

Trouble and Stride

No.3

a radical feminist magazine £1.50

I have
control!

Who's holding the test-tube? Reproductive Technology

Therapy: Underneath we're all lovable

*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and
Marxist Feminism?*

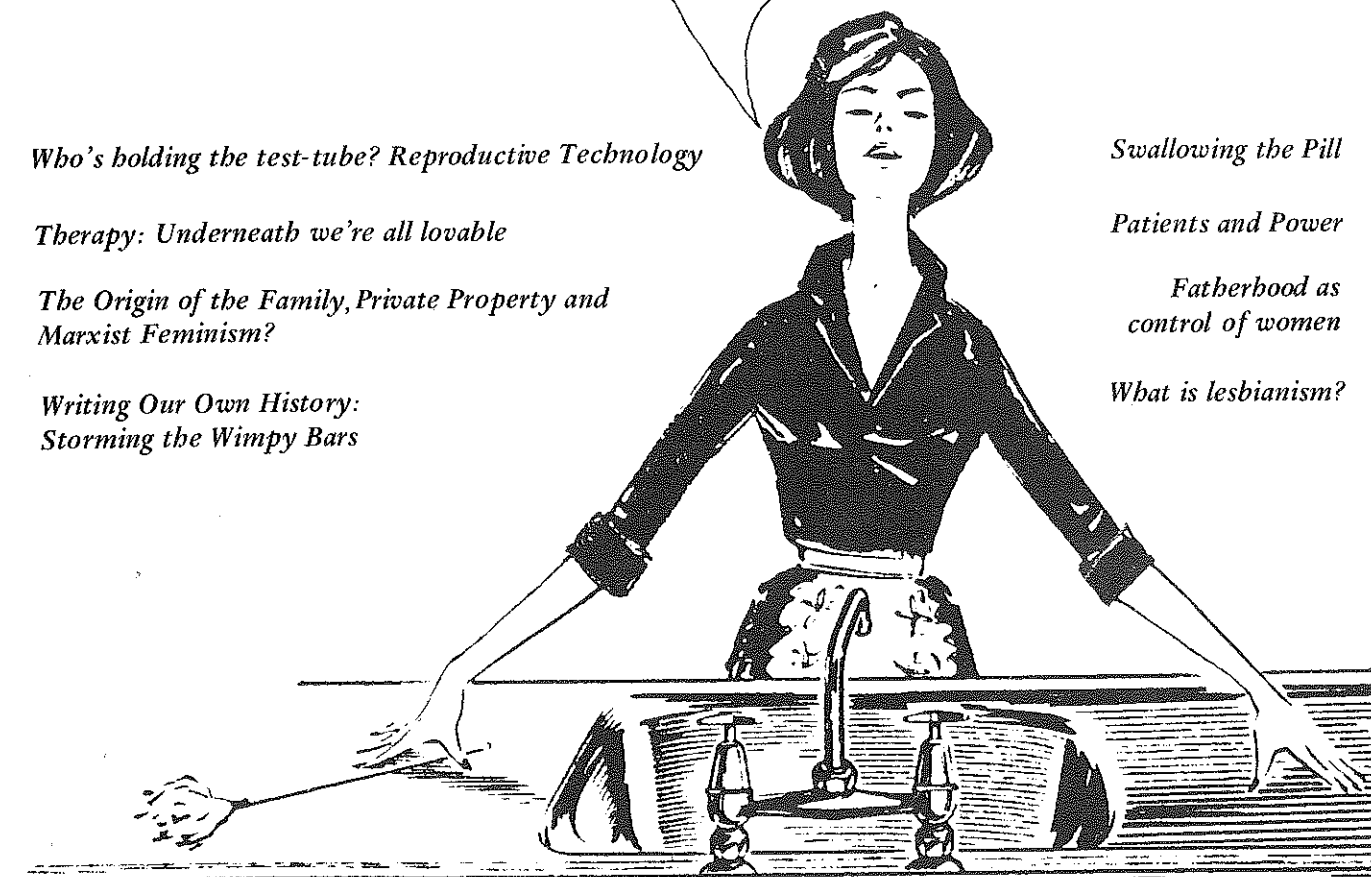
*Writing Our Own History:
Storming the Wimpy Bars*

Swallowing the Pill

Patients and Power

*Fatherhood as
control of women*

What is lesbianism?



Write for 'Trouble and Strife'!

So far, *Trouble and Strife* has mainly received articles from women known to members of the collective. We hope many others will feel free to send us suggestions or outlines for pieces they would like to write. We need your contributions.

We do not want to limit the magazine to reflecting a narrow range of views, politics or experience. We are open to ideas from any feminists and are willing to help or make suggestions if you would like us to work with you on features or interviews.

We also need cartoons, photographs and drawings to make the magazine work visually.

If you are interested in contributing to *Trouble and Strife*, get in touch with us, and the sooner the better!

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, PO Box MT16, Leeds LS17 5PY, Britain.

Trouble and Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Jalna Hanmer, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Diana Leonard and Ruth Wallsgrove, with help from Judy Stevens, Cath Jackson, Kate Taylor and Paddy Stamp (illustrations), Alice Henry, Joyce Cunningham, Pauline Bart, Renate Prince, Vanessa Coode and Rose Kernochan.

Thanks to *Spare Rib* for the use of their space.

Although we take collective responsibility for the contents, we do not necessarily agree with every article we print — only that we feel it is interesting. Unsolicited articles are welcomed; please enclose a stamped addressed envelope. We do not intend to publish poetry or fiction.

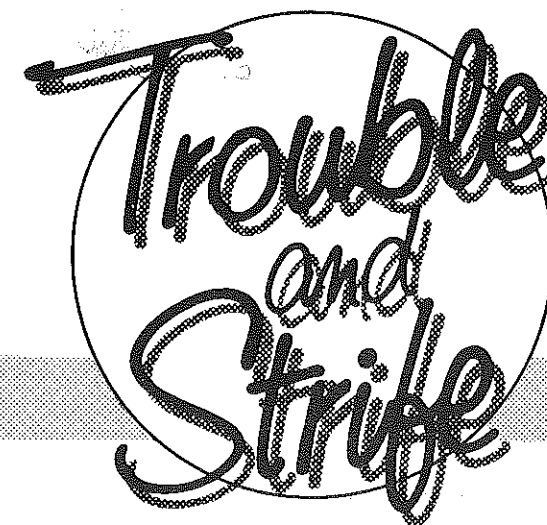
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Cover by Judy Stevens

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Letters

We would like the letters pages to be a forum for discussion. Not only do we encourage women to comment on articles in *Trouble and Strife* but also to extend and develop the issues raised. We feel that for many women writing a letter may be less off-putting than writing an article, although we welcome both. If you have ideas or experiences you want to share about issues not so far covered in *Trouble and Strife* do write to us.

"Nit-picking, quarrelsome, intolerant" views on peace and class

* I am busy trying to figure out what criteria you use for including letters. Or are you so desperate for a response that you will print whatever rubbish you receive? It certainly looks that way from some of the self-opinionated clap-trap written in response to issue No.1. Since we are all affected to some degree by the liberal principle of a 'two-sided debate' and the numbing confusion it induces, I read three of these letters before I realised what a waste of time it was.

The last thing I need when I open something claiming to be a Radical Feminist publication is a moral lecture in the guise of an academic letter (with each argument numbered and apparently countered) on the evils and horrors of war.

Judy Cavanagh who wrote the letter on Greenham says she defines Peace as freedom from oppression rather than the absence of war. My dictionary defines Peace as: "Freedom from disturbance, contention or war; ease of mind; quiet; stillness etc", and this is the definition I shall use. If the Greenham women were in a Freedom from Oppression movement instead of a peace movement, perhaps their understanding of the working of Power would be different. They might then be able to produce more convincing and effective tactics than those of holding hands around a missile base.

We must get our politics right, so that we can create the conditions for revolution and women's liberation. And 'until we do' as someone older and wiser and more famous than me once said, 'everything we try to achieve, must fail'. This is what I see as the real struggle, though of course it feels like an unreal struggle most of the time, precisely because it is not elitist and hierarchical.

*indicates letter has been cut

I certainly don't know anyone who wants to be in an elite with me. But I am not alone in my political unpopularity. There are others of us who will continue tirelessly (or tiresomely) to question and oppose other women's politics, especially when it is as anti-feminist as so much of the rhetoric from Greenham Common has been.

What Judy Cavanagh dismisses as a narrow band of opinion is the produce of a deep and unfolding consciousness of our lives as women oppressed by men. This understanding requires that we recognise co-optation for what it is, not shove it under the carpet as she attempts to when she says, "All women are feminists by experience".

We are not nice girls who think we "must be prepared to listen to other women's views". We nitpick, quarrel and gossip. We are intolerant and angry. Especially when we realise that after reading all about the virtues of being a peace woman, we are now expected to muddle through "Religion as a basis for Politics", Jill Chadwin's letter.

But enough of that, for the most enraging letter I came across and the one that finally prompted me to reply was Hilary Potts' "What is Class".

What, indeed. You could almost be forgiven for thinking that you'd made the whole thing up, and the history of industrial capitalist society had been a bad dream, when you read that all she intends to mean by middle class is "educated, articulate and able to use the media".

She seems to want to confirm a romantic notion of what it's like to be working class, (which she says she learned from visiting her granny in Manchester) else why would she demand that working class women present a "less doleful view" of our position, than Marlene Packwood did in *Trouble and Strife* No.1.

To say, as she does, that people don't have to deny their backgrounds as they used to, is a blatant lie. It totally sidesteps and denies the reality of many women's attempts to bridge the gulf between assumptions that are made about who you are when:

1. you're an 'educated' woman with perhaps a well-paid job, and
2. the woman that you know yourself to be irrespective of your financial circumstances.

It is not with nostalgia, but anger and pain, that you consider your ma's varicose veins and you dad's fascist or left-wing politics. Over the years you see your brothers and sisters horizons become more and more limited. You watch them take their sense of worth from the acquisition of new and useless goods, foisted on us all by the advertisers. They may gain their pride from a car, a telly or a garden full of builders' dirt if they're lucky enough to get one of those council houses on a new estate. And of course, a husband is one of the first items on the list.

Keeping body and soul together while working a lifetime away for these prizes is no easy task. Any passion for art (by which I mean paintings), music, or books you may be moved to describe as literature, must be firmly contained if not suffocated, and your total energy channelled instead into the precarious business of staying alive. Of coping. The fear is that if you relax this tight control, you spirit will scream with rage until they carry you off to the looney bin. And for many many working class women, this is exactly what happens.

It is not always long before you sneer contemptuously about earlier dreams and ambitions. By the time you get careers advice (and among working class women this is always the source of a good many laughs), you've probably already recognised the great myth that you can do anything if only you work hard enough, for what it is.

If you give up at this point the feeling of defeat may never leave you. If you fight on, the responsibility is enormous.

What it must be like to struggle through the British Education System hanging on to

a notion of 'bettering yourself', I can hardly imagine. But when I try to picture it, it seems to me like an unending diet. A constant curtailment of your needs to fit in with some square professor's notion of a broad-minded individual. O yes, Ms Potts, we certainly must deny our backgrounds, and our whole lived reality as well. I meet 'successful' working class lesbians every day who testify to the harm this does us.

Ponder, if you will, the implications for us all, when working class women emerge out of what you call college, with sociology degrees (three years of middle class men's class analysis) and a brave new vocabulary



with its carefully tailored yet inevitably ill-fitting Queen's English accent. What are we to do with our dislocated histories... community work?

Writers who struggle to reconcile this kind of experience are a brave few who truly seek the meaning of integrity and offer it to us as a living word in a living language. As such, Marlene Packwood has my respect, even if I disagree with aspects of her politics.



...an unending diet...

How dare Hilary Potts bait her, and the rest of us, with suggestions that we cannot define words like 'catalyst'.

Despite platitudes about feeling a prisoner of middle classness, Hilary Potts' complacency is apparent throughout her letter. She says that illiteracy is one of the things by which she defines class, not a shocking or new discovery, and goes on to suggest that Marlene change her writing style. She says it might be a more effective way of making them listen. I say that this attitude betrays her patronising arrogance. My mother would say it reflected on her upbringing, and I suppose that just about sums it up.

Kate Monster,
London.

Absorbing and excluding working class women

I would like to reply to the letter from Hilary Potts in your last issue of *Trouble and Strife* to clear up some misunderstandings. Firstly she seems to feel that I wrote my article to get at middle class women. This was not nor ever has been my intention. The reason I write what I do is for the benefit of working class and middle class women alike. I wish to expose and explore differences in order to eradicate or at the very least acknowledge them, rather than attack women for them, which I feel serves no purpose whatsoever. Furthermore, and this is central to my argument, I recognise that not all working class women have a consciousness of their identity as working class. This does not mean that we do not know we are working class. What it necessitates we recognise is that just as all black people in our society do not necessarily have a consciousness about being oppressed because they are black, and just as all women in our society do not have a consciousness about what it means to be a woman in the world today, so all working class people (and that includes working class feminists) do not necessarily have a consciousness about what it means, specifically, to be working class. Women's

Liberation taught me, through consciousness raising groups, about how I'd been brought up as a woman and the expectations and oppressions which had been foisted on to me. I hope very much that through working class women in the WLM coming together to explore our upbringing and past histories we can do the same.

Through doing this perhaps we can even begin to explore methods of language or education which may be working class. Who knows we may even come to the conclusion that we would like an education which is truly Classless, whatever that entails. We cannot know unless we have the space to explore these things autonomously.

I am sorry you misread my intentions with regard to the way the middle classes try to *absorb* the working classes. I feel that a process of exclusion and absorption does occur at the same time, though it is a complex one to observe. Put simplistically, if working class women (or men) do well, achieve scholarships or mobility into the traditionally 'middle class' professions, those around them from middle class backgrounds and education attempt, whether consciously or unconsciously, and often succeed in influencing working class people with regard to values, lifestyle, language, accent, family life etc. This means that the dominant ideology, a middle class one, exerts itself over one which it views to be 'inferior' and perhaps it is inferior on some levels. Certainly with regard to health and diet research has shown that working class people get more ill than middle class people and eat foods that are more carbohydrate-laden. This is not the point though. What is at issue is that working class women/people must be able to decide for themselves what they want rather than having values and lifestyles which are assumed to be superior, foisted on to them.

Exclusion is a more obvious issue for me. A dominant class of people simply excludes those it considers its inferiors from entering its ranks unless it is on its terms, as in *Brideshead Revisited* or *The Jewel and the Crown*, (I often like to use TV examples as they are

so available to us all and so much a part of the process of indoctrination). Thus the fine line of exclusion/absorption is the doorway to giving up your working class roots. Both operate on the level of 'force' for the middle classes are not going to leave you alone if you succeed on their terms; nor are they going to accept you if you do not accommodate yourself to their values/lifestyle. I have spent years observing all of this and see little variation to this pattern.

Please don't force me into the middle class mould you'd be so happy if I fitted into, I don't want to go into it nor do I feel a part of it either. In fact I am very much in limbo right now, with a working class background and lifestyle, resisting middle class absorption, trying to create a new space for working class women. I expect to be here for the rest of my lifetime. I can't feel 'jealous' of what 'they' have (as you say) for I honestly don't know if it's any good to me. I have enough to contend with right now with exploring working class women's existence.

In sisterhood,
Marlene Packwood,
London.

What about mothers?

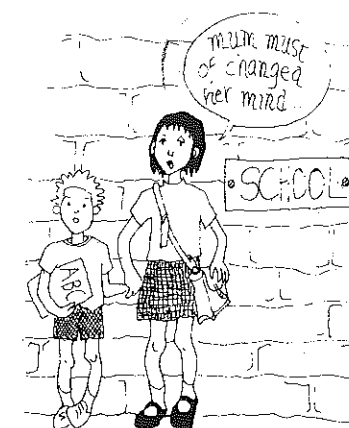
- * The first thing I saw when I opened the magazine was Cath Jackson's cartoons accompanying the Greenham letters — and that one with the worried face, the dishevelled hair and a bent back over the pushchair is me I suppose? It would take a real PR job to turn me into the cool, immaculate, expensively-booted dyke on the opposite page — but I am a lesbian!

Since I left the (comparatively) safe haven of heterosexual coupledness 6 years ago (and of course I had particular pressures, anxieties, oppression to cope with there), I've felt as though I've been thrown to the winds. I have two children, a boy and a girl, and oh do I feel oppressed now. From each side I am watched — by the State, through its institutions, the custody courts, schools, welfare officers, doctors, concerned neighbours and relatives — they are ready to spring if I make too many false moves,

radical moves. And these last weeks I've been thinking hard about the conflicts of being a woman with children who wants to have other strong and meaningful relationships and how I end up walking a tightrope juggling with fifteen coloured glass balls. One false move

I am not obsessed with my children — I want to live my life too. I do *love* them, I want to live with them — and the reality is that I *must* live with them and take responsibility for them, whatever the weather, the state of the nation, or my temper. Having had children I must settle on my bed because hardly anyone is going to share that responsibility without asking a very high price — as a lover once said when I complained that I could not rush out to meet her, fifty miles away, because there was no-one to meet the children from school — "It was your choice to have children". And it is my choice to be a lesbian — and I quite often feel bloody miserable because of it, and I'd better not complain because someone is going to say, "It's your choice". This is all rather garbled because of a weight of troubled feelings (and a horrible sense of knowing all the responses to what I say, which will leave me as powerless, if not more demoralised, as before). I'd like to write something based on my own experiences and those of other women I know, both with and without children and to try to face some of the realities of having children without prescribing limits, denying possibilities.

A lot of what I read in the feminist press would make it appear that women in the WLM either don't have children, or wish they hadn't, or are phasing children out. But many women I know either have children (and feel wild with the conflicts and dilemmas imposed on them because of it), or *want* children — even though this is meant to be a negative and soul-destroying experience — or have just lost custody of their children and are receiving no support, therapy or understanding because apparently they've got rid of the problem (but they're feeling guilty, bereaved, spaced-out,



insecure). I'd like to write something that counterbalances this impression — women do have children and do love them — and it is harrowing, tiring, unrewarded, unacknowledged — a very large chunk of our lives. Just because *Woman's Own* has articles about child-rearing (not that many actually, maybe they are getting more right-on) doesn't mean feminists can't talk about it too — just because Mary Whitehouse writes about pornography doesn't mean Susan Griffin has to pipe down.

I've really enjoyed the magazine. It's a long time since I've felt in touch with feminism as an active positive ideology. I do appreciate the thoughtful articles, the sense of compassion and commitment. That is why I'm unhappy about the anti-Greenham Women articles, there's a sense of the old bandwagon of rightness moving there that I feel uneasy about. It's not that we shouldn't question the basis of the peace movement — more that a lot of assumptions are being passed around and gradually fossilized into hard-line attitudes. The French WLM gave some idea of the process by which such lines are drawn, I think.

Anyhow, best wishes and congratulations for/on the magazine, in sisterhood, Anira Rowanchild, Leominster.

Lesbian radical feminism: the only radical feminism?

These days in the women's liberation movement many feminists seem to be proving an old saw we once knew we had to disprove — that to complain, particularly against those with power, and certainly against those who merely work within the power structure, is terrible . . . unseemly?, cruel?, insufficiently caring about how the accused feels?, too loud?, uncouth?, unwomanly?, divisive?, shrill?, unsisterly?, dogmatic?

The women who call themselves 'Radical Feminists' in France (see last issue, 'What's the French for Political Lesbianism?') echo the limp liberal language of many women in Britain. What is this crap about 'closed'

versus 'open', this blah about 'dogma'? Radical feminists became an identifiable political grouping, more than a decade ago, on the grounds that we understood that it is *men* who oppress women and that we were/are prepared to say so, and go on saying so, and act on that analysis. We/I — lesbian radical feminists — are indeed 'open' to further political development, *new* thought on what we as lesbians can do together. Having realised that heterosexuality is one of the oppressions imposed upon us, it would be absurd to suggest we should be 'open' to reconsidering it, to stepping backwards. What is 'open' about the tedious traditional modes which keep us down? And what is 'closed' about focusing on women exclusively, trying to learn what we can be without the massive constraints that heterosexuality continues to force on all women (lesbians included)? Is it 'dogmatic' to state clearly and honestly one's actual thoughts and beliefs?

Maybe some women who once knew that men are the enemy of women are now indeed "collaborating". In the Oxford English Dictionary "collaborate" means to co-operate, as in work together. Its second meaning, the one used in the article 'What's the French for Political Lesbian', refers to working with an enemy. You can't co-operate with an enemy unless you recognise it's an enemy. There is an implication of choice, knowledgeable betrayal. Otherwise women are just being pleasant (to men) and getting on with life. The people who collaborated in France in WW2 were not actually performing unusual acts either, for the most part. They were merely buying, selling, cooking, fucking. It was for and with whom they did these things that was meaningful.

The French 'Radical Feminists' not only suggested that women who knowingly co-operate with the enemies of women are serious feminists but they also shun the word "collaborator" with a ladylike abhorrence. Claire Duchén attempts to explain the refusal of the term by saying that in France it is "heavy with the resonance of Vichy and Nazi occupation". Well, yes, the

term is heavy and not just for the French, as she implies.

The reference to those non-Jews prepared to aid in whatever way in our/my extermination is not a term I use lightly either. Collaboration is not unique to France. To suggest that the use of the word should be avoided as somehow especially . . . what?, uncouth?, is to me a way of not wanting to recall that WW2 did happen, that millions of Jews were indeed murdered and that millions of others, not Nazis, aided in that attempted genocide. Some anti-semitism today takes precisely that form of refusing to acknowledge the real situation of Jews both now and a mere 40 years ago and over a history of thousands of years of persecution. As a Jew I want it said, understood — not avoided. I am a lesbian radical feminist and a Jew who is now left wondering why 'Radical Feminists' on *Nouvelles Questions Feministes* are trivialising the situation of women, all women, somehow, bizarrely, in the name of an anti-semitic 'propriety'.

The anti-lesbianism of this stance is similar to the current British version. We seem to have stepped back into a period when personal private sexual preference is tolerated but any assertion of the political validity of lesbianism is derided. Jews too are tolerated provided we don't go on about it.

It's very painful when women who *know* men are the enemy consort with them. It makes me very wary, certainly. But these women are working not only with my enemies but with their own. I know that lesbianism is essential to the ultimate liberation of all women and it does us all a disservice to pretend I know or mean something else. The heterosexual feminists I know do not want to be patronised, do not want lesbians to treat them with kid gloves. I think we must demand rigorous thought and action of ourselves, of all women; and to sham approval of heterosexual feminism is hardly that.

