Trouble and Strife

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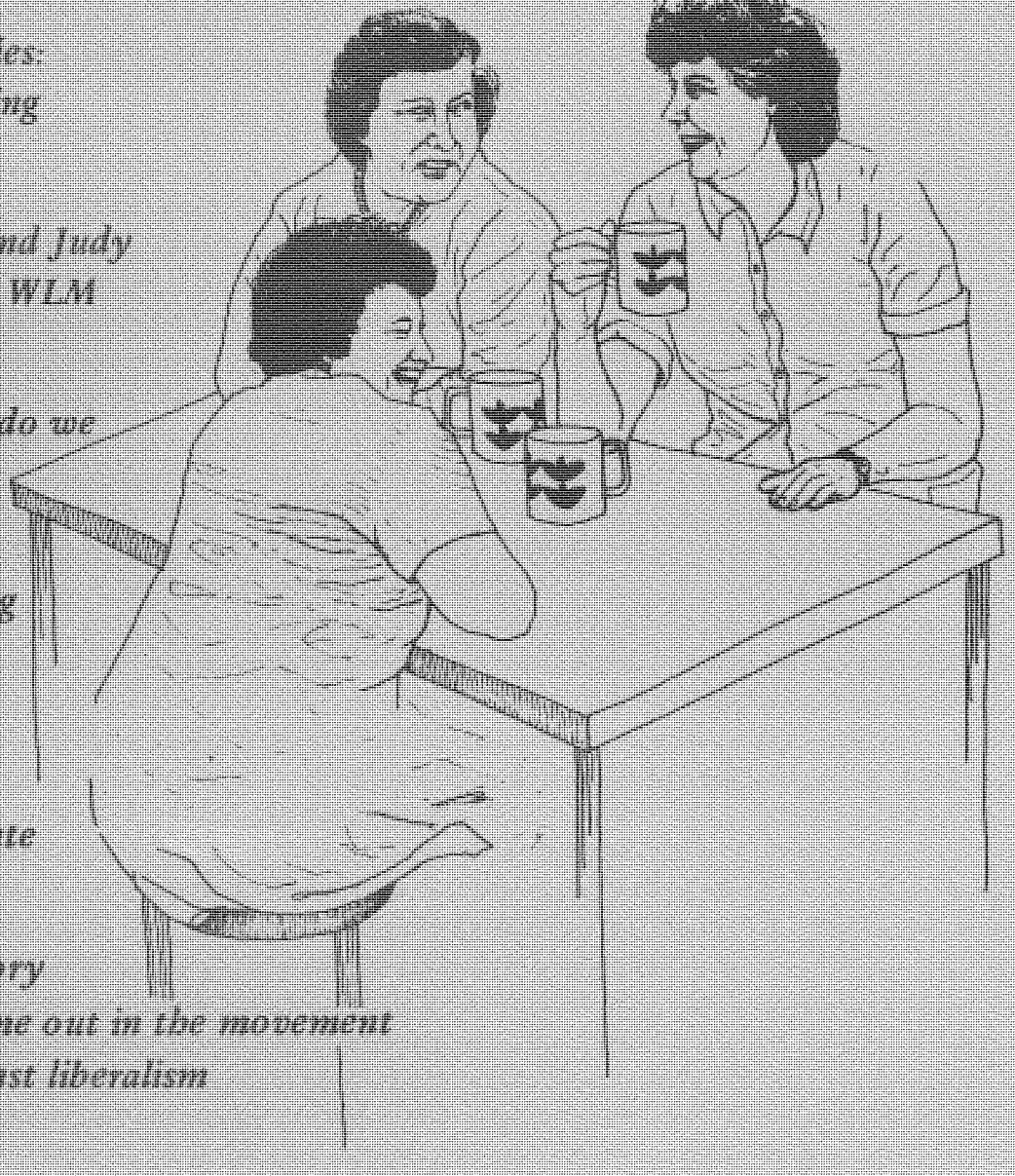

Hating women's bodies: the politics of slimming

The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady: class in the WLM

Greenham — so why do we still feel ambivalent?

Why the Left is wrong about Thatcherism

Sexuality — NOT the sado-masochism debate

Writing our own history
1) When lesbians came out in the movement
2) The struggle against liberalism

Trouble and Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

Trouble and Strife, 30 Brudenell Avenue, Leeds LS6 1HD, Britain.
Trouble and Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Jalna Hanmer, Sophie Laws, Diana Leonard, Sheila Saunders and Ruth Wallsgrove, with help from Amanda Sebestyen, Dianne Ceresa (design) and Judy Stevens (illustrations). Thanks to *Spare Rib* for the use of their office.

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Trouble and Strife

Contents No.1

Editorial

We hope that this magazine will provide a new centre for what has been known, since the start of the current wave of feminism, as radical feminism.

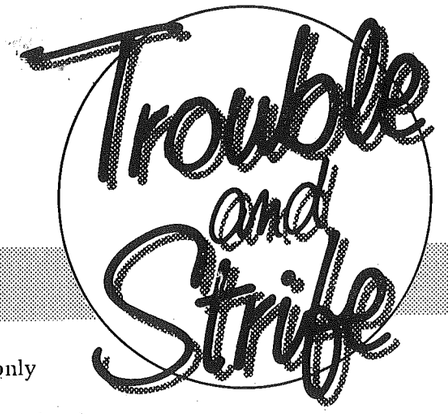
We want *Trouble and Strife* to be a widely available, easily readable magazine, exploring in depth issues which are of direct and current relevance to the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain. We will publish material we do not necessarily agree with in every detail, and certainly from women who do not call themselves radical feminists. But we want to encourage writing from, and to make visible the activities of, a particular strand within feminism. Radical feminism, though central to movement practice, is too often silent in print.

Within this strand, some call themselves just 'feminists', because they see labels as restricting and divisive, and they want an evolving, broad and united Women's Liberation Movement. However, there are today important differences within the movement and many strands always use a qualifying adjective. We, therefore, feel we must too. The following paragraphs outline what we in the collective see as the shared basis of our radical feminism.

We believe that men as a group benefit from the oppression and exploitation of women as a group. We do not see women's oppression as secondary in importance to class or any other oppression; nor do we see it as produced by or maintained because of class or any other oppression. Although we recognise that women experience additional oppressions, particularly through race, ethnic origin, age, disability, class, and that these additional oppressions may benefit and be contributed to by women who do not share them, *all* women are oppressed *as women.*

Men oppress women, but not because of their (or our) biology – not because men are physically stronger, nor because men have phalluses and women may bear children and breast feed, nor because men are innately more aggressive. We consider men oppress women because they benefit from doing so. All men, even those at the very bottom of male heirarchies, have advantages which flow from belonging to the category male. Even the men most sympathetic to women's liberation derive benefits from women's subordination. The social structure has been developed in such a way as to ensure that the collective and individual actions of men support and maintain them in power. We believe change can come about only through women's collective action, and we therefore do not see convincing men of the need for feminism to be a priority in our struggle against male supremacy.

We seek a movement of *all* women to overthrow male supremacy. While we criticise the institution of heterosexuality, we do not think that only lesbians can be feminist or that all feminists should be lesbians.



We hope that *Trouble and Strife* will encourage feminists to let each other know what they are doing and thinking. We hope it will enable ideas and practices to be clarified and developed. We see ideas as emerging from personal experience and practical struggles which then feed back into our work within the Women's Liberation Movement. Although we are producing a magazine we are not doing so because we think intellectual activity is more important than practical campaigns. Sharing knowledge supportively, not using it to impress and mystify, is an important part of radical feminist practice, and it is to this that *Trouble and Strife* is devoted.

The idea for a magazine came from several of us who had connections with a French radical feminist journal, *Nouvelles Questions Feministes.* We had discussed the possibility of an English language sister publication with them over a number of years. Others of us have been involved in various kinds of radical feminist publishing. Last year we formed a group to produce this magazine.

We come from various backgrounds within the Women's Liberation Movement but have shared commitment to radical feminism and the project of getting this new publication established. We do not want it narrowly to reflect the opinions of the collective, but rather to be a forum for debate open to and used by all who fall within a broad definition of radical feminism. An important part of our commitment to open debate is to develop links with radical feminist publications in other countries world wide, in order that our readers can be informed about and contribute to radical feminism internationally.

We are united by our differences and our similarities. We are heterosexual and lesbian, working and middle class, with and without children, and we vary in age from mid 20s to mid 50s and in kinds of Women's Liberation Movement experience. We are all white women.

We are aware that our collective by no means represents all the lines of division between women. There was no Black woman, for instance, whom we could approach without it being an act of tokenism. Few Black women see themselves as radical feminists, and we see this as a general problem for radical feminism. But once the first two issues of the magazine have been produced, we hope new members will join the collective.

Trouble and Strife collective, November 1983.

CARTOONS BY JUDY STEVENS

Greenham Common – so why am I still ambivalent ?

If Greenham is not a feminist issue, is it positively dangerous for feminists? Ruth Wallsgrove thinks that, despite its limitations, there is something there for women.

This weekend, as I finish off this article, I have been to the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp for the 'Rainbow Dragon Feast'. When we arrived, it looked extraordinarily '60s, minus the hippy men – women dressed in bright-patterned mini-dresses and headbands, playing flutes; my heart sank. But then I discovered the hippy costumes were part of a performance about men's ownership of women. I don't know where the organisers had got the idea of a dragon symbolising women's strength, and I don't think I want to; but, again, up close the 'dragon' was not what it had seemed on paper. A three-mile patchwork of banners, quilts and embroidery from several countries, it was a labour of passion that I found very moving. Whatever else it is or is not, the peace camp is passionate.

USAF Greenham Common, indeed, provokes passion: that sand-blasted, barbed wire sterility only feet away from a lovely English wood in which the birds sing and insects hum and the ferns are very green. It is hard not to feel – well, if that is what men really want, let's go and talk to the birds.

Many radical feminists have serious disagreements with the women's peace campaigns, however, as the one day anti-Greenham conference in London last May showed. Greenham has been criticised for taking energy away from the Women's Liberation Movement, for using feminism to liberal ends, and for relying on the 'feminine' stereotypes – particularly of the 'natural' mother who cares for everything and is emotional rather than political – which feminists have struggled against. The papers at that conference suggested that women are being conned yet again by the idea of the 'greater cause', which makes women's oppression very much a secondary issue, if an issue at all.*

It is true that the camp has proved very seductive, though I don't know many women already involved in the women's movement who have given up feminism for peace; rather, it has attracted an enormous number of women without much previous political commitment. It's also true that what the air force base and women's camp symbolise side by side doesn't require that women think beyond a vague women-are-nicer-than-men line – and in case anyone doesn't realise, that *is* the basic line at Greenham.

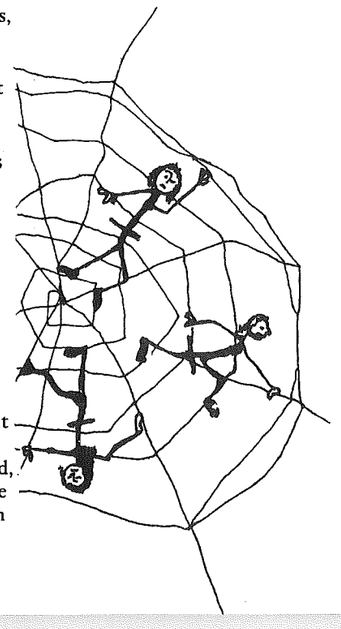
But what we, as feminists, have to face is that many women are moved by Greenham in a way they have not been moved by feminism, and if we simply put that down to the 'easiness' or 'safeness' of the nuclear issue we'd be fooling ourselves and patronising the women involved. Most have given up husbands or jobs or education to live there, perhaps with great relief; they've been attacked on the front pages of several national dailies for being ugly lesbians and unfit mothers; they've shown extraordinary inventiveness in their tactics, and some courage, too, in confronting the most grossly physical of the forces that oppress us. I can't believe that any of us can afford to dismiss them, or even avoid some admiration for their energy, even if we disagree with some or all of what they do. What's more, we have to ask ourselves at this point what exactly we are going to do to make the Women's Liberation Movement more attractive to more women – to these women – since we now have proof that there are a lot of them out there who have energy and passion for politics. We must do more than sit in our corner complaining that women *ought* to find the movement more attractive.

I have always felt ambivalent about Greenham myself. It started life as a 'women's march' that was mixed, and it thoroughly alienated feminists along the way by the autocratic way in which it was organised, even before its long-blond-haired pregnant-mother images got to us. Its only politics seemed to be that women should protect the planet because we're made to look after defenceless babies; worse, in a way, was the undertone that women aren't even important enough to defend in our own right, because what really matters is that our children survive – that it 'was only when I had my baby that I cared what happened to the world'. It used to enrage me to hear women say that; now I think it only saddens me, because some women really do seem to believe that what happens to their babies matters more than anything that could happen to themselves, or indeed all adult women, and if it is in some ways a selfish view, it's also very self-negating. Even at its most negative, it's not women's fault that they don't think about other women; this society does partition us into family cells and divide us from each other, and who understands that better than radical feminists? Of course, feeling that you're doing it for your children as an individual, and using the sentiment on leaflets to bludgeon women into working for peace are two very different things; and the two women who, it seems to me, have perpetrated the babies against the bomb line as much as anyone should certainly know better, because both of them have had contact with feminism and all the arguments against compulsory motherhood. But in fact they've long since been left behind as Greenham has grown and changed.

In its first year, the camp got rid of its 'supportive' men. The standard explanation is that a couple of those men were determined to do their own violent thing against the wishes of the women, but it wasn't purely a response to those particular men.

It was also a positive decision to be a women-only camp because the women enjoyed each other's company and felt they didn't need the men around. The image of the camp, under the self-appointed leadership of two or three women, didn't change, however. The long blond hair and swollen belly remained on the posters. The public line was now that 'ordinary' wives and mothers were leaving their homes for the fiercely rough winter mud for the sake of the children they had left behind; as a sacrifice, it was a higher form of maternal concern. In some ways, and from a distance, I was a little impressed by this, still caught up as I am in thinking I don't really count as a woman. However, the public and private faces of the camp were beginning to move apart. The 'leaders' moved to London with their new lovers (still saying they'd done it all for their families!), taking the press contacts with them, to be sure, but leaving behind a rapidly expanding camp already out of their control.

It started to sprout statements about male violence, as well as about wimmin power; it became a 24 hours a day women's centre, or perhaps a 365 days a year women's conference, bringing in older and very young women from all over the country and, increasingly, some working class and Black women – and a curious semi-lesbian culture, as the 'ordinary' mums, and grandmums and daughters, fell in love with each other.



Their inability, or lack of desire, to wrest back control over the £19,000 they once had, has certainly distressed and infuriated feminists involved in supporting Greenham; the sheer anarchy of the camp isn't always exhilarating; and it often sounds as though some of them believe you can hope the military out of existence. However, the truth is that the soppy-sounding ideas for actions get women there in their hundreds and thousands, and provide good copy for the press, and seem (to me) to disturb the men inside the base in a way conventional demonstrations never could. We've got to the point where lesbians singing songs about wimmin power are the cutting edge of the peace movement world-wide, which is wierd, to say the least; where, much more than the Women's Liberation Movement, they are an

issue on the party political agenda. As I said, I don't see how we can fail to be impressed, at some level.

So why do I still feel ambivalent? Partly, I suppose, because I'm a city-lover who thinks politics requires hard thinking, not just soft slogans; partly because the camp hovers uneasily between its old 'ordinary mum' and its new 'superwimmin' images, and it doesn't add up to feminism. They almost get there, but not quite. Many of the women are secretive about their relationships with other women, or the fact that they were happy to stop being ordinary wives, and they don't talk about sexuality or marriage as political issues, as far as I can tell. Perhaps it's so attractive precisely because it allows women to change without immediately facing up to the full importance of their decisions, and in that sense Greenham may well stay a personal solution, on an admittedly large scale.

The camp runs on an assumption of spirituality that is totally outside my understanding of politics – but I recognise it's somehow an integral part of its optimism, and so I feel ambivalent about that too. I don't want my criticisms of it to sound like those from boring lefty men who'd like to see us all talk our feelings into an abstract void, with occasional time off for joyless and totally ineffective demos. It can't be wrong for birdsong to be part of our impulse towards action.

I doubt if the camp will stop deployment of cruise missiles, which themselves are such a small part of women's problems. I don't know how much all the women involved think about who actually makes the decisions about nuclear weapons, and what would or wouldn't affect them. I want to understand those things. But, on the other hand, having tried to understand, I then always feel pretty pessimistic, and I certainly don't have any better ideas for what to do about nuclear weapons in the short run. Non-violence may seem pathetic in response to the men and money and equipment they can use against us, but I think the arguments in the feminist press against non-violent tactics, using (for example) an analogy with Northern Ireland, are quite useless. How are women suggesting we could beat them in an *armed* struggle?

The feminist alternative stressed by radical feminists, that we have to start by getting control over our own lives, or at least the feeling that we can struggle for that control, is obviously much more to the point. But this can, and must, be done in every possible way. Whether or not it can stop cruise missiles being deployed (and they're probably being assembled in Britain already, and could possibly be air-lifted into Greenham even if we could maintain a blockade around the base), Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp has already made many women believe that they can change things, not *just* by hoping, but by getting together and acting. That, despite constant police, and who knows what other more personal, harrassment, women can choose to live in a women-only camp for two years, which still comes as a revelation to most people in this country.

Greenham isn't cultural feminism, or ghetto socialising; it isn't apolitical peace-and-love, and it certainly doesn't follow left party politics. It isn't even a particularly one-issue campaign, but rather has a tendency towards taking up anything going, in its optimistic and not very analytic way. It is infinitely more generous and open-minded towards women than some of the nasty brands of Moral Monopoly 'anti-imperialism' now going round the Women's Liberation Movement – yes, and less motivated by overt anti-feminism, *and* more realistic.

I am ambivalent about Greenham, but I don't want to see radical feminists mistaking their enemies, or attacking the Greenham women for things that they're not. In spirit, many of the women at Greenham remind me of feminists at our most enthusiastic. As a radical feminist I think I am essentially on the same side as them, not just because they're women, but because they are pro-women women. I feel the Women's Liberation Movement has a lot of things to learn from them, and they from us – if only in the sense that we can talk to them about radical feminism, and they can make us think about how we actually reach out beyond our small corner.■

Breaching the Peace papers from the conference will be published soon by Onlywomen Press.

The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady ~ sisters under the skin?

Marlene Packwood argues that the Women's Liberation Movement must listen to the voices of working class women and change its ways.

Being working class has its trials and tribulations, no less in the Women's Liberation Movement than elsewhere. The disgruntled noises of rebellion and dissention have been heard for some years now from working class women, such as myself, yet they remain ignored by the majority. This paper began when I asked myself why I got so angry with the coarse rebellion of working class women which occurred from time to time in the WLM. Was I looking for a more refined insurrection? A more genteel revolution? This became my starting point. A stone which when I turned it over revealed the middle class values I had absorbed and a mentality which states 'don't rock the boat'. I had learned my lesson well in the middle class grammar school I had attended, along with a small number of working class girls from poor families: bright girls from 'dim' homes. Perhaps others will recognise the symptoms – the fermenting working class anger placated by the carrot in front of the donkey's nose.

In the women's movement working class anger sometimes comes out sharply and with jagged edges. It presents itself in the form of hurled insults, accusations of snooty middle class values, drunken working class women calling middle class women snobby, arrogant, dismissive bitches at conferences and workshops I have attended. The resentment and hasty conclusions of these confrontations are that middle class women are complacent, comfortable, unable to recognise the every day struggles for money to pay the rent, to find a decent place to live without being able to afford a mortgage, finding a job – any job, paying gas, electricity, phone bills or finding the price of a bus fare into town. Issues I call 'basic survival numbers' which the middle classes appear to be unaware cause desperation and despair. Yet these merely concern money. They do not encompass the deeper attitudes which cause feelings of inferiority and loss of confidence – lack of a good education and the luxury of having words which spring to mind for use in argument or and debate; articulateness with the whole of the English language and not merely that section of it which the working classes are seen as fit to consume in schools. (Despite this, I think working class women are more articulate than middle class women in using a combination of language, anger and emotion in order to be understood). Perhaps this is why the reception they (we) get when we lose our tempers with middle class women in the heat of argument and debate is one of passivity, or passive retalliation by leaving (akin to Adrienne Rich's concept of lying by omission in my book), cold shouldering, back-turning, snubs, coy snobbery, or fear and tears, none of which are conducive to discussion and debate. Sometimes it appears that even hurled insults and verbal denials would be preferable.

Such a state of affairs shows that these are not open discussions where new direction is formulated but, at best, dull affairs – loaded before they begin – entrenched in

sullen resentment from working class women and guilt-laden nervous stomachs from middle class women. To ordeals such as this, trial by fire would be infinitely preferable and perhaps more productive.

This said, such a situation exists also in our journals and newsletters to a degree where all are left on the defensive and dialogue is non-existent. Even worse, the fallacy of "why don't they pull themselves up by their bootstraps and make something of themselves" is still around and hangs in the atmosphere (if not actually spoken) in reference to working class women. It is akin to the unspoken thoughts of "why don't they write/debate/argue on our terms – with a 'gentleman's (!) agreement". Thus there is still the middle class concept of the 'right way' to do things in entering debate. Is this not similar to Margaret Thatcher's Resolute Approach?

As a result many women are reluctant to declare their class origins openly. Many's the time working class women will try to pass as middle class women by disguising their accent or (lack of) education; or by buttoning their lips. Other women will not reveal that they *are* middle class, fearing to appear oppressive; or not question privilege and its validity in determining the basis of argument and debate. One thing is utterly clear – one class is subordinate to the other and each fears the other for reasons which are power-laden.

This paper aims at exposing the foundations of alienated working class women's values. It is my contention that middle class women will have to acknowledge the advantages and merits they have gained by virtue of their class (by birth and circumstance). These benefits appear powerful to the have-nots and expose values which cannot be concealed. Nor indeed can the values inherited by working class women, no matter how much one may have risen with 'upward mobility'. I was, therefore, to delve into the realms of the values, ideals, behaviour and attitudes which pervade the mainstream of a feminist movement from which most working class women are alienated.

In a country where over 80% of the population are working class, that should also be the class composition of women in the WLM. However, this is not the case. The foundations of the movement originated through middle class ideals, hopes and aspirations, via women in universities and in the male Left in the late '60s – as well as women in the hippy 'movement'. Whilst at that time these areas were natural catalysts for women to consolidate and organise (because of the intrinsic misogynist nature of the Left and Hippies, as well as the universities), this class power base has never been overthrown or shifted to accommodate the new women coming in. I here include working class, Black, Coloured, disabled and older women who find it hard to relate to a movement with such a class biased foundation when they have become involved because they felt it was in their interests too. How and where the WLM should be moved has to be decided in a multi-faceted way. This will be a natural extension to our principles of collective working, where no one woman can (should) lead and where all opinions are taken into account equally. Of course learning to accept our differences has always been the hardest thing in such a pluralist movement. No less so for the acceptance and incorporation of working class women's values as part of the consolidation and forward movement of feminism.

