

Trouble

The radical feminist magazine

& Strife



From Southall to Beijing

No. 32

£4.50

Fighting anti-lesbianism in Hackney

Working with ritual abuse survivors

Feminism and human rights

Nonsexist nonsense

Televising women

Trouble & 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 & Strife is produced by Dianne Butterworth, Debbie Cameron, Marian Foley, Stevi Jackson, Liz Kelly and Joan Scanlon.

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Trouble & Strife Update

For those of you who did not see *T&S* 29/30, we'd just like to clarify that *T&S* now appears twice a year rather than three times. The size and price of each issue has risen in proportion. The new improved *T&S* represents excellent value for money. Larger issues means more variety, and a longer production schedule means greater reliability—so you'll know when to look out for the next issue.

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Letters

Dear T&S*

I enjoyed your article on spiritual matters in Issue 31, but would take issue with Debbie Cameron for conflating matters of the human spirit with manifestations of them in religious practices, supernaturalism and occultism.

As a result her analysis only serves to confirm her irritability rather than make explicit what even she finds amiss in the WLM.

Our struggles for spiritual well-being all seem to converge upon one single plane of goddesses, spooks, Jesus, and crystal-gazers.

The personal is political relative to the material conditions of women's existence. It therefore has an external focus even where the conflict is carried out in the mind in the form of thoughts, language, concepts or belief systems. I therefore fail to see how the spiritual could be viewed as political. Viewed in isolation of its religious, supernaturalistic, or occult manifestations, spirituality is primarily a state of mind.

As an emotional event it is non-material, cannot be quantified. It hovers in feminist nowomansland between our attempts to generate new forms reflecting our empowered selves and the sisyphian task of eking out space within long and powerful patriarchal traditions. Occasionally the acrobatics involved may appear risible; they are nevertheless serious endeavours.

Spirituality cannot be pinned on like a badge, nor 'built' or 'grafted' at will. As I continue to search for way to become energised by meaningful acts or thoughts I spare one for all circle-dancers and menstrual blood bathers, and wish them well.

They are unlikely to end up drained by political needs, priorities, control, lies and pretence, because they tank up when the moon is full.

Sisterly yours,
Brigitte Lechner
Stockport

Dear T&S,

I appreciate the reasons why it's necessary for you to change to twice-yearly publication, but I have some misgivings.

One is that it's hard to be interested in letters pertaining to an article you read six months ago, and can barely remember.

The other is that in six months it's possible to forget about the existence of a publication—I couldn't imagine what on earth was in the envelope when T&S 29/30 arrived. I talk about

fresh arrivals, mention T&S when I read the articles. Really, I feel that for anything to be called a 'periodical', where readers have a sense of continuity, 4 times a year is the minimum. And while I enjoy T&S's articles, point of view, etc., if it wasn't the only lesbian and feminist journal in England, I probably wouldn't subscribe, so unconnected does a twice-a-year publication feel.

Also, it would've helped if the sub. form matched your new policy—I guess I've subscribed for three years!

Good luck with future issues, and please consider a return to more frequent publication.
Lesbially,
Amanda Hayman

Dear T&S,

We are writing to inform you about the launch of a new feminist campaigning group: Action Against Child Sexual Abuse. AACSA will focus on state intervention/lack of intervention in child sexual abuse, addressing issues such as the criminal justice system, mental health services, the education system, social services, etc.

AACSA also produces a monthly 12-page newsletter which we are inviting T&S readers to subscribe to (phone or write for details). The Newsletter includes listings of courses, workshops and events around child sexual abuse and updates on campaigns; we aim to provide a space for networking and information exchange between individuals and groups representing the different strands of work currently taking place on the issue. The Newsletter also includes a summary of news on child sexual abuse each month, such as significant legal rulings, as well as articles, conference reports and book, TV and film reviews. We will also be producing 'Specials', which will focus on specific issues relating to child sexual abuse, e.g. false memory syndrome, child protection in schools and the mental health system.

