

# Trouble and Strife

No.4

a radical feminist magazine £1.75



*Incest:  
the great Freudian cover-up*

*Pornography in the Guardian*

*Danger, men at work!*

*On being white*

*Medieval feminism*

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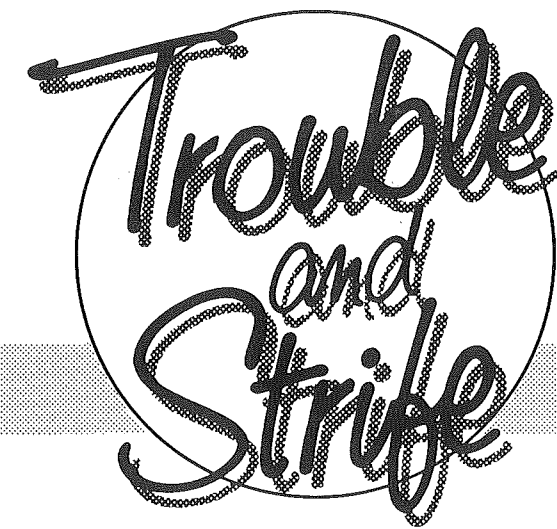
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Cover by Judy Stevens

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*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 Wallsgrave, with help from Judy Stevens and Cath Jackson (illustrations), Angun, Alice Henry, Margot Farnham, Carole Reeves and Louise Wild (paste-up) and Pam Muttram and Sara Scott (taping).

Thanks to *Spare Rib* for 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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# Letters

## *Trouble and Strife: anti-semitism and racism*

We want to write this letter together but at the same time give voice to our different experiences. This is difficult but strengthening to do. We do it because for a long time we have together used our different origins to help us begin to understand the racism we face and to support each other when we face it. One of us is Irish and the other Jewish. We both went to the *Trouble and Strife* readers meeting on 14 June. Here is what occurred for each of us, in the order it happened.

*Romi*

I am writing in response to comments you, as a collective, made about Lilian Mohin's letter printed in Issue 3, Summer 1984.

Whether you recognise it or not, I feel the discussion revealed the superficiality of your commitment to opposing anti-semitism, (and made me seriously doubt whether you have one). Your attitude seemed to bear out Elly Bulkin's comment in *off our backs* April 1984 that any visible presence of Jewish women in the WLM is regarded as 'too much' or as 'Jewish control'.

I was astonished by Diana Leonard's comments that Lilian had not declared in her letter that she was an American Jew and had merely said she was a Jew. She implied that Lilian had done this with the intention of misleading the reader, and I believe it was said so as to discredit her. She went on to say that as an *American Jew* Lilian was not able to comment on the use of the word 'collaborator' and that only those who had lived under Nazi occupation could comment and understand its particular 'resonance'.

I really don't know how you dare to suggest that an American Jew is not connected to/affected by the Holocaust, the Nazi occupation of Europe, collaboration, and all that implied. All Jews, no matter where they

\* indicates that a letter has been cut  
You must let us know if you do not want your letter published in a shortened form.

live, suffered/still suffer the consequences of the Holocaust, and have a right to comment on any aspect of it. Did you not think about why so many Jews went to America — they were refugees fleeing for their lives.

When I questioned this statement you, the collective, all shouted together that you meant something else; then Diana said something which did not seem any different from what she'd first said. With the political expediency which I thought characterised the meeting you moved on to the next topic. You did not check back with me whether I had understood the reply or felt satisfied with it. I felt you had no respect for me as a Jewish woman or for my question.

I was shell-shocked by your attitude and I felt that wounded feeling I tend to get when radical feminists are anti-semitic in such a deeply ingrained way. The situation was made worse by the fact that I knew a number of women in the room were personal friends of Lilian and were likely to know her history, the details of which she has in any case published. It should not be necessary to repeat it here, but I must ask why you were silent when I feel sure some of you knew that Lilian was carried in her mother's womb as she fled the Nazi persecution in Vienna in 1938 and that she was born in England, en route for America.

You consolidated the attack on Lilian by using another Jewish stereotype, and thereby attacked all Jewish women. During the discussion of editorial responsibility, you said that a black woman, who had agreed to write an article for the magazine, had decided not to on seeing Lilian's strongly worded letter. You pitched the loud, aggressive Jew against the black woman, and so damaged all black and Jewish women.

*Bernadette*

I went to the *Trouble and Strife* readers' meeting last Thursday because I wanted to show support and encouragement to the women who have produced a radical feminist magazine. As a radical feminist, I feel it is really important that we have a forum for discussion and debate, and would

like to be very clear that I think *Trouble and Strife* is great, and I hope it continues for a long time. In the meeting we discussed a variety of issues but one of the ones which was mentioned most was racism. This is what I want to write about now.

I was disturbed, upset and angry at the way in which women were discussing racism. It felt as though women were paying lip service to something they felt they had a duty to say.

During one of the discussions I used an experience I had had as an Irish woman to illustrate a political point and was surprised that the point I had made was ignored. Instead, I was asked if I would write about my experience in *Trouble and Strife*. (We had been told earlier that there was a shortage of 'ethnic minorities' who were prepared to write for it.) Since this wasn't what I had been talking about, I was at a loss for what to say. Then someone suggested that if I didn't want to (wasn't capable of?) write about it, then I could put it on tape and it would be transcribed. I was shocked to say the least and did not pick this up at the time — however, I know that it betrayed a deeply held attitude that Irish people are stupid and illiterate.

What we both wonder is why it is that women who in other spheres would think things out clearly and carefully do not seem to do so when it comes to racism. Your very different responses to us — as a Jew and as an Irish woman — were revealing in their predictability; one dealt with brusquely, the other patronised, both dismissed. A commitment to radical feminism means to us a commitment to consciousness raising, and using our experience as individual women, taking account of class and race, to understand oppression and the abuse of power by one group over another. We suspect that guilt, hatred and fear stop this process. What do you think?

In sisterhood  
Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning  
London

## *The Collective replies*

Dear Romi and Bernadette,  
Thank you for your letter. We are very sorry you were upset by events at the readers' meeting on June 14 and we greatly appreciate your writing.

With the wisdom of hindsight, we regret having held a meeting where discussion was inevitably superficial, given that the many women present had never met, and where important topics were hurried over because of nervousness on our part.

We spent several days together going over and over the events to try to make clear for ourselves how and why antisemitism and racism operated on this particular occasion, so as to criticise and change our behaviour.

We generally think it was wrong to have introduced discussion of one specific piece we had published. During the meeting, women wanted to know not only what our personal politics were, but also what kind of disagreements there were within the collective. Lilian Mohin's letter (*T&S* 3; p6) was used as an example because we had had an argument within our group about it and had talked with the writer about some of our disagreements with the first version we saw. However, we should never have singled out one piece in this way, especially since Lilian wasn't present at the meeting, and because it was clear from the way Diana spoke that her personal disagreements with the letter still rankled. This came out in the line that Lilian, though Jewish, hadn't experienced occupation and therefore was not entitled to comment on the word 'collaborator' and its being applied to heterosexual feminists. In the course of our discussions it has become clear to all of us that it was anti-semitic to bring up Lilian's nationality as if it somehow disproved the relevance of her perspective as a Jew. We understand that we cannot make the same assumptions about the meaning of nationality for Jews as for non-Jews. We accept responsibility for not confronting this on the spot and, further, for having blocked Romi's challenge by trying to pretend nothing had happened.

The letter having been raised within the meeting, it got used again in relation to a discussion of the problem in the women's liberation movement that women feel very hesitant to write for certain internal women-only publications (ironically) for fear of attracting vitriolic replies. Some women said they liked the process of working through an article with an editorial collective because this meant that statements they might not be able to defend had a chance of being challenged and altered before they appeared in print, and also that no personal attacks in 'reply' would be accepted for publication. In this context, Lynn mentioned that even the degree of strength of opinion in Lilian's letter had led someone to hesitate about writing an article because of the response her writing might provoke. She need not have used a specific letter as an example, nor should she have mentioned that the article in question was by a Black woman, since this was not the point she was trying to make. We did not say at any point in the meeting that this was a reason why Black women would not write for us, nor do we think this.

Lynn had not thought out the implication that she was setting a Black woman against a Jewish woman or contributing to the stereotyping of Jewish or Black people. However, we accept that we should have been aware of these implications and the dangers of setting one woman against another, especially given the history of *Spare Rib* and *Outwrite* in the past two years.

We feel that these are instances of the general way in which the subtler but more pernicious varieties of anti-semitism and racism operate: by the barely conscious use of particular examples, by barbs used in the course of arguments, by the inclusion of particular pieces of irrelevant information and, conversely, by carelessness in not considering wider contexts.

We are sending a copy of this letter with our apologies to Lilian.

We also wish to apologise to Bernadette. We remember that you made an interesting

point and that we reacted to this in terms of your having been at the Irish Women's Conference rather than in terms of your actual point, and this was undeniably a tokenising act. We do not, however, remember suggesting to you personally that you should tape anything. Two of us did then talk to you afterwards about writing for us — Ruth about reporting on the Irish Women's Conference, and Liz (to Bernadette and Romi) about a possible review of *Against Our Will*. Taping was mentioned in the latter case, because we felt that your group, London Rape Crisis Centre, might wish to do it collectively. We are very sorry if something we said led you to believe that we thought you or Irish women generally were incapable of writing.

We can see that our approach to you felt like an empty gesture, but we did genuinely feel that the Irish Women's Conference was a particularly important event. We had been trying to get a report written by other women which had not turned up. Ruth, who spoke to you about this, knew that you had previously offered to write about your perspective on particular aspects of Irish politics for *Trouble and Strife*. We would still very much like you to do this if we could publish it in a context that wouldn't make you feel a token Irish woman.

As individual radical feminists we on the collective not only have to struggle against our personal histories as white women — the attitudes we have been taught and the material benefits we gain from imperialism — but also against aspects of our history as radical feminists. Within the wide range of ideas called 'radical feminist', there has been a strand which did indeed believe we could generalise from the experience of white gentile middle-class English women to 'cover' all women's situations. As well as being arrogant and foolish, this assumption that women's situation is essentially the same the world over is also finally biologicistic — that is, it fits with the belief that women's oppression stems from biology, from natural differences between women and men. *Trouble and Strife* want to see a different sort of radical feminism develop-

ing — one which recognises the uniqueness and gravity of women's oppression, but which struggles against the other oppressions women are subject to and understands that women's oppression is experienced in very different ways by women in different situations. We do not see the growing recognition of race and class among us as threatening to our politics; on the contrary, we are enriched by it and learn things that we need to know. We expect radical feminism to continue to be transformed as Black, Jewish and Irish women, women with disabilities, older women and working-class women organise and challenge those of us with particular forms of privilege.

Of course, as individual women we often feel threatened by being challenged about our behaviour. This reaction is one thing we have to overcome to move to anything positive. We don't think that privileged women within the women's liberation movement have yet found very useful ways of raising their consciousness on these issues, or of acting in ways that are unquestionably right or appropriate. But we hope that within our collective and as a magazine we can take that process further.

We have often discussed among ourselves the problem of the composition of our collective, being all-white, gentile and largely middle-class. We are committed to changing this situation, but given the state of the women's liberation movement at the moment we cannot see any easy or quick ways of doing this. So we choose to produce the magazine as ourselves, feeling that inactivity and silence are no answer to the challenges confronting us. We know that we have to earn trust, and that this process must involve active thought and change on the part of white and gentile women, and not just the tokenistic use of individuals who also live under other oppressions. At the same time we do very much want and need the involvement of women with experiences other than our own, and do not see this as an optional extra, but as crucial to the future of feminism as a whole.

We are grateful, therefore, to both of you for taking the time to come to the

meeting and to write to us in such a constructive spirit, and we welcome other such contributions. We intend to take more time as a collective for discussions, self-education and self-criticism on the issues of racism, to work towards a point when you will not need to pull us up, and towards a politics that will truly reflect women's experiences in all their diversity.

In sisterhood,  
Ruth Wallsgrave, Diana Leonard, Liz Kelly, Lynn Alderson and Sophie Laws.  
The other member of our collective, Jalna Hanmer, was not present at the readers' meeting and is presently out of the country.



### Straddling two worlds

*Trouble and Strife* Issue 3 brought me an overwhelming sense of relief — letters from lesbians and two articles about lesbians. My own frail sense of reality as a lesbian mother whose balance on the tight-rope is very shaky was in great need of the support and challenge this issue gave me.

I think that as a lesbian with children the pressures from society to conform and the realities in which one has to live, are not widely acknowledged or understood by feminists without children.

There seems so little written about the transition from one stage of thought to another. It is as though one has to define oneself — heterosexual and lesbian — but the changes in my life have come gradually. It has taken years for me to acknowledge myself as a lesbian and even now my thinking flashes back to my heterosexual conditioning — think of the children, your husband, relatives and neighbours, and above all, don't be selfish! And people do watch, waiting, waiting for the children's maladjustment, waiting for my sense of reality to break down, waiting for my choice not to work. And so I wait too, not daring to move too quickly and I know I'm afraid of the pressures against me and I feel angry at my own fear and troubled by the weight of responsibility thrown at me because I have children. Perhaps because of this burden I



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feel an ambivalence to some of the attitudes expressed by lesbian radical feminists. On the one hand I need the challenge of a radical separatist view and on the other I know I have had to think very hard about the decisions I've made. It has taken time and I do not want another dictatorship of how I should be. For, if I am 'to state clearly and honestly my actual thoughts and beliefs' (taken from Lilian Mohin's letter) then I have to say that as an individual I still like the man I married twelve years ago. I know what he can and can't do and I'm beginning to understand the basis of our friendship. A friendship based on a respect for one another built over a long period of eighteen years and the caring of three children. Sexually, emotionally and politically my life has developed and changed but I cannot deny the years we had together.

I am finding it difficult to continue this line of thought, for it appears full of conflict, but I can only try and write down how it is, another woman's experience — let us hope that one day we can fit all these pieces together to form a broad strong political movement.

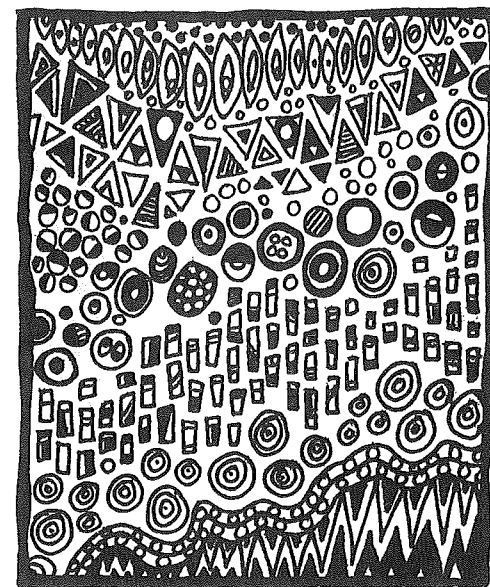
As a lesbian I can accept myself as a woman, that who I am is important. I can experience feelings without having to make myself feel them. I am no longer in a position of 'being looked at' by the 'other' — male. A role so carefully nurtured from birth with the full support of a patriarchal system. This system holds no values, no meaning for me as a woman, nor any woman, because it is a system operating against her intellect and perspective.

These thoughts are my beliefs but I know how easy it is to become isolated and invisible. At the moment I feel I'm straddling two worlds, the one we grow up to accept unquestioningly and the other which has given my life meaning and purpose. Inside, I want to say that my lesbianism is strong, vital and the only way to be, but in reality I am confronted with a silent wall which effectively silences me. I gain strength from other women's positive attitudes, but let the radical be balanced with understanding

of the position of many women who are still in the process of unravelling their silence. I feel uneasy about hard-line stances that seem to disregard many women and the realities in which they live, and I question a Women's Liberation Movement that seeks only a limited academic elite.

I wrote these thoughts down in response to Anira Rowanchild's letter with which I immediately identified and Lilian Mohin's which I felt was so strong that it did not allow for other women's experiences. Since then, I have read *The Reach and other stories* edited by Lilian Mohin and Sheila Shulman. A book long due in Britain, written by lesbians of all ages, backgrounds and experiences. It has made me smile at the end of a long day — women can and do love women. I feel a personal thanks to all the women who made this book possible. Your honesty is the greatest support I could ask for.

In sisterhood  
Liz Leather  
Bradford



### *Radical feminism, heterosexuality and antisemitism*

In reply to Lilian Mohin's letter (*T&S* 3) to my presentation and translations concerning the radical feminist/radical lesbian split in France (*T&S* 2), I don't want to go into the substance of her argument, as I'm sure other women will, but I want to take issue with the way her argument is set out.

I am talking about the way the radical feminist position is equated with anti-semitism, which I find shocking and upsetting. I read and reread the paragraph which ends with Lilian Mohin making the connection between wartime collaboration and heterosexual women and quite honestly I don't think that the paragraph fits convincingly in with the rest of the letter — especially when it goes on to say that radical feminism is ultimately the same as anti-semitism — which just doesn't follow.

Before collapsing together radical feminism, heterosexuality and antisemitism, which I for one, as a Jewish radical feminist, find totally unacceptable, I think we should think about whether all oppressions (Jews and women, for instance) are the same — and whether all oppressors (Nazis and men . . .) are the same. Can equivalents be made as easily as this?

Most importantly, I feel that talking about antisemitism deflects the argument away from what it is really about. Lilian Mohin's letter is an attack on heterosexuality. It is not a 'plea for more rigorous radical feminist thought and action', but it is a plea for feminists to see that we have to be lesbians to be 'real' feminists. Bringing in arguments about antisemitism is a specious way of saying this and takes away from the full impact of the point she is trying to make.

In sisterhood  
Claire Duchon  
London



### *We know what class we are*

I want to respond to Kate Monster's letter about class, and particularly about "the women that you know yourself to be irrespective of your financial circumstances." Most of the ideas I have come in contact with about class have set themselves the primary task of defining what class is in order to arrange groups of people on either side of various barriers. So bourgeois ideology deals with socio-economic status, allotted according to the possession of various goods in order to sell the correct class the correct repeat prescription of education, housing or fast cars. A Marxist analysis speaks in terms of relationship to the means of production (boss/worker), or in the deviant case of a woman, relationship to father/husband's relationship to aforementioned means of production. (If he's a boss, we get to be a boss too.)

Then comes the domestic labour debate, woman as reserve army of labour, various sex class theories, relationship to means of reproduction and finally the affirmation, which I hear increasingly amongst feminists, that the whole class issue is a (possibly socialist?) red herring likely to split the women's liberation movement as women are divided off from each other and back into the arms of those men whose interests they share.

I think, as Kate suggests, that we are "the women we know ourselves to be", that we know what class we are, that we act daily on this knowledge and that we recognise class in others. I believe firmly (passionately) that men are the enemy, all men, and that consequently all women share a common oppression. However, I don't think this basic conviction is the least endangered by a little honesty about the differences between us, can in fact only be enhanced by it. We know class has something, but not everything, to do with money, more to do with that subtle commodity money represents — power, and the various other attributes which give power — the right education, the right accent and the right table manners. It has to do with our assumptions and expectations about what we will be able to do in

the world, what we have been able to do. And, just as important, other people's assumptions about what we will be able to do.

To explain more clearly what I mean, I am going to describe my own family background, not because I believe mine to be more complicated than others, nor because I believe family and class to be inextricably linked (I don't; it's much more complicated than that) but because they are who I have known longest and who I am expected to refer to.

On the line labelled 'Father's Occupation' of my dad's birth certificate is written proudly "of no occupation", and elsewhere, "Gentleman". My mother's family were Anglo-Irish aristocrats, her father a Dublin

stock-broker. When they die they will leave nothing because, not knowing where their money came from, they cannot repeat the process to chase after it once spent. My father was an actor, writer, film director; while my mother lived with him our life style was middle class.

My step-father is a taxi-driver and before that he had a lawn round. My mother is a secretary. My elder sister used to work in a cake shop and is soon to marry her baby's father, a panel-beater, and stay home with her daughter. My younger sister is an apprentice hairdresser, has to live at home because the wages are so bad. They live in a working class suburb north of Perth, Western Australia.

Both of the above statements are true and if my family were what decided my class, the conflict between the two descriptions should leave me at least confused. If we add to them the fact that I am a woman, a lesbian (and as such disinherited

by my paternal grandmother) I should dismiss the whole concept of class as ill-defined, insufficiently sensitive and probably male. But I'm not confused, and I find it too useful to dismiss: I am middle class from my ancestral history, through my college diplomas to my flutney accent and entirely despite my lack of money and property, two working class sisters or even my lesbianism.

All women are oppressed by all men, because it is useful for men to do so. I still believe this. All lesbians pose the threat of insubordination. But more happens in the world than these basic antagonisms. Lesbians, however middle class, are often refused housing or evicted, refused jobs or sacked, beaten up in the street, deprived of their children. It is possible for us to 'pass' as respectably married wives and mothers to acquire some of these essentials normally reserved for the providers of men, but I'm not talking about the shadow lives we might lead in The Man's backyard. It is also possible for middle class men to make a class alliance with middle class women over the provision of these services despite our lesbianism. What's more, we know this, and they know this and working class lesbians know this. And . . . it does not hurt our feminist politics to say so.

When I lived in Paris I had, for complicated reasons, to leave my passport at the British Consulate awaiting an official stamp to give me 'right of abode' in Britain. I was born in Ireland, and when my passport was taken away, I fell into the grip of the most awful terror that I might be sent back to Dublin, a city I hardly knew. I decided to take the ferry to England with only my French Carte de Séjour and hope for the best. The French authorities allowed me to leave without murmur but warned me that the British would certainly not let me in. On board the ferry I approached the passport office with great anxiety, prepared to make a long speech with promises and addresses to back it up. At the top of queue I said to the British official, "I am British but I'm afraid I don't have my passport on me at the moment." Without letting me explain further he brushed the whole incident away

with a raise of his eyebrows and said, "But of course you're British. Now I'll give you this bit of paper in case you have trouble at the other end."

I believe that he simply heard my flutney accent, made flutier for the occasion, felt a class alliance with me and decided it would shake the foundations of Albion not to allow me back into Great Britain. I believe that a regional or working class accent would not have had the same effect and that in ever attempting to enter the country without a passport I knew my accent would provide. A working class lesbian would quite possibly have waited in Paris till the stamp came through, knowing that it was too risky and deportation more likely. Also, I am white. A Black lesbian would obviously be in an entirely different and far worse position, but I am restricting myself to a consideration of class, as race differences are too large and too important to be treated here as a postscript.

It is possible the passport official recognised my short hair as lesbian, and being himself a gay man, was responding to that. Or that he was a socialist enterist who did not believe in state boundaries. Or that he was too tired to argue. It doesn't matter; I am talking about my assumptions about my power in the world.