Working class women's culture, ideals, hopes and plans for a feminist future are as valid as are anyone else's, even if our tradition is more often verbal than written. Perhaps some of our voices are so loud because even up until very recently working class women's views were ridiculed as worthy of only pity or charity ("due to lack of an adequate education") or amusement ("due to ignorance and naivety"). Mrs Mop with her views on the British Empire, or the harrassed housewife stuck in a tower block on the verge of mental breakdown – both are stereotypical images thrown out at us as working class women: ignorant, racist and amusing, or ignorant, a bad mother and unable to cope. How strongly the middle class media has attempted to trip us up through our lack of education – which they are so greedily preventing us from having access to. Working class women who do manage to achieve any higher education are immediately reached out to by the middle classes in an attempt to absorb them as middle class. Hence education can only be

Socialist Woman, 1976

This and the following cartoons of stereotyped 'working class women' are taken from a variety of feminist and socialist publications.

a middle class phenomenon and the working class woman who escapes her traditional alotted place in the hierarchy is penalised through a denial of her roots.

Middle class education has always had intrinsic within it a sense of callousness and the selfish hoarding of information which is at the roots of what undermines the confidence of working class women. This attitude is often unrecognised and unacknowledged in feminist meetings and is a prime bone of contention, for it means that some women are 'in the know' and others not.

For instance, until recently there were few 'great' women novelists and writers, but the contribution of *working class* women to literature has been non-existent. Never allowed to read or write until the turn of the century, and then only in small numbers, our experience has had to rely on a verbal tradition, mother to daughter, sister to sister, or be rendered invisible. Even today the methods of teaching literacy remain middle class and so a great number of working class women remain either illiterate or semi-literate. By this I mean they may be able to read and write but find it hard if not at times impossible to express themselves in what can appear to be an alien language. Such a situation cuts across all the races and cultures which make up this country and thus racism and classism become interwoven. Following on from this, even when working class women can write, they are discouraged from being heard (ie published), unless they conform to the established principles of traditional writing and literature (here again male and middle class). Such a situation gives rise to a complete justification for wrenching journalism, a bastion of nepotism in the form of 'who you know', publishing and the mass media out of the hands of the middle classes.

But to speak about literature, or theatre and film, is to open up not only Culture but also the arena of the most influential image-makers in this country, such illusions of grandeur project far beyond most women's experience. Historically this situation has changed little over time. Working class women have been actively prevented from making their mark, or furthering images of themselves as positive, determined, intelligent, softly spoken, perceptive, caring, supportive and angry. For the record, current images, which don't seem to have shifted much since the '30s, show working class women as ignorant, dominating, gossipy, unaware politically and in relation to current affairs, bad with money, frivolous, sick of kids (ie uncaring mothers), hysterical or neurotic (unable to cope) loud-mouthed, insensitive, uncaring and selfish. Both television and the press are responsible.

To reiterate, few middle class women – but *no* working class women – have written great fiction, or composed symphonies, designed large buildings, discovered rare metals, performed heart surgery. To the extent to which middle class women are fighting to achieve status and recognition in such areas and are beginning to be admitted, by virtue of their class as much as their sex, working class women are going to have to fight twice as hard for perhaps a tenth of the rewards.

All of this goes some way to describing the lack of validation working class women live with daily. Bombarded by imported American materialism via soap operas such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, and devoid of strong heroine figures, it is hard for us to find any images of peers who have risen without rejecting their roots. Our anger and resentment at women who seem to succeed on their own, while we do not, who have space to buy clothes, drive cars, pay for (working class) babysitters and au pairs, comes out sideways. We witness it out of the corner of our eye: the shopgirl dealing with a difficult customer, the polite smile, the hidden scowl – the hairdresser with her client, making public jokes, private digs at her customer. Such resentment at those with more money, whilst underhand and bitchy, masks a lack of political awareness that the Left could never answer in its theory, but which women's liberation must. For it is at the root of much divisiveness among women and thus we cannot afford it. If such divisions continue at the rate they are now – and they are indeed widening as opposed to narrowing – resentment will build to a fever pitch within the next few years.

The images of working class women

Shrew, 1976

Red Rag, 1980

This is even more offensive about Black women.

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which are presented, via the media,television, magazines and the gutter press, reinforce our roles in life, our lack of advantages and low horizons. *The Sun* tells us how profitable it could be if we took our clothes off and sold our bodies to men, commercials that we should continue with the domestic work we do because new products are making housework a craft and a joy and, besides, it's still what we're best suited to. *Widows,* a recent Thames television soap opera, insisted that the only way working class women were likely to end up with money for spending freely was to rob a bank and risk prison; perhaps it is. Working class women virtually never break out of the trapping of family life to become directors of companies, lecturers, surgeons, literary critics, journalists, photographers, artists, dancers . . . Our confidence is weak, our voices quiet, and our demands ignored against those who have had the benefits of a university education. Thus, unable to force entry into the world of what is shoved at us as success by the middle classes — but which the Left tells us is bourgeoise and discourages us from entering, working class women are forced into the narrow spheres of servicing others which are our lot — modelling, hairdressing, serving in shops, working in factories, nursing, striptease, prostitution. In fact, any servile job which guarantees a steady income. (It may be noted here that not many middle class women are strippers or maids at the Strand Palace Hotel.) Those locked into the treadmill of factory work, with only the facade of support from male unions, get even lousier wages and conditions, and are hostages to what may be the only job many can hope for, for the rest of their lives.

Even sociologists and marxists have verified the lack of opportunities for working class women, yet merely paid lip service to the fact and practically never addressed the notion that creative, fulfilling and rewarding work, which involves comfortable financial reward on which to live, should be available to all.

As Carol Hanisch pointed out in her paper 'An Experience with Worker Consciousness Raising' in *Feminist Revolution* — "Raising working class consciousness — our own and others — would do two things — build a working class movement which would be in our interests as workers (women) and help change men's consciousness on feminism which would also be in our interests as women". This means that we need to explore how socialists and working class men have also been instrumental in keeping working class women down, and from defining their own culture and history. Whether they have been more or less responsible than middle class men at this juncture is debatable. Yet working class women's futures — socially, politically, financially and emotionally — are bound up in creating a working class movement for change which is both truly socialist and devoid of opportunism and hierarchical values. The Left at the moment has both. Whilst fighting to keep working class men off our backs, working class women are holding out a hand to their middle class sisters for support, survival and a piece of the pie. Not much of the pie is being sliced out equally, however. If the situation of middle class women as the buffer between working class women's (and men's) anger at privilege and status is to be resolved, a union of middle and working class women, along the lines of advantages both material and social/educational will have to be set up. Middle class women, whether inside the movement or not, do play a part in the rendering invisible of working class women.

Classism today is the culmination of this situation. It represents a specific oppression where the rules, values, mores and ideals of one class are imposed upon another, within the hierarchy of class values. Within feminism it filters through from middle class to working class women, denying them a language, banning them from self-expression, labelling them ignorant, stupid, coarse, bombastic, rough, uneducated, ineffectual. It is for such reasons that working class women get drunk, cause furore at workshops, insult and throw accusations at middle class women in order to guilt trip and attack. I could never condone such anti-woman behaviour and find it ineffective for working class women's aims. However, it is all too obvious that it is based on a desperation for attention and dialogue. Yet it turns on itself and its self-destructiveness, destroying potential honest discussion and is a key example of an oppressed group internalising oppression. Getting drunk and demanding to be heard is an old form of vulnerability, as many an alcoholic will confirm. It exposes feelings of inferiority and vulnerability which are met with a vacant, stony silence, snubs and ignorance.

Middle class women are perceived by working class women as clique-y, secretive of their earnings and capital. They are understood as being 'in the know' and of having connections both social, career-related and financial which will pull them out of a jam if things get tough. Their connections with working class women are kept to a minimum and they are seen as side-steppers who avoid talking about the fundamental issues of material survival. Hence, on a social level, dialogue is not as fluid or as trusting as it could be. Rumours in the shape of X having a lot of money or Y having a private income leave no level of rapport when other feminists are in the situation of not being able to pay the rent, having their gas/electricity/phone cut off, and wondering if they'll have enough money for food the following week. In these times of financial hardship, middle class women appear to be consolidating their positions in their careers. If these careers are not open to working class women, this causes even more suspicion, snobbery and secretiveness, as do salaries which at times are two or three times those of their sisters.

Money may be the root of all evil. If there is no opening up and honesty about what women do own and control (as well as what they do not), a situation of secrecy can only be perceived by working class women as one of snobbery, prejudice, greed and guilt. Time has come for a long overdue discussion and implementation of income sharing, as well as on inherited wealth and where this came from and how it was made. Many young working class women can expect no job opportunity or help with further education from the State, and we as feminists should not only recognise this but those of us with money should be doing something about it. If we are serious about any socialist principles which women's liberation is supposed to hold, then there has to be dialogue about the redistribution of wealth which is more than theoretical — which is practical; which can be put into operation. Otherwise the remarks of Margaret Thatcher, "Never mind about public ownership — in practice that gives nobody anything. What I'm offering is personal ownership", will become almost prophetic, inside the movement as out. As a whole, working class women have had less chance of going to college or university, less chance of fulfilling, creative work than ever before. As a movement, feminism condemns itself to rhetoric and platitudes if it does not take seriously the emotional, creative, educational and financial needs of all the women it purports to umbrella.

The issue of the ways in which we as women support one another has never been without complications, yet such support and solidarity is the very fabric of our movement and of living and learning. It is part of our process of achieving change as well as our longterm goal: the constant creation of a political movement dedicated to radical change for women. Just as white women are now beginning to open up and address the painful and loaded issue of racism, so classism within the WLM will also have to have the lid taken off it. The issue of the laying on of middle class values when working class women try to organise, or even the ways in which we communicate in meetings, must be treated more seriously, and with respect — it must not be given the sceptical, objective distancing which I'm sure Black as much as working class women have been subject to for so long.

In our diversity there are many ways to organise and also many priorities. Thus it is not charity but sisterly support for middle class women to open up to other women areas of the spheres and institutions they are now beginning to have access to: education and the law, the medical profession and the press, television, publishing. These are all ruled by the middle classes (the Law being particularly Upper Class) and the working classes are subject to them. Support in terms of sharing money, power and influence, (we have not been so ineffective over the last 15 years!), is called for — since it was feminism which made it possible for those women to achieve such status, not merely their own hard-working efforts.

Anna Cooke and Tess Gill, Women's Rights

Red Rag 6

Part of working class women's lack of confrontation comes from this sense of being frozen out, excluded, undermined in both will and confidence. With the death of the 'Angry Young Men' and the potential that that short-lived phase in middle class chic (working class trendyness) had in our culture, working class women sank back. If the working class men hadn't made it, what chance had they? Exclusion and undermining confidence by rendering invisible is a basic tenet of the oppression of classism (which is none the less relevant to sexism).

In the movement the remarkable differences in the ways middle class women and working class women express themselves and display emotions, feelings, desires, both verbally and bodily, need also to be accepted as the diversity and richness of our experience. Currently overtly emotional language and behaviour are grounds for judgement and condemnation.

This brings me to say something further about language. Because of the poor or even non-existent education working class women receive (alongside little encouragement or support for 'intellectual' pursuits), we at times experience the English language as alien, full of subtleties and nuances which are available to the middle classes. Certain words are totally out of our area of experience and the 'Queen's English' a foreign language, as divorced from us as the monarchy itself. It is another aspect of middle class lifestyles which reiterate the different world we were brought up in. Whilst at the same time as we have to reclaim it as our own, moulding it into something we can both identify with and use, we need our working class mode of expression to be taken seriously. Lack of confidence with language mirror's our nervousness inside. The floating fragments which make up our daily lives are not easily expressed with subtlety. Sometimes the words come out coarse, harsh, simplistic, clumsily expressing what we need to say. The most basic need, language itself, almost as basic as breathing, is still not yet ours for the asking. Support in building a new language for women, one which incorporates working class idioms and quirks as well as perceptions and the ways in which we express political criteria, is the very least of our desires.

To finish, with the ethos of a right wing government pervading the country, a clever, poisonous, insidious male state which has used one of our sex as its figurehead and mouthpiece, working class women are reminded constantly of how far down the social scale we are. With ideals and images of those with money, and the lifestyles of the aristocracy, the rich and the royal family bombarding our senses, we turn from becoming punchdrunk and get angry. The rage of working class women has, at times, landed us in prison – for prostitution, abandoning children, shoplifting, assault – situations which the male state have forced us into. There were women among those throwing bricks in the riots two years ago, and they weren't there as 'one of the boys'. Obviously support and cameraderie from middle class women is needed. Relief can come in the short term both financial and moral. In a long term view it is hard not to imagine violence breaking out if the cuts in health care, social services and educational opportunities are made. Not individualised violence as at times now, but on a wider level.

But I digress. In a movement fragmented by other divisions besides class and cynicism, breaking down or breaking out become the only roads open to working class women. The former is no longer a viable option.■

An open letter on anti-Semitism and racism

Over the last year or more a fierce debate has raged within the Women's Liberation Movement about Zionism, racism and anti-semitism. Dena Attar, writing from her experience as an English Jew whose father came from Iraq, raises some of the fundamental questions behind the argument. Taking feminism as her starting point she challenges anti-semitic statements published in Spare Rib while offering support to the women of colour at Spare Rib in their struggle against racism.

What has been said on these issues has been complex – we are concerned not to stereotype the arguments of the participants in introducing the debate. To summarise briefly: in recent years many Jewish feminists have begun to meet together as Jewish women, and to challenge the anti-semitism around them. At the same time, anti-imperialist women's groups, in particular Women for Palestine, have been arguing that feminists should fight against Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people. Writings have been published in both Outwrite and Spare Rib which some women have felt contained anti-semitic statements. When Jewish and non-Jewish women wrote to protest, first Outwrite and then Spare Rib refused to publish the bulk of the response, saying they were Zionist and therefore racist.

The dispute has therefore recently largely been carried out in the pages of the London Women's Liberation Newsletter, with only some pieces reaching the pages of the large-circulation publications. There has now been further conflict over what should and should not be published there, and over censorship generally.

As Dena Attar's letter shows, crucial questions have been raised in this debate about how we define some of the commonest terms of political argument: racism, imperialism, power and support, as well as Zionism and anti-Zionism.

I wrote the following letter to the Spare Rib *collective in response to their collection of articles 'Sisterhood . . . is plain sailing', published in issue 132, July 1983. It was not originally intended for publication anywhere else, but it is now obvious that the anti-semitism/racism and feminism debate is not going to die down and that many more women have been concerned with the issues. My letter was by no means intended as an exhaustive analysis, or as the last word on racism. I see it more as a starting point.*

The feminist movement in Britain is currently facing a crisis over its handling of racism, and of working class politics. Some women have become almost unbearably angry, while others are feeling insecure and threatened. I believe we must all go through the painful experience of first recognising and confronting racism in others and in ourselves, and then of reassessing our politics. In the midst of guilt, self-doubt, anger and recriminations, women can feel so overwhelmed they don't know where to begin. Radical feminism fifteen years ago was inspired by the insight of women creating the new movement that you start from where you are. That still holds good.

Dear sisters,

I am one woman who wanted to write to you after reading *Spare Rib* 121 – 'Women speak out against Zionism'. I didn't write then, partly because I had no time but mainly because of how I felt after the massacres at Sabra and Chatilla. My sense of shock and grief made me feel that it was just not the right time to take up the separate issue of anti-semitism. But nevertheless I did feel, not just anger and distress, but also real fear about the anti-semitism which was quite evident to me in some of those articles. Other Jewish women I talked to around that time seemed to have the same reaction – were alarmed about what was appearing in *Spare Rib* but didn't want to write to you about it, because they felt they did not want to give even the slightest grounds for anyone to think that they supported Begin's war in Lebanon. In retrospect I think we should all have written, however difficult it was at the time and however much courage it took.▶

Jan Parker writes in this month's issue (132), "How anyone can support the genocide of the Palestinians is beyond me". It's beyond me too, but who is she talking about?No doubt you've had your share of loony extremist letters, but that doesn't seem to be what this debate is about – surely no-one is suggesting that that's what you should publish? Of course there are some Jewish women who are right-wing, women who I couldn't describe as feminist. But they don't represent the rest of us, Jewish feminists who are critical of Zionism and also critical of the anti-semitic articles you've printed. So to suppress letters from Jewish feminists who, by definition I would have thought, are not right-wing or pro-Zionist makes as much sense as suppressing any coverage of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) on the grounds that Palestinian splinter groups have bombed synagogues in European cities.

Two of you explain that the women of colour decided that *all* of those letters were Zionist and/or racist. You haven't let us see the letters, so I can only take up this point on the basis of what's been said elsewhere, and knowing what I would have written. I don't know how you decided that. But I do know two things – that Jewish and Zionist are not, never have been, interchangeable terms; and that saying 'Zionist' when you mean 'Jewish' has always been the practice of neo-Nazi groups like the National Front. I write this not of course to accuse any one of you of sharing any of that sickening ideology – I know you don't – but to try and explain why we cannot accept that *you* have the right to label us Zionists when we don't call ourselves Zionists. As for the charge of racism, I wish you would explain what you are referring to. My impression, from various things I've read in *Spare Rib* recently, is that the charge that Jewish women are being racist crops up in two contexts. One is where the writer is assuming that Jews are white and Palestinians are not, the other is where the history of Jewish communities in the Middle East is mentioned.

"you are creating new myths"

If seems to me that because of your lack of information about our history you are resorting to stereotypes, and in the process you are creating new myths. One such myth is that Jews were never oppressed in Arab countries, but always co-existed happily with their Moslem neighbours: therefore women who challenge this picture of our recent past are being racist. I can understand why you would like to believe this, and it is true that, compared with what happened in Europe, Jewish communities in the Middle East were relatively secure. But the truth is that they were still an oppressed minority. I am the daughter of an Iraqi Jew. My father used to tell us stories about the persecution of his home community in Mosul suffered – how, on the Day of Atonement when it was customary for the Jews to walk to synagogue barefoot, their Moslem neighbours scattered the road with broken glass. In the fifties his family, and most of the Jews of Mosul, fled/were expelled from Iraq and ended up in Israel.

My relatives in Israel are Arabic-speaking, are mainly poor and ill-educated – the women have large numbers of children and many of them are illiterate. And it is perfectly true that they hate and fear the Palestinians and the Arabs, though they also believe that the Palestinians and Arabs hate them and are out to destroy them. If you say simply, as you have said, that this is just racism, what does that mean? What does it have to do with imperialism and colonialism, when two peoples are so much alike – can you tell an Arabic Jew from a Palestinian or Moslem Arab? – are locked in such bitter conflict? This is a real and not a rhetorical question, because I know that it is to do with imperialism and colonialism, but not in the simplistic way that you make out. Your analysis doesn't go far enough. We need to know and understand more, we need to work out what ways our feminist politics can help us struggle against racism and deal with nationalist politics, but I don't see that it is any help to reduce everything to a formula. And it is worse than useless to try to suppress facts about our experience which don't fit in with what you would like to believe, or like us to believe. None of this is an apology or a justification for the actions and policies of the Israeli state. But if it's true, and when it's relevant, why should it not be told?

We need to do a lot more work together on understanding the mechanisms and the causes of racism. It is a bitter irony that two groups of us, women of colour and Jewish women – remembering that the groups overlap – should be fighting each other over these issues when we are each so fearful, insecure and unsupported in relation to the growing reactionary forces around us. But just as it is true that Jewish women must take responsibility for dealing with other kinds of racism besides anti-semitism, so it is true that you, the women of colour, cannot dismiss anti-semitism as "a white women's issue" and refuse to discuss it. Jew-hating kills Jews just as surely as other forms of racism kill their targets. That knowledge is part of my daily life. I live in York, best known as the city where the entire Jewish community was burnt alive by the good citizens of York in the year 1190. (I do not know what imperialism or colonialism had to do with it – you tell me.) About a year ago, a mere eight hundred years later, they got around to putting up a plaque to commemorate the victims. The man who led the massacre has a whole village named after him. Walking around the town I can see swastikas daubed up any day. I recall when I lived in London reading in the local press about Jewish youths walking home from Yeshiva (an Orthodox religious high-school/college) beaten up by gangs of fascists, about one who was stabbed to death, and about how we could never have anything to do with the kids next door after one of them told my sister, "Hitler didn't do a good enough job". Having lived with this fear all my life, it adds to my insecurity when you write, "There are more important issues to me to fight for WOMEN, such as Paki-bashing, gay-bashing, Irish-bashing and deportations of Black women". Why, I am asking you, do you consider those to be more important rather than of equal importance?

I am also frightened when you write "Let me remind you that there has been a Black and Third World people's holocaust for centuries and it is still continuing . . ." Why do you see it as a contest, that we cannot pay any attention to each other's histories because in each case our suffering has been so great? What price solidarity then? But I want to point out to you that for me and for all Jews the word 'holocaust' has a very specific meaning, and always has had. It has always been used to refer to the systematic gassing of six million of us by the Nazis, and whenever the word gets extended, the meaning gets changed and its original application is forgotten, my fear and the fear of other Jewish women is that the world is trying to forget, or minimise what happened. The far right after all spends a lot of its time trying to rewrite history and claims either that there was no holocaust or that it was not really so bad. Can you not accept that we are in no way minimising the crimes against Black and Third World people, the enslavement, murder and rape that has gone on for centuries, when we raise the subject of our own recent history?

"one reason why we don't become better informed is because the facts are unbearable"

I believe that one reason why there is such a recoil is just because it is so painful for us, and for you, and we don't become better informed because the facts are unbearable. The row that's going on has reached the depths of bitterness it has because of the extent of our pain. When you say "it (the holocaust) is still continuing in India, Africa and to native Americans . . ." I don't know what terrible pictures come to your mind. But I know what the word 'holocaust' evokes for me. My parents had a book about the concentration camps, which I looked into once when I was a child and then could never open again, it held such terrors. The description I remember is of the marks scored in the concrete ceilings of the gas chambers, left by Jews in their death agonies scrabbling with their fingers against the concrete in vain hope of escape. That could have been my family, my parents. It was the relatives of many Jewish women here now. That's why we can't talk to each other calmly. But we have to try, we have to reconcile your fight against racism and mine, rather than wasting our time fighting each other and failing to respect each other, or what hope is there for any of us?

"That could have been my family, my parents"

Lastly, I want to answer two other points you make. One of you says "Define my power". You are not powerless. None of us is completely powerless or how could we hope to struggle for anything? Working on *Spare Rib* you have the power to open up debate, to communicate ideas and information, to change women's politics and encourage them to work for change themselves. If you don't believe that, why are

"I am not prepared to suspend my judgement, or shelve my feminism for any cause"

you working on *Spare Rib?* One of you says, "It is pointless to explain oppression". I don't agree. We have to, all of us, stand up and make ourselves visible and point out our oppression and keep on pointing it out. That's not to say other women should not also take responsibility for 'doing their homework'. But if you still think I and women like me are racists and imperialists, where and how do we 'do our homework' if you decide not to talk to us and inform us? I rely on *Spare Rib* as a source of information and political analysis, and if you don't continue to offer it where else do I and other women go? What do you gain by making it harder for us to learn? Some of the things I've written here I've never spoken or written about before — that's one reason why you know as little as you do about the oppression of Jews, because it hasn't been mentioned. I believe now that it's vitally important we start talking to each other about oppression, and listening to each other, but without the spirit of competition there seems to have been so far — in order to learn more, understand better and be better able to resist racism and imperialism and all forms of patriarchal oppression.