After all, most heterosexual feminists already know what most lesbians think about heterosexuality. They've read *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Exis-*

tence by Adrienne Rich and probably even *Love Your Enemy*? Some of them may be glad to be let off the hook, not challenged. Others feel justifiably patronised. If we are all in this together, working to end our common oppression, then we have a responsibility to enact our feminism with the greatest sincerity we possess. I don't intend to soft pedal that I believe that lesbian feminism is one step ahead, that I know that all women would be better off if we were all lesbians. To say otherwise would be to lie to women whose energy I need, whose intellect I need and must respect. If the WLM is for all of us it must be for the truth in all of us, real dialogue, opinions truly spoken . . . not evaded with this sort of liberal bullshit which merely masks both old-fashioned anti-lesbianism and a subtly phrased patronisation of women in general.

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
If not now, when?
Rabbi Hillel, first century, CE.

The fudging of what radical feminism originally meant seems to me part of a general drift to less feminist thinking, a return to various traditional politics. For example, although race and class are in the forefront of movement considerations these days, which is a relatively new development, they are most frequently addressed in old socialist terms, enhanced with the odd bit of feminist jargon. We have yet to see much of the process-oriented personal approach that radical feminism has developed. The traditional structures offered by the left are readily available but not seriously challenging nor particularly effective. Because lots of women can see that these issues must be addressed *now*, there is a great grabbing for any methods going, and thus many of us have been involved in the sort of inconclusive lip service that traditional left politics ultimately is. But we know that Marx left out women, and certainly lesbians, and that the left has studiously ignored Jews when not being more actively anti-semitic.

So women become understandably frustrated (in all the ways that led to the formation of the women's liberation movement

all those years ago). Lately I've been hearing middle class women complaining not about the ways that class operates among us, but about being called to task. I'm told that some white women are 'tiring' of being 'blamed' for racism. I know there are Gentiles bored with the 'paranoia' of Jews. And I've heard lesbians asked to realise that there are 'real' problems in other parts of the world, so please shut up about lesbianism (this at a lesbian writers' conference). We seem to be losing hold of the few truly feminist ideas and ways of working that we managed to create in the last few years.

So, then, this letter is a plea for more rigorous radical feminist thought and action. Radical feminism need not be the vague anything that's not explicitly socialist that it's so often assumed to be in the UK and apparently stated to be in France. Firstly, it's crucial that we assert the necessity for lesbianism as a means of freeing all women from the oppression of all men. Lesbians have provided most of the vitality that fuels the WLM and it's time we acknowledge that rather than politely refrained from mentioning it. Out of an assertion of lesbian radical feminism we could address seriously the ways race and class operate among us and begin to act to dismantle those, while retaining the richness of our origins, our lived identities, and what, as lesbians, we can begin to see as freedom for women.

In sisterhood,
Lilian Mohin.

Putting our money where our mouths are

I thought I'd write and tell you how much I enjoyed the first two issues, although I don't, of course, agree with everything in them.

I'd like to comment on Zoe Fairbairns' letter in No.2. My feelings on the subject of paying women for writing are rather ambiguous. I'd be willing to submit articles whether money was involved or not — but then I can afford to.

I think women should have the *option* of being paid for writing for *Trouble and Strife*. The better-off among us can always refuse payment or give it back as a donation. What do other readers think?

Money is a subject that is rarely approached directly by feminists. But clearly it is necessary if women aren't to be financially penalised because they put their energies into feminism. Middle-class feminists generally have more money than they need for day-to-day living, and the surplus is stock-piled for cars, houses, trips abroad, etc. I'd like to see us putting our money where our mouths are — by donating 10% of our income annually to the WLM, no strings attached. Then working class women and Women of Colour could have conferences, centres, etc, and contributors to publications and women doing 'voluntary work' for campaigns could receive *some* money, if not the going rate for the skill involved. I realise that the organisational problems would be horrendous, and who decides where the money goes anyway, but I think we have to accept that in society at present money is power, and we're not going to get very far, inside or outside the system, without it. Again, do any other women think this idea has possibilities?

The articles on *WIRES* and the 1974 Lesbian Conference both provided background information to the WLM, which I probably wouldn't have learnt, even if I had stayed in Britain, and I think they are a valuable contribution to our Herstory. How about something about the women who started *Spare Rib*? I'd also be interested in hearing from women who went to the 1978 National Conference in Birmingham, which is, I've heard, when Women of Colour decided not to work with the mainstream movement. And I'd *really* like to read something by a working-class woman on the *advantages* of being working-class, and by a middle-class woman on her *disadvantages*.

Looking forward to receiving No.3.

Yours in Sisterhood,
Amanda Hayman,
Tokyo.

NAC and SAC continue

* Behind the facade of objective journalism presented by Alice Henry in "Whose Right to Decide" (*Trouble and Strife* No.2) lies an attack on other women, by the use of innuendo, half-truths and distortions. Worse still, she uses the arguments and theories of the anti-abortionists in order to attack the National Abortion Campaign.

Let me make my own position clear. I am the Co-ordinator of the Scottish Abortion Campaign, a part of NAC. I am not and never have been a member of any political grouping. In stating the latter I may seem to give some legitimacy to the McCarthyite approach of the article, but the guilt by association technique is designed to entrap those who "plead the 5th amendment", and I have nothing to be guilty about, and a lot to be angry about!

There is not enough space to cover every single distortion in the article, but I will pinpoint a few of the factual inaccuracies and omissions. The article states that the 'Scottish NAC newsletter' did not report that NAC was splitting into two groups. We issue minutes of our meetings — not a newsletter — and the minutes do make clear that 2 separate groups had been formed.

Also obscured is the fact that, in order to take the debate to as wide an audience as possible, we arranged for two women who supported the 'broadening out' of NAC to put their point of view at a specially convened meeting in Glasgow. The vast majority of the 50 or so who attended from all over Scotland were from other women's groups, and their decision was unanimously in support of NAC continuing to prioritise abortion. Does that raise the spectre that all Scottish feminists are controlled by the Fourth International?!

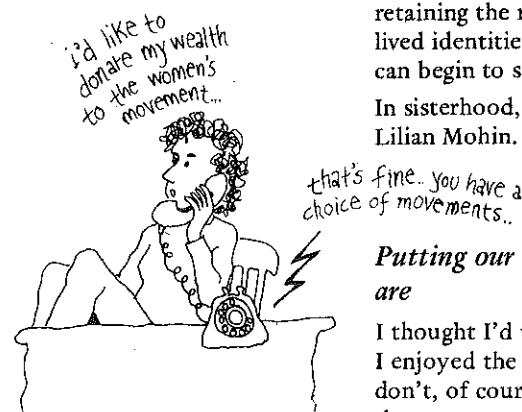
As for the specific smear embodied in the article, it is important to say that, yes, there are women in NAC who are members of the Socialist League. Does your contributor believe that women who are members of political parties should be excluded

from participation in the WLM? All political parties are mixed sex, and on Alice Henry's rationale many women must stand accused of bringing male politics into feminism.

Then we have the reference to two men at NAC Conference, and the 'informal' discussions afterwards, when men are supposed to have talked about 'fems' making a fuss. The two men at NAC Conference spoke for, and voted for the dissolution of NAC. It transpired afterwards that both were anti-abortionists, there to further their own aims. One in fact used the debate at the Conference to try to stop his union affiliating to NAC at their National Conference (National Association of Probation Officers) just two weeks later. He failed narrowly, but there is no doubt that the anti-abortionists are rejoicing at the present situation, where NAC is under attack, not only from the establishment and the anti-abortionists, but apparently from a section of the Women's Movement itself.

The anti-abortion tactic of opposing abortion on pseudo-feminist grounds seems to be paying off. And the underlying suggestions in Alice Henry's article are more dangerous than the open witch-hunt it promotes. Firstly, she poses the continuance of NAC as an abortion campaign as "the political line of a mixed-sex political party". She leaves the reader with little doubt that she believes it is *the men* in the political party who want to have abortion rights promoted — she could hardly raise her objection if she thought it was the women. She shows very little respect for women in believing that they are so easily manipulated by men. But Alice Henry goes further. She openly suggests that Socialist League women might have wanted to support the dissolution of NAC, but did not dare say so at Conference! She also poses the question whether men would be more reluctant to support women's rights to decide on child-bearing and sexuality, than the availability of abortion.

All this fits neatly into the anti-abortionists' claim that women them-



PADDY STAMP



selves do not want abortion and that it is men who want it and who use it to avoid their responsibility. (It appears to have escaped their notice that men have been avoiding their responsibilities for centuries, and inevitably it is women who are left literally and figuratively 'holding the baby'.)

'Women for Life', an anti-abortion organisation, promotes this current theme in various leaflets, eg "Is it really the woman who advocates abortion... or is the pregnancy unwanted by the MAN" (*Your Body - Whose Choice*), and "Next time you see a man with a banner saying 'A Woman's Right to Choose', think. Is he not rather promoting 'A Man's Right to Use'?" (*A Message to Men... from Women for Life*). Speaking at a local meeting recently a (male) SPUC full-timer described abortion as "a plot of the patriarchy", and Lord Robertson, moving a Bill in the House of Lords to curtail women's abortion rights, said he was doing so to protect women, as abortion gave men an escape route.

Both the explicit witch-hunting in Alice Henry's article and the implicit support it provides for the anti-abortionists are despicable, and I trust that the sisters involved in the new Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign will dissociate themselves from such tactics.

Having made a number of essential points, I would like to turn from the negative approach, to a positive statement about the National Abortion Campaign - a campaign promoted and led by women to defend and strengthen women's right to choose on abortion.

NAC is not 'New NAC', but a continuing campaign in our fight for abortion rights. We have no objection to women forming a separate campaign to fight on the wider issues, and would like to work with them. What was always objected to was the attempt to dissolve NAC and prevent any women continuing to prioritise the abortion fight. No woman below the menopause can be certain that she will not some day face

an unwanted pregnancy, and we believe that we must go on fighting until a woman's right to continue or terminate a pregnancy is established both in law and in practice.

Since the split, we have had no premises or workers, but our energy has carried us through. We have now produced two new leaflets, one on NAC's aims, and one on the anti-abortionists, and two more are in the pipeline, and will almost certainly exist by the time you read this. We also produced a new badge, highlighting the demand for NHS facilities, to coincide with the Conference we organised on abortion facilities on 25 February.

The Conference 'Abortion Rights and Facilities - What Future?' was a great success. It covered a wide range of topics from anti-abortion activity, to NHS cuts, to the experience of black women in relation to the '67 Act.

Ester Goulding, a young black woman, exploded the myth that black women do not want to have abortions, and went on to explain the two-way pressure they often encounter. She said that within their own communities black women are often pressurised into having children, as if their right to exist is proved by motherhood, and at the same time white doctors and counsellors try to push them in the opposite direction.

The attention of the Conference was focussed to a large extent on the Report of the Royal College of Gynaecologists, which proves conclusively that a central reason for late abortions is the failure of the NHS to provide adequate facilities. The anti-abortionists have seized on a 2½ line reference within the 100 page report which indicates the possibility of a foetus surviving at less than 28 weeks. They have used this to fuel their latest attack, an attempt to reduce the time limit within abortion is legal in England and Wales.

Women at the Conference decided that we must seize the rest of the Report to fuel our attack on the shocking lack of NHS facilities available to women, and that we

must go on the offensive to change the practice which allows massive discrepancies to exist throughout the country. The way in which the present law can be manipulated is underlined by the fact that abortion law in Scotland is more liberal and there is no legal time limit for abortion, but the practice is less liberal, and thousands of Scottish women have had to travel to England to obtain abortions.

What we must do now is to expose and campaign against the prejudice inherent in the system, and the deliberate underfunding of the Health Service by the Tories.

Any woman who wants to work with us to fight for women's abortion rights is more than welcome - whatever your political background, party card or lack of one!

Yours in sisterhood,
Carol Thomson.

As we said in our first issue, 'Trouble and Strife makes no claim to be "objective" in our reporting. We don't regret publishing Alice Henry's account of the National Abortion Campaign split, and welcome Carol Thomson's writing to us to put her point of view to our readership.

We do not think that publicly naming the political commitments of those involved in a political debate is witch-hunting, McCarthyism or innuendo. There is a long history of women from socialist organisations working in an organised way within feminist groups - and whenever other feminists refer to such organisations by name, they have been met with this sort of accusation. If a woman belongs to a group which has a policy on the issue being debated, surely her membership of that group is relevant to her part in the debate? Why is there always this claim that it is unfair to expect women to acknowledge within the movement political beliefs which they are presumably happy to proclaim elsewhere - indeed, which they surely intend to proclaim in joining a political group or party?
Trouble and Strife.

Euphoria at Canterbury: lesbian history

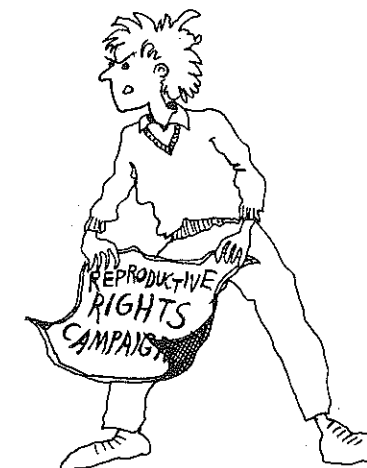
I am glad that you are putting us back into the history of the WLM and felt warmed and perhaps nostalgic on reading Sheila Shulman's piece.

However, for me, she understated the euphoria and amazement of the Canterbury and Edinburgh conferences, and I did not recognise in her, necessarily personal, account, my own acute and quite spontaneous sense of being at a turning point of history when I stood near a pillar in the James Gillespie school hall and the 'lesbian demand' was actually taken seriously, and passed! I, and others, felt overwhelmed.

The clue as to why this sense is somehow missing from her account lies in her statement near the end of the piece, that "most of us had been heterosexual" and did not feel different from "hypothetical ordinary women".

I doubt that it is true that most of us at Canterbury had been heterosexual though it may have been different at Edinburgh. I had certainly never been heterosexual, and I did feel different from other women! After all, I was attracted to women, fell in love with women, and was at best indifferent to men. That made for a sharp sense of disorientation and fear (though oddly never guilt) in my identity. I did not know any other lesbians until I was 21 and mostly felt either I was mad or the world was. Obviously my experience is not unique, and I feel it should not be left out of account.

The cataclysmic experience of Canterbury, Edinburgh and the development of the WLM generally, launched me and other lesbians into a sense of solidarity with a far greater number of people - straight women - than we had ever dreamed would be possible. This, through political analysis and sisterhood, a term of joyous recognition, without the overtones of grim dogmatism which it has since, perhaps inevitably, accrued. I just wanted to put this on record!
In sisterhood,
Caroline Natzler,
London.



NAC are producing a pamphlet on the RCOG Report to be used for campaigning work. The pamphlet, leaflets and badges can be obtained from NAC, 47 Waldram Park Road, London SE23 (041-993 2071).

Lesbian Custody and the New Myth of the Father

Lesbians nearly always lose custody of their children if the father chooses to fight for them. But it's not only the children of lesbians that men fear growing up without fathers. Lynne Harne, a white lesbian mother involved in the Lesbian Custody Campaign in London, writes about how men take revenge against women who try to escape their control.

The experience of lesbian mothers involved in custody battles has been written about to some degree elsewhere.¹ But I feel it is important to take account of the extent and viciousness of the reaction from men when their wives or girlfriends leave them as lesbians, (or subsequently become lesbians), taking the children with them, and the general ideology of fatherhood which is called in to protect male control over women and children.

I cannot be specific about the circumstances of mothers that I know about through the Lesbian Custody Campaign, because of danger to them, but I can say that many women have experienced reprisals for daring to be lesbians and removing themselves and the children from male control. It is not uncommon for mothers and their lovers to be physically assaulted, for lovers to be raped or sexually abused, or for lesbian mothers to be accused of being mad, starving their children, being insensitive to their children's needs, or simply being bad mothers.

It is not unusual for such violent behaviour, sexual abuse, and false accusations to be made by an anti-sexist, socialist or liberal man, who may state that he believes in the equality of woman, the swapping of gender roles and the freedom for people to decide their own sexual orientation. He may well take his revenge beyond such harassment and even beyond the courts to, for example, contacting his ex-wife's employers and abusing her to them.

In court he may say that if the children go to the mother, they will be deprived of a

'normal' family background (the normal background that he can supply, as he has usually found a new wife or girlfriend, by this time) that the children will suffer from the lack of a 'father figure' (the mother's lover, if there is one, not being suitable for this role). Alternatively, his liberal facade may crack, and he will say that he doesn't want dirty perverts corrupting his children, and introducing them to a lesbian life style.



Not uncommonly his statements will be backed up by court welfare officers and psychiatrists, who will support the ideology of fatherhood by saying that, without a father figure and male model, the child will suffer a confusion of gender identity and behaviour — boys will not develop along strong masculine lines, girls will learn that they don't have to be available to, and can exist without, men. Further, they will say that children will suffer the social stigma of not growing up in a heterosexual household.

Of mothers who win custody through the courts, and a few do, they have to show that the transmission of male control (values) will be continued by proxy (that is, without an actual male being present in the household). She may be ordered not to advocate lesbian or feminist politics to her children, not to engage in lesbian feminist politics, not to tell her children that she is a lesbian, or to see her lover in the children's presence. All this may be policed by a supervision order (ie a social worker visiting the house

figures in their lives, including continuing contact with the father (if there is one) — more in fact than single heterosexual mothers — and that children conform to the correct stereotypes of gender behaviour. Here are some sickening examples of such studies.

At four, Sara asked her mother if girls can marry girls and she was told they could choose a lover of either sex. Mother states she hopes Sara will be heterosexual in adult life. Sara enjoys dressing up as a princess in mother's high-heeled shoes and negligee, and plays Mommie in fantasy games. Sara's grandfather, whom she had visited only twice in her life, was installed in her mind as an 'important and valued figure'.

and

Martin, (aged 6½) dislikes rough play, but shows no current feminine interests. He enjoys building, prefers the company of boys and has a girlfriend who he plans to marry.

(Taken from an American study called *Lesbian mothers and their children, A Comparative Survey*, by Martha Kirkpatrick et al. 1981.)

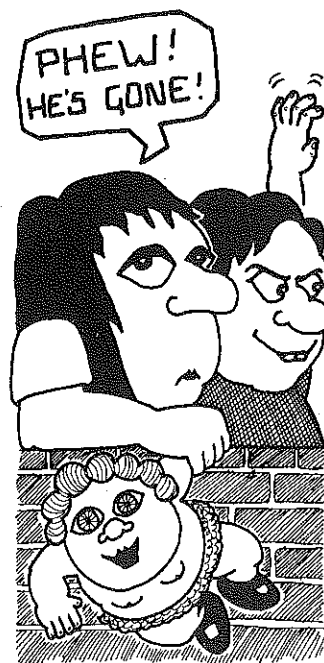
Whilst these studies maybe strategic, in helping to win lesbian custody battles (the



at intervals to make sure that the mother is complying with the conditions of her having custody). Often the price of getting custody is high.

A new batch of psychological studies (some of them commissioned in support of lesbian mothers) fall over themselves backwards to show that lesbian mothers do not encourage their children to be lesbian or homosexual, that children have many male

recent British study has yet to prove itself), they take as their basic premise that lesbianism is a sickness or abnormality that can only be defined negatively against heterosexuality, and the heterosexual family. They involve a denial that lesbian and feminism influence may be good for the children, and that being brought up without a male may be positively beneficial. They still take the view that lesbianism has to be



explained as some quirk of a faulty and inadequate personality. Indeed, the study quoted above suggests that lesbians may have a *special* need for an intimate relationship not found in heterosexual marriages; since most of the lesbian mothers in this study breast-fed "this might represent an attempt to satisfy this hunger (for intimacy) which later expressed itself in a lesbian relationship". With psychological studies like these who needs psychologists?!

Until recently the need for male models and the father figure argument has only been applied to lesbian custody situations. Perhaps it was assumed by the courts that the heterosexual mother and her children would enter under the control and protection of another male, who would transmit the appropriate male values to the children.

Divorce has, however, increased to one in five of all marriages, and the number of one-parent families (mainly women) has increased to one in seven nationally. Also in the mid-seventies women made some legal gains (on paper at least) in terms of male violence and being able to get violent men out of the home ('ouster injunctions'). All this, and the increase in the number of women choosing not to remarry, has produced a backlash in terms of fathers' rights and a new ideology of fatherhood.

The spearhead of such a movement can be seen to be led by Families Need Fathers (FNF), but it can also be seen to be supported in a more subtle form by Men against Sexism groups. FNF, in its more extreme statements, see the *authority* of the father within the family being eroded; in a 1981 document it states that urban violence and delinquency are the result of a lack of paternal influence! FNF was in fact formed in 1974, only a year after married women were given equal rights to custody (Guardianship of Minors Act, 1973). Before this, whilst married women had some rights to custody, and in practice often got care and control of their children, under common law fathers had complete rights over their legitimate children.

Since its beginning, FNF has on the one hand argued that father's rights are being eroded, whilst on the other it claims that it only wants what's best for the children —

that children *need* two parents. It has been developing psychological theories to fit in with this premise. Bowlby and maternal deprivation theories have, according to it, undermined the importance and the role of the father in a child's development. The members' underlying motives, to regain some of the control that men have lost, can be seen quite clearly in some of its past documents; for instance, in its 'evidence' on Violence in Marriage submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee of the same name in 1975. It stated that, "We believe it fair to see much of the physical violence . . . as a final response to violence inflicted in other forms, especially by women, verbal violence", and they go on to state that the causes of domestic violence are due to (male) frustration. FNF does not explain, however, why it is that men beat women up and not the other way around. Where violence has been involved (FNF calls it alleged violence) it emphasises that men must still have access to their children. It states that "It is always better for children to see their father" — and fathers who are excluded from their children may resort to (justifiable) assault, manslaughter and even murder. In a 1981 document it states that there has been a "deep psychological wound" imposed on fathers who do not get custody which is "little appreciated by the divorce courts".

In another document (Children and Family Breakdown; Custody and Access, A Code of Practice, 1982) FNF outline the kind of access the non-custodial parent, read father, should have. Where violence has taken place, a separate room should be set aside for the father to have access to *his* infant (under three) several times a week. When the child is older, staying access should be allowed at least once a week, but visits to the child should be more often.

FNF, along with the Campaign for Equality in Divorce, have had considerable influence on the pressure to end maintenance to women, "alimony drones", and have pushed for the new conciliation procedures, where the divorcing parties have come together informally to try and work out some "reasonable" arrangement about the children. They have also pushed for joint custody to be made the norm. So far they

have been fairly successful. A recent government committee, the Booth Committee, set up under the Lord Chancellor's office to look at divorce procedure, is considering recommending that joint custody is the *normal order* unless the parties involved can show good reason why it should be otherwise. Whilst a joint custody order will mean one parent will retain care and control, it enables the father to intervene and interfere in the mother's life and to veto important decisions that she might want to make about her children.