In sisterhood,  
Anna Livia  
London

*Freud and Buddha are just around the corner*

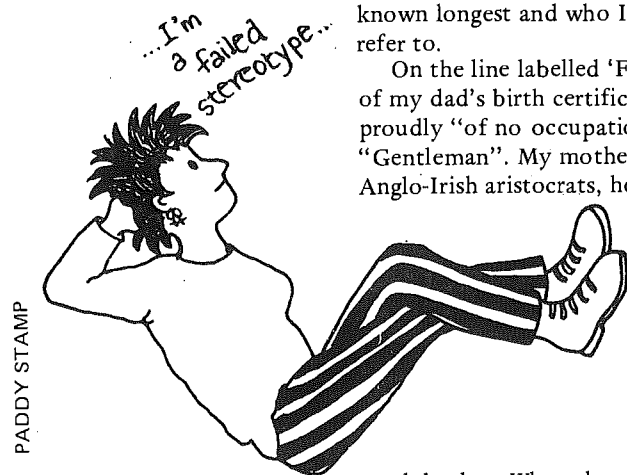
"Underneath we're all lovable": A brave article (Issue 3) it's difficult to criticize therapy. It's a rotten world, terrible things happen to us, we work too hard, have to put up with being hassled/harassed all the time. The question becomes more how do we keep our heads above water rather than how to move forwards.

Who can we turn to when we become casualties? Psychotherapists — there are some who call themselves feminist therapists — can they help? Or maybe it's physical — what about one of those osteopaths or acupuncturists everyone is going on about. Could it be diet — maybe a herbalist? It's probably a disease — better a homeopath. What if it's physical and mental — maybe one of those deep massage people — chiropractor or rolfer or . . . I've no doubt that some some of these 'therapists' help women but where does feminism come in? How does power operate? How is it abused?

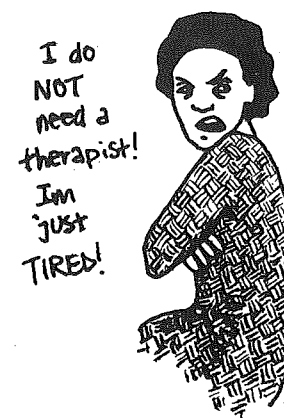
Psychotherapy has crept into our feminist theory to such an extent that women write books on feminist therapy, women advertise themselves as feminist therapists and in doing this rip other women off. We live traumatic lives making us vulnerable to this attack. Now alternative medicine is well on the way to becoming the 'new feminist therapy'. Its theories and practices not being questioned. Women are devouring its theories and assimilating it with feminism — our theory.

Such is the state of our women's liberation movement, so softened by 'feminist therapy' and alternative medicine that EST\* is back with a vengeance. Change your life (I thought we already had), you too can be as aggressive and hard sell as other ESTers (sorry assertive) — for £250 we will strip your psyche, verbally abuse you (haven't we had enough?), make you into nothing then rebuild your new self (brain washing).

EST has several things in common with all these therapies: they all have their versions of taking the layers back, finding the



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natural self, making whole. They all say they can help make us better. They all deal with us as individuals — each with our own solution — they separate and isolate us. They are all based on male philosophies, male religious beliefs or male theorists.

Most practitioners are not feminists, even where they are that does not give us for example, feminist acupuncture — it gives us a feminist who is doing acupuncture. Just as there is no feminist therapy, only feminists who are working as therapists. Yes, I expect different treatment from a feminist and that her feminist thinking will influence her practice as a therapist, whatever sort she is, but don't let's fool ourselves, Freud or Buddha are just around the corner.

We musn't underestimate the enormity of what we are trying to change. We are striving for an ideal that's very different from the world we live in. Men are not about to give us power, they are fighting to keep it. Whatever we call ourselves we are caught up in that struggle and that takes its toll. It's not a failure of the women's liberation movement that we get hurt along the way. It's not surprising that in our desperation we embrace other philosophies in the hope at finding a solution whether rejecting feminism or, more dangerously, incorporating these other philosophies into our feminism. Resisting male power is no easy task, they attack us in so many different ways.

In sisterhood,  
Lorraine Davies  
London

\* Ehrhardt Sensitivity Training

### *Liberalism in the US women's movement*

Please send me the first issue as one of the three included in the subscription price. I was very attracted to the sound of the politics behind 'Greenham — so why am I still ambivalent' and 'The struggle against liberalism' as well as 'Not the S&M debate . . .' (T&S 1).

Certain issues — the sado-masochism debate, vegetarianism — have been invested with a political significance, passion and coverage in the 'women's' papers far beyond their importance — yet *why* this has happened is the issue that needs analysis. It's a symptom of a very liberal and incorrect application of the old and useful slogan 'the personal is political' used by some of us in the late '60s to mean that the personal life we had could be understood in each of its aspects as a product of the larger political and economic system, male supremacy/capitalism. It was never intended as some sort of moral maxim to be applied as in — if you eat meat, like pain, etc (of course no-one likes pain) you are politically incorrect because your personal life is open to political judgements of some moral nature. It is, but these judgements have to do with one's behaviour in group struggle — the sides you take, honesty, and so forth — *not* whether you drink a certain beer.

I feel considerably alienated from the women's 'community' in my town as I am disgusted by its antics about nuclear war. I am glad someone is protesting nukes, but it seems outrageous that the liberal community doesn't rise to the occasion and leave the women to feminism. The women are attracted to the anti-nuke movement for its social acceptability I'm afraid.

in struggle  
Carol Giardina  
Gainesville, FL, USA.



*We reprint this American article by Marilyn Frye in the hope that it will help other white women to question the meaning of their own racial identity. Can white feminists disaffiliate from their race?*

White feminists come to renewed and earnest thought about racism not entirely spontaneously. We are pressed by women of color. Women of color have been at feminist conferences, meetings and festivals and speaking up, pointing out that their needs and interests are not being taken into account nor answered and that much that white feminists do and say is racist. Some white feminists have been aware of and acting against racism all along, and spontaneously, but the topic of racism has arrived not so much because some white feminists urged this but because women of color have demanded it.

Nonetheless, many white feminists have to a fair extent *responded* to the demand; by which I mean, white feminists have to a fair extent chosen to *hear* what it was usually in their power not to hear. The hearing is, as anyone who has been on the scene knows, sometimes very defensive, sometimes dulled by fear, sometimes alarmingly partial or distorted. But it has interested me that I and other white feminists have heard the objections and demands, for I think it is an aspect of race privilege to

have a choice — a choice between the options of hearing and not hearing. That is part of what being white gets you.

This matter of the powers white feminists have because of being white came up for me very concretely in a real-life situation a while back. Conscientiously, and with the encouragement of various women of color — both friends and women speaking in the feminist press — a group of white women formed a white women's consciousness-raising group to identify and explore the racism in our lives with a view to dismantling the barriers that blocked our understanding and action in this matter. As is obvious from this description, we certainly thought of ourselves as doing the right thing. Some women of color talked with us about their view that it was racist to make it a group for white women *only*; we discussed our reasons and invited women of color who wanted to participate to come to the meeting for further discussion.

In a later community meeting one Black woman criticized us very angrily for ever thinking we could achieve our goals by working only with white women. We said

The full version of this article can be found in Marilyn Frye's book *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (The Crossing Press, 1983). Available to bookshops through Airlift. This is a slightly revised version of the text of a talk I delivered to a general audience at Cornell University, sponsored by the Women's Studies Program, the Philosophy Department and the James H Becker Alumni Lecture Series, 29th October 1981. In the revision process I profited from the comments and criticisms of Nancy Bereano, Michele Nevells, Carolyn Shafer, Sandra Siegel, Sharon Keller and Dorothy Yoshimori. This piece directly reflects and is limited by my own location, both culturally and in a process of change. The last thing I would want is that it be read either as my last, or as a complete, account of what whiteness is and of what that means to a white feminist. I do not for a moment take it or intend it to be either.

we never meant this few weeks of this particular kind of work to be *all* we ever did and told her we had decided at the beginning to organize a group open to all women shortly after our series of white women's meetings came to a close. Well, as some of you will know without my telling, we could hardly have said anything less satisfying to our critic. She exploded with rage: "You decided!" Yes. We consulted the opinions of some women of color, but still, we decided. "Isn't that what we are supposed to do?" we said to ourselves, "Take responsibility, decide what to do, and do something?" She seemed to be enraged by our making decisions, by our acting, by our doing anything. It seemed like doing nothing would be racist and whatever we did would be racist just because *we* did it. We began to lose hope; we felt bewildered and trapped. It seemed that what our critic was saying must be right; but what she was saying didn't seem to make any sense.

She seemed crazy to me.

That stopped me.

I paused and touched and weighed that seeming. It was familiar. I know it as deceptive, defensive. I know it from both sides; I have been thought crazy by others too righteous, too timid and too defended to grasp the enormity of our difference and the significance of their offenses. I backed off. To get my balance, I reached for what I knew when I was not frightened.

A woman was called 'schizophrenic'. She said her father was trying to kill her. He was beside himself: anguished and baffled that she would not drink coffee he brought her for fear he had poisoned it. How could she think that? But then, why had she 'gone mad' and been reduced to incompetence by the ensuing familial and social processes? Was her father trying to kill her? No, of course not: he was a good-willed man and loved his daughter. But also, yes, of course. Every good fatherly thing about him, including his caring decisions about what will improve things for her, are poisonous to her. The Father is death to The Daughter. And she knows it.

What is it that our Black woman critic knows? Am I racist when I (a white woman) decide what I shall do to try to grow and heal the wounds and scars of racism among

lesbians and feminists? Am I racist if I decide to do nothing? If I decide to refuse to work with other white women on our racism? My deciding, deciding anything, is poison to her. Is this what she knows?

No decision I make here can fail to be an exercise of race privilege. (And yet this cannot be an excuse for not making a decision, though perhaps it suggests that a decision should be made at a different level.)

Does being white make it impossible for me to be a good person?

What is this 'being white' that gets me into so much trouble, after so many years of seeming to me to be so benign? What is race?

There is the matter of skin color. Supposedly one is white if one is white. I mean, one is a member of the white race if one's skin is white. But that is not really so.

In the matter of who is counted as white by white people, neither complexion nor genealogy serve either as necessary or as sufficient conditions for the categorizations. A person can be very light, identify herself as white, and be classified by white people as white, and yet at the slightest hint of her having colored relatives or ancestry she may be reclassified by whites as 'non-white'. But then on the other hand, one can claim significant Black ancestry and identify oneself as Black, and still be classed by white people as white; light-skinned people who assert their own identification as Blacks, Mexicans, Indians, etc, encounter among white people disbelief, resistance, open hostility and perverse forgetfulness.<sup>1</sup> And even very dark-skinned people encounter situations where white people, apparently trying perversely to be nice, go to great lengths to be color-blind and avoid categorizing them as 'non-white'. What these things reveal is that the point for white people is not a semantic point of correct application of a word. The

arbitrariness is the clue: they are constructing and legislating, and they are jealous of those functions. The concept of whiteness is not just used by white people, it is *wielded*. Whiteness is not a natural category, but a political one.

The group to which I belong, presumably by virtue of my pigmentation, is not ordained in Nature to be socially and politically recognized as a *group*, but is so ordained only by its own members through their own self-serving and politically motivated hoarding of definitional power. What this can mean to white people is that we are not white by nature but by political classification, and hence it is in principle possible to disaffiliate. If being white is not finally a matter of skin color, which is beyond our power to change, but of politics and power, then perhaps white individuals in a white supremacist society are not doomed to dominance by logic or nature.

Some of my experience has made me feel trapped and set up so that my actions are caught in a web that connects them inexorably to sources in white privilege and to consequences oppressive to people of color (especially to women of color). Clearly, if one wants to extricate oneself from such a fate or (if the feeling was deceptive) from such a feeling of fatedness, the first rule for the procedure can only be: educate oneself.

One can, and should, educate oneself and overcome the terrible limitations imposed by the abysmal ignorance inherent in racism. There are traps, of course. For instance, one may slip into a frame of mind which distances those one is learning about as 'objects of study'. While one is educating oneself about the experiences and perspectives of the peoples one is ignorant about, and in part as a corrective to the errors of one's ways, one should also be studying one's own ignorance. Ignorance is not something simple: it is not

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a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state. Ignorance of this sort — the determined ignorance most white Americans have of American Indian tribes and clans, the ostrichlike ignorance most white Americans have of the histories of Asian peoples in this country, the impoverishing ignorance most white Americans have of Black language — ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences. To begin to appreciate this one need only hear the active verb 'to ignore' in the word 'ignorance'. Our ignorance is perpetuated for us in many ways and we have many ways of perpetuating it for ourselves.

I was at a poetry reading by the Black lesbian feminist, Audre Lorde. In her poems she invoked African goddesses, naming several of them. After the reading a white woman rose to speak. She said first that she was very ignorant of African religious and cultural history, and then she asked the poet to spell the names of these goddesses and to tell her where she might look for their stories. The poet replied by telling her that there is a bibliography in the back of the book from which she was reading which would provide the relevant information. The white woman did not thank the poet and sit down. The white woman (who I know is literate) said, "I see, but will you spell their names for me?" What I saw was a white woman committed to her ignorance and being stubborn in its defense. She would convince herself that she cannot use this bibliography if the Black woman will not spell the names for her. She will say she tried to repair her ignorance but the poet would not cooperate. The poet. The Black woman poet who troubled herself to include a bibliography in her book of poems.<sup>2</sup>

In Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*<sup>3</sup> (a book of considerable value to feminists), one can see the structures of white *ignorance*

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*Does being white make it impossible for me to be a good person?*



from the side of the ignored. Nothing the protagonist can do makes him visible. He wants nothing so badly as to be seen and heard. But he is frustrated by an opaque and dense veil made up of lies the white men tell each other about Black men. He is ignored nearly to death.

There is an enlightening account of some structures of white ignorance also in a story called "Meditations on History," by Sherley Ann Williams.<sup>4</sup> In the story, a man who is writing a book about how to manage slaves is visiting a place where a slave woman is being held until her baby is born so that, when they hang her for running away and killing a white man, her owner will at least have the baby to make up for his loss. The writer is interviewing the woman to find out why she killed the slave trader, and why and how the slaves got loose. (His ignorance is, of course, already showing, along with some of the structures which both motivate and support it.) He is irritated by her humming and singing, but it never occurs to him that it means anything. By way of her songs, the woman is able to conspire with the other slaves around the place; she tells them that her friends will come to rescue her and notifies them when the time is at hand; they cooperate with her, and she escapes. The hapless interviewer is totally baffled by her escape. His presumptions have closed out knowledge; his ignorance has been self-constructed. His ignorance has also been both encouraged and used by the slave woman, who has deliberately and reasonably played on it by pretending to be stupid, robotic and disoriented. It was certainly not in her interest to disabuse him of his assumptions that her singing was mindless and that she was too mindless to be plotting an escape. Ignorance works like this, creating the conditions which ensure its continuance.

White women can dip into our own experience as women for knowledge of the ways in which ignorance is complex and

willful, for we know from our interactions with white men (and not necessarily only with men who are white) the 'absence' imposed on us by our not being taken seriously, and we sense its motivation and know it is not simply accidental oversight.

If one wonders at the mechanisms of ignorance, at how a person can be right there and see and hear, and yet not know, one of the answers lies with the matter of attention. Members of dominant groups are habitually busy with impressing each other and care more for that than for actually knowing what is going on. And again, white women can learn from our own experience *a propos* (most often, white) men. We do much of what we do with a great anxiety for how we will be received by men — by mentors, friends, husbands, lovers, editors, members of our disciplines, professions or political groups, tenure-review committees, fathers. Since white women are *almost* white men, being white, at least, and sometimes more-or-less honorary men, we can cling to a hope of true membership in the dominant and powerful group, and if our focus is thus locked on them by this futile hope, we can be stuck in our ignorance and theirs all our lives. Attention has everything to do with knowledge.

White women's attachments to white men have a great deal to do with our race privilege, with our racism and with our inabilities to understand these. Race and racism also have a great deal to do with white women's attachment to white men. We need to look at these connections more closely.

Within the span of a few days, a little while back, I encountered three things that came together like pieces of a simple puzzle:

1. I heard a report on the radio about the 'new' Klan. It included a recording of a man making a speech to the effect

that the white race is threatened with extinction. He explicitly compared the white race to the species of animals that are classed as 'endangered' and protected by laws. He also noted with concern the fact that ten years ago the population of Canada was 98 percent white and it is now only 87 percent white.<sup>5</sup>

2. In a report in the feminist newspaper *Big Mama Rag*, it was pointed out that 'they' are making it virtually impossible for white women to get abortions while forcing sterilization of women of color both in the United States and around the world.
3. In the feminist magazine *Conditions*, No. 7, there was a conversation among several Black and Jewish lesbians. Among other things, they discussed the matter of the pressure on them to have Black or Jewish babies, to contribute to the survival of their races, which are threatened with extinction.<sup>6</sup>

I think on all this. For hundreds of years and for a variety of reasons, mostly economic, white men of European stock have been out, world-wide, conquering, colonizing and enslaving people they classify as dark, earning the latter's hatred and rage in megadeath magnitudes. For hundreds of years, those same white men have known they were a minority in the population of the world, and more recently many of them have believed in the doctrine that darkness is genetically dominant. White men have their reasons to be afraid of racial extinction.<sup>7</sup>

I begin to think that this fear is one of the crucial sources of white racism even among the nonrabid who do not actively participate in Klan Kulture. This suggests a reading of the dominant culture's immense pressure on 'women' to be mothers. The dominant culture is white, and its pressure is on white women to have white babies. The magazine images of the glories of motherhood do not show white mothers with little brown babies. Feminists have commonly recognized that the pressures of compulsory motherhood on women of color is not just pressure to keep women down but pressure to keep the populations of their races up; we have not so commonly thought that the pressures of compulsory

# BEAR

motherhood on white women are not just pressures to keep women down, but pressure to keep the white population up.

This aspect of compulsory motherhood for white women — white men's anxiety for the survival of their race<sup>8</sup> — has not been explicit or articulate in the lifetimes and lives of white women in my circles, and the pressure to make babies has been moderated by the pressure for 'family planning' (which I interpret as a project of quality control). But what *is* common and overt in primarily white circles where the racism runs deep and mostly silent is another curious phenomenon.

In all the white or mostly white environments I have usually lived and worked in, when the women start talking up feminism and lesbian feminism, we are very commonly challenged with the claim that if we had our way the species would die out. (The assumption our critics make here is that if women had a choice, we would never have intercourse and never bear children. This reveals a lot about the critics' own assessment of the joys of sex, pregnancy, birthing and motherhood.) They say the species would die out. What I suspect is that the critics confuse the white race with the human species, just as men have confused males with the human species. What the critics are saying, once it is decoded, is that the white race might die out. The demand that white women make white babies to keep the race afloat has not been overt, but I think it is being made over and over again in disguised form as a preachment *within an all-white context* about our duty to keep 'the species' afloat.

Many white women, certainly many white feminists in the milieu I am familiar with, have not consciously thought that white men may be fearing racial extinction and, at the least, wanting our services to maintain

*The pressures of compulsory motherhood on white women are not just pressures to keep women down, but pressure to keep the white population up.*

1. I have not generally included Jews in my lists of examples of 'racial' groups because when I did, Jewish critics of this material said that the ways in which anti-Semitism and other sorts of racism are similar and different make such simple inclusion misleading. My thanks to Nancy Bereano for useful discussion of these matters.

2. I do not mean to suggest she provided the bibliography specifically or primarily for the education of white women; but it is reasonable to assume she thought it would be useful to whatever white woman might happen along with suitable curiosity.

3. Random House, New York, 1952.

*Ignorance is not something simple: it is not a simple lack, absence or emptiness, and it is not a passive state.*

*Attention has everything to do with knowledge.*

# WOMEN

4. In *Midnight Birds, Stories of Contemporary Black Women Writers*, edited by Mary Helen Washington (Anchor Doubleday, New York, 1980).

5. This report went by quickly and I had no way to take notes, so I cannot vouch for his statistics or for the absolute accuracy of my report of his statistics, but these figures do accurately reflect the general magnitude of 'the problem' and of his problem.

6. Many Blacks in this country have a global perspective which reveals that though white racism here has its genocidal aspect, Blacks in America are certainly not the whole Black race. For such people, the idea that their race is threatened with extinction may not have the force it would have for those with a more 'american' perspective.

7. Edward Fields, a principal ideologue and propagandist for the Klan, was asked if homosexuals are a threat to the white race. He replied that they are, and went on to say: "Our birth-rate is extremely low. We're below population zero, below 2.5 children per family. The white race is going down fast, we're only 12 percent of the world population. In 1990 we'll be only 10 percent of the population worldwide. We'll be an extinct species if homosexuality continues to grow, interracial marriage continues to take people out of the white race, if our birth-rate continues to fall." (Quoted in "Into The Fires of Hatred: A Portrait of Klan Leader Edward Fields", by Lee David Hoshall with Nancy A F Langer, in *Gay Community News*, 6th November 1982, p. 5.)

8. Male chauvinism makes the men think of themselves as the white race. In this context it is appropriate to call it *their* race, not 'our' race.

their numbers. Perhaps here in middle America, most white women are so secure in white dominance that such insecure thoughts as whether there are enough white people around do not occur. But also, because we white women have been able to think of ourselves as looking just at *women* and *men* when we really were looking at white women and white men, we have generally interpreted our connections with these men solely in terms of gender, sexism and male dominance. We have to figure their desire for racial dominance into the equations. A liberal white feminism would seek 'equality'. If what we want is equality with our white brothers, then what we want is, among other things, our own firsthand participation in racial dominance rather than the secondhand ersatz dominance we get as the dominant group's women. No wonder such feminism has no credibility with women of color.

Race is a tie that binds us to men: 'us' being white women, and 'men' being white men. If we wish not to be bound in subordination to men, we have to give up trading on our white skin for white men's race privilege. And on the other hand, if we detach ourselves from reproductive service to white men (in the many senses and dimensions of 'reproduction'), the threat we pose is not just to their male selves but to their white selves. White men's domination and control of white women is essential to their project of maintaining their racial dominance. This is probably part of the explanation of why the backlash against feminism overlaps in time and personnel with renewed intensity and overtness of white racism in this country. When their control of 'their' women is threatened, their confidence in their racial dominance is threatened.

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It is perfectly clear that this did not occur to many of us in advance, but for white women a radical feminism is treacherous to the white race as presently constructed and instituted in this country. The growing willingness of white women to forego the material benefits and ego supports available through connections with white men makes us much harder to contain and control as part of the base of their racial dominance. For many of us, resistance to white male domination was first, and quite naturally, action simply for our release from a degradation and tyranny we hated in and of itself. But in this racial context, our pursuit of our liberation (I do not say 'of equality') is, whether or not we so intend it, disloyal to Whiteness.

I recommend that we make this disloyalty an explicit part of our politics and embrace it, publicly. This can help us to steer clear of a superficial politics of just wanting what our white brothers have, and help us develop toward a genuine disaffiliation from that Whiteness that has, finally, so little to do with skin color and so much to do with racism.

There is a correct line on the matter of white racism which is, in fact, quite correct, to the effect that as a white person one must never claim not to be racist, but only to be anti-racist. The reasoning is that racism is so systematic and white privilege so impossible to escape, that one is, simply, trapped. On one level this is perfectly true and must always be taken into account. Taken as the whole and final truth, it is also unbearably and dangerously dismal. It would place us in the hopeless moral position of one who believes in original sin but in no mechanism of redemption. But white supremacy is *not* a law of nature, nor is any individual's complicity in it.