To get back to the issue which started all this. I had no objection to *Spare Rib* giving support to to the Palestinian people and condemning the invasion of Lebanon. You were right to do that. You were wrong to print articles which were anti-semitic in content, although you obviously did not realise that they were. You were wrong to refuse to publish criticisms of those articles and depict *all* the women who criticised them as Zionist and/or racist. I would like to think that we can begin again, working out how to express support for the Palestinians and analyse the situation in the Middle East without compromising our politics of feminism and anti-racism in any way and without having to distort, minimise or ignore any of the issues affecting us. That means working hard at trusting each other, at developing our own analysis and avoiding glib over-simplifications. I think it also means going back to the politics of experience in the sense of making sure our rhetoric *means* something to us, and isn't just a form of words. I'm thinking here of the letter-writer Shelagh from Brixton who says "Feminists must give full support to the Palestinians and the struggle to smash the State of Israel. Anything else is a wet liberal cop-out . . ." I don't know just what she means by full support, and smash the state: does she? Does this mean feminists are expected to support anything done in the name of the Palestinians by any Palestinian group? What about those Palestinian groups, disowned by the PLO, which carried out terrorist attacks on Jewish targets in Vienna and Paris? I am sure Shelagh would say she doesn't mean us to support those actions. Then what's the point of using that kind of rhetoric? I find it profoundly alienating when I encounter phrases like 'smash the state', familiar from Socialist Workers Party papers and suchlike, because I don't know what I'm supposed to understand by them. What does it really mean in terms of what we can do now?

I am not prepared to suspend my judgement or shelve my feminism for any cause — I believe we can only give *full* support to women and for the struggle of our liberation, but that we can give critical support, though not mindless automatic responses, when it comes to other liberation struggles.

Roisin asks what support white readers will give the women of colour at *Spare Rib*. Jan says *SR* has been experiencing increasing withdrawal of support from the Women's Liberation Movement. From all your accounts I get the impression of isolation from your readers, almost of being under siege. Well I hope you do get a lot more support, and I offer my support to, to all of you for what you are attempting, and particularly to the women of colour who are the most isolated. But it cannot be unconditional support that I offer in that I must continue to point out to you where you are putting forward anti-semitic lines or refusing to acknowledge that anti-semitism is an issue. And I hope it doesn't have to happen another time, or that another time you would listen.

In sisterhood

Jena Attar

Slimming: conquering the nature in our bodies

In this discussion review of Kim Chernin's Womansize: The Tyranny of Slenderness, Margot Farnham raises some uncomfortable questions about our attitudes towards our bodies. Looking at the slimming industry and at the new exercise cult, she argues that hatred of fat has little to do with health. More to do with woman-hating. It is easier said than done, though, to overcome our hatred of our own and other women's bodies.

I came to think again about slimming after reading, talking and writing about pornography. What I was left with to turn over in my mind after that time, which claimed about three months of last year, was: Shame. What did it mean for our struggle if we felt, still, and underlyingly, complicit? Anti-pornography activists developed a potentially many-fronted campaign, embracing both direct action against sex shops and attempts to reach other women. Some women knew we had to become image-makers, to make a future seem possible, to get us through this war. But what were those positive images to be? Women on motorbikes? Those are important, we need them, but if we weren't to stop at a cheerful propaganda campaign, along the lines of 'the collective work brigade builds a new piggery', I knew we had to return home, to allow consciousness raising a central place again in our political action. That might even mean, talking, thinking about our own bodies again, even though I remember a small voice in me saying, enough, now is the time for the mind.

The other thing that instilled in me a sense of urgency was the experience I had last year as a student teacher. What the young women I taught reminded me of was a teen obsession with weight and food that looked like this: A class of us driven to exercise feverishly, not for strength, but for 'the waist'. A girl in my year whose periods stopped because she did not eat enough. Another who was like a star among us. Her accomplishment was that she could go through the whole day, defying what I remember as a fierce adolescent hunger, eating nothing. I remember the sexual undertone when I was told by a male relative that I was a 'big girl' and like a buxom aunt. I remember street assaults and feeling that my own body had given me away, full breasts in a white school blouse and hips much wider than a child's. I associated thinness with power; I left myself notes on the dressing table saying not to eat, in case I forgot in the night. My father is thin; my mother is not. I hated to eat in front of men, and hate now the men, who say, in the street or sweetshop, that I must not eat.

I associated thinness with power; left myself notes on the dressing table saying not to eat, in case I forgot in the night.

During the teaching practice, I also lost weight myself, not an alarming amount. I realised in a direct way how much I am my body as we pined together; also how much women still police each other over weight. Several women told me how 'good', even (goodness) how beautiful I looked and I was ashamed to remember that this was how I viewed the dying face of a woman with cancer in the ward I worked in at eighteen. In spite of myself, I began to feel charmed and 'light'. Despite feeling horrified at the nighmarishly slenderised fragility of Lady Diana, her response to the bad publicity after her pregnancy. Despite feeling shaken when I ran into an anorexic woman in the street. I was not in control in the classroom, but I had made surprising changes in my own body unintentionally. I had the suggestion of a feeling that I wanted to disappear. I also know that wider conflicts came back with me every night,

Women still police each other over weight.

What about poverty, racism, poor housing, sexual violence . . .?

were expressed intimately every time I ate dinner, every time I looked in the mirror. Who was it who stood there, whose physical profile was so unreliable? How difficult it was to accept my eventual regained weight, which anchored me in an ordinary woman's body.

Kim Chernin called her original American version of *Womansize/The Obsession*. She wanted to write about the suffering we experience in our concern with weight, the size of our bodies, our longings for food. She felt a sense of urgency writing it; she was once an anorexic. She believes that once we scratch the surface of this obsession "we enter the hidden emotional life of woman". But this is not a book about anorexia; it is dedicated to all of us who have ever felt ourselves too fat. I read it (excuse me) voraciously in one day, on the bus, at the hairdresser's. You might say I was looking for something.

It seems to me that slimming is treated as a 'luxury item' on the revolutionary agenda, if it appears at all, because it is an oppression women face.

Chernin reflects that uneasiness with the body "might well be considered one of the most serious forms of suffering affecting women in America today". What about poverty, racism, poor housing, sexual violence . . .? I asked her silently. Then I put away this league table approach to oppression and considered the material I had collected before me on the table. The dimension of the obsession: Slimming foods accounting for £100 million a year; prescribed drugs and appetite suppressants £40 million; slimming magazines selling three million copies a year; 4000 slimming clubs signing up 315,000, mostly women, members. A recent study by Cooper and Fairburn, published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* this year, surveyed 369 women at a family planning centre. It showed that 20.9 per cent of the women reported current uncontrollable eating, 2.9 per cent made themselves vomit to control weight. Although the great majority of the women were of 'normal' weight, many of them thought they were significantly 'overweight' and felt, often, fat. 21.1 per cent responded positively to questions concerning "feeling terrified about being overweight". However, I didn't really need a survey to inform me of this terror. I have heard feminists speak in hushed tones about (horrors) 'cellulite', accepting the propaganda of the slimming industry. We, who have argued over the social origins of other cravings, for babies, romance, do not question our desire for 'lightness'.

Jane Fonda: from Vietnam activist to Fitness Supremo.

Where does the current exercise cult, thinness disguised in a sporting new tracksuit, fit into this collective dread? We might think it an improvement that everything these days is advertized by a sporting image, to a degree that you'd think only parachutists and scuba divers had periods, but isn't this preoccupation with an individual body a turning-inward of wider conflicts; A new form of every-woman-for-herself feminism? (Jane Fonda's co-optation from Vietnam activist to Fitness Supremo.) And whose body do we emulate, do we struggle towards with our weights and 'programmes'? Do we really trust that this apparent burgeoning of body-love is what it seems? I don't want to suggest that to enrol at a gym is the ultimate in acts of self-oppression, but the gym is no holiday away from the body disgust that exists in our culture.

Chernin writes of our 'obsession', her 'neurosis', using the words of psychiatry, but if a woman or girl believes that to be slim is to be graced in this culture, this is not an irrational belief. Fat Liberation activists in the States have tried to raise consciousness over and resist anti-fat propaganda and feeling in that country. No such movement exists here as far as I know and I can't imagine one thriving in this second wave of Thatcherism, this defensive era. But it seems to me that slimming is treated as a 'luxury item' on the revolutionary agenda, if it appears at all, because it is an oppression women face. Fat has a much different significance for men. So slimming is largely trivialised and goes largely unresearched. Certainly I have read many socialist accounts of the 'politics of food' that ignore the slimming industry. When 800 million people, mostly food-producing peasants of the Third World, live under the constant threat of scarcity, slimming is seen as a perverse concern. Fat is used as a metaphor for decadence, greed, corruption, waste, calling back an era when wide girth not taperedness was a sign of wealth and power, the difference between the robber baron and the multinational executive. Anti-fat feeling is mobilized constantly in humour and there is always a punitive attitude to it: "If You Can Pinch An Inch". To become fat is to deliver oneself up to ridicule, physical and verbal abuse, job discrimination, the cheap psychologizing of others, is to em-body qualities this culture despises.

Reading the literature of diets, Chernin was impressed by its similarity to the fire-and-brimstone sermon. She sees a clear parallel between the turn-of-the-century medical views on women's sexuality and today's attitude to women's bodies. According to one historian (in Ehrenreich and English *For Her Own Good*, p.111), among the indications for removing women's ovaries at that time were: "troublesomeness, eating like a ploughman, masturbation, attempted suicide, erotic tendencies, persecution mania, simple cussedness' . . ." "One Thing Leads To Another To Another" (cream cake advert).

To go on a diet is to believe that one is taking action towards one's salvation, and of all the horrors that can afflict one, this is seen as something within our control. (However, to slim is to accept that our bodies are responsible for our oppression.) Chernin believes that in a period of changing awareness, women can go and have gone in either of two ways: we can step on a diet treadmill or we can fight. Yes, there is more room to spread in the feminist and lesbian communities, but we have our boundaries even so. Certainly much is invested in the diet by the weight watcher and she can be drawn to believe that it is her fat, not an oppressive economic system that weighs her down. Jean Nidetch, founder of Weight Watchers (now owned by Heinz), who dubs herself FFH (Formerly Fat Housewife), makes the organisation sound like the early days of consciousness raising, a place where mostly women could tell their secrets to people who understood (*The Story of Weight Watchers*, Nidetch).

Of course WW cannot afford to advertise how many of its members 'fail'. The most commonly quoted figure for 'recidivism' (or weight regain after a diet — yes, it is a crime) is 98 per cent with 90 per cent of successful slimmers gaining back more than they lost. Chernin reflects on the precariousness of a well being that hangs on chronic slimming, with its inevitable swings in weight, that locks one into a cycle of temporary euphoria then self-hatred as the loss comes back. It is difficult not to believe on some level that because our bodies are hated they are hate-worthy.

From Susan George and Nigel Paige, Food for Beginners

Why is it women's hunger and flesh have become the monster of our time?

Mass slimming is associated, for obvious reasons, with countries that do not, because of their exploitative relationship with the rest of the world, experience scarcity. I don't know whether it would appear as a mass activity without the slimming industries. I don't know what (or whether) body shape is enforced in countries that do experience food-insecurity, or how women in this country who have other cultural traditions experience the mandatory slimness of the dominant one. Apart from an association with affluence, it is difficult to put together the historical precedents for the current enforced slenderness. Chernin sees 'our obsession' as predated by and belonging within the mind/body dualism of Early Christian and Greek cultures. I have only found clues, insubstantial seeming like bits of pot dug up in a back garden. Susan Sontag (in *Illness As Metaphor*) offers up a recent historical link. She sees the romanticization of TB in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as the first widespread example of the modern activity of promoting the self as an image, and present women's fashion as a last stronghold of such metaphors. Chernin repeats that the body has meaning, yet the male and female body, the nude in art, carry different meanings and this difference throws up more clues.

Yes, there is more room to spread in the feminist and lesbian communities, but we have our boundaries even so.

Margaret Walters in *The Nude Male* writes that, in the two formative periods of Western Art, the male body was all-important. Impelled by scientific curiosity about the body's structure and by the belief in 'man's'

The male nude is public, striding; it guards buildings and is worshipped in churches. The female nude came into being only recently when art became geared to the tastes and fantasies of male consumers in private.

Is it the fat itself or the experience of being stigmatised that makes people ill?

The slimmer's diet becomes accepted as the proper diet for a woman.

The 'Sins that make you fat' from Slimmer *magazine, August 1983*

divinity, artists created images of the human body at once lifelike and idealized. "But it was the male body they studied so lovingly . . ." The male nude is public, striding, it guards buildings and is worshipped in churches. The female nude came into being only recently when art became geared to the tastes and fantasies of male consumers in private. I remember how ungainly I felt in my teens beside my leaner male lovers and a recent grudging admiration for a male exercise teacher's, to me, miraculous absence of curves. Even the feminist slogan, "Beneath Every Curve a Muscle", implies that fat could only be an encumbrance to our strength. The much touted compliment 'not an inch of spare fat', implies that Muscle is King, flesh a terrible excess. Man, in his quest for power, seems to want to burst through his body in a triumph of muscle, despising that which protects and guards, the racing driver of our times. How does Woman fit with this scheme?

The above are clues only; I can't put them together. One thing sticks in my mind: the description in *Slimmer* magazine of the this year's Golden Slimmer of the Year who is transformed by her diet "from a lump of lard in the corner into a winner". What hatred is there.

Is our current enforced thinness the same-but-different as other beauty standards? Much of the feminist attention to slimming has been concerned with resisting ideals of beauty that are unattainable for most of us and dictated by men. Chernin felt compelled to unlock what is signified by the ideal itself.

Struggling to break through the ideology of slimming, Chernin puts before us medical evidence which counters the conventional wisdoms about fat and health, knowing even as she does so that health is not really our preoccupation. What can be healthy about the stapling of a woman's stomach, the wiring together of her jaws, quack medications, speed, fad diets or a level of eating that makes a woman obsessed with thoughts of food, some of which now become 'wicked'? "Naughty but Nice" (cake advert). She considers other evidence which suggests that our understanding of the link between high weight and illness is crude. To illustrate this she points to the case, researched by Dr. Margaret MacKenzie, an American anthropologist, of the large women of Samoa. These women do not suffer from heart disease or high blood pressure in their own land. Even when Samoans migrated to the USA, only three out of 100 people weighing 200 or more pounds showed any sign of hypertension. According to MacKenzie, there is not social stigma associated with being fat and she is led to ask whether it is the fat itself or the experience of being stigmatised that makes people ill. (Or could it be diet, housing, work, poverty, the impact of the food industry . . .? There is a reluctance to consider race, class and ethnicity in this book.) And is Chernin implying, by not questioning whether fat is the ideal for women in that country or how a thin woman fares, that the large women of Samoa are fulfilling their nature?

Although health doesn't come into it for most women who want to be thinner, some women have discussed considerations other than the life-threatening illnesses – heatrash, tiredness, the discomfort of thighs rubbing together. These are not the delusions of a fat-hating society. But when the health risks and plain long term ineffectiveness of 'diets' is so downplayed and the dangers of fat so exaggerated, how can a fat woman decide her priorities and needs in an informed way? Most of the common wisdom in circulation about health and weight is to the fat woman what *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was to American Communists under McCarthy. Slimming becomes the locus for a spectrum of eating disorder – its cycle is one of deprivation and gorging. The slimmer's diet becomes accepted as the proper diet for a woman and indulgence becomes anything over 1000 calories a day. The position Chernin comes to in her quest for understanding is that the anorexic and the slimmer and all of us who fear our appetites are determined "to conquer the nature in our bodies".

According to Chernin, when we put back weight after our diet is over, the body is merely reclaiming what is ours 'by nature'. For someone who recognises the difficulty in questioning deep seated cultural attitudes, Chernin is suspiciously confident about describing female nature, the heroine of this book. The author may have considered other evidence which suggests that (however the weight got there to begin with) any low calorie diet leads the body to defend herself from starvation. Her metabolic rate may slow to adjust to the perceived blockade and, depending on how active she is muscularly, the body converts for energy either fat or the muscle. The slimmer, who often becomes tired, may well, in small ways, avoid exerting her strength and uses her muscles less and less. When this happens, the body eats into her own muscle tissue to survive. Even slimming organizations like WW now include an optional exercise programme in concession to this research. This is a weakness of the book, because I think many women, not believing for a moment that it is our nature to be fat, will enlist in the exercise cults of our time. I can see the slimming industry, if they do not bury this research, turning to the exercise industry to extract their profits. (Actually the new wave of exercise engulfs only those of us who are already thin enough, strong enough, leisured enough to swim in its tide. What sports facility will exist for the fat, for the poor, will be available for a woman who holds down a job and is solely responsible for her children?) If there is a new way for weight to be attributed to choice rather than nature, I can see a strengthening of the individualism of the new Health and Beauty movement we now have.

Chernin opens herself too, to a reactionary interpretation of her book by a carelessness in adopting images of women as earth as mother. She discusses those of us who are embattled in a struggle over our flesh, our appetite, in this way:

> We cannot grow ripe, we cannot mature, we never appreciate the power of our kinship with nature, we fail to wonder that our menstrual cycle is influenced by the moon and that our seasons of psychic and emotional life belong as much to the cosmos as the ocean's tide. We whose bodies know how to conceive and create life, whose breasts know how to bring forth food from themselves, despise those bodies that possess the very power the world's great religions regard as divine.

When Chernin believes that our hatred of flesh has its origin in a patriarchal system, why does she so uncritically interpret our other feelings?

Chernin believes that we project onto our mothers, onto women, our own voracious hunger and hold a residual terror from that time because we invest our mother with power and design over both comfort and distress. Men turn this anger onto women; by forcing us to be thin, men want to spare themselves from traces of our likeness to mothers. Women turn this anger onto our own bodies. A parallel dynamic is that boys harbour an envy of women's ability to create new lives from within ourselves. So as not to appear deterministic, Chernin says that these conflicts end miserably for women because our culture is incapable, when we are adolescent, of mediating the transition of womanhood, of generating a climate of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Our society hates female flesh and women. But it does not follow that a woman's body 'must have' generated this anguish. Such a psychoanalytical theory does not explain the historical and cultural specificity of the conflict. Finding it impossible to hold contradictory ideas together in one hand, it's as if Chernin drops this line of thought. She turns her commentary to the shift in beauty standards over the last generation. She sees compulsory thinness as a backlash to feminism, an attempt to reduce our power. Why could Hollywood accommodate Marilyn Monroe in her time? Why is Jane Fonda the ideal for our own time?

It is painful to look at the damage this cult has caused, enraging to face the lives, the energy, lost and spent. But it's as if,

Fighting over crumbs?
From Successful Slimming, *August 1983*

Our society hates female flesh and women. But it does not follow that a woman's body 'must have' generated this anguish.

She sees compulsory thinness as a backlash to feminism, an attempt to reduce our power.

reacting to the apparition of the death head, (and what else does the anorexic body call to mind?), Chernin retreats to an imagined golden age when women's girth was celebrated, appreciated. She credits a male artist with the gift of reproducing and cherishing this femaleness, the painter Renoir. She does not acknowledge that when standards of beauty favoured large women this was not a liberatory phase for us. I hated as a teenager and hate now the awful passivity, the forced-fed appearance of Ruben's nudes. Chernin craves for a way out for us, a door to our sensual nature. A recurrent image in this book is the voluptuous woman dancing, 'jiggling' her flesh, but this has echoes for me of the courtesan dancer. I do not want to accept this idea of women's sensuality, feeling as I did as a fat teenager that I was seen as an earthy type because of my size. We cannot summon up positive images for ourselves in this way, even though we feel the absence of them, poignantly.

I realise that just as we learn much that is frightening from women's bodies, we are also each others' salvation.

Reflecting on this book, which says much that is surprising and inspirational, I realise that, while I cannot agree with Chernin's theory of infancy, these passages moved me very much. We piece our lives together so much in reaction to our mothers' perceived 'fate'.

I read a story by Henry Handel Richardson (christened Ethel Florence), called *The Bathe*, where a girl-child is wrenched from an unselfconscious girlhood to a realisation of womanness which leaves her in dread of her own inevitable growth. The girl is swimming:

> Tired of play, she came out, trickling and glistening, and lay down in the sand, which was hot to the touch, first on her stomach, then on her back, till she was coated with sand like a fish bread-crumbed for frying. This, for the sheer pleasure of plunging anew, and letting the silken water wash her clean.

The girl is joined by two middleaged women:

> Gingerly, yet in haste to reach cover, they applied their soles to the tickly sand: a haste that caused unwieldy breasts to bob and swing, bellies and buttocks to wobble. Splay-legged they were, from the weight of these protuberances. Above their knees, garters had cut fierce red lines in the skin; their bodies were criss-crossed with red furrows, from the variety of strings and bones that had lashed them in. The calves of one showed purple-knotted with veins; across the other's abdomen ran a deep, longitudinal scar.

I think it is not to 'female nature' that we should turn, but to women, to each other.

In the last line of the story the girl swears to herself that she will never grow up. Henry Handel Richardson, who used a man's name to write, speaks of the terror of growing up into a woman. She has summoned up ugly images of women; I don't want these, but I recognise that women's bodies in our society are imprinted actually or symbolically with the mark of the corset, still.

I go to the Turkish bath and see an old woman soaping herself under the shower. I have seen her before, swimming. She smiles at me, looks to my face because she is hard of hearing. Seeing her now behind a cloud of steam billowing from the vapour bath, I am relieved to see her beauty, saddened that we are kept from healing relationships with women, shut away in this youth culture, left to imagine that some terrible grotesquery will befall us. And I realise that just as we learn much that is frightening from women's bodies, we are also each others' salvation.

A young girl I am looking after for the day, nestling against my breast in the tired evening, while we read, finding comfort there, even though I am not her mother.

My grandmother, breasts low as the heavy fruit we pick together and rocking gently under her old shirt as she walks beside me through the long grass, her strong legs, and shooing flies with a long switch.

My mother's face in the candlelight of a power cut, telling me goodnight. The exquisiteness of my lover's heart beat. A memory of a holiday, swimming naked in the sea. A woman sweating over, kicking a machine. Days when my own appetite is at peace, eating cherries in the garden, or making soup after flu. Knowing that what positive images we make for ourselves, we invent from unexpected understanding as we go along, wanting not just the comfort of softness, but something durable as bones. If we need to look for heroines to open doors to our sensuality and strength, I think it is not to 'female nature' that we should turn, but to women, to each other. If this isn't enough, then the question is: why not?

