcare. That's not a 'woman's issue'. It's an issue that affects us all."

The patronising Better Together video – the woman didn't even know Alex Salmond's name! To use the basis of an appeal, to present women as indecisive, who fear risk-taking and focus all their political thinking on childcare issues...well it really shone out for me. That a political party thought that was a video that would appeal to women!"

SAFETY

Violence against women was mentioned in many of the discussions, with participants noting everyday safety concerns that they face as women. Several described feeling intimidated on the street.

"On the street there are countless seemingly unthreatening comments like 'cheer up darling, give me a smile' but these are patronising and a little threatening. I think, would you say that to me if my husband were here? Women are not here to decorate your world."

"A group of boys followed one of my classmates down the road, wolf-whistling and calling after her. I think they were really shocked when we pulled them up on it the next day at school; she was upset. They didn't realise that it could be perceived as threatening until we explained it; probably because girls don't do that sort of thing to boys, so they don't know what it feels like."

"I wear a hijab and in this political climate that potentially puts me at a risk of violence, or people making assumptions about me. But it's my choice and an expression of my culture and beliefs."

"No matter what I wear, I can't remember the last time I left the house without having men harass me on the street. For example I was walking to the doctor in jeans and a t-shirt, and counted nine different times of men bothering me – honking the car horn, shouting degrading stuff and racial stuff too. I ended up phoning my mum because I was upset."

"I walk down the street and am constantly scanning, scoping out for potentially threatening men."

These participants also said that the fear of violence affected their behaviour or the decisions their parents made about the amount of freedom they could enjoy.

"My brother is younger than me but he's allowed to stay out much later and to make his own way home. My parents say the different rules are for my own safety."

"There are subtle differences for women. For example there was an attack in The Meadows [Edinburgh] and all the guidance and recommendations from the police etc. was aimed at girls, asking them to change their behaviour. It's this focus on the victim not the perpetrator, couched in 'it's for your own safety'."

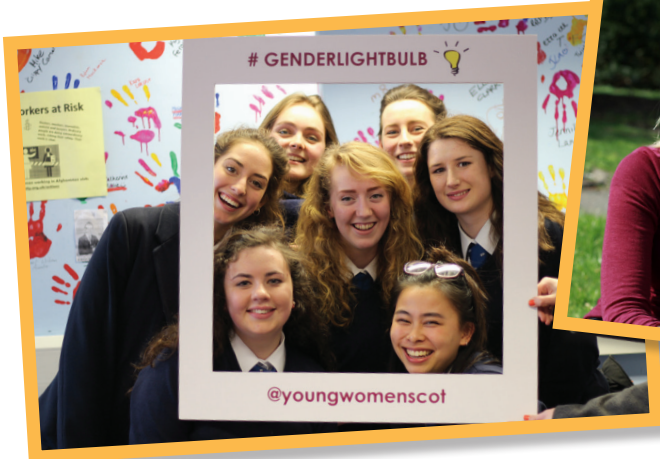
"I've always tried to object to gender discrimination, I signed 'No More Page 3', but in my personal life it's much harder... you end up tolerating much more than you'd like to admit. One in three women in the UK have experienced violence against them by their partner."



“

IT'S LIKE THERE'S 'JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF SEXY' AND
WOMEN DON'T GET TO DECIDE HOW MUCH THAT IS.

”



POLAND

'In Poland there is certainly more gender equality in some spheres – especially employment – because of our history of comradeship and the five-year plans where everybody would work. However I think Poland is more sexist when it comes to domestic chores and appearances. I was really struck when I moved to Scotland about the freedom women have in expressing who they are through what they wear – it seemed like there was a lot of different ways to look and different styles; not one 'idealised version of beauty' that all women were struggling to conform to.'

SPAIN

'I would say it's better in Scotland. In Spain our infrastructure forces the choice between career and children – there are fewer opportunities for state support. Diversity and freedom with style are greater here.'

SOUTH AFRICA

'I moved here from South Africa aged 12 and found sexism more prominent here in smaller ways; like women are more self-conscious here – I think this is because of media criticising women. However in South Africa a woman is more likely to get raped than learn to read.'





NORDIC COUNTRIES

'Scotland needs to catch up with Nordic countries.'



DENMARK

'I feel like I've grown up in an equal society (Denmark) and I knew this on a subconscious level but it really struck me when I moved to Scotland! It made me see how the state's infrastructure can really be a mechanism of social change or restriction. For example Danish childcare is good quality and affordable; most people use it and most return to work. The lack of access to affordable childcare in Scotland contributes to women being the main carers, reinforced by the pay gap. Also here I've noticed all this guilt women have about returning to work. Like they are not good parents, or its something they will be judged for.'

BAHRAIN

'I've got more freedom and opportunities in Scotland than I did in Bahrain where I used to live, but there are problems here too, white men are always cat-calling.'



SINGAPORE



'At home, in Singapore, the majority of the population are Chinese and I think cultural difference really contributes to the pressure to marry before the age of 30. I don't think women in Scotland worry about it so much. On the other hand women wear more makeup here; I felt I had to also do this to fit in. I can see it in other Asian students - they're changing their style to fit in with other women here.'



“

CREATE NEW SPACES TO TALK ABOUT FEMINIST ISSUES, MOVING AWAY FROM THE ARGUMENTATIVE TONE TOWARDS INFORMATIVE AND UNRELENTINGLY POSITIVE.