I do not suggest for a moment that I can disaffiliate by a private act of will, or by any personal strategy. Nor, certainly, is it accomplished simply by thinking it possible. To think it thinkable shortcuts no work and shields one from no responsibility. Quite the contrary, it may be a necessary prerequisite to assuming responsibility, and it invites the honorable work of radical imagination.□

## Womanpower in India

*To what extent are western feminist ideas relevant to women's situation in India? Madhu Kishwar — who no longer describes herself as a feminist — in this interview with Jalna Hanmer talks about women's relationship to the land as an essential basis for power.*

Jalna: *Is radical feminism a meaningful term to you, in the context of the Indian movement?*

Madhu: I have stopped using any political label for myself. I do not call myself a feminist. It seems to me that labels become a short cut, a hindrance to thinking. Opting for a label such as radical feminist, socialist or bourgeois feminist (nobody wants to call themselves bourgeois feminist somehow) is more often a statement of aspiration than of fact. People may want to see themselves in a particular way but that is not necessarily the role they actually play in a historical context. Very often, it becomes like a character certificate you have chosen for yourself, which may or may not mean anything.

For me, it is far more important to know whether what someone says is truthful or not, whether it is close to the reality we are dealing with than whether it is socialist or feminist or radical. So, although I have drawn inspiration from many ideologies, I do not identify myself with any 'ism'.

J: *Are these terms used in the women's movement in India?*

M: In the last few years, some urban based groups which have some contact with the women's movement in the West have started using the term feminist. On the one hand, there is a tendency among women's groups in India to set up enormous resistance to influence from the West. This resistance is often based on terribly stereotyped notions of what feminism, especially Western feminism, is about. On the other hand, there is also widespread tendency indiscriminately to adopt and use political labels

from Western movements. For instance, even before the present phase of the women's movement had come into being in India, small groups began to see it as divided exactly on the same lines that the Western movement had characterised its divisions. Those who began to trade in labels would invariably characterise themselves as socialist feminist and everyone else whom they disliked as either bourgeois feminist or radical feminist. All these terms are differently understood by everyone yet are banded about as if there is a commonly understood meaning. Radical feminist is generally used to condemn somebody as man-hating. My experience is that these labels have a way of creating a charmed circle of people who converse with each other. The dialogue does not seep through but stays within the circle. And a lot of meaningless name calling is facilitated by the use of labels. For example, some people see *Manushi* as socialist, others see it as bourgeois feminist and yet others see it as radical feminist! It is ironical that only middle class people are the ones calling each other bourgeois or petty bourgeois.

In any case, the word feminist is an English word and therefore can have currency only within the very small section of educated people, mainly those who speak and read English. When written about in English, a struggle may be termed feminist by the person who is writing but the women who participate in the struggle may not characterise themselves in that way.

J: *How would they characterise themselves?*

M: Certain words like *Stree Shakti* and *Stree Sangathana* are more commonly used.



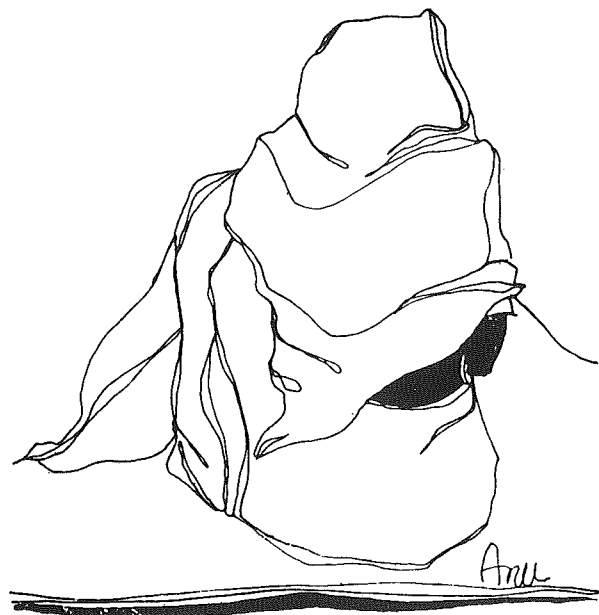
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM  
'MANUSHI'

One could roughly translate these as women's power and women's organisation respectively. But there is no equivalent for feminism. It can be translated into Hindi as *Narivad* but that term is not commonly used and has not come to mean anything as a political term.

#### *Feminism and autonomy*

J: *Does the idea of a women's movement mean anything?*

M: In India, there is a long history of women's struggles and women have articulated their aspirations in so many different ways through the ages that I think it would be arrogant and foolhardy for us to think we are the first ones. I see our work as part of a whole tradition. For instance, the social reform movements which took place in many parts of India in the nineteenth century have left a powerful legacy of women taking up issues of social reform and of women's rights. Women were also active in the national movement. The idea of women's equality was very much on the agenda of the freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi. Many of the women who kept alive women's organisations after independence, and who are still active today, are those who had participated in the independence movement.



J: *Is there a difference between women who work in mixed organisations and those who do not?*

M: In the West, certain important sections of the women's movement broke out of the left. In India, the situation is different. There are very few women activists in the rural areas where the majority of people live. Therefore it is not always possible to speak of women's organisations initiating women's struggles. Yet it has been found that in rural organisations and in urban trade unions too, the presence of one or two determined women can make a vital difference to the shape taken by women's issues. Some important women's struggles have emerged out of left-inclined organisations. These may not be big parties; they are often small radical groups working in the countryside or among the youth and students in small towns.

In many cases, the initiative on women's issues has been taken by men. The Chipko movement (environmental issues) is an example of this pattern. Women constitute the social base of the movement but the leaders are mostly men simply because it is they who are educated, who have mobility and access to the authorities, and have been able to acquire skills in organising. Very often, men have been found to facilitate women's struggles, but there are also cases where incipient women's struggles are crushed and not allowed to develop by men because they are seen as posing a threat to class unity within the movement. However, the split of women's movements from left movements has not taken place. The struggle goes on internally.

On the other hand, many women's groups which see themselves as autonomous today are those that are attached to one of the funding agencies. There are a very large number of foreign funding agencies involved in development projects in rural areas. I feel that autonomy would mean, first and foremost, creating an independent economic base for the social and political activity we undertake. I see this as an integral political task, not as something external to politics. If some Foundation or other provides the economic base for one's politics I would hesitate to call that political autonomy.

#### *Public sympathy*

J: *How do people react to the women's movement in India?*

M: I feel that it is easier in India than in many other countries to have a social consensus on certain issues of women's equality. Not even many conservative men would dare stand up and publicly oppose the idea of women's equality or women's rights. Perhaps due to the legacy of the 19th Century reform movements and the national movement and Gandhi's stress on the women's question as a key question, there is a fair amount of acknowledgement that women should get justice.

Quite a lot of positive legislation on women's issues, such as the no-discrimination clause in the Constitution, went through with not even a fraction of the opposition that, for example, confronts the ERA in the USA. We have relatively reasonable laws in many areas affecting women. Of course, the laws may not be implemented but I do feel that it is valuable to have a public policy which is not blatantly hostile to women's issues. The women's movement, therefore, has found a lot of support and encouragement from different sections of society. Even the mass media have been sympathetic and supportive.

Evidence of this support is the fact that it is not just women's organisations which have taken up women's issues. Civil liberties groups, mixed radical groups, youth and student organisations — are all equally if not more active than are women's organisations. In large parts of rural India, there would not be a women's organisation to speak of. Groups of men with some help from women take up cases of violence on women and protest, help the victim go to court, and so on. This is especially so in cases of powerful men belonging to the rural elite or to the police force or bureaucracy perpetrating sexual violence on poor women. Even in cities, many of the rape cases that have triggered off all-India campaigns were initially taken up by a whole range of political groups, not just by women's groups.

All this energy is going into what will grow into a women's movement. But it is important to remember that it is small groups of people who are involved in all

these various struggles. Even their combined might is very inadequate to challenge the force of social and economic institutions which enslave women.

#### *Violence against women*

J: *What have been the most important issues for struggle for women in India?*

M: The one issue that seems to have emerged as a common rallying point for urban-based groups the country over is dowry murders and maltreatment of women by their in-laws who often wish to extract more money from the women's parents, sometimes even to arrange second marriages for the man so as to secure another dowry.

Another issue that has sporadically been taken up by urban groups is that of sexual violence on women, such as harassment on the streets, in public transport and public places, and also rape. Certain cases of rape of poor labouring women have sparked off protests in some big cities. It is police rape that has attracted most attention. By and large, civil rights groups have been very active in picking up such cases for protest.

As far as rural areas are concerned, only in areas and among groups where women play an active role in economic production have women taken the first steps to challenge and resist their oppression. Rural women who have participated in struggles usually belong to marginalised tribal groups, so-called low castes, and the landless poor. These groups are relatively less influenced by the dominant culture of the upper and middle peasant families. Marginal peasant women have, in some cases, joined struggles by the landless poor but better-off peasant women have almost never done so.

Most of these struggles have been around survival issues such as scarcity of fuel or water, demand for minimum wages and forest rights, demand for land and employment. Once women are mobilised in large numbers during these agitations, they frequently raise questions related to their own subjection and oppression. Some issues raised by women have been familial violence, wife beating and violence by drunken husbands, and also sexual violence by rural rich men on poor women.

Though these rural struggles usually begin by confronting the social and econo-

mic exploitation by rich peasants or landlords, yet they rapidly come into conflict with repressive state machinery, including the police force, which are sent in to protect the interests of the exploiters. Most struggles of the rural poor have to face not only the armed might of the local elite but also the organised violence of the State.

### Men and machines

J: *What is the situation with regard to women's employment?*

M: There is evidence that in the last few decades there has been a steady decline in women's employment. A few educated, middle class women have got increased visibility in certain select professions in urban areas, such as medicine, teaching, law, administration. But they are still a tiny minority within each of these professions. And in rural areas, women are being pushed out by the millions from their traditional forms of employment, without being provided with alternatives. Every little technological advancement that comes into use, pushes women out of employment. Especially as the new jobs become better paying it is invariably men who are trained to handle the machines. For example, threshing used to be a women's occupation and millions of women found employment as long as the job was done manually. With the introduction of threshing machines women are eased out. Hardly ever is a woman allowed to operate a threshing machine. When a job is low paid and involves hard manual labour, women do it. When it becomes better paying and easier to perform, it gets into the hands of men. Many examples of this process can be cited — handpounding of rice by women has been replaced in many areas by rice mills operated by men.

The women who are thrown out of employment have to find work in order to survive. They are pushed into even more tedious and less remunerative work such as gleaning or gathering firewood for sale in rural areas, and junk collecting in urban areas. Thus it is women who seem to bear the brunt of destitution and poverty.

The vast majority of Indian women workers are employed in the unorganised sector where they have no legal protection,

no security, no fixed wage rates, and are severely exploited as well as being most vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Even in the organised sector, studies show that women tend to be on the lowest rung, doing the hardest, lowest paid, lowest status jobs, and with very little chance of promotion.

While women from landless or poor peasant families are vulnerable because of very inadequate and unequal access to employment, women from land owning families are rendered powerless because they are denied the right to inherit family property. The basic structure of peasant families in most parts of India is such that economic and political power is concentrated in the hands of men. First, land ownership or tenancy rights are vested exclusively in men. This is so, regardless of what the laws of inheritance or land records may indicate. As early as 1956, the Hindu Succession Act conferred near equal inheritance rights on most women. But this right has by and large remained confined to paper.

### Dowry

At the same time, these peasant families spend enormous amounts of money on providing dowries for their daughters. Dowry chiefly consists of consumer goods, cash and some jewellery, all of which belong to the in-laws and the husband. Very few women have any real control over the articles given in dowry. Yet the fact that daughters are given dowry becomes a pretext for denying them succession rights, especially in income generating forms of property such as land.

This lack of access to property or income is usually combined with strict restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Even though different levels of seclusion and segregation are practised in different parts of the country, the general result is that of withdrawal of women from the more publicly visible forms of labour which are also the forms that bring income. For example, in large parts of the country, even if women are the primary workers in family farms, they will not be allowed to take the produce to market since there they will have to come in contact with unrelated men. This is another way in which control over family income comes to be in the hands of men.

Thus, in some ways, women from land-owning peasant families are more powerless and dependent than women from landless poor families. These peasant groups constitute the hardcore perpetrators of atrocities on women, both the women of their own families and those of poor families who are at their mercy. The men of these groups are well organised, well armed, and have important connections with the government machinery so the police usually act at their behest. I feel that these groups will kill rather than yield an inch of land to anyone, including the women of their families. Therefore, this struggle is going to be among the hardest of all.

### Land

J: *Has the women's movement ever tried to take up the struggle for land reforms for women?*

M: We reported one important struggle in *Manushi*. This struggle took place in the Bodhgaya district of Bihar. Landless people of the area struggled for land rights and women within this section were organised, played an active role and finally ended up demanding and, in some cases, getting, land in the names of the women instead of the men of each family.

*Manushi* has also challenged the Supreme Court the denial of land rights to tribal women. The case is pending. At present, the Hindu Succession Act allows daughters to inherit almost equally with sons though of course, fathers can will their property to sons. However, several minority groups such as Muslims, Christians and so on, continue to follow their own personal laws. For instance, amongst the tribals, women manage the entire rural economy. They do about 90 percent of the work, from farming to marketing to food gathering. Yet women do not have any inheritance rights to land, thus they are rendered very vulnerable to oppression by male relatives. The issue is now being thought about and beginning to be taken up by some groups. However, it is a very small beginning.

J: *Have tribal women always been excluded from land ownership?*

M: We do not know much about the pre-colonial system of land tenure but from the little we know, it seems that women's rights

were much better protected than they are now. In tribal communities, land was communally owned by the tribe and everyone had the right to cultivate it. Since women were primary workers in cultivation they had relatively more secure rights. In the 19th century, the British introduced various new land tenurial systems which vested land ownership exclusively in the male head of a family and gave inheritance rights to sons. Daughters' rights were ignored. Thus the balance of the family power structure shifted in favour of men.

J: *What politics have there been around the dowry system?*

M: I feel it is unfortunate that attention seems to have remained confined mostly to dowry related murders and suicides, which are an extreme manifestation of a much more widespread situation which affects many more women than the ones who actually get killed. It is easy to feel self-righteous indignation against this criminal and gruesome manifestation of the problem. But the real issue escapes. The fact is that almost every family is at both the giving and the receiving end — giving dowry to daughters but extracting it for sons.

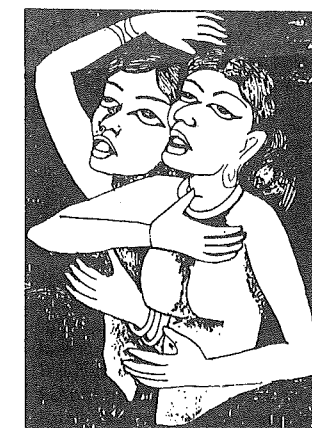
J: *So is it a question of some families not just breaking even but making a profit?*

M: I think trying to extract more and more dowry is another way of making a woman aware of her powerlessness and her devaluation. It is almost never dowry alone which is the issue. If the woman is valued, it is unlikely that dowry will become an issue. Almost always, there are a hundred other things that the woman is tortured about, and she is powerless in many other ways — for instance, is deprived of decision-making power, has no access to money, is restricted access to her natal family, her mobility is severely curtailed. She is almost held as a hostage.

Just as a rape is not really to do with sexual enjoyment but is a way of humiliating a woman and asserting the rapist's power, so also dowry is much less to do with greed and more to do with making a woman realise her lowly position in the family, making her feel dependent and worthless, rendering her powerless. □

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# The Liberal Organ: Porn in THE GUARDIAN

*Arguments about pornography tend to end in confusion between women's right not to be abused and people's right to read and see what they like. Debbie Cameron and Liz Fraser question the usefulness for feminists of thinking about issues in terms of 'rights' at all.*

On 20th May 1983, the *Guardian* carried a full-page advertisement for an exhibition by the photographer Helmut Newton. The image, a naked woman in bondage, was unambiguously pornographic and overtly sadistic, while the caption wittily urged us to go and see the exhibition "unless you're all tied up". Women lost no time in complaining to the *Guardian*, and several letters were printed during the following week deploring both the advert itself and the editorial policy that allowed it to appear. As it turned out, however, these letters were only the first of many. The correspondence raged for a full two months until the end of July 1983 and covered every aspect of the debate on pornography. In all, 35 letters on the subject were published.

Originally, we collected these letters as a sort of political archive: both of us were active in the feminist campaign against pornography and we had ourselves contributed to the *Guardian* discussion (Liz Frazer wrote three letters, Debbie Cameron one). As a result of this we had collected more material in the form of private correspondence, including copies of an exchange between two men.

When we looked closely at the progress of the discussion, it was clear problems were being raised which were not sufficiently addressed by the usual feminist arguments. The contributions that came after the initial protest letters were overwhelmingly pro-pornography; they were mostly from men, but a number of women also argued against the feminist position. Although this feminist position was represented by several corres-

pondents beside ourselves, it seemed to make very little impression on the course of the debate. So we were led to examine the whole question of why on this particular issue, ways of thinking are dominated by the 'liberal' tradition which the *Guardian* obviously represents.

Liberals are traditionally *less* our enemies than conservatives, because they are seen to preach the freedom of the individual, and this has for some time entailed a rejection of sexism; there is no justification for discriminating against particular individuals just because they are women. Liberals, in other words, support 'women's rights'. And indeed, many feminist issues are discussed within this framework of *rights*: abortion, for instance, where our slogan has long been 'a woman's right to choose'. It is no accident that liberal men have supported the demand for abortion as an individual right (which happens to be exercised by women), and equally it is no accident that they do not support our position on pornography. In the case of pornography they assert it is the right of the individual to use it in private if he likes. Thus a glaring contradiction appears between liberalism and feminism on the issue of pornography, where on other issues there seems to be no contradiction.

We want to examine the liberal arguments for the continued existence of pornography as revealed in the *Guardian* correspondence. What we aim to show is that these arguments are underlain by certain assumptions, hardly ever made explicit, about the nature of the individual. Furthermore, we will argue, these assumptions are totally at odds with any acceptable feminist

notion of the individual, and the two positions cannot be reconciled. Because of this, liberals are never the allies of feminism; because of this, we should stop demanding our 'rights' and replace the whole liberal concept of *right* with a much more straightforward insistence on *power*.

### The Correspondence

The first letters in the correspondence were from women, and expressed outrage: "Even the tabloids . . . stop short of ropes round her neck, for God's sake, and leather."<sup>1</sup> But when men entered the ring, a new note was struck, and the women were taken to task for their "prudish hysteria".<sup>2</sup> These cooler and more 'objective' correspondents introduced a number of points which were to recur throughout the debate.

One of these was the question of whether pornography directly causes assaults on women. Many writers denied that it did, and some asserted there would be more violence if porn were suppressed. This part of the debate illustrates the extent to which the feminist argument, that pornography is violence against women, simply is not understood; it also illustrates a liberal belief that private activities and attitudes are of no importance unless they can be shown to have measurable 'public' effects. We will return to this liberal dichotomy between the public and the private below.

Another recurrent concern was with *definition*. Men were worried about confusing pornography with 'erotica' or 'art'. Often, we felt this was just a stonewalling move on their part. To avoid engaging with clear cases like the Newton photograph, anti-feminists challenged us to pronounce on the borderlines of offensiveness. But men were also worried about *who* defines an image as pornographic, and this concern shaded into a concern about authoritarianism: other people telling the individual what he might and might not do. One correspondent remarked that feminists

are totally convinced that they know *better*. Whatever 'good' one seeks to do someone by deciding for them what they should be allowed to see does not diminish the odious arrogance of the attitude itself.<sup>3</sup>

This odious arrogance became out and out authoritarianism when it was practised by the state through censorship. It was endlessly repeated that "what censorship means

in effect is more state control over our lives and greater police powers."<sup>4</sup>

But while neither the state nor women in general were felt to have any right to dictate to men, men were felt to have every right to look at pornography: indeed this activity was labelled by one writer as one of "the basic rights of any free society".<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since pornography is entirely harmless, "What right does Ms Cameron have to deny (men) even their fantasies of non-violent contact with women?"<sup>6</sup> This indignant defence of men's fantasies often went hand in hand with the idea that some men actually *needed* to gratify them with pornography, either because they were abnormal, or because feminists so often denied men anything more concrete in the way of sex. But the central question here was whether anyone had the right to deny the individual his private pleasures; and the commonest answer was *no*, especially when this might mean state intervention.

Our initial reaction to the general position taken by correspondents was to find it all rather inconsistent, contradictory and even absurd. We felt inclined to argue against the proposition that using porn was harmless unless it inspired a man to go out and commit atrocities that minute; we also wanted to deny that porn fulfilled a 'need' for any man. As for 'rights', the answer was to claim that women have a 'right' not to be degraded, and point out that this conflicts with men's 'right' to use pornography. This line, which implies that the problem is fixing an acceptable balance of rights, was actually taken by two women correspondents. But when we probed a bit deeper, we concluded it was not a very useful perspective. The apparent illogic of men's concentration on their *rights* and their *needs*, as well as the apparent falseness of their claim that porn is *harmless*, fell into place when we realised what was beneath the surface of the discussion: a concept of the *individual* which is fundamental to liberalism, but alien to us. It is that concept of the individual, and its political implications, that really need to be attacked. Since liberalism is at the heart of most western political thought, to attack it is to attack the whole framework in which we have learnt to think.

"a glaring contradiction appears between liberalism and feminism on the issue of pornography"

"we should stop demanding our rights and insist on power"

the right of men to look at pornography is labelled as one of the basic rights of any free society

### *The Nature and Rights of the Liberal Individual*

Liberals believe in an individual who is autonomous and above all *presocial* rather than being shaped by society. For them, society is a coming together of various, already fully-formed persons; and the major political conflict that exists is that between the single individual and the larger society which constantly threatens to overwhelm him. (We assume that the liberal individual is prototypically male!) Individuals therefore need to be protected from *society*; they are not naturally *of* it. Liberty, in this framework, lies in separation from others, and especially, separation from the collectivity.

Liberal political theory states that an individual has certain natural *rights* which exist before and regardless of social arrangements: the right to life, the right to property (which is needed to maintain life) and the right to go about his business unmolested. It is because in a presocial 'state of nature' these rights could not be guaranteed (people would always be molesting each other) that individuals actually come together to form societies (this is the idea of the 'social contract'). In doing so each conceded a certain amount of his autonomy to the state; in return, the state will protect individual rights. However, the power of the state must be kept to the minimum necessary for this protection: individuals must retain as far as possible their presocial freedom of action. This leads to the division between the public domain, where authority is vested in the state, and private life, where the state may not encroach on individual freedom. Private life for the liberal is sacrosanct.

It is obvious that many of the reforms which constituted the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s were 'liberal' in the sense of respecting the individual's private life. For instance, the legalisation of male homosexuality between consenting adults was defended precisely on the grounds that sex was a private matter and therefore one's own affair, something the state should not be permitted to interfere with. Similarly with the relaxation of censorship (and the resultant increase in the availability and acceptability of pornography). Since porn was defined as sexual, it too was outside the proper sphere of the state. This notion of

an inviolable right to freedom in private clearly underlies the repeated equation of censorship and authoritarianism in the *Guardian* correspondence.