Subscribe if you can! AACSA is being launched in the context in which the backlash against acknowledging the truth about child sexual abuse is particularly fierce. Keep in touch—we can publicise events you are organising or work you are doing on child sexual abuse.

In sisterhood,
AACSA, PO Box 9502, London, N17 7BW.
(0181) 365-9382 (Sub=£12/yr for individuals)□

Twin Leaks and Hackney Outings: The Kingsmead School Affair

In 1994 Jane Brown, the head teacher of Kingsmead primary school in Hackney, turned down the offer of some discounted tickets for school pupils to go to the ballet Romeo and Juliet. Her action triggered a furore: she was attacked for her lesbianism and her so-called 'political correctness' not only in the media but also by local Labour politicians. But the attack on Jane Brown—and the wider implications of that attack—galvanised local lesbian feminists into action. They were not the only people in Hackney who felt the need to do something. Various groups within the community came together to support Jane Brown, and more generally, to defend equal opportunity politics in Hackney. Jill Radford tells the story that was obscured in mainstream media reporting, puts the Kingsmead School affair in context and takes stock of the campaign.

On April 30th 1995, a sunny Sunday afternoon, a number of residents of the London Borough of Hackney including lesbian mothers and their children, lesbian workers in education, together with parents and children from Kingsmead school, and members of the Kingsmead School Support Group gathered for an outing to the Town Hall. Our picnic on the town hall steps took place under a banner reading:

Kingsmead School a Success—Official;
Hackney Council a Disgrace.

and was combined with a lobby of councillors arriving for a meeting.

The reasons for the picnic-picket, as well as its tone—celebratory but tinged with anger and bitterness—can only be understood in the context of the storm of heterosexism which surrounded Kingsmead School for the previous eighteen months.

Kingsmead School

Kingsmead School is an inner city primary school in Hackney serving one of the most run down and economically deprived estates in London. In 1993, when its present head, Jane Brown, was appointed it was deemed 'at risk' by Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools. Under her leadership the school has been 'brought back from the brink' and is now not only in good shape, but according to the OFSTED (the privatised equivalent of the old HMI) report is a highly successful school.

Standards of achievement meet or exceed national expectations in nearly three quarters of the lessons ... in many cases the quality of teaching is good or outstanding ... the school provides a caring and secure environment for all pupils ... in a high number of lessons pupils achieve appropriately with many pupils achieving levels that are high for their abilities ...

An earlier version of this paper appeared in the *Rights of Women Bulletin* Summer 1995.

* asterisk indicates that a letter has been edited.

KINGSMEAD SUPPORT GROUP

Following the successful lobby of Hackney Education Authority, supported by MPs, parents, children, councillors and hundreds of local people:

**LOBBY THE
FULL HACKNEY COUNCIL**

DEFEND JANE BROWN

and equal opportunities in Hackney

the school is managed with great commitment by the headteacher ... the school's equal opportunities policy is well understood by all and underpins the work of the school ... the environment reflects and celebrates the diversity of the school ... effective working relationships are in place between governors, staff, pupils and parents ... the school's provision for the pupils cultural development is outstanding.

(OFSTED report 1995, as quoted in Kingsmead Support Group Newsletter, April 1995.)

Jane Brown is highly regarded by parents and children of the school¹. They speak of her as 'an excellent head'; 'trustworthy and approachable'; and 'most of all committed to our children achieving'. Even the local authority was impressed. The policies and practices of Kingsmead school had been presented as

models of good practice by school inspectors and were widely drawn on in training sessions across the borough and beyond. Jane Brown is clearly a successful head who secured the confidence of pupils, parents, her staff school governors and at one time Hackney Council. The highly favourable OFSTED report was achieved through hard work, commitment and dedication on the part of the school, its pupils, teaching staff, head, parents and governors. But it was achieved against a backdrop of eighteen months of continual harassment on the part of the national and local press, aided and abetted, it is alleged, by the council.