Lesbian mothers are well aware of the effects of joint custody and increased access orders. Joint custody is often agreed as a strategy in order to keep the case out of the courts, where the mother would most probably lose. Often the father does not actually want care and control of the children — this would mean too much hard graft — but he wants control over what happens to them, the best access times, and a reason to interfere. Frequent access is often agreed under the threat that the father will use her lesbianism to contest custody unless she agrees. Father's access, for lesbian mothers as for other women, is often a huge time of stress, when he either does not turn up on time, returns the children late, tired and upset, or does not return them when he says he will, leaving the mother to wonder whether he has 'kidnapped' the children or intends to go to court. He may frequently use access times to harass the mother, as well. Some men go back to court years later, when the hardest of the childrearing years are over, bring up lesbianism, and get care and control of the children.

Of course some may argue that since men are doing more of the childcare they ought to be given more recognition. But there are two points here. One is that there is not much evidence of them actually doing this, and the second is that their involvement in childrearing, since they have the power, can only mean a transmission and reinforcement of those values that as feminists we are working so hard to get rid of.

Those of us who are lesbian mothers, who for one reason or another still have

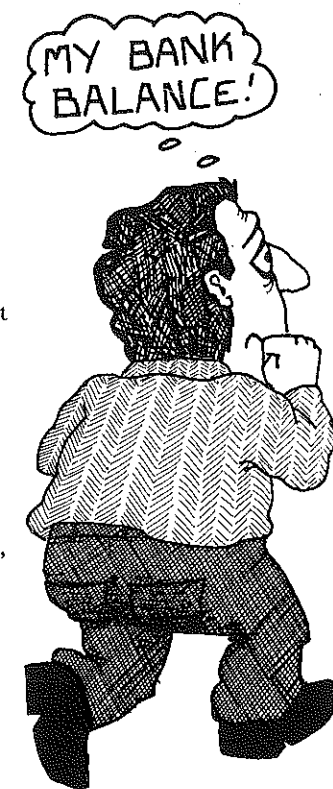
fathers involved with our children, know only too well how these fathers are able to undermine our own relationships with our children, and to put down our own values. Of course they have the backing of a male supremacist and anti-lesbian society in this, so it is not that difficult for them to enforce their values. Fatherhood denotes status and power in our society. Up until the end of the nineteenth century fatherhood meant literally owning women and children as chattels. To act without the father's (male) approval is still very risky.

Some lesbian mothers are still dependent on men for doing at least some of the childcare, and this raises the question of how far lesbians without children should share childcare with those who have. Whilst many lesbians have made the positive choice not to have children, and I for one would never say that motherhood is the next best thing to sliced bread, unless more support and consideration is forthcoming from more lesbian feminists, some lesbian mothers will continue to rely on men for childcare. This can only perpetuate the situation of women's dependence on men, the transmission of male values and control, and the possible sexual abuse of our daughters. It will also increase the power of such groups as Men against Sexism.

Many of us as lesbian mothers have had to come out twice in the movement: as lesbians and as mothers. The guilt about imposing our experience as mothers on other women is still there. Also, as lesbians with children we are continually in the front line for anti-lesbian attacks, either through threats over custody, or from fathers who have access to our children, or from other agencies such as our children's schools, and the social and health services. We need support. Whilst there are a growing number of us in lesbian mother groups, and custody groups, many of us still experience isolation, and lack of validation both from within the movement and outside of it.

As women with children who are stating by our existence and our life-style that we don't need and depend on men, either sexually, emotionally, or for protection, the extent of their reaction and revenge is not really very surprising.

Since last January, when lesbian mothers held a conference in the north of England to organise around the whole issue of lesbian custody, support networks and lesbian custody groups have been set up around the country. Lesbian mothers wanting support, whether they are going through a custody case or not, can contact their local Lesbian Line for their nearest local group or can write to London Lesbian Line, BM Box 1514, London WCN 3XX. Lesbian mothers who need to find a sympathetic solicitor can phone or write to Lynne, Lesbian Custody Group, Rights of Women, 52/54 Featherstone St, London EC1 (01-278 6349).



Rights of Women, a feminist legal collective, is investigating how the law affects lesbians with children. If you are a lesbian mother and have any experiences good or bad about custody and access arrangements, or dealings with the social services like care orders or more generally about how the law has affected your choices and lifestyle, then please contact the Lesbian Custody Group, c/o Rights of Women.

'sharing a particular pain'*

What impact does it have on your life to study violence against women? Liz Kelly writes about how it made her more aware of the threat and about what she learnt about how women really deal with violence in their lives.

Most of my local feminist activity over the past ten years has been work around the issue of violence against women, and I am still involved in my local refuge group. The decision to do research followed two years of paid community work and lots of discussions about the relevance of universities to 'real life'. I wanted to talk to women about experiences of violence in the context of their lives, rather than as some abstract, separate event. I wanted to look deeper at some ideas I had about male violence and at how complex women's experiences are, and postgraduate research seemed the only way to have the time and resources to do this.

The initial aims of the project were: to look at the links between the different forms of sexual violence in terms of the experiences themselves and how women coped with and understood them; to look at how agencies respond and general attitudes to sexual violence and to discuss the long-term effects of sexual violence.

Living with the fear

I began, like most of us do, by reading and reading some more. My life became saturated with violence against women. I was spending most days reading articles or books that infuriated or challenged me. Aspects of what I had read or my reactions to it would pop into my head at inappropriate moments. I became even more aware of how surrounded we are by images, comments, jokes and real events connected to sexual violence. It was impossible to watch television, read a newspaper, go to the cinema or a pub, walk down a street, or even have a conversation without some echo of this being present. Perhaps the

clearest example of how 'highly tuned' I had become was when I reread a book and saw a film I had first come across four or five years ago, when I was a feminist working on male violence, and realized that I had 'not seen' a rape and sexual abuse.

During this period I became increasingly aware of and concerned about my own vulnerability. For the first time in ages I felt scared walking alone at night and became dependent on my bicycle. I struggled with myself over this, told myself this reaction was irrational, I was no more at risk than I had ever been before I began the research. I wondered how much of our projecting our fears into the public sphere and onto strange men is a way of protecting ourselves from the implications of accepting that men we know, and perhaps care for, are the ones most likely to abuse us? How much is it a way of trying to keep some control because it is easier to limit our activities with men in general than our interactions with men we live with, work with, or who are part of the same family?

As I heard women's accounts of violence they had experienced from men they knew, and how these often functioned as some form of punishment for challenging them in a particular way, my fear began to focus on an individual man: a man with whom I had had several political confrontations in the past, and who had once threatened me at a party. Coincidentally this man seemed to appear in many of the places I was — in pubs, at concerts, at the train station. My stomach would churn and I would want to leave immediately. I began to feel that he knew where I was, that he was following me.

I then understood how overwhelming the ever present threat of violence is; how women could be driven mad by this fear. After all wasn't I paranoid; who would take my fear seriously, based as it was on 'over-reactions' and projection? This experience made clear to me the importance of the threat of violence in women's lives, and that this is not just fear of walking alone at night but is there in complex and subtle ways in many of the interactions women have with men — men they know and men they don't. I also understood how the threat can be the result of hearing about other women's experiences — the fact that so many women in the north changed their behaviour as the result of the Yorkshire Ripper and the media coverage was an extreme example of this.

Protecting Girls

Another aspect of this sense of vulnerability was specific to my daughter, then aged 10. After doing the first two interviews with incest survivors, hearing other women recall sexual assaults from childhood, and reading several studies from the USA¹ that estimate one woman in four experiences some form of sexual assault from an adult male before she is 16, I became concerned about protecting her from what seemed almost an inevitability. I had begun the research feeling that most women have some experience of sexual violence at some point in their lives. Having to accept this for my own daughter, her friends, another generation of young women, caused me great anguish.

My fears were about men I knew and men I didn't, I watched every man who came to the house — relatives, friends and acquaintances. We both live with her father and I started to watch him too. My feelings were so strong that we had to discuss the effects of my distrust. I knew that whilst most of me trusted him, this faith was backed up by the knowledge that she knew the words to describe abuse and that it was wrong, and that he knew too that if I ever found out anything had happened my anger would be uncontrollable. Knowing that part of my trust was based on such negative factors was as much a depressing thought as it was a comfort.

I had several dreams at this time which involved revenging myself on men who had assaulted her on the way home from school. I became very concerned with knowing where she was all the time. I still panic if she's more than a few minutes late. We have discussed my concern and that my need to know she is safe is linked to knowing so many examples of things that happened to young women.

As I was working through all of this for myself, thinking about the interviews and reading I'd been doing, I saw how easy it is for men to choose to interpret children's openness and affection as sexual, to abuse children's trust that it is adults who know what is right. I also saw how much power adults, and particularly adult men, have over children. The difference in size and strength is greater than that between men and women. The rights most fathers assume to discipline children in violent and/or humiliating ways creates fear and awareness of the threat of violence for challenging male authority. The way children get affection is often tied to them having to behave in certain ways, as defined by adults. We deny them knowledge of the world, thinking illogically that this somehow protects them.

I now think that children have a right and need to know why their mothers worry about them, what the warnings about strange men are about, and that it is certainly not only strange men that might abuse their trust. Children's vulnerability is reinforced and in part created by the lack of information, confusing information and sometimes misinformation they are given. They need to be given a sense of their own autonomy, that



The Research

I interviewed 60 women from a wide variety of backgrounds, aged between 17 and 45. The interviews covered childhood, adolescence, first sexual experiences, marriage/not marriage; three specific areas of violence in detail (rape, incest and domestic violence); attitudes to sexuality; other areas of violence (eg pressure to have sex, sexual harassment, flashing); why women think violence happens and how it can be prevented; and a final section on the future. Follow-up interviews were done when each woman had a copy of the original interview. These took up issues women wanted to say more about. Almost all the women interviewed felt that participation had been positive for them.

* This phrase was used by a woman in the study to describe talking to other women about violence.

they do not have to tolerate touching they do not want. As adults we have to learn to respect children, to stop assuming a right to touch simply because they are children, and by doing this we will reinforce the idea that they can refuse touches they do not want.

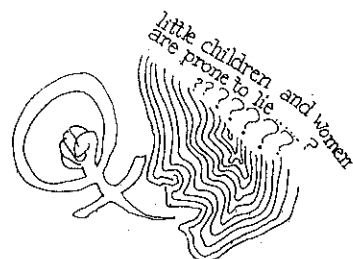
Sexual violence is far easier to commit when the man has all the advantages. I hope the knowledge my daughter has about sexual violence from my research and local work protects her slightly more than many women of my generation, who found out through painful experience.

Remembering and Forgetting

As I did more interviews, things women said often sparked off memories of my own. I 'remembered' five separate incidents of sexual assault/harassment from childhood and adolescence. The fact that this also happened to the woman who typed up six of the tapes made me see that this was important. I had seen myself as lucky, one of the women who had escaped, and in terms of the more extreme forms of sexual violence this, so far, is true. But I had not escaped. Looking back, some of my experiences were formative and caused quite definite changes in my life.

I stopped travelling home on late night buses after having been trapped in a shop doorway by two men. I escaped only because the owner arrived, pushed us out of the way, assuming I suppose that we were a group of friends. I took the opportunity and ran the rest of the half mile home. I remembered how this restricted my life, how it was important to be able to stay overnight with friends or have a male escort home. My adolescent independence was limited as I unconsciously tried to protect myself.

That was the only experience I ever discussed with anyone else. On another occasion I couldn't even explain why I failed to buy the school shirt I was sent to town for. I had in fact been followed around the shop by a man who kept touching me up. Perhaps the reason I said nothing was that at the time I had my period and he kept touching me where my sanitary towel was. I found this embarrassing and totally confusing. Other experiences I remembered happened when I was younger, where there was a sense that something was not right, but I did not know what it was.



On reflection now it is clear what disturbed me. When women discussed one of the reasons for not telling anyone about experiences of sexual abuse, which was not having the words to describe what had happened, I understood. The fact that we do not have the words reinforces our silence, and this is particularly so for young women. The power of naming became clear, the need to have words that describe and reflect the meaning of that experience for women. The fact that feminist activity around sexual violence has involved finding new words that reflect our reality, like sexual harassment, and redefining others so that they more accurately describe it, like rape, underlines this need.

Another aspect of remembering is linked to my initial idea that all women experience sexual violence at some point in their lives. I realized that to study this was much more complicated than I had thought, as we 'forget' many of these events. I now think this is a survival strategy and happens across all the different forms. Our reasons for forgetting will be different. We may not understand what happened or have no words to describe it. We may understand it all too well but feel we cannot afford at that point to cope with what it means. Understanding this meant I stopped being surprised when women told me they had forgotten, often for long periods, experiences of rape or sexual abuse, or that there were aspects of their experiences they had no memory of. Instead I became angry at the effects that not being able to name, acknowledge and deal with such experiences had had on women's lives. It was clear that whilst we might forget the details of the event, the effects of it remain, and are all the more difficult to understand and work on if they seem to have no other cause than our own personality. We have no way of knowing how many women are being treated by the medical profession, or are in mental hospitals for problems that have their root cause in undisclosed experiences of sexual violence.

It was also apparent that we can never accurately know how much sexual violence women experience. No matter how sensitive researchers are to under-reporting, they can only record what women remember, define as sexual violence, and are willing to discuss.

An in-depth study like mine, including a follow-up, may encourage women to remember and discuss more incidents than an impersonal questionnaire. It is important to remember that however we study sexual violence, there will be incidents that remain buried and that any estimate we make will be an underestimate.

It was at this point that I began to see sexual violence as a continuum in a number of ways. There were some forms that most women would experience at some point in their lives (pressure to have sex, the threat of violence, harassment), and other forms that are not experienced by most women (rape, incest). At one end, the continuum contains male behaviours that are generally considered normal; at the other, extensions of these behaviours to an extreme. How women cope with/survive their experiences also varies, and different forms can have similar effects or the same form different effects. We cannot assume these things by seeing certain forms as more serious than others.

Mothers and Fathers

The aspect of the research I least thought would affect me was discussing childhood and family relationships. I had hoped this part of the interview would be relatively easy and would show that the usual family-blaming theories weren't true. Some personal history is relevant here. I grew up in a catholic, working-class, extended family till I was 8. When I was 12 my mother died after a long illness and my father looked after my younger sister and myself until he remarried just before I left home at 18.

Coming to look at mother-daughter relationships without a mother, yet being one, perhaps gives me a particular perspective. Women with children have no choice but to be mothers. Women in many jobs are expected to act as surrogate mothers to male superiors, and many married women feel this is their main role in relation to their husbands. Other women have written about the impossible pressures mothering places on women. I slowly came to see the trap mothers of girls who are sexually abused are in, and why girls and women may (by no means all feel this way) blame their mothers. Children see mothers as powerful, as people

who should *know* in some almost telepathic way when something is wrong. When, for whatever reason, our children see us as failing to protect them, they experience this as betrayal. Many children feel they can do very little to prevent the abuse themselves, the person they feel they ought to be able to expect something from is their mother, sometimes regardless of whether they have told her and regardless of her own relationship to the man in question. How much easier it is to be angry with our mothers than our much more powerful fathers.

Which brings me to fathers. In trying to look at all forms of violence in terms of the continuum, I began to notice how many women's fathers were controlling, seductive or violent, and that father-daughter incest was an extreme form of this more common pattern. As I struggled with bitter feelings about my own father, I realized that as feminists we are mysteriously silent about fathers. We have, almost without noticing, reinforced the idea so popular in psychology that mothers are the most important influence in our lives. I now believe that fathers, however they play the part, have a central role in our lives. They lay the basis subtly, coercively or violently of our fear of male anger, and therefore our fear of challenging men. Feminists must unpick relationships with fathers in as much detail as we have those with our mothers, and we must confront how damaged we have been by those relationships. We need to understand why we have been silent about fathers for so long.

Heterosexuality, Coercion and Resistance

I listened to women describing their experiences of sexual violence every day for a year and a half — taping or typing. We also discussed sexuality more generally and women often talked about conflicts they had within heterosexual relationships. My sexual feelings seemed to evaporate at some point and I no longer saw myself as a sexual person. I'm unsure how far this was the result of hearing so many negative experiences and it therefore becoming necessary to cut-off from sex because of the meanings it came to have. It could also be linked to a refusal to accept the heterosexual norm and that I was pushing my own relationship as far away from it as possible in order to prove that



change is possible (although I don't believe in individual solutions). It was very obvious that heterosexual relationships involve an assumption of male sexual access, and when this is no longer so, the relationship seems not to fit the category somehow. I was not happy about feeling so cut-off from my own sexual feelings, but accepted that at least for a time it was necessary.

Through working out my own feelings and transcribing the interviews, I came to see how central sexuality is to power and control in heterosexual relationships. During this period Catharine MacKinnon published two articles in which she explored many of the ideas I had been working on. She maintains that, "feminism fundamentally identifies sexuality as the primary social sphere of male power."² She argues, as I now want to, that all forms of male violence are sexual violence:

Rape is not less sexual for being violent; to the extent that coercion has become integral to male sexuality, rape may be sexual to the degree that and because it is violent.³

She thinks that the reason rape is so difficult to prove legally is that forced sex is actually very common. There is no sharp distinction between rape and sex, they shade into one another. I also came to see the sexual aspects of domestic violence, and how common physical violence is in incest. These things fitted the idea of the continuum and led to me to look much more at how women defined sexual violence.

As I worked in more detail on the interviews, I began to see how many of women's behaviours that have been labelled unhealthy, were actually forms of resistance, sometimes conscious sometimes unconscious, to male heterosexual control. Promiscuity, for example, was often talked about as a way of feeling in control, of having power, of not being vulnerable, by refusing to be touched by the experience. Periods of promiscuity seemed to follow being hurt emotionally in a relationship or a sexual assault. I began to ask women in the follow-ups how successful they felt this was as a survival strategy. Whilst some felt it had been necessary for a time, few felt it was successful long-term. Perhaps this is because in itself it cannot change basic issues of power; perhaps also because it is in and of itself alienating from oneself and others, and within it women

internalize definitions of themselves as 'bad'.

What became obvious was how central to women's feelings about heterosexual relationships were the control and form of sexual expression. Women felt positive about heterosexual relationships within which they were respected as a whole person, where they got care and nurturance from the man, and perhaps most importantly, where they felt they could refuse sex without this threatening the relationship (and conversely where they could initiate it without constant rejection). Many women commented angrily on the irony of men not accepting their refusing sex yet constantly refusing it when they made the first moves. Women felt relationships had potential where sexual control was not vested in the man. Not surprisingly this was not the case for many women.

Political activity

One problem not often discussed in relation to feminist research is how we keep our connection with ongoing feminist activity. Thinking about issues in such depth can often result in forgetting the basics that were the original starting point. It is a great temptation to move out of the messy world of political activity and into the relative safety of academia. Fighting this temptation and staying involved in my local refuge group, and supporting rape crisis, has been very important for me. It has stopped me moving away from the reality of what I am studying, and also offered at times another source of validation for the ideas I'd been working on.

I hope that by moving from the interviews to my own experience and back to the interviews again will mean that I get closer to understanding what other women told me. I certainly understand myself much more. There are many things I wish at times I hadn't uncovered, but there is no going back. Once you know something it is difficult to remember ever not knowing it. I'm sure my experience of research isn't unique: that many other women have been changed by the work they do, as we are when we work in most feminist groups. It was one of feminism's first principles — that in changing the world we would be changing ourselves, and that changing ourselves was part of changing the world.

UNDERNEATH WE'RE ALL LOVABLE

Is women's self-help therapy feminist? Sara Scott and Tracey Payne look at the ideas and practices of the women's therapy movement.

Sara: Women I know have suggested various explanations for what they termed my 'resistance' to therapy. Often these have cast aspersions of trauma upon my childhood. At the same time they told me that therapy was not concerned with judging or explaining other women's lives. Interpretation was left to the psychoanalysts; women's therapy was different, its methods being feminist not Freudian. I considered there to be something of a contradiction between the obvious willingness to interpret my dislike of therapy and the claim that women's therapy is not judgemental. This article was written as an attempt to explore the implicit assumptions of women's self-help therapy.

Tracey: I got involved in this article after reading Sara's first draft. I realised I had a lot to say about therapy, having been involved in mixed and women's self-help groups over a couple of years. I wrote this in order to fit my experience of therapy into a political framework. At the time of my involvement I just assumed that as I was a feminist doing therapy it was automatically feminist therapy. It wasn't. My women's therapy group decided to be women only because we were all feminists. We then ignored feminism in the group and did our work totally individually. No connections between our experiences as women were made as part of the therapy.

The book *In Our Own Hands* by Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison is the bible of every women's self-help therapy group we have come across, which is why it is used as the major written source for this article. *In Our Own Hands*¹ claims to be a feminist adaptation of existing therapy techniques. The therapy it puts forward is supposedly feminist on several grounds — primarily it is non-hierarchical and it is women only. Therapy is seen as a tool which has been used in mindless and reactionary ways in the past but may be put to new use by feminists. Now, it is true that if women's therapy was set up hierarchically on the basis of an expert/client relationship, it would be hard to call it feminist. However,

lack of hierarchy doesn't equal feminism. As for it being women-only, well so is the WRVS (Women's Royal Voluntary Service). In our view, the feminism of women's therapy is merely cosmetic. It is true, for example, that a woman's lesbianism would no longer be regarded as pathological in a therapy group, yet the constant search for solutions to problems in her own psyche is always a denial of the relevance of the social structures of male supremacy.

People starting to do therapy now will find a more accepting climate than we faced. We encountered fierce criticism both from within the women's movement and from others on the left.

(Ernst & Goodison, *In Our Own Hands*.)

1. A Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, Saunders 1953; J. Landis, *Experience of 500 children with adult sexual deviants*, Psychiatric Quarterly Supplement, 30, 91-109, 1956; D. Finkelhor, *Sexually Victimized Children*, Free Press, 1979.
2. Catharine MacKinnon, *Marxism method and the state: an agenda for theory*, Signs 7.3, 1982, p529.
3. Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism, marxism, method and the state: toward a feminist jurisprudence*, Signs 8.4, 1983, p624. A longer version of this article will be published in (ed) Olivia Butler *Feminist Experience in Feminist Research*, Studies in Sexual Politics no.2, available from Sociology Dept. Manchester University, £1.





Ernst and Goodison are referring to the early seventies, and the ferocious criticism they mention does seem to have been largely replaced by tolerance, if not wholehearted enthusiasm. It is now unfashionable to suggest that therapy is of its origins and nature politically naive or even reactionary. Nonetheless we feel that feminist criticisms of therapy are as valid as they have ever been, for the recent development of women's therapy leaves the basic therapeutic perspective unchanged.