It is also the concept of a public/private split that explains why so many correspondents thought the use of pornography did not have harmful effects on other people. Since for the liberal, private life is outside society, being the part of one's life on which society has no legitimate claim, it cannot possibly have any social or political consequences. Individuals are seen as autonomous and separate, and an individual's private behaviour is believed to have no consequences in the public domain. This is why the production of pornography for private use can be labelled "a victimless crime"<sup>7</sup>.

### *Needs*

Liberal theorists have traditionally argued that human individuals exist with certain needs (commonly mentioned ones include food, warmth, shelter and sex). Like the individuals themselves, these needs are presocial; they are not dictated or formed by society and its practices. This idea too has consequences for any debate on pornography. Since the need for sex simply and unproblematically exists for each individual prior to socialisation, the forms of sexual gratification that exist within a society are equally simply seen as *responses* to this pre-existing need. For the liberal, then, pornography testifies to men's need for the kinds of sex depicted in it, rather than appearing to mould sexual desire in a socially and politically loaded way.

The issue of need was made much more explicit in the *Guardian* correspondence than the concept of the individual and his rights. Some contributors pulled the strands together by insisting that the need for sexual gratification, though natural, should be confined to the private sphere:

As it happens, I object to having my natural drives stimulated when I'm crossing London on business by being confronted with . . . bare buttocks and a pair of pouting glossy lips. It fucks up my day for me. That's alright in the bedroom, but when it's on the street. . .<sup>8</sup>

This man clearly felt that *public* pornography was the main bone of contention because it tended to cause unacceptable public behaviour toward women. In the

bedroom, however, it would be his own affair. He did not entertain the idea that feminists might be criticising his sexual desire *itself*, because to him sexual desire is not just private but also natural.

Others felt that while men needed sex, they did not (or should not) have a natural need for pornography. They turned to it only when other more acceptable forms of sexual gratification were denied them.

. . . the primary function of pornography is to satisfy the unhappy needs of personalities which, for whatever reasons, are inadequate to meet the tasks of normal social and sexual behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

This is something of a contradiction in the liberal position, since it seems either to assert that there is *not* an unproblematically given, presocial sexuality (some individual's needs are perverted by society) or else, that there are 'unhappy' persons who are not free to choose their mode of behaviour.

Elsewhere, however, the freedom of individuals to act as they wish is taken for granted, and this leads to the absurd claim that women are equal partners in the pornographic enterprise because they 'choose' to model for girly magazines and act in video nasties. The physical, mental and financial pressure that drives women into the sex industry is ignored, for the liberal insists we all start off free and equal.

In a similar vein, women are said to have equal needs for and power over sexual intercourse, which they display in pornography. "A large part of the hard-core porn portrays the woman as the active partner."<sup>10</sup> One writer notes that men fantasise about being dominated by women, and concludes porn is about "man's inhumanity to man" (sic!)<sup>11</sup> Liberals do not appear to see the power structure in which the customer is always superior to the goods: nor that even if in reality women spent their whole sexual lives dominating men, it would still be men's fantasies that were being gratified by women, and thus the women would not in fact wield power.

The underlying assumptions of the *Guardian* correspondence should now be clear. The claim that men have a right to use pornography, which gratifies pre-existent sexual needs, while women have no reciprocal right to stop men using pornography via

censorship, and no reason to do so, since private sexual gratification is harmless, comes straight from a liberal notion of the individual as a free autonomous being whose needs and rights exist outside social conditions; it also reflects the belief that while the individual surrenders certain rights to the state, there is still a 'private' area of life that is not subject to anyone else's authority. It is time to look more critically at this liberal perspective on pornography, and to point out the implications of rejecting it, as we believe feminists must.

### *Radical feminism and the individual*

Feminism derives from certain insights about the world and about women's position within it. Three of these are especially relevant, since they are completely incompatible with the assumptions of liberalism.

1. *The individual is a social being.* Feminists have always rejected the notion that male dominance is a natural state of affairs, arguing instead that women and men are socialised or conditioned into different roles, which social practices and institutions coerce them into playing. We are the products of our relations with others in a given social and political system: there is no such thing as a 'state of nature' and there are no such things as needs, desires or 'rights' existing independently of the conditions in which we live.

2. *The social world is one of power inequalities.* Feminists take it for granted that the world which produces us is not one in which we are all equal. Men have power over women; men control the social institutions and through them, our potentialities as human beings. Thus it is nonsense to say, as liberals do, that women are free and equal individuals. None of us acts autonomously, since we are products of a particular social structure; but women have much less autonomy than men.

3. *The personal is political.* Finally, there is no sphere of being where social conditions and power structures are absent or irrelevant. Power relations are played out every day in our interactions with others: for women, the conflicts may be most obvious, and the oppression most acute, in the so-called 'private' space of family or sexual relationships. Thus feminists refuse to

"The physical mental and financial pressure that drives women into the sex industry is ignored"

"There is no sphere of being where social conditions and power structures are absent or irrelevant"

"Private life for the liberal is sacrosanct."

1. Catherine Longford, May 26.
2. Hugh Hetherington, May 28.
3. Chris Challis, June 6.
4. Judit Kertesz, July 23.
5. Michael Freeman, July 9.
6. Tony Sudbery, July 16.
7. Michael Freeman, July 9.
8. Ian McCormick, private letter to Trevor Ward (sent to us by Mr Ward).
9. Leonora McBolt, July 9.
10. Tony Sudbery, July 5.
11. Leonora McBolt, July 9.
12. Marion Hunt, June 14.
13. Ian McCormick, June 10.

depoliticise sex, love and similar 'private' concerns: they reject altogether the liberal idea of an inviolable private life.

Yet if women are social beings whose lives are permeated with conflict and inequality in every sphere, it is ultimately no good demanding our 'rights' as individuals. The whole idea of individual rights implicitly rests on a belief that individuals are *equal*, and this is patently untrue.

One of the *Guardian* letters put this very clearly:

Unfortunately it is easy to assert a right to this or that but difficult to resolve the conflicts which may then arise. My neighbour may feel he has a right to play his records at top volume while I feel I have a right to peace.<sup>12</sup>

The liberal notion of 'justice' assumes that such conflicts can somehow be resolved by the mediation of impartial judges (an opinion frequently expressed in *Guardian* editorials, and by some correspondents about pornography). But once we realise that the judges themselves are products (and if they are men, defenders) of the prevailing order — in other words, that the dice are loaded — it becomes evident that *power* is the real deciding factor. The same correspondent on the subject of rights goes on to challenge the male defenders of porn:

... suppose they heard that in some neighbouring country a large proportion of the women derived pleasure from seeing men raped, humiliated, tortured or killed and furthermore that the women of that country were ... generally stronger than men, ie perfectly able to mete out such treatment, would they have any misgivings about visiting that country? Unfortunately with

the reverse situation women do not have that choice. We are residents.<sup>12</sup>

From this perspective, abstract talk of individuals and their rights is nothing but a red herring. What is really at stake is the collective power of opposing social groups: in this case, men and women.

We have sometimes been uneasy about a tendency in radical feminism toward a sort of libertarianism or anarchy which stresses the political pre-eminence of the individual.

In our view this emphasis on 'my needs' and 'my rights' is a double-edged sword, for it ignores the fact that needs and rights, indeed individuals themselves, do not arise in a social vacuum. We have a responsibility to question what we think we 'need' or are 'entitled to'. We must also recognise that rights cannot be *demand*ed in a vacuum. Feminists are really aiming not for the recognition of each individual woman's right but for the advancement of women as a class; which means, in effect, the overthrow of male power.

#### Power not rights

This amounts to much more than a change of emphasis — it involves a wholesale shift in worldview — a shift which we think must be made explicit. This, in turn, requires our using language which explicitly dissociates us from liberalism. Otherwise, consider the stalemate of the *Guardian* correspondence: for the liberals the problem throughout was "who draws the line and where"<sup>13</sup> — our problem is how to say "we draw the line, and we draw it here". We think we have shown that within a liberal framework it is impossible for us to 'win the right' to draw the line where we see fit — the line has already been drawn, by men, and in any case you can only win 'rights' if you start out free and equal.

Feminists must struggle for power — this struggle will be much more effective if we are clear that we are struggling against the male monopoly on power, but also against the liberal ideology of the free individual and his rights, which *conceals* his power. If we don't have this clear — and we demand 'rights' — we are forced into arenas where we cannot, by definition, win the battle. We should set the terms of the debate and make it clear that liberal democracy and feminist democracy are not the same thing. □

In their 1971 paper "The Fourth World Manifesto"<sup>1</sup> Barbara Burris and her co-authors warned that

Recently ... some women have begun to call anything which they do not like 'male'. They seem to think that anything that has been defined as a 'male quality' is inherently bad ... We need ... to sift out what is good in what has been defined as male and therefore denied expression in us. We need no more glorification of the oppressed and their ... 'superior' culture ... Neither the male culture nor the female culture is a model for a human society.

In 1984, cultural separatists<sup>2</sup>, in their promotion of a 'women's culture', make reactionary attacks on all the traditional 'masculine' attributes whether they are intrinsic to patriarchy or not, including such indispensable tools as logic/rationality, intellectual clarity/lucidity and deductive reasoning.

I strongly contest the idea that there is any such thing as a 'male' value at all. Feminists should not confuse the characteristics patriarchy calls 'masculine' or 'feminine' with the real biological differences of male and female. Surely the word 'male' should only be applied to the *biological* characteristics of men. As the French feminist Christine Delphy remarks, men's way of thinking is that of other oppressors, since ideology is not secreted like a hormone, by a type of biological person<sup>3</sup>. There can be no such thing as a 'male value' — unless, of course, cultural separatists think that values are organic, material entities like a prostate gland, for example! The patriarchal value-system is quite another matter, since *patriarchal* values can be held by both sexes — witness Margaret Thatcher!

Cultural separatists, in their seeming belief in the *innate* existence in women of compassion, tenderness, nurturance etc, are guilty of biological determinism. If women should rule society because of these innate 'feminine' abilities, it follows that men will never have these abilities or feelings, can never change their nature or behaviour and that therefore there can never be equality between the sexes and a society which is sexually egalitarian and diarchal<sup>4</sup> (as opposed to patriarchal/matriarchal). This is

hardly a feminist conclusion. Just as anti-feminist are the attacks made on women who pursue male-dominated careers or leisure activities. (One example of this was a letter published in *Spare Rib* some years ago which attacked female motor-cyclists for 'copying men'. Perhaps cultural separatists think women should confine ourselves to being run over by male motor-cyclists. This is, after all, an activity sufficiently 'feminine' and 'woman-identified' to attract the approval of almost everyone.)

There is a difference between women becoming part of institutions (such as the army or the police) which are unchangeably patriarchal because state repression is their whole *raison d'être*, and women entering careers or activities where they obtain knowledge and learn skills which they were previously the sole property of men, ie, the law, science and technology, sport etc.

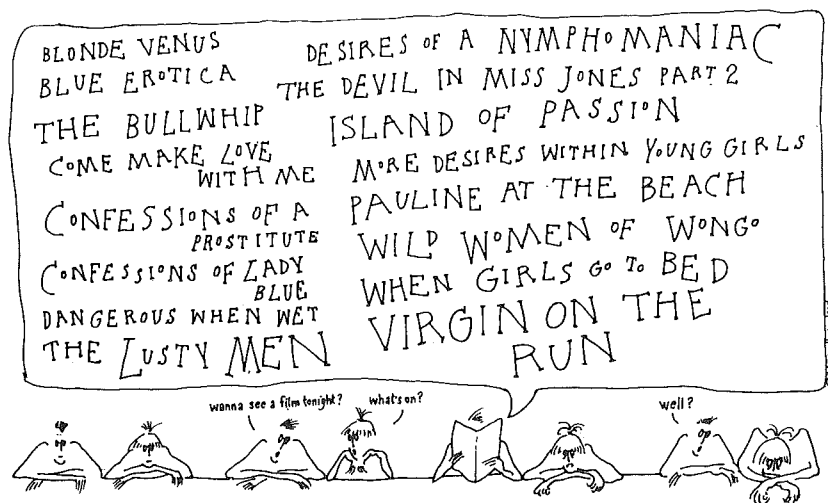
This is not, however, a difference which seems very clear to cultural separatists. The depth of anti-feminism in this tendency of the WLM is revealed when it is realized that these women arrive at conclusions which are *absolutely identical* to the ideology of the patriarchy, although the premises attached to the arguments of the two camps are slightly different. Here is the patriarchal argument. Premise: women, due to their innate biological and intellectual inferiority, can never be even one half as good as men as lawyers, scientists, mathematicians, athletes, etc. Conclusion: women should therefore be KEPT OUT of these fields of activity. Here is the cultural separatist argument. Premise: women due to their innate superiority and good sense, would never want to enter 'male' professions and activities such as science, technology, sport, etc; indeed, women are (or should be) hostile to them. Conclusion: women should therefore KEEP OUT of these fields of activity. Is any further comment necessary?

One last point: my analysis of *cultural* separatism is in no way an attack on separatism per se. On the contrary: I believe that political separatism (the existence of an autonomous WLM independent of the male-supremacist left) and sexual separatism (withdrawal of sexual service from men) are both vital to the feminist struggle. □

Lynette Mitchell

# Against Cultural Separatism

1. Barbara Burris et al, "The Fourth World Manifesto", in *Radical Feminism*, Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone, eds. (N.7: Quadrangle, 1973).
2. This tendency in the WLM is often referred to as 'cultural feminism'. I think this is a mistake. Although in their call for a *separate* women's culture, these women are certainly cultural separatists, I hope I have proved here that their ideas are often *anti-feminist*.
3. Christine Delphy, "The Main Enemy" in the collection of her work *Close to Home* (London: Hutchinson, 1984). Diarchy: a society based on the political rule of *two* equal sexes.



# The Great Freudian Cover Up



JUDY STEVENS

*In this edited version of a paper first published ten years ago, Florence Rush discusses why Freud chose to deny women's experiences of sexual abuse. We had already decided to publish this article as it is one of the most damaging critiques of Freud to come out of the women's movement. The publication this year of a book by a man (Jeffrey Masson) on the same topic, in which he makes no reference to Rush's work, made publication even more important, as a means of recording our own history.*

*The Freudian Cover-up* was first published in an American feminist journal — *Chrysalis* — which is no longer available. We have put a full copy of the article in the Feminist Library, Hungerford House, Embankment, London for any women who want access to it.

In 1905 Dr Sigmund Freud presented the world with his theory on infant sexuality. He informed a society still deep in Victorian prudery that very little children had strong erotic drives. His theory shocked middle class sensibility at first, but eventually this same middle class society came to find Freud to be quite right. Today it is almost generally agreed that children have crogenous

zones and sexual feelings, but, since Freud's interest focused on the psycho-sexual aspects of human development, he gave little attention to other infantile endowment. He chose not to notice that just as children are sexually aware, so are all their other faculties intact, and therefore they know when they have been humiliated and exploited. So when Freud claimed that chil-

dren who reported sexual abuse by adults had imagined or fantasized the experience, he was quite wrong. Children know the difference between reality and fantasy, often with more accuracy than adults, and sexual advances are in fact made to children in the course of everyday life. To insist that these advances are imagined is to underestimate a child's perceptive capacity, create doubt and confusion, undermine self-confidence, and provide the food upon which nightmares are nourished.

Franz Kafka was a master at communicating the anxiety resulting from general disregard of personal fear and sense of danger. The world of science and suspense fiction is permeated with the eerie loneliness of distorted reality. But my favourite, still enjoyed by late-show insomniacs, is the 1944 film *Gaslight*, a tale which so impressed public imagination that still today the word 'gaslight' is used to describe an attempt to destroy others' perceptions of reality and, ultimately, their sanity.

Personally, I know I have been 'gaslighted' frequently in my lifetime, not the least traumatic instance being the denial of my own molestation. I recognize, however, that the gaslighting procedure, as it applies to the subject of sexual abuse, is far more serious than a Victorian suspense story and more effective than one man's treachery. It evolves from widespread indoctrination. Sigmund Freud, whose theories have enormous influence on modern thinking, knew that the sexual abuse of children existed, but he could not reconcile the implications of that abuse with either his self-image or his identification with other men of his class, and thus he altered his telling of reality. Eventually he succeeded in gaslighting an age into ignoring a devastating childhood reality and a very serious social problem.

## A Freudian discretion

Early in his career Freud believed that little girls often experienced sexual abuse because his patients, predominantly women, consistently reported childhood instances of sexual molestation. Many of Freud's patients suffered from hysteria, a common Victorian ailment affecting middle class women. The symptoms included loss of voice or appetite, compulsive vomiting,

sneezing, coughing, temporary blindness, deafness, paralysis, or epilepsy, and these symptoms, with no discernible organic base, were resistant to medical treatment. Since his hysterical patients repeatedly reported sexual abuse, most often naming their fathers as the abusers, Freud drew a causal connection between sexual abuse and neurosis. Before he formulated his better-known theories, he framed the "seduction theory" in which he pointed to a direct connection between sexual abuse in childhood and adult incrimination of fathers by his patients made him uneasy, and, never quite comfortable with the seduction theory, he mentioned it publicly only in the year 1896 and not again until much later (1933), when he was able to reassign the abuse to female fantasy and disavow it as erroneous:

Almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I was driven to recognise in the end that these reports were untrue and so came to understand that the hysterical symptoms are derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences.<sup>1</sup>

More at ease with the fantasy rather than reality of sexual abuse, Freud was even more comfortable when he could name the mother rather than the father as the seducer. When he implicated the mother, however, he assured us that maternal seduction was based on reality.

It was only later that I was able to recognize in this phantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of the typical Oedipus-complex in women. And now we find the phantasy of seduction once more in the pre-Oedipus pre-history of girls; but the seducer is regularly the mother. Here, however, the phantasy touches on the ground of reality for it was really the mother who by her activities over the child's bodily hygiene inevitably stimulated and perhaps even aroused for the first time, pleasurable sensations in her genitals.

(Emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

Before Freud could conclude that seduction by fathers was a fantasy, he had to be rid of his earlier theory. Since men did not complain of maternal seduction Freud limited the 'imagined' abuse to a specific female problem: "I was able to recognize in this phantasy of being seduced by the father the typical Oedipus complex in women."

Freud formulated the Oedipal complex, the theory of innate erotic attraction of



children to parents of the opposite sex, and he gave us the 'libido theory' or sex energy as a vital life force. Yet this man who saw the sex drive as a dominant factor in personality development, and the struggle to sublimate sexual gratification as essential to practical survival, to the mature psyche, and to all of civilization, for that matter, told us nothing of his own sexual impulses, sexual conflicts, or experiences.\* What makes this concealment even more surprising is the fact that Freud used his life, his conscious and unconscious being, as a prime tool for understanding and explaining all of human sexuality. His theories evolved from self-analysis and the interpretation of his own dreams, yet he never once revealed a masturbatory fantasy, or a sexual passion, nor did he ever associate "one of his dreams with an erotic desire or a woman".<sup>3</sup>

It should come as no surprise, then, that Freud also saw fit to censor what he thought was other ill-advised information. In a footnote to the 1924 edition of his *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), he confessed that he had altered some studies for reasons of discretion. In two cases he had substituted an uncle for a father as sexual abuser. In the light of Freud's rather arbitrary employment of discretion, his conclusions regarding female fantasy or the female personality can be reasonably questioned.<sup>4</sup> And were it not for the accidental recovery of Freud's correspondence with his one-time friend and colleague, Wilhelm Fliess, the story of his very subjective need to cover for the sins of the fathers and renounce the seduction theory would have been lost to us.

#### *The Fliess caper*

The account of the Fliess letters is a lively and exciting tale in itself. From 1888 to 1902, when they quarrelled, Sigmund Freud and his good friend, W. Fliess, a Berlin nose-and-throat specialist, engaged in prolific correspondence. Central to their friendship was a mutual interest in the sexual aspects of the human condition, and Fliess had developed his own sex theory, which he felt would "explain the phenomena of life and death." Freud admired Fliess tremendously and found in his friend a man of supreme intellect and impeccable judgement. He welcomed his comments and criticisms regarding his theories, findings, and

even his writing style. But as Freud became more secure in his work, he looked to Fliess less, and finally the men separated over scientific differences. Freud destroyed all his correspondence from Fliess, but his own letters, which included elaborate and detailed drafts and notes, were retained by Fliess.

After Fliess's death in 1929, his widow sold a packet of 284 pieces of correspondence to a Berlin bookseller, Reinhold Stahl. Knowing that Freud would destroy the letters if given the chance, Frau Fliess gave Stahl instructions that they were not to fall into Freud's hands. Later, when the Nazi regime forced Stahl to flee to France, he offered the letters to Mme Marie Bonaparte, a student and disciple of Freud, who perceived their value and happily purchased them for 100 pounds. She took the packet to Vienna and appraised Freud of the letters' existence and of the transaction, but, indignant that they had been brought to light, he ordered them destroyed, and even after Bonaparte read portions to him to convince him of their scientific importance, he was adamant. "I don't want any of them to become known to so-called posterity," he said.<sup>5</sup>

Bonaparte defied this order and deposited the correspondence in a safe deposit box at the Rothschild bank in Vienna during the winter of 1937-1938. When Hitler invaded Austria, she employed her status as a Greek princess and was permitted, under Nazi guard, to remove the contents of the box. She then placed the documents with the Danish legation in Paris, but when their security was again threatened by Nazi invasion, the letters, wrapped in waterproof, bouyant material (in case of a mine explosion), finally crossed the channel and reached England in safety. There they were transcribed and edited by Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, and finally a volume of 168 letters and notes, selected from a total of 284 pieces of correspondence, was published in 1950 under the title *Origins of Psychoanalysis* - eleven years after Freud's death.

I found the correspondence, more than any history or intellectual process, the work of an extremely complicated, imaginative, and talented human being. Nowhere does a novel reveal as artistically the ambivalence,

\* In his private letters to his friend, Wilhelm Fliess, published after his death (1950), Freud did reveal some sexual desires, dreams, and feelings. He did not intend, however, that these letters be brought to public attention.

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ambition, courage of a man in a personal struggle. These letters, more than any information officially released by Freud, precisely demonstrated *his* unconscious connections, and from beginning to end tell why he could no longer abide his own seduction theory.

**Uncovering sexual abuse**

During the early years when he published *Studies on Hysteria*, in collaboration with Joseph Breuer, Freud was already well into the exploration of the human unconscious in search of the secrets of neurosis. Having discovered 'free association', a method whereby both he and his patients could explore hidden emotions in an atmosphere free of judgement and censure. Freud listened carefully and intently to his patients. But however clearly he recognized the existence of repressed thought and feeling, he did not, at that time, doubt that a real experience was the cause of hysteria. "I have come to the opinion that anxiety is to be connected, not with a mental, but with a physical consequence of sexual abuse", he wrote to his friend Fliess.<sup>6</sup>

Freud later pinpointed vulnerability to sexual trauma as occurring during "primary sexual experience (before puberty) accompanied by revulsion and fright".<sup>7</sup>

In the year 1896 Freud presented his seduction theory in a group of three papers broadly titled 'The Aetiology of Hysteria'. This work was a public challenge to heredity as the cause of hysteria, and, in bold opposition to general medical opinion, Freud named social rather than biological causes of neurosis. He identified the specific excitement of the genitals resulting from sexual abuse in childhood as the trauma that brought on hysteria and cited 18 cases, not one lacking in a sexual experience, to support his theory. Moreover, in addition to this case evidence, Freud certainly realised that his Victorian world was notorious for its sexual license, particularly in the sexual abuse of children. "It seems to me certain that our children are far oftener exposed to sexual aggression than we should suppose."<sup>8</sup> To Fliess, Freud continued to present case material to further substantiate his hypothesis. He named seduction by fathers as the "essential point" in hysteria.