”



HOW WOULD YOU BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

GENDERLIGHTBULB



@youngwomenscot

All of the young women who took part in interviews expressed enthusiasm for efforts to promote gender equality. They had a range of ideas about ways to stimulate positive change; within these conversations there was a mixture of consensus and disagreement about how to go about this.

CONVERSATIONS

A common theme in our discussions about encouraging change was to find new ways to get more people talking about gender equality.

“Champion this research! Engage with the media and promote these sorts of conversations like we’re having in this group discussion.”

“Run positive, constructive and inspiring events/gatherings creating opportunity for young women to meet mentors.”

Almost every young woman we spoke to asked if young men were also going to be interviewed. Several of them, particularly the youngest participants, suggested that similar conversations with men about gendered experiences and a more holistic approach that engages and encourages young men could play a role in bringing about changes in attitudes.

“Work with women from an earlier age – from puberty, to help negotiate that complex time but include boys in these discussions, educate them about periods, feminism etc. There’s no use talking about feminism with just girls.”

“Things like equal distribution of domestic tasks will only be achieved when men don’t feel stigmatised for taking on those roles.”

CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIVISM

- | “Famous women on banknotes.”
- | The idea about statues of women is interesting but I’m not sure about what domain we should celebrate – would we go for women in business or celebrate virtues such as kindness that I think are extremely important...”
- | “Encourage young women to put themselves forward for political and representation roles.”
- | “Encourage the tiniest acts of pulling people up, on individual and structural levels.”
- | “More scrutiny of the media around gender issues.”

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

“Teach that gender equality and feminism is relevant and contemporary.”

Another popular idea was to promote education about gender equality and provide mentoring or training to address issues that young women feel they lack confidence in, compared to men – such as assertiveness, financial literacy and negotiation skills. Several young women said that we should start talking about gender equality from an earlier age.

- | “More information for kids, help them deal with over-sexualisation at young age, tackle the images of women in children literature where women are just mums and men have roles like policemen or doctors.”

“Assertiveness training in schools would be helpful – showing girls that it’s ‘assertive, not bossy’.”

“Deliver training around assertiveness ‘having difficult conversation training’ and ‘asking for help’ training, also in effective diplomacy – how to avoid confrontation yet still be effective in negotiations.”

“Champion young workers and fresh graduates – we’re closest to the training, we bring new undertaking and attitudes about equality and we could be instigators of change in workplaces. Instead, you learn all this stuff, then go and work somewhere with managers who maybe finished their training 20 years ago and have attitudes that are 20 years old.”

“Reach out to people with different backgrounds and cultures, particularly ethnic minorities.”

“How about having a curriculum for activism?”

“A mentoring programme – support peer to peer learning or link young women with people who have more experience... create or advertising existing networking opportunities... Work in schools around attitude change workshops on simple issues that people don’t seem to get – e.g. consent.”

“New complex spaces are emerging between sexuality and technology – influence sex education in schools – young people are exposed to pornography et cetera and need much more guidance through this new territory.”

ROLE MODELS

As one young woman said, “we need more role models; you can’t be what you can’t see.” Role models was one of the most repeated ideas across the interviews and it is interesting to note that almost every participant mentioned Nicola Sturgeon during the course of their interview, all referencing her being a positive role model for young women in Scotland.

| “She’s inspiring.”

| “Nicola Sturgeon is really interesting. She’s the first female politician that isn’t afraid to be female. For example she mentions childcare a lot and I think previously female politicians have shied away from that because they would’ve been ridiculed or it might have made them look less serious. But she knows it’s an important issue and is not scared to be judged about taking it on.”

| “Sturgeon is a very positive figure to be leading Scotland.”

“I’m not massively interested in politics but went to hear Nicola Sturgeon speak – she represents Scotland really well.”

| “I’m normally really shy but I just had to go up to her [Nicola Sturgeon] and shake her hand.”

Other suggestions for positive role models included celebrities, campaigners and politicians.

| “Cat Boyd”
| “Angela Merkel”
| “Emma Watson”
| “Taylor Swift”
| “Lena Dunham”

“Beyoncé, MIA, Nicki Minaj – all women of colour who don’t let their fame compromise their cultural values.”

“Promote those who build websites and other new skills that young people have.”

“Bloggers behind much of the social change.”

“It’s sad we can’t think of many successful women to champion.”

A TOOL FOR CHANGE

We would like to see the **Status of Young Women in Scotland** report become a platform for young women's voices and a tool for change.

When we first met to map out this project together in 2014, we agreed that there was no one place where we could find a holistic, evidence-based and intersectional picture of what it's like to be a young woman living in Scotland today. The Status of Young Women in Scotland 2015 provided a safe space for over 60 young women to reflect on their individual and collective experiences of inequality.

Most of the data we found on the status of women did not take into account ethnicity, non-binary identities, disability, the experiences of those aged 13-30, or the different areas of Scotland young women live in. We would like to know more.

We would love to see some of the interesting UK & EU gender equality research on young women carried out in Scotland too.

We invite you to read, draw comparisons, and raise questions about the data and experiences shared in this report. We would like you, as a reader, leader and decision-maker, to use this report to listen to young women and be inspired by their words to bring about change in whatever small or big way you can.

We look forward to engaging with other young women in future to ensure even more of our voices and opinions are being heard. We'd love to hear what you think of this report and for you to get involved with The Young Women's Movement. Chat to us on social media using the hashtag #SYWS and email us hello@ywcascotland.org.

The Status of Young Women in Scotland 2015 Team

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