The roots of women's therapy lie in the 'growth movement' of the 1960s, which emphasised personal liberation and 'human potential'. The central image was of a vaguely defined 'sick society'. 'The System' was poisoned by its materialism, consumerism and lack of concern for the individual. These things were internalised by people; but underneath the layers of 'shit' in each person lay an essential 'natural' self which could be reached through various therapeutic techniques. What this suggests is that revolutionary change is not something that has to be built, created or invented with other people, but that it is somehow natural, dormant in each of us individually and only has to be released. All the techniques used in women's therapy, apart from those derived from Freud or Jung, come from this tradition. The essential belief of therapy is that people have a core self, a human essence which exists before and outside of the social reality in which we live.

'True' selves beneath the social

This belief in an underlying socially-untainted self must assume some characteristics of the 'natural self', otherwise it would be impossible to recognise one when you saw one. Speculations about 'human nature' have a long history and have usually been considered rather dubious by feminists. Therapy subscribes to a vague idea of people as naturally nice — the 'underneath we're all lovable' school of thought — and therefore to the idea that we need only rid ourselves of the socially imposed 'shit' to reveal the 'natural child' beneath.

Such a view of people may seem very appealing, but a belief in a naturally beautiful, happy, powerful and fulfilled self which only needs to be uncovered, leads directly

and inevitably to the idea of personal solutions and individual liberation. This is not necessarily how feminists involved in therapy see the rest of their lives; but when it comes to doing therapy it is essential to each and every technique that women see their 'real' selves and their 'social' selves as distinct.

Assumptions about a natural self are closely connected with another aspect of therapeutic theory — the emphasis placed on childhood experience. Childhood is seen as the time when our natural selves are originally repressed, and it is assumed that many of the problems brought to therapy groups will have their origins in failed relationships with parents. This form of explanation is of course common beyond the limits of therapy, but it can and should be questioned. The dubious way in which connections can be made between past and present is illustrated by an example of a bioenergetic exercise given by Ernst and Goodison, in which a woman 're-lives' being held down by her mother while having her nappy changed and then connects this with her current aversion to the missionary position. Is the assumption here that before her experience of nappy-changing this woman was naturally inclined to the missionary position?, and still would be if her mother had changed her nappies differently?, and will be in the future now that she has 'discharged' her trauma about it by 're-living' the experience?

Therapy's emphasis on the past is based on the idea that we store up emotions which we couldn't then express, and that these emotions remain blocked inside us until we find a way of letting them out. These blocks are the source of our problems in the present: they are what prevent us from (here we go again) being the whole, happy people we *really* are. Therapy becomes a sort of mental laxative. This perspective leaves us reaching constantly backwards into our own past experience rather than outwards to the experiences of other women to find explanations for our lives.

Non-verbal equals natural?

Another aspect of therapy we want to look at is the emphasis on non-verbal means

of expression, such as body language, guided fantasy, drawing and dreams. The assumption is that the conscious mind expresses itself in words which are pinned down by social meanings. The unconscious on the other hand can supposedly by-pass social constructions and reveal itself directly through symbols and images. We reject the idea that symbols and images have a *natural* meaning any more than words do. To take an example, in one therapy exercise you are asked to draw a tree. After you have drawn it you are supposed to gain insights about yourself from it. But we question whether it is possible not to know what drawing a tall tree with spreading branches, green foliage and birds nesting in it would mean as opposed to a gnarled, black, leafless tree in a barren landscape. Such images are part of a 'language' with culturally fixed meanings, and if they were *not* they would be useless. Drawing a tree is not necessarily any more 'true' or 'natural' a statement about the self than thinking or writing.

The last point about therapy is its preference for the emotional over the rational. The making of a transition from talking to feeling is constantly emphasised; shouting, crying, laughing, making sounds and body movements and thumping cushions are all seen as more natural responses. A woman who does not express herself in these ways is considered to be repressing her feelings which when the lid is eventually prised off will gush out in one of these forms. We cannot accept this. It is as true in therapy as elsewhere that what counts as a natural expression of emotion is structured and

learnt. For example, in some cultures it is acceptable for men to cry in public. From the perspective of women's therapy this would suggest that these men are more in touch with their real selves and therefore less likely to be oppressors. Yet crying can express a multitude of different meanings. It can be an expression of personal grief or group solidarity, a sign of weakness or of an appreciation of Walt Disney films. This is not nature. It is the expression of norms of culture, sex, class, peer-group or therapy group.

What about consciousness-raising?

We are not suggesting that we do not still need to talk about ourselves at length with the support of other women: it seems to us that the rise of the small self-help therapy group owes much to the gradual disappearance of consciousness-raising. Therapy groups are often the first point of access for women new to the Women's Liberation Movement. We feel that their popularity is a comment on the fact that we still need space to discuss personal experience, rather than showing an attraction specific to therapy.

Women's therapy has claimed to reach the problems consciousness-raising (CR) could not reach. It is argued that CR identified problems around marriage, sexual possessiveness, jealousy and lack of confidence, for example, but failed to stop women experiencing them. Therapy takes this to mean that these feelings are rooted deep within us and cannot be eradicated by an act of will. We consider this to be a



misrepresentation of the purpose of CR, which claimed that 'feelings' could not simply be expelled because they could not be divorced from the relations that created them. CR recognised that feelings have material roots. For example, jealousy has roots in the social and economic importance of catching and keeping a man (lover), the stigma of being a single woman, the emphasis on valuing a woman only in her relation to a man, and people on the basis of their attractiveness, desirability and so on within social constructs. (This list is not exhaustive!)

The immediate 'liberation' of CR is in recognising that 'the problem' is *not* inside our heads. Therapy returns us to a view of ourselves as the arena for struggle which feminism helped us to escape. Therapy is backward-looking: you change the past and you're free in the present. Feminism is forward-looking: you change the present and you're free in the future.

Power

The ways power is conceived in therapy and feminism are totally opposed. Ernst and Goodison suggest:

Therapy can help us to reach beneath our conditioning to contact the power locked in ourselves and the deep love which energises to act in our own and common interests. The revolution we want seeks a change not just in the ownership of production but in the reclamation of our sexuality, our feelings, our relationships, our working and living conditions, our creativity...

Power is regarded as being locked within ourselves, a property internal to individuals rather than as constructed within social relationships. As for the 'reclamation' of our sexuality, etc, this is part of the same assumption that these things already exist in us in a feminist form and only have to be unearthed. Revolution is split by Ernst and Goodison into two completely divorced areas: economic change, which is external; and this process of 'reclamation' which is internal. The dangerously apolitical nature of such ways of understanding the world are summed up for us by the following introduction to a co-counselling exercise on racism:

This exercise is based on the idea that in order to have become oppressors with racist

attitudes and patterns of behaviour, we were ourselves first badly hurt: the racism masks grief. By starting from a position of pride in who we are and a sense of unity with all oppressed people (by recalling how we are or have been oppressed) we can discharge that grief and let go of the racism.

Postscript

Tracey: Having written this article I wanted to say what I found attractive about therapy. The experience of being in a group with the time and attention of five other people was very powerful. There was an emphasis on being self-centred, and martyrdom was definitely discouraged. Looking back on it I see very little that I could not have got from close friends or a CR group, but at the time therapy also offered 'freedom'. In particular freedom from my past. I felt that if I kept 'shovelling shit' fast enough I could catch up and be free of it. Although I was a feminist and accepted the reality of external oppression, I also believed that 'sorting myself out' was a good thing in itself. (There might be political side effects of being a really 'together' person, but these were just side effects.)

There were times when I did feel I had broken all constraints on myself and when I was extremely happy and full of energy. I now consider that these feelings were not caused by therapy 'work' but by other factors such as general support from the group and what else was going on in my life. I also think that three and a half weeks of feeling amazing don't outweigh two years of trying to feel like that again, or the hundreds of hours spent reliving my childhood.

The last point I want to make is that feminists who weren't into therapy were somehow categorised as: out of touch with their feelings, repressed, joyless, slogging on for the revolution but doing nothing for themselves now, and so on. This is probably what kept me involved in therapy the longest. It is a myth.

1. Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison *In Our Own Hands*, The Women's Press, 1981.

DOES IT MATTER IF THEY DID IT?

What is lesbianism? Sheila Jeffreys looks at the work of Lillian Faderman and her critics.

In her book *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Lillian Faderman showed that passionate friendships with other women were a crucial part of the lives of middle class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She, in common with other American feminist historians, found that the diaries and letters of these women would almost inevitably reveal a same-sex friendship which was likely to have involved passionate embraces and kisses, declarations of love, sharing a bed for a night of cuddles and intimacies, and which would last, often, from childhood to old age. These relationships were so socially acceptable to contemporaries that a woman could write to the fiancé of the woman she loved and tell him that she felt just like a husband to his betrothed, and loved her to distraction and could not help but be very jealous. Men tended to see these relationships as very good practice for their future wives in the habit of loving. Sometimes the women friends could not bear to be parted even on the honeymoon and the husband would spend his honeymoon with both of them.

To modern eyes the passionate declarations of eternal devotion and descriptions of highly sensual interaction are startling because we have been trained to see such behaviour as indicative of lesbianism and not part of the everyday lifestyle of the majority of married middle class women. Faderman shows how sexologists in the late nineteenth century started to create a stereotype of the lesbian in which such passionate interactions were included, and how the acceptable form of friendships between women became more and more circumscribed. Strong emotional and physical intimacy was allowed only to those who were classified as lesbian. She attributes this change to the greater necessity of controlling women which resulted from the development of a really strong women's

movement and social and economic changes which threatened men's power over women. Emotional relationships between women were harmless only when women had no chance to be independent of men, and became dangerous when the possibility of women avoiding heterosexuality became a reality.

Faderman's work earned her many admirers, but it also provoked some critics to a storm of protest. It is important to our understanding of ourselves that we understand what the controversy was all about.

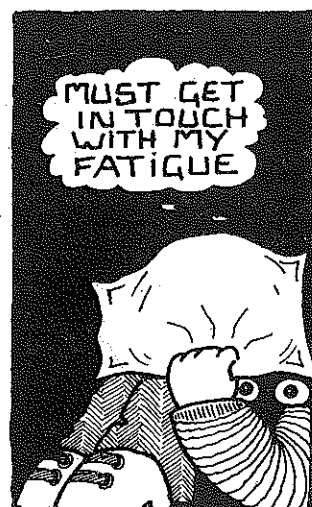
The problem seems to be that Faderman includes these passionate friendships specifically within the history of lesbianism. She assumes that the women involved were unlikely, because of nineteenth century views on women's lack of an active sexuality, to have engaged in genital contact, and her definition of lesbianism does not include compulsory genital activity.

"Lesbian" describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. "Romantic friendship" described a similar relationship. (Faderman 1981, p18)

Faderman is aware that the suggestion that lesbian identity need not include genital contact is controversial. She recognises that "It is no doubt unlikely that many women born into a sex-conscious era can conduct a lesbian relationship today without some sexual exchange. The pressure is on in our culture if we want to be physically and mentally healthy..." (p329). She quotes a number of lesbian writers who reject what they see as the male definition of lesbianism as defined by and focussed upon genital contact.



From *The Scotch Verdict*: a picture of a romantic friendship by the painter Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807).



In discussions, workshops, on the pages of *The Guardian* and elsewhere, lesbians have voiced hostile reactions to Faderman's assumptions. There seem to be two main grounds for the opposition. One is a sense of betrayal. Faderman's definition is seen as watering down lesbianism by playing down the sexual content. Another objection is that Faderman has made a false reading of history and has somehow been disloyal to the memories of the women she describes as having passionate friendships by imputing to them lesbianism when they would not have recognised themselves as lesbians. An example of a fairly standard attack is an article by Sonja Ruehl in the recent Women's Press collection *Sex and Love* (1983) in which she dismisses Faderman's work as being of any use to feminist theory because, she says, Faderman 'desexualises' lesbianism.

Ruehl and other critics take a particular contemporary definition of lesbianism — the one which lies closest to the hearts of the male sexologists — and they deny that women's passionate friendships can have anything to do with lesbianism because, not surprisingly, they don't match up to this definition. They want to uphold a particular lesbian identity and subculture which they see as being threatened by admitting those who have not gone through the initiation ceremony of genital contact. (They clearly define 'sex' as genital contact.) All the intense sensual activity, kissing and fondling which nineteenth century passionate friends went in for is classed as wishy washy and 'not' lesbianism.

Some of their anxiety is well grounded. I think it is true that the uniqueness of lesbianism and the lesbian identity has been under threat from the concept of sisterhood. Lesbians in the movement have had to play down their passions and their sexuality so as not to give offence to the heterosexual women who are still the bulk of the movement; and little attention has been given to lesbianism or any issues connected with it. Lesbianism cannot be subsumed beneath the good feelings of hand-holding sisterhood. This leaves no space to talk about specifically lesbian oppression and gives us little chance to build up the history and culture of lesbianism which we need for our pride and our survival. I don't accept Adrienne Rich's

idea of the lesbian continuum whereby all women's friendships with women are some shade or gradation of lesbianism. Women who simply have 'best friends' who are women share neither lesbian oppression nor lesbian experience. So long as we keep the definition of lesbianism open enough to include heterosexual women who love their women friends, it will be hard to articulate what is specific about the experience and oppression of lesbians and to develop the strength to fight compulsory heterosexuality and the invisibility of lesbians.

Why passionate friendships are part of the history of lesbianism

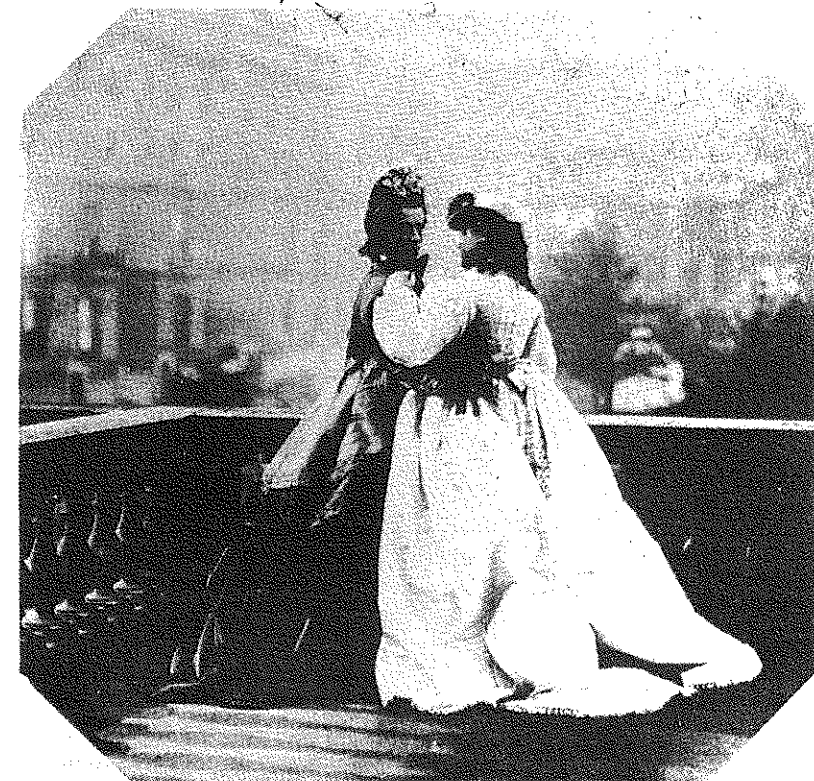
However, if we accept that proof of genital contact is required before we may include any relationship between two women in the history of lesbianism, then there is a serious possibility that we will end up with no lesbian history at all. The history of heterosexuality, and that is the only history we have been offered to date, does not rely on proof of genital contact. Men and women are assumed to be heterosexual unless there is 'genital' proof to the contrary. Women who have lived in the same house and slept in the same bed for 30 years have had their lesbianism strongly denied by historians. But men and women who simply take walks together are assumed to be involved in some sort of heterosexual relationship.

If we see the creation of a lesbian history as important then we must be prepared to assert that certain women were involved in relationships which have some relationship to lesbianism, even though in any historical period before the 1920s we are likely to have difficulty locating women who would be recognisably part of a sub-culture and lesbian identity which would fit with current definitions. The argument that it would be insulting and unfair to identify as lesbian women who had not seen themselves as lesbian when there was no modern lesbian stereotype to measure themselves by is rather dubious. It suggests that there is something rather nasty about lesbianism which would cast a slur on those to whom it was attributed. I can't agree about that.

Heterosexuality has changed its form too, yet we are prepared to assume women to be heterosexual in the past who had no interest in sexual activity with men and may have endured it with total repugnance. Many nineteenth century women, so far as we can tell, were in this position. For the married middle class woman in the nineteenth century, a heterosexual identity based upon positive choice of sexual activity with men, or indeed upon any concept of desire for men, would have been unintelligible. Can we include these women in the history of heterosexuality?

Heterosexuality is, of course, much more than a sexual practice. It is an institution with rituals, history, poetry, art, etc to back it up. Trying to pretend that heterosexuality or homosexuality are simply, or mainly, sexual practices, is to ignore the politics entirely. Society is organised around heterosexuality and is based upon it under male supremacy. Since that is so, women who won't take part drift in a limbo or form an identity for themselves which can enable them to survive with a sense of self, a culture and a social life. Lesbianism can therefore never be simply a sexual practice. The sexual practice that has been identified as lesbianism has been taking place between prostitutes, to turn men on, for centuries, and it has also been tried out by women whose commitment to the heterosexual system has never been in doubt. Lesbianism is a passionate commitment to women, a culture, a political alternative to the basic institution of male supremacy, a means through which women have always gained self-respect and pursued their own goals and achievements with the support of other women. It is more than likely to include a sensual component, which may or may not take a genital form.

Whose interests does it serve to regard lesbianism as a sexual practice? Lesbianism then becomes part of a list in sexological textbooks with bestiality and paedophilia. The emotional, cultural and political dimensions disappear. This serves the status quo. Lesbianism as a sexual practice is not a threat. If it were, then it would not be the stock in trade of brothels and men's pornography. Lesbianism as an emotional universe which provides an alternative to women from slotting into the heterosexual system, is a



threat. It is then anarchic and threatens the organising principle of male supremacy which is heterosexuality.

Why do we need a lesbian history? To build our confidence and self respect. To make it more possible for women to be lesbian. With no past our existence is very shaky. We need to be visible. We need to know how lesbianism has been controlled in the past, just as we need to know how heterosexuality has been organised, so that we may organise in the way most calculated to threaten and explode the heterosexual system.

The Scotch Verdict

Having said all that and having found myself in basic agreement with Faderman, I must admit to being thrown by her second book *The Scotch Verdict*. The book treats in greater depth an incident given briefly in *Surpassing the Love of Men*. This is the case of Miss Woods and Miss Pirie against Dame Helen Cumming Gordon in Edinburgh in 1811. Dame Cumming Gordon's grandchild (the illegitimate daughter of a Scottish imperialist and an Indian woman) was at the school run by Woods and Pirie. She told her

grandmother that the mistresses had sex together and Cumming Gordon saw that all the other children were removed from the school and the teachers ruined. Woods and Pirie then brought a case against Cumming Gordon, which they won largely as a result of the inability of the judges to believe that two ladies would do such things. The book includes large chunks from the trial transcripts translated into contemporary English. These offer us tantalising glimpses of how women and girls in the period saw their relationships with each other.

Faderman chooses to rest the book on the interesting question of what Pirie and Woods were doing with each other. Were they involved in genital contact, as some witnesses in the trial suggested? Faderman is certain they were not. Her lover Ollie, who travelled to Edinburgh with her when Faderman did her research, was just as convinced that they did. I admit to being puzzled by both their versions of events, and to being puzzled as to why the question of whether they had genital contact is a matter of such importance it needs to be proved or disproved. I'm not sure that it's sufficient subject matter for the detective story that *The Scotch Verdict* becomes. Faderman and Ollie's versions are interspersed amongst Faderman's versions of the trial transcripts.

Faderman considers it unlikely that the two women had genital sex for the following reasons: they lived in an era when women were likely to repress sexual feelings or at least not interpret them in a genital way; and they were unlikely to have done it (as they were accused of doing) whilst sharing beds with school students. It is quite possible to sympathise with Faderman's belief that they did not have genital sex. What is hard to stomach is the energy she devotes to proving this. Here is part of her explanation:

Almost everything Jane Cumming and Janet Munro (schoolgirls) described had its counterpart in a gesture or remark that was entirely innocuous. Where there was no innocent counterpart it was because Jane Cumming invented that particular detail from a stock of misinformation and half-understood images. These she had gathered from one or two girls at the Elgin school, shopkeepers' daughters who had been out in

the world before they were sent to learn a trade

From September to November they came to each other's beds more than a dozen times to talk Sometimes they came to argue, in subdued tones – but the strength of their emotion was so powerful that if it could not find vent through the voice, it would be expressed through the body: they might shake each other or pound the pillow or tear at the bedclothes. Sometimes they sobbed, breathing high and fast In October Miss Pirie's rheumatism would have been bad. Sometimes, when they were on good terms, Miss Woods would have gone to Miss Pirie's bed to massage her friend's back. Faderman 1983 (p246).

And so on.

Ollie's version is very different. She uses a very contemporary model of lesbianism to explain for herself what these women were doing. For that reason I find it hard to accept. It does seem that she was simply transposing her own experience and definitions onto that of women in a very different time and place. Here is part of her explanation:

They became lovers – not in the romantic friendship sense, but as we would use that word today – shortly after they met, eight or nine years before the breakup of the school And there they were in bed together. They had not been in bed together for over a year perhaps, maybe longer. Miss Cumming snored loudly. They had not intended to, but they found themselves making love. The long abstinence, and the necessity to be covert, the risk, all together made it more exciting than it had ever been. (p247).

The strength of Faderman's determination to prove that they were not doing genital sex rang so strangely to me that I became suspicious of her confidence in her earlier book that nineteenth century women in passionate friendships would never have had genital sex.