Kim Chernin, *Womansize: The Tyranny of Slenderness* (Women's Press, £4.50)

Holding on to what we've won

Sara Scott's review of Feminist Revolution is the beginning of a series in which we will look again at influential feminist writings, in the light of current women's liberation politics. We shall include both those which we think should be better known and those which may not have been examined critically enough or from a radical feminist perspective when they were first published. It is appropriate to begin with Feminist Revolution since the book itself is no longer on sale, having fallen victim to the silencing processes clearly described by Redstockings themselves. It is, however, available in the Feminist Library (Hungerford House, Victoria Embankment, London WC2) and possibly in some other libraries throughout the country. (Try ordering it through your local library – and find out if it exists in the British public library system!)

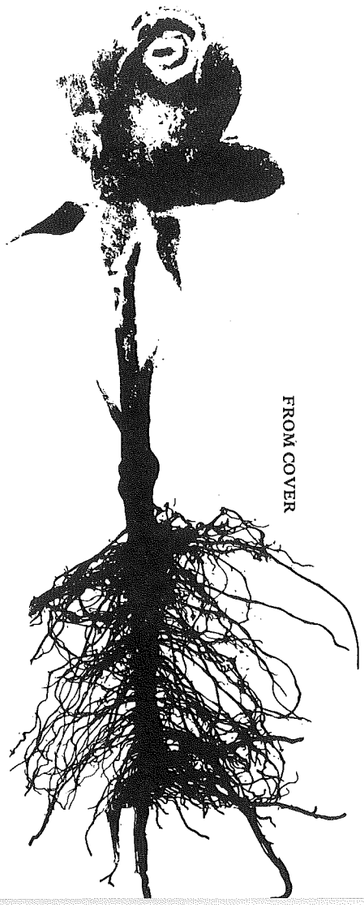
Originally published in New York in 1975 by Redstockings, there was an abridged edition in 1979 (which omitted some controversial articles) from the US publishers Random House.

I had never heard of *Feminist Revolution* by Redstockings until someone suggested that I should review it. It wasn't until after I'd read it that I realised that this was due to something other than purely personal ignorance. Admittedly I was in my early teens when it was published, and therefore, through circumstances beyond my control, missed the initial debates which fed and followed its writing. However, since then *Feminist Revolution* appears to have become a victim of the destructive process it describes; what Kathie Sarachild calls the "historic invisibility treatment". Here lies the core of the book, of equal if not greater importance today than when it was first published in the USA in 1976, and with implications for every aspect of women's liberation movement (WLM) theory and practice. It is in the light of these current implications that I intend to begin discussing Redstockings' work.

The "historic invisibility treatment" is not a straightforward silencing of feminists through the denial of access to publishing or the media by the 'most powerful' men. It can take the form of obscuring, oversimplifying or deliberately misinterpreting feminist ideas; and it can be 'done' by academics, socialists and even other feminists. It is usually directed at the most radical section of the WLM. The process of deradicalisation is described by Redstockings as being partly about the production of an 'acceptable face of feminism', and partly about the effectiveness and purposes of radical feminist tactics and organisation.

Recent misrepresentations

The first section of *Feminist Revolution*, from which the title of this article is taken, discusses the way in which radical feminist ideas and slogans become disembodied, and therefore open to whatever interpretation and use others want to make of them. My own experience confirmed the truth of this, in that my knowledge of Redstockings until very recently extended only to the ability to attribute to them the statement: "We take the woman's side on everything". The 'foolishness' of which socialist-feminist friends kindly pointed out to me five years ago by insisting that such a position implied at least tacit support for Margaret Thatcher. Not having access to the manifesto which delineates the meaning and implications of their slogan, I believed what I was told. I believed many other things I was told about radical feminists, all of which contributed



to an image of a 'lunatic fringe' which lurked only in the furthest corners of the 'real' (socialist) women's movement. One piece in *Feminist Revolution* by Rosario Morales describes North American books purporting to give an overview of the WLM which entirely omit radical feminism, but more common in this country and equally disturbing is the total misinterpretation which I have described above, but which also occurs in 'academic' texts. The most recent example I have come across is Michele Barrett's 'refutation' of radical feminism in *Women's Oppression Today* on the grounds firstly that it reduces the issue to one of biology, and secondly that radical feminism has no sense of historical change. Conveniently (for the purposes of illustration) Barrett uses every technique described by Kathie Sarachild and Faye Levine to discredit radical feminism whilst simultaneously relegating it to the sidelines of the book, and therefore beyond the bounds of serious debate.

Barrett commences with an assault on 'explanations' of women's oppression which describe the origins of patriarchy as having a single cause. Shulamith Firestone is the familiar target, and indeed she stands up badly to the accusation of biologism – the problem with such marxist feminist criticism comes in the erecting of Firestone as the embodiment of radical feminism, especially since Firestone described herself as a marxist. Presumably it is for her very weaknesses that she is chosen for such a role. Having grounded her accusation of biologism here, Barrett goes on to state that such arguments, and therefore by implication *all* radical feminist arguments, are held to be 'naturally' given, there is little we can do to change them."

Accusations of determinism (and pessimism), no matter how false, are powerful, as are those of a-historical analysis. Barrett makes the latter attack by setting up the plainly ridiculous question: "How useful is it to collapse widow-burning in India with 'the coercion of privacy' in Western Europe?" thereby giving marxists the monopoly on understanding historical change and cross-cultural difference.

Redstockings also describe the 'writing out' which occurs through the non-attribution of ideas to particular sources and the caricaturing of positions. Barrett's book contains generalisations such as the following:

> Radical Feminist thought on sexuality has tended to argue that the wider context of sexual politics, male supremacy, is grounded in men's attempt to secure control over biological reproduction.

There is no further examination of such a position as belonging to a particular writer (ie Firestone), nor is it contrasted with other radical feminist understandings of sexuality or male supremacy. Sarachild tells us that in 1976 De Beauvoir and Firestone were already disappearing from reading lists and bibliographies: recently Barrett's book has become the introductory reader on more than one women's studies course. Perhaps such changes, along with the tedium of the domestic labour debate (which is taught as though it were once the passion of the entire movement, rather than the peculiar property of a couple of academic journals) will serve to alienate from the WLM a number of women unfortunate enough to encounter them.

The Conditioning Line

Redstockings were not only concerned by the disappearance/misinterpretation of radical feminism, but also with clarifying radical feminism's direct relationship with other strands of the WLM. Much of the Redstockings' challenge is directed at a particular form of liberal feminism which is bound up with the notion of socialization:

> We reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression. Women's submission is not the result of brain-washing, stupidity or mental illness but of continual daily pressure from men.

Despite their apparent differences the current use of both marxist 'false consciousness' and Lacanian psychoanalysis serves many of the same purposes as socialization theory. Barbara Leon provides an incisive criticism of all psychological explanations in terms of their substitution of personal explanations for political ones. She points out that in practical terms it makes very little difference to men's use of the arguments whether we were born inferior or got that way afterwards; nature is simply replaced by second nature. Probably the strangest thing about feminists adopting socialization theory (or psychoanalysis or 'false consciousness') is that it cannot explain 'us' in any terms apart from those of deviance, as Brooke points out:

> It does not explain the women who do *not* follow the particular 'sex roles' that women are supposed to be brainwashed into, but who are oppressed. How does brainwashing account for lesbians? Feminists? Etc?

It seems that the Redstockings exposé of conditioning theory in 1976 has not made the concept go away. I think rather it has become so much a part of 'common sense' for feminists and non-feminists alike, that many of us either use these explanations, or let them slip by unquestioned when they are used by others, simply because they are easier, and acceptable in a wide range of contexts. (I suggested to someone the other day that the fact of giving a little girl a doll's pram does not ensure her suitably maternal behaviour, or indeed preclude the possibility of her using it to run down the boy-next-door; I was greeted by an exclamation of extreme puzzlement and the question: "But aren't you a feminist?")

Therapy replacing consciousness raising

There is another reason why the critique outlined above seemed so appropriate to the present: the rise of 'feminist' therapy. The listings of professional therapists in *Spare Rib* get longer by the month, and, at least in this part of the country, the small women's therapy group appears to have replaced the consciousness-raising group. It seems to me that here we have the most recent version of an orientation which situates the state of our heads rather than the overthrow of male power at the centre of the solution to women's oppression. Having been told by various women that therapy is only the modern version of consciousness raising (CR) (but better because it really gets to the 'heart' of our 'hang-ups',) I was delighted to read Sarachild's article on the original politics and purposes of CR:

> The purpose of hearing people's feelings and experiences was not therapy, was not to give someone a chance to get something off her chest . . . It was to hear what she had to say. The importance of listening to a woman's feelings was collectively to analyse the situation of women, not to analyse her.

From this definition it is impossible to argue that therapy and CR are mere variations on a theme. Indeed as sources of feminist theory and action they emerge as diametrically opposed. Consciousness-raising takes women's own experience as the best source of knowledge about our oppression, which explains its incompatibility with any perception of women as brainwashed. It also points to a rejection of the traditional distinction between objective and subjective, suggesting there is no escaping the personal into some transcendental realm of absolute truth.

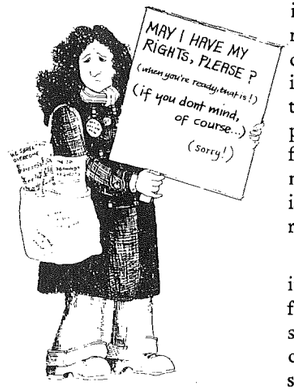
There are objections to an experience-based approach to women's oppression on the grounds that we are thereby confined to issues within women's immediate perceptions, and more particularly feminine socialization. However, far from being pre-occupied with the problems of sex roles and women's passivity, the Redstockings only mention of socialization theory is to disagree with it. The emphasis of Redstockings on experience was not, as has been suggested by some marxists, an un-thought out response to be later superseded by a more objective approach (marxist theory?), but rather:

> The idea was to take our own feelings and experience more seriously than any theories which did not satisfactorily clarify them, and to devise new theories which did reflect the actual experience and feelings and necessities of women.

Cultural feminism is not radical feminism

Redstockings were watching a process of de-radicalisation, not only of feminist ideas as they became more widely disseminated, but also of the WLM itself. In her article 'The Retreat to Cultural Feminism' Brooke accords cultural feminism the responsibility for a reduced emphasis on political change, replacing radical feminist principles with an individualistic morality. She describes this strand of feminism as being concerned with lifestyles, and the setting up of 'alternative' situations within the status quo, which tend to co-exist with, rather than challenge, male power. She considers that these embody the back-to-nature trends of the 1960s, and as with therapy or the careerism of liberal feminism find the solution to our problems in individual changes:

> Cultural feminism, through the sisterhood mafia,



JO NESBITT

WOMEN'S MODERATION MOVEMENT?

From the cover of Women's Report, *May/June 1977, referring to its article on the 1977 National Women's Liberation Conference. A major workshop of this conference was 'The Liberal Takeover of the Women's Liberation Movement' — itself a phrase from* Feminist Revolution *then newly arrived in Britain. The workshop marked the beginning of revolutionary feminism.*

> changes the focus of the women's movement from winning our freedom to being a 'good person'. It promotes the therapy model of liberation . . . and replaces political organising with moral rearmament.

She sees the label itself used against radical feminism: "Socialist feminists coined the phrase and used it interchangeably with 'radical feminist' in their effort to characterise feminism as non-political." Matriarchy is regarded as being the logical conclusion of cultural feminism, attractive through its images of women as powerful, and despite these being set in a mythical utopia of pre-history. It serves only to reduce our faith in the present possibility of liberation: mysticism and religion are based on fatalism, and therefore absolutely opposed to revolutionary change.

There is a certain unnerving puritanism in Brooke's comment "The function of feminism is to create social change not social life"; perhaps this was to do with a certain optimism about the brevity and success of the struggle in hand, from the point of view of which women's theatres, co-operatives, communes or bars would be merely distractions from the real business of the WLM. Or there again it might have been informed by a pessimism about the inevitably greater attraction of lifestylism over political struggle. I found myself struggling with contradictory responses to Brooke's position. On the one hand my existence without the 'feminist lifestyle' would be unimaginably isolated and precarious, as well as poorer for the loss of rich sources of new ideas and internal critique. At the same time, however, I seem to visit more and more towns with well-established women's communities but with less and less that could be easily identified as a women's movement: against this Redstockings' passion and certainty is inspiring and provides a piercing critique of those aspects of feminism which have become static and ghettoized.

Lesbianism a personal solution

I have left till last those aspects of Redstockings' work which are most difficult to deal with; their association of lesbianism with cultural feminism, with the resulting condemnation of both, and their exaggerated fear of its attractiveness leading to the demise of the movement. (Throughout they also seem to need to claim to have thought of everything first). It seems clear too that they held deeply contradictory attitudes on the one hand towards men, and on the other towards heterosexuality. It is clear that the attitudes towards lesbian-feminists manifested in a number of the articles in *Feminist Revolution* have a specific historical context which it is impossible to grasp entirely from the text. Much of it was in response to lost slogans such as Jill Johnson's "Feminism is the complaint, and lesbianism is the solution", which Redstockings saw as deeply entwined with the lifestylism of cultural feminism. Lesbianism is only ever referred to as a personal answer to political problems, and never examined on its merits as a mode of struggle or strategic practice. Redstockings appear to regard lesbians as interlopers in the WLM whose 'cause' is properly dealt with in the gay rights movement and is of no particular relevance to 'other' women. There is no awareness shown of the argument that male responses to lesbianism are due to the autonomy and independance from men implied by lesbian lifestyles, and are therefore of significance to all women. Adrienne Rich states that: "Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality." It is in this spurious and non-gendered category that the Redstockings place lesbianism, thereby failing to see its significance within a matrix of male power.

Redstockings write with a political acuteness and with such an unusual clarity of argument, that the contradictions around men and sexuality come as something of a shock. There is no doubt in their writing that men are responsible for women's oppression and that they are not likely to give up their power without a fight. There is no romanticism about anti-sexist men; indeed, Carol Hanisch's article on men's liberation is the most cutting imaginable. At the same time Hanisch has printed an open letter to Don McLean asking him why he says such horrible things about women in his songs and how nice it would be to have his music on the side of women, the effect of which is, to say the least, confusing.

In opposition to the sexual revolution line of the '60s, which they straightforwardly condemn as 'liberating' only for men, the image of women's 'real' desire for security, companionship and respect is set up as demands which can, and should, be made of men. True love remains an enclave in which power, when it dares enter, can be fought on better terms than elsewhere. It is particularly bizarre to find the belief that homosexuality is chosen in the same article as the following quote asserting the naturalness of heterosexuality: "Lesbian-feminists deny that men and women have sexual needs, needs for each other, needs that have led to political ramifications."

Feminist Revolution is one of the rare places where radical feminists address themselves to heterosexuality. It is a pity therefore, that they do so only in terms of a 'natural' order. More recently the social construction of sexuality has become central to radical feminist thought. It would be good to see heterosexuality opened up in these terms, rather than defending itself by reference to a dubious 'nature', or maintaining a silence which serves only to deny much of the experience of heterosexual feminists.

Feminist Revolution is a marvellous book, it is very much part of our radical inheritance, and at the same time reminds us how easily that inheritance might disappear. Reading it has made me more suspicious, more critical of everything I come across that is supposed to represent the WLM in general, or radical feminism in particular. It is a book very much concerned with connections; it implies we must take our present seriously and not regard the WLM as a mere random collection of groups and individuals, but as a movement, the direction of which we are all responsible for . The process of de-radicalisation the Redstockings describe is still going on. It takes different forms in 1983, forms we need to understand: the writings of marxist-feminist 'interpreters', the growth of women's therapy and the 'feminism' based on a feminine morality of peace and nurturing.

Feminist Revolution makes clear the value of the sort of honest criticism with which all these issues need to be approached; but it also makes clear the unpopularity of such criticism within the WLM. The ideas and practices which the Redstockings describe as inhibiting honesty are still with us today, most particularly the 'sweet sisterhood' concept of the WLM, with the emphasis on being 'nice' rather than truthful, and a fear of criticism as being a painful rather than productive process. Nothing about *Feminist Revolution* gave me the impression that the Redstockings were particularly nice people, but I felt a growing respect for the confidence and passion with which they wrote, and a great sadness that I was unable to remember the last time I had read anything of comparable power. I was reminded of my own anger on first discovering women's studies texts which actually manage the incredible feat of making feminism sound boring. Such antiseptic detachment adds nothing to feminst debate; we still need a little passion with our politics.■

A sense of possibility

The Lesbian Sex and Sexual Practice conference, held in London, 23rd and 24th April this year, was called to discuss the ways in which political views and sex lives interact. Jayne Egerton did not go to the conference as a reporter, but afterwards we asked her to write about some of the issues it raised for her. She has chosen to focus on three particular areas of concern, to look at some problems brought up by trying to live out our politics every day – 'personal' issues which are crucial to a feminist politics of sexuality.

I nearly did not go to the conference because I anticipated it being dominated by the recent debate about whether or not sadism and masochism (S&M) should be acceptable sexual options for lesbians. I think this debate has now outlived its usefulness, especially given that no vocal lesbian S&M lobby has materialised in this country equivalent to that which exists in the States. Most of the conference papers did reflect this preoccupation with challenging S&M and much of the impetus for having the conference had come from the S&M controversy. Some women felt that it was vitally important for anti-S&M lesbian feminists to get together and discuss our sexuality (a rare event) since the accusations of puritanism and romanticism which are hurled at opponents of S&M are bound to flourish in the absence of our discussing precisely what it is we are up to. Although I find the S&M lobby pernicious and anti-feminist (particularly after reading the San Francisco based, lesbian 'feminist' Samois group's book *Coming to Power*), I felt that the S&M obsession might severely restrict the terms in which we talked about lesbian sex at the conference. After a certain point this approach paralyses our attempts to create alternatives for ourselves and makes us forget our potential power. Fortunately the spectre of S&M did not hang over all the workshops, or at least not the ones that I went to.

The following is a very personal account of how I felt about two of the workshops I went to and about the conference in general.

The most worthwhile workshop I went to posed the question of how vital or central we felt the sexual component of our lesbian identities to be.

When is a lesbian not a lesbian?

We covered a lot of ground during this discussion and were thankfully able to express a variety of views without being at each others' throats. The basic disagreement was between women who felt that we often over-sexualised lesbianism in a way which was undermining to celibate lesbians, and denied the extent to which the term lesbian now encompasses much more than the sexual dimension due to the development of lesbian feminism; and other women who felt that the political definition of lesbianism sometimes desexualised our identities altogether and made them hinge on a political rejection of heterosexuality and feelings of sisterhood for other women.

I felt a lot of sympathy for the celibate, or often-celibate women who said they felt put down and made to feel like lesser lesbians because of an overemphasis on sexual activity as proof of lesbian identity. It became pretty clear during the discussion that being sexually involved with someone was for many of us a basic source of our sense of self-esteem since it made us feel 'real' and desirable lesbians. A few women were critical of the fact that this need to assert ourselves as sexual beings can lead to obsessive and trivial sexual gossip about 'who is doing it with who'. I'm not sure that it's always a politically dangerous thing to do – I want to know about other lesbians' relationships not just out of prurient interest but mostly because it positively helps me with my problems and choices.

Another reason for some women feeling that an exclusively sexual definition of lesbianism was inadequate was that lesbian feminists have broadened the meaning of lesbian to include identification with all women and 'giving up' men as a political act. I personally felt that the definition must include sexual attraction towards women and the possibility of acting on this feeling (bearing in mind the number of women who are trapped in situations which preclude acting on this potential). For me, lesbianism stripped of its sexual element becomes political celibacy and the woman is better described as woman-identified. Last year I took a heterosexual feminist, who seemed in principle to think that being a dyke was marvellous, to a straight lesbian bar and noticed how utterly shocked she was to see two women kiss (as opposed to read Adrienne Rich poetry to each other or skip through fields of billowing corn), which really brought home to me the anti-lesbian dangers of downplaying our sexuality as lesbians. I worry that our own residual anti-lesbian feelings may lead us to want to somehow dignify or legitimate our 'perversion' with a political rationale. How much better to be able to say to the homophobes that we are not only not sick, but are more importantly in the forefront of destroying male supremacy.

Some women in the workshop thought that lesbianism always had this political significance irrespective of whether a lesbian saw her sexual preference in these terms or not. I agree that as long as men's power over us includes the compulsory imposition of heterosexuality then lesbianism will continue to have political implications (although I'm much less sure these days of the effects it has on either structural male power or even individual men). Some other women argued that even when a lesbian did not see her choice in feminist terms it did include a critique, albeit unconscious, of patriarchy.

I really felt that this was a denial and distortion of the straight lesbian experience. It also seemed to set up a false kind of hierarchy of perceptiveness amongst women, in which we are divided into those who suss male power at age eleven and become lesbians partially in response to this awareness, and those of us who were heterosexual because we were too thick to 'see through' it all. There are, after all, plenty of girls and women out there who are just as aware as men's economic and sexual power as we are but this does not lead them to consider lesbianism as an alternative.

In spite of our differences of emphasis, many of us, whether we were pre-movement lesbians or, like me, had come out in a feminist context, seemed to want to integrate the sexual and political aspects of our identity rather than making a straight choice between them. I found the whole discussion really stimulating and helpful, and in stark contrast to some of the 'real'-lesbians-versus-'political'-lesbians arguments I've been involved in before.

A first-world luxury?

Another discussion which we had in this workshop was about whether or not lesbian sex is a first-world luxury which is irrelevant to the oppression and the needs of Third World women. It seemed important to ask ourselves, in a mainly white, western women's workshop whether our concern with lesbian sexuality was culturally specific – whether it could not easily be transplanted to the situations of women living in gross poverty, possibly engaged in anti-imperialist struggles, for whom every day is a question of survival. As usual there were definitely feelings of awkwardness amongst us when we began to tackle this question. Nobody suggested for a moment that our analysis or priorities could be imposed on these women, but some of us voiced reservations about the straightforward socialist line that entirely dismisses lesbian oppression and effectively makes out that lesbianism is non-existent in the Third World. One woman said she had recently opened a copy of *Manushi* (the Indian feminist magazine) and seen a picture of two lesbians who had committed suicide rather than be separated.

It struck me that the suggestion that

lesbianism is a Western capitalist phenomenon is racist in itself and leads to situations such as that of Cuba after the revolution where lesbians (and gay men) have been ostracised or driven out of the country as bourgeois decadents. As one woman pointed out, socialists, including socialist feminists, have signally failed to get to grips with heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality and were therefore failing to support lesbian political prisoners in other countries as well as assuming the continuation of lesbian oppression in future 'socialist' societies.

Culture and Image

This workshop served to reinforce my dislike of certain very narrow and rigid definitions of 'correct' lesbian culture – this includes ways of dress, music and so on. When I went in the discussion was well underway and centred on clothes and make-up. A line I thought very purist was being put forward about the need to renounce all forms of adornment.

Some of us argued that we had surely gone beyond the early days of the movement when the need to reject the powdered, stilletoed and disguised image of womanhood which we were offered was so paramount that women felt obliged to adopt nondescript uniforms in defiance of this male standard of conventional femininity. We felt that there should be more room these days for women to experiment with their appearances without feeling disapproved of. None of us suggested that it would be a good idea to reclaim plunging cleavages and high heels, since these clothes seem to be inextricably associated with self-hating definitions of femininity which do reduce us to the status of sexual goods, denoting sexual availability to men.

