



## The Facts

*Layla's Room* tells the story of an average British teenage girl: Layla. For Layla, every day is a battleground. The pay gap, the thigh gap, over-sexed pop and selfies that are photoshopped – they're just part of the world she lives in.

But that world is about to change. While breaking out of her bedroom – and with drama, comedy, poetry and music as her weapons – Layla breaks down and makes sense of the realities, difficulties and absurdities of teenage life in the UK today.

Many of the stories and topics explored in *Layla's Room* will directly relate to the lives of the students. These facts and provocations will help extend understanding of the subject area – in addition to serving as stimuli for the students' own creative work and devising.

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## **1. A Brief History of Feminism: First, Second and Third Waves**

### **First wave: 1860s - 1918**

Feminism was not a movement before the 20<sup>th</sup> century – it was more of a series of proto-feminist writers and philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, the views of whom were controversial for the time amongst politicians and the establishment. In the nineteenth century women had no place in politics. They could not stand as candidates for Parliament. They were not allowed to vote. Their role was in their home and in looking after children.

Following the Industrial Revolution, a transition in new manufacturing processes that took place from about 1760 to 1840, many women were in full-time employment and had more opportunities for discussing political and social issues in large, organised groups. From 1866, women began campaigning for a more much active involvement in politics. Women realised that they must first gain political power, including the right to vote, to bring about the social change they sought.

The movement to gain votes for women had two wings: the suffragists and the suffragettes. The suffragists – predominately middle class women – believed that they would achieve their goals through peaceful means. The suffragettes, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, drew a greater amount of working class women to their cause. Their motto was “deed not words” and from 1912 onwards they became more militant and violent in their methods of campaigning. Law-breaking, violence and hunger strikes all became part of their campaign tactics.

Their political agenda expanded to issues concerning sexual, reproductive and economic matters. The seed was planted that women had the potential to contribute just as much if not more than men.

When World War I broke out in 1914 the suffrage movement scaled down and even suspended some of their activities in the face of a greater threat to the nation. At the end of the War in 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave women over 30 the vote, and in 1928 this was extended to all women over the age of 21.

### **Second Wave: 1950s- 1980s**

Following World War II, the second wave of feminism focused on the workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights.

Outside a Miss World competition feminists launched a demonstration, throwing their bras in bins in protest and refusing to talk to male journalists. Women in the West gained control over their bodies for the first time as it became legal for unmarried women to buy the birth control pill in the 1960s. By the 80s, under Reagan’s administration, right-wing America frequently stalled the Equal Rights Amendment. Feminism hit a brick wall.

During the second wave many women were initially part of the Black Civil Rights Movement, Anti-Vietnam War Movement, Chicano Rights Movement, Asian-American Civil Rights Movement, Gay and Lesbian Movement and many other groups fighting for equality. Many of the women supporters of the aforementioned groups felt their voices were not being heard and felt that in order to gain respect in mixed-gender organizations they first needed to address gender equality concerns. Women cared so deeply about these civil issues that they

wanted to strengthen their voices by first fighting for gender equality to ensure they would be heard.

### **Third Wave: 1990s - present**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a rejuvenation of the feminist movement, with the age of celebrity acting as a driving force behind it. Stars like Emma Watson (actor and founder of the HeForShe campaign) have helped modernise feminism to remind young people of its relevance to them. Some people contend a fourth wave of feminism, with origins in 2005.

The 2016 mayoral election in London saw an impressive stride in the work of the Women's Equality Party who came sixth in the race after the five major UK political parties. Feminism has also broadened in scope since the turn of the century. Queer theory has now been incorporated into its philosophy and Laura Bates' website 'Everyday Sexism' helps women call-out and challenge microaggressions such as verbal misogyny and body shaming.

The main issues we face today were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. We are still working to eliminate the disparities in male and female pay and the reproductive rights of women. We are working to end violence against women in our nation as well as others.

We are still fighting for acceptance and a true understanding of the term 'feminism', although tremendous progress since the first wave. It is a term that has been unfairly associated first with ladies in hoop skirts and ringlet curls, then by butch, man-hating women. Due to the range of feminist issues today it is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like. Perhaps the dictionary definition is best. It is simple, yet profound: "Feminism - the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes".

### **References:**

<https://www.progressivewomensleadership.com/a-brief-history-the-three-waves-of-feminism/>



## 2. Layla and Feminism

### Body image

In the play the girls share a common problem with the many young women in the UK today: lack of confidence with their own body image. As many as 69% of young women say that advertising affects their idea of a 'perfect body', despite the fact that the average model weighs 23% less than the average woman. Monica in particular struggles with this idea of perfection.