I think there is a third possibility which may give credit to the fact that these women were living in a very different world with different definitions, whilst allowing some flexibility. I think it is possible that two women engaged in passionate embraces as a usual part of a passionate friendship, might discover the interesting sensations attendant on genital friction and explore the possibility of improving on the sensations. Women do sometimes discover sex with other women in this way now, so I do not think it is impossible that they would have done in the nine-

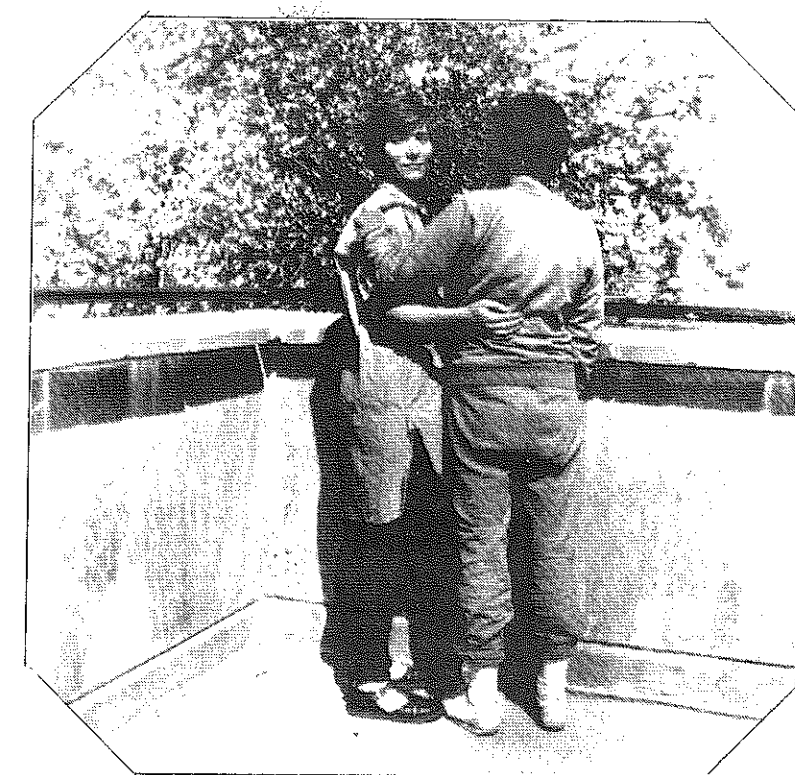
teenth century. I think we must be flexible and avoid transplanting onto the experience of our foresters either a contemporary lesbian identity or a determinedly non-genital one.

What is very interesting about the book is that it shows that girls at 'nice' boarding schools in 1811 seem to have been as keenly aware of and as likely to chatter about lesbianism as they are today. They talked of lesbianism with maids and nannies who all seem to have known something about it. This suggests for me that an assumption that all passionate friendships were non-genital is unwise when so many girls and women were aware of the genital possibilities of such relationships.

An aspect of Faderman's writing that I find unsettling is her tendency to use class stereotypes. The assumption in the section above, that girls who were 'trade' and not ladies would have been more likely to have known about lesbianism, and to have read, as she suggests, pornographic magazines, sounds rather suspicious. She seems to have had some problems interpreting the Scottish class system generally. She comes out with some gross class stereotypes. She searched in Edinburgh for a model on which to base her idea of the maid-servant at the school, Charlotte Whiffin, and writes as follows:

. . . . my image is a girl I saw Friday night in a working class disco that we happened into after an early dinner. The place was almost empty. She was on the floor, gracelessly dancing at a distance from her partner, barely lifting her feet or moving her body. They both, but especially she, looked bored – worse than bored, lifeless, without passion or hope. She is stocky, white-skinned, pimply I think she gossips viciously, losing herself in the meanest smears, which perhaps alone have the power to give her a jolt of life. (p20).

Overall, I would say that *Scotch Verdict* is a book worth reading, in conjunction with *Surpassing the Love of Men*. It would be useful for us to have a debate on the difficulties of writing lesbian history, for write it we must. Faderman is one of the very few women who has embarked on the field and her work is fascinating and full of questions. To write lesbian history it will be necessary for us to debate what our lesbianism means



PAM ISHERWOOD

to us and to explore our different definitions.

This is a process long overdue. The subject of passionate friendships rouses passionate controversy and this suggests to me that it must touch on some very important political issues. Any heretical questioning of the traditional twentieth century stereotype of lesbianism, such as was done in the 'Political Lesbian' Paper, which called on feminists to withdraw from men and define themselves as political lesbians even before they had had a love affair with a woman, leads to a storm.

How can we question that definition whilst protecting our identity as lesbians? If we do not question it, then lesbians will remain a tiny minority of women, defined by genital contact, fitting neatly into the category the lords and masters have assigned to us. The ramparts of heterosexuality will not be breached, and the heterosexual foundations of male supremacy may slumber quietly on. If we do question it, then we question our own security too, inasmuch as our security and identity have been based on this definition. We need an identity that is strong, revolutionary and *lesbian*.

Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (Junction Books, 1981).

Lillian Faderman, *Scotch Verdict* (Quill, NY, 1983).

Sonja Ruehl, 'Sexual Theory and Practice: Another Double Standard', in Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan, eds, *Sex and Love* (The Women's Press, 1983).

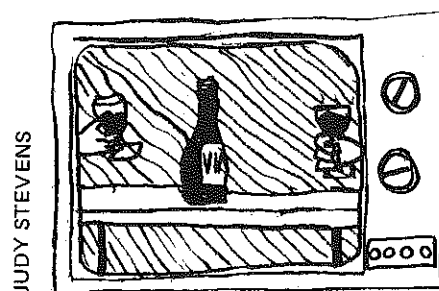
The 'Political Lesbian' Paper is in *Love your Enemy* (Onlywomen Press, 1981).

Whose Pictures Of Women?

A group of feminist activists, Kathy, Mary, Liz, Helen and Ruth, talk about what Channel 4's series 'Pictures of Women: Sexuality' meant to them. Is this the picture of women's liberation we want broadcast?

During January and February a series of six programmes made by Pictures of Women collective about women's sexuality were shown on Channel 4, Monday nights at 11.00 pm. The programmes covered heterosexism, pornography, advertising, prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual violence. The collective intended the programmes as an introduction to the way feminists see sexuality. We had heard quite a lot about the programmes and were looking forward to them.

We came together after the first programme because we were so angry about the content and the way imagery was used. All of us had, in one way or another, felt alienated or excluded from that programme. We decided to carry on watching and write something about our feelings.



We don't feel the programmes touched our reality. We are five women, all white. We come from different class backgrounds, some of us are lesbians and between us we have six children. We live in a small city and are active in Women's Aid, Rape Crisis, Reproductive Rights and our local women's centre. Some of us felt a barrier about writing but not about talking so we decided to tape a discussion after seeing all six pro-

grammes. We typed up over 24 pages of talking and this piece has been edited and rearranged. It was an experiment for us to try and find a way to write collectively. It was much more complicated than we expected but using a different method allowed us all to contribute.

Expectations

Ruth: When I knew it was a collective of women producing it, filming it, who had some control over the way it was presented then my expectations were obviously high. I not only expected to be able to pull some things out that I identified with, but thought that there would be a clear feminist perspective on the issues. It just felt like so much space and opportunity.

Helen: It was really well set up in the press beforehand as being to do with female sexuality. It was to do with women as they are, not sex objects in a heterosexist world but women within their own sexuality.

Kathy: I did expect to see and listen to women I could identify with and understand.

No Perspective

K: I'd really like to talk to them about what they meant by collective working, because it felt to me that they had drawn on each other's different skills but that they hadn't drawn up any ground rules, any perspective which they could work together towards. I got an impression of them trying to present the programmes differently, but not having any idea of how different or in what way. It felt as if they didn't have any real understanding of the issues they were presenting, and yet they controlled the content so there

was no opportunity to hear ideas other women or groups might have. I don't think it's bad that, having got a chance to use the machinery, they wanted to use it, but I think they should have given the content over to women who were involved in the issues they were presenting.

H: Yes, it felt like they were playing around with images. This often made the programmes difficult to watch. They weren't challenging and were boring if you knew what they were talking about. If you didn't know all of that to start with they were very confusing, so you lost out all round, really.

Mary: The one called 'Men at Work' felt a bit better. Most of the first part was a film with actors showing sexual harassment in an office. The rest of the programme including the discussion referred back to that. So it was easier to follow because it had a focal point.

Liz: One thing that made me very angry was the lack of responsibility about raising issues. However badly it was done, they did discuss sexual violence, prostitution, lesbianism and there was absolutely no contact points for women to follow up those things. Women watching might have needed support or wanted to join a group.

M: The only contact I remember them talking about was how to contact the Advertising Standards Authority, which obviously reflected their main concern with media. It's got more official status than our organisations as well.

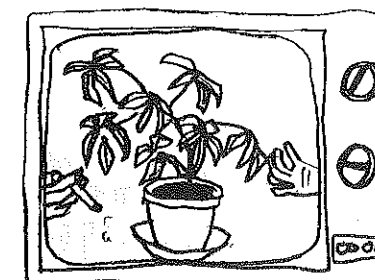
R: You could have watched the whole series and not know anything about the amount of work that feminists in this country have done to set up services that women can use.

Feminism misrepresented

L: I felt several of the programmes were very selective in the way issues were discussed. For example there is a debate in the women's movement about prostitution but there was no way that came over in the programme. They presented a woman from the English Collective of Prostitutes as an expert and representing the feminist viewpoint. She maintained that there are virtually no pimps, that very few young women are coerced into prostitution and that these things don't really matter anyway because prostitution

is basically an economic choice.

M: The suggestion was that a feminist attitude to prostitution should be that it is a job like any other. There was no discussion about why prostitution exists in the first place or how it links to men's ideas about sex as a commodity. Feminists do support campaigns against harassment of prostitute women, but we should also be confronting why men use prostitutes in the first place.



L: I objected to them putting a discussion of marriage in the middle of the last programme which was mainly about male violence. It didn't really fit with the rest of the programme at all and implied that violence only happens to women who are married. It also happens to women who are single, who are divorced; the link isn't to marriage but to sexuality.

R: The first programme was on women's sexuality, but there was no discussion about who lesbian women are, where they come from, how they live their lives, what it means to them to live in a heterosexist society — none of that came out. The one upfront lesbian that was shown was not saying much, but what she was saying was to a gay bloke. She wasn't talking to other women about why she was a lesbian and what it meant for her.

K: I was really angry at the way that discussion implied that you were born homosexual or lesbian and that was a problem you had to face. I see lesbianism as one of the most positive choices women can make about their sexuality. Another positive choice is celibacy which wasn't mentioned at all.

H: It was crazy that there were six whole hours on women's sexuality and no discussions amongst lesbians.

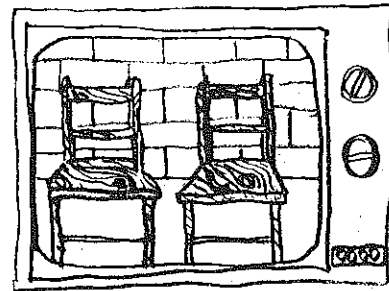
Images of women

K: Basically there wasn't a positive thing

about being a bloody woman!

R: That's how it felt anyway, women live in this void where the whole of their life experience is a negative one because they are on the defensive all the time — there were very few positive images of women in the programmes.

L: It seemed that they weren't concerned about getting women to talk about their own experiences, what they were concerned about was playing around with images of women.



K: Not only images but totally taken by the machinery and technology, that seemed to have been the most important thing for them. I also resented very much any pictures of reality they showed. People's housing and living spaces were generally very middle-class and affluent.

H: They actually gave a lot of time in the programme on pornography to pornographic images and they stayed on the screen for quite a long time too.

R: They talked critically about the way pornography objectifies and fragments women's bodies but they then reinforced that by further defacing those women, scribbling out bits and pieces of them and writing all over them.

M: Like that picture from a pin-up magazine onto which they then scribbled the word 'object' and the collage that was made up of parts of women's bodies. They were using the stereotypes against women instead of exposing the stereotypes. In the same programme when they spoke to two women from Women Against Violence Against Women, they set them up against a white-washed wall on two stark chairs! They should have been included in the discussion

at the end.

L: Watching all those pornographic images really upset and disturbed me. The women in the discussion group at the end didn't seem affected like that at all, the main objection it seemed they had to porn was that it was boring!

K: Even the introduction to the programme was parts of women again. It was fallopian tubes and ovaries turning into a face! So is a woman her sexual parts, or isn't she?

In the last programme about rape and domestic violence they showed a woman as a contestant in a quiz which was meant to show how your rights as a married woman are different from your rights as an individual, particularly in relation to violence. When I was watching her stand there in her white wedding dress, I identified with her and I really felt horrible and stupid and ridiculous. I didn't feel like that on my wedding day. All right, I feel like it now, looking back at it, and maybe I should have been more aware and perhaps I should have known all those things, but I didn't. How dare they pick you out in your white wedding dress and have a man saying 'It's your responsibility, you don't know these things, how stupid you are?' I felt my experience was treated very flippantly. Also in that programme was a reconstruction of a court scene in which the prosecution cross-examined a woman who had been raped and that was done in a very similar way.

R: I think they could have used that scene quite well, but within the context they put it, it was totally dismissable: it was just another piece of stupid play acting. And for me when I saw it I knew that was real, that is what happens to women, but I couldn't make it real in the context of the programme, it was still a piece of comic strip.

H: And it's only not a joke if either that's happened to you or you know that's what happens. If you don't, then it could be quite humorous. There's no way that should be remotely humorous.

Experts

R: The whole emphasis on experts infuriated me. Why have a woman take what felt like half an hour to say basically that she thinks advertising doesn't make society the way it

is, it simply reflects it? That could have been said in a couple of minutes and then challenged and talked about.

H: But it never was challenged, nothing was really. They just poked around a little bit with imagery. Nobody came back to what she said at all, they moved on to the next thing.

R: And why did they have a Freudian psychoanalyst in the first programme, give her 20 minutes or however long it was and never actually say what Freud did for women's sexuality, how his theories are based on him dismissing girls' experiences of sexual abuse as fantasy — I mean how can you!!

H: The programme began with her and it finished with her, didn't it, and mostly what came over from that interview was some really dreadful stuff that shouldn't be in a programme about women's sexuality.

M: The woman doing that interview should have challenged lots of points but her attitude to what was being said wasn't clear at all — did she really accept the psychoanalyst's ideas about penis envy, passivity?

R: I resented an 'expert' being given licence to talk about my sexuality. A group of women talking about their feelings would have had much more meaning for me.

L: Because she was an expert she was allowed to be cold and detached about what she was saying. For me discussions about sexuality are about feelings and emotions and also about politics. The way she was interviewed was as if she had an 'objective' view, and one of the most fundamental things about feminism is that it validates women's personal 'subjective' feelings.

H: Also the way she spoke was offputting and boring. Lots of women I know didn't watch any more of the series because the first one put them off so much.

K: That psychoanalyst was like a politician. The nastier the things she said the more she smiled. It was like saying (laughter) this hurts me more than it hurts you.

M: Experts never seemed to get edited either. Yet in the last discussion group they were so concerned to get a particular point from women from Women's Aid, Rape Crisis and Rights of Women that they actually stopped

discussions about women's real experiences that would have been useful and interesting.

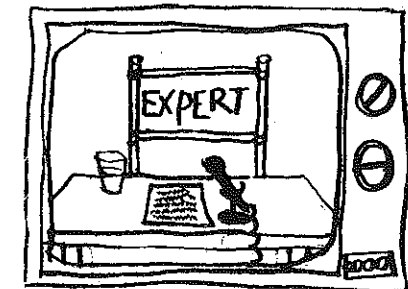
H: Women were actually cut in mid-sentence to sharpen them up and get them onto the next point, although relatively compared to the rest of the programmes I found some of the discussion groups quite accessible.

R: The discussion on advertising was quite good, they talked about trade advertising and I thought quite a lot of points came out. But they chose to end the discussion on 'If only men would take it up, then we'd get somewhere'.

H: It was like saying the thing to remember in all of this is that we want our help from men, and then we'll get listened to, then we'll get heard, something will happen if men do it for us and on our behalf.

So what's new?

For a group supposedly concerned with pictures of women they were extremely insensitive about the images they did portray. Ironically they ended up putting forward what they supposedly objected to — stereotyped images of women. The content of the series was heterosexist and most of the women who appeared on them were white and middle-class. Most women appeared as some sort of expert or professional.



There were no discussions or differences in experience or analysis. Most of the discussion groups seemed to have been set up to contain women who basically agreed with one another, and this often made them boring. It was all very safe: no threat or challenge to the status quo.

The collective call themselves Pictures of Women. We'd like to know which women they felt they were presenting images of and to whom — more of us were excluded than included. So what's new?

Swallowing The Pill

What would be a feminist view of the Pill and its relationship to women's sexual freedom? The recent scare about the Pill's effects has brought up a lot of fear and anger. Like many of us, Sue Leigh now finds herself discovering the possible consequences of choices made many years ago.

Recent research on the Pill has linked it to increased risks of cancer of the breast and cervix. The newspapers headlined it in a big way. I saw the banner headlines and bought a copy of the *Standard*. At first read I appeared to be one of the women at greatest risk. I had started taking the Pill when I was under 25, and had taken a medium progestogen Pill for over 8 years. It was the first time I had thought about my body in relation to contraception for many years: I was sterilised in my mid-30s and have since become a lesbian. I somehow felt I had overcome this side of my biology.

I have since found out that any cancers I might have had as a direct result of the Pill would most likely have made themselves evident by now, but I talked to several friends who gave up taking the Pill a few years ago, and who thought they might be at risk, and I became increasingly angry at the thought of one of them getting cancer as a result of what, at that time, seemed to be a way for women to gain greater control over their own reproduction.

Talking it over with friends in their 30s and 40s I started to try to form a more historical framework on the Pill and related changes in the politics of contraception.

First of all I asked myself why I was so angry about the Pill. We are all being chemically poisoned in one way or another by nuclear waste, fall out, lead in petrol, insecticides — modern living is carcinogenic. Furthermore the recent research findings were not the first to link the Pill with cancer, and much of the research has been

questioned for its lack of rigour. I think I was angry because taking it involved a free choice — women choose to take it or settle for another form of contraception, or can abstain from penetrative sex. This raises all sorts of questions around perceived choices available at certain times in history or in an individual's life experience. It also depends on women's experiences with other forms of contraception, how important it is to them not to conceive, their relationships, economic circumstances, a whole network of factors. At the same time it is important to understand the social climate in which the Pill was introduced on the market, what alternatives have been made available, and what has happened to it since.

The Technological Miracle Fix

The Pill was introduced in the '60s at a time when women in the west expected to have no more than the average 2.5 children, and not to have to spend all their married lives in childbearing as their grandmothers had done. Reading the letters from working women giving their experiences of childbearing in 1915 makes horrifying reading:

I had seven children and one miscarriage in ten years and three months. This left me at the age of thirty a complete wreck.¹

For women who expected to have small families the Pill seemed the answer to all their contraceptive needs.

But almost from the start there were fears about its safety, as high-dosage pills were cynically tested on women in the third world. We were willing guinea pigs ourselves,

our fear soothed by the medical profession's assurances that all was well. It was all part of the belief in modern medicine and technological invention. The professionals knew best, their science was boundless.

The doctors argued that the Pill should not be bought over the counter but only be prescribed by a qualified doctor because that way women would be given regular health checks whilst they were taking it, but, in reality, many GPs seldom checked blood pressure and asked about side effects, and repeat prescriptions were issued without even seeing the patient. The doctors were able to keep the Pill, and with it the reproductive rights of many women, under their control, and receive a rake-off from the prescriptions they wrote out at the same time.

Did the Sixties Swing?

There were also all the moral attitudes which went along with prescribing the Pill. In the early sixties it was still quite hard for unmarried women to get advice on contraception from clinics and doctors, and young girls especially would have been refused the Pill on moral rather than health grounds even when they were over sixteen.



Friends have told me how they said they were getting married in six weeks so that they could be issued with the Pill.

Within the space of a few years, certainly between 1964-1970, it became easier to obtain the Pill if you were unmarried. A sexual revolution was supposed to have taken place which doctors and clinics were forced to respond to. What eventually happened was that more women turned to the male-dominated medical profession for contraception thereby giving them greater power to intervene chemically or surgically in women's lives.

The Pill was ideally suited to the 'swinging sixties'. Women had to take it daily and so became always sexually available. We thought that the Pill might even up some of the sexual inequalities between men and women, because women would be free from the fear of getting pregnant. What really happened was that we found power relations in bed still favoured the man, and that the Pill made it more difficult to refuse sex. A woman was now supposed to enjoy sex, please men, achieve orgasm every time and if she didn't there was something wrong with her. This, anyway, was the image of the sixties given by the media as a role model to women, and was extended into the sexually liberated woman of the seventies, the antidote to the bra-burning dyke (yawn). In reality most of us did not have the money or circumstances to pursue any of these free wheeling life styles, but took the Pill when we were sleeping with a steady boyfriend or husband, and felt that we were missing out on some great party that was happening anywhere but where we were. It certainly wasn't happening around the unwashed nappies in my council house, or for the young women at the small town youth club where I worked part-time.

There were also economic reasons why the Pill suited the sixties. There was nearly full employment and women were needed in the workforce. Married women were especially popular in the labour market as part-time workers in low paid sectors of the economy. Women were encouraged to limit the size of their families in a reliable way so that they could return to work earlier.

There were also strong pressures on women at that time to have smaller

families because of very real fears around the dangers of overpopulation. I remember that, as a middle-class liberal, I felt quite guilty about having accidentally conceived 0.5 over the socially acceptable number of 2.5 children, because I thought I was contributing to this overpopulation. These social pressures still exist; if you do not take the Pill and become pregnant whilst using less reliable methods of contraception you are blamed for being careless. Women in the west who have large families still get blamed for their incontinence especially if they are poor. By taking the Pill in the sixties you were merely being a responsible citizen.

The Risks

Although soothed by the professionals approval of the Pill, we, the first generation of women to take it, were not altogether unaware that swallowing synthetic hormones every day for years might not be good for us. I can remember telling my mother that I was on the Pill, and her expressing doubts about its safety: "It's quite drastic to interfere with your hormones; are you quite sure it's safe?" I wasn't sure but desperate. I had three children under five and the cap hadn't worked. I weighed up the risks. There were the risks of unknown health hazards which might prove groundless against the risk of yet another pregnancy. Sterilisation or vasectomy was seldom offered as a choice then. Many of us opted for the unknown risks as many women are still doing, and I recognise their dilemma because the choice is still not a real one.

Before the introduction of the Pill most women were offered the cap at birth control clinics. In 1963 I was living in a small Oxfordshire town, and had to travel 20 miles on public transport with 2 small children to get to the nearest family planning clinic. I had to wait for hours to be interviewed by a white coated woman health worker who filled in a massive form and brightly asked, leaning forward conspiratorially, "How's the sex life?" I was fitted with the cap in a tiny and far from private cubicle, where I could hear what was happening to the apprehensive women on either side of me. If we had been less divided (expressing only our fears to each other in the waiting room) we might have given each

other advice and support, but the circumstances made the fittings furtive and hasty. With no room for me to fiddle around to see how it fitted, little supportive instruction and the distraction of wondering how my children were getting on in the waiting room it is not surprising that I became pregnant for the third time, and that I welcomed the arrival of the Pill.