Despite continued evidence, Freud never

again, after the 1896 presentation, publicly promoted his seduction theory. True, his theory was poorly received, and Krafft-Ebing ridiculed it, but Freud's reticence was hardly the result of adverse opinion; even then he was prepared to create a disturbance.<sup>9</sup> It was Freud's own faltering conviction that prevented risk of further exposure. Though staunch on sexual trauma as the cause of neurosis, he was extremely unhappy with the father as seducer, and though able to name him in the privacy of the Fliess correspondence, he was unable to do so publicly. Consequently, his 1896 papers were weak on identifying the perpetrators of the sexual trauma; he cited almost as many categories of sexual abusers as he cited actual cases, and created a series of unlikely contradictions.

The grown-up stranger as sexual abuser was the most infrequent offender, he said; nurses, maids, governesses, teachers, and near relations were more often responsible. But children of the same age (or very close) and of the opposite sex, such as brother and sister, most frequently created sexual trauma. This large category of predominantly female offenders did not fit the illness in question. Hysteria was primarily a female affliction (a 'male hysteric' was hard to find), and the sexual assaults Freud mentioned were heterosexual. Furthermore, in general discussion of sexual assault and hysteria, he always referred to the abuse of children by adults. Suddenly to claim that the largest number of offenders came from among children of the same age was a contradiction. The only credible abuser was the "near relation", whom Freud mentioned in passing but did venture to say "initiated sexual intercourse" more often than one thinks.<sup>10</sup>

That Freud's inconsistencies reflected his need to protect fathers was substantiated as more than a possibility by the editors of the Standard Edition (a collection of Freud's work). They noted that in his 1896 papers on hysteria, Freud intentionally omitted and suppressed the role of fathers just as he had in the earlier *Studies on Hysteria*.

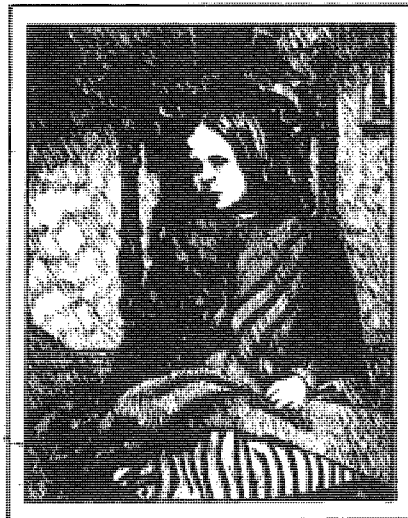
The subjective reason for Freud's cover-up was revealed to him (and us) when he began to explore his own disturbing and complex

reactions to his father's death.

### *Father Freud and Oedipus Rex*

His father's death evoked in Freud such intense conflict and suffering that he felt compelled to examine himself — to search inward for the cause of his extreme reaction. This journey resulted in self-analysis, interpretation of his dreams, and the beginning of the psychoanalytic process. It brought him to his own unconscious motives and drives by taking him back to memories of his childhood experiences. It was these memories that made him aware of his own early sexual feelings. He told Fliess that at age two he had seen his mother naked and recalled that his "libido towards *matrem* was aroused."<sup>11</sup> The knowledge of his own youthful sexual feelings destroyed for him forever the myth that children were sexless: children, he now knew, had erotic feelings.

As he travelled further into his past, he found that his desire for his mother had stirred hostility toward his father, and when he looked at this complex of infantile sexuality — desire for his mother and hatred for his father — he understood his own extreme



anxiety as guilt resulting from an unconscious paternal death wish. Conscious now that he harbored deep paternal antagonism, Freud confided to Fliess in an unpublished letter (dated February 11, 1897) that the number of fathers named by his patients as sexual molesters had truly alarmed him: with the father as prime abuser he had "inferred

from the existence of some hysterical features in his brother and several sisters that even his father had been thus incriminated."<sup>12</sup> But when it was later revealed to him in a dream that he was feeling overly affectionate toward Mathilda, his daughter, he understood that "the dream of course fulfills my wish to pin down a father as the originator of neurosis and put an end to my persistent doubts."

Freud was becoming convinced that the suspicion he directed against his own father and himself and his acceptance of his patients' stories of seduction were prompted by his need to "pin down the father as seducer." Based on personal inclination, he presumed that all his patients had the same need and therefore came to suspect that their stories of fathers as seducers were 'defensive fictions.' Freud continued to delve, and with the discovery of his death wish toward his father and the ensuing guilt, he quite assured himself that he had reached the roots of his own 'neurotica'. As he solved his own problems, however, he simultaneously relegated his patients' testimony to fantasy, discarded his seduction theory, and replaced it with the incipient Oedipal complex. He was not at all unhappy to make these changes, and, in October 1897, one year after his father's death, he wrote to Fliess that his conviction of his patients' seduction as fantasy left him feeling triumphant.

As he approached the source of the neurosis, and evolved the now-famous Oedipal complex, Freud freely applied his particular personal discovery to everybody, to all cultures, and to females as well as males. So, as the son loved the mother and hated the father, so did the daughter love the father and hate the mother, he said. But he found the daughter's desire and need for the father so much more powerful than those of the son for his mother that the daughter's wish to be seduced found its fulfillment in fantasy and fictitious seduction stories.

Today 'Oedipus complex' is a household term; however, the Oedipal myth as a representative of a universal pattern of family interaction was a rather capricious selection.

A far more dominant theme in Greek mythology is parental fear, hatred, and

slaughter of children. Ouranos, the cosmic sky god, imprisoned his children in a cave until his son Kronos castrated and supplanted him. Kronos, fearful of competition from his children, ate them all as soon as they were born. Rhea, unhappy mother, rescued Zeus; Zeus conquered and supplanted Kronos, but took the same precautions as his father and swallowed Metis, whom he had impregnated. Laius pierced the feet of his son Oedipus and left him exposed to die; Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to the gods; Medea slew her children to avenge her husband's infidelity, and the daughters of Cadmus, founder of Thebes, also violently destroyed their children. It would seem that children's anxiety growing out of childhood dependency and fear of adult authority and destructive powers is a much more plausible cause of neurosis than guilt from the questionable unconscious wishes imputed to children by Freud.

As long as Freud held to his own experience and unconscious motives, his discoveries were credible. That he desired his mother, competed with his father, and found this conflict at the root of his neurosis, I believe. But to suppose from these personal insights that the testimony of his patients was fictitious requires mental acrobatics. It is much more reasonable to attribute Freud's denial of the reality of female sexual abuse to his own subjectivity, which he projected into a universal infantile-parental hostility. Freud, no matter what he felt, never actually incriminated fathers: he never mentioned them publicly as sexual abusers and even took upon himself to alter information in order to protect them. His conflicts about his father may have caused him anguish and guilt but he never once incriminated other fathers.

It is too bad that Freud was so resistant to the possibility of female childhood seduction, for, had he followed through, he might have come to believe — as I and many others do — that there were, in addition to sexual assault, other causes of female neurosis. He might have come to see that the middle class Victorian woman afflicted by hysteria suffered from many abuses that frustrated and repressed her normal inclinations toward human growth and achievement. Freud's

patients were talented, bright, and ambitious women, who, in addition to being sexually exploited, were discouraged from activity and deprived of rewards or recognition commensurate with their energy, interests, intelligence, and skills. Though influential in removing hysteria from the sphere of physiological disturbance, Freud was unable to



admit that women could contribute beyond the role of passive wives and mothers, and he too held that they were inherently defective. As a result, he could not acknowledge that they suffered from sexual abuse and social inequality and discrimination.

With the elimination of the seduction theory and the adoption of the Oedipal complex in females, Freud had come full circle. The seduction theory maintained that hysteria was a neurosis caused by sexual assault, and it incriminated incestuous fathers, while the Oedipal theory insisted that seduction was a fantasy, an invention, not a fact — and it incriminated daughters. When Freud replaced the seduction theory with the Oedipus complex he relieved himself of his 'neurotica' and vindicated fathers, but implicated daughters. However, one must remember that when Freud arrived at the seduction theory, he did so by listening carefully and intently to his female patients; when he arrived at his Oedipal theory, he did so by listening carefully and intently to himself. His monumental *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the result of self-analysis and the basis for

all his later theories, came from *his* memories, *his* dreams, and *his* experiences and, unfortunately, his theories strongly bear the stamp of *his* personality and *his* time, sex, and class.

The value of certain Freudian insights is not here denied, but in his attempt to shape a particular personal conflict into a universal mould, he reverted from a cultural to a biological determination of neurosis. This shift was damaging to the female, for it was she, not the abuser, who bore the brunt of her own seduction. This so-called 'seduction fantasy' this myth of the incestuous wish for the father, became integral and inevitable to the woman's nature, and therefore, even if actually assaulted, the problem was not the assault but the result of her innate compulsion to possess a penis.

If a female child developed normally (that is, had faith that someday she would grow up, be married, get the penis, baby, and all), Freud assured us she would not be overwhelmed by the flood of anxiety and guilt coming from the incestuous desire for her father, and an external stimulus — an actual seduction — would be harmless. Freud therefore cautioned the world never to overestimate the importance of seduction and the world listened to Freud and paid little heed to the sexual abuse of children.<sup>11</sup>

#### A Freudian gaslight

The Western world, America particularly, took Dr Freud very seriously indeed and, in compliance with his instructions, was careful not to overestimate a real seduction — or the importance of any concrete reality, for that matter. In fact, the complex of inner drives gained such ascendancy in the public mind that the psyche was considered capable of dominating the external world.

Disciples of Freud who accepted penis envy as axiomatic soon surpassed their master and firmly established female 'organ inferiority' as the crucial problem of molested children. Melanie Klein, known for her psychoanalytic work with the very young, held that little girls, even under ages two and three, were governed by the primacy of the penis and were desperately driven to possess the coveted male genital.<sup>14</sup> Helene Deutsch told us that the organless female child was endowed with an "erotic-passive attitude to-

ward the father" and so saw him as her seducer.<sup>15</sup>

While Karl Abraham, one of Freud's earliest followers, readily conceded the reality of sexual abuse, he argued that since not all little girls were molested, there must be something very wrong with those who were. This particular contribution by Abraham was applauded by Freud and has since become the rationale identifying the peculiar personality needs of sexual abused little girls.<sup>16</sup>

What can be the consequences of such thinking? Only confusion, resulting in a distortion of reality, total misunderstanding of female sexuality, and extensive damage to the confidence, pride and self-worth, and dignity of children.

The reasoning is illogical. It categorically assigns a real experience to fantasy, or harmless reality at best, while the known offender — Uncle Willie, the grocery clerk, the dentist, or the child's father — is permitted further to indulge his predilection for little girls. The child's experience is as terrifying as the worst horror of a Kafkaesque nightmare: her story is not believed, she is declared ill, and, worse, she is left at the mercy and the 'benevolence' of psychiatrically oriented 'child experts'.

I am often reminded by today's experts in the new psychologies that Freud's theories are now outdated. With the advent of ego, group, and reality therapies and the miracle of weekend marathons, we are told that Freud is passe, the Oedipal complex is a period piece, the idea of penis envy is quite gauche. But though the words may have changed, the melody lingers on and Freudian concepts are more popular today than ever. Students of the human services today — doctors, nurses, educators, social workers and parents, who perhaps never heard of 'infant sexuality' or 'penis envy' — readily accept that children are sexy; that they participate in, and even instigate, their own molestation; and that, in the famous words of every child molester, "the kid really asked for it". From a 1970 book on sex education, we have a variation on the main Freudian theme:

There is the incontrovertible fact, very hard for some of us to accept, that in certain cases it is not the man who inaugurates the trouble. The novel *Lolita* . . . describes what

may well happen. A girl of 12 or so, is already endowed with a good deal of sexual desire and also can take pride in her 'conquests'. Perhaps, in all innocence, she is the temptress and not the man.<sup>17</sup>

In 1968, a book entitled *Vulnerable Children*, by Cindy Burton, discussed some 30-odd studies on the sexually assaulted child from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s. The conclusion emphasized the prevalence of victim participation and the harmless nature of the assaults. As a matter of fact, one could soon be convinced that the molester was the real victim and, further, that the victims were not victims at all, but juvenile delinquents acting out their pathology. Burton suggested that the pathology found in the delinquent girl "may also account for the participation sometimes apparent in sexual assault cases".<sup>18</sup>

I worked as a social worker with children for many years and during one period in a home for dependent and neglected girls. The children were between 7 and 17, and not one had escaped sexual abuse. If a child showed no visible scars, it was assumed that the experience was harmless, but if she had problems, was difficult, angry, failed in school, attracted boys, or got pregnant, she was diagnosed as acting out her incestuous wish for her father or other sexual fantasies.

Despite the enormous importance psychotherapy places on sexual experience, I was taught never to deal directly with the sexual abuse of a child in treatment. In one case I thought I might help a girl to understand that her father was the guilty one, and he was the one to be ashamed. But my supervisor would have none of that, and he handed me the formula straight from the book. The actual event did not shame her, he continued. It was her deep, unconscious, incestuous wish for her father that made her feel guilty. One must listen carefully, be sensitive to the nuances of the child's fantasies, and at the right moment help her to understand that her shame evolved from her own deep sexual desires.

Although women — young women and even children — do not talk freely about their molestation, there are few who consciously, or otherwise, avoid the subject. For women who have not been believed or had the opportunity to confront their molester

(with adult support), there is always a sense of unfinished business; there is always the rancour of boiling humiliation and rage that remains after an unchallenged insult. When the subject of sexual abuse of children received some media exposure as a result of feminist discussions on the radio, in lectures, and in articles, many women approached me and finally found an opportunity to ventilate their long-festering secret. In their stories, the psychiatric conspiracy of avoidance or distortion of the sexual-abuse problem was prevalent.

I discovered that women were as shocked and disturbed by the lack of sympathy and acknowledgement of the problem as by the incident of sexual abuse itself. When Sigmund Freud ventured to explore the cause of his neurosis, and uncomfortably suspected his father to be his seducer, he took great pains to ferret out the reality of something he vaguely remembered. He checked into his past and was relieved to discover that "my father played no active role", but that an elderly, ugly nursemaid "was my instructor in sexual matters". This supposedly took place when Freud was under age 2, but Max Shur, in his study of Freud, found the possibility of any actual seduction very unlikely.<sup>19</sup> Freud's effort to verify the cause of his own anxieties has been hailed as courageous, whereas a similar investigation by a child or a woman is today discouraged.

Alice B, with the same driving curiosity as Freud, and with much greater cause and anguish, tried to reach the roots of her 'neurosis' and anxiety, but her psychiatrist would have none of it. By the age of 25, without the ego or status of a Dr Freud, she was rebuffed:

I really feel that this thing with my father destroyed my life. I have no confidence, I never did. At 24 I went to a psychiatrist, but you know they don't talk. But I was upset and talked about it so very much that he finally said that what happened to me was very common, but he said, "I think your most important problem is your mother. Your father didn't have anything to do with your unhappiness."

With no less courage than Freud and brave enough to confront her father-molester, Alice tried to rescue herself and her sanity. But, with the exception of her aunts, she was engulfed in a world bent on covering up

for fathers, no matter what the cost to human reason and dignity.

### *Is Freud to blame?*

To hold Freud responsible for a 70-year 'gaslighting' episode is pointless. He lived in an age in which logic, reason, and science supposedly supplanted religious mysticism — an era which required scientific rather than religious authority to justify brutal social injustice and inequities. Freud filled the bill. His theories, surrounded by scientific aura, allowed for the suppression and concealment of the sexual exploitation of the female child.

The Freudian cover-up — the refusal to name the offender — was more than one man's attempt to hide illegal or immoral sex practices. Victorian men were permitted to indulge in forbidden sex provided they managed to keep their activities hidden. Adultery, practised with impunity, was kept under wraps, and prostitution, which operated with police sanction, simply had to avoid public exposure and scandal. Within Freud's own circle, his biographer Ernst Jones was implicated in sexual adventures

with his patients and little girls, but he managed — at some financial cost and the resignation of a job — to avoid public scandal.<sup>20</sup> The excesses of the loving and exuberant Ferenczi, known to be intimate with his patients and his wife's daughter, were tolerated by Freud and his circle.<sup>21</sup> Freud, who regarded the incest taboo as vital to the advance of civilization, appeared to demand only that forbidden sex be practised with tact and discretion so that surface Victorian respectability was in no way disturbed.

The little girl, then, with her innate passion for a penis, is — as in Christian doctrine — the temptress Eve, and, if she is violated, the nature of her sexuality renders her culpable. Any attempt on the part of the child or her family to expose the violator also exposes her own alleged innate sexual motives and shames her more than the offender; concealment is her only recourse. The dilemma of the sexual abuse of children has provided a system of fool-proof emotional blackmail: if the victim incriminates the abuser, she also incriminates herself. The sexual abuse of the child is therefore the best-kept secret in the world. □

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# Coming out confused

*Less enthralled than most of its reviewers, Alice Henry looks at the politics behind 'Sex and Love'.*

*Sex and Love* looks at several of the obsessions the Women's Liberation Movement currently has about sexuality. The editors say the authors puzzle over whether there is a natural sexual essence at the core of every woman, or whether women's sexuality is 'socially constructed'. Other concerns are "personal autonomy as a precondition of intimacy" and the "vulnerability and passion of being in love". Sounds delightful, doesn't it? How to be autonomous, dependent, powerful, powerless, express yourself, listen, love and be loved are *very* interesting things to experience and talk about. And who wouldn't want both personal accounts and more abstract analysis? I think most any woman who walks into a feminist bookshop might buy this book, and would enjoy at least several of the essays.

However, the reader should be warned that the book does not hang together. There is little mental glue to hold together the individual chapters — and the physical binding is no better. This book falls to bits upon reading!

Almost every essay, both personal and abstract, is shot through with the thought style of therapy. Some, like Joanna Ryan's 'Psychoanalysis and women loving women' straightforwardly try to salvage psychoanalysis. But most, like Angela Hamblin's 'Is a feminist heterosexuality possible', mainly — not entirely, but mainly — try to cope with women's complaints by improving individual relationships rather than trying to change the structure of adult life so that women in intimate relationships

won't have to put their partners through intensive individualised training courses.

None of the selections address what feminists might want to do about rape, sexual harassment, pornography, and men's often severe problems with intimacy. When the authors take a stab at what the problems might be, they guess that childhood socialisation is where the whole mess starts, so parent-child relationships must change before grown-ups can change.

I think people (as much as other animals) are quick learners, even as adults. If adult men were not constantly rewarded by a sexist society for being shits, many more of them would stop oppressing women. Similarly, if lesbians weren't constantly told they are 'queer', maybe 'failed men', or perhaps 'perverted', sex and love might be slightly less agonised that it has been for women like Jo Chambers and Jill Brown, who tell their tale in 'Two personal experiences'.

I don't think it is wrong to examine one's life and motives, nor do I think it is wrong to talk to therapists (I went to one for years and found group therapy especially helpful). I did find it surprising that a feminist book is so heavily into the fascination of sorting out individual 'problems'. I was most bothered that so many of the writers claimed it was 'living feminism' to be doing whatever they were doing.

### *The personal is not always political*

Tales of personal experience take up half the book. I suppose the essays on the

*Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions*, edited by Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan (Women's Press, 1983).

trials and tribulations of acting out each sexual identity were written because the editors remembered that the 'personal is political', but they forgot the next line — 'there are no individual solutions'.

One heterosexual woman, Angela Hamblin, asks how women can confront male power in heterosexual relationships — a hard question for women committed to both feminism and maintaining heterosexual relationships. Her picture of male sexual relationships might deter women from getting into heterosexual relationships at all, but if you are in one, she thinks it might help not to go along with what men want and start figuring out what women want.

According to Hamblin's analysis, men want to prove they are 'real men' by having regular intercourse with women, and think fucking is all women really want; according to the women answering Hamblin's questionnaire, women want fun, friendship, and pleasure. No wonder Hamblin sometimes feels that "this part of me that loves them (men) is the problem — if I could get rid of that and simply cut them out of my life and my heart, my life would be much simpler. Yet at the same time the part of me that loves them is a very important part of me, which I don't want to get rid of." Hamblin does a reasonable job of describing the troubles of feminist heterosexuals, but produces little evidence for her claim that women can make a dent in the structure of male dominance by "actively engaging in the process of creating a feminist heterosexuality".

I know it is hard being a heterosexual woman, whether you are feminist or not. I hate the idea of pressuring feminists to stop being heterosexual for the sake of political consistency, but I don't think 'creating a feminist heterosexuality' will ever be a lynchpin of feminist politics — unless that means feminist political organising to slog away at the issues of rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, pornography and sexist sex.

#### Bisexual sex and love

Deborah Gregory wrote 'A case for feminist bi-sexuality' based on her own experiences and on responses to a questionnaire. She picks coming out as bisexual as

the topic for her section on 'political implications'. She comes right out and says, "Coming out is an area of confusion for me." She says private changes must be made public if they are to be politically significant, but does not say what is politically significant about being publically bisexual. What help is this stance when talking to a sexist, heterosexual man? What use is it to tell a lesbian or heterosexual woman that being sexual with men as well as women is . . . well, mostly confusing, according to Gregory? She concludes with a quote she says she likes very much: "My sexuality today is a mixture of old patterns and new insights . . . a glorious mish-mash which my feminism is committed to nourishing and developing. Feminist politics must make all our sexualities liveable."

I know it is confusing to be bisexual, whether you are feminist or not. But must feminist politics make *all* sexualities liveable? Our society insists on a rigid gender system that requires 'real' men and women to be very different from each other and to be attractive and attracted to the other sex. Under these circumstances, it is probably a good thing that feminism makes women think bisexuality is confusing, rather than especially liveable.

#### Lesbian love and sex

Being a lesbian gives some women a sense of being politically correct, but women loving women still smash into the problems of dependency, intimacy, looking for a perfect lover, discovering a need to have your lover accept you (call that dependency) and your lover's need to have you accept her (call that demanding). In addition, every lesbian copes with homophobia both in herself, in her loved one, and in everyone.

Jo Chambers and Jill Brown tell how they have been mired in these problems. Jo tries to be loving and understanding about why Jill has rejected her. Jill fell in love with Anne, her co-counsellor, who seemed to have the withdrawal skills that would keep Jill's fear of closeness at bay.

They use words like nurturance, dependency, and autonomy. What do they refer to? What words or behaviour of the lover trigger the 'issue of dependency'? Jill's

analysis uses the jargon of therapy, but does this go far enough? Why not also connect the fear of asking for 'full nurturance' to the common experience of men really and truly jeopardising women's autonomy in the name of love? I found I could not make myself emotionally trust a man I liked enough to marry; the issue of economic dependency deeply aggravated me (not that he wanted me to be dependent). I wonder if my inability to overcome emotional distance with him has persisted in my love relationships with women?