Looking around the workshop there was in fact a lot of variety in terms of women's dress, although one woman did say that if her sister walked in we would still look like a bunch of feminists to her. Some dykes grow their hair, wear eyeliner and the occasional skirt (I am guilty of two of these) and so long as they are not still seeing themselves through male eyes and secretly wanting male approval, or trying to 'pass' as normal in the straight world, some of us really don't see these things as heinious crimes against feminism. There were one or two who seemed to be absolutely opposed to women taking any interest in their appearances on the grounds that 'dressing up' necessarily involved disguising the 'real' and 'natural' woman, not to mention being a sign of frivolity and narcissism which we hard politicos just couldn't afford. I'm not sure that the idea of the natural woman comes entirely from feminism – to me it's horribly reminiscent of hippy days. And the concept of political seriousness owes more to the principles of stalinism, plus a dash of quakerism, than to those of feminism.

The debate about lesbians and dress went on for a long time before there was any mention of how class or race might influence women's views on fashion. A white, working class woman pointed out that women who spent their days in factories wearing overalls often really looked forward to dressing up at the weekends, and that fashion for these women was a rejection of and escape from a tyranny of drabness and conformity. This obviously struck a chord for other women in the workshop too. Although this woman now has professional status she still has clothes for 'best' as do other working class women she knows.

A further important point which was made was that make-up may not have identical meanings in differing cultures. A woman said she had a Black woman friend who wore make up in order to rebel against the Rasta idea of pure and natural womanhood. One woman said that we could not really talk about Black culture since there were no Black women present, but this notion only served to reinforce the tendency for white women to talk about "us" as if our culture is that of all women, so long as there are no women of colour present to put us straight.

The discussion turned to music and a few women criticised those lesbians who still listen to male music rather than lesbian and feminist stuff. I said that I thought it might be easy enough for white women to reject their culture, but that some Black music has a history of resistance to oppression which Black lesbians might more easily identify with than white-defined Chris Williamson type music. It is not our place to inform these women that their culture is male-defined: we should really be addressing the fact that 'women's' culture whether literature, music or painting often is implicitly racist. Thinking about this since the conference, I realise that we should have also acknowledged that there are aspects of Jewish culture which Jewish lesbians feel validated by and want to hang on to and again it is not really christian women's place to talk about the 'patriarchal' nature of a heritage which is so associated with persecution.

I enjoyed the workshop, but in retrospect I feel increasingly dismayed that so few of us (and then only late in the discussion) wanted cultural and racial differences to complicate their concept of lesbian culture and image. Will we ever learn?

Unresolved differences

There were moments of compelling, passionate, not to mention hilarious discussion at the conference and it seemed that lots of us were very keen to re-evaluate the forms our relationships take and the meaning of sex in our lives. But the question remains as to whether we can even begin to skim the surface of these issues at such an amorphous and anonymously big conference. I wonder if it is ever possible to speak openly within such a structure? The workshops did at times end up as a rather unsatisfying and confusing mish-mash of anecdote, soul searching and polemic.

There are so many unresolved power imbalances and political differences amongst us that it almost seems that we need to have a conference on the things which divide us before embarking on anything else. The fact is that these differences seem to go on flaring up in destructive ways at every conference we have – some women I know have stopped going to conferences, since conflict and pain seem to be a foregone conclusion. Anyway this conference was no exception. There were Jewish women who understandably felt like sticking together given current anti-semitism amongst feminists, working class women who were angry that so few middle class women went to the class workshops and demanded a plenary on class (which a lot of women, including myself did not even know took place), and women with disabilities who forced the rest of the conference to recognise the physical exclusion of women in wheelchairs from workshops which were not at ground level. Certainly the most consciousness raising aspect of all this for me was being forced by lesbian members of Sisters Against Disablement and Gemma to be aware of the isolation which we impose on women with disabilities. Their demand that we talk about this in every workshop was a very chastening and important experience for many of us, and one which hopefully will prevent us from hiring venues which are not totally accessible in the future.

Positive results of the conference

I don't know to what extent the conference did begin to break down 'the silence' around lesbian sex as I personally did not talk about sex once (the sheer act of making love with a woman that is), and nor did quite a lot of other women. Perhaps we will only do this successfully in small groups of close and trusted friends. It seems likely that we're going to go on talking about our sexual relationships, if only because political involvement is so often interrupted because of the crises which blow up periodically in our 'love' lives. It's reassuring to be reminded that we need not struggle alone or in embattled couples with our sexual and emotional problems; that we can draw on and learn from each other's experience. But it's less reassuring to recognise that when we meet en masse we have to surmount so much distrust to do so.

The most positive feeling I gained from the conference was a renewed sense of homecoming and relief and possibility – the feeling I had when I first came out. We're still trying to make relationships in ways which do not duplicate the tired and familiar patterns of hurt and exploitation, and we're still doing this against all the odds. I was glad to hear women talking about the pleasurable and creative aspects of being a lesbian. I had feared we might have those kind of discussions in which patriarchal control of our sexuality is made to sound completely devoid of chinks or contradictions and I'm left feeling that there is little room for our resistance or manouevre.

We've got a lot in our favour.■

The Desire for Freud
Psychoanalysis and feminism

How and why is Freud being reinterpreted as relevant to feminism? Stevi Jackson explores the "new readings" and asks – who needs them?

It is no longer possible for those of us who reject psychoanalysis to ignore it. It has gained too strong a hold to be easily dismissed.

In the early days of the womens liberation movement, Freud's theories were rejected, but new "readings" of his work have gained many adherents among feminists today. I remain sceptical and I want to show that, despite the great claims made for it, the new brand of psychoanalysis has nothing to offer feminists. The new interpretation is written in such complex, difficult language that the rest of us are barred from entering the debate. Thus those who promote the "new readings" escape criticism. I have tried really hard to explain their ideas clearly in order to reveal the unproven and unprovable assumptions on which psychoanalysis rests; to expose explanations that rely more on faith than fact.

I draw mainly on Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism,* published in 1975, and on the work of Rosalind Coward and her associates (Coward 1978; Coward and Ellis 1977; Coward, Lipshitz and Cowie 1976). I concentrate on the early work here. The more recent developments/debates can be found in Gallop 1982 and the journal *m/f.*

The "new readings" are said to be "anti-essentialist"; that is, to make no assumptions about biological differences between the sexes or biologically based sexual drives. This is important since an essentialist approach effectively denies the possibility of change. However, I argue that the "new readings" *are* essentialist, just as were the "old readings" of Freud. These ideas are of no help at all in understanding and resisting our oppression today; the "new" and the "old" readings are equally reactionary. It is always important for feminists to understand ideas that seek to "explain" female subordination as "natural" or as unchanging and unchangeable. It is for this reason that I ask you to bear with me as we pick our way through what may seem nonsensical rubbish.

Deferring to Freud

In debates around sexuality psychoanalysis is often treated as if it were the only possible way of explaining things. The failure of traditional academic disciplines and established bodies of theory to produce an adequate theory of sexuality is taken as sufficient justification for the reliance on psychoanalytic explanations.

Even those who are critical of psychoanalysis and opposed to its being used as an explanation for the persistence of patriarchy frequently display considerable deference towards it. There is a tendency to assume that any aspect of women's experience, especially sexual experience, that is not immediately explicable by any other means must come within the realm of psychoanalysis, that psychoanalysis provides a key for decoding mysteries which would otherwise remain unfathomable.

An example of this deference is provided by Michele Barrett (1980). Having made some telling criticisms of psychoanalysis, she falls back on it as soon as she encounters an aspect of women's subjective experience which she believes not to coincide with objective fact. Discussing Masters and Johnson's insistence that all female orgasms are clitorally centred she says that this: "... did not tally with many women's lived experience of intercourse." And:

> It is at this point that Freud's account may be useful, precisely in demarcating the psychic processes that underlie the pleasure of this experience.
> (Barrett 1980, p.66)

Even supposing she is right in saying that what women feel does not match with the known facts – which I would dispute – why should she suggest, even tentatively, that Freudianism can explain it? In particular, why is this the *only* possible explanation she considers? I would agree with her that we need

> ... an understanding of sexuality in terms of meanings, definitions, the discourse of pleasure in relation to our knowledge of the technical processes involved in sexual activity.
> (Ibid, p.66)

But this is precisely what psychoanalysis does *not* provide.

The original feminist gut-reaction against Freud was, I believe, justified. I do not accept that we "read" his work incorrectly or misunderstood and misrepresented him. It is sheer arrogance to suggest, as Juliet Mitchell does, that we could only come to this negative conclusion on the basis of second-hand, popularized versions of Freud, or because we only read the bits on femininity without understanding their place in psychoanalytic theory, or simply because we thought penis envy was a silly idea. (Mitchell 1975, see pp xv–xvi).

We are now told that new "readings" of Freud, specifically those deriving from the work of Lacan, have purged his work of all the elements which feminists found unsavourary, magically disposing of all its sexist elements – these were in any case products of our misinterpretations. The "new readings" say that we are not born feminine or masculine but are constructed as "sexed subjects" through our aquisition of language. Language structures both consciousness and the unconscious. It is also at this 'moment' of our 'entry into language and culture' (as they put it) that "desire" is constituted, ie that we become sexual. Nor need we worry about penis envy any more because it's all symbolic and has nothing to do with that organ being intrinsically "better" than anything women are endowed with. To quote Rosalind Coward, who comes closer than most to expressing these ideas in plain English:

> ... all reference to the anatomical superiority of the penis is removed. The phallus is the symbolic representation of the penis, not the actual organ. This is because of its role in the symbolic, the pre-existent linguistic and cultural order.
> (1978, p.46)

Freud Redeemed?

The role of this symbolic phallus is crucial for that all-important entry into language and culture. In Lacanian theory it is the "privileged signifier" around which all "difference" – which is taken to be the basis of language and culture – is organized. In structuralist linguistics, the filter through which Lacan reads Freud, the meaning of a word or symbol (the signifier) is not sustained by its relationship to the object it represents (the signified), but only in relation to other words, other signifiers. That is, a word means something not merely because we know what object it refers to, but because it marks a difference from other objects. We only know what a word means by knowing what it doesn't mean. Thus language is a system of differences in that it differentiates objects, concepts and ideas from each other.

The meaning of the penis/phallus therefore has nothing to do with the physical difference between the sexes as such, but with the cultural significance which the phallus is given the mark of *the* difference which governs entry into language and our construction as sexed subjects, ie., the difference between the sexes is somehow taken to be fundamental to our becoming language-using social beings.

Lacan Reworks Freud

In short, psychoanalysis is seen as phallocentric only because it is analysing a phallocentric, patriarchal culture. So we can forgive Freud his occasional misogynist lapses since basically, it is claimed, he was right.

I remain unconvinced. One problem concerns the status of this reading of Freud. Lacan is seen as offering the "correct" reading of Freud, the key to what Freud's writings really mean. Writers on psychoanalysis treat Freud and Lacan as if they were saying the same thing. Lacan's own position appears to be that Freud anticipated the

insights of structural linguistics.

What did Freud think?

> Freud could not take into account this notion which postdates him, but I would claim that Freud's discovery stands out precisely because, although it sets out from a domain in which one would not expect to recognise its reign, it could not fail to anticipate its formulas. Conversly, it is Freud's discovery that gives to the signifier/signified division the full extent of its implications: namely, that the signifier has an active function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to its mark . . .
> (Lacan *Ecrits*, quoted in Coward & Ellis, 1977, pp.95–96). *(This gives you the flavour of Lacan's writing.)*

Lacan's obscure writings are thus taken as revealing what Freud really meant and, therefore, anyone who 'reads' Freud literally has got it all wrong.

It seems to me, however, that Freud said what he meant and meant what he said. That is to say, I hold the unfashionable view that the literal reading of Freud is the correct one and that the insights claimed for Freud by the Lacanians are often little more than wishful thinking. What Freud was concerned with was children's responses to their discovery of physical differences between the sexes. Briefly he argues that a boy, seeing that girls lack a penis, thinks they have been castrated and fears that this will happen to him as punishment for desiring his mother and his rivalry with his father. This leads him to resolve his oedipal complex (his desire for his mother and hatred of his father) by giving up his desire for his mother. A girl on the other hand, seeing the penis, is overcome with envy, feels she is castrated, blames her mother for this condition and therefore turns away from her mother towards her father.

The tension between biological and cultural determination of human sexuality evident in Freud's writings is more often resolved in favour of the biological than his recent apologists seem willing to admit.

There are, however, more fundamental problems which are not attributable to the misogynist bias of Freud but which are intrinsic to psychoanalysis – its status as "knowledge", its assumptions, its methodology. It is these problems which I wish to address.

The First Line of Defence: Discrediting the Opposition

The difficulty of these modern psychoanalytic writings is widely acknowledged. The style is tortuous, the vocabulary esoteric and the concepts slippery. The unwillingness or inability of the proponents of psychoanalysis to translate their ideas into terms which the uninitiated can comprehend has been rightly damned as elitist. It makes these writers relatively immune from criticism from outsiders and this, I think, accounts for much of the deference towards psychoanalysis. How can we presume to criticise something we don't understand? Those working within this framework can smuggly reassure themselves that if the rest of us have doubts it is only because of our ignorance. Juliet Mitchell's work, being less directly influenced by Lacan than many of the other writers of this genre, is more comprehensible. She makes up for this by constantly implying that if we reject Freud it is because we are too stupid to see the Great Truths that he has uncovered. The whole tone of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* is arrogant and condescending.

Faced with either incomprehensibility or condescension our confidence is undermined and we are denied the possiblity of assessing what, if anything, psychoanalysis has to offer. I admit to being as confused as anyone else when it comes to unravelling the complexities of this brand of theory. I am aware that I am laying myself open to the charge that I am misrepresenting it, aware that I may have missed some vital points or misunderstood essential steps in the argument. But I have yet to read anything that persuades me that my doubts about psychoanalysis and its relevance to feminism are unfounded and I know that others share these doubts. I believe that we must resist being cowed into silence by elitist mystifications.

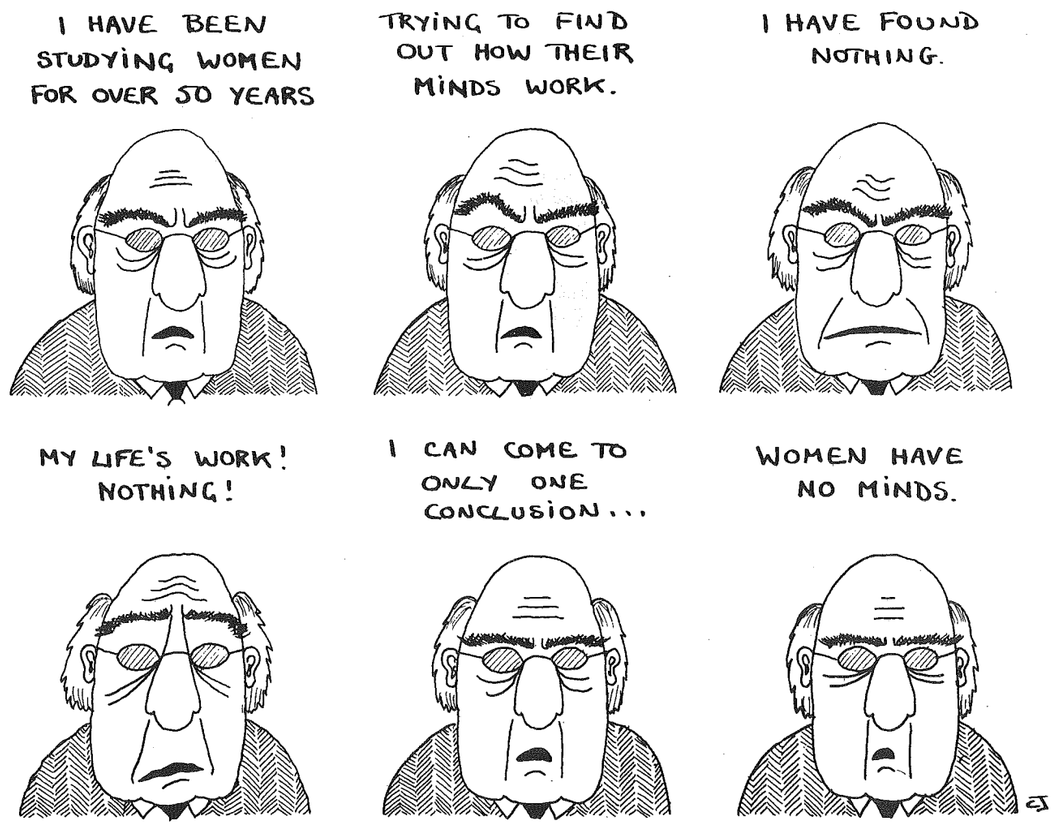
This is all the more important since what psychoanalysis purports to offer us is an explanation of our "lived experience" as women. We need, therefore, to challenge the strategies which prevent us from testing it against that experience. These are not all reducible to the inarticulateness of its

supporters for they have a second line of defence.

The Second Line of Defence: the Mysteries of the Unconscious

Any criticism of psychoanalysis we might offer, on the basis of any data or experience, is subject to the instant rebuttal: "Ah, but in the unconscious . . ." Juliet Mitchell repeatedly asserts the need for us to understand the nature of the unconscious, for without such understanding Freud makes no sense. She constantly chastises his critics for claiming to dispute specific points when, in reality, they are rejecting the whole idea of the unconscious. She makes such a rejection sound like a neurosis. I am willing to admit, quite openly, that I suffer from this sickness. I cannot be convinced, by Mitchell or anyone else, that we are dealing with a body of irrefutable fact concerning the unconscious. I submit that we are merely being asked to have faith — whatever she says to the contrary.

I am not denying the existence of any psychic processes beyond our consciousness. What I *do* contest is that the non-conscious mind is knowable in the systematic fashion claimed by psychoanalysis and that everyone's unconscious is subject to similar processes and contains similar repressed wishes or drives. By definition it is not knowable by the conscious mind: it is claimed that it can only be made available through analysis, through the piecing together of dreams, slips of



Does psychoanalysis rest on circular reasoning?

speech and so on.

Analysis is a highly intuitive process. The results of such intuition can hardly be taken as objective fact. Analysts' conclusions on the construction of gender and sexuality cannot but be affected by patriarchal culture and frames of reference drawn from it. Moreover, the method of psychoanalysis is to work back from the present to the past. It is self evident that, as Mitchell says, each of us has a past which exists in our present. But the danger is that in reconstructing the past we mould it to fit the present. This is made worse by the fact psychoanalysis rests on a closed system of circular reasoning. Everything is interpreted so that it fits in with the dogma already laid down by Freud. Yet we are expected to accept on faith all the theorizing that rests upon these presuppositions about the unconscious. Much of this theorizing, in any case, seems to be based on pure speculation with no reference even to the dubious evidence of analysis.

It is these 'discoveries' about the nature of the unconscious which are supposed to provide the radical thrust to psychoanalysis. It is held to be the means by which "the process of the construction of the subject in relation to social relations becomes available to scientific analysis." (Coward & Ellis, 1977, p.94). Not only am I unconvinced as to the 'scientific' status of this enterprise, but I fail to see why you need to believe in the unconscious to see that our 'subjectivity', our sense of ourselves is built up through a particular language and culture, in relation to specific social relations.

Does 'repression' imply a biological explanation?

It is further claimed that Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular makes a radical break with "the notion of the 'wholeness' of identity and consciousness". (Ibid p.121). The argument appears to be that without these preconceptions as to the nature of the unconscious, we cannot account for the complexities and contradictions of our subjectivity. While it may be true that many social scientific formulations are guilty of assuming "a unified subject of self consciousness" (ibid), there are no grounds for asserting that this is an automatic consequence of failure to accept the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious. Of course we are complex, contradictory and inconsistent beings; we are, after all, products of complex, contradictory and inconsistent experience. We do not need any assumptions about the unconscious to account for the lack of a unified 'self'.

Just as these general conclusions on the effect of culture on our 'subjectivity' and the nature of the 'subjectivity' so constructed could be arrived at without any preconceptions as to the nature of the unconscious, so could many of the more specific conclusions yielded by psychoanalytic theories. For example, Moi, in a paper on sexual jealousy, after meandering through the usual Freudian arguments that jealous women are normally depressive, concludes :

> Feelings of loss and wounded self-esteem are conducive to depression. In order to be respected and esteemed, women in patriarchal society must demonstrate that they can catch and keep a man. To lose ones lover/husband is interpreted as a blow to the woman's worth as a human being. It is easy to understand why depression should be a widespread reaction in women who discover they have a rival.
> (Moi, 1982, p.61)

This seems a reasonable, commonsense explanation. But why did she have to jump through Freudian hoops, demonstrating that female jealousy is somehow "pre-oedipal" in order to arrive at a conclusion that most of us could have reached without the benefit of the "insights" of psychoanalysis?

When psychoanalytic accounts yield reasonable conclusions it is in spite of, rather than because of, their assumptions about the unconscious. But these assumptions can lead to very dubious arguments, especially those based on the notion of "repression" – the idea that certain drives or needs are denied expression and therefore repressed. It is this which undermines the claims of many of these writers that they are dealing with the cultural construction of subjectivity for it assumes the existence of drives which exist *outside* culture . . . which are presumably innate, products of biology rather than culture, and which reside in the unconscious.

An example of the sort of explanation I find dubious is this, from Mitchell (1975). She maintains that our 'amnesia' about infantile sexuality is the result of repressing wishes which our culture does not allow to be fulfilled. Along with other psychoanalysts, Mitchell seems to assume that this amnesia validates the claims made about repression and the unconscious. I am sceptical of this for two reasons. Firstly, it presupposes that these infantile experiences are essentially, in themselves, sexual, independent of any such meaning being applied to them (except by psychoanalysts). This assertion that certain experiences are inherently sexual seems to have no foundation beyond the fact that Freud said so.

I would argue that nothing is sexual unless it is subjectively defined as such; a point I will return to later. Secondly, most of us remember little or nothing about our earliest years. Are we to believe that *all* of this was repressed, that everything that happened in that phase of life comes under the heading of that which our culture does not permit? There is a perfectly simple explanation for the loss of these early memories, one which does not require any assumptions about repression or the unconscious: that we lacked the language with which to represent these experiences to ourselves.

Language, the Phallus and the Production of Sexed Subjects

The process of acquiring language has become central to psychoanalysis. It is through this process that we become social beings, that we enter culture and culture enters us, constructing us as "sexed subjects". This I do not see as particularly contentious and I am quite prepared to accept that language structures experience. Language is not merely a tool with which we express ideas. It shapes how we think, indeed what it is possible to think about and therefore orders the way we make sense of our experience. Psychoanalysis is far from being the only perspective within which this point is made. What is more problematic is the idea of the oedipal situation and the role of the phallus as 'primary signifier'. The notion of penis envy as such is still very much there in Mitchell's work, albeit an envy of what the penis represents rather than of the physical organ. Coward and associates place the emphasis much more on the importance of recognizing this difference as *the* difference so that the phallus becomes the crucial symbol around which entry into language and culture is ordered. It is only after the mirror phase (in which the child differentiates itself from its environment, accomplishes a separation between self and other) and the castration complex,

How important is penis envy?