For me, as for many women, it was important that the Pill was taken by mouth. It was easy, foolproof and non-messy. You could forget about the connection between pregnancy and sex, but the price I paid was taking a drug which had an effect on the whole body. When I began to take the Pill I experienced breakthrough bleeding and nausea. This wore off, but during the eight years I took the Pill I put on 1½ stone, which disappeared within a few months after I stopped taking it. At the end of eight years I started to develop swollen veins in my legs and headaches and I stopped taking it. Although, surprisingly, very fertile, I only had periods every six weeks. My cycle became a regular 28 day one on the Pill and has never varied since, whether as a result of all those years on artificial hormones or physical changes in me I shall never know. Above all there had been the feeling that my natural cycle was being chemically interfered with so I always felt out of touch with my own body. But whenever I was asked how I "got on" with the Pill I always smiled brightly and said it suited me fine — I wanted to think I had control over nature through modern medicine, anything rather than return to less reliable methods of contraception which appeared to control me.

The side effects, which became evident over the years, provide a staggering list of nasties, which are consistently smoothed over by the medical profession. They were of the opinion that certain side effects would go away with a change of Pill, or go away after a few months. Anyway most women who developed blood clots, strokes and so on were taken off the Pill before they died.

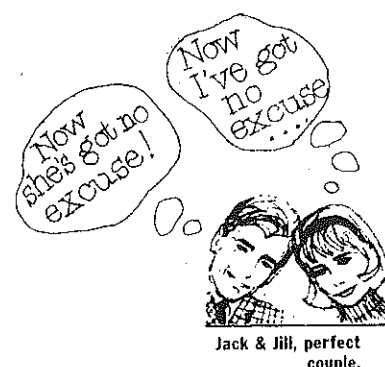
The side effects were also blamed on other factors which exacerbated them and which were often thought to be within a woman's control. They were blamed on the combination of the Pill with the woman's own life-

style. She was the one who was asked to change her habits rather than be offered alternative methods of contraception. Those women who are most at risk from circulatory disorders are older women (over 35), heavy smokers, and women who are overweight. It is ironic that the Pill is not recommended, albeit for sound medical reasons, to those women who offend a society which is ageist, sizeist and still hasn't buried old prejudices about heavy smoking being unladylike.

What has slowly become apparent is that the effects could last long after we stop taking the thing. More and more reports are coming out which link the Pill to increases in cancer of the breast and cervix, and as more health risks become known women are likely to be blamed for taking the Pill when they know it has hazards attached to it.

Although, as I have already mentioned, there have been several reports which linked the Pill to cancer, why did the two reports released last year attract so much publicity, especially as they have been shown to be inadequate in many respects? It is no coincidence that they have received so much media attention at a time when unemployment is high, and women are being forced/encouraged back into the home. It is also interesting that the scares around the Pill fit in with the 'New Morality' of the right, which seeks a return to 'family values', and an end to sexual promiscuity. The right are especially vociferous about the contraceptive advice given to young women under 16. They have extra ammunition when they can prove that there is a relationship between increased sexual activity in young women, the use of the Pill, and cancer of the cervix.

It is the paradox of the Pill that it permits women to control nature through modern medicine whilst at the same time their bodies are kept in a condition resembling pregnancy which is induced by the hormones in the Pill. Except for the undoubted improvements in women's health, which were present before the introduction of the Pill, is using the Pill so far removed from the constant pregnancies of our grandmothers in terms of the control it offers over our bodies? It may have improved women's quality of life, but has it really offered more control over the process

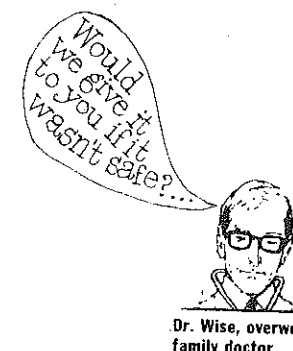


Jack & Jill, perfect couple,

ANYTHING rather than another....



Mrs. Bustle, busy housewife, (mother of four.)



Dr. Wise, overworked family doctor,

Just out! From the Oxford Women's Health Action Group, *Whose Choice: what women have to say about contraception*. Available from Women's Health Information Centre, 12 Upton Road, London N1, for 50p plus postage.

For women who wish to know more about the research on the Pill and other reproductive rights issues, subscribe to the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign Newsletter, 52/54 Featherstone Street, London EC1 (please note new address).



of reproduction? As women it seems we are given valium to control our raging moods and artificial hormones to control our raging fertility. Women have replaced the fear of pregnancy with the constant fear of illness so that women who take the Pill have to be constantly watchful for side effects, lumps and positive smear tests.

Some alternatives are less awful than others

The evidence is not yet clear as to whether women are seeking alternatives to the Pill as a result of the latest scares. There certainly has been an increase in the demand for cervical smears, and the South London Hospital for Women cannot do any more tests because of a backlog.

It is also difficult to find out how concerned women really are about the latest scares. Reports from clinics indicate that women sought advice and guidance in increasing numbers about the new research, but so far I haven't heard that a significant number of women have stopped taking the Pill. My guess is that women will continue to take the Pill whilst the risks remain obscure, and few adequate alternatives are put forward in clinics. Alternatives are pushed more when women are judged to be unsuited to the Pill. The change that needs to come about is for clinics to adopt the view that all women are unsuited to the Pill because of its health risks and to start taking more time and trouble in the way in which most of them offer the alternatives.

The cap is seldom presented as a safer alternative in terms of health because women need time and support to learn to use it successfully. The cuts in health services makes it increasingly hard for clinics to give this kind of contraceptive help to women. Furthermore if pregnancy occurs as a result of using other methods of contraception the cutbacks and restrictions on abortion services make it more difficult for women to fall back on termination as a last resort.

The IUD or coil is often given to women who are unsuited to the Pill in spite of the fact that it has a frighteningly high incidence of side effects especially heavy bleeding and infections. It has also been given to women thought to be 'at risk' from 'unwanted' pregnancy.

Sterilisation is the alternative I opted for, but it is for women who wish to end fertility rather than control conception. There have been side effects with even this drastic solution, and it does involve surgery, so, as with all the other alternatives women need information and discussion through helpful clinics and self-help groups in order that they can have real choice around the limited alternatives available.

Some women have tried to regain control over their bodies by natural means as part of the movement towards alternative medicine. Natural birth control however requires a great deal of effort and dedication; getting to know your cycle, observing your mucus daily etc. It is rather like organic gardening — very rewarding in terms of individual health, but often risky in terms of end product.²

The other natural method, which is often connected to natural birth control mentioned above, is non-penile sex or rather non penetration of the vagina by the penis. In natural birth control there are many times in the month which are 'unsafe', and non-penile sex is often practiced, but this relies heavily on the willingness of the man to co-operate. Non penetration by the penis involves a level of trust and caring which few men are capable of. It also suggests a radical change in heterosexual attitudes to sexuality in a culture geared to the idea that without penetration you haven't really "done it". Besides non penetration involves women in having to become more intimate with men's genitals than they might wish. Nevertheless it is an alternative which is seldom suggested; there is only one sex manual for young people which presented this as a positive choice, and this was banned by many schools.³

Many women are silent around their fears about the Pill, and say, as I did, that they are quite content with it because they know that they are taking a risk, but feel that the risk of future illness is less traumatic than unwanted pregnancy or abortion. Along with that risk goes guilt because if they fall ill it will somehow be their fault for choosing to take the Pill. Heterosexual women live within a cycle of fear, guilt and risk around fertility, and that is why so many of them carry on taking the Pill and say it suits them fine. I recognise that silence.



The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and Marxist Feminism?

The account of the evolution of the family given by Karl Marx's collaborator Frederick Engels in 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' has been held to contain "the elements of the socialist analysis of women's oppression". It has been the basis for the writings of dozens of authors and for the policies of left-wing parties in many countries. Here Diana Leonard explores what is wrong with Engels's suggestion that economic changes in society caused the relationship between men and women to become restrictive and exploitative.

As is well known, the nineteenth century socialists Marx and Engels had relatively little to say about the oppression of women. Those feminists (and friends) who today find their analyses of other aspects of society so fruitful have therefore scoured through the volumes of their collected works and pondered long and deeply the little they could find of relevance to sexual divisions. Engel's *Origin* . . . has been one of their major sources.

This is actually quite a slim book (150 pages), only one full chapter of which concerns sexual divisions. It started with Marx's marginal notes on Lewis Henry Morgan's lengthy *Ancient Society, or Researches into the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization* (1877). Engels added to these and wrote them up and published them in 1884 after Marx's death. The book ran into several editions with new prefaces and an addition. A new translation was produced in the 1940s, and with the rebirth of feminism two new editions were issued in the early 1970s, one with an introduction by Eleanor Burke

Leacock and the other with one by Evelyn Reed. Also in the early '70s more than a dozen articles were published 'Looking Again At . . .' or 'Revisiting' Engels, discussing his attempt to explain the conditions which caused men to exploit women.

The book itself has as its core a theme very common among 19th century thinkers — the establishment of a series of stages in the evolution of mankind. Morgan's version of this theme focused on changes in 'the arts of subsistence'. That is, he divided development into 3 stages, each of which were further subdivided, according to the technological level and inventions and discoveries.

Developing at the same time as changes in the arts of subsistence were changes in social, economic and political institutions. Since many of the stages and substages occurred before written records existed, Morgan had to work out some way to define the nature of their social structures. This he did by looking at contemporary societies at the various stages of technological development, and he supplemented information about what existed in his own time with



1. ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (1915, reprint Virago 1978), p128.

2. Before hordes of readers who support organic gardening rush for their pens I admit to being a bit snide here, but I do support the idea, and when I had a garden I used organic methods, but I never had enough time to produce really good crops.

3. Jane Cousins, *Make It Happy* (Virago and Penguin Books, 1979).

evidence of past structures which he saw as embedded in systems for naming kin and in myths.

Morgan's focus on changes in subsistence as related to changes in the division of labour and patterns of ownership made his work most acceptable to Marx and Engels. They felt he provided the earlier sections for the materialist account of history they had begun in *The German Ideology*. Engels's book shortened and 'sharpened up' Morgan's account, stressing what he saw as its major theoretical and political implications. Engels emphasised the transition from the stage where natural products were appropriated (hunting and gathering) to that where domestic animals were bred and crops grown (agricultural production), because he saw the latter as allowing the production of large surpluses and hence the start of social inequalities — of some having more and some less of the surplus. He also emphasised the development of extensive exchange of products between households as leading to economically-based classes and the requirement of an overall political organisation (the

state) to rule and control the dispossessed and to maintain the privileges of the wealthy. Engels believed, again along with Morgan, that the power of property would become unmanageable and would soon produce contradictions which would lead to the destruction of society as he knew it; hence to the establishment of a future communist world.

In the earliest stages of human evolution, the only social divisions, according to Morgan and Engels, were those between men and women. Engels's account of savagery and of early barbarism is therefore largely taken up with detailing how patterns of sexual division and connection shifted and changed. He suggests that after a possible period in a 'very remote epoch' when there was promiscuity (when "every woman belonged to every man and every man to every woman"), there soon developed a prohibition on marriage between parents and children, and then on marriage between brothers and sisters. Since paternity was never certain but maternity was, it was the sisters who stayed together. They lived in communal groups/households and their children who lived with them were the next generation of that group. The brothers meanwhile lived in the communal houses of women to whom they were temporarily attached acting as partners with other men there.

Communitistic housekeeping (meant) the supremacy of the woman in the house; just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent . . . (meant) that the women — the mothers — (were) held in high respect . . . Among all savages and barbarians of the lower and middle stages . . . the position of women (was) not only free, but honourable.

However, as "the traditional sexual relations lost the naive primitive character of forest life" owing to changing economic conditions, women found sexual relations with several men oppressive and humiliating, and they sought "the right of chastity, of temporary or permanent marriage with one man only, as a way of release" (p117).

At this same time, however, "the domestication of animals and the breeding of herds (also) . . . developed a hitherto unsuspected source of wealth" and according to "the social custom of the time", the cattle belonged to the men — as did the commo-

ditities exchanged for cattle (which came to include slaves). All the surplus therefore belonged to men, and this "made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's". Men then wanted their own, and not their sisters' children to inherit from them. Because women had already brought about 'pairing marriage', men were able to introduce strict monogamy — though only for women — so paternity was assured.

The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also: the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children (p121, stress in original).

Exactly when this happened wasn't known, because with the dawn of history it had already occurred. But Engels was able to include some evidence on the family in the next stages of evolution, and to show that monogamous marriage had not always and everywhere been equally harsh. Women were freer and more respected among the Romans than among the Greeks, and freer still among the German clans. But in the space of a page* he skips from the ancient world to his own day, to announce that although monogamous marriage continues among the bourgeoisie, it has virtually disappeared among the proletariat. Here

All the foundations of typical monogamy are cleared away . . . there is no property, for the preservation and inheritance of which monogamy and male supremacy were established; hence there is no incentive to make . . . male supremacy effective . . . And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labour market and into the factory, and made her often the breadwinner of the family, no basis of any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household, except, perhaps, for something of the brutality towards women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy. (p135).

Engels saw the poor as having the best form of sexual relationship of his time. (His feeling for the equality of proletarian women and for heterosexuality is perhaps not unconnected with his own long relationship with a working class woman, and after her death

*In later chapters when he looks in detail at the history of the Ancient World and the feudal period to trace the development of the state, he says nothing about sexual divisions.

with her sister.) For most Victorians, however, marriages were not freely chosen. Parents refused consent or threatened to disinherit to coerce their children, and within marriage there was "open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife" and male adultery. Engels therefore looked forward to the overthrow of capitalism and private property — which he and his comrades hoped would be imminent — not only because this would improve the quality of people's employed lives, but their private lives too.

The single family (would then cease) to be the economic unit of society. Private house-keeping (would be) transformed into a social industry. The care and education of children (would become) a public affair; society would look after all children alike, whether they were legitimate or not. (p139).

There would not then be a return to 'pairing marriage' much less the group marriage or promiscuity of earlier times, because in the intervening centuries there had developed a particular form of 'sex love' — romantic love — which has been the supposed basis for marriage for many centuries. Marriage under communism would be monogamous and based wholly on mutual inclination.

Revisiting Engels

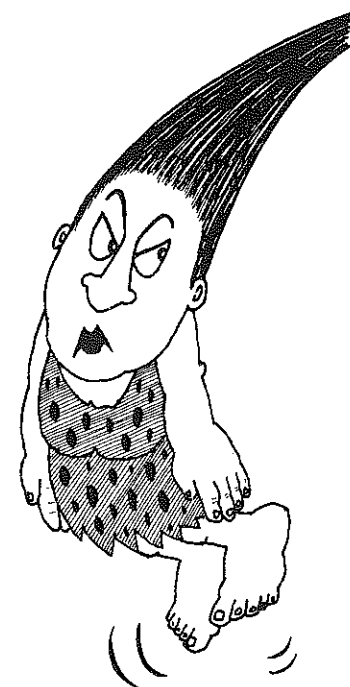
Those who have written recently in appreciation of Engels' work have suggested his contribution was to establish the beginnings of a history of the family and of women's oppression. They see his account as stressing the social nature of relations between men and women and the possibility of change (improvement) in the future. It is certainly true that Engels nowhere suggests that women are naturally inferior to men — which is remarkable in a late nineteenth century author. He does also stress that power, sexual and emotional relations between the sexes can vary profoundly — with changes in technology and in the economic system; and he is progressive in seeing prostitution as due to male dominance and marriage, and not to male sexual 'needs'.

But the book is fundamentally flawed, as is all of Marx and Engels's (and most subsequent Marxist work) on women's oppression. First, Engels asserts that in subsistence economies, such as hunter-gathers, or among

Even if it is merely a projection backwards from the situation of the modern monogamous family, which no scientific investigation will ever be able to verify in the past, it is an evocation which contains within it the elements of the socialist analysis of women's oppression and the pre-conditions of women's emancipation. That reason alone is sufficient to make it of interest. (Rosalind Delmar, 'Looking again at Engels' *Origins of the family, Private Property and the State*, in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (eds) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, 1976.)

Frederick Engels was the first person to treat (the) problem (of the origins of women's oppression) in a systematic and scientific way which related to women's present position to what had happened at the dawn of history. Of course there had been writers before Engels who had protested about the treatment of women in modern society, but they had not undertaken an historical investigation into how this had arisen. (Communist Party pamphlet, *Women: Oppression and Liberation. Part 1. The Beginning*, 1976.)





Basing much of this theory on Morgan's fascinating but inaccurate, anthropological investigations, Engels had many valuable insights . . . (but) The position of women . . . in the work of Marx and Engels remains dissociated from, or subsidiary to, a discussion of the family, which is in its turn subordinated as merely a precondition of private property. Their solutions (to overcoming women's subordination) retain this overly economic stress, or enter the realm of dislocated speculation. (Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, 1971.)

the nineteenth century poor, there was near equality between men and women. Yet this is contradicted by the actual accounts of some of the tribes he cites (eg the Australian Aborigines) and by his own earlier book on *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1844). It may be uncomfortable, but it has to be admitted that when everyone has to work all the hours God sends to make a living, some still work more hours than others; that when there is too little food to go round, some get *all* the meat and beer — and have the right to use violence and to abuse others sexually; in a word, that there is *not* 'equality in misfortune', but rather further inequality and exploitation. Hunter-gatherer men may have a hard life, but their wives' lives are harder. Proletarian men are oppressed by capitalism, but this does not mean they do not, in turn, oppress women.

Engels's (and other's) unwillingness to see inequalities in early societies is undoubtedly related to seeing the divisions within such societies as natural. In *The Origin* . . . there is a sense of early man having a functional, utilitarian understanding of and interaction with nature and of the difference of social role between males and females being a requirement if the society as a whole is to survive. Each sex is seen as necessary to the other, and their relationship is seen as one of co-operation and mutual aid.

Although feminists have been swift and thorough in demolishing assertions that there are psychological differences between the sexes, and physiological differences — eg the men's muscularity — which are significant *today*, and although we have also criticised the fact that almost all studies are set up to look at differences and never at similarities between the sexes, we seem to experience a curious block on recognising natural determinism in accounts of early societies. It seems to be universally taken as 'obvious' that *all* societies *must* recognise and treat the genital differences among humans in the same way as Western societies do (ie as of major social significance: as the basis for dividing the population into two, and only two, mutually exclusive categories from birth), and that all societies, and especially early societies, will have a sexual division of

labour. Anyone who tries to question this is accused of 'denying biology'.

However, differences of skin colour or age are equally 'biological', yet most people are happy to accept that these are noticed and used as the basis for social divisions only in certain cases and in different sorts of ways. Why the double standard in respect of sex? Perhaps because gender is so central to *our* thinking that it is a major act of the imagination (found only in a few science fiction writers) to conceive of the possibility of a society without it: one where sexual differences are just that — *differences* of genitals, of no greater social import than hair colour or height. This is not a denial of biology, but of the suggestion that biology automatically produces particular social effects.

In Engels's reconstruction of the childhood of mankind there is an elaborate social division by sex: men hunted and women cared for the home. This he took as given by differences of biology: men could run faster and women had babies and so needed to stick close to safety and to be near nursing toddlers.

But why, if fleetness of foot was actually the point at issue in hunting, wasn't it the fastest runners in the society (regardless of genitals or pregnancy) who hunted? Why two *categories*, and why *rules* about behaviour? Between all those who actually *can* do something doing it (and those who can't do it, not doing it), and a category (those with/without penises) being *required* to or *excluded* from doing something, there is a major change — a change from "a pure and simple outgrowth of nature" to a *social* division (the social construction of categories and of behaviour).

Because Engels does not see sexual divisions as social, he does not enquire how the categorisation and the rules came about, who benefits from them and how, and who had the power to maintain them. He thus in fact takes as given precisely what he said he was going to explain: the origin of men's power over women.

This ties directly with a third major flaw in Engels's theory: that in explaining the *sexual* division of labour he goes against the very methodology he and Marx were at

pains to develop. Their genius — and their political concern — was to show that all divisions of labour are a consequence of and a means to maintain hierarchy and exploitation; that all divisions of labour are bound up with one category (one class) appropriating (exploiting) and benefitting from the labour of another. Yet in the case of men and women, Engels argued that *the division of labour came first and the hierarchy, the oppression, later*, due to outside factors. But if women were not already dominated when 'men's' area of work became a source of surplus, surely they would have made sure that 'the customs of the time' changed, so that everyone, men and women (continued to?) get an equal slice of the cake? If they didn't, it must have been because they *couldn't*.

Similarly, although Marx stressed that all class systems are maintained by an ideology which legitimates the hierarchy and oppression, and although he himself showed that for the last 200 years in the West such ideologies have characteristically been a set of beliefs about the different *natures* of the two classes (he specifically attacked the idea that the working class was naturally inferior: more stupid, less hard working, less moral — almost a race apart from the bourgeoisie), Engels still proposed that the origins of the sexual division of labour lay in the different natures of men and women.

Engels's account thus puts itself forward as an historical account of the origins of men's oppression of women, but it is not. It appears historical because it suggests the oppression of women came with a particular event, at a particular point in time; but the fact that this event benefitted men *against* women is based on what Engels had *invented* as the natural (ahistoric, asocial) 'egalitarian' division of labour between the sexes. In addition, because he saw women's oppression as having its roots in basic human nature, albeit coming into effect only at a particular period, he could also suggest that once established women's oppression was perpetuated down through the ages despite changing conditions. Pastoralism might have sparked off women's oppression, but as pastoralism was succeeded by farming, or feudalism by

capitalism, monogamy just continued. (It tends to be radical feminists — like Kate Millett — who get accused of giving a universalistic, ahistoric account of patriarchy. Engels's is far worse. As you turn the page he jumps *5½ thousand years*, and still marriage is essentially the same!)

All those who, when faced with the fact that we do not know, and cannot know, how gender, the sexual division of labour and male dominance came into existence among humans, are nonetheless prepared to 'reconstruct' prehistory, are in the business of telling stories. They are making up accounts of 'the origins' of women's oppression which are not so much about the *beginnings* as about the *ultimate causes*. For Engels in *The Origin* . . . the reason why women are oppressed is because of nature and a particular mode of production (a technology and a set of relationships — in fact relationships between men). This is *not* a *social* explanation; it is a logical monstrosity.