Jill says, "A particularly crucial part of my relationship is around the area of my internalised lesbian oppression. As a woman who has expressed her sexuality until recently as a heterosexual, Anne has not carried the painful feelings of guilt and shame about being sexual with women." I don't understand that. I thought *all* women were given a heavy dose of guilt and shame, thus keeping most heterosexual women from wanting to be lesbian. And first lesbian relationships often bring some painful feelings of shame, self-hatred, and rejection of the woman you love. I know I went through the agony of flashes of feeling distaste for the first woman I loved.

I know it is hard and confusing to be lesbian, whether you are feminist or not. Given this, therapy may be as important to lesbians as it is to heterosexual and bisexual women. And surely lesbians can't always be thinking about how what they are doing contributes to the revolution? Conversely, when lesbians are not contributing to the feminist revolution, they should not feel compelled to claim they are, unlike Jill (the lesbian who more or less leaves Jo) who concludes, "My relationship with . . . all the women who share my life, reflect no more and no less the revolutionary feminist process which, through politicising the personal, is breaking down patriarchal thinking and behaviour and opening up new possibilities of love between women."

#### Sexuality and sex

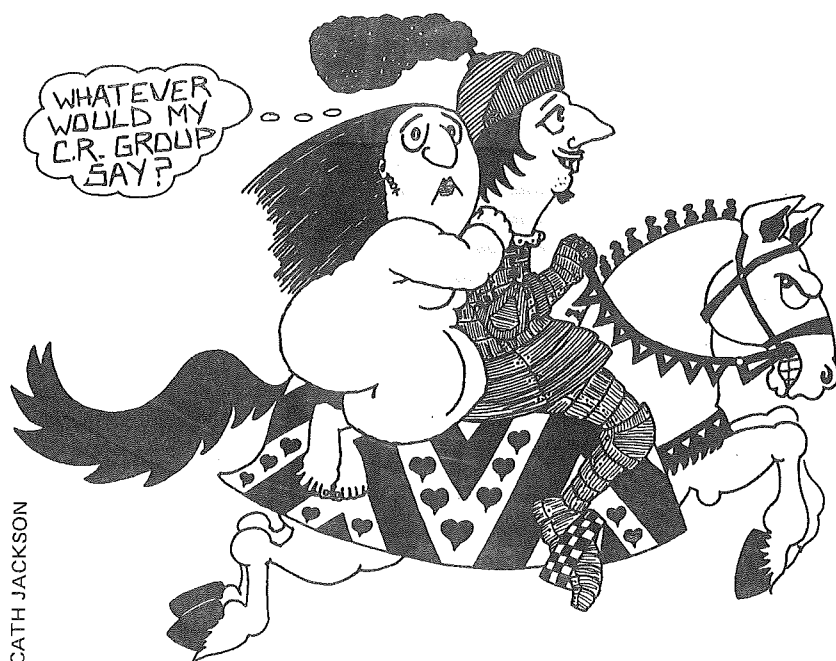
At the theoretical end of the book, Elizabeth Wilson and Sonja Ruehl criticise various feminists who have been pushing the idea that heterosexuality is *the* essential characteristic of male supremacy.

Elizabeth Wilson criticises feminists who "have come to assume that 'sexuality' holds the key to, or is the core of, the subordination of women, and also the source of female power". Wilson adds that it is "a denial of material reality to believe that sexual freedom is possible as long as the vast majority of women remain economically and socially subordinate to men". I agree that sexual freedom is a mirage, and that it will neither precede nor follow economic, social and political equality; but Wilson's phrasing seems peculiar. Does she mean to say that sexual harassment and rape are not material realities, or are less real than other ways of subordinating women?

Wilson criticises feminists like Lillian Faderman (*Surpassing the Love of Men* and *The Scotch Verdict*: see review by Sheila Jeffreys in *T&S* 3) and Adrienne Rich ('Compulsory heterosexuality') for defining lesbianism to include all positive relationships between women. Wilson thinks the sexual aspects of lesbianism should not be played down, even if the goal is to play up political lesbianism, as the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists did. In 'Political lesbianism' (reprinted in *Love Your Enemy*), the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists say, "We do think that all feminists can and should be political lesbians. Our definition of a political lesbian is a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women." Wilson disagrees with this position as she thinks it wrongly claims that sex with men is the ultimate in male oppression of women.

Sonja Ruehl is also critical of overemphasising 'reproductive sexuality' (presumably she means heterosexual intercourse) as the archetypal expression of male power and aggression. Ruehl identifies this as a radical feminist line of thought, which leads radical feminists to see heterosexual activity exclusively as an exercise of male dominance and to see women as engaging in heterosexual sex only out of self-defence or submission, rather than because it is pleasurable. Ruehl also says that seeing 'reproductive sexuality' as the crux of male control of women leads radical feminists to emphasise lesbianism as the best haven from oppressive sex.





CATH JACKSON

I agree with Wilson and Ruehl that sex with men is not the worst, most crucial, or most typical form of male supremacy. After all, men have many reasons and ways to keep women down. In abstract terms, division of labour by sex, the economic subordination of women, and control over reproduction are as important as rights of sexual access. In concrete terms, why think a good fuck is any more important to a man than the joys of having women do almost all the shit work?

It is interesting that radical feminism is described as concentrating on sexuality (heterosexuality and lesbianism). Many radical feminists — Ti Grace Atkinson, Kate Millett, Christine Delphy — describe different ideas on sex and economics. The crude, oversimplified representation of radical feminism as focusing biologically on the sex act itself rather than the complex role which sex plays in the oppression of women as a whole, reflects Wilson and Ruehl's separation of sex and the 'material' world, rather than a radical feminist approach.

Wading through *Sex and Love* made me wonder about the place of sexual issues in perpetuating male dominance. Sometimes I

think the rules about how to be a 'real' man and a 'real' woman keep women in their place so that men can monopolise the good work, the good play — all the 'goods'. Sex roles — the rules about what men and women should do — are shot through with sexual implications. For men, things associated with competence at work are cleverly linked with sexual competence and called 'masculinity'; for women, things associated with incompetence at work are cleverly linked with sexual competence and called 'femininity'.

Sex segregation and female seclusion is another important institution linking sexuality and work that supports male supremacy. Except in sexual situations, men socialise mostly with men, and women with women, in a multitude of societies and social classes. When women try to break out of the female world and work with men, men often try to put them back in their place through sexual harassment. And one of the first and worst things to call a competent woman is — a lesbian. This neatly ties together being heterosexual with being a 'real' woman, with economic and political powerlessness.

'Sexuality' refers to a number of social institutions — often it refers to sexual identity (heterosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, etc); sometimes it refers to sexual attitudes and behaviour (such as 'male sexuality' or 'female sexuality' as described in sexologists' textbooks and *Playboy*); sometimes it even refers to sex role prescriptions about how women and men, or women and women, or men and men interact. Because 'sexuality' has been used to refer to so many things, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether to disagree or agree when a feminist says "Sexuality is (or is not) the most crucial aspect of male supremacy."

I think, then, that it is wrong to think that sexual issues (meaning lesbianism and heterosexual sex) are the basis of male supremacy, but I also think socialist feminists like Sonja Ruehl and Elizabeth Wilson have gone overboard pursuing 'socially constructed desire' — a 'sexy' wording that has not yet led them to address the specifics of how heterosexuality is linked to male supremacy. □

# DANGER! MALE BONDING AT WORK

The term sexual harassment was coined in 1975 to describe a range of behaviours which form part of the working conditions of most women. Unlike pay or hours of work, these conditions had not previously been formally recognised and therefore no grievance or other procedures for complaint and action existed.

In the last nine years some limited progress has been made: for example, in Britain, as elsewhere in the West some unions and places of employment have begun work on defining sexual harassment and devising informal and formal procedures for handling complaints.

This account of their experiences by Rita Krut and Elaine Otto shows how far we have come and how far we have yet to go to enable women to raise complaints without victimisation.

We are a secretary and a student who worked together at an African Studies Centre at a Canadian university during the academic year 1982/3. Elaine Otto was born in Nova Scotia in 1957. She was the secretary and sole support staff from September 1981 until her resignation in June 1983. Riva Krut was born in South Africa. She is a doctoral student in London, England, and was on a visiting fellowship to the Centre from September 1982 until she left in June 1983.

In May 1983 we submitted a *Brief* to a Review Committee set up to review policy for the Centre for the coming year. We explained that we were subject to continual sexual harassment at the Centre. We said this took various forms and degrees, but it created a work environment which was difficult for women.

The *Brief* rapidly became a major issue in the university as a whole. It prompted an official internal inquiry through a President's Committee. Our work became impossible: Elaine resigned and Riva left her office.

At the Centre, the response to the *Brief* was dramatic and intimidating. Our motives were questioned, our emotional stability thrown into doubt, our statements of our experiences treated with scepticism. Our attempt to confront the issue of sexual harassment in public meant that we came under scrutiny and the issue disappeared. This article is an attempt to redress the imbalance.

**First Major Incident — "Men Will Be Men": November 1981.**

Elaine: I had been receiving leering looks and comments from the students at the Centre since my arrival there in September 1981, but until a particular incident I could not quite put my finger on why it was I was feeling so uncomfortable. I did not understand what these looks were saying.

It all began very innocently (at least on my part). In my capacity as Secretary I did some typing for the President of a student organization with the understanding that this was part of my job. He apparently felt

*Extracts from the Harassment Policy of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, February 1983 . . .*

*Protection against acts of harassment extends to incidents occurring at or away from the workplace, during or outside normal working hours provided such acts are committed within the course of employment, or in the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation.*

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

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

Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, (reprinted in this country by Onlywomen Press, 1981).

Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, 'Political Lesbianism', in *Love Your Enemy?* (Onlywomen Press, 1981).



that I was to be rewarded. He began by claiming that he would like to take me to dinner as an expression of thanks. I was reluctant and refused the invitation many times. Finally, feeling guilty for being so unthankful and succumbing to his persistence I agreed to a dinner, believing wholeheartedly that I was doing the proper thing.

The dinner went nicely — quite enjoyable actually — he was a perfect gentleman.

I began to enjoy the food and conversation towards the end of the meal, thinking "OK, I've done my duty and soon I can go home." Well, when the dinner was over he decided we should extend the evening and go somewhere for dancing and a drink. I opted for the drink — a stupid move. We went to a local lounge and I very slowly had one drink — he had several. Shortly I began to get a little more uneasy — he was steering the conversation towards more personal subjects and becoming decidedly more friendly and affectionate. Resisting urges to have more to drink, I decided to cut the evening and go home. He thought perhaps we could go to his place to relax, and was very persistent. I thought, "Oh no, how am I going to get out of this?" — I had no transport home and he would not take "No" for an answer. My solution was to say perhaps we could go to my place, thinking my roommate and her fiance would be there and I would have no worries.

It was past midnight at this point and after arriving we spent a pleasant enough few hours talking with my roommate and her fiance. At about 3 am I started to suggest that it really was late and perhaps he should be getting home. At this point he very cleverly manoeuvred me towards the coat closet — also the direction of the bedroom and, even more cleverly, didn't stop at the coat closet but under force headed me into the bedroom. I was understandably reluctant at being manoeuvred anywhere under physical pressure and even more disgusted at the physical pressures exerted on me once within the confines of a dark bedroom. I was repelled, frightened and angry at the situation I found myself in and totally horrified at his outright announcement that he thought me totally aware of his intentions and quite willing to comply. I was completely unaware that I'd given him any indication of that.

In the meantime, my roommate and her fiance, who apparently felt I had the situation under control, went off to bed. After repeated attempts to release myself from his grip I succeeded in getting into the lighted hallway. Here my efforts to fight him off only succeeded in getting me pinned to the wall where I was held under severe force for over an hour arguing that "no,

he didn't need me" and "no, I definitely didn't need him". At this point I was making a valiant effort to maintain control.

At about 4.30 am he realised his force was getting him nowhere and as I was about to scream out of frustration and fright he relaxed his grip. I went to the phone, called a taxi and literally pushed him out the door. It was close to 5 am.

I spent the rest of the early morning hours wondering what I'd done to deserve such treatment. How did this man ever get the impression that I was willing to be his victim of that night? Was it the dress I was wearing? Did I say something suggestive? What had I done?

The next day was marked by a telephone call from this man with an apology. The following Monday morning I was presented with a cheque from this guy for payment of the typing services I'd done for him! I gave the cheque back, wanting to erase the whole issue from my mind completely.

Several weeks passed during which he came in every day, showing no embarrassment but being continually annoying and frustrating. He asked for more typing services, leaning over my shoulder, staring. I thought for a while perhaps I was overreacting to his appearances but overreacting or not I could not continue to work amidst his friends who had obviously heard his version of the evening.

Everything came to a head one day soon after and I resigned from my job. My boss asked me to reconsider. I was granted 10 days vacation and decided during this period to give the situation another try. I needed a regular income. I arrived back from vacation only to learn that my boss (to whom I had given no details of the incident) had learned the name of the man and was to meet him shortly in his office. I left the office for an hour while this meeting was going on. Upon my return my boss informed me that the student had denied any unpleasant encounter and that I must have misinterpreted his intentions! "Men will be men" was his reaction.

Riva arrived at the Centre in September 1982 just at the point when I felt I did not know how to handle the situation at the Centre on my own. A second female added support that I needed. We very quickly fell

into a routine of getting together each morning before work to have coffee and chat. We did not feel strong enough to confront sexism in the Centre, but in February I wrote down the incident above and submitted it as an anonymous memorandum to the newly formed University Committee on Sexual Harassment.

### *Second Major Incident — All Women are Strippers: April 1983.*

Riva: A meeting had been called to discuss a projected trip by delegates from the Centre to a conference in another province. The university was paying to hire a bus to take us to the conference. About a dozen people were assembled: mainly students with two staff members. I was the only woman.

The discussion was conducted amidst general joviality. Said the organizing professor, "You can get on the bus as drunk as lords, but we leave midnight Saturday". I gulped: a bus load crammed with drunk men, speeding through the night along the dark Trans-Canada Highway. They were collecting names of drivers over twenty-one for the rental company. As I put forward my name as driver, I felt two dozen disbelieving eyes descend upon me: *I was going to drive?* Professor X raised his voice to have his next joke heard above the general clamour: "Look guys, if you can drive, put your name down. Tradition has it that no-one spends too much time at the conference. We go downtown to the strip joints." General laughter. I felt as if I had been punched in the guts by a sandbag. Was I their buddy, one of the 'guys'? Did they expect me (as colleague) to join in their laughter at women in 'strip joints'? Or was I not one of them — not one of the guys: a 'girl'; not a colleague: a stripper?

I knew I could not let it pass, but I knew that if I raised my voice above the guffaws, I would become hysterical. I knew that whatever words I used I would be seen as overreacting, prudish, no sense of humour. All I could muster was, "Well in that case I will definitely have my name on the list, and make every attempt to remove the bus and prevent your doing that." My voice was unheard. The laughter continued, died down in its own time and the meeting went on. Everything seemed hollow and ugly. I

*Harassment . . . may be verbal, physical, deliberate, unsolicited or unwelcome; it may be one incident or a series of incidents.*



*While the following is not an exhaustive list, harassment may include:*

*verbal abuse or threats; unwelcome remarks, jokes, innuendos or taunting about a person's body, attire, age, marital status, ethnic or national origin, religion, etc; displaying of pornographic, racist or other offensive or derogatory pictures; practical jokes which cause awkwardness or embarrassment; unwelcome invitations or requests, whether indirect or explicit, or intimidation; leering or other gestures; condescension or paternalism which undermine self-respect; unnecessary physical contact such as touching, patting, pinching, punching; physical assault;*

couldn't believe no one had said anything, no one had registered my response.

I walked out of the meeting and phoned the chairperson of the Sexual Harassment Committee. On the phone I was surprised to find that my voice broke. I was unable to relate the incident coherently. I was still unable to be coherent about this incident a week later.

### *Making in Public*

Elaine was away. I asked the Sexual Harassment Committee for advice. I was reluctant to approach Professor X personally, because he was unlikely to change his ways. He had been brought before the University Human Rights Commission two years previously on a charge of sexism. He had apologised to the individuals who had lodged the complaint, and things had gone on as before. A personal confrontation would have served no purpose for what seemed to me to be a broader problem. The Sexual Harassment Committee agreed. They suggested that I submit a *Brief* to a Review Committee which was then sitting to decide on policy for the Centre in the coming year. This seemed a sensible way of dealing with the issue internally. I thought it avoided coming out in public with charges that would need to be proven against specific personalities.

By this time Elaine had returned. She was horrified by my experience and supported the idea of a *Brief*. We decided to write it together, and thus finally make a formal statement about our experiences as women in the Centre.

Up to this point, our response to sexual harassment had been informal. We had received support and warmth from each other and from women cleaning staff who were also at the Centre in the early mornings, shared our opinions and offered acute comparative insights from their experiences in other departments. These were vital support mechanisms. However, they remained enclosed within our female world which was invisible to the men at the Centre. When we took our perspective into their world, we confronted entirely different responses.

### *Professor X Fights Back: May 1982.*

After receiving his copy of the *Brief* in his capacity as a member of the Committee of Management at the Centre, Professor X circulated it to the students at the Centre. The atmosphere became very volatile and the tension was extreme.

Riva: Word reached me that the students felt that Elaine and I had had ulterior motives in writing the *Brief*. I decided to discover from a colleague at the Centre what this was about. David said it seemed clear to him and the men at the Centre that I was an extremely vocal and articulate academic. If I had genuinely felt discomfort at any stage during the year I would have said so at the time. My doing so *now* indicated some wider motive: to ensure that the teaching post going vacant went not to a male student but to the new wife of a friend of mine.

On one level, this was ridiculous: the male student was a friend and a good squash companion; the woman in question I had met only once, and briefly. More important was the total refusal to listen to the essence of the *Brief*. David and the men who had read it were convinced that a secretary was unable to hold the convictions expressed there herself: she was 'influenced' by me. Apart from the shattering implications of that, he also insisted that there was no harassment at the Centre. He has a wife, he understands women, he is not a sexist; and when I calmed down we could resume our relations as colleagues (ie, all would be forgiven).

I pointed out that his analysis clearly stated that I was a manipulator who had conspired to influence the secretary and the operation of the Centre for some (undefined) malicious personal motive. He agreed, all the while nodding and smiling. I could take it no longer. I asked him to leave, and for the first time since the submission of the *Brief*, I broke down. I could not deal with the ironies and the hurt. I felt the theoretical armour, the image of the powerful woman, the 'together' academic, I had had to construct in order to develop an academic career, and which had supported me through the difficult year at the Centre, had collapsed. If I dropped the armour and let

my colleagues see who I really was, they would throw back at me the image I had constructed. Disillusioned and depressed, I phoned Elaine. We decided to leave town for a few days.

### *The Male Students Fight Back*

We returned to find an open letter from the students of the Centre addressed to us. It began by saying that because of a feeling of uncomfortable tension they had decided to communicate with us in this way. It reproached us for not talking personally to the students about the alleged sexism of the Centre before making an official complaint.

Riva: The student's memo then argued that we had written the *Brief* in order to air feminist grievances which might have a relevance on campus, but which had no relevance to the Centre. Our alleged political intentions led them "to question seriously our motives". These 'motives' were never specified; nor did they need to be as our perceptions that we were being harassed (together with our perceptions of anti-Semitism and of women not being taken seriously in seminars) "are indicative more of paranoia than of any actual behaviour or remarks on our part".

They also raised the issue of racism for a different end. They claimed never to have heard of the offensively sexist reputation the Centre had on campus. They attributed the rumour itself to racism: "Does (this reputation) take the form of the oft-heard prejudice, 'African men are sexists'?" By perpetuating such a rumour, Elaine and I were allegedly not making a statement about our condition, but propagating racist rumours. They also argued that, in writing the *Brief*, we had not consulted with Black women who use the Centre.

Now there were other African women on the campus, but they did not come to the centre. According to one of them, who was appointed to the University Special Committee which was set up to review our *Brief*, this was because African women did not find the environment pleasant. They worked elsewhere, and preferred to socialise elsewhere. Neither Elaine nor I had this option, as our work was based at the Centre.

The charge of racism was particularly

hurtful to me, as I was sensitive to my position in the Centre as a white South African Jew and had for many months been unable to say that I was a victim of racial or sexist prejudice. Their assumptions confirmed my fears, and make it necessary to clarify certain points. Firstly, the rumour of sexism at the Centre did not refer to Black Africans specifically, but to all the men there. Secondly, many of the incidents of daily harassment came from white Canadian men, and Professor X who provoked the incident which finally broke the silence is a white Canadian. These were issues of which the students were aware. They were invoking racism as a vehicle for uniting the men as the offended group, and dividing women along racial lines.

The racist, paranoid and malicious feminist picture which had been painted now gave the students space to throw our evidence into doubt. Moreover, they now marshalled a language of liberalism to their cause. This is a typical male response to women claiming sexual harassment and I would like to deal with it at some length.

As we have seen, they claimed to be "surprised, confused and hurt" on receipt of the *Brief*. They claim to be nice guys, feminists, "mature human beings". In an environment of friendship and collaboration, why did we not express our anger at the time we allegedly experienced it? 'If all of this was true, why did we not do anything about it at the time? They were careful never to admit the truth of any of the incidents we named. 'If there had been an incident of physical battery, they wrote, or 'if' the Centre had a bad reputation, then they felt concerned that they did not know of it, nor had they been given the opportunity to do something about it.

These are important points. It is true that Elaine and I are vocal and intellectually able to account for ourselves. We had on some occasions been able to voice our objections to specific incidents, but these had not been heard. Elaine's physical assault is the most dramatic example, but there were others. In addition, how, for example, does one cope with men in the next room discussing their weekend sexual exploits? How do I respond to a male friend telling me that lesbians are not women? That I look good in

*For a practice to be considered harassment it must: be reasonably perceived as a term or condition of employment (including availability or continuation of work, promotional or training opportunities) or of the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation customarily available to the general public; or influence decisions on such matters; or interfere with job performance or access to or enjoyment of goods, services, facilities or accommodation; or humiliate, insult or intimidate any individual.*

*Any act of harassment committed by an employee or an agent of any employer in the course of the employment shall be considered to be an act committed by that employer, unless it is established that the employer did not consent to the commission of the act and exercised all due diligence to prevent the act from being committed and, subsequently, to mitigate or avoid its consequences.*

a skirt and shouldn't wear trousers all the time? That all he wants is a hug because he is also a foreign student in a strange place? Naturally, our responses to these kinds of situations vary with each day, each mood, each interaction. I have known myself on one day to be quite happy to give and receive a kiss from a colleague because we were delighted to be with each other; and I have engaged in banter which jibes women and men and Jews. On other days I find these offensive.

Is there a definition of sexual harassment? The students' memo asks for one. It legitimately points out that Elaine and I were inconsistent in our behaviour; that there is to some extent a post-hoc analysis. Incidents bearable at the time were subsequently interpreted as harassment.

I would argue that these inconsistencies are natural, and emerge from our position as women in a heterosexual work environment. Some boundaries have been established in this environment: hours of work; rates of pay; rights of redress; conditions of work; sick benefits, etc, but these were not always present: they are the results of workplace struggles. In some respects, sexual harassment involves similar struggles, affecting us as women in the workplace. It was remarkable that all women to whom we related our experiences found them immediately recognisable; all men were sceptical. However, all our interpretations, all our cutting points, differed.