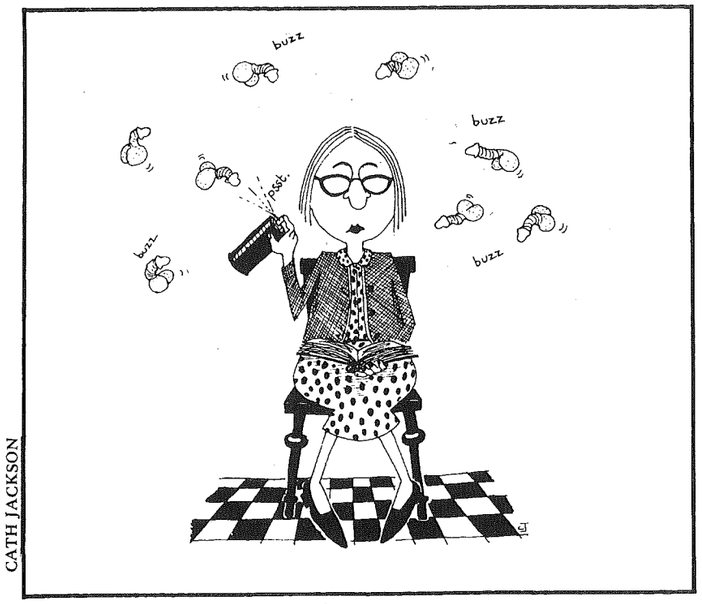
> . . . that the subject can find a signifying place in language where it can represent itself adequately to the structure that already includes it.
>
> The role that the phallus plays is that it governs this positionality by which the subject can represent itself in language.
> (Coward et al, 1976; 1982 reprint, p.287)

What this apparently means is that the child cannot place herself in the world, specifically as a sexed subject without having taken note of this crucial difference and cannot, therefore, become a fully social language-using human being. While male children make a positive entry into the symbolic since they "find themselves in a relation of possession of *the* symbolic function" (ibid), girls enter in a negative relation, one of lacking, of not possessing the phallus, the mark of difference.

How central is the castration complex?

One aspect of this formulation which I find confusing is the exact relation between the constitution of the sexed subject and the learning of language, a confusion heightened by the obscure terminology they use. Coward and Ellis (1977) assert that becoming a fully language-using subject is dependent on the castration complex. It is claimed that in order to "use" language the subject must take up "a position in regards to meaning". This "positionality" is "achieved through . . . the mirror phase and the castration complex". (ibid p.105). So it seems that language can be *learned* but not *used* prior to the oedipus complex.

Presumably this means that a child cannot speak (or at least not speak properly) until s/he has been constructed as a sexed subject. If this meant merely that learning language involves being aware that one's position in the world was *as* a boy or a girl, then this would not be too problematic. It seems to be the case that girls *do* enter into culture in a negative relation, being defined



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in relation *to* the male, as not-male. What *is* problematic is the notion that the child cannot enter culture as a sexed subject and cannot speak until she has negotiated the castration complex; that is, has positioned herself in language and culture in terms of lacking the phallus. These processes are seen as absolutely neccessary in order to enter into (patriarchal) culture.

How important is real experience?

While these explanations of our construction as sexed subjects rests on the symbolic function of the phallus rather than on envy of the penis itself, it nonetheless seems to assume an awareness of, a representation of, this real physical difference. Now it seems to me that it is quite possible for a girl to remain unaware of the existence of penises until well after she is fluent in language and has identified and placed herself as a little girl.

Are we to assume that it all somehow happens "in the head" without a child having basis for it in experience? Surely, even the unconscious mind (as it is postulated within psychoanalytic theory) must reflect real tangible experience and not merely an abstract system of symbols? Symbols or language may order our experience, but they do not create it out of thin air. Are we to believe that children magically "know" the phallus without ever having seen or heard of the penis?

Why are cultural differences ignored?

Little girls, who do not know of these physical differences and therefore cannot represent it to themselves, are not stunted asocial beings, nor are they guaranteed to be unfeminine, nor do they inevitably "fall ill" (as those who do not negotiate the proper stages of development must, according to psychoanalysis). Many other well-documented processes are occuring which allow a girl to place herself as a sexed subject – and language, of course *is* crucial to this.

Psychoanalysis, however, appears to claim that all other data on socialization are false or irrelevant. More conventional studies of socialization have revealed that the processes contributing to the construction of gender and sexuality are many, varied and complex and I see no reason to discount these findings, to dismiss them as superficial and inconsequential. At least they refer to real children; psychoanalytic explanations on the other hand seem to rest on a theoretical construct called "the child".

Psychoanalysis is also very bad news for anyone attempting to rear children so that they do not grow up to be walking feminine or masculine stereotypes. We know it is difficult, but the formulations of psychoanalysis suggest that it is impossible, that the critical processes involved are way beyond our control. So we may as well encourage girls to be vulnerable, narcisistic and masochistic because that is how they will end up anyway.

The category "woman" is taken to be virtually universal, applying to all (patriarchal) societies. Now obviously people are constructed as 'sexed subjects' in all cultures but I doubt this happens in exactly the same way in all contexts. Mitchell maintains that while there may be variations in "the expression of femininity", this does not fundamentally alter what it is to be a woman, the basic functioning of women's psyches. Patriarchal societies may be subject to variation but since the significance of the phallus remains constant, so does female (and male) psychology.

It is not at all clear how Mitchell distinguishes between expressions of femininity and the fundamentals of feminine psychology. It looks like a form of words to avoid taking seriously any anthropological evidence which might otherwise contradict psychoanalysis. The assumption that evidence drawn from psychoanalysing women in Western societies can be applied to all other cultures is in any case clearly untenable.

The problem with phallocentrism, then, is not so much that it is possibly sexist but that it precludes any understanding of the complexity and variation of women's experiences under patriarchy and of the full range of processes that contribute to the construction of gender and sexuality. But psychoanalysis is so closed in upon itself, its adherents so immersed in its methods and assumptions, that they cannot conceive of any alternatives and the only means of avoiding phallocentrism they can envisage is a retreat into a belief that femininity is some innate essence distorted by patriarchy.

The Problem of Sexuality

There are major problems with psychoanalytic ideas about sexuality itself. Just as Mitchell insists that we must accept the existence of the unconscious so we must take as indisputable fact Freud's "discovery" of infantile sexuality. Other psychoanalytic analyses concentrate on the constitution of "desire"when we enter into language and culture but still retain some notion of drives which exist before this time. It is claimed that this is not an essentialist position since a drive is not the same thing as an instinct in that it has no 'object'; that is, it is not oriented towards any particular outlet, any specific category of person. Sexuality is not seen as something we are born with but is constructed in particular ways through our entry into patriarchal culture. Yet it still seems to be assumed that certain infantile experiences are intrinsically, *essentially* sexual. What is apparently being argued is that while sexuality is socially constructed, the drives we are born with are sexual in themselves.

Not only is this contradictory, but the whole notion of sexual 'drives' is rather dubious. A drive is an inborn urge towards physical gratification. While the satisfaction of hunger, for example, can be seen in this way (since it is necessary for physical survival) other forms of sensual pleasure do not so easily fit this model. Obviously infants do experience sensual pleasure but this does not mean that this experience involves either the gratification of a drive or that it is specifically sexual. To think of sexuality in terms of drives is to see it as something we are impelled towards by inner urges beyond our control and beyond the reach of social forces. To see any form of sensual pleasure as sexual *in itself* is to view sexuality as a natural biological endowment rather than something which is learnt. Both these assumptions are essentialist. Both imply that sexuality is unchanging and unchangeable. The notion of sexual drives are also dangerous as they imply an aggressive male defined view of sexuality. The idea that children are intrinsically sexual can be used as a means of justifying sexual abuse of them.

Is sexuality 'natural'?

In order to escape the consequence of essentialism, sexuality must be seen as something which is socially defined rather than as something which exists independently of our subjective definitions of it. In other words nothing, no act, no sensation, is sexual in itself. What is sexual depends on culturally defined and socially learnt meanings. We are born with a broad sensual potential, an ability to gain pleasure from certain sensations, but which of these become part of our sexuality depends on what we learn to define as sexual. This means that an infant gaining pleasure from her own body cannot be said to be behaving sexually even if she is doing something that an adult would define as sexual. She has not yet learnt language and can therefore not yet categorise her world and her experiences and does not yet have access to the concepts which would endow certain pleasures with sexual, erotic meaning. It is nonsense, therefore, to talk of 'infantile sexuality'.

Does acquiring sexuality depend on language?

Similar problems arise concerning the nature of the 'desire' supposedly constituted at the 'oedipal moment' when children become oriented towards the appropriate heterosexual 'object'. In what sense can a child be said to have desire when the

concept of desire, and indeed all knowledge through which she could make sense of her experience as sexual, is not available to her? We cannot ignore the fact that most children in our society are kept ignorant of those aspects of life which adults label sexual. Once again I would argue that such a child cannot be experiencing sexual desire in the sense that an adult would, since she cannot make sense of her feelings in those terms. And here too those proposing psychoanalytic explanations tend to contradict themselves. Many of them, like Ros Coward, maintain that language structures and orders our experience. So how can a child who cannot name desire be said to experience it?

Is the unconscious a conceptional dumping ground?

Maybe this would only be problematic if it was being argued that desire exists at this stage at a conscious level, whereas most of these writers appear to be saying that it is constituted in the unconscious. But if this is the case, then the notion of the unconscious is simply being used as a conceptual dumping ground to explain away things which do not fit in elsewhere. We are left again with a residual essentialism — that even if something is not, cannot, be defined subjectively as sexual, it is nonetheless, in itself, sexual.

What is desire?

We are also left not knowing what 'desire' is supposed to mean. In some contexts they clearly are referring to sexual desire, since their account of social construction of sexuality consists of processes by which desire is constituted. At other times, however, they seem to be talking about something more nebulous: a desire to be completed by and to complete someone else, some sort of yearning after a 'wholeness' disrupted by the linguistic capacity to categorize and differenciate experience. I suspect the term 'desire' is favoured precisely because it is so ambiguous.

Is sexual conditioning a continuous process?

There are further difficulties with this slippery concept. It seems to me that the processes whereby we are conditioned towards genital, reproductive sexuality are far more continuous throughout childhood and adolescence than the psychoanalytic account allows for. I cannot accept that it all depends on what happens at the 'oedipal moment', which in any case seems to be more of an abstract, mythical 'moment' than a real event in time. *Most* of our learning experiences define sex for us in genital reproductive terms. Moreover, a full account of the social construction of sexuality needs to explain more than merely why most of us become heterosexual. If what we define as sexual involves selecting from a very broad sensual potential, then there are many possible forms of eroticism consistent with heterosexuality. Does heterosexuality have to involve passive femininity and active masculinity? Does it have to be genitally and reproductively focussed, involving the gaol of orgasm as end point? Psychoanalytic explanations of 'desire' imply that all this is essential to heterosexuality, that heterosexuality is fixed and unchangeable. Nor can the existence of desire itself explain all facets of our sexuality. Both women and men may engage in acts conventionally defined as sexual without desire being their primary motive. And what are we to make of acts such as rape which may be motivated more by a wish to punish and humiliate as by sexual desires? Presumably psychoanalysis would conceptualise such wishes as sexual, but this merely confuses the issue.

Gender and sexuality are not the same

A central difficulty here lies in the conflation of gender and sexuality, a criticism Barrett (1980) makes of other perspectives but not of psychoanalysis where it is most prevalent. Indeed, in psychoanalytic accounts the term 'sexuality' is often taken as synonymous with gender or at least to subsume it. I, like Barrett, would argue that while gender and (erotic) sexuality are obviously linked, we should not confuse them and should investigate these links rather than prejudging them. In psychoanalytic theory, however, both gender and sexuality appear to be constituted simultaneously at the oedipal moment. It is with the formation of desire, in taking the appropriate object, that we become sexed subjects. This, in any case, gives far too much determining force to sexuality in determining our psychic life, and implies that it has some intrinsic power to do so.

It is this confusion of gender and sexuality and the reduction of sexuality to desire and its object which I think accounts for the failure of psychoanalysis to confront the issue of lesbianism and homosexuality noted recently by Elizabeth Wilson (1981). For if our desire is directed towards an object disallowed by our culture, how can we be fully sexed subjects? If gender and sexuality are one and the same, what gender has a lesbian or homosexual? The only way of resolving these questions within the psychoanalytic framework would seem to lead us back to the realms of limp-wristed men and Amazonian women.

Feminism and Psychoanalysis: Why the Attraction?

I have argued that psychoanalysis, built on a dubious methodology, on unfounded assumptions about the unconscious and containing within it a residual essentialism does not offer us a very fruitful means of analyzing sexuality. As an explanation for the persistence of patriarchy and of its effects on our consciousness it is an extremely depressing doctrine, for it offers us little chance of changing the situation. We are trapped in a vicious circle. Why is the phallus the privileged signifier? — Because we live in a patriarchal culture. Why is our culture patriarchal? — Because the phallus is the privileged signifier. Linking this to the notion of relations of reproduction as Coward and associates do (1976) does not help much. This is itself a difficult concept that can mean many things and in this case it seems to mean little more than biological reproduction; or, as Coward and Ellis would have it, it is through the castration complex that "the reproduction of the species is ensured" (1977, p.112). If it is the reproduction of the species rather than of specific social relations which are ensured by all this, then there is nothing we can do about it.

Why, then, should psychoanalysis appeal to feminists? Various factors have been suggested, for example by Wilson (1981) and Sayers (1979). The most important of these is that psychoanalysis offers an analysis of patriarchy as a structure in its own right and rests on a universalism that stresses the commonality of women's oppression. This being the case, it would be expected to appeal to radical feminists. But it is *marxist* feminists who have adopted it. While Wilson sees in this a potential retreat from marxism, I disagree. There are very good reasons for its appeal to marxist feminists in that it helps them to deal with theoretical difficulties which radical feminists do not have to face.

Psychoanalysis has been *appropriated* by marxists generally to account for aspects of lived experience to which conventional marxist categories are inapplicable. But it has a more specific appeal to marxist feminists in its ability to create a space for theorizing gender relations and sexuality in their own right without challenging pre-existing marxist concepts and categories. By placing this theorization in the realm of the ideological, the problems of trying to relate women's subordination to specific modes of production is avoided.

In doing so, however, some of the failings inherent in attempts to place women's oppression at the economic level as somehow contributing to the maintenance of capitalist economy are repeated. It has been noted, for example by Friedman (1982) and Delphy and Leonard (1982) that such explanations tend to take the sexual division of labour as given and therefore rests on an implicit biological reductionism. This, of course, is also true of a theory which regards specific psychic processes as necessary to the reproduction of the species.

The appropriation of psychoanalysis also serves to perpetuate another common ommission in marxist thought: the unwillingness to confront the issue of male power, the preference for considering women's oppression solely in terms of structures (whether economic or symbolic) at the expense of analyzing the ways in which real men exercise and benefit by their power over women.

Radical feminists have never doubted that patriarchy is worthy of consideration in its own right, have never been afraid of confronting the day-to-day realities of male dominance and are not trapped within the confines of any existing body of theory. For them psychoanalysis can have little appeal.■

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Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. (Penguin, 1975).
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Feminist Writers Conference

Feminist conferences have rarely been fully reported in the feminist press in this country – Trouble and Strife hopes to change this. Much exciting political debate develops at our conferences, and events may take place which change many of our minds. But unless something is written down, what has happened is passed on only by word of mouth, and this tends to increase the distance between those who are 'in' and those who are not.

We hope to develop a way of reporting on conferences which take place available to our readers, so that new questions raised and arguments put forward can be more widely discussed. We admire the practice of 'off our backs', the American newspaper which reports major conferences very fully, sometimes reproducing exchanges word for word.

There are many problems to be dealt with in attempting this – foremost among them how to avoid misrepresenting women whose position the reporter disagrees with. We welcome comments from other women who were at any conference we report. We make no claim to be objective, or for that matter fair, and we hope that women will want to challenge our interpretations of events. All women are also welcome to send us their own reports of events, and we might well publish more than one version of the same conference.

This report on the recent Feminist Writers Conference in Edinburgh is our first attempt at this sort of reporting, and women will no doubt see the problems involved. We welcome your comments on how we can improve on it!

When you think about it, feminists do a lot of writing. If we added together all the leaflets and handouts, every poem and novel, all the articles and reviews, it amounts to a great deal of work. Much of our feminism exists through the written word, and it is often the only link with women in the past. We may not be able to physically dismantle the patriarchal state, but we can and do criticise and seek to undermine it. In other words, writing is a form of power, a tool which women do have access to. However, most of us would not describe ourselves as 'feminist writers'.

The list of conference workshops suggested problems of definition which beset us, as well as the practical ones of publishing, censorship and editing. What counts as feminist writing? Should we call ourselves writers? What stops women writing or shapes and defines what we do write? How is it possible to write about or for others whose experience is different from our own?

There were over 50 workshops and we attended 15 between us. Clearly, this is not a representative report, but an amalgamation of our impressions. It is also biased in that the three of us were more interested in talking about factual and polemical writing than novels and poetry and the workshops we chose to attend do reflect that.

The Saturday workshops were grouped around the idea of 'process' and those on Sunday oriented more towards content. We had assumed that a discussion of the processes of writing at a feminist conference would also be in a political context. Unfortunately, in some of the workshops this was not the case. For example, in 'Naming Ourselves as Writers' the emphasis was very much upon women finding the self-confidence to claim this prestidgious title. One woman declared that if there ever had been a sex war we'd won it long ago and now it was our own fault if we did not make it as writers. Another woman who questioned whether we should want to call ourselves writers given that it had traditionally been a white middle class preserve was firmly ignored. Obviously there were women present holding very different political views and the discussion was not a very comfortable exchange but seemed polarised between women whose primary focus was on the problems of being a woman writer in a male-dominated profession and those whose feminism made them question the fundamental structures around who writes, is published and for whom.

Romance and slogans

It seemed to us more generally that there was a widespread acceptance of a romanticised image of writing – that it was an isolated activity troubled by problems of inspiration and inner turmoil. Some women were thinking of their work and ideas as coming from their feminist community, even if the actual writing down was done alone, but that was not the underlying assumption behind much of the talking about how we write.

In more specifically feminist workshops we felt generally disappointed that the repetition of well-used phrases frequently stood in for any real discussion. Slogans such as "language is patriarchal" and "rationality is male" were reiterated rather than talked about. Race, class, disabilities and sexuality were all given mentions as though an agenda was being automatically ticked-off. This may well say more about the current political climate in the women's movement than this particular conference. But on the whole, the atmosphere was obviously not right for exploring the way our lives connect with these shared problems rather than simply admitting their existence.

Of course, it is difficult to know what specific conferences can achieve and what the women who attend want to get out of them. Over 150 women, almost all of whom were white, came to this conference, but it was quite a mixed bunch in terms of age, occupations and politics. There were problems of access for disabled women, which necessitated some of the workshops being moved downstairs. Other than this, the organisation went well, though some of us were surprised and annoyed that it had been necessary to bring in men as 'resource people'.

The range of interests and backgrounds was reflected in differences in what we wanted to see happen at the conference and the ways of doing things. Some women said they wrote primarily "to sort out their feelings", others "to change the world". This distinction did not run along simple lines of division such as fiction and non-fiction, or process and content, but it expresses something of the varying approaches which came through whatever the topic under discussion.

The necessity for criticism

In the workshop on criticism it was felt that the kind of bland support that we often give one another, for example, when writing book reviews was not really very useful. We thought that when we criticised each other's work we should be prepared to be more personally open and willing to admit the interests and involvements from which our views stem.

Paradoxically it was noted too that we seem to be most harshly critical of work that is closest to us, for example, with novels that present the feminist world. Such works are taken to represent all of us, even if the author herself had no intention of doing other than describing her own world. In the same way, work by women writers is seen as expression of 'the female consciousness' as though there was one universal experience. This was a particularly good session with the women present really listening and responding to each other's thoughts.

Working from our own experience seemed to be both a unifying feminist principle during discussions and the source of a great deal of confusion. In some workshops such as the one on working class writing, and also one on editing, writing about or making judgements upon the work of women whose experience or oppression you did not share was seen as fraught with danger. Some women declared that we should write only from our own perspective and direct experience.

Racism and correctness

Such wariness was present in various workshops and when certain topics were brought up. The workshop on racism and writing was a painful example. The all-white women discussion after the paper by an Asian woman had been read was tense to the point of paralysis. One woman left angrily declaring that it was impossible to do anything in an atmosphere of personal guilt. Another reminded us that racism was not just about colour though what little discussion there was still continued to focus on Black women. The palpable fear of saying the wrong thing and inability to make our own judgements rather than waiting for the 'right line' to come from a Black woman made this a most depressing and hopeless non-event.

In her paper 'Political and Polemical Writing' Dena Attar makes some pertinent comments about 'correctness'.

> We should not get too obsessive about 'correct' political language, so that women are constantly looking over their shoulders as they write and fearing they will be criticised for inadvertently using an offensive phrase or letting slip a reactionary thought. I think we *should* take care when we write and be prepared to give detailed criticism. But our awareness of oppressive forms of language has to be part of a wider understanding of oppression, and using the right right words and phrases could become a mere mechanical technique. If we insist on complete political purity of thought and word – and this is leaving out the question of who decides – we are effectively silencing women who are still reaching towards an understanding of oppression.

Working class writing

One of the largest and certainly angriest workshops was the one on working class writing. A lot of women present seemed to have been through some form of higher education, and as we talked about the ways in which we were changed by that and by feminism, it became clear that there was a lot of resentment at being assumed to be middle class as an automatic result of those processes. Some women spoke of having to unlearn mystifying and unnecessarily complicated ways of writing, academic writing coming in for particular and fierce criticism. Everyone agreed that there were no ideas so complex that they cannot be expressed in straightforward language and that working class women have a right to demand simplicity from feminist academics. It is particularly galling when the ideas being written about are of deep concern to, and originate in us all, and yet many women have no access to whole areas of debate. A lot of other things were talked about and the workshop was useful and interesting to most of us. A tape was made of it and it is hoped that it will become available in written form; contact Lavender Menace Bookshop, 11a Forth Street, Edinburgh, for information.■

Lynn Alderson, Sophie Laws, Sara Scott

There were many papers written for this conference and a book may come out of them and issues raised at the conference. Contact Ultra Violet Enterprises, 25 Horsell Road, London N5. And we will be printing on of the papers – 'Writing for my mother', by Pearlie McNeill – in the next issue of *Trouble and Strife*.

Thatcherism is anti-feminism

It is often argued that since Margaret Thatcher and many of her supporters are women, her government must at least be a half-hearted supporter of equal rights – even if the policies it has pursued have indirectly harmed many women. Miriam David here takes issue with those on the Left, including the Communist Party's theoretical journal Marxism Today, who want to persuade us that feminism is not an important issue when confronting the Tories.