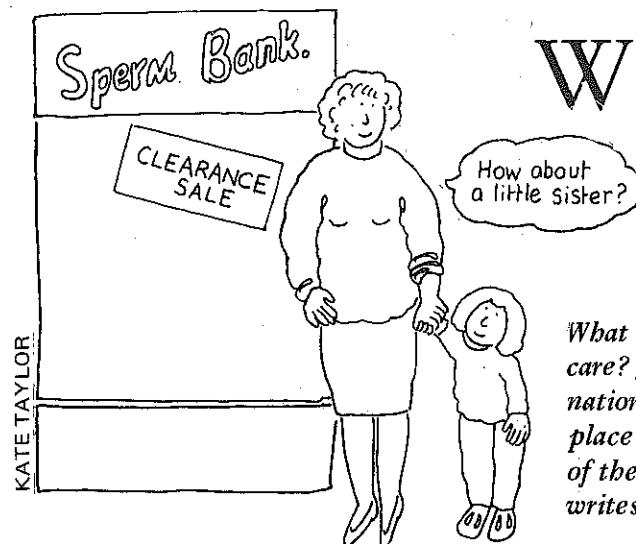
Engels did not reach this conclusion by employing historical materialism. He reached it by undermining Marxism, by reasoning in an *anti-marxist* fashion. For if he could invert the causal order he and Marx insist on for class divisions when dealing with sex divisions, why not elsewhere? Either *all* divisions of labour are a consequence of and a means to maintain hierarchy and exploitation, or *none* are. Either naturalism is an *ideology*, as a means of viewing the world which justifies and thus helps continue exploitative relationships, or it's the *actual reason* for such, *all such*, relationships.

I believe that the approach developed by Marx and Engels in their analysis of various forms of division of labour is an invaluable tool in understanding — and combatting — different forms of oppression. Unfortunately, however, they themselves did not apply this analysis to the sexual division of labour. Quite the opposite. We will not therefore, find the understanding of women's oppression which we need within even the limited writing they have left us on the family. These will only mystify us, especially if treated as Holy Writ. We must discard them and continue their work ourselves.

Thanks to Christine Delphy for the loan of some of her ideas.



CATH JACKSON



Who's holding the test-tube?

What are the new reproductive technologies? And why should we care? Jalna Hanmer and Elizabeth Powell-Jones report on the first national conference on the new reproductive technologies that took place in Leeds, March 24-25. This is followed by an explanation of the complicated jargon of the medical men. Diana Leonard writes on their definitions and our interpretations.

Medical intervention in women's reproduction is not new. Contraception, abortion, sterilisation and the process of giving birth are routinely controlled by doctors. But medical and scientific intervention has now reached a further stage of development. So much so that the Government has set up the Warnock Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology. Its terms of reference are:

to consider recent and potential developments in medicine and science related to human fertilisation and embryology; to consider what policies and safeguards should be applied, including consideration of the social, ethical and legal implication of their developments and to make recommendations.

Billed in the press as the "test-tube baby" inquiry, the Committee decided that its terms of reference includes sex selection, sex determination, artificial insemination, invitro fertilisation (IVF), embryo replacement (ER), embryo transfer (ET), cloning, genetic engineering, organ transplant using embryos, surrogate motherhood and womb leasing, and the artificial placenta (ectogenesis), but not abortion and contraception. There is no firm news about when the Warnock report will be out, but all the evidence they are prepared to accept is now in and the last Committee meeting has taken place. We expect their report to be available anytime from June to December 1984.

The first day of the Conference was spent learning about the new technologies and looking at the way the medical and

scientific establishment has reacted to their potential. We worked from the information supplied by the Warnock Committee, which served to remind us of the considerable establishment interest. We examined the way the media has promoted the new reproductive technologies, particularly IVF, with lots of photos of delighted white mothers with babies and nary a word about their failures.

There were two main issues to be discussed; the increased control over women by men (professional and husbands), and the different application of the technologies to different women. On Sunday we explored the implications for all women; disabled, Black, Jewish, white, with and without children (voluntarily or involuntarily), heterosexual and lesbian. The medical professionals promoting the new technologies are dividing women into fit and unfit mothers. While we expect this division to be followed in the Warnock Committee's recommendations, it was firmly rejected by the women present.

Given the potential for exploiting women, we were certain that Black and Third World women will continue to be the most exploited. For example, in the USA there are agencies to provide surrogate mothers. The men who run these "stables" are keen to apply the technology so that Mexican and other Latin American women can bear children for wealthy westerners. "If we could cross international lines, then \$1000 is a significant sum of money, whereas (in

the US) it's just a week's or a month's wages", says John Stehura, president of the Bionetics Foundation in California. He claims that a Third World surrogate mother would not even need to be healthy. "The mother could have a health problem which could be quite serious. However, if her diet is good and other aspects of her life are OK, she could become a viable mother for genuine embryo transfer." Although this may sound too much like science fiction, and may not happen in Britain, we know that Third World women are already used routinely for experimentation by white western scientists; for example, the testing of drugs prior to their release as "safe" in the West, and the widespread use of the forms of contraception that are considered least acceptable here such as Depo Provera and contraceptive hormonal implants.

We began to discuss the issue of motherhood and how we, as feminists, feel about it. We looked at the social pressure on women to be mothers; the view that you're not a real woman until you have a child, and the negative way women without children are described as 'barren', 'sterile', and 'infertile'. Often child-rearing is the only area in a woman's life where she can have some control and her children may be her only source of love and affection. Much of the time was spent sharing personal experiences and feelings which gave us a different perspective on the technologies than we would have had if we had just discussed the issues on an abstract level. There was concern that a blanket rejection of in vitro fertilisation, in particular, would in effect be saying that the involuntarily childless woman has less right to have children than other women. This would be as bad as saying that lesbians or poor women or Black women or women with disabilities have no right to have children.

Unfortunately our discussion of our feelings and views about disability in children didn't go as deeply as it might have. We already accept a wide range of screening procedures to detect certain congenital conditions, with the underlying implication that the less than 'perfect' baby will be aborted. The search for 'perfect' babies has a nasty past in the West. It takes us back to Nazi Germany, the Final Solution and their

breeding programmes. The new twist is a medical approach aimed at 'correcting' defects by selecting 'perfect' embryos for implanting, or later by surgery while still a fetus in the womb. If the underlying premise is accepted, how do we object to 'correcting' for sex or Blackness? The more closely the idea of 'perfection' is defined and enforced, the more deviation from it will be punished by social isolation and judgements of 'freakishness'. These ideas may seem closely related to anti-abortion groups that define themselves as pro-life. However, we believe that a woman must be able to exercise choice once she discovers that she does not want or cannot cope with a pregnancy. The emphasis must be on what the woman wants and not on some notion of creating 'perfect' babies. We think this issue needs a lot more discussion.

While many issues remained very open-ended, there was agreement amongst those of us who were there. We did not think it necessary to have a complete consensus of opinion, a 'feminist line', but we did agree about how to approach the issues. There is a need for more information and discussion. We agreed that there is a need for action. We agreed that we reject the underlying philosophy upon which the medical profession, and we think the Warnock Inquiry, are basing their recommendations for practice. We therefore can work together to demand increased control by women over all reproductive technologies, both old and new. We agreed there is a need to present an alternative view to the general public and to widen the discussion within the movement.

There is a particular need for a network of women to monitor developments and more opportunities to come together to consciousness raise around these issues. The national office of the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign have offered to collect and send out information to interested women by keeping a resource file which women can consult, by sending out photocopies of articles if requested (small donation), and information through their newsletter. (Their address is 52/54 Featherstone St, London EC1.) We feel this is an increasingly important issue, as did the other women who came to Leeds. Women are urgently needed to help.

Women make strides in Reproductive Technology.



KATE TAYLOR

This information is taken from the description provided by the DHSS for the Warnock Committee. Our comments are in italics.

In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), Embryo Replacement (ER) and Embryo Transfer (ET) — 'Test-tube Babies'

IVF and ET are used primarily to overcome female infertility due to the absence or gross disease (or past medical destruction) of the Fallopian Tubes, down which the egg has to pass to reach the uterus. The concept of IVF is simple; a ripe human egg is extracted from the ovary shortly before it would have been released by nature. Next the egg is mixed with the semen of the husband or partner, so that fertilisation can occur. The fertilised egg is then transferred back to the mother's uterus, once it has started to divide. In practice the technique for recovery of the eggs for fertilisation, their culture outside the mother's body, and the retransfer of the developing embryo to the uterus, have to be carried out under very carefully controlled conditions. IVF and ER became a human reality when the first baby, Louise Brown, was delivered by Mr Patrick Steptoe at Oldham General Hospital in June 1978. This birth was the culmination of more than a decade of research by Mr Steptoe and Dr Robert Edwards of Cambridge (*University*). Their programme at Oldham resulted in two further IVF births. ER (embryo replacement) is the term used when the embryo is returned to the donor mother, and ET (embryo transfer) when it is implanted into a woman other than the donor of the ovum (egg).

Induction of Super-Ovulation

Normally one egg is released during each human menstrual cycle. Some women do not release an egg regularly and for them certain hormones, such as chorionic gonadotrophin, may be used to stimulate ovulation, as this can cause the release of several eggs in a single cycle (super-ovulation).

As the recovery of an egg for techniques such as IVF involves a surgical operation and an anaesthetic, drugs that cause super-ovulation can be used so that more than one egg can be recovered from a single operation.

At the time the woman ovulates, the ripe egg is extracted surgically, using a laparoscope (a long tube with a fibre-optic telescope) inserted through an incision in her navel — under local or general anaesthetic and with her abdomen distended with carbon dioxide. Semen is poured onto the egg in a glass vessel (hence 'in vitro'), and the developing embryo is reintroduced into her vagina or uterus using a syringe or catheter. It then may work up to and settle in the womb, attaching itself and growing normally.

The 'disease' of fallopian tubes IVF is used to 'cure' is often the result of past medical misdiagnosis of pelvic infection or due to IUD infection.

In 1980 Steptoe and Edwards opened a private clinic at Bourne Hall, Cambridge, where IVF is now available to UK residents and to couples from overseas. It was reported recently that there have been more than 140 pregnancies conceived at Bourne Hall, representing a 20–25% success rate among women to whom embryos have been transferred. In Australia there is a successful IVF programme in Melbourne, and there have also been IVF births in France, USA, Sweden and Denmark. The technique is now being used in many more centres worldwide (as a result, the research teams say, of 'intense' public demand').

Note that Steptoe and Edwards' work was developed using public and charitable funds (NHS, University Laboratories, Ford Foundation). They then went private, charging up to £2000 to couples desperate for a child. They will only consider using the egg of a married woman and her husband's sperm.

The success rate of 25% is doubted by many. It is virtually impossible to get IVF through the NHS. It is reported to be especially frequently done for/on foreign (Arab) women.

Super-ovulation is in regular use in treatment of infertile women (unfortunately, not necessarily only after testing to establish if there is any problem with ovulation).

Developments of IVF: Surrogate Mothers, Womb Leasing and Egg Donation

In veterinary practice it is now possible for an embryo conceived in vitro to be transferred to the uterus of a cow, pig or sheep that is not its natural mother.

The term 'surrogate mother' has been used to describe this situation in humans or alternatively 'egg donation' (or ET).

It has been suggested that human egg donation might be used:

(a) Where a woman has or may be the carrier of an hereditary disease. She might receive a *donated egg*, which after fertilisation by her husband's sperm in vitro would then be transferred to her uterus.

(b) When a woman cannot herself bear a child (eg has a history of miscarriage, or a disability). She could donate an egg which would be fertilised by her husband's sperm in vitro and then transferred to the uterus of another woman. The surrogate mother would then *carry the pregnancy* but return the child to its genetic parents after delivery. This sequence of events has been called "womb leasing" in some publications, if the mother is to be paid to carry the pregnancy. (*Our stress.*)

Cloning

In certain amphibian species (such as frogs) and more recently in some mammals (for example sheep) it has become possible as an experimental procedure to divide a fertilised embryo when it is at a very early stage of development and contains two or four cells. Each of these cells develops into a separate individual (clone), but they have identical characteristics and genetic constitution.

It is possible that cloning could be used to investigate the chromosomal normality of human embryos conceived by a couple who have a high chance of procreating an abnormal child. One of the clones would be allowed to continue development, while the remaining clones would be deep frozen. If the embryo proved to have a normal chromosomal make-up, one of its clones could be unfrozen and transferred to the mother's uterus.

There are reports that in the USA and Australia, IVF embryos have been transferred to women who are not genetically related, but in the UK there are as yet no reports of a successful pregnancy in which a woman has borne a child of which she was not the genetic mother.

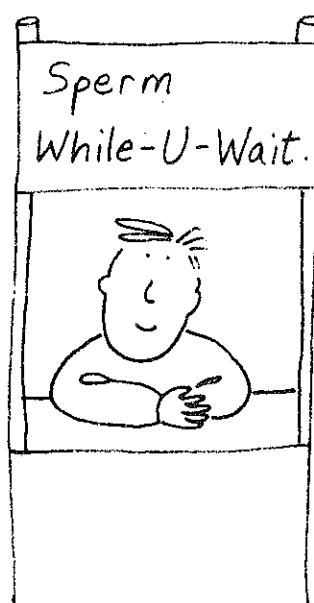
Edwards has said publicly he is against these latter procedures being carried out on a mass scale, because there would be 'no point in getting married in the first place'. Others have hesitated because of the legal uncertainty as to whose child it would be (the sperm donor's, the egg donor's or the womb owner's). It is, however, reported that a consultant is planning to open a clinic using IVF and donated eggs if the Warnock Committee Report is favourable to the procedure. Andrea Dworkin describes this as reproductive prostitution. She suggests poor women would end up giving eggs or going through pregnancy for the rich.



The technique described by the DHSS is only one of various forms of cloning, and would be less mysteriously described as artificial twinning. Another, parthenogenesis, the production of young by the mother without fertilisation, which is quite common in some species, is not mentioned. It has been discovered recently, however, that the start of the process can occur in humans.

Since all offspring of this form of cloning are female, it is obviously of use to animal breeders, but not, one would think, of much interest to most scientists in relation to humans!

There are no reports yet of a successful human pregnancy following (artificial) cloning of the embryo, though twins or triplets of course have been born naturally.



Artificial Insemination

The DHSS distinguishes two types of artificial insemination: Artificial Insemination by Husband (AIH) and Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID). (*The DHSS doesn't describe the process by which semen is obtained!*) The semen may either be placed in the upper portion of the vagina next to the cervix or injected into the uterus through a fine catheter (tube).

AI may be carried out using fresh or frozen semen.

AIH is used for some couples who cannot otherwise conceive and if, for example, it is felt that the chances of pregnancy would be increased by concentrating the husband's semen or by inserting it directly into the uterus. Other reasons for AIH occur:

When the husband cannot ejaculate but instead passes his semen into the bladder (retrograde ejaculation).

For some couples where the husband is severely physically disabled and AIH offers the only possibility for him to father a child.

If a man is to undergo surgery or radiotherapy that may result in sterility, his semen may be stored by deep freezing and used at a later date for AIH. More recently semen has been similarly stored by some men before they undergo vasectomy as a means of permanent contraception.

Less commonly, AIH may be used to overcome a particular type of female infertility where antibodies which kill the sperm are found in the cervical mucus. In such cases AIH may be successful when the semen is injected into the uterus.

AID is used when investigations have shown the husband to be infertile or to have significantly reduced fertility. AID has also been used when a fertile husband suffers from, or may be the carrier of a serious hereditary condition, for example, Huntington's Chorea; and the couple decide that they will not risk passing on the husband's condition to the next generation.

To obtain semen, the man simply jerks off into a clean glass or china container. Most AID uses semen from male medical students (who are paid a fee — unlike blood donors). The semen is then introduced into a woman's vagina at the time of ovulation with a syringe or eye dropper.

Historically artificial insemination was the first technique applied to modify human reproduction almost 100 years ago. It is now widely used medically.

There have been many successful pregnancies using frozen semen, although the proportion of successful inseminations is not as high as it is with fresh semen.

According to the DHSS, in 1979 more than 1800 women began treatment in the UK, and in the same year there were over 800 pregnancies from AID. *The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) offers AID among its services.*

AI has recently been used by lesbians who want a child but not through sexual intercourse. (Called Self Insemination, SI). A doctor who was helping a group of them was 'exposed' in a newspaper and hostile questions were asked of the Minister of Health in the Commons (see Spare Rib no.78, 1978). The whole procedure is in fact easy and can be done without medical help or the involvement of an official donor organisation. Self Insemination groups exist in many big cities in Britain.

There have been reports in the British press of a married couple who could not have children making an agreement with another woman that she would bear a child fathered by the husband. Following the birth, the mother was to give the baby to the couple. The child was conceived by AI, but when the baby was born the mother decided to keep the child herself. Although the reports referred to this arrangement as 'womb leasing' the pregnancy was, in fact, no different from other AI pregnancies; ie it was simpler than the other forms of 'surrogate motherhood' described below under 'IVF developments'. The courts upheld this woman's right to her child even though she had agreed before its birth to give it up.

Choosing the Sex of Human Offspring (Sex Selection, Sex Determination)

In future, the development of a technique to separate male and female bearing sperm would allow couples to choose the sex of their offspring using AIH after the sperm had been separated. Techniques to separate male and female bearing sperm do not exist at present.

There are however two techniques available that can identify the foetal sex as early as 16–18 weeks gestation, namely ultrasound (*high frequency sound waves making a picture on a TV screen of the foetus in the womb*), and amniocentesis (*taking a sample of the fluid surrounding the foetus in the womb, drawn through a needle inserted under local anaesthetic*) followed by chromosomal analysis. Either method is now used to identify the foetal gender when there is a risk of a sex-linked hereditary disease, but both techniques can only be used at a relatively late stage of pregnancy. If a foetus of the affected gender is identified, a late abortion may be carried out under section 1.1.B of the Abortion Act.

It has been suggested that IVF, cloning and freezing techniques could be used to determine the sex of an embryo prior to its transfer to the mother's uterus, thereby avoiding the situation where a late abortion might otherwise be performed on account of an inherited sex-linked disorder such as haemophilia. It has also been suggested the techniques might be used more widely by couples who particularly wanted a child of a given sex.

Ongoing Development of the Human Embryo and Foetus In Vitro Ectogenesis (Artificial Wombs and Placentas)

In the current state of knowledge it is not possible to maintain development of a human (or other primate) embryo in vitro beyond a comparatively early stage, but development of current techniques is likely to result in embryos being maintained for progressively longer periods so that embryonic and foetal development can be studied. In the foreseeable future it is improbable that a human embryo could be maintained to full term in vitro.

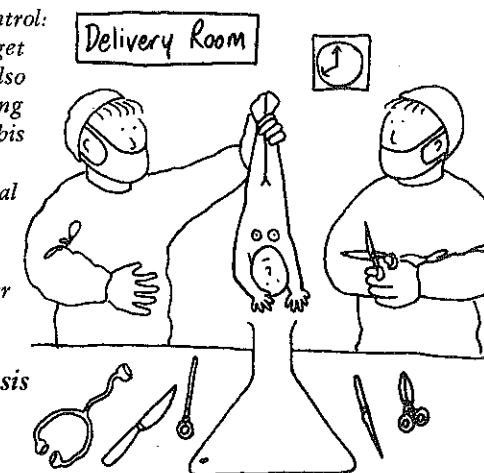
The DHSS documentation doesn't mention it, but such techniques could also, of course, be used by people not in couples, using AID or SI.

At present, all techniques to maximise the chances of getting an X (or Y) sperm to fertilise an egg, are unproven, though several have been patented and advice abounds.

Abortion at 16–18 weeks would be unlikely to be done if the objection were just to the sex of the foetus.

There have been a relatively large number of studies on sex preference, showing a consistent preference for boys, as elder or only children. The studies all assume that once methods of determining sex before conception are available, they will be used, although some account is taken of the large number of respondents who express no interest in determining the sex of their children. The usual rationale given for research on sex predetermination is its potential contribution to population control: people will have fewer children if they get the sex they want first time. It would also avoid infanticide (in fact gynocide: killing of females) in certain countries where this is practised. (Work has been going on in China for many years to determine foetal sex for these reasons.)

More nightmare visions have also been suggested of a world with a much greater number of men than women.



The placenta performs an at present irreplaceable function in providing nutrients to the foetus in the womb. It certainly seems that the time when babies can be artificially incubated, as in Brave New World, Woman on the Edge of Time, and The Dialectic of Sex, is a long way off. However, womb-envy continues. A French geneticist, addressing a conference on IVF in May 1983, speculated that it might be possible one day for men to give birth via Caesarean section, to babies artificially nurtured in the abdomen.

Patients and Power

A review of Catcall 15 and 16: Special issues on Feminist Politics and Women's Health

A noisy 'homemade' magazine called *Catcall* has been appearing with erratic regularity for the past eight years. The collective says it's a 'non-sectarian forum for discussion, theory, and the exchange of ideas by and for women in the women's liberation movement'. Although it includes socialist feminist articles, my assumption is that its impetus and sustenance comes from radical feminism at the 'grass roots' level. The two most recent issues have been guest edited by Sophie Laws and focus on the feminist politics of women and health.

I'm going to look at these two issues of *Catcall* together — it's easier for me but does not indicate that the two issues form some sort of unified whole. I'm going to concentrate on two areas which present the most substantial amount of material although they provide more of a beginning, a questioning, a setting of the stage than definitive answers.

The healer-patient relationship is political!

In *Catcall* 15, Sophie Laws and Carol Smith set up in the first two articles differing perspectives on alternative and 'allopathic' (conventional, Western) medicine. Sophie, in *Women's Health Care and Alternative Medicine: Reasons to Believe?*, asks a series of questions and makes sharp points about alternative health care which left me nodding in agreement. "What I want to write about here is how that critical attitude often seems to disappear when it comes to anything outside mainstream medicine." And later: "Women who go to any health practitioner as patients are in a very vulnerable position, and I feel we should be allowed to expect an answer, in terms we can understand, to questions about *why* that healer thinks what she proposes to do is good for us. On the other side, I think those of us who go to alternative practitioners have the responsibility to judge and discuss the treatment we get. Most healer-

patient relationships are very private, and it seems to me that for all our sakes we have to start breaking down the silences that come with that privacy."

She tellingly questions a tendency to romanticise a golden past of female healers when women were supposedly in control and in contact with nature, able to use herbs and 'home' remedies to heal the people of their community. This uncritical harking-back has less to do with the harsh realities of life in previous centuries than with our present day awareness of how male-dominated medicine and technology has alienated us from what little women did control in those past days.

I liked Sophie's discussion of 'nature' and feminism in relation to alternative health treatment. "There must be other reasons, though, for all this willingness to believe — we do not, for instance, go on pilgrimages to Lourdes because generations of women have believed it was good for them to do so. I've been thinking that maybe one of these is that many feminists are attracted to the idea of nature that the alternative disciplines teach. Instead of the doctors' image of nature as a battleground of germs versus chemicals, the 'natural' faction offers a much pleasanter vision, where natural foods exist to keep us healthy, where a plant exists to match every kind of breakdown our bodies are subject to. We are to live in harmony with 'Mother' Nature. Women are often felt to have a special relationship with nature, a duty, even, to defend 'her' from bad men who seek to deny 'her' goodness and to dominate 'her'."