Our interpretation of what constitutes 'harassment' depends on our different direct and indirect experiences. These don't 'arrive' after a mandatory reading of the set texts on the subject; they cannot be established through scientific testing. Because we can't refer to precedence or to science, our experiences of harassment are necessarily subjective. These interpretations cannot be dismissed as invalid, however, still less as paranoid, and 'typically' female. It seems to me that once Elaine and I had reached the point where neither of us could take any more, we were able to take a stand not only on that event, but on the events that preceded it. What had previously been a grey area, sources of private disquiet, became clear incidents of harassment. These re-appraisals were important. They now

became parts of our analysis of our conditions of work, and explained the reasons we were unable to deal with them at the time.

#### *Pushing the Women Out of the Centre: June 1983.*

Elaine: The same professor responsible for Riva's bus incident and the original distribution of the *Brief* came to me on June 2 and handed me a memo with instructions to type, copy and send. I accepted thinking it was routine.

It was a memo from the professor to the Vice-President of the university regarding the *Brief*. The essence of the memo was an allegation that I was going along with an issue which Riva had devised and that I wasn't dedicated to the issue by my own experience. He criticized Riva's clothing, relationships with fellow students, etc, none of which I felt I should be expected to type. The crowning touch, offensive because entirely misleading and actually an untruth, was the part of the text claiming that neither Riva nor I were aware of this memo. He said he felt bad doing it "behind our backs", but he didn't feel we should get a copy — yet HE GAVE IT TO ME TO TYPE!

This was the last straw. I went to see the Vice-President to resign. As I walked to the Vice-President's office, I felt a power and strength of conviction I had never felt before. I knew I was doing the right thing. I felt a sense of relief that I would no longer have to wrestle with how I was going to handle the situation. I knew I would resign and let the university deal with the consequences. My resigning under these circumstances made me realize that I have every right to do what is best for me and I felt the personal strength I possess.

#### *End note: July 1983.*

Elaine: As things are winding down I can sit back quite calmly and analyze the implications for me. I have experienced every emotion from a feeling of jubilation to total depression. In between these two extremes I have experienced various degrees of guilt, anger, despair and utter disillusionment. Coping effectively with these emotions has been a challenge — one which I can honestly say I met quite well. If nothing is achieved

as far as correcting the problem of sexual harassment at the Centre, at least I have gained personally through this personal turmoil. I felt jubilation when Riva and I received support from other women at the university and people showed us that they knew how we felt by sympathizing with us and promising to help us if we wished. The depression followed quickly when it became evident that although these people wanted to help, we were in this on our own and would have to support ourselves and each other when it came down to it.

I've gained personally by recognizing just how much turmoil and resentment I can tolerate before my body rebels physically and my mind tells me it can take no more.

#### *End note: March 1984.*

Riva: The most interesting thing for me was the way the issue polarised men and women. Apart from two men, all the others endorsed in various degrees the tone and the spirit, the indignation and the liberalism, of the 'members of the Centre'. All the women I spoke to, feminist and non-feminist, were outraged on our behalf. All of them found something in our story they recognised as their experience too. Women's support was warm, empathetic and wonderful. Friends, and friendships made through this experi-

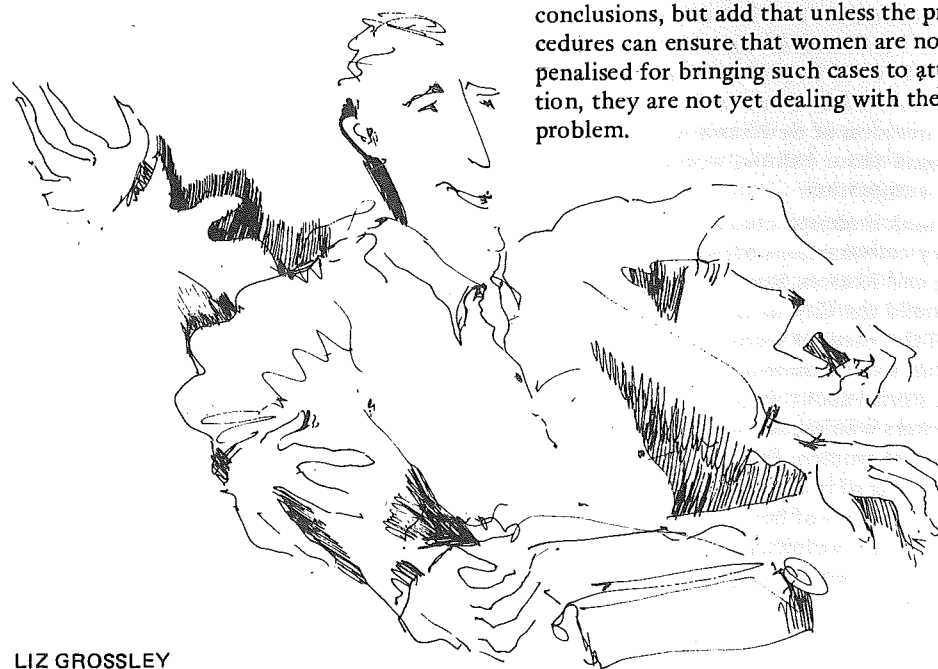
ence, were critical supports during the summer. I would especially like to thank Barbara Harris, Bruce Tucker, Linda Hershkovitz, Tina Simmons and Toni Laidlaw.

The issue reached such dimensions that the university put the Review Committee on hold, and set up an independent President's Committee of Inquiry into the events. They reported strongly in our favour. I received an official apology on the telephone from the university President's Office. Elaine received £1,000 compensation for having to leave her job early. However, these were minor concessions. In reality, Elaine lost her job and I left my position. The findings of the President's Committee were apparently libellous, and have not been released, even privately to us. We have been told that an 'official' report is in progress, but we have yet to see it. The people who were implicated in the events at the Centre are still there, and Elaine and I are not.

The university and the Sexual Harassment Committee at the university reported (informally, again) to us that they were sorry that they had not been able to publicise their findings, nor offer official support. They are grateful for the experience because they have learnt a great deal about the procedures of such a case and hope that this kind of event will not recur. We share their conclusions, but add that unless the procedures can ensure that women are not penalised for bringing such cases to attention, they are not yet dealing with the problem.

*Harassment will be considered to have taken place if a reasonable person ought to have known that such behaviour was unwelcome.*

*In investigating and deciding each case, there must be an objective examination of all the circumstances (including the nature and context of the incidents).*



LIZ GROSSLEY



JUDY STEVENS

## Chaste Feminists

*Lyndal Roper reviews 'The Book of the City of Ladies' and finds female heroes praised for wisdom, steadfastness, bravery and chastity.*

What could a collection of courtly tales and histories, largely derived from ragbag anthologies made by male authors and worked into a book by a fifteenth century French woman, possibly have to say to feminists today? I began this review intending to point out how remarkable Christine de Pizan was as a widow who managed to support herself by her writing, note how useful it is to have this neglected classic — first written in 1405 in French — now available in English, and conclude by setting the work in its medieval context. Yet I found myself unable to maintain an academic distance from this disparate series of stories, and was drawn to make some sense of them, and challenged by the directness of de Pizan's writing to reflect again about culture, women, men, violence and passion.

The book is constructed as a series of imaginary conversations between Christine de Pizan and Reason, Rectitude and Justice as they build the City of Ladies, which is to house all the virtuous women who have ever lived. This is the framework for an encyclopedia of stories about women, aimed at those writers who argued for the natural inferiority of women. But more than that, de Pizan seeks to reinterpret the fables, myths and legends of her own culture in a sympathetically womanly direction — she wants, in other words, to create a feminist culture.

Even the most improbable women are

reclaimed for this pantheon: Medea of Greek legend, who killed all her children in revenge for her husband's infidelity and was held to be a witch, becomes in de Pizan's text a woman whose husband's desertion made her turn "despondent, nor did her heart ever again feel goodness or joy". We hear nothing of the gruesome murder of the children. Yet de Pizan is aware that her audience knows the full story: by teasing us with this half-telling, she tricks us into sympathy with Medea, and makes us perceive the misogyny of the original myth.

The virtues for which these female heroes are praised are wisdom, chastity, steadfastness and bravery. The last, especially to the modern reader, comes as a surprise; and it is wonderful to have such pictures of decisive, independent and resourceful women. De Pizan's commendation of wisdom, too, does more than plead for women to have equal access to a culture which, as she saw so clearly, was male centred and male defined. She includes many prophetesses in the City, women whose knowledge does not derive from formal education. Prophecy, of course, is not a gift confined to women, but it is a talent which awards them direct access to divine things, when, as women, they can have no priestly role.

When she writes about chastity, de Pizan has an acute sense of the injustice of the sexual double standard. In one marvellous passage, she analyses beliefs about rape,

arguing that women do not enjoy rape as men claim they do; and insisting that women mean what they say when they refuse sex. The argument is all the more significant in a society which thought women to be the more sexual sex; and held that raped women who became pregnant must have 'consented' and had pleasure in intercourse, because (according to widespread belief) the seed of both the male and the female had to be released for conception to take place; and only the orgasm of both man and woman could bring this about. Yet de Pizan stops short of questioning this attitude, and her solicitude is reserved for the chaste woman who is raped. Chastity is a central theme of the work; and de Pizan uses the word in what may seem to us a surprising double sense. For virgins, it entails sexual intactness, and for married women, absolute fidelity to the husband. It sets apart deserving, chaste women who are to be respected and admired from the unchaste who, we are left to feel, deserve the treatment they get. And yet her definition of chastity is not quite the same as that of her own patriarchal culture, which sees the virgin who has never been sexually possessed by a man as the paradigm of chastity. For her, it has to do with a state of womanly physical and spiritual intactness which resides in the woman herself and is not ruptured by marriage.

Chastity is a state which is constantly under attack from men. If we leave aside her implicit condemnation of unchaste women, we can see her to be presenting womanhood itself as constantly beleaguered, a theme which becomes even clearer as she writes about women martyrs. Here, she tells how women's bodies were put in vats of boiling water, their breasts torn off, their tongues pulled out because they would not give up their faith. Torture is piled on torture in an almost pornographic vision of the attempted destruction of the female body — a vision which is all the more disturbing because although this obsessively erotic fascination with the tearing and searing of the body was part of the religiosity of her culture, it is hard to tell whether de Pizan, as narrator, is indicting this male, pagan hatred of saintly women, or whether she too is titillating the reader. Whatever one's ambi-

valences about writing of this kind, de Pizan's intention is certainly to focus upon the martyrs' survival of all these assaults. Nothing harms the women, and their deaths are a release given by God, not a result of the torture. Their religious wholeness is mirrored in their bodily chastity: both are under constant attack from men. The 'City of Ladies' from which all men are excluded thus becomes an imagined walled fortress of safety as much as it is a monument to these exemplary women.

Her writing is most vivid when she speaks about sexual passion. One of the most moving stories concerns Ghismonda, daughter of the Prince of Salerno, whose father loved her so jealously that he refused to let her marry. She chose herself a lover; and de Pizan justifies this on the grounds that women, too, have sexual feelings and ought not to be prevented by their parents from marrying. This assertion was not in itself unusual, for Church homilies on the duties of parents argued in a similar fashion. What is less conventional is the sympathy de Pizan draws us into feeling for Ghismonda (a far more rounded character than most of de Pizan's creations), for her stand in taking a lover, and her rebellion against her father. The lovers are discovered; Guiscardo is executed; Ghismonda commits suicide. Yet the suicide is not an act of resignation, but of revolt, a refusal to be possessed by the father. All the same, just a few pages further on, de Pizan warns women not to "set themselves adrift in the dangerous and damnable sea of foolish love for its end is always detrimental and harmful to their bodies, their property, their honor and — most important of all — to their souls". The danger of romantic love was a fifteenth century commonplace; but de Pizan can make us aware of both its attractions and its fatality for women, precisely because she is convinced of men's absolute otherness, their power, and their capacity to harm. It comes as a shock to find de Pizan's stories presenting dilemmas so familiar to feminists today in such an alien society. Yet in the end, I'm left with three images: the female body surviving every kind of hideous assault; the delight a woman like Ghismonda can have in her Guiscardo; and women, combining to build a City of Ladies. □

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, transl. Earl Jeffrey Richards, Foreword Marina Warner, (Picador, £2.95).

# Of Caps & Quarks

*Famous feminists such as Robin Morgan and Germaine Greer receive a lot of attention in the media and are seen, often to our annoyance, as speaking for the women's liberation movement generally. What's more, people will buy their books whatever they write. In this review, Amanda Sebestyen finds that, although there's a good book inside both 'Anatomy of Freedom' and 'Sex and Destiny', you have to do a lot of digging to find them.*

Passing beyond feminism. That's the way both *Sex and Destiny* and *The Anatomy of Freedom* have been presented. With Germaine Greer it's passing backwards, actually: to some pre-industrial Age of Gold where sturdy peasant virgins are seduced by 'eager yet tender husbands', where their warm loving extended Southern families are under attack from population controllers, manufacturers of Walkmen, and the occasional women's liberationist. With Robin Morgan it's a whirl with the red-white-and-blue quarks into a New Physical future. In both, there's a theme confusedly repeating: what kind of relationship is now possible with men? Feminists haven't much liked either of these books. I'd like to suggest some reasons why; and then go on to open up other things these two women are saying, how they are saying them, and what's good about what they say.

When I was nineteen, the Cambridge Footlights came on tour, with one exceptional performer. I was interested enough to find out that her name was Germaine, and then I forgot about her for years. But I often think of that revue as I watch the learned doctor dispense each new vocabulary with brief authority: 1970 (*Female Eunuch*) cunt/prick, 1979 (*Obstacle Race*) pinacoteca/chiaroscuro, 1984 (*Sex and Destiny*) sequelae/varicocele. I intend to tell my own traveller's tale here, and say that I find the Greer persona extremely Australian; not bold and brash as colonial myth would have it, but on the contrary tensely preoccupied with a rather old-fashioned kind of correctness. Just as *The Obstacle Race* championed free-living Modern Art and castigated Victorian academic women as if postwar changes of taste (and feminism!) had never happened; so

*Sex and Destiny* drags in an irrelevant Shakespeare sonnet, talks like some benign dowager about 'the working girl', and manages to roll back the colonial clock so far as to describe Vanuatu as 'the New Hebrides'. Also 'Australian' is a touching respect for celebrity; the only Western mothers to rate an amiable mention are Diana Rigg and Viva.

To GG in the role of Doctor Greer, all statements are absolute. Objections to *coitus interruptus* are 'silly' and 'pseudoscientific' — 'the tendency of modern sexologists to denigrate [it] really indicates their own lack of sexual imagination'. *Coitus obstructus*, on the other hand, (where one partner, usually the woman, grasps the penis and forces the sperm backwards — a method just as long and widely practised, and especially favoured by the early Utopian feminists) is 'a dangerous practice', 'seems unlikely to catch on', leads to infection 'with eventual incontinence and prostrate problems' — just the sort of pseudoscientific things that are said about *coitus interruptus*.

The real issue, it seems to me, is why men won't do either of them anymore. In other cultures the flashpoint may be virginity, paternity, the veil, the sewn genitals, the shadow of a menstruating woman; in ours it is unlimited access to the vagina — in menstruation, in menopause, during and after pregnancy. Greer points to the phenomenon but, rather than confronting the male reader, she's committed to the doomed exercise of coaxing him into giving withdrawal a go. Any anger gets alternately sublimated into an act of amused wisdom over Games Lovers Play, or pushed onto other women. Western females are shown as sexless, septic, and slack of pelvis; *feminists* are accused of endorsing 'jam-in-the-doughnut' sex (that's a good one! Though she may have shown up a way our public practice around abortion and contraception hasn't meshed with our movement theory around fucking as an oppressive norm); then there are Western mothers who don't cuddle their babies . . .

I think we've hit a big one here. Mother-hatred, so flaunted in *The Female Eunuch*,

by *Sex and Destiny* is at least seen as a problem, if only for one tardy sentence. But unfortunately it's far more often just acted out in the virulent obsessive quality of Greer's attacks on Marie Stopes, Margaret Sanger and unnamed Indian 'lady doctors' — no male population controller or eugenisists arouses the same fury. Let's take one of Stopes' crimes in more detail, her alleged replacement of the cervical cap, 'neat, elegant and economic . . . guerilla contraception', with 'the much cruder and more uncomfortable' diaphragm of 'obscenely pallid rubber', 'spluttering glop' and 'coated with chilly sludge'. Now I suspect that if Greer had ever used the cap she might say something about: sharp edges that wound the cervix, tiny size requiring frantic ingenuity to insert correctly, higher failure rate owing to its habit of falling off in any but the missionary position . . . No, though. The diaphragm 'and all that sails within it' are gross, her experience has proved it. So there has to be something *else*, somewhere, better than one's own life. I know the feeling and it worries me.

There's an absent centre. Jetting from clime to clime and anecdote to anecdote in search of happier families, ploughing through statistic after paper after technical detail on Sterility, page after page of seriously-taken sociobiological claptrap on Fertility, I longed for just a page — a sentence! — about Greer's own reproductive history. And all those unfunny jokes about genuflecting to sperm and christening sanitary towels, all that love and care expressed for the foetus — what's wrong with owning up to a Catholic girlhood? There's a good book inside *Sex and Destiny*. A book about growing older, childless, in a society that itself may be heading for death. That book would consist of the chapters 'A Child is Born', 'Changing Concepts of Sexuality', 'The Fate of the Family', 'Governments as Family Planners' (none of them serialised in the papers or discussed on TV, you notice), together with others that just weren't written and needed to be.

So what's good about the book we've got? Well, it kicks off with a chapter of

superb polemic. 'Proponents of birth control often point to the phenomenon that the birthrate falls as the educational level rises, and see in it a sign that literacy and investigative intelligence lead to informed choices and a greater measure of control. They could interpret the phenomenon in a less positive way: the more women know childbirth the more likely they are to refuse to undergo it.' Greer turns her blast on the assembly-line of the Western maternity ward, on the segregation of children and the obnoxious ways they then behave; on the tragedy of the highly-motivated mother anxiously reading and practising childbirth techniques only to be left helpless and torn at the hospital. I see a sharp sad picture of my own peers, blaming themselves for not managing the perfect birth, blaming themselves for becoming 'vegetables' if they enjoy the baby *too* much, struggling to fit the child into a conjugal bond with some unwilling-to-be-committed male. Lesbian and other feminist mothers involved in a subculture of resistance might disagree with the writer's pessimism, but I'm sure they agree with her on this: the bearing and raising of children has become for us a point of crisis. Greer may be omitting the status and security that children *still* bring to women; but she's right that in our culture they come attended by impoverishment, social isolation and stress.



The part of the book that I felt most deserved to be used and remembered, though, was its arraignment of the population lobby. Greer spent six months in India researching for *Sex and Destiny*, and I don't think that the Women's Liberation Movement has itself succeeded in putting so much material together in such an accessible form. Other women with more specialised knowledge may take issue with some of the findings, but I must say that I tend to respect Greer's qualities as a researcher after reading *The Obstacle Race*, which dealt with a field I know much better (history of art). Here's a summary, then, of the arguments which impressed me.

The export of Western methods of birth control has often been not only cruel but useless. 1776 people actually died from compulsory sterilisations carried out in the Indian State of Emergency; yet the effect on population was negligible. The men coming forward for the operation had already finished having children several years earlier. Humans have *always* spaced their births: by *coitus interruptus* which kept the French peasant family down to two children for centuries before rubber contraceptives, by abstinence during a long period of breastfeeding, by abortion and infanticide, by adopting oral and anal sex.

As for the imposition of massive untested hormone doses, irreversible abdominal surgery or unremovable poisonous metal devices, Greer names these for the atrocities that they are. And her detailed information will be of use to the international women's movement whose struggles she ignores.

But *why* do most peasant families *choose* to have numerous children, even without the threat of infant mortality? And is the nuclear family simply a tool of the advertising trade? Greer romances one and slags off the other because she's stuck with observation — a historical framework is missing. What I see is two great movements in the dialectic of sex; the first — thousands of years ago for most of us — from small nomad group to settled territory with its cults of fertility; the second, with industrialisation, away from reproduction and into the cult of pleasure. Linda Gordon lays bare the roots of birth control wonderfully in

*Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, which Greer has apparently read without seeing how its analysis affects her own statements like 'Historically, human societies have been pro-child'. Children become wealth at a certain particular *point* in human history, a point of uprooting and attrition comparable to recent Industrial Revolutions. Elizabeth Fisher points out in *Woman's Creation* that the average life expectancy in the first known settlement, Catal Hayuk, was *seventeen years*; the intensified labour of women in childbirth contributed to that death toll.

I need to think of childfulness as just one stage in human history, and feel that the new stage, for all its cold confused occasional madness, does contain the germ of — freedom. Which, as Robin Morgan points out, we recognise mainly in its absence: 'Being, so far, creatures of lack and of longing, humans seem to have perfected those skills that permit us to mourn, to yearn — and to deny the condition of not having something we never have had.' *The Anatomy of Freedom* then just goes ahead to wager on a feminist future. Entering the book is entering a space full of familiar progressive expectations, cosy for all its quarky futuristic decoration. I'd *like* to believe in new technologies, in writing ten postcards a week to legislators, in turning the world upside down, but the knowledge of my own body, painfully acquired through years of illness, makes me doubtful. The book does, however, contain another message — about some existing tendency in *life as it is* to create and transform. Revolution 'will happen because it is happening'. Six months ago I'd have dismissed Morgan's message as mystical rubbish. Now it's because I believe in it that I'm disappointed when the writing flails.

One minute we're in high hyperbole, a kind of cosmic 'Call My Bluff': 'We are the particles, the waves, the bumps on the ribbon, the negentropic information gathering itself to itself for the sheer joy of communicating through interference waves which also are part of the field to other negentropic photons of light-darkness-matter-illusion-energy. We are the holomovement.' We are the walrus, too, I expect.



The next minute everything's scaled down to domesticity and cuteness: 'One night at dinner when our son was about four years old, the three of us had been involved in a lively conversation on the inalienable rights of children to defend themselves from adult oppression. Seemingly, out of nowhere, Blake, looking back and forth between Kenneth and me, announced in a tone of great satisfaction, "I am the child of a comet and a meteor living together in the West Village".' Marriage to fellow poet ex-Flaming Faggot Kenneth Pytchford especially seems to cause a lunge for the purple ink — it's a double helix, it's a Moebius strip, it's Chopin's Etude Op 25 . . .

There's some unease here, some evasion within all Robin Morgan's onion rings of personal revelation. It's like Telling All to strangers on a train in the hope that it's the same as telling no-one, that the secret at the core will lose its mystery and so exposure lose its power to hurt. I'll suggest a reason for this later. Meanwhile: there's still something magnificent about *The Anatomy of Freedom*. It tries too hard, therefore it succeeds. The poet's skills have been growing in the years since *Monster\**, and there are passages of sustained metaphor where she makes the truth known with a beauty I've seldom read.

