



## WHAT IS FEMINISM?

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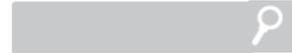
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## LIFE NOT LIFESTYLE



### BODIES



## London Feminist Film Festival: Body Politics

By Alisha Rouse

*Alisha Rouse attended last week's London Feminist Film Festival at the Hackney Picturehouse for us. In the first of three short blog posts, she reports back on the opening session, Body Politics.*

It's been 40 years since *Our Bodies, Ourselves* came out and caused a right raucous by suggesting that body image, transgender issues and abortion were things women could claim ownership of.

Down here in the 21st century, and the Sunday before last, in fact, 'Body Politics' was the premiere session at the second ever London Feminist Film Festival.

A great, week-long film fest based at the Hackney Picturehouse, the opening session featured three feminist documentaries dealing with women's ownership and power over their bodies.

*The Cut* was a deeply upsetting film documenting FGM in east Africa, where girls are circumcised from as young as six. FGM is an extreme but very real example of body politics for women living in these communities, and for many women in our own.

The politics of body ownership are still hugely up for debate. More women, like Texan senator Wendy Davis, are standing up (albeit not for as long as Wendy did, bless her) and trying to gain the most basic rights to self-determine the life of their torso and its inners.

I've asked some of my friends about this, and as expected, the responses were pleasing and generic.

"So, who owns a woman's body?"

"The woman, obviously!"

"Do you think a woman has a right to choose what happens with her body?"

"Of course!"

"Good! Well done, right thinking individual."

"No problem, Alisha!"

But when push comes to sexist shove, the packaging of body politics may have changed, but the product is just the same. While the majority of right-thinking men, women and politicians (a breed of their own) consistently state that a woman has the right to govern her own body, it's rare that insinuations of male or societal ownership don't come creeping through.

*Still Fighting: The Story of Clinic Escorts* showed women and men abusing people on their way into abortion clinics in America – and in liberal-thinking New York state, no less.

In the style of Shirley Phelps and the far-holier-than-thou Westboro Baptist Church, there were placards and Hail Marys, as pretty amazing volunteers escorted women into the clinic, surrounded by vile and unfaltering hatred.

Being in a north-eastern state, the documentary was even more frightening. With Davis filibustering for what felt like days to make sure abortions in Texas weren't restricted, while still refusing to mention the A word in her political leaflets, the US seem to have no visible heroes for the self-determination of women's bodies, except these amazing ladies in hi-visibility jackets.

Back in the UK, *Blank Canvas*, a short but sweet documentary, gave us all hope. A woman suffering from cancer and going through chemotherapy, opted to henna her bald head rather than getting a wig, using the canvas as self-expression: expression that she needn't pretend all is fine; needn't look a way that makes non-sufferers feel more comfortable; and needn't suffer from the lack of control cancer gives you over your body.

She took control, and we all need to learn something from that.

*Alisha Rouse is a Newspaper Journalism MA student at City University, desperately missing the north and praying for a job. Find out more @alisharouse.*

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This entry was posted in Bodies and tagged abortion, choice, FGM, film, health, reproduction, violence, women on December 3, 2013 [http://archive.feministtimes.com/london-feminist-film-festival-body-politics/] by Sarah Graham.

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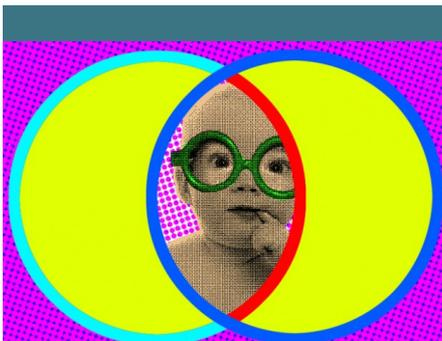
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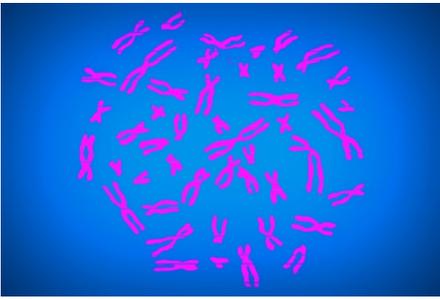
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