

WHAT IS FEMINIST SELF-DEFENCE?

All the needed tools, attitudes and reactions which allow for reaching the root of violence and ending it are referred to as self-defence. It means societies awareness towards different gender-dependant roles (masculine-feminine). It also means the effort of our self-esteem. This is why we believe that we can go forward using self-defence.

We want to be free and autonomous women; we want to be owners of ourselves. We must reinforce all our securities and believe in our many abilities. We want to feel that we own our lives, our decisions, our bodies and our future. Loving and respecting ourselves and drawing limits when necessary will be the tools which will lead us to defend ourselves with autonomy. We are all able to identify and reject sexist attitudes which is also practising feminist self-defence.

If we are attacked, we must defend ourselves. We can't delegate the duty of our security and our lives in other. That is why both individual practice and collective organisation between women are necessary and vital: defending each other, setting out collective debates and creating communal areas.

We are all women; me, you and her. Even if we come from different cultures, our age or our colour is different, we all suffer the consequences of violence. We are the first to want to end it and the ability and strength to face it is in ourselves. Let's design a good strategy! Let's gather, think together, share our thoughts, create... let's kick out the attackers and make all those patriarchy-friendly institutions blush.

WHY FEMINIST SELF-DEFENCE?

SELF: Because we are capable on our own!

Although they wouldn't have described it as such, women from different territories have always used what we call feminist self-defence. In silence or as a collective, they have started up strategies to survive and/or face attacks. In the Basque Country, a group of 30-40 women created different groups to protect women who were abused by their husbands. They stood guard on these women's houses to stop the husbands from entering. Sexist violence wasn't socially recognized then, but a problem which belonged exclusively to the private life.

Today, a different interpretation of these types of situations can be socialised thanks to the struggle carried out by the feminist movement; we have made sexist violence a public and social matter.

Institutions have been asked to act with responsibility and have been made to take several measures, like the gender violence law. Nevertheless, these requests have unconsciously led to delegating the problem on institutions and their judiciary and political means. This has made us put aside the idea of defending our bodies and ourselves.

In addition, women are shown by institutions and the media as passive subjects which are constantly waiting their saviour, their Prince Charming. It is not often that we can see, learn or remember references, names or images related to women who defend themselves and their rights. The headline of the news will be about a raping, but never about a woman who has been able to scape an assault on her own. We mustn't also forget those women who have faced violence, nor those who continue fighting it day after day. We are all capable of responding to violence, even if we have to reinforce our aptitudes and abilities and take the necessary tools to face assaults.

We must stress that the word "self" doesn't only refer to oneself, but to the community of all women. I am not assaulted for being who I am, but for being a woman. That's why each disdain, insult or assault against one woman is an attack to and against all of us women. But we are not alone, and together we are much stronger!

DEFENCE: To give an answer

Unfortunately, women suffer sexist assaults every day. Everyone has the right to defend him or herself, and unless we don't defend our rights, no one will. That's why we are completely legitimate to respond to each attack.

We think that being able to characterise the "defence" is very important. Within sexist assaults, there not only physical attacks and that's why we cannot only learn some physical techniques as they do in defence courses. We can be very skilled with these techniques but not bet able to identify an attack, we can have a mental block and be unable to react. Or maybe we can't use those techniques. That is why we start Feminist Self-defence by working our self-esteem, inner consciousness and feminism.

Attacks can be very different; a blow, a word, a joke, an expression, a face, a look or a silence. There isn't a specific answer to each case, so each woman must decide what kind of response she wants to give depending on the context she is in. Our body is our main tool, so we must prepare our voice, our look and our body language to prevent or respond to an attack.

How can we face symbolic violence that sexist advertising spreads with physical means? Sexist violence is a structural problem, we are oppressed and discriminated. The personal and political network that we create around us is our main guarantee to defence. It is important that we have moments to know each other, to care about and listen to each other. To share our experience, respecting each others pace or speed, and to create spaces where we feel safe. Solidarity between women is essential.