### Women in the media industry/arts

Layla's poetry is one of focal points of the narrative. She is able to express herself eloquently through it when she might otherwise not be able to. Lack of women in the arts is an ongoing issue. Since 1999 the number of women in newsrooms has actually decreased (from 36.9% to 36.3%), and the highest-paid female actor, Angelina Jolie, is paid significantly less than her male co-stars. Many women however have taken a stand against this, such as Robin Wright, who is now paid the same amount as her *House of Cards* co-star Kevin Spacey, and Jennifer Lawrence.

### Abuse

In the play, Monica has to deal with an abusive boyfriend and Layla is the victim of sexual harassment. Whilst sexual violence has fallen 73% since 1993 it remains a serious and important problem. 66% of those who suffer sexual violence are 12-17 years old – the same age as Layla and Monica. With the rise of websites like 'Everyday Sexism' increasing cultural awareness, men and women must remain vigilant and continue to engage in conversations around abuse as much still remains undocumented and unreported.



### 3. Survey Results

As part of the research for Layla's Room, playwright/performance poet Sabrina Mahfouz designed a survey for teenage girls across the country to respond to. Sabrina wanted to use responses to create an accurate picture of what life is like for young women and girls aged 13-19 in the UK today. Approximately 1000 young women completed the survey and their collated responses are as follows.

#### 1) The 5 objects that young women are drawn to:

The respondents were asked choose only FIVE objects, from a list of 41, which they felt most drawn to, for whatever reason. The top 10 and bottom 5 are as follows.

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Head/Earphones	<b>46%</b>
2	Phone	<b>46 %</b>
3	Laptop	<b>36%</b>
4	Mascara	<b>27%</b>
5	Book	<b>27%</b>
Bottom 1	Ball	<b>2%</b>
2	Doll	<b>2 %</b>
3	Bleach	<b>2 %</b>
4	Drill	<b>1%</b>
5	Plug	<b>1%</b>

#### 2) Main interests and preferred ways to spend free time

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Music - listening to or making	<b>73 %</b>
2	Films	<b>63 %</b>
3	Socialising	<b>59 %</b>
4	Reading	<b>50 %</b>
5	TV	<b>43 %</b>
Bottom 1	Politics	<b>17 %</b>
2	Volunteering	<b>14 %</b>
3	Sports - watching or participating	<b>14 %</b>
4	Computer games / programming	<b>13 %</b>
5	Crafts	<b>11 %</b>

### 3) Main worries/concerns

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Exams	66%
2	GCSEs / A Levels	66%
3	Weight loss / gain	57%
4	Career plans	51%
5	Going to uni	50%
<b>Bottom 1</b>		
Bottom 1	Pressure (sexual or other) from boyfriend/girlfriend	8%
2	Domestic violence	8%
3	Learning needs (your own or someone else's)	8%
4	Bullying online	7%
5	FGM (Female genital mutilation / cutting / circumcision)	7%

### 4) Dreams/Aspirations

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Actor	8%
2	Writer	6%
3	Film / TV director	6%
4	Doctor	6%
5	Musician	5 %
<b>Bottom 1</b>		
Bottom 1	Geologist	0.33%
2	Customer Services	0.33%
3	Leisure & Tourism	0.33%
4	Technician	0.16%
5	Retail manager	0.16%

### 5) Obstacles to success

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Confidence	50%
2	Money	36%
3	Lack of job opportunities	34%
4	Experience	31%
5	Self-esteem	31%
<b>Bottom 1</b>		
Bottom 1	Learning needs	4%
2	Romantic relationships	3%
3	Sexuality	3%
4	Caring responsibilities	2%
5	Disability	1.95%

## 6) Role models

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Top 1	Parent or carer	<b>42%</b>
2	Friend	<b>40%</b>
3	Actor	<b>28%</b>
4	Teacher	<b>28%</b>
5	Musician	<b>25%</b>
Bottom 1	Comedian	<b>9%</b>
2	Youth worker	<b>7%</b>
3	Sports player	<b>7%</b>
4	Politician	<b>5%</b>
5	Support worker	<b>3%</b>



#### 4. Sexual Harassment and Abuse

One of the narratives explored in *Layla's Room* is the sexual harassment of the protagonist, Layla. Below are statistics from surveys carried out in the last 4 years:

- 100,000 women are raped in the UK every year and the conviction rate is only 6.5%
- 1 in 3 teenage girls has experienced sexual violence from a boyfriend
- Almost a third of girls experience unwanted sexual touching in UK schools
- 1 in 3 young women experiences sexual bullying in school on a daily basis
- 1 in 2 boys and 1 in 3 girls think it is OK sometimes to hit a woman or force her to have sex.
- ¼ of teenage girls believe it is more important for a girl to be beautiful than clever

Doireann Larkin from the domestic violence Charity Tender: “often (teenagers) have normalized all kinds of strange things. A girl might think that her boyfriend grabbing her by the throat is completely normal”. The charity teaches young people that the excuses they might hear such as “I hit my girlfriend because my dad used to hit my mum” are never valid. Every abuser has a choice.