Margaret Thatcher's dissection of the Labour Party's manifesto in a rousing speech at the disgraceful "triumphal Tory youth rally" (*Daily Telegraph*, 6.6.83) focussed on its feminist intentions. Quoting the manifesto first, she added some scathing comments:

> 'Men and women should be able to share the rights and responsibilities of paid employment and domestic activities so that job segregation within and outside the home is broken down . .'
>
> It's a grim catalogue – a list of proposals aimed at destroying the spirit of enterprise and the chance to display and develop your talent, your ability, your excellence, whatever it may be and wherever you choose to develop it . . .

She paused and looked round to her husband, Denis Thatcher, and said of the Labour Party to resounding laughter: "They are going to see that Denis does his share of the washing up."

Feminist issues scarcely figured in the 1979 and 1983 election campaigns. Apart from this decadent rally, Thatcher has avoided direct attacks on feminist demands. The Left have not seized the possibilities and campaigned around feminist issues. They, too, have left themselves vulnerable to accusations of sexism. Despite having the strong statement in the Labour manifesto which Thatcher seized on, and 78 women Labour parliamentary candidates (compared to the Tories' mere 38), Labour and other Left parties rarely use women on their most public platforms and election addresses (and, of course, few of the 78 were in safe Labour seats). The Thatcher factor, on the other hand, relying as it does on the cult of personality, is at least able to offer us *a* version on womanhood. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher was marketed as the model woman – mother, 'nanny', housewife, sex object. Many women and men seem to have 'bought' the image and use it to undermine feminist demands. They say to the women's movement, "If you say gender is the issue, what about Mrs Thatcher being Prime Minister? It cannot be an issue of men oppressing women." They refuse to see, to understand, that gender relations, or patriarchy, are structural issues, not just matters of individuals or interpersonal relations.

CARTOONS BY JUDY STEVENS

The Tories – Ambivalent supporters of Women's Rights?

Certainly before the election campaign the Left had not developed a coherent analysis of Thatcherism as anti-feminism. Some socialists and feminists were indeed wildly optimistic about their own abilities to stave off a right-wing assault on their demands. *Marxism Today*, for instance, has only printed very equivocal assessments of Thatcher's treatment of women. First Lynne Segal wrote an odd piece, with the title 'Thatcherism is not the Moral Majority: it is not a general offensive against feminism', for the January 1983 issue. (This has been reprinted twice – in the volume edited by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques collecting together *Marxism Today*'s essays on Thatcherism; and as the conclusion (slightly extended and amended) to the book she edited *What is to be done about the Family?* which is published by Penguin for the Socialist Society.) Then Phil Lee, in the May issue, looked at Thatcher's welfare policies and did not point up their fundamental anti-feminism. Both Lee and Segal draw the erroneous political conclusion that Thatcherism is only anti-feminist in its *indirect* effects and not in its rhetoric or policies. *Marxism Today* has subsequently refused to publish any rebuttals of what

were, to say the least, generous and cautious statements.

In the conclusion to her edited book, for instance, Segal goes so far as to state:

> Indeed, Thatcherism itself, while immensely increasing the work-load and stress of women in the home – through increased poverty and cuts in services – remains *ambivalent about women's rights.* In this way it is unlike the pro-family movement in the U.S., supported by Reaganism, which is directly anti-feminist – explicitly against abortion and equal rights for women, as well as anti-gay . . .
> (Segal, 1983, p.224) (my emphasis)

Of course, it all depends what you mean by feminist and anti-feminist.

It is true that in the USA the terms are more commonly used and form part of ordinary political currency. Many 'feminists' in the USA are women who have fought on a liberal platform for changes in women's legal rights – such as abortion and equal rights – and won a large number since the Equal Pay Act, 1963, and the Civil Rights Act, 1964. They have succeeded in getting a political and legal commitment to positive (what they call affirmative) action on women's rights, which entails organisations in receipt of public funds setting targets for equal employment opportunities. To ensure this commitment in all walks of life they moved on to campaign for an amendment to the US constitution – the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This has created an enormous backlash and any opposition to such feminist demands in the USA can openly name itself anti-feminist. But just because *we* don't use these terms in party politics and the media, it doesn't mean the issues are any less contentious here.

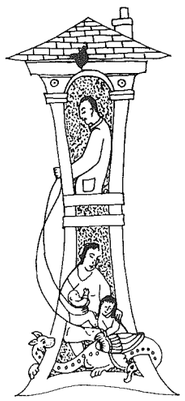
In the USA the language is clearly more direct, but the battle is not yet won in the way Segal believes. Reagan has not declared himself or his policies to be anti-feminist: he has not endorsed direct attacks on the equal rights legislation, affirmative action or abortion, although he did not support the Equal Rights Amendment. He has been very careful to appear to be "ambivalent", claiming to be "committed to a fairer society" which includes *equity for women.* But he has also accepted the support of right-wing pressure groups, such as anti-ERA and Right-to-Lifers as well as the Moral Majority, who declare themselves anti-feminist and who campaign vigorously at federal, state and local levels for reversals to women's rights. It is only in the effects of his fiscal policies that Reagan is clearly anti-feminist.

So what is so different in Britain? Segal claims that Thatcher's "pro-family rhetoric is less consistent – tempered by the continued success of [British] feminism in mobilizing support for women's rights and equality" (ibid, p.225). What nonsense this is!

The British legislation is *much* weaker than that of the USA. For instance, it does not have any commitment to a programme of positive action, nor is there any way in which groups of women can take collective action (what the Americans call class action suits) on pay or working conditions. The Equal Opportunities Commission in Britain operates by means of "persuasion" and is much less aggressive in its pursuit of women's interests than the American EEOC, which uses legal means.

Feminists have also been less successful in Britain in finding a voice in party politics. Even the Labour party has shown itself unwilling to face the electorate on women's issues – despite its commitment to the manifesto quoted so sneeringly by Mrs Thatcher. Feminists in Britain are virtually outside the conventional political spectrum. Far from 'tempering' Thatcher, we have little place on her political agenda and are so unsuccessful that it is hardly necessary to attack us head-on. It is only in rare moments of exhilaration that Thatcher turns to confront the issues – and, of course, reduces them to a kitchen sink joke!

Women's rights are the very least of feminists' demands. On the other hand, attempts to revoke the Sex Discrimination Act and Equal Pay Act are not the only signs of anti-feminism. You can be anti-feminist without mentioning the SDA and EPA – you can find more subtle ways around these pieces of legislation which make revoking them unnecessarily dramatic and perhaps counter-productive into the bargain. To repeal the EPA and SDA, which are after all *women's* rights, would focus direct attention on those rights and give feminists an opportunity to mount a counter campaign. To the anti-feminist this might be to run the risk of the opposition gaining support. Anti-feminism can be more subtle, focussing on issues that are not so directly



about women's rights – such as improving mothers' voluntary work conditions, through financial support to the Preschool Playgroups Association (see on).

Thatcher's Declared Intentions

If Lee and Segal are too kind to Thatcher, what is the evidence of her anti-feminism? It is true that she has not even tried to revoke the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts, merely weakened them through lack of funding and support for even their more "persuasive" measures. The Tory manifesto also appears committed, in Lee's terms, to "lukewarm, equal rights feminism" since it states

> As an employer, this Government is fulfilling its commitment to equal opportunities for men and women who work in public services . . . We have brought forward for public discussion proposals for improving the tax treatment of married women, whether or not they go out to work . . . We shall also reform the divorce laws to offer further protection to children and to secure fairer financial arrangements when a marriage ends.

This is very high sounding, though it is *all* they say on women and their position in society. But on closer inspection, it is not worth the paper it's written on.

First, the Tories are committed to reducing the size of the public sector by means of privatisation. So there will be very few women who "work in the public services", and a commitment to equal opportunities there is destined to be an empty promise. Most women will work in the private sector and they are promised nothing.

Second, as to taxation, the Tories are still chewing the issues over but are unlikely to go for a scheme which treats *all* men and women whether married or single as *individuals* for tax purposes. They are more likely to give favourable tax treatment to married women who stay at home and do not work than to women in paid employment.

Finally, as to fairer financial arrangements on divorce, the Tories' intention is to make this fairer to *men*, assuming that women at present get the better deal. Men will no longer be "obligated" to pay maintenance to women who take paid employment, and a time limit will be set on the period over which those that have to, do so. But women who take paid employment may lose the custody of their children on the grounds of not being good mothers. So 'fairness' is about men's rights and making working mothers pay the price of divorce, either financially or by losing custody of the children, or both. So much for the Tories' commitment to "equal opportunities".

Lukewarm equal rights feminism, then, amounts to worse than nothing. Thatcher's intentions have been more clearly spelled out in places other than the manifesto. The Family Policy Group's ramblings revealed in *The Guardian* are perhaps a better statement of intent. There it is obvious that women will get nothing, and worse, will be pushed back into the home. Ferdinand Mount, Mrs Thatcher's policy advisor and chief architect of the Family Policy Group's thoughts, is intellectually committed to the family as a natural unit. In his book *The Subversive Family*, in which he takes feminists and socialists to task for their utopianism and their failed visions, he concludes:

> . . . the first . . . aspiration, most intimate and ancient, is the desire for equality, privacy and independence *in marriage* . . . marriage still seems to be the most *interesting* enterprise . . . Its outcomes – children, grandchildren, heirlooms of flesh and blood – stretch away over the horizon . . . a way of living which is both so intense and so enduring must somehow come naturally to us, that is part of being human. (Mount, 1982, p.255–6) (his emphasis)

Mount's eulogy of marriage takes no account of the work entailed in a marriage for women. His passion for marriage comes from his desire for an emotional sanctuary: a usual male perspective. Equality for him is equality for men to have a wife to come home to.

This perspective on marriage and the family forms the basis of the Family Policy Group's policy suggestions. Although the proposals were not presented as a coherent policy plan, they had a clear underpinning theme. This is that all social and public services should no longer be the responsibility of government but of the family. Of course, the family is used in these policy prescriptions as a euphemism for women-in-the-family. The purpose of the group was stated as:

> . . . to ensure that all the Government's domestic policies help to promote self-respect and a sense of individual responsibility. We are concerned with the overall well-being of the family and not solely or specifically with the provision of welfare by the state or other public agencies.

Given this, the Family Policy Group's aim was to "persuade", by social, educational and fiscal means, women back into the home to care, voluntarily, for men, children, the elderly (meaning of course mainly women) and the sick and disabled.

The Group proposed to cut the cost of health and education services by imposing those costs on families. For instance, it suggested shifting from a National Health Service to a scheme of private health insurance; and from a state education service to a system of education vouchers. Under this latter scheme, each family would receive a financial voucher to pay the minimal cost of schooling, redeemable at a private or state school and with the possibility of parents' "topping up" if a school charged higher fees than the value of the voucher. Schools would become "parental schools", with parents having the chief say and where those with religious values would be given a position of importance. One aim of the Family Policy Group was to make sure "schools had a clearer moral base".

Given the Family Policy Group's view of the family, a moral base here would mean a commitment to the traditional patriarchal family, with a male breadwinner and economically dependent housewife and dependent children. Moreover, the morality is clearly a sexual morality, with clear prescriptions for women. Sir Keith Joseph, in his contribution to the Family Policy Group, was concerned about teenage pregnancy and parenthood, especially of girls still at school. He suggested a preventative publicity campaign, similar to that mounted by the Health Education Council against smoking. He aimed to prevent teenage sexual activity by putting fear into girls. A very curious and contradictory strategy, given the Tories' aim to make girls into mothers, and only mothers – but of course it has to be at the right time.

The Tories have a clear moral view of women's position. This concerns not only sexual morality but also women's work. This should be "caring" work, done within marriage for love not money.

Policies Already Set in Train

Burdens on women are not only planned by the Tories in the Family Policy Group or in other discussion documents, but have already been set in train by their policies over the last four years. The government has already started the process of what has been called privatisation of the public and social services. It has cut-back on its financial involvement and placed the costs on families or private organisations whether voluntary, charitable organisations or private profit making firms. Some left critics have tried to distinguish these processes, calling the imposition on families domestication and the burden on the private sector privatisation. But this only serves to underestimate the impact that these processes have had on women. *Both* have been more burdensome for women than men.

The impact over all has been to increase unemployment, and this has made women and men's lives more burdensome and stressful. The cuts in public services have increased poverty amongst both the employed and unemployed. Women have fared the worst from these. And in an effort to reduce the number of registered unemployed, mothers who are unemployed and attempting to register for work and unemployment benefit are now asked to prove their childcare arrangements are such that they could take up work immediately if offered a job.

One of the biggest cut-backs has been in child care for preschool children. Local Education Authorities no longer have to provide nursery schools and there is no financial support for other ways of caring for or educating children. The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) has just started a scheme of financial support to help the voluntary sector in this area. It has encouraged the spread of playgroups which usually involve mothers' participation on a voluntary basis, and mother and toddler groups. It has also encouraged new schemes of supporting mothers of preschool children who are seen to be "inadequate". Mothers of older children are to be asked to "befriend" one such inadequate mother: to talk to her about parenting and to help with the housework, shopping or baby-sitting.

Mothers' voluntary work is being encouraged in schools, too, to substitute for the cuts in teaching and ancillary staff. They are being asked more often to become "listening mothers": listening to primary school

children learning to read, helping to laminate books, and generally providing unpaid help to teachers.

The reduction in LEAs' statutory duties to provide school meals has doubly hit women. On the one hand, women have lost jobs (underpaid though they were) as school dinner ladies and helpers. On the other hand, mothers have been forced by the costs either to provide packed lunches or to club together to provide meals on a voluntary rather than paid basis for children. Changes in school meals clearly illustrates how hard it is to distinguish what is privatisation and what is domestication. Both sets of policies are framed with the underlying idea that the real job of a woman is to care for families on an unpaid basis.

This exploitation of women, through cuts in social services, has also occurred in the health services. For instance, contracting out laundry and cleaning services to private businesses in order to cut the costs of the National Health Service has reduced the number of women's jobs. It has also meant that the remaining jobs for women have become even lower paid than when they were part of the NHS.

Sexuality and Abortion

Obvious anti-feminism, though, is not only about women's jobs, jobs segregation and motherhood as voluntary work, but about women's sexuality and about abortion. The Tories have not mounted explicit campaigns on these, but this does not mean that these issues are not under severe attack.

One effect of the policy of privatisation as it affects the National Health Service is that it is a covert way of reducing women's rights to abortion, without having to fight to repeal the legislation. Each health authority will have to decide, within strict cash limits, which areas of medical care to prioritise. Abortion will clearly not be high on many agendas. It is clear, too, that the Tories will make it more difficult for the charities, which currently provide the majority of abortions, to go on providing them. They will add administrative restrictions which will make it more expensive, more unpleasant, and, with the added burden of more interrogation, more illegitimate to get an abortion.

In the USA, the anti-abortionists have tried more explicitly to get massive administrative restrictions on access to abortions. Given their legal situation which is more politicaly visible, this has had greater publicity than in England. As yet, however, in the USA they have not succeeded in getting a change in the law. The Supreme Court has, in fact, just struck down two plans for only hospital-based, rather than clinic-based, abortions. But the anti-abortionists have yet more plans and are successful in local areas at making it difficult for women.

Anti-feminism in the USA is also directly anti-gay. This is beginning to be the case, too, in England. Mary Whitehouse, through her Festival of Light, has taken up several cases recently against gays and against pornography. She has also mounted a campaign against sex education and the publication of feminist literature on sex education. One major campaign was against Sheba for publishing the *Playbook for Kids about Sex.*

The Department of Education and Science (DES) have followed Mrs Whitehouse's lead and changed the nature of sex education in schools. They have tried to control the ways in which it is taught and to specify the content of such courses to include chastity before marriage. Lesbianism is of course a taboo subject within such sex education courses. Sex education is to be part of a broad programme of religious, health and moral education. Some LEAs have published their own schemes which include discussion of personal and moral values, such as abortion, but do not allow for discussion of sexual orientation.

The Left's own Anti-Feminism

With all this evidence (and more) in front of it, why has the Left not developed an adequate analysis of the anti-feminism of Margaret Thatcher? I believe, because it has itself its own weaker brand of anti-feminism and because it insists on a traditional approach to economic and social policies. Until the Left does seriously take up these central problems for women and plans a concerted attack on the onslaught of the New Right with feminists and other radicals, the situation is very scary. Racism, nationalism, chauvinism, anti-semitism, monetarism and anti-welfare statism, together with anti-feminism, make a grim catalogue of policies for the foreseeable future.■

Jobs for the Wives

A review of Janet Finch, 'Married to the Job: Wives' Incorporation in Men's Work', Allen and Unwin, 1983, £10.00.

Before Pierre Trudeau was prepared to establish even a secret relationship with Margaret Sinclair, her biography tells us (*Beyond Reason*, Arrow, 1980), she had to learn French, give up marijuana, and come off the Pill. After their marriage, his values and life took her over completely. "A glass panel was gently lowered around me . . . for five years I lived in cotton wool . . . increasingly convinced that this artificial life was slowly crushing me to death. With so much civility around, whom should I attack? With so much comfort, how dare I complain?".

Her escape and her biography are rarities. Few wives of heads of state are so disaffected with their roles that they are prepared to be as candid as she was; few husbands or nations would allow her story to be published; and few prime ministers would marry when already in office, so most wives are broken in much more gradually.

Wives usually accept the total transformation of their lives which comes when their husbands change jobs. Some even embrace them eagerly – for the vicarious status, and because their job as 'the wife of . . . .' may be extraordinarily varied and interesting. Margaret Trudeau, for example, found herself

> One minute . . . firing a cook, the next discussing icefloes with strange non-English-speaking geologists; one day sitting at home watching television, the next in full regalia, waltzing with a Head of State . . . In the first year I had a taste of almost everything that would come my way during my marriage to Pierre; a state visit abroad, a number of receptions at home, a new household to organise, official and formal clothes to buy, a style of life to master, even a pregnancy.

Janet Finch, in her recent book, does not unfortunately, use the rich potential of autobiographies such as this, preferring to restrict herself to more systematic sources – the relatively few sociological studies and government reports which have looked at wives' relationships to their husbands' work, and accounts of particular occupational groups which include sufficient information on the male workers' families, or of families which include information on the head of households' employment, for her to be able to extrapolate. Consequently, she focuses primarily on the lives of the wives of managers, diplomats, police and prison officers, politicians, American doctors and academics, men in the army and navy, fishermen, small shopkeepers, miners, railway workers – and her own research on clergy wives. (For a feminist, she tells us remarkably little about herself and why she became interested in the topic.)

It seems a pity she was not prepared to throw her net more widely, especially since this is an exploratory piece of work, designed as much to challenge prevailing beliefs as to establish alternative hypotheses. It is also a pity, I think, that the book is aimed so much at sociologists, since the topic is of wider interest. It's not that the language she uses is difficult or jargonized – rather that she makes a lot of reference to theories and "past work in the field" which will mean something to fellow academics, but just irritate general readers.

The received wisdom Janet Finch wants to challenge is that "work and domestic life became separated with the development of industrial capitalism" and that "the productive (male) sphere is now separate from the domestic (female) sphere". This, she says, is both empirically untrue and theoretically naive. Writers who continue to stress this are themselves contributing their own stone to building and maintaining the ideology which makes much of women's lives invisible. She contends that all married women have their lives structured by their husband's jobs, and that all married women contribute towards the work their husbands' employers receive from their employees. This is not symmetrical: if wives are employed, few husbands are much influenced by the nature of the work. It may have a secondary influence on their standard of living, but it does not determine the overall income and status of the family – as the man's does. Nor does the household pattern of space and time revolve around the woman's work: it does not determine where the couple live, and on the contrary it is fitted in around the hours and needs of other family members.

The wives who are least influenced by their husbands' work are those whose men have jobs with absolutely regular and reliable working hours, who bring nothing home – neither physical work, nor mental stresses, nor friendships, nor altered personalities, whose work is always in the same place, and away from home, and whose job has 'no contaminating effects': which does not require or confer a particular position or standing in the community (such as a vicar or policeman). Such men are in fact rare. Also rare are those at the opposite extreme, for example soldiers, whose families live in tied housing on army bases, who are potentially on call in any emergency, who move frequently geographically at their employer's discretion, who may be away from their wives for long periods of time, who use secret weapons they may not talk about, who are trained in particular expressions of masculinity and physical violence, and who are held at arms length by civilian society (particularly should the wife herself be from Northern Ireland). Most couples fall somewhere in between; and what causes the variation they experience, Finch says, is not class differences, but the nature of the husband's occupation. (Both middle and working class jobs can fall at either extreme.)

Drawing on her work on clergy wives, Janet Finch makes a strong case that the combination of

From the cover

flexible working hours and home-based work which it is often asserted is the path likely to be followed by many in the future and which will break down the sexual division of labour, in fact often leads to a *more* rigid division than is experienced when the husband works in a factory or nine to five in an office. Because the sexual division of labour requires that the wife 'cover' what the man does not do in the home, she is only possibly free when he is *not* at work. If his work can spill over into non-work time, if he always has more work than he can possibly do, if he is always available (it is not only professionals such as doctors and high executives, but also rural gas repair men and funeral directors who are always 'on call'), she can never be sure of being free. If she and the local community value the work her husband does, she hesitates (and has no social support) in putting 'the family', let alone her own needs, above his work. She may therefore take on *all* the domestic work and struggle to produce domestic conditions which he does not find distracting.

Finch includes little historical material in her book, but what she says leads me to wonder if in fact in the pre-industrial handloom weaver's family, one might not also have found a very marked division of labour. Maybe the move to factory work *reduced* sexual divisions in the home, rather than increasing them, as is usually suggested. When you have a clear division into work and leisure time for men, perhaps they are more willing to do domestic work and childcare when the *are* with the children, than when the latter are around their heels all day?

A central theme of the second half of the book is the significant benefits *all employers routinely* derive from the domestic work and moral support which wives give their married male employees. (Again, Finch stresses, this is not symmetrical: women employees do not get it from their spouses.) "The significance of wives' domestic labour is not the particular task she performs, but her assumption of responsibility for whatever 'needs' doing." Whether what 'needs' doing is dictated by the husband's frequent absence or constant presence, the underlying structure is always the same: "the demands of the man's employment are supreme, and the wife's domestic labour facilitates these demands." "This represents a very significant mechanism through which employers benefit from the work of people they do not employ and to whom they have almost no legal obligation."

Many wives contribute over and above this minimum (domestic cover and moral support) 'as the opportunity permits'. All relieve their husbands of humdrum tasks and concerns when they can, and contribute direct labour at times of crisis or overload, or serve as a back up, for example if someone is needed to be constantly available to answer the telephone. Some women are especially 'fortunate' in being able to demonstrate their partnership publically – like Margaret Trudeau, standing beside their husbands on the victory platform. (As Finch says, "thus exploitation is constituted as privilege".)

