

## **Bristol Feminist Network (BFN) Position Paper**

### **The Media**

The media have a huge influence on the ideas and attitudes that are held in society as a whole. How women are represented in the media matters – it profoundly influences how women are seen and treated and, as Lisa Tickner says:

***‘Representations enter our collective social understandings, constituting our sense of ourselves, the positions we take up in the world and possibilities we see for action in it’***

ROW: The Representation Of Women in the media project is one of the key campaigns organised by BFN (with Bristol Fawcett) since it started in 2007.

The project looks at how women are

- represented
- misrepresented
- or not represented at all

Our research and activism has overwhelmingly found that women appear either

- as idealised objects performing a narrow definition of beauty and sexuality
- or
- They are marginalised and largely absent

ROW is a participatory project that aims to:

- Take constantly updated ‘snapshots’ of the media landscape in which we live
- Provide hard evidence in support of feminist arguments
- Disseminate that information
- intervene in the media where we can to change hearts and minds

The project is always open to new participants [www.rowitm.org](http://www.rowitm.org) for more info.

All our research has shown us so far that whilst women are marginalised in the creative, powerful and political or sporting sphere, women are encouraged to appear as objects who embody a very narrow definition of what it means to be beautiful. Women continue to be there as something to look at, rather than as active citizens of the world. Whilst there is of course nothing wrong with being young, slim and beautiful, there is something very wrong with the message that women should only and always conform to a certain standard of beauty. There is something wrong with never seeing our reality reflected back to us. And there is a problem when women's successes are not recognised, because they do not meet the beauty standard. Women in the public eye are all too often expected to conform to an unattainable and often narrowly sexualised version of femininity, to look a certain way whilst their own professional achievements, be it winning an Oscar for her acting, an Olympic gold medal or a seat in the cabinet are seen as subordinate to the ultimate achievement of looking “hot”.

We believe that there is something very wrong with this narrowing of women's potential and women's ambitions. If all we are, are objects to be looked at, or invisible, then how can we hope to compete in the creative, sporting, political and powerful worlds, on our own terms, as women, to achieve equality.

We therefore campaign for a wider and more reflective representation of women in the media that allows women the space to be more than just highly sexualised objects for the male gaze, or rarely seen or heard at all.