Why Gender Equality is Midwives Business

Dr Denis Walsh, Nottingham University
Plan:

* Childbirth against a backdrop of global & historical discrimination against women
* Women’s response: the 3 waves of feminism, feminist values, types of feminism
* Childbirth: failing bodies, medicalisation, paternalism, obstetric professional hegemony, gender politics
* Reclaiming women’s agency and autonomy
Global Data on Women’s Oppression/Exclusion

* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZCTdKPv708
* 1.4 billion living in poverty, 70% are women
* 1 in 3 women globally are beaten, abused or coerced into sex
* 80% of world’s 27 million refugees are women
* Women do 66% of the worlds work but receive <10% of income
* Women 51% the population of the earth but own 1% of the land
Global Data on Women’s Oppression/Exclusion

- >50% of women over 15 cannot read or write
- 67% of all illiteracy in the world are women
- 2/3 of children who receive <4 years education are girls
- 200,000 to 300,000 women trafficked each year in Europe
- Two countries women cannot vote: Saudi Arabia and Vatican City
- Only 17% of the world’s MP’s are women
- Only 11 out of 190 heads of government are women
Violence Against Women

1 in 3 women throughout the world will experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner.

- 29.8% WHO Region of the Americas
- 23.2% High income
- 37.0% WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region
- 37.7% South-East Asia Region
- 25.4% WHO European Region
- 24.6% Western Pacific Region

Map showing prevalence of intimate partner violence by WHO region

All statistics can be found in the report entitled Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, by the World Health Organization, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and the South African Medical Research Council, found here: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/en/index.html

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Global Data on Women’s Oppression/Exclusion

* 75% of Russian women suffer violence within the family
* 6,500 brides in India are murdered/year because of inadequate dowry
* 48 million women in Pakistan live under a law that they can be buried alive if they refuse arranged marriage
* 5 million women in Somalia can be publicly stoned for adultery
African women are 180 times more likely to die in childbirth than western Europe

* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2z7NH0yxCw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2z7NH0yxCw)

* FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wj6W66RniJ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wj6W66RniJ8)
UK Data on Women’s Oppression/Exclusion

- 2 woman/week is killed by male partner
- A woman is assaulted in her home every 6 seconds
- 230 women raped each day but more than \( \frac{3}{4} \) are not reported
- Only in 6% of reported rate is there a conviction
- 1 in 10 women say they were coerced into having sex
- After college/university, women earn 20% less than men, and 10 years later: 31% less than men
- UK: 88% of prison population are men and if they had the rate of offending as women, the budget deficit would be paid off
‘It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a male soldier in active combat’
Women’s Exclusion through History

- World religions tend to exclude women (Bible & Koran)
- History written by men about men
- Name a famous female painter, classical music composer, scientist (apart from Marie Curie), philosopher, world leader prior to the 20th century
- British monarchy: Heir always passed through male line until 2 years year
- Property inheritance passed through male line until 20th century
- Family tree traditionally follows male line
Sexism in Contemporary Society

- Sexualisation of women in media and advertising: RCM joined Stop Page 3 Protest
- 85% of women in high profile roles have appearance commented on in media v 5% of men
- 1/3 of all journalists are women but only 1% are department head, editor or media owner
- Bechdel Film test of gender stereotypes:
  - Two named women in it
  - who have a conversation on screen
  - that is not about men
  - 44% of all films fail it
Chemaly, US feminist writer says: ‘Globally, childhood politeness lessons are gender asymmetrical... we generally teach girls subservient habits and boys to exercise dominance’

- Parents interrupt girls twice as often and hold them to stricter politeness norms
- continues into adulthood where "women’s speech is granted less authority”
“I have a dream” (Martin Luther King)
“I’m sorry, I just had this idea — it’s probably crazy, but — look, just as long as we’re throwing things out here — I had sort of an idea or vision about maybe the future?”

“Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” (JFK)
“I’m not an expert, but I feel like maybe you could accomplish more by maybe shifting your focus from asking things from the government and instead looking at things that we can all do ourselves? Just a thought.”

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Language of Submission & Self-Deprecation

* App that replaces qualifying language with assertive, positive alternatives e.g. deletes the ‘sorry’, ‘just’

* Phrases women need in group meetings to challenge men’s speaking dominance, stealing women’s ideas:
  * ‘Stop interrupting me,’
  * ‘I just said that’,
  * ‘No explanation required’
### Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More emotional</td>
<td>Better at science/maths/accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better at communication</td>
<td>Better leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better at multi-tasking</td>
<td>Better soldiers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better nurturers</td>
<td>Less interested in their physical appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like babies and children more</td>
<td>More promiscuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More monogamous</td>
<td>More interested in gadgets/cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interested in domestic work/crafts</td>
<td>Interested in power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested in power</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Women inhabit a patriarchal world (the Patriarchy) and masculinist culture

Three waves of feminism

1. 1st wave 1830’s to 1920’s: women’s rights including suffrage (vote), abolition of slavery
2. 2nd wave 1960’s to 1980’s: rise of feminist consciousness, reproductive freedom (birth control), equality before the law
3. 3rd & 4th wave 1990 to present: objectification of women (sexualisation), commodification of women (appearance/clothes), equality in employment (reproductive disadvantage) and public roles (‘caring rather than daring’)
Central notion of ‘False Consciousness’
(don’t know you are oppressed but when
you see it, you see it everywhere!)