FEMINIST: because we go down to the root of the problem and build new relation models.

As we have already stressed before, sexist violence is structural because women suffer it in all spheres of our lives: economy, social and political organisation, culture, ideology... Heteropatriarchy builds hierarchical power relations where masculinity and femininity are the only models. The use of violence is essential for this system so that women continue oppressed in all these live spheres.

They are not crimes of passion, the responsibility is not only of the attacker and the problem is not that he was poor, he drunk too much or that he had psychological problems. The problem is sociocultural and the key is the socialization process lived as men or women. Women have learnt to feel an excessive fear which works as an internal defence mechanism for us. This has limited and conditioned the right to occupy spaces or even our own self-esteem. We have been denied the aggressiveness that boys have developed; we had to be formal, weak, sensitive and vulnerable. We have learnt to be dependent, to put the others needs before ours, always with a smile on our face. But when we quit the role that characterises femininity, when we break the imposed roles, we are punished and labelled as maniacs, blabbermouths, boors, butches or bitches.

That's enough! We need Feminist Self-defence to face the sexist violence we suffer. We need it to stimulate the awareness of women and become political subjects rather than objects of desire. We are going to respect and make respect our desires, our needs and preferences! Say no! Put your own limits, show your anger and say what you don't like! We are not dependant, we are not victims; we are strong and capable of answering, and we are not alone. It is our right and our decision; lets use Feminist Self-defence!

CONTENTS WHICH ARE DEVELOPED

- Emotions: Women have been educated with fear and it is one of the strongest means of control over us. It is time to undo all these fears so that we can be free even at

night and in the street. We must also learn to handle the fear which activates with real dangers. Don't bloc your fear! Use it! On the other hand, since we were born we have been denied the use of aggressiveness, which is a very important and useful tool. We must recover this tool and use it without feeling guilty.

- Self-esteem: It is one of the most important weapons for our protection. It is the source of personal power we need to respond and guarantee who we are. It is also the base of confidence over which we relate to the world. It is related to respecting each other and loving ourselves; with knowing where to put our limits and not accepting chauvinist attitudes. The stronger our self-esteem, the less probability to be trapped in a passive role and higher the chances to respond to an attack.
- Identifying attacks: there are many types of attacks; physical and psychological, active attacks or those that come with a silence. Having in mind what we said before about the iceberg structure the visible and invisible parts of it, we must know that subtle attacks happen every day; attacks that exist on the unseen side of the iceberg but which damage our integrity. These micro-sexisms are more difficult to identify, but noticing them is the first step.
- Responses: The person, the place, the moment... Everything changes the possible responses to an attack, all of them legitimate. There is not a wrong response, to escape in a run or to do nothing can also be ways to respond. In defence classes they stress the strength of muscles as the only way to respond. But there are many other qualities like intuition, speed, creativity or even humour which can be very important when facing different attacks.
- Attitude: Our reactions or attitudes facing an event or even life are based on the consciousness and self-esteem each woman has. An appropriate attitude in the correct moment can prevent an attack; a look, a voice or body language are very strong weapons. However, knowing physical techniques will be of no use without the appropriate attitude when putting them into practice. We are all capable to respond, we only have to believe in ourselves!
- Solidarity: Feminist self-defence has no sense without protection, refuge and organisation between women. The only purpose of defence techniques is that each woman defends herself. On the contrary, the objective feminist self-defence is to

share our experiences, fears and strategies as a collective. On the basis of our individual and collective consciousness as women in this society, and overcoming individualism and understanding it as a way to relate to each other, we must build a wall of support and solidarity between women. Every time a woman that suffers sexist violence is attacked, every and each one of us is attacked!

- Being horizontal: Whereas related to defence courses, the master is omniscient; in feminist self-defence no one has more power or value than anyone else. Everyone's experiences, ideas and techniques are useful. We all have the opportunity to learn from each other, for all the responses are equally legitimate. Therefore, there is nothing we can do wrong.