

She's Beautiful When She's Angry (2014) by Mary Dore

In 2014 Mary Dore directed the documentary *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*, which details the events and accomplishments of the women's liberation movement from 1966 to the early 1970s in the United States. The film features commentaries from greater than thirty activists who worked to advance the women's movement. Throughout the film, the activists describe the timeline of events that led to women's improved access to reproductive healthcare and a reduction in sexual discrimination in the US. The documentary also features clips from protests, demonstrations, and other significant events during the US women's liberation movement. According to the film's website, the filmmakers made the documentary to inspire women and men of the twenty-first century to continue to advocate for gender equality. The documentary educates viewers about historically significant events of the women's liberation movement and increased awareness of feminist issues like women's reproductive health.

The documentary *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* chronologically examines significant events during the women's liberation movement and features commentaries from activists who lived through those events. The director and primary producer, Mary Dore, created the film along with Nancy Kennedy, Kate Taverna, Pamela Tanner Boll, Elizabeth Driehaus, Abigail Disney, Geralyn Dreyfous, Gini Reticker, Mark Degli Antoni, and Svetlana Cvetko in 2014. Dore was an award-winning producer and director known for incorporating activist perspective in her films. There is no one main narrator in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*. All narration comes from the footage of greater than thirty activists who comment on their experiences, television and radio clips, and other mixed media from the mid-1960s into the 1970s. The film also features some older videos of the activists from their earlier years when they worked in the women's liberation movement.

The film begins by describing the social climate of the 1960s and continues on to discuss certain issues and events of the women's liberation movement from the perspective of the women activists. The first half of the film focuses on some of the first events of the women's liberation movement, such as the founding of the National Organization for Women and the existing Civil Rights Movement in the southern US. Next, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* introduces the female consciousness raising groups that formed throughout the US and the public protests and demonstrations that women across the country participated in. The film then details women's liberation issues like lesbianism, rape and sexual assault, reproductive health education, and birth control. The documentary concludes with commentary on the Women's Strike at the Statue of Liberty in New York City, New York, in 1970 and the lasting accomplishments of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s.

The opening scenes of *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* introduce the viewer to what it meant, according to the activists interviewed, to be a woman in the 1960s. The film details a number of things that were inaccessible to women at the time with a series of interviews and footage. The interviewed women claim that because of their gender, they were discriminated against in almost every aspect of life and had considerably fewer freedoms than women of the twenty-first century. According to several activists, women in the 1960s were unable to have career aspirations, especially if they chose to have children. Several of the interviewees describe how many women lived in fear of pregnancy and if a woman was raped, it was reportedly unlikely that authorities would believe her. Instead, according to one of the activists, the authorities would give the woman a lecture regarding her promiscuity. According to the activists in the film, the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought women's issues like reproductive health and job discrimination to public attention in the US. Coupled with the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement, the women's liberation movement was one of several activism groups that gained momentum during the 1960s.

After describing the reasons for the women's liberation movement, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* discusses what the female commentators viewed as one of the first pivotal moments in the movement. The women in the film first discuss the National Organization for Women conference held in October of 1966 in Washington, DC. That conference was the founding event for the National Organization for Women, which later promoted a large array of women's rights in the US. According to the interviewed activists, after the publication of Betty Friedan's bestselling book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1964, many women across the US found that they were underpaid, overworked, and that men in power neglected their talents and skills based on their gender. Some of the women recalled instances in which they were not eligible for a job because of their gender. Friedan led a group of women who founded the National Organization for Women to combat employment discrimination and advance the civil rights movement for women. After the initial formation of the organization in Washington, DC, other chapters opened around the country, including one in Chicago, Illinois. The former president of the Chicago chapter shows her collection of pins from the movement during the interview, including one button reading "Uppity Women Unite".

Next, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* explains how the political climate of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s made the women's liberation movement possible and successful. According to the women in the film, the Civil Rights Movement, especially in the southern states, and the peace movement during the Vietnam War brought many different types of groups of people together. The women of the film refer to the emerging group as the New Left, describing the prevalence of young liberal-thinking people during the 1960s. The interviewed women who belonged to the New Left group comment on feeling as though their voices were never heard and report being told to stay quiet and let the men continue to take credit for any progress or success. *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* shows large gatherings of New Left supporters, rallies, and interviews with the women. One of them, Susan Griffin, comments that women were the ones licking the envelopes and doing all of the organizational work for the demonstrations. Women were constantly disrespected by the men of the New Left who were preaching for the equality of all people during the Civil Rights Movement.