‘double shift’

‘emotional housework’

‘Nagging’: the repeated reminder that
someone’s behaviour is anti-social and
selfish
1. Primacy of women’s experience.
2. Listening to and valuing women’s voice and women’s version of events.
3. Establishing relationships of equality and reciprocity.
4. Having the same rights, opportunities and privileges as men.
5. Unmasking of dehumanising and oppressive practices against women.
6. Action for empowerment and emancipation.
* If you are committed to woman-centred care, then you believe in gender equality
* If you believe in gender equality, then you are a feminist!
* If you believe in gender equality, then you are a feminist.
Gender Discrimination in Maternity Services: Examples

- History of discrediting the female body
- Medicalisation of childbirth
- Historical dominance of obstetrics over midwifery
- Paternalism and women’s choice
Failing/Faulty/Leaky Bodies

- Original Grey’s Anatomy privileged male body; female body invisible apart from gynaecology/obstetrics
- Female madness: hystero, need to be controlled and kept under surveillance
- Reductionist history in obstetrics: powers, passages, passenger, disembodied
- Faulty bodies: hospitalisation of birth, C/S, episiotomy, induction/augmentation, proliferation of risk factors
- Leaky bodies: douches, confinement
Midwives seen as competitors
- Obstetric regulation of midwifery
- Colonisation of normal childbirth until 1990’s in UK but ongoing in many other countries
- Obstetricians have more strategic posts in hospitals
- Obstetrics have more power in clinical guideline development
Midwives acting as an Oppressed Group

- ‘Doing good by stealth’ (Kirkham, 1999)
- Horizontal violence (Leap, 1997)
- Compromised managers (Roberts, 2000)
- Self protective behaviours (Stapleton et al., 2002)
- Career stagnation following maternity leave
Paternalism: health professionals know better than women

- Much of our evidence base is centred on professionals, not women’s interests
- Assumptions around safety that are professional-centred, not women-centred
- Informed choice?
- Hierarchical thinking
- Defensive practice & risk
How this can play out in practice

- ‘steering decision-making’
- ‘blackmail’
- ‘playing the baby card’
- Using guilt to gain compliance
- Stereotyping/judging
- Bias in presenting risks: relative risk v absolute risk
- Wrongly attributing childbirth trends to women’s preferences (elective CS)
Women’s agency in childbirth practice

- Power over their own body
- Autonomy in decision-making about themselves and where they want to birth and what happens to them

Litmus test: how does your service deal with women requesting ‘out of guideline’ choices?
Women lacking Agency: Place of Birth UK

Where women gave birth in England, 2012

Total number of women = 686,500

- NHS Obstetric Unit, 594,000, 87%
- Alongside midwifery unit, 61,500, 9%
- Freestanding midwifery unit, 12,000, 2%
- Home, 15,500, 2%
- Non NHS hospital, 2,500, 0%
- Other, 1,000, 0%

Numbers and percentages are approximate and are derived from a variety of sources including ONS and NAO
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Women lacking Agency: Place of Birth
UK

Midwifery Units: 11% of All Birth

- Obstet Unit: 164
- Along MU: 85
- Free MU: 67

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women as creators
* oneness between mother & baby
* power, beauty, strength of woman’s body in birth
* mother’s intuitive knowledge of herself & her baby
* sense of mystery around birth
* rites of passage experience
* as transformative & opportunity for personal growth
* symbolised by love, not fear (Davis-Floyd, 1997)
Midwifery profession:

* A profession where women have an enhanced opportunity of occupying every leadership role - practice, management, research, education

* A profession where women do occupy every leadership role!

* A profession where biological disadvantage of motherhood is negated?

* So why not for every other profession/jobs???
Society is poorer for systematically EXCLUDING HALF THE WORLD’S POPULATION from leadership roles, the professions, the trades, business and politics
Conclusion

* Childbirth is systematically affected by legacy of gender inequality that at best undermines childbearing women’s agency and at worst puts their own lives and the lives of their babies at risk, especially in low income countries

* The challenge remains how to embed feminist values so gender inequality is exposed and addressed wherever it manifests
‘Don’t wait for the light to appear at the end of the tunnel...

*Stride down there and light the bloody thing yourself!*’ (Goer, 2004)