So why did Kingsmead School become the site of what Bea Campbell described as a titanic struggle between the school's autonomy and the council's authority, between the reputation of white women and the reputation of black men. It also became a battle between the poor but sophisticated modern community around the school taking on prosperous but politically primitive protagonists in the press and the town hall. (Bea Campbell, 1995. p18)

The roots of the controversy

The Kingsmead School affair has both a wider context and more immediate roots.

Its wider context lies in the reorganisation of schools following the Tory government's introduction of local management of schools (LMS), transferring power and responsibility for the running of schools from local authorities to school governors, part of the Thatcherite attack on local government. The politics of 'New Labour', a party concerned to distance itself from any traces of its so called 'looney left' image of the early 1980s also played a part. As did local struggles to hold on to equal opportunities against the present right wing political backlash, growing religious fundamentalism and growing fascism as reflected in the election of a British National Party councillor in neighbouring Bethnal Green.

The more immediate roots of the affair lie in the school Head's refusal of an offer of tickets for the ballet of Romeo and Juliet offered by the Hamlyn Foundation and the reasons she gave. The tickets were refused on a number of grounds.

- They were not free tickets as continually implied in the press, but cost £7.00 per child—a price which many Kingsmead

parents could not easily afford.

- The cost of coach hire for this outing would have been equivalent to the entire term's swimming budget and the school's funds could not stretch to both.
- The outing would incur extra staffing costs to the school's already overstretched budget.
- Romeo and Juliet with its twin themes of underage sex and gang warfare was not considered appropriate for children of this age group, particularly children coping with life in the inner city, including some, who as Bea Campbell reported, were already traumatised refugees from the genocidal 'ethnic cleansing' in Europe and Africa.
- Shakespeare's plays, do not appear in the national curriculum for children at Key Stages 1 and 2 ie for the children at Kingsmead school.
- The school receives many invitations every year and is unable to accept all of them—if this invitation had been accepted, another would have to be foregone.
- The ballet was heterosexist.

It was this last point which was seized on by the press and taken out of the context of the wider explanation about how cultural events are considered in light of the school's and Hackney Council's equal opportunities policies, the school curriculum, timetable and limited resources. Rather, the press and initial radio reports ridiculed and misquoted the Head's comment about heterosexism, representing commitment to equal opportunities as outmoded 'political correctness'. Listening to the radio on that day in January 1994, I initially mistook the report as one of those last item semi-humorous reports which would drop out of the agenda and disappear into the oblivion as 'serious' news came in, especially the breaking of the story about the selling of council houses for Tory votes by Westminster City Council.

It could have happened this way, but it did not. As Bea Campbell reported:

It was Hackney Council itself that allowed the Romeo story to become a sex scandal. It was the council which gave Jane Brown to the media, knowing enough about her private life to realise public notoriety was the next step. ... the decision to name her was made by the (then) Council Leader John McCafferty and the (then) Education chair Pat Corrigan—the man who appointed to the headship. It was he who dubbed the tickets debacle as 'ideological idiocy' and 'cultural philistinism' without consulting Brown for her version of events. It was he who revealed

her name to the press, again without her permission. (p20,1995).

Public humiliation

The television news that evening carried what was for me unforgettable imagery. On the steps of a Hackney Council building, she stood there, the Hackney Head, spotlighted in the glare of television and camera lights, head down, reading in a low voice from a piece of paper handed to her by one of a gaggle of male officials who both surrounded and towered over her. The text was a garbled apology, transparently one she had not seen before. Watching this spectacle of a woman being publicly humiliated for national TV, a lesbian being pressured into apologising to the forces of patriarchy for defending equal opportunities, reduced me to tears. Tears of rage, of empathy, of fear about what was happening in my borough and what it meant for me and the hundreds of other lesbians. Sitting at home, in Hackney, it was these TV images which moved me, which made me realise that something seriously wrong and frightening was going on, and going on very close to home.