This is good stuff and I would have liked it to go on more — more about how this view links into a quite traditional view of the 'feminine' which extends beyond matters of illness and health and can be seen at work in some of the appeal of Greenham Common.

A few months ago I co-ordinated a day workshop on 'Women, Health and Sexuality' at an adult education institute. I quite expected that there would be a diverse group of women; what I wasn't prepared for was the number of women who were so wound up in holistic medicine that reactions to oppression and exploitation, as well as health, were individualised into a matter of a 'state of mind'. Not only could you prevent cancer through being 'in tune' with your mind and body, you could transcend sexism by the same method.

Sophie asks for a more scientific (albeit feminist) approach to alternative treatments, as well as feminist questioning. Again this is tantalising, but more suggested than developed. If, and I agree, we need to remove the fuzziness from alternative approaches, then we need a much more precise view of science. For myself, it is not only a question of whether science is 'male' or not. What *would* constitute a feminist scientific approach to allopathic and alternative medicine? When Sophie talks about evaluating different approaches what she appears to be partially asking for is a feminist evaluation of different methods of getting statistics, 'facts', rather than a more in-depth discussion of what constitutes radical science. This would have to include the intuitive and imaginative 'leaps' in science and could be helpful in an evaluation of alternative health methods.

Sophie's clear look at a tendency for feminists to fall into an individual sampling of the different alternatives to conventional medicine — her insistence that as feminists we should ask political questions about the theories and practices of different treatments — is appealing to me. And yet . . . when I turned to Carol Smith's article, *Is Alternative Medicine Necessarily Better For Women?*, (pretty much a qualified yes), I was also in sympathy. I am a sampler of alternative health care; I am a 'believer', if not in a big way, and especially in relation to chronic health problems. Yet I rely on the NHS for cervical smears, panics about heart murmurs, children's ailments at times.

Carol's discussion of the social relations between practitioner and patient in the NHS and in holistically oriented treatments raised important issues about how to evaluate

different treatments. But when she used acupuncture to illustrate a particular point I began to wonder. "To lie there and have needles put into you, (which is a crude simplification for which I apologize), does seem to be far away from any idea of power to the patient!!! It is not Acupuncture as medical practice that I dispute, but what I see as the inevitable social relations of passivity and power." Although she goes on to say she's in the process of having her mind changed, I haven't a clue in what way. Surely you cannot simply locate 'power and passivity' in the treatment but must look at the context in which that might occur. When I was having acupuncture, my sense of having chosen and understood the basic ideas behind it made me feel more in control than during any NHS treatment I've had.

Perhaps it is the perspective of the practitioner and patient together which may transform the particular treatment. Although I may have romanticised Chinese health care in the mid 1970s, I still think there were parts of the Chinese approach then (things have changed now!) which are relevant to this discussion. There, whatever the treatment — herbal, acupuncture, surgical, drugs — it was discussed in detail with the patient in a political context.

Other thoughts were stirred up in me by Carol's focus on taking control, taking power, taking responsibility. Quite rightly she points out that some alternative professionals are as classist, sexist, racist, ageist and heterosexist as in allopathic medicine. "They can be careless and disrespectful of women's needs and desires (sounds familiar?)" Quite rightly she points out that "Some women do not want that power; even big strong dykes want to be looked after sometimes!" And she's clear that there is a contradiction we all should be aware of between taking responsibility for our own health and recognising the basic responsibility for most ill health lies in the society we live in. But *what* exactly does 'taking control', 'taking power' mean on an individual, one-to-one level?

As a relatively small, puny, not young dyke, I think there are very different situations in which we approach health care. One is when we're relatively 'well', or disturbed by a chronic health problem, and

Even if lobotomy and ECT were outlawed, the sophisticated and devastating use of drugs is a much more accepted method of social control, and one far harder to intervene in.

"We do not, for instance, go on pilgrimages to Lourdes because generations of women have believed it was good for them . . ."



Catcall 15 and 16 are available from *Catcall*, 37 Wortley Road, London E6, for 80p, or £1 for a three-issue subscription.

When we're relatively well it's easier to be more 'active' and to take control than at the point when we might be scared and in great physical pain.

want to improve our health or prevent ill health. We're likely to be less fraught than when we know/figure something is really very wrong. In the first case it's easier to be more 'active' and to take control than when we might be scared and in great physical pain.

However, in both situations I would want a — hmmm — have to say it — dialectic relation with practitioner and treatment. One in which my health needs are being 'served' and in which I'm involved in understanding it and fitting it into the rest of my life. I would want the possibility of one-to-one treatment/care in which I knew or was told about the possible effects/side effects of the treatment and where I could trustingly receive the healer's help and advice. To receive help/advice/treatment is not necessarily in itself power-less. And I would also want the possibility of collective discussion with other 'patients' and with practitioners — a to and fro between my individual needs (no matter how socially based) and feminist desire to exchange and explore with other women in that situation. An ideal, I know, but not an impossible one.

Therapy — feminist advance, retreat or neither?

Barbara Briggs in *Catcall 15* and Danielle Harway in *16* both tackle feminist therapy; Dianne Grimsditch lays open her own experience of severe emotional crisis. Barbara and Danielle are feminist therapists; their articles attempt to disarm critics of therapy and to build bridges between the individualised experience of one-to-one therapy and the necessity they both see of collective organising, understanding and change. Of course I want the 'perfect' answers — greedily as I am, and in therapy after years of dismissing it myself. The answers are not there in any easy way, nor do I believe they could be.

Barbara Briggs in *Feminist Therapy: some questions* asks why so many feminists are interested in therapy. "Are we only just waking up to a need previously unmet, and adding to our political practice, or are we seeking private solutions in the face of political failure?" She goes on to ask if therapeutic practices, "do have a valid place in the repertoire of skills possessed by women, and can be seen as political tools, or whether

they represent a retreat into the private".

My own feeling is that her questions are too polarised — I don't think that therapy necessarily releases new political energy or by its nature drains it off into 'the private'. That is not to minimize its importance for many women, nor to dampen down criticism. The therapy movement can become a place into which feminists, formally more involved in other areas of the movement, put time and energy. But even if one is critical of the time and energy going there, we can't pretend that therapy 'seduced' all of those women away from more important areas of involvement. Being involved in the WLM has meant many things to many different women. As Barbara says, some women have found that pain and unhappiness of a 'feminist kind' threatened their ability to continue — even as they realised the 'personal is political'. Unfortunately we can't simply 'will' ourselves into perfect, politicised, assertive, powerful, independent women.

However, I wonder if Barbara's picture of women who ended up in therapy because they could not speak openly of their pain or problems in feminist settings or did not get the attention and care they needed is a true one? I've had a lot of care, support and concern from feminist friends and co-workers when I've been in emotional crisis. I've spoken, at times what felt like endlessly, to feminists who listened with careful attention. I don't need therapy to understand my oppression as a woman, nor to identify where that oppression comes from. But none of this is enough to help me change the often unconscious, negative repeating aspects of myself which are rooted in the socially determined but individualised way I grew up in a western, patriarchal, capitalist country. If I had to choose I'd choose the women's liberation movement over therapy in one second flat. But I don't have to choose. I'm willing, through what feels like personal necessity (and opportunity!), to go to someone who says she has skills, to try to understand those inarticulated patterns and defences which have had pretty disastrous effects on my life.

Dianne Grimsditch puts it very well in her article *There Have Not Been Words For the Way I Feel*. "Sadly my struggles not to be an 'individualist' further undermined my

self-confidence, my vague feelings that it was all right to want to be happy, to feel joy and pleasure. I became increasingly active and increasingly ill-at-ease with myself. Any sense of identity I had could only come from my 'political activity'. Trying to sort out my emotions seemed grossly self-indulgent (and almost impossibly difficult). So I ignored my feelings of unease the best I could until they overwhelmed me."

At present feminist therapy is an option primarily open to white middle class women. The women writing in *Catcall* point out that working class and/or Black women suffer depression, crisis, nervous breakdowns in larger numbers than middle class women, but because of their specific oppressions of class, race, sex and age do not have the 'choice' of turning to private therapy. They end up in the NHS sector and there they are drugged and often hospitalised, with the aim of slotting them back (adjusted of course) into society.

The Unkindest Cut — or not

Di Hudson's article in *Catcall 16* on *The Psycho-Control of Women: Lobotomy as a method of social control* takes us into medicalised 'treatment' of women. We jump from the question of whether therapy can be part of feminism to the totally biologically oriented, male-dominated 'treatment' of women who haven't the choice, who go 'too far', who cannot function in society, cannot escape notice — from family, superiors, the medical profession itself.

There is no reason why a very specific form of psychiatric 'treatment', lobotomy — in which nerves in the brain, usually in the frontal lobe, are cut — should not be used to illustrate the psychiatric profession's overall attitude to women. In itself the information in Di's article about the history and present day approach to psycho-surgery in relation to women is horrifying and fascinating. She says of psychiatry that "The 'constant' in all these theories has been biological: a biological cause of unknown origin. The unknown always causes uneasiness, both for psychiatry as a discipline which was left in a no-man's-land on the fringes of medicine, and for the public who expected the mind doctors to 'do something' about the behaviour of the insane." She

claims that psychosurgery is the logical outcome of a biologically oriented approach to mental illness. In discussing Erin Pizzey's book on battered women, which puts forward the belief that certain women are 'addicted' to violence through their addiction to a certain brain chemical, Di says that "Pizzey is directing women's feet towards the first rung of the ladder which ends in psychosurgery".

All this is very interesting, but I can't help but think it collapses too much meaning into a specific form of treatment. Even if lobotomy and Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) were outlawed, the sophisticated and devastating use of drugs is a much more prevalent, even 'accepted' method of social control and one far harder to intervene in.

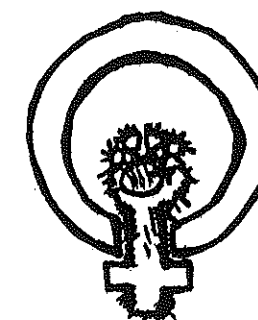
The *Catcall* articles do not fully tackle the difficult question of what is to be done about women (ourselves, our mothers, daughters, lovers, friends, any woman) who are seriously 'out of their minds' — with fear, depression, delusion — and are, for whatever reason, unable to cope with day to day life. For some, therapy may help, for many it wouldn't be enough. For many, the psychiatric institution waits and solves nothing.

The other articles in both issues of *Catcall* are varied and very good. *Does Superman Have Prostrate Trouble — Medicine and the Male Reproductive System* by Naomi Pfeffer is a wonderful little article which points up the completely different ways in which medical language is used to describe male and female reproductive organs and functions. *The Setting Up of the Women's Health Information Centre* by Lisa Saffron is a useful and constructive description of what the role of the centre will be and the way in which it is being organised. *Ovulation* by Pam Dawling is the only overt self-help health article, looking at the question of whether women can ovulate twice in one cycle, which is very important to those using 'natural' birth control methods.

Overall I enjoyed and was stimulated by these 'catcalls' — my questions and doubts are an indication of how much the articles made me think, gave me ideas and information.

Sue O'Sullivan

Quite rightly, she points out that some alternative professionals are as classist, sexist, racist, ageist and heterosexist as in conventional medicine.



What would constitute a feminist scientific approach to alternative medicine?

If I had to choose I'd choose the WLM over therapy in one second flat. But I don't have to choose.

Writing Our Own History 3

Storming the Wimpy Bars

In one of the earliest public actions of the WLM in this country, women held demonstrations in Wimpy Bars against their policy of refusing to serve "unaccompanied" women late at night. Lilian Mobin talks to Sara Scott about her first consciousness-raising group and their involvement in these 1971 actions.

Sara: When were you first involved in the Women's Liberation Movement?

Lilian: Literally, physically, in 1970, when I came to live in England. I'd been reading feminist literature, avidly, in America, but had been too frightened to join up with any of the feminist groups that were available where I was living, mainly because I felt they were big and strong and wonderful and I was not. That was to do with a kind of media-hype that I don't think exists here.

Once here, I felt I had a sort of foreign status and could sally forth immediately — which I did. This was 1970 and I was married and had two children and I went off to my first consciousness-raising group meeting in Notting Hill. It had been advertised for new women in *The Guardian* and was held in a very small sitting room which overflowed with women. We obviously needed several groups. So, women arriving started heading off with someone else who lived in the area, and my CR group came out of that.

S: What was the initial attraction of feminism when you were in the States? What had been published?

L: Much of it was very theoretical, very abstract, with which I could agree because it didn't touch me. But also, I think, being Jewish meant I had always been concerned

with politics one way or another. The Civil Rights Movement principally, and pretty much anything that was about someone else's miseries that I could get into — so I did do quite a lot of that. And what made a difference about the literature I was encountering about women was the way it was written. There was an article in a newspaper, not a feminist newspaper, and a woman columnist was writing about herself. It was about standing in her kitchen talking to other women and this was so different from all the civil rights and lefty stuff, and it seemed to be about me, which really was a revelation in those days.

S: Now, the first group you were in was a consciousness-raising group in London. What sort of awareness did you have, at that time, of being part of a movement, of there being other things going on?

L: A lot really. I think because it started with the left, with socialism, they were into structures, so one could not avoid knowing. So I think it was sort of two-tier. There were these structures and we knew about that, and then there was what we were doing with each other once a week, and that was really quite different and much more important. But there was already the Women's Liberation Workshop in London which was a kind of 'umbrella' for lots

of small CR groups. It seemed necessary for the groups not only to talk and develop theory from that, but also to come together regularly and do things, and then go back into our groups and see whether that had worked and what it meant. . . . At that time there was a demonstration against the 'Miss World' competition at the Albert Hall. I didn't go to the 'Miss World' demonstration, I felt it was not appropriate for me to get arrested — who would look after the kids? But not long after that I was involved in the Wimpy Campaign in 1971, have you heard about that?

S: No! Miss World, yes, but Wimpy Bars?

L: Ah, well, it was one of the many things that were going on, I think in the rest of the country as well as London. The Wimpy chain had a rule about not serving what they called "unaccompanied women" after 10 pm. Which meant if you wanted to eat after 10 you had to go in with a man, and they were putting up signs in Wimpy Bars that said this. Although why anybody wanted to enter a Wimpy Bar anyway was not clear. Still we were concerned that we weren't allowed to even though most of us didn't want to.

So there were demonstrations in different parts. In Golders Green they tried letting off stinkbombs, but no-one noticed! It was just awful, no-one did anything. Eventually, there was a planning group of all the groups that were involved in this Wimpy business. We got legal advice and learned that any place open to the public at night could exclude anyone on the grounds that they were likely to be criminals. The categories considered most likely to be detectable at a glance were thieves and prostitutes. And they decided only women could be prostitutes . . . or that they didn't mind male prostitutes or that we were more obviously vile. The law, though, lists an amazing number of illegal activities that might arise in a Wimpy Bar.

We were very angry, with that sense of exhilaration that came with a first heady taste of anger on our own behalves, not just anger like when someone is mean to you personally, but a righteous blaze for all women, for ourselves as part of all women, superseding the individualism we'd all been brought up on.

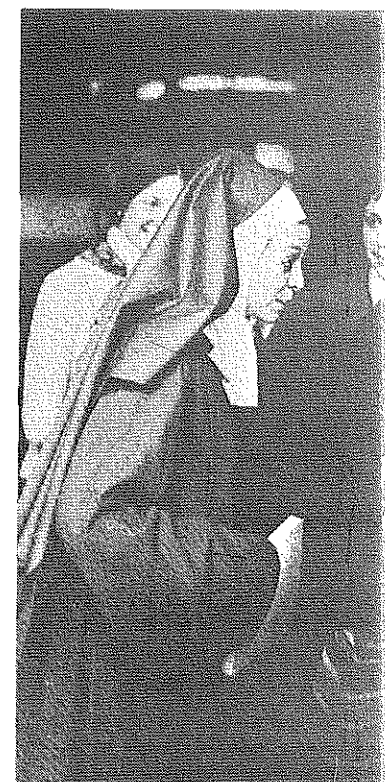
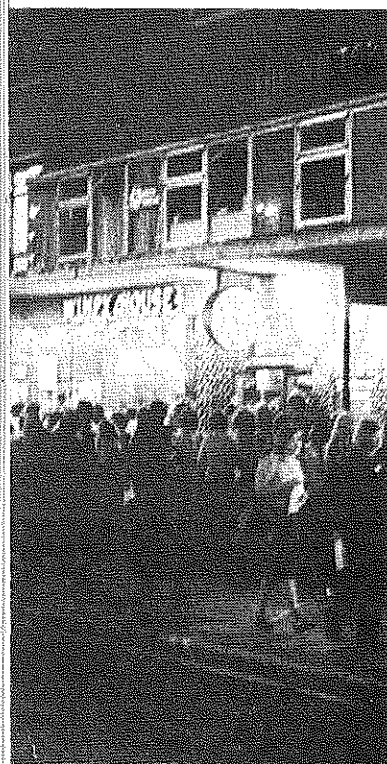
We sent letters to the managers and owner of Wimpy Bars — Metropolitan Hotels, one of Maxwell Joseph's many enterprises — who took little notice. Companies House provided their names and even home addresses which was handy. To encourage them to shape up we wrote to the tourist board asking for censure of the Wimpy Bar chain on behalf of women tourists and to Nicholson's Guides who, like the tourist board, publish guides to late night eating places. We got articles — all in our favour — in the *Evening Standard* and in local papers too. But what was much more important than any minor triumph like being allowed to eat without men after 10 pm in a Wimpy Bar, or being noticed and even patted on the head by the establishment, ie the press, was what we learned about our strengths, our own intentions, our capacities for working together, for being inventive together. Sure, we made trouble wherever we could for 'them' but what we really did was make sense to and for each other.

Small groups worked together, but also we formed a co-ordinating group and at last mounted a massive demonstration outside the Marble Arch Wimpy Branch. Gay Liberation Front men and women and a women's theatre group came dressed in a huge variety of drag. Small children were brought along, too. We wanted to make a noticeable point about assumptions — what is a woman? When is 'she' accompanied? If she's brought a child? With a child of what sex can she be deemed to be 'accompanied'? What if she's wearing men's clothes? How about men in dresses? What does any of it MEAN?

S: How did it go on the day?

L: I'd gone into Covent Garden and hired a costume from 'The Sound of Music' for one of the women in my CR group, so she went in a very wonderful royal blue nun's habit. It was very exciting. We marched. We had picket signs of our own creation — not anyone else's slogans. Exhilarating. Fun even.

In the week before that demo several women in the planning group had become ill or had other reasons for not being able to manage the last minute organising and I was left doing most of it. To me this seemed temporary, an accident. But at the demo



there were suddenly a lot of cops piling out of vans in a determined looking sort of way and a few fought through the crowd to get to me — small mousey-looking me — to say, archly, "Who's in charge here?" I gave our standard reply, "We do not have anyone in charge, thank you very much." They didn't bend to this but departed having left the uneasiness which may have been what they intended.

The manager closed down the Wimpy Bar early and we felt so sort of pleased with ourselves that some of us rushed off to another Wimpy Branch in Paddington. That was very different. Evidently the Marble Arch lot had been alerted to our demonstration before it happened and were prepared. So were the cops. So it had been in reality fairly civilised. But at the one opposite Paddington Station the manager was completely unprepared and panicky. We must have looked like dangerous maniacs approaching his nice plate glass window — a mob headed by a heavily made-up nun. There was a revolving door into this place and my friend in the nun's outfit, who also had a caliper on her leg which wasn't visible under the habit (she had had polio as a child) led the way into it. Just as she got in the door compartment, the manager stopped the door, crushing it against her leg and locked it, with the patrons inside and us outside. She screamed. We screamed. The people inside the Wimpy Bar screamed. We demanded to get in and rescue our friend. The people inside were desperate to get outside. This sudden terribleness. The police came again but different ones than at Marble Arch.

Everything lost that cheerful fantasy air very fast. Although they made the manager extricate Lynn at once they were interested in protecting the Wimpy manager and in what evil we represented. At that time there was a lot of publicity around the Angry Brigade and the police asked if we were anything to do with them. Some of us hadn't heard of the Angry Brigade, others assumed the question was were WE angry — and we were, of course, and said so.

S: So what happened in the end?

L: Eventually we were released. I returned the nun's habit to the hire place, albeit

with pancake make-up on the wimple. Wimpy Bar management invited us to a discussion which was in fact a polite capitulation. In those terms it seemed over. But for us, well, no it wasn't. For example, when we went to discuss their capitulation they offered us elaborate food and drink (not Wimpy Bar food). We took this as a softener we didn't intend to accept. We didn't want a polite gentleman's arrangement in which all parties would pretend that someone else had been silly, or uncouth but us charming grown-ups would now overlook all that. No way. So we said we'd prefer to take the food and drink away with us, as it was nice food and we'd enjoy it without them around, thanks.

S: What do you think you learnt from the action? Did it seem like a victory?

L: Sure, a small one in a way. But, as I said, the importance of this and other early actions was in what we learned both about how the world and war operates and about what we might be able to do for ourselves. Working on what we really want — which for most of us didn't include Wimpy Bars in any way — followed. Even symbolic action had to be closer to our own lives than this.

That demonstrations are so heavily, so rigidly, structured in the minds of the police and also in our own minds was very revealing. If we hadn't hared off to Paddington perhaps it would have been less obvious that we had been playing by rules, somehow *allowed* to demonstrate, naughty little girls given a small space in which to misbehave. It reminded me of all I'd read about why guerilla warfare works. Somehow I think we had collaborated in a standard view of the situation, of ourselves. A demonstration is such a predictable number, so within male expectations... so bloody useless, really. Talking about what we'd done, what we'd thought, led us into quite other areas, away from such obvious lefty and traditional actions. Confrontations with authority were played by rules that we accepted somehow but certainly didn't create. For me, that particular demo illuminated the necessity to concentrate on us, not them.

Trouble and Strife readers' meeting

As part of the Feminist Bookfair, we are holding our first readers' meeting in London: 14 June, Thursday at 8 pm at Sisterwrite bookshop, 190 Upper Street, London N1.

All women are very welcome to come along and talk with us about the problems and possibilities of the magazine. The room is wheelchair accessible, but the toilet is not. We are trying to arrange a signer — check with Judith at Sisterwrite, 01 226 9782.

We hope in future to hold other meetings outside of London — if women in other towns would be interested in organising such a meeting, we'd be very pleased to come to it.

WRITERS

Lesbian contributors needed for lesbian/gay book on the Media-reporting our lives and case studies. Approximately 5000 words.

Further information from co-editor Margaret Michie, Flat 5, 30 Princess May Road, London N16 8DG (01-249 3933).

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This piece is based on an interview Sara Scott conducted with Lilian Mohin as part of a series in making a video (with Harriet Wistrich) called 'Unreliable Witnesses: accounts of women's liberation'.

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