

How did the women's rights movement shape modern Britain?

How did the women's rights movement change British culture in the 1970s?

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

By the end of the lesson students will:

- Understand the significance of the birth control bill as a landmark cultural moment in Britain
- Be able to identify the wide range of political and social changes initiated by the women's rights movement in the 1970s
- Examine primary source visual material as historical artifacts

Introduction

When Carol Hanisch wrote in 1969 that “personal problems are political problems,” she popularised a slogan which is now synonymous with the women's liberation movement. This belief that the personal is also political pushed women's rights activists to advocate for equality not only in the public sphere, but in the private sphere as well. This lesson examines the broader cultural shifts of Britain in the 1970s, as women formed community groups, advocated against gendered violence, and sought equality in their homes as well as their workplaces.

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the work of Margaret Sanger and her belief that birth control was a crucial method of increasing women's autonomy. Students will learn how British women gained access to contraception and understand the significance of this access. They will later examine a broad variety of ways through which the women's rights movement initiated societal change, including the creation of women's refuge and crisis centres, women's fashion and literature, and feminist community-building initiatives. The lesson will conclude by asking students to examine posters from the LSE Women's Library as historical artifacts attesting to the movement's belief that the personal is political.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 12 and above. It is devised for History classes.

Timings are suggested based on a one-hour lesson and may need adapting based on circumstances.

Prior knowledge is not needed. However, the notion that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore and resolve misconceptions.

Resources:

- Lesson plan
- Lesson PowerPoint
- Mapping activity (Slide 4) – one printed copy per student
- Timeline activity (Slide 6) – one printed copy per student
- Cause-and-effect chart (Slide 9) – one printed copy per student

Lesson Plan

Starter: The personal is political (6 minutes)

As students enter the room, introduce them to one of the fundamental slogans of the women's rights movement: "The personal is political." (Slide 1).

If needed, students can refer back to the Timeline and Terminology Worksheet provided in Lesson 1 to provide more context for the definition of 'political.' Political in this context refers to structures of power in a wide range of spaces: government, law, culture, education, etc.

Ask students to reflect:

- What do you think this statement means?
- Do you believe this statement is accurate?

Facilitate a classroom discussion. Students may share a wide variety of responses to the quote and may disagree on its accuracy.

Explain that this quote, popularized by the American feminist Carol Hanisch in 1969, refers to the notion that the world of laws and politics is related to family life and personal identities. Feminist activists believed that it was not enough to gain equality in the workforce or under law: they also wanted to change the culture of Britain to be more equitable for women. They began to examine how women were treated in their personal lives.

Introduction (2 minutes)

Remind students of the enquiry question for the unit (How did the women's rights movement shape modern Britain?) and introduce them to the enquiry question of the lesson: How did the women's rights movement change British culture in the 1960s and 1970s? (Slide 2)

Contraception in Britain (18 minutes)

When the National Women's Liberation Conference first met in 1970, one of their four major demands was "free contraception and abortion on demand." Activists in the women's rights movement wanted to fight not only for employment and educational opportunities, but to achieve broader social equality between men and women, because the personal was political. Access to contraception was a key part of this fight.

Now, play students this [BBC video](#) about Margaret Sanger and the introduction of the birth control pill. As students watch, they should consider the following questions:

- Why did Margaret Sanger feel so passionately about the creation of a birth control pill?
- How was the development of the birth control pill funded?
- What has been the impact of the birth control pill for women?

At the conclusion of the video, ask students to map out the impact of the contraceptive pill for women. Give each student a copy of the Mapping Worksheet (Slide 4). Students should spend 4-5 minutes filling out the worksheet with a partner.

Share the exemplar Mapping Worksheet on Slide 5. Students should understand that the contraceptive pill allowed women to make informed decisions about their healthcare, to wait until they felt ready to have children, to stop having children once their family was large enough, and to consider their financial means when planning for a family.

Hand each student a copy of the Timeline Worksheet (Slide 6). Ask students to put in chronological order these significant dates in the history of contraceptive access (Slide 7):

- 1921: Marie Stopes opens the UK's first birth control clinic in London
- 1961: The birth control bill was introduced under the NHS in the UK for married women only
- 1967: The NHS Family Planning Act allowed doctors to give contraceptive advice to unmarried women

- 1974: Contraception officially became free-of-charge under the NHS for all women regardless of age or marital status
- 2017: More than 3.1 million women in the UK use the birth control pill

Share the completed timeline for students to reference and make amendments if needed (Slide 8).

Cause and effect chart (22 minutes)

Hand out one copy of the cause-and-effect chart (Slide 9) to each student.

Students will take notes on four ways through which the women's rights movement pushed for cultural change in the 1960s and 1970s: the Miss World protest, the creation of women's shelters, changing fashion norms, and community-building initiatives.

Lead the entire class through the first cause-and-effect example as a large group. Play [the BBC video](#) on Slide 10 and explain the historical context provided in the notes.

Facilitate a classroom discussion on the key questions:

- Which cultural issue was being tackled?
- How was the issue addressed?
- What was the impact of this on British society?

Give students time to make notes on their own cause-and-effect worksheet based on the classroom discussion.

Repeat this exercise with the following three slides (11, 12, and 13). Each slide examines a different element of society which was transformed because of the women's rights movement. Encourage students to share their perspectives on why these transformations were necessary and their ongoing relevance to the present-day. Students should understand that these issues have not been entirely resolved.

At the end of exercise, display the exemplar cause-and-effect chart (Slide 14) and give students several minutes to add any additional notes, if needed.

Summary (8 minutes)

Give students several minutes to read and examine a poster from LSE Women's Library Collection (Slide 15). Ask students to examine: What event is this poster advertising? What

does this poster tell us about the cultural changes taking place in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s?

Students should understand that this era was not only a time of legal and political change, but of cultural change within society. The birth control pill transformed the level of choice and control women had over family planning. Women began speaking out publicly against sexism (such as the Miss World Pageant). Trailblazers in popular culture transformed how women were depicted in music, literature, and fashion. Organisations like Women's Aid provided resources and shelter for women in need, while the women's liberation movement became a social movement of both political and personal connection. All of these different strands combined to create overarching change in British society from the start of the 1970s to the conclusion.