She's Beautiful When She's Angry proceeds to discuss the formal announcement of the women's liberation movement in 1969. According to one of the interviewees, Marilyn Webb, the announcement came during an anti-inaugural demonstration following the election of Richard Nixon. Webb, along with other women, stood up and announced the women's liberation movement to a crowd of New Left men. The film features footage from the demonstration showing protesters with anti-Nixon signs. According to Webb and several others, in response to their announcement, the majority of men in the crowd whistled and shouted sexist and lewd slurs at the women, asking for the women to be removed from the stage.

The documentary then shows the emergence of female consciousness raising groups throughout the US and the spreading of the women's liberation movement with pictures and videos of those groups. According to Alix Kates Shulman, another interviewee in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*, during that time women across the country shared stories and talked about their lives as they never had before. Women who reportedly felt like they had no purpose and that their lives were meaningless found meaning in conversations about feminist issues with other women. Susan Brownmiller comments that, during her early days in the movement, she shared with others that she had three abortions and soon, realized that she was not alone and that the issues she faced were common.

After forming activism groups and growing the movement in 1968, the women in the film discuss the beginnings of public demonstrations to further the women's liberation movement. According to activist Alix Wolfstein, she, along with many other women, protested outside Congress buildings on issues including women's reproductive health, employment discrimination and disparity, and lack of affordable child care. While discussing demonstrations, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* shows Ruth Rosen, along with many others, burning their university degrees in a trash can that they called "The Freedom Trash Can" to protest the lack of education on women's issues. Many women also burned their bras, along with maxi pads and high heeled shoes. Next, there is a scene inside the Miss America Pageant where a group of women hang a large banner from a balcony that reads "Women's Liberation," which attracted media attention.

Other women describe their participation in demonstrations to attract media and attention to further the women's liberation movement during the late 1960s. The women describe belonging to

other groups like the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, or WITCH, and sporting WITCH outfits in public to raise awareness. After hearing about a woman who was being sexually harassed while walking on Wall Street in New York City, Karly Jay along with several others founded national Ogle Day where they walked down Wall Street, catcalling at men and raising awareness about the harms of objectifying and sexualizing women. The interviewees also discuss the importance of literature that furthered the women's liberation movement, including the poetry publishing company, Shameless Hussy, that Susan Griffin founded and the women's liberation magazines, *It Ain't Me Babe* and *Cell 16*, which featured many feminist political comics.

The women in the film then move on to discuss the emerging topic of lesbianism in the women's liberation movement during the late 1960s. According to several of the interviewees, most lesbian women kept their sexual orientation a secret due to shame and many of them who were a part of the women's liberation movement reportedly felt that their lesbian specific issues were not being addressed. According to Jacqui Ceballos, the larger women's liberation movement was initially hesitant to incorporate lesbian issues. That was due to the leaders of the movement, including Friedan, the founder of NOW, being reportedly concerned that the issue of lesbianism was too much, too soon.

According to several women in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*, Friedan and others feared that the progress the women's liberation movement had made in achieving respect from men would be hindered by taking on a more controversial issue like lesbianism. In response, an organization called the Lavender Menace formed to protest the exclusion of lesbians from women's liberation issues. That group interrupted the Second Congress to Unite Women meeting in New York City in May of 1970 by removing their blouses to expose shirts reading "Lavender Menace." The women demanded that their lesbian-specific issues be included and according to lesbian activist, Rita Mae Brown, after that showcase, many movement leaders put lesbian issues on the agenda for the feminist movement.

The next segment of the film is devoted to reproductive health education and commentary by many of the members of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and their accomplishments during the late 1960s in Boston, Massachusetts. The Collective was a reproductive health organization that educated women about aspects of their female anatomy. During the late 1960s, birth control had been recently legalized but abortion was still illegal. The women in the film claim that almost everyone had heard stories of doctors patronizing their female patients, talking down to them and not taking women's health concerns seriously.

In response to finding that many women knew very little about their bodies or even what their genitals looked like, members of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective came together to educate women of all ages on their anatomy. They taught informal instructive courses for women on subjects like masturbation, menopause, menstruation, pregnancy, nutrition, and women's reproductive health to students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1969, the organization collectively wrote and published the award winning book, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, about women's health issues. In *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* footage shows the 40th Anniversary Symposium of *Our Bodies Ourselves*, where women from all over the world reflected on how the book and the women's liberation movement gave women access to understanding their bodies and their health.