Bea Campbell also picked up on this newscast:

What was haunting is not what she said, but the shadow of fright which crossed her face. Another sad woman was forced to say something she did not believe—she had just been handed the statement which had already been broadcast by the time the council gave it her." (1995 *ibid* p18)

I was obviously not the only lesbian moved by the Council's betrayal. I was still reeling from these images when my phone rang. Lesbian networks were activating. ROW's lesbian custody phone line was on fire throughout the next few days as lesbian mothers, many living in Hackney and with children in Hackney schools, rang to express their anger, disbelief and distress and to discuss the implications for lesbians in Hackney, in London, around the country and beyond. Calls also came in from overseas showing that the newscast had generated international concern in lesbian networks. Many of the calls expressed disbelief, disbelief that a radical council could so betray the school Head, exposing her to the hostility and homophobia of the right wing press, which so many times in the past had misrepresented Hackney Council itself. To quote Bea Campbell again there was shock and disbelief that

... a progressive education directorate in one of Britain's poorest places was prepared to sacrifice

Let her get on
with her job

TOWN HALL DEMO IN
SUPPORT OF
HEADTEACHER

a successful school and deliver its lesbian head to its own mortal enemies. The controversy was laced with toxic and tragic ironies: Britain's best known black educator, Gus John was defining the limits of anti-oppressive practice in schools—against white women.

This radical boroughs deadly foes became its best friends. The Evening Standard, the Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph became the couriers in Hackney Council's campaign ... p20

This then was the dramatic beginning to the storm around heterosexism which broke over Kingsmead School and continued to rage for a further eighteen months. It was a controversy which incurred high costs for Jane Brown, her partner and children, for Kingsmead school, its pupils, their parents, the teaching staff, the school governors. The shock waves extended beyond the school encircling the lesbian communities in Hackney and beyond. They impacted in particular and immediate ways on lesbian mothers and their children; and on lesbian teachers and educators whose limited and tenuous security as residents and professionals living and working in the borough was threatened by the council's betrayal.

Witch hunts

Events rapidly moved deeper into an anti-lesbian witch hunt during which Jane Brown was ordered to make no statements, while being misrepresented and vilified, subject to press harassment and hate mail. The school was named, besieged with reporters intent on destabilising it. Photographs of Jane's house and her address were printed in the press. Journalists searched the electoral roll and approached neighbours and former neighbours to investigate her private life. Her partner's name and photograph were published. Door-stepped at home, besieged at work Jane, partner and children were forced into hiding.

The fact of their relationship led Hackney Council to make further unfounded but well publicised allegations of improper practices concerning Jane Brown's appointment as head. The accusation of impropriety rested on her partner being Acting Chair of Kingsmead school Governors at the time. Fortunately they were able to demonstrate that they were not in a relationship at the time, and further that when their relationship began, her partner quite properly resigned as school governor—not however before the story was fully aired in the

press. This was apparently accepted by the Council, but further allegations followed, this time that Jane had been improperly coached for the interview. The basis of this for this seems to have been that neighbours, when pressed by the journalists admitted to seeing women visitors at Jane's house!

The school governors were forced to establish an enquiry into the allegations over the tickets and appointment procedures. Even this process could not run smoothly. Controversies erupted over the constitution of the enquiry as Hackney Council it seemed preferred to work through the press, rather than cooperate with the properly constituted governors enquiry. The appetite of the press knew no limits. For example in March of 1994, when I attended the British Sociology Association's National Conference in Preston, Lancashire, hundreds of miles from Hackney and Kingsmead School, I encountered reporters in workshops far more concerned to gather gossip about the Kingsmead affair than to report on the proceedings of the Conference.

As the controversy continued into 1995, the anti-lesbian witch hunt widened and other Hackney lesbian mothers were outed. This time the spotlight focused on one of the newly elected school governors involved in the enquiry. The Daily Telegraph had acquired, its not clear how, copies of letters both she and her partner had earlier written to Hackney Council's education directorate complaining about their mishandling of the initial publicity. One week after the Telegraph had raged over the 'homosexual terrorism' of Outrage for outing the Bishop of London, this paper published extracts from the women's letters (*Daily Telegraph* 21.3.95), not only outing them, but also revealing personal details about one of their children. This led to another door step siege of a local 'pretending family'. The Hackney Gazette then ran a similar article, ensuring that the women were fully outed in their own borough.