- **Impact of media**

Michela Marzano, a philosopher and psychologist from France, said it was becoming increasingly difficult not to relate French children's increasing exposure to pornography to the recent surge in cases of teenage collective rape in France.

"Pornography is supposed to be reality, it imposes a norm that will lead many young consumers to construct a world where sexual relations are those of these films," she said.

"When they discover the real world, some of them will inevitably be disappointed and decide to stick with porn. Some will accept reality. And some will refuse the real and react in the way pornography has taught them: with sexual violence. Porn does not recognise that the other person might have a different urge to yours."

- **The Bigger Picture: Has Society gone backwards on Gender Equality?**

Kat Banyard in her book *The Equality Illusion* argues that whilst we have been led to believe that we have gender equality this is in fact an illusion that hides the reality that society is full of growing inequalities. She believes some of the worst cases of this are amongst young people and girls at school.

She argues that advertising, culture and even your education teaches girls from birth that physical beauty is a reflection of worth and value, whereas boys are encouraged be judged by what they do. Presidential nominee Hilary Clinton was famously once asked in an interview who her favourite fashion designers were. She replied “Would you ever ask a man that question?” The interviewer admitted the he would probably not. Hilary Clinton, amongst many others, proves that women can attain positions of great power and responsibility but is there still an imbalance between men and women in expectations of physical appearance?

- **Sexual Behaviour and Sexual Violence**

There are many myths surrounding definitions of rape. Some are misleading and it is helpful to be aware of the facts.

#### Definitions of Sexual Abuse

(Taken from *Coping with Sexual Assault: A Guide for Young People*, Produced by the Havens Centre <http://www.springlodge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/A-Guide-for-Young-People-on-Sexual-Assault.pdf>)

- Rape is when a man forces his penis into the vagina, anus or mouth of another person when that person doesn't want him to do so; the law calls this without consent
- Sexual assault is a crime that can be committed by both men and women against men or women. Different types of sexual assault include:
  1. Objects or parts of the body (e.g. a finger) being put into someone's vagina or anus when that person doesn't want it to happen
  2. Someone being touched in a sexual way that makes him or her feel uncomfortable or frightened. This could be through their clothes like bottom pinching
  3. Someone being made to sexually stimulate themselves using their hands or fingers (known as masturbation) or putting objects into their vagina or anus, when they don't want to do it.

The Facts – Consent (*taken from Your rights, Your body, Your life: produced by the Havens Centre* <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Your-rights-your-body-your-life-a-young-persons-guide-to-sexual-violence-and-the-law.pdf>)

- If the perpetrator believes that you did consent to the sexual activity (even though the victim didn't) then they are not guilty of the offence. The belief has to be reasonable – this means the perpetrator can't just say that he honestly thought the victim was "okay with it" and they will not be guilty. If the victim was saying 'no' and screaming, the perpetrator would not have a "reasonable" belief that the victim wanted to do it – even if they had a belief.
- The law says that sometimes it might be difficult/impossible for the victim to say no to something; they might not have the choice to say no because they are – for example – unconscious or afraid.
- The law says that when a person drinks alcohol or takes drugs voluntarily, then they say yes to sexual activity – this is still consent and no criminal offence has happened. If the victim was drunk and you did not consent to sexual activity, or you were unconscious and could not agree, then this is not consent.

## 5. Help: Sexual Harassment and Abuse

If you have been sexually assaulted or raped, remember –it is **always** the rapists' or attackers' fault. You are **not** to blame and you are **not** alone. Here are some things you can do:

- Try to be somewhere that feels safe.
- You might be in shock, so try to keep warm.
- See if a friend or someone you trust can be with you.
- Talk to someone about what has happened. If you don't feel like talking to a friend or family member yet, here are some useful numbers/ links:

### **Childline**

0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk/](http://www.childline.org.uk/)

### **The Havens (London-based)**

The havens are specialist centres in London for people who have been raped or sexually assaulted.

Camberwell: 020 3299 1599

Paddington: 020 3312 1101

Whitechapel: 020 7247 4787

<http://www.thehavens.co.uk>

### **Women and Girls' Network**

A community-based organisation providing a comprehensive range of therapeutic services, which facilitate healing and recovery from experiences of violence.

020 7610 4345

[www.wgn.org.uk/](http://www.wgn.org.uk/)

### **Rape Crisis**

0808 802 9999

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

### **The Samaritans**

08457 90 90 90

<http://www.samaritans.org/>

### **MPower**

Supporting Male Survivors of abuse

0808 808 4321 (Thursday 8pm - 10pm)

[www.male-rape.org.uk/](http://www.male-rape.org.uk/)

[support@seva-uk.org](mailto:support@seva-uk.org)

### **Victim Support**

National charity helping people affected by crime. Provides free and confidential support to help you deal with your experience, whether or not you report the crime.

0845 30 30 900

[www.victimsupport.org.uk/](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/)