Finch looks both at how some employers seek actively to use and incorporate wives into their husbands' jobs – sometimes to the point where wives work almost full-time (unpaid) and are given training, or secretarial help (for instance, publicans' wives by breweries or diplomats wives). And she also considers why wives may be either happy to be incorporated, finding it neither unwelcome or alienating; or else moan a bit, but go along with it because it makes the best economic and social sense for them. They can have a higher standard of living and social status as the wife of a successful man than they could expect to achieve for themselves. She also shows how wives who refuse to be married to the job are sanctioned – they are 'letting their husbands down', putting his job in jeopardy, risking divorce. If a wife is herself employed, she must show not only that the children are not suffering, but also that her husband's job doesn't suffer. Finch therefore suggests that employed women do not a double, but a triple work load: her job, the domestic work, and work for his job.

Through the entire book, however, husbands are the absent centre. Finch sets up the problem as being that work and home are not separated and that the wife is influenced by and contributes towards her husband's job. (She ignores thereby of course all single women and men.) She looks at the effects of men's *work* on wives, but never considers how men's actions themselves can influence their work as well. (She presumes, for instance, that the wife *is* free when the husband is not at work. Surely whether she is or not depends on what he chooses to do with his 'free time'?)Structurally, a wife's work is determined by her husband's needs, which include his personal desires as well as his *job*. She believes that the main beneficiaries of wives' vicarious contribution to production are their husbands' employers – obviously, since she has omitted any work done in the home which is not specifically to do with the husband's job – for instance to do with his leisure: hobbies, voluntary work and so on, to which, from my observation, wives contribute in just the same way as they do to men's paid work. Finch even goes so far as to suggest that "a wife presents her husband's employer with a man who is fit *for* work and able to give his undivided attention *to* his work", which suggests the wife owns and sells her husband's labour. She most certainly does not – as divorce makes only too rudely clear! To say that wives may be incorporated into men's work is a shorthand – and one we should be very ware of using. Wives work for husbands, who work for bosses; jobs affect men, and thereby the men's dependents. If we forget this, we contribute a stone to *another* ideology: the one which says "it's not men but 'the capitalist/occupation system' which benefits from women's work", which contributes to hiding the nature of women's oppression and deflects attention from one particular place where struggle needs to be mounted to change things.

Diana Leonard

Writing Our Own History 1

When lesbians came out in the movement

In this first interview, Sheila Shulman talks with Lynn Alderson about the first national lesbian conference, and what it was like to be a lesbian feminist in 1974.

Sheila was born in New York city in 1936 and has lived in Britain since 1970. All of her involvement in the Women's Liberation Movement has been in London. She is a lesbian, radical feminist, and Jewish (not necessarily in that order).

Sheila: The first lesbian conference was in 1974, at Canterbury University, and about 300 women turned up.

Lynn: Was it a lesbian feminist conference?

S: I can't remember what we called it, but I certainly was going as a lesbian feminist and everyone I knew was. I didn't know what to expect, I was very excited. I remember arriving on the grounds for registration and seeing this giant queue of dykes, which was wonderful. I had not to my knowledge seen so many lesbians in one place at the same time.

The Canterbury women organisers did a very nice job of accommodation in university rooms. I also remember that it was one of those conferences where morning workshops kept going all day, because they were good and the women liked being together. That was a really lovely feeling. The one I was in in the afternoon went way over its time. It was a good thirty women, I'd say.

L: Do you remember what the topic was? As I recall, we talked about relationships.

S: Yes, we talked about relationships at great length, but I'm not sure that was the topic. I was in the same workshop as my ex-lover and a lot of what we talked about was how we had survived a bust-up. We had broken up with enormous upheavals and had managed to work our way back to being quite close and the burden of what we were saying was that all that work on relationships worked.

L: But I remember you in tears, and you remember it being very positive. Was it emotional rather than negative?

S: I have no conception of positive that excludes pain. I never thought any of this was going to be easy or quick.

L: But you believed it to be possible.

S: Yes, I believed it had to be. I've been saying for as long as I can remember that all ▶

This interview with Sheila Shulman is the first in a series exploring the history of women's liberation, which will be a regular feature of Trouble and Strife. In recent years, a number of attempts have been made by feminists and by nonfeminists to write 'the' history of the women's liberation movement. All of these have been sharply criticised for misrepresenting political ideas, for distorting events and, simply, for leaving out much of what we know has gone on among us.

We are committed to telling the story from women's own point of view – for this reason we are recording interviews with the participants themselves. We are aiming to put political experience in the context of our lives to get both a sense of what it meant to us and the ways in which our lives change. The interviews will focus on events which have been important to many of us, for although each woman has her own perspective, we have been doing collective political work and therefore have had common experiences.

We hope to cover a wide range of events, and to hear from many and various women. We have chosen this method (interviewing) so that women who for whatever reason will not write about their experiences may also be heard speaking in their own voices.

At least at first we will focus on those areas of feminist activity which we feel have been most often left out of other accounts. It is not entirely accidental, of course, that we begin with an account of a lesbian conference, for liberals are forever embarrassed by the presence of lesbians in the movement, and have sought to conceal it.

We hope that our readers will participate in this project in several ways. Let us know if you would like to talk about something you were involved in – or if there is some event you have heard about and would like to hear described by someone who was there at the time. We recognise that different women will have very different versions of the meaning of events. We welcome other women writing in to challenge, agree with, or add on a different perspective from their own experiences to what women have said in our interviews. Let us know what it meant to you.

We hope that this project, by accumulating a published record of some of our own views, will go some way towards countering the attempt to write us out of existence.

The first national lesbian conference was held in Canterbury on 26th and 27th April, 1974. Workshops included: separatism, radical feminist lifestyles, monogamy and jealousy, lesbianism and the women's movement, lesbians and the gay movement, lesbians and the revolutionary left, lesbians in the National Union of Students and lesbian mothers. About half the women attending left on the Sunday morning to support an anti-SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child), pro- abortion demonstration. At the conference the following resolution was formulated to send to the planning group of the fourth National Women's Liberation Conference, an annual event which was to be held in Edinburgh later that year:

"We, the National Lesbian Conference, consider lesbianism the largest undiscussed issue in the women's movement and the movement needs Saturday afternoon of the Edinburgh Conference entirely devoted to a discussion in small workshops on lesbianism followed by a plenary session to collate the workshops."

The workshops happened and out of that came the movement's sixth demand, phrased as an end to discrimination against lesbians and for women's right to determine their own sexuality (since split at the national conference in 1978).

we have is each other – all of us, and you know that's not a whole lot of people. More now, but . . .

The disco was something else – I think it was the first time that the women's band from the London Workshop played – at least one of the early times and – I was so exuberant – I who am normally totally inhibited was without my shirt and dancing!

L: It was quite the thing to take your shirt off then.

S: I think that's when it all began. I was kind of flabbergasted – there were a whole lot of naked ladies around, it was quite wonderful. The whole tone of the conference was "My God, look at us" – "we're all here, look how many of us". It was in a lot of ways a very innocent conference – it felt good to be together and things were getting said, however painfully. There did seem to be, however fatuous, an assumption of trust of some sort – that we could talk to each other.

L: And a belief that that was what was important – that we had to begin by speaking to each other?

S: Absolutely, yes, that was the beginning.

L: Were there things that hadn't been talked about with heterosexuals in feminist groups?

S: Certainly. I think one of the reasons relationships got talked about so much was because if you were in a group with heterosexual women they would persist in making analogies between their relationships with men and lesbian relationships, and I, at any rate, had a sense that those analogies didn't work. When we were talking about relationships with lesbians at least we knew we were talking about something more like the same thing.

L: Did it feel freer?

S: What felt freer to me was that I felt more ordinary. That I didn't have so strong a consciousness of myself as 'other' as I did normally walking because I was surrounded by lesbians and I felt in an odd way relaxed – more than I normally felt – which felt very good indeed.

L: I remember a lot of talk about the kind of relationships we wanted to have – there seemed to be big differences between what we might want, what we were doing, and our pasts. There were questions revolving round such things as monogamy because we were so strongly rejecting the idea of the couple and marriage.

S: I expect I was roughly on the side of non-monogamy, though that is not how I would ever have put it. That is, I think the nature of my argument was against the idea of possession. There was no way I could figure that I owned anybody, or had any kind of primary rights over anyone's body and certainly no-one was going to have any over mine. I did and do have a quite primitive sense that there is no way I can say in a relationship "You can't" or "You oughtn't" – that is there's no way I can have any control over anyone else's sexuality. Again I knew it wasn't going to be easy, though I behaved as though it might have been easier than it was in fact. I don't think I took a theoretical stance, you know, it's just that if things happened in the course of a relationship, well you couldn't stop them from happening, which is essentially the way I still feel. The other point in my stance on that is that there was no way I could promise for the person I was going to be in five or ten years. I thought that was just untrue, not possible.

L: I think there was a very strong feeling of anti-romance then – a strong consciousness of what a very specific trap it was for women.

S: Yes, I've been speaking against any conception of romantic love since I became a feminist.

Aside from the question of relationships was the question of the nature of the lesbian presence in the women's movement. That was the other thing we talked about at great length. How we were going to make it clear and what we were going to do about it. It was, in fact, out of Canterbury that the decision to demand block workshops on lesbianism at the next National Women's Liberation Conference in Edinburgh came. We wrote the resolution and made sure it got to Edinburgh and insisted on it – and everyone spent the entire afternoon of the Edinburgh conference talking about lesbianism.

L: What was it hoped would come out of those block workshops? Why did everybody have to discuss it?

S: I think partly because we felt we had been invisible in the movement, even to ourselves in some way. I think because we thought the issues around sexuality were not being really confronted. I think we did want a Demand . . . I remember a lot of us felt very awkward because we were *the* lesbian in the block workshops, which made it a very ticklish business.

L: So it was still very much a minority?

S: Oh yes. Very very much. And we were a quite beleaguered minority in many ways.

L: The fact that the lesbian conference addressed itself to the National Women's Liberation Conference – that was quite significant?

S: That was our bid to be acknowledged within the WLM.

L: Was it a demand for a Demand?

S: The lesbian demand came in at Edinburgh, but I don't know that the point of the workshops was meant to be the demand. It was meant to be a recognition of our presence and the necessity for women to confront their own sexuality – for heterosexual women to confront their own sexuality. And I think there was a feeling, among us anyway, that radical feminism did mean being a lesbian, or would ultimately mean being a lesbian. The 'should' wasn't in there yet, but I think the assumption was there that perhaps if women did confront all the issues of their own sexuality they would naturally become lesbians. I think it was a hope.

L: Lesbians were quite strongly involved in the movement. They were a definite, active presence, although not a collective presence necessarily. Were there lesbian groups then?

S: I was in a number of what were called radical feminist groups, the constituency of which was lesbian. Most of the lesbians I knew were calling themselves radical feminists, and the consciousness raising groups I was in were all lesbian. I think that groups that were mixed were often split into two, though the lesbian part wouldn't have called themselves a lesbian group, it would just have been another radical feminist group.

L: The picture that we are getting was that radical feminism was fairly mixed. Lesbianism was not obligatory, although sexuality was obviously a strong issue. Were most of your friends lesbians then?

S: Yes, but also my next closest group of women was my writers' group, most of whom were heterosexual.

I remember it being a highly symbolic event that the woman I was having a relationship with then (who had been heterosexual up to that point) on the same weekend as Canterbury opted to go to a conference on methane – about making chicken shit into fuel in the country. This was a deeply symbolic event and had reverberations way into the future.

L: What were you and your friends involved in at the time, apart from your writers' group?

S: We were involved in the London Women's Liberation Workshop.We had not too long before that squatted Earlham Street and mucked it out and began to set it up – so we were involved in that and all the politicking around that. The initial politicking was around whether it was to be a woman-only space.

L: Were there accusations of lesbians taking over the movement, because I thought it had begun with this, it being seen that lesbians didn't want men in?

S: No, being seen that radical feminists didn't want men in. The stuff about lesbians was later. There were heterosexual radical feminists – who invariably stood with the lesbians during all those Earlham Street issues – consistently in favour of women-only space, consistently in favour of woman-identification. There were celibates too, quite a few of them around, who also seemed to be speaking the same language for quite a long time, taking the same positions and voting the same way.

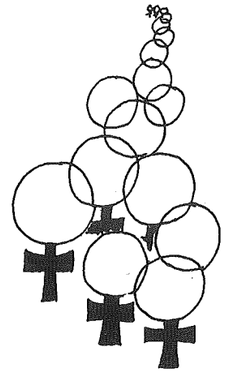
L: What were the arguments about?

S: That it would alienate a lot of women not to have men there.

L: What were you reading?

S: I was reading Judy Grahn *The Common Woman* poems; *Amazon Quarterly* – a lesbian journal, mostly literary, stories and poems. It came out for about two or three years and then folded and they put out *The Lesbian Reader* later with the best bits of it. And *Woman-Identified Woman* was the credo at that point, in fact, it still very well might be. I think at that point, personally, I was trying not to read, which has to do with my own history – in so far as I read, it would be only things written by feminists and les-

The London Women's Liberation Workshop had been previously operating as an organising centre on behalf of the many groups in London, in Shavers Place. It moved to Earlham Street in Covent Garden in 1974. In 1977 it became an autonomous women's centre called 'A Woman's Place' and is currently located at Hungerford House, Victoria Embankment, London.



bians. I was deliberately trying to read very little, though I was very hungry for anything that would reflect us. Being in the writers' group meant reading all the things that the women around me were producing, which I found quite exciting at that point.

L: Were there things in Britain?

S: There was a London newsletter — full of controversy and screaming of various sorts going on.

L: What about the social scene? And the way women were living, were there women's houses and other women's centres in London?

S: There was the South London Women's Centre in Radnor Terrace and Kingsgate in North London. I was living in Harringey and Tottenham — initially in a house with two other lesbians, one celibate woman and a bloke who left very shortly. Then I was living in a lesbian house and then forever after. I was teaching secondary school for a while, and then I quit and got a grant to go to printing college.

L: By the time you were doing a printing course, you were already thinking of the possibility of setting up women's presses?

S: Yes, that's why we went to do the printing course. The idea for a women's press came out of talking at the writers' group. There were several writers' groups and we talked a lot about our control of our own work, both our personal control of our personal work and women's control of women's writing. By '74 I was doing the printing course — with the intention of setting up a women's press — in which we would print feminist writing in Britain today.

L: Were you at that time calling yourself a separatist?

S: Yes, but I was always very careful to try and say what I meant by it. Which was that I wanted nothing to do with men, I was far more concerned with the kinds of bonds women could make with each other. A lot of my separatism involved an enormous effort at unlearning everything that I had learned, which was unfortunately a great deal and all of it male culture. I think I'd been peculiarly steeped, and I had to scrub my head out.

L: So for you, trying not to read was part of that?

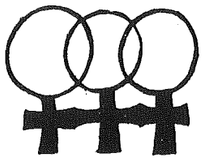
S: Yes, and I was also involved in quite tortuous efforts at not throwing babies out with the bathwater. I had enormous anguishes about could I listen to Beethoven or not. It seems absurd, but that did feel — that was quite painful. What could possibly be my relationship to all this, a lot of which I really loved? A lot of my separatism involved an intellectual effort to start from scratch with my own perceptions and, I hoped, finding other women that were doing likewise. Also I didn't want to be in men's presence if I could possibly avoid it.

L: Were you a lesbian before you were a separatist?

S: Yes, but I could hardly be described as 'out'. I had a deeply clandestine and paranoid and panicked relationship for four years with a woman in the course of which we didn't call ourselves lesbians — we were just in love with each other (as so often is the case). But as of the Women's Liberation Conference in Acton, I was out. That was in '72. But I can't say I was really out until I had a relationship with a woman who the instant she became a lesbian was out loud and clear and, to my mind, with unprecented brass. She scared me half to death by taking me to see her old aunties and writing letters announcing it hither and yonder and kissing me in Oxford Street and I was just, dragged out, as it were. And then began to find it very exhilarating. So I was really quite timid about the whole thing really.

L: When you say you were out, did that mean at work?

S: I decided to quit teaching because I couldn't see how I could go on teaching given the kinds of things I was thinking and I wanted very much to come out but I didn't see how I could and keep teaching. So about two months before the end of term, after I'd handed in my notice, I began to wear a lesbian badge to school every day. It caused absolutely no reaction of any description that I noticed. The kids, the staff, nothing. It was the one with three women's symbols and lesbian liberation written all over it which was, after all, a little hard to read. But it did have the word on it and it was a quite large badge, purple and white. I attributed that lack of response to this being England and they weren't going to register it, even if they had. But the crowning event was a kind of do for the governors and staff at which there was some dancing and I went with my lover. There was one other lesbian teacher and a bunch of women who'd been to a Women's Liberation Conference in Bristol, which was prior to Canterbury, and which they had found very exhilarating. There was this quite slow dance played and my lover and I stepped on the floor. This is the kind of brass that I never thought in a million years I'd have, to dance on an empty dance floor, much less with my lesbian lover, much less in front of the governors of the school, and the whole faculty. And I felt fantastic, I felt just wonderful, and then the music got faster, and all the women came out in a mob to dance because they'd had experience of a bunch of women dancing together at Bristol. I had no idea what the official response was to all that, it was the last night of term and I just breezed off feeling great.



L: There was a lot of activity around Gay Liberation in those days?

S: Yes, the only time I participated in that — there was a gay 'be-in' of some species at Essex University (prior to Canterbury). There were discussions and a dance in the evening. I went with the woman who was my lover. Within a couple of hours, we'd hived off all the women at this 'be-in' and made it clear that the women were to be together. I remember talking with some of the gay blokes from Bethnal Rouge, which was a mixed gay commune in Bethnal Green, about how it was obvious that men and women couldn't work together even if we all were gay. We weren't gay anyway, we were lesbians, gay was a preposterous attribution and I remember I quoted to them what an American friend of mine had said: "Gay, I ask you". It was a ludicrous term. Well, you know, it wasn't exactly frivolity. I also had a long arguinent with one of the blokes there who was in drag. He was dressed in black fishnet stockings and red satin skirt and God knows what and telling me it was a tribute to his mother! Which was balderdash, total misogyny.

L: Why did you think it was misogyny?

S: Because it was perfectly clear that it was a parody of a woman. That was the extent of my participation in gay politics.

L: Why do you think it was that a separate lesbian movement didn't develop?

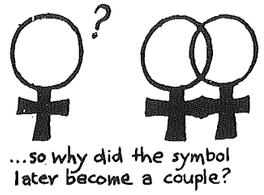
S: I think it's a complicated issue. The initial reason I was reluctant to abandon the label radical feminist was that I did not want to come out so far, that is to say, lesbian. Once I began to say lesbian loud and clear, I didn't want to abandon radical feminist because I didn't want to abandon the possibility of dialogue with straight women because I thought that dialogue was very possible and necessary and inevitable and, you know, the throbbing heart of the women's movement — women's liberation.

L: Well, what was changing? You talk about Canterbury being positive partly because it was a coming together, a collective lesbian presence, but didn't things start getting more aggressively lesbian after that?

S: I would say there was getting to be a lot more hostility towards lesbians. Some women were taking a more aggressive stance, but a lot weren't. There's always been a strong tendency to identify what is happening among lesbians with the most visible and simple-minded of us, and I really take exception to that. I take very strong exception to that. I and most of the women I know never were hostile to straight women. Whatever was going on at the workshop, where there was, apparently, some hostility — it was not our responsibility. We couldn't take responsibility because we weren't there, it didn't happen when we were there. Because there were some idiots among us doesn't mean this is the way lesbians behave. I think the whole assumption of aggressiveness would not have happened if other women had not been ready to assume it.

L: When they notice that there are lesbians, they see that as aggressive in itself — the fact that you're there.

S: I remember a long discussion with one of the heterosexual, then celibate,women, in my writers' group, who had been saying for some time that she had felt oppressed (though I don't know if that's quite the word she used) by the lesbians in the group, of whom there were two at that point, out of seven. I said I couldn't see how this was happening and we should talk about it. We talked about it for a good four hours. The group had enabled me to become clearer and clearer about being a lesbian. Was that clarity



the source of why this other woman felt oppressed? She said yes, it was a challenge to her, it threatened her, not that I was doing the threatening, but she fully recognised that the simple fact of my becoming clearer as a lesbian was inherently somehow a threat to her – it was not anything I was doing, it was how she was responding. I think at that moment she was being extremely honest, and I think that was the case much more generally, and never acknowledged as such.

L: Because it means that you have to question sexuality as a whole?

S: Yes. And your own, very intimately, never mind generally and abstractly.

L: Was it about this time also that there were a lot of accusations flying about that lesbians were taking over the movement?

S: I think not quite yet. I don't think heterosexual women were saying "lesbians are taking over", though they certainly began to after Edinburgh. That is, as soon as we were a clear presence, they began to say we were taking over, which has remained the case, I might add.

L: Perhaps because a lot of women were becoming lesbians at that time? There was a also a discussion going on about – well it wasn't called political lesbianism then, but whether you had to be born a lesbian, and what was the significance in terms of our politics of sleeping with each other and whether it was just a continuation of friendship or whether it was a withdrawal from men?

S: I don't remember that at Canterbury, I was operating on the assumption that at last I could be in love with my friends, which was what I'd always wanted in the first place! It felt like a vindication of feelings I had had, and then had knocked out of me and was now being allowed to come back to. But I don't know how much at Canterbury the idea that women *should* be lesbians was around. It was more like isn't it great to be a lesbian? My emotional memory of the kind of things women were saying is "how can they not see, it's fantastic!" It was obviously the thing to do and the way to be – there wasn't that kind of grim moral injunction aspect.

But, the more clearly lesbians were a presence, the more anti-lesbianism either revealed itself or grew. That seemed to me a one-to-one correlation – one more lesbian sticks her head up, there's some more anti-lesbian feeling. Lesbians ask for things collectively, there's yet more anti-lesbian feeling. That was one chunk of trouble; another was feeling that a lot of heterosexual radical feminists had gotten stuck, somewhere. I went on at attempting very hard to maintain this dialogue a very long time, so long a time that I think it became counter productive.

L: Are you thinking of women you were in groups with?

S: Yes, and just friends. It got to be that I felt I was saying the same thing over and over and they weren't hearing. There got to be a kind of experiential gap. Having been heterosexual I knew very well what their experience was. They had no conception of mine as a lesbian, that made a gap that became more difficult to talk across. As I lived longer and longer as a lesbian, I kept changing, but there were ways in which they didn't seem to be.

L: Do you mean there was quite a lot of active anti-lesbian feeling?

S: Anti-lesbian in the sense of, what does it matter?

L: "We don't care what you are" kind of thing? "We don't discriminate" . . . rather than questioning their own sexuality?

S: Yes. And more overt hostility about giving the movement a bad name . . . there was some of that around. Not so much giving the movement a bad name as this perpetual alienating of "other women". That is, the more visible lesbians were, the more alienated women would become.

L: "Ordinary" women would become?

S: Yes. Therefore we should all stay under wraps, presumably. Which made us all very angry indeed. Because who were we if not ordinary women, really? I mean most of us had been heterosexual, and had become lesbians one way or another, you know. There was no way we could get through our heads this distinction between us and these hypothetical ordinary women. As far as we were concerned, we were radical feminists, we had been ordinary women, we still *were* ordinary women.■

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