Those who support conspiracy theories of politics might see this outrage as an attempt to both shift attention from the expected glowing OFSTED report, quoted earlier, and to discredit the school governors enquiry which was concluding, and expected to fully exonerate Jane Brown and Kingsmead School of any wrong doing.

In the early summer of 1995 these things

happened. The OFSTED report on the school was favourable in the extreme. The Governors enquiry exonerated Jane and the school, hence the celebratory picnic-picket banner.

It must have been astonishing to Hackney Council and other outsiders that a small and previously unremarkable primary school could survive and emerge with new confidence from an eighteen month onslaught of heterosexism in the national media, whilst the key Hackney councillors involved, John MacCafferty and Pat Corrigan, were ousted from office by a coup within the Hackney Labour group.

Keys to success

The keys to this ostensibly unlikely outcome to a political struggle between a small school and its friends set up against the power of the national press and a local authority are all to be found in the scenario outlined above.

A major key must be Jane Brown herself, as OFSTED reported. She is undoubtedly an excellent head under whose leadership and in a relatively short time period the school had been turned round. Not only this but she managed to retain the support of her pupils, their parents, staff and the school governors, despite the fact that her version of events could not be spoken. Without their active and outspoken support, particularly that of the pupils, whose presence at the several protests outside the town hall added warmth, energy and a touch of humour to the winter evenings, the Kingsmead Defence Campaign could not have achieved its success.

Another key to the success must have been the televising of the 'apology'. It was those powerful images which impressed on me that here was real trouble, not a heterosexist storm in a teacup. They graphically demonstrated the power relations in the struggle and secured strong support from lesbians in Hackney, across London, across the country and internationally. Within minutes of that broadcast, the lesbian networks were buzzing. Within days an *ad hoc* lesbian support group had formed at a meeting attended by 150 lesbians. Through the network-ing we learnt of the emergent Kingsmead Defence Group, made up of local parents, teachers, trades unionists supportive of Jane and Kingsmead school.

While there were differences in perspective between these newly forming groups, the shared commitment to defending Jane and the school made for sufficient common ground for

us to be able to work in a loose sort of coalition. Without acrimony, the lesbian support group agreed to work in a range of ways as suited our skills and interests. Some agreed to work closely with the Kingsmead Defence group, becoming involved in producing a newsletter and fund raising, including the

Inspectors praise Romeo ban head

spectacular benefit at Hackney Empire. Others got involved as a legal support team who provided free legal advice to the school governors for the duration of the controversy. Still others drew on trade union skills ensuring Jane was fully supported by her union at all levels, since there were employment rights at stake. Another group formed a concerned residents association and lobbied the council. Others participated in a press and publicity group whose brief was to challenge media atrocities, as well as monitoring and responding to media attacks. On one occasion and with the support of the Lesbian Avengers we visited an unprepared editor of the Hackney Gazette to suggest that it was time for the local paper to lend support to a local school rather than participating in the witch hunt of local lesbians; Necessary personal support was given to Jane and those close to her. While the alliance remained sufficiently loose for women to be involved in ways which felt right for them, the lesbian group quickly agreed to work in cooperation with the Kingsmead Defence Group and for representatives to attend these mixed meetings to ensure that misunderstandings and embarrassments did not occur.