Next, the film *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* discusses the issues of rape and sexual assault in the women's liberation movement. Rozanne Dunbar, one of the women interviewed, describes her involvement in promoting self-defense training for women who lived in dangerous areas. She also describes her involvement in the campaigns for "Take Back the Night," or demonstrations where large groups of women crowded the streets to spread awareness about women's safety after dark. According to the interviewees, those demonstrations helped show the wider public that rape was not a crime of passion but was another way in which men dominated women. In the film, several activists claim that the common notion that men raped because of their strong sexual urges was broken down by activist demonstrations.

The film then shifts to focus on the issue of abortion in the US during 1969 and the early 1970s. According to the film, before abortion was legalized in 1973, thousands of women were hospitalized each year after incorrectly performed abortions, and greater than 5,000 died every year. The women

in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* recall their friends and peers desperately attempting self-abortions or taking pills and having dangerous medical complications. Members of organizations like the Jane Collective in Chicago, Illinois, and other illegal abortion agencies provided relatively safe and affordable abortion options to women seeking to manage their reproduction and avoid self-harm.

Then, the interviewees in the film spend time on the subject of birth control during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the harms of high-dose estrogen birth control pills, and their medical consequences for some women. Estrogen is a female reproductive hormone, the release of which alters the menstrual cycle. The first oral contraceptive pills became legal in 1960 and almost all early birth control pills contained substantially more estrogen than birth control options available in the twenty-first century. Women reported their hair falling out from the high doses of estrogen and that they were consequently affected with serious health issues like blood clots, strokes, and cancers. According to one of the woman activists, Alice Wolf, researchers and doctors had known about the relationship between high dose estrogen and cancer since the 1930s. The film shows footage of Wolf and other women interrupting a congressional hearing on birth control and demanding that women not be test subjects. As a result of those demonstrations and resulting activism, the Food and Drug Administration required an addition of an informational insert to all birth control pill prescriptions detailing the side effects and potential health consequences of the pills.

One of the final subjects covered in *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* is the Women's Strike on 26 August 1970, when 50,000 women gathered at the Statue of Liberty in New York City, New York, to protest sexism and further the women's liberation movement. At the public demonstration, women hung large banners from the top of the Statue of Liberty that read "Women Of The World Unite." Footage and images of the protest spread around the world and images of the banner were printed in *TIME Magazine* that month. The women in the film describe the goals of the women's liberation movement while the film shows the footage of the protests, emphasizing that women gained the right to vote and gained access to birth control, and later abortion, due to their radical activism.

The film concludes with commentaries on the scope of women's issues in the twenty-first century, emphasizing the lasting accomplishments of the women's liberation movement. Interviewees in the film discuss the fact that many women have since shared more parenting responsibilities with men, have more freedom to pursue careers, and have seemingly endless access to reproductive health information on the internet. One of the women, Virginia Whitehill, states that forty years after the legalization of abortion, no victory is permanent and the women discuss how the right to an abortion is being challenged again. They argue that only by being proactive and defending their rights will women be able to maintain and continue to fight for women's equality.

The film *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* debuted in New York City in December of 2014 and continued to screen in cities across the country including Chicago, Washington, DC, and throughout California. The creators of the film also participated in multiple radio and talk show interviews. They received high praise reviews from publications across the nation. In 2014, the film's team partnered with organizations like Planned Parenthood and the National Organization for Women to promote empowerment and women's issues activism. In the years following its release, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* was screened on college campuses and was recognized in film festivals in other countries, such as Canada, Australia, Turkey, South Korea, Ireland, and Spain. In 2016, Music Box Films obtained the rights to *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* and released it with DVD copies and on iTunes, a media playing program. As of 2018, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry* was available on Netflix, one of the largest and most popular online streaming companies in the world.

Sources

1. Dore, Mary. *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*. Music Box Films. 2014.
2. "Our Bodies Ourselves." *Our Bodies Ourselves*. <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/> (Accessed February 22, 2018).
3. "She's Beautiful When She's Angry." *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*. <http://www.shesbeautifulwhenshesangry.com/the-film/> (Accessed March 14, 2018).