She talks about evolutionary feminism as The Handmaiden of a Holy Man, slowly emancipating herself from him and forgetting to beg. She talks about the planet as a burning room, and — another message I'd once have rejected angrily — how saying it 'would have to begin with one woman, in her own life. It would have to begin utterly, devastatingly; she would have to leave everything familiar behind, be willing to believe she knows the way out and that the fate of life hangs on her, be willing to believe that she can create anew other rooms even more beautiful than the one now in conflagration, be willing to risk her own human soul, be willing to move to the door that cannot be seen, and be willing to fling it open.'

She talks about the meetings of feminist voyagers: 'Always we dip in greeting and continue our ways, our brief duet together one moment of rest in our journey over the endless sea, like the Waved Albatross of the Galapagos Islands flying, flying, months of sunrise and sunset on the wing, and storms hitting full in the face until breath almost will not come, and the heat going to the spine, and no horizon to really call home.'

She talks about the act of writing and the act of reading and the act of taking action: 'The moment of pure focus that keeps passing in the blink of a frightened lid or in the rapid-eye rhythms of a dream.' She talks about pornography, 'the stake in the heart'; she gives the funniest, most acute, most moving, saddest account of the male myth — sex as violence — in Beauty

and the Beast, the female myth — romance as suffering — in Psyche and Eros. She talks about freedom itself, which moves with such energy that we can know it 'only by the trail of light it leaves behind.'

I can't hope to do justice to her language here. It would take a book; it would take the book I wish she'd published — a smaller one about that 'something in men and women, however hidden, that is both tired of hiding and tired of searching — and yet indefatigably dedicated to the search'. Not universes in collision, not Robin-and-Ken cosiness (it's fine that she wrote all that, but it needed to be written privately, for her and not for us). Just this — 'You there, the man: come out of the burning room . . . For yours has been the fate to hear and hear and keep on hearing no matter how you stopped your ears, no matter how you burned me at your stakes or plunged them in my heart, no matter how you feared my voice calling to you before you were born, to hear and hear and keep hearing . . . the fragment that might hold the clue for all of us, something in me calling and crying and raging and questioning and whispering endless inexhaustible that we are relative to one another, that you are still, are still my brother.'

Two books are now in print — long, inconsistent, sometimes embarrassing. Inside, half-written, are two books to move the world. It seems to me that *we* have a responsibility here. Greer's public posturing (like Byron, half allured to her audience, half hating it) that will not let her share herself; Morgan's gush of confidentiality. Provoking or placating, aren't they two sides of a coin — fear of us? We are now the Feminist Constituency, we can't pretend to be entirely powerless any more. Don't we owe it to these women to free them of the burdens of celebrity, to read their books with loving rigour, to stop publishers encouraging them to push out big over-written manuscripts because every word means money? Like science fiction readers, we're very close to our writers — as close, Robin Morgan points out, as mother and child; so close that we often change places. What we get depends on us. □

\*I first met Robin Morgan in 1972 at a Washington reading of her unpublished poetry book, *Monster*. Her poem arraignment Ted Hughes for 'the murder of Sylvia Plath' was something British feminists had to read and British publishers would be scared to handle. So when, sure enough, an injunction was slapped on the book, a group of us radical feminists brought out a small illustrated pirate edition. When we met at the International Feminist Book Fair she explained that she'd now separated from Pytchford, something I didn't know about at the time of writing this review.

Linda Gordon, *Women's Body, Women's Right* (Penguin, 1977). Elizabeth Fisher, *Women's Creation* (Wildwood House, 1980).

## Writing Our Own History 4

# The Early Days of Women's Aid

*Jalna Hanmer, in a conversation with Jo Sutton, the first national co-ordinator for Women's Aid, discusses the opening of the first refuges for battered women, the split with Erin Pizzey and the setting up of the National Women's Aid Federation.*

J: How did you become involved in Women's Aid?

Jo: I was a social work student at North London Poly and I was looking for a residential placement that looked interesting. Someone told me about Chiswick I went over there and they looked me up and down, and said they didn't like social workers. But as I was 5 foot 10 they would take me on: So they said I could stay there and open the door to the husbands, which I did for four weeks. I lived in the refuge, which at that time was a two up, two down terraced house which they rented at a peppercorn rent.

J: That was in 1973. Was there a group of women responsible for the refuge at Chiswick?

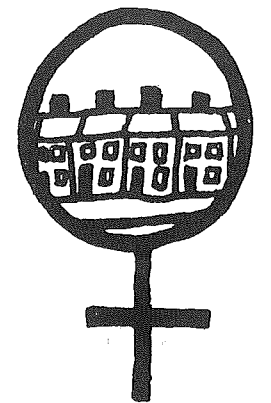
Jo: It grew out of the remains of the Goldhawk Road Women's Liberation group which held a campaign over the withdrawal of school milk against the then Education Minister. The slogan was Mrs Thatcher, Milk Snatcher. They had a demonstration down the Chiswick High Road with a live cow. Out of this came an advice centre, which was very trendy at the time. They opened this rented house (the two up, two down, which the council had said was not fit for human habitation) to give advice to any women coming along. They admitted they did this very much thinking on their feet. Women came with problems they didn't know the answers to and had to find out. They then found they had a lot of battered

women coming to them, and in 1972 they let the women stay over night. That was the first row with Hounslow Council, who said the centre could only be used during the day. By the time I was on placement there were very few of the old members left in the group. Erin Pizzey was very prominent with a couple of battered women who had been there from the early days.

J: Were they the only refuge at the time?

Jo: No, they were the one that got the publicity. There was the Brixton group. They didn't have the contacts that Erin Pizzey had and started out squatting a house that had no windows and only had electricity downstairs. They had a community newspaper, *The Angel*, and as women started coming to the group, they found the problems so desperate that they had to go and squat a house. It came out of the same sort of community based activities that were around groups of women and particularly the Women's Liberation Movement groups. There was a big row between Brixton and Chiswick over who was going on the Jimmy Young show. It was meant to be both groups, but so far as I understand Chiswick pulled a fast one and went on alone. Brixton became the Lambeth group, they moved to a nice house with central heating with the help of the council.

J: So Erin was pretty much in control of Chiswick in 1973 and she acquired a house



from the property company Bovis?

Jo: In the autumn of 1973. I was on placement in the summer and they were about to move into this house. We had a mini van. A woman's husband came and sat outside it and ran a hose pipe into the car, committing suicide just outside the door. The woman was greatly relieved and the police were very shocked that she was relieved rather than upset that the man was dead. She donated the van to Chiswick and it was used to move everything to the Bovis house.

J: After your placement did you stay in contact with the group?

Jo: Yes, partly because the course wasn't that wonderful and there were more interesting things to do. Erin applied for some money from the DHSS (Department of Health and Social Security) to employ a co-ordinator. I was employed from September 1974 by Erin to make contacts with refuge groups as they set up around the country. So I set out in September to spend time with groups around Britain. I had organised the first national conference before I got the job, when I was still a student at North London Poly. There were about 15 groups at this point — August or September 1974. Being totally inexperienced I forgot the creche till the day before.

J: I was working at LSE at the time on the social work course and two of my students went on placements to Chiswick. Erin asked me for some advice on forms of organisation. I told her how Claimant's Union had created national links between groups and the way the Squatting movement had organised. Clearly this was of no use to her as the message came back to me that I had not been useful.

Jo: I can understand that. Erin enjoyed sitting in the back room with lots of arm-chairs around it where people came to her. I asked her why she didn't want to travel around the country meeting others, which would be the logical thing as she was so interested in Women's Aid in general. She said she felt like a spider in the middle of a web and that she really enjoyed that. There was one other thing that was going on that was very important. Pizzey was asking people like Dr Jasper Gayford to come in

and do research. He had a questionnaire given to women as they came in, I think they felt they had to answer it as a way of earning themselves a place. Only the results of 100 were published, but many more than 100 were completed.

J: Erin understood that Gayford was making his reputation on this. I remember her saying she had more and was trying to weigh up whether to let him have them. After publishing the paper on 100 cases he got a psychiatric consultancy.

Jo: Yes I remember he said something of that sort to me, that it would help his career. He said he really regretted not asking about lesbianism because he thought it might be a cause of men hitting their wives. He later published that awful paper where he divided battered women into types and gave them names like Go-go Gloria, Fanny the Flirt and Tortured Tina. NWAF criticised his work, and others, in a pamphlet.<sup>1</sup>

J: You and I met for the first time, at Erin's suggestion, in the autumn of 1974. By then Pizzey had started to move against you. She locked you out of the office at one point didn't she? You had to organise the 2nd National Conference without access to the office?

Jo: This was an advantage because I hadn't kept any proper records in the sense that social workers would keep records, so Erin didn't have any pieces of paper. She didn't even know where all the other refuges were. She was obviously feeling very ambivalent about it as I had contact with individuals around the country and she didn't. This looked like another power base, which I think was entirely accurate.

J: I remember you saying you thought your problems with her started when you suggested that she share donations, that were absolutely flooding into Chiswick at the time, with other groups?

Jo: Yes that's right. By the end of January 1975 there were 30 groups, and by March there were 35. We were moving fast at that time. I could see that women were setting up on shoestrings and at the other end, the base I came from, there was a great deal of money coming in. It would have been quite easy to share a bit of the money. I think

people would have been grateful and Pizzey could have bought loyalty in some way, at least to tide her over the hard times.

J: The real crisis came with a big donation from Norwich of some thousands of pounds. As I remember you said the woman who donated the money can't know about the Women's Aid group in her city, and she wouldn't have sent it here if she had.

Jo: Erin clearly believed in the survival of the fittest. She felt everyone was in some kind of equal race and she was winning. She therefore should get the rewards for doing so. Her connections with the media and influential people through her husband, who worked on the TV programme *Man Alive*, gave her lots of advantages. Coming out of a women's group this is incredible. She must have been in contact with women's movement principles. She must have known! Most of the Women's Aid groups were coming out of the movement and they had those sorts of principles. That's very much the character of Women's Aid. She was swimming against the national tide of the ways things were happening.

J: That brings us to the 2nd National Conference, February 1-2, 1975. How many groups were there?

Jo: 38. They were very diverse. Some had men in them.

J: Can you summarise what happened?

Jo: The conference was held in a church hall a few doors from Chiswick itself. We did not know whether an individual represented a group, whether a whole group had one vote, or whether you had as many votes as you had people in the meeting, so when it came to the big divide between Pizzey and almost everybody else she tried to pack the meeting. She brought in the male play-leaders and as many women as possible from the refuge, which by then was a very large house. I found this very threatening. I was publicly denounced. I was keeping the minutes at the time. I was shaking so much that I couldn't write anything — so there are no minutes of that! That was the big row on Saturday, February 1st, 1975.

J: What did she denounce you for?

Jo: I can't remember! I blocked it out. It means nothing can ever be as bad again

mind you.

J: I remember she fired you on the spot, most dramatically. It was actually DHSS money that paid you for being national co-ordinator.

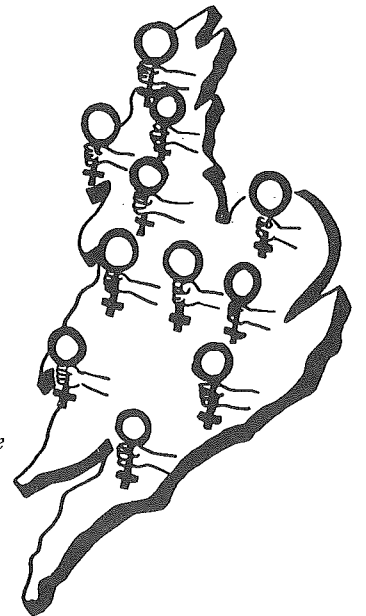
Jo: As far as I knew Chiswick kept the money from the DHSS afterwards and didn't replace me with anyone. We did write to the DHSS to inform them of this.

J: But they chose to do nothing about it. Marguerite Russell reminded me that they kept saying things like "Chiswick has the only open door policy", "other refuges turn women in need away", "other groups charge women for the use of facilities — extra to their rent". These sorts of comments upset a lot of women who knew their refuges didn't operate like that.

Jo: Other women who were there remember her introducing Gayford and asking everyone to co-operate in the research. He wouldn't answer questions and most groups were really suspicious of this.<sup>2</sup> Another part of the row was over who was going to speak to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Violence in Marriage which was to start in February 1975. Pizzey felt one person should give evidence representing all groups and the other groups felt everyone should have a fair say. Pizzey made a stand that she should speak for everybody.

J: Marguerite has also reminded me that we wanted to issue a press statement saying the conference had taken place, was attended by X number of groups — it was even conceded that we wouldn't mention the newly named 'National Women's Aid' by name. Even with this concession Chiswick wouldn't agree and they walked out.

Jo: Because of the confrontation, the so-called 'split', people felt they wanted to meet together, particularly women from the Women's Liberation Movement. We met together, so by the next day we were able to set up the beginning of the national organisation. We passed resolutions recognising ourselves as part of the National Women's Aid Movement as we called it then. Nobody voted against, but Chiswick abstained. We agreed that the national conference itself was the national organisation — which has held on I think. I was to carry





on working as co-ordinator until April.

J: *Donations were taken at the time to cover expenses and some of the better off groups gave straight away. Wandsworth gave use of a telephone which was crucial. After you were sacked you went on Supplementary Benefit.*

Jo: You remember this was one of the grounds on which we went to the DHSS for cash? One argument was that someone should be paid — as they were paying already through a different office they might as well do it officially. I went on travelling around as groups paid for fares. We were based at Wandsworth as it was felt important that we were based in a refuge and not set up a national office. Our main problem after the conference was that Pizzey was very much against us. She wrote letters to various local authorities — both housing and social services departments. She posted them on the Monday, February 3rd. They denounced me in particular, even though nobody knew who I was, and denounced groups and suggested that if authorities wanted to know if their local

## WOMEN'S AID

Women's Aid Ltd.  
358 Chiswick High Road, Chiswick, London, W3  
Telephone: 01-595 6439  
Registered Charity No. 269924

4th February, 1975.

Dear

Women's Aid which is a charity and based in Chiswick has sacked our National Co-ordinator Miss J. Sutton — we have been increasingly worried about her political affiliations and a conference she organised last week-end confirmed our suspicion

We are particularly worried and unhappy that there are groups who seem to be trying to use Women's Aid as a platform for Women's Liberation and Gay Women's Liberation.

We would strongly advise Social Services and Housing Departments to look very carefully at the groups in their areas who are offering to set up refuges before giving them your support. If in doubt please feel free to contact us at Chiswick for any information. Please would you see that this letter is also seen by the Director of Housing.

Yours sincerely,

*E. Pizzey*  
ERIN PIZZHEY

← receipt stamp  
of the social  
services dept. this  
letter was mailed.

Directors:  
ERIN PIZZHEY (Chairman) ROSALEEN GRIFFINSON (Vice-Chairman)  
ANNIE ASHBY (Secretary) PAT GRAY (Secretary)

group was alright they should contact her. The attacks focussed on politics, membership of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Women's Liberation Movement (an organisation known only to Erin; I've never heard of it!) The lawyers, Marguerite Russell and Pat McBain in particular, spent most of the Monday and Tuesday ringing the newspapers — she sent the letter to them as well — threatening them with libel action if they published the story. We kept debating whether lesbianism was libel or not, whether politically one should just accept the label. But it was intended to stop the growth of Women's Aid. The other part of it was that middle of the road groups felt like this was victimisation and it was a bit like being handicapped: people felt sorry for me in a way. It united even the middle of the road groups in forming a new national organisation. The letter was so harmful to new groups, therefore it united all of us. *It didn't matter* about the differences between us, we were united by her actions.

J: *I remember at that point you didn't have a job and you had to carry the worry for some years that the letter would keep you from getting a job.*

Jo: Absolutely, there was always the possibility that someone would remember something about a letter at the bottom of a filing cabinet. It had serious consequences for groups. Many at the time the letter went out were negotiating with local authorities for houses and several used the letter not to give houses to groups. It took some groups several years to get the house they were just about to get before the letter was sent. They had to prove they were "responsible". Some ended up squatting because the delays were so long.

J: *The groups coming together was important in terms of the DHSS. We know as far as they were concerned the question was who was the national organisation. Pizzey was claiming to be the national organisation and so were we. She had about four groups. We needed the rest because as far as the DHSS were concerned it was about numbers.*

Jo: By March we were 35 groups. Pizzey managed to keep Liverpool and Southport, Dublin and North Wales; we managed to keep all the rest. At the Manchester conference in March we set up the national organisation. A prior meeting in Leeds agreed on six aims and the fifth aim of Women's Aid is a combination of two of these. At the end of the day when everyone was getting ready to travel back home somebody threw out the phrase that violence against women was "due to the position of women in society". This sentence, which has been a bone of contention with the Charity Commissioners for the last ten years, (to see battering as due to women's position in society is seen as political by them and therefore they refuse to recognise the national organisation as a charity) was an offhand statement by someone who was rushing away. It was immediately adopted because the women there said "yes, that's right".

J: *So the five aims were what came out of the Manchester conference?*

Jo: We were also working on the pamphlet *Battered Women Need Refuges*<sup>2</sup>, which has been reproduced several times. The first one had different typefaces all the way through because women in different parts of the country wrote parts of it. The whole thing looked none too terrific. It ended up being put together one weekend. We had some Letraset and we were doing the cover and we began to run out. One of the chapters was to be called "Why women come to refuges", but as we ran out of Letraset we just called it "Why women come". We agreed the evidence for the Select Committee, which went in at the beginning of April 1975. We had to go in looking like an organisation, with a pamphlet, with evidence and with further work coming in.

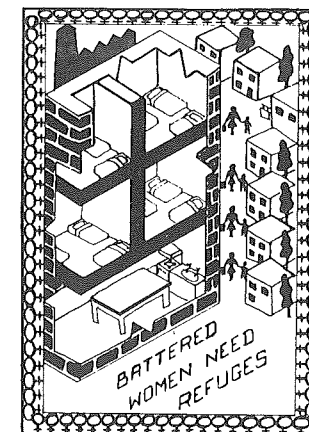
J: *I remember Marguerite Russell went when they had legal people on and she said "injunctions aren't worth the paper they are written on", which put a sparkle in the eyes of the Select Committee. Suddenly they realised they had an issue they could legislate about and it not cost any money. Out of that came Jo Richardson's bill. Then I remember going to a meeting with Michael Meacher at the DHSS about the money.*

*NWAF wanted two things — money for more refuges and recognition of NWAF as a national organisation, with money for regions. We knew we could not ask for money for individual refuges, this was the responsibility of local authorities, but only for a national organisation.*

Jo: We organised into nine geographical regions so that we didn't have a highly centralised organisation with someone in charge of it. Scotland left soon after to form Scottish Women's Aid. They had to do this to get funding from the Scottish Office and also Scottish law is different. We also agreed that the co-ordinator's job should only be for one year and should circulate around groups. We were negotiating with MPs, like Jo Richardson and Jack Ashley, who were showing interest and we didn't want the national organisation to be associated with any one person's name but with a co-ordinator. The job should remain the same but the people filling it should change so that no-one came to feel they were in charge. That was a period of very rapid growth. Most groups were forming themselves on women's liberation political lines and not having people in charge, not having a treasurer or a chairperson, and were finding it extremely difficult because even trying to open a bank account meant requests for treasurers etc. There was a lot of pressure for groups to go along with bureaucratic rules. Women had to support each other in that.

J: *What we were after was a devolved structure with a co-ordinator who would do just that — liaison and co-ordinate. It was a completely decentralised structure we had in mind. We wanted money for each of the geographical regions. Conferences were where decisions would be made. These were open to every member group. As many women from refuges as possible as well as support group members should come. Then there was the group that was to carry on between conferences — the National Co-ordinating Group. The idea was to get a devolved structure and maximum involvement of all women.*

Jo: That's what we went for when we applied for money to the DHSS. We got an advanced copy of the Select Committee



report the day before we went to the final negotiation for cash. The Select Committee had recommended amongst other things funding a national organisation. If you remember we went to your flat and drew up the document. We included £30,000 for each region and did the arithmetic wrong. When we got to the DHSS they pointed out that the sums didn't add up. We said it was a typing error, which I think was very quick of us. We asked for about £120,000 — all for spreading between the regions. We aimed to spend a lot of the money on fares so everyone could afford to travel to meetings even if they were women living in refuges on Supplementary Benefit. It wouldn't cost them anything to take part in this organisation.

J: *One of the things I've been asked is why was it so important to focus so much on the Select Committee and the DHSS. Was there no dispute about maintaining independence from the State?*

Jo: The women we were offering refuge to came to us — often after years of so-called help from state workers, particularly social workers, health workers, housing and social security officers. There was no way we could avoid the State. Also refuges needed money to operate — even in squats as many were in the early days. The so-called help was so negative that we had to contest the way women were *seen* within the family as well as *how* they were treated. This meant making our point of view known wherever

we could — that women didn't have to put up with violence from men and that their children shouldn't either.

J: *Some women tried to raise the issue of our dealing with the State. I remember being asked "why are you doing this?" But we wanted to establish that a women's liberation way of working — no leaders, no stars was the way to deal with Erin's attempts to establish Chiswick as THE national organisation with all the money.*

*When did you stop being the national co-ordinator?*

Jo: When we got the DHSS money early in 1976. They offered us £11,000 by the way, which we got up to £15,000 after some struggles. And then they gave us £5,000 for an information officer.

J: *1976 was the big growth year for Women's Aid. That was when we jumped from 38 groups to over 100 in 1977. Looking back Jo do you have any thoughts you'd like to share with Trouble and Strife readers?*

Jo: This was a movement organisation. We always hoped it would give back to the movement as well as take from it.

J: *And for you personally?*

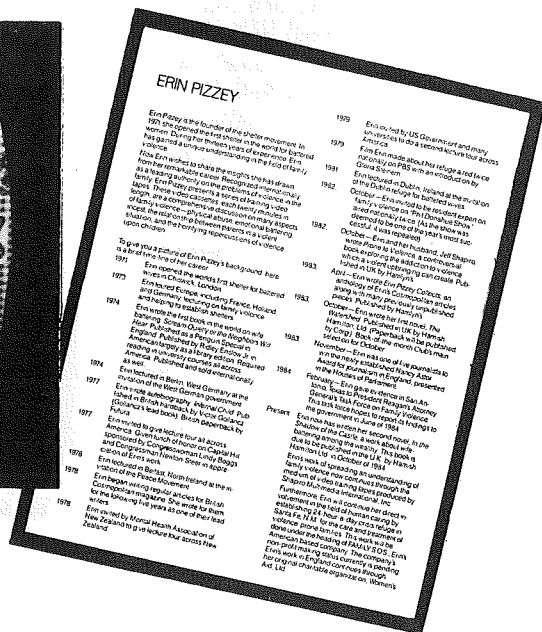
Jo: I discovered Women's Aid and the Women's Liberation Movement at the same time and therefore violence against women has always been quite central to my understanding of the oppression of women. □

Footnotes

1. Elizabeth Wilson, *The Existing Research on Battered Women* (NAAF, 1977).
2. NAAF, *Battered Women Need Refuges*, 1976. Both still available from WAFE, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London, EC1.

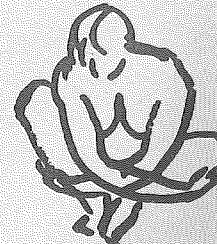


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