Racism and heterosexism: making the connections

Both the lesbian campaigners and the Kingsmead Defence Group were fully aware of the attempt on the part of the right-wing media to set an agenda of conflict between anti-racist politics and the politics of anti-heterosexism. What Bea Campbell referred to as a 'toxic and tragic irony' in media use of personality politics centred on Gus John and Jane Brown to generate divisiveness by portraying the struggle as one between black men and white lesbians. This made it all the more necessary to try to ensure that our support for Kingsmead school was explicitly anti-racist and seen to be so. In a fast moving campaign this at times created

Schools take their protests to council meeting

THUMBS-UP FOR ROMEO AND JULIET SCHOOL

Parents praise inner London school as 'oasis'

'Support' Kingsmead could have done without

Head in ballet trip row cleared

tensions and there are lessons still for white women, myself included, to learn. The Hackney Commission for Racial Equality played an important role in supporting the Kingsmead Defence Group by speaking on its platform and ensuring that connections between racism and heterosexism, so central to fascist politics, were not overlooked. It was from this background that the campaign focus became one of defending equal opportunity politics in Hackney rather than a more narrow campaign around lesbian rights. In part, in my view, it was this broader based campaigning rather than a narrow lesbian separatist agenda that won local support and produced a successful outcome.

Lesbians: defending our rights

As well as working with the Kingsmead Defence Group, the lesbian group continued to meet autonomously, both to keep in touch with the progress of the campaign and to explore the wider implications of the controversy. It has been claimed that the lesbian community in Hackney is one of the largest in London, even in Europe. The fact that so many concerned lesbians could be brought together in a matter of days and through networking was an important reminder of the power of lesbian strength and friendship networks. As women gathered for that first meeting the most frequent conversations I overheard were between women who had not met in ten years. Lesbians who had maybe quarrelled or drifted apart since the heady feminist days of the late 1970s/early 1980s or who had not met since the activism around Clause 28 came together in common purpose. While their must have been all manner of tensions left over from those times, the atmosphere seemed to be that of old friends coming together. This in part generated a spirit of goodwill which hopefully will outlast the controversy.

Few of us knew Jane personally at the beginning of the struggle and while personal and political support for a lesbian in trouble was part of the reason we were there, there was more to it than that. It was more even than the recognition that it happened to be Jane, but it could have been any one of us who found herself target of media heterosexism in the present political climate. These concerns were present, but so was the recognition that defending equal opportunities in education, in employment and across the board, not only in Hackney but in all

local authorities, was as vital to lesbians as it was in the 1970s and 1980s when equal opportunities policies were established. If Hackney was allowed to abdicate this responsibility then other authorities could follow. Defending the kind of equal opportunities in education our children are entitled to, defending the kind of equal opportunities we are entitled to in relation to employment, defending our human rights to live openly with our chosen families at a time of political backlash were central to the concerns of the lesbian support group.

For many of us the lessons of the late 1980s in the struggles against Clause 28, in attacks on lesbians over access to donor insemination in the moral panic over 'virgin births' (see *T&S* 21) and in relation to adoption and fostering, had been learnt well. We had come to recognise how lesbians and anything to do with children could generate strong reaction from homophobes and the political right; how local outbursts of anti-lesbianism could grow from a storm in a teacup when fed by a vitriolic press into a full scale moral panic, and may fuel oppressive legislation undermining the human rights of lesbians and our children.

Learning the lessons

Although the campaign raised far reaching issues for lesbians, who over the period of struggle worked in an unstructured, autonomous group (which for much of the period had no name) and at other times several names, the success of the struggle owes much to the fact we were able to work in collaboration and cooperation the other groups supporting Jane Brown. The Kingsmead Defence Campaign, a mixed campaigning group, welcomed our support and worked closely with the school, the NUT, and other community groups. The Kingsmead Defence Group operating as an umbrella group was able to bring together some skilled and experienced activists, as well as the energy and commitment of those for whom political activism was a new experience. My impression is that as well a profound sense of outrage, high levels of commitment and awareness of a need for careful strategising, it was the culture of respect and willingness to learn from each other which made for a successful outcome. □

A triumph Kingsmead
can be proud of

References

Bea Campbell, 'Hard Lessons', *Diva* August 1995.

Notes

¹ All quotations unless indicated otherwise are taken from Kingsmead Support Group Newsletters 1, (Feb 1994); 2 and 3.

ZERO COMMITMENT

One of the goals of feminist action around domestic violence has been to get the police, the courts and the public to take it seriously as a crime. And recently it might seem as if we've been making progress: special police units, high-profile media campaigns and successful appeals on behalf of battered women who killed abusive men all give the impression that things have changed for the better. But the reality is rather different. The public message that domestic violence is a crime is being undercut as policies are ignored in actual practice and contradicted by initiatives designed to cut costs by downgrading certain offences. Here, Liz Kelly explains how these little-publicised changes are affecting the treatment of domestic violence and how feminists can frame a response.

I am writing this to the accompaniment of tantalising radio trailers for the decision of the jury in the OJ Simpson case—knowing that whatever the decision it will take us no further in creating justice for women and children who live too much of their lives under the power and control of abusive men. I am also fairly certain that Los Angeles Police Department are not on alert for possible rioting by women if the verdict is not guilty. How the case has been reported, handled and responded to says something about how far things have changed since I first began working on this issue over twenty years ago, and how much everything has remained the same. Nicole Brown's fear and terror recorded on her 911 calls have been used as both evidence of a history of abuse and as a piece of courtroom drama. They have seldom been discussed as indictments of a law enforcement and legal system which has supposedly been responding to domestic violence as a

crime for over a decade. Yet again we have been placed in an either/or position, being asked to choose between a focus on either racism or male violence, thus preventing any exploration of how the two can exist at the same time, in the same place. The very real drama of a murder trial has been transformed into a soap opera, and in these days where everyone knows something about domestic violence, the media has for the most part ignored this fundamental element of the story, preferring to concentrate on more important matters such as Marcia Clarke's hairstyle and child care arrangements and Judge Ito's relationship with his wife. What could have prompted some investigative reporting into police responses to domestic violence, has instead been constructed as the real life version of LA Law.

This piece is an attempt to take stock; to look at what has changed, and why, and at the

From hopeful beginnings

sealed with a
FIST

to a hopeless reality.

Many women in Northern Ireland exist in day to day fear of domestic violence.

Women's Aid can help.

Telephone Belfast 249041

Women's
AID
WHEN HOME IS WHERE THE HURT IS

remaining barriers to treating domestic violence as a crime.

The good news

I was amongst the many feminists who celebrated—justifiably—outside the Court of Appeal on Friday July 7th (and for days



afterwards). We had freed Emma Humphreys, and we had changed the law. Victories such as this have been in short supply, and we savoured the moments—caught each others' relief, elation and emotion, hugged each other, laughed and cried.

The weeks leading up to the decision had

been frenetic, demanding and tense. None of us dared speculate about losing, but we all harboured our private worries. London Justice for Women worked literally round the clock, building up publicity about the case and support for Emma at every opportunity. The dedication and skill that this small group of women have developed in relation to feminist campaigning using the mass media is nothing short of extraordinary.

Emma's case was heard over two days and then the decision deferred for a further week. As women strived to rearrange their lives in order to be there for the decision we struggled to hold onto our optimism. The release of emotion when we knew she had won had more than a little to do with the week of tension we had all endured. In celebrating the recent achievements of campaigns for women who have killed violent men, I want us also to remember to place them in context—the context of 25 years of feminist activism which built the ground on which these cases were then fought, and also the context of other changes which have occurred quietly, which are as—if not more—significant than the appeal court ruling.

The significance of Emma's case

Emma's appeal was fought on the grounds of provocation rather than diminished responsibility. The latter has been the route most women have taken, since the courts have been far happier to view women as 'mad' than provoked following ongoing abuse. On the other hand men who have killed their female partners after abusing them for years have been able to use the defence of provocation, using acts as trivial as 'moving the mustard pot' and 'nagging' to lessen the significance (in the eyes of the law) of their lethal acts. Justice for Women have consistently pointed to the injustice of these acts counting as provocation whereas repeated abuse does not (for more details see *T&S* 22 and 31, and *Justice for Women*, 1993).

Emma's lawyers argued her appeal on three grounds, which from inside the court seemed insignificant and picky, but in terms of how British law works were potentially profound. Our system works on 'binding precedent'—that is the law is changed through case law. The decisions of the higher courts (the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords) become

precedents, binding future cases until a later decision by a higher court overturns that precedent. Lawyers can refer to them in presenting their client's case, and judges must use them.

Many legal theorists and most legal practitioners argue that this is the strength of the British legal system; that it contains within it the potential for gradual change as both public opinion and knowledge alters. Whilst convincing in theory, the practice is not always in the direction of positive change, and as Justice for Women have demonstrated change often only occurs when there is a concerted campaign outside the legislature and judiciary.

How the law on injunctions has been interpreted by judges and magistrates is an opposite illustration—the intention to provide protection backed by powers of arrest was gradually watered down through precedent, so that we are now at the point where the majority of injunctions do not carry powers of arrest, and most have very short time limits of three to six months. It is only after years of concerted criticism of current practice that proposals for change have been formalised.

Rulings in the high profile cases of Kiranjit Aluwahlia and Emma Humphreys have changed the law through precedent, meaning that future cases of women who have killed violent men will be heard under a different definition of provocation. Kiranjit's case began this change through what many legal experts regard as extremely significant arguments that were put in her defence and included in the Appeal Court's judgement. But in the end she won her freedom on the grounds of diminished responsibility and expert evidence on Battered Women's Syndrome.

Emma's successful appeal hinged on whether the Court of Appeal was willing to extend the interpretation of provocation, and they did so on two grounds - how the concept of 'reasonable man' is to be interpreted, and that a history of abuse does constitute a form of 'cumulative provocation'. It appears, however, that a 'trigger' event will still be required for future pleas of provocation to succeed. The new interpretation will undoubtedly benefit some women whose cases come to court following this ruling, and we know of at least one woman who had the charges against her dropped within days of the Appeal Court ruling in June. It seems unlikely that the interpretation of

provocation can be extended much further by case law. Although Justice for Women has also been campaigning for a restriction of the definition such that neither words or accusations adultery *alone* should constitute provocation, as a means of limiting the ease with violent men have been able to 'get away with murder'.

Campaigners are not convinced that the redefinition of provocation will provide an appropriate defence for all women who kill in desperation. It is for this reason that the campaign for a new defence of self-preservation (first discussed in print in *T&S* 22) will continue. Justice for Women are also calling for an amnesty in relation to women now in prison who were convicted of murder of violent men before the recent changes in legal interpretation.

Meanwhile back at the cop shop

The positive publicity attached to recent cases, the accompanying plot of Brookside, and the outcomes of successful appeals have created an atmosphere in which it appears progress is occurring in relation to domestic violence. If our attention is held only by what has happened recently in the higher courts, and on television, that interpretation is a valid one, but if we turn our attention to how the majority of domestic violence cases are dealt with by the legal system a rather different picture emerges.

Police records on reported domestic violence incidents show increases for a period of close to a decade. But whilst women continue to report more (and/or the police record more reports in their statistics) the percentage of arrests remains at 12-14%, 81% of which resulted in charges (Grace, 1995). The proportion of prosecutions will be far lower, but could not be tracked due to the way police and CPS records are kept. So much for treating domestic violence as a crime, which has been a consistent message from the Home Office (it was the key slogan in their pathetic attempt at a prevention campaign in 1994) and from many police forces since the late 1980s.

The recent evidence of some serious attention to domestic violence within the police began with the establishment of the first Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) in Tottenham in 1987. It was staffed by two inordinately committed and determined women officers. There are now over 100 DVU's throughout

Sometimes
Domestic Violence affects over
it's hard
4,000 women
to be
in Northern Ireland.
a woman...

Women's Aid can help. **Women's AID**
Telephone Belfast 249041

Britain, but the kind of service they offer, who staffs them, and how they function varies dramatically. Public perception of DVU's is extremely inaccurate, even fellow professionals assume that they are specialised teams of officers who respond to domestic violence calls. No unit has ever done that. Rather they are one or two police officers who keep track of all domestic violence records, send out form letters to victims offering advice and support, and who participate in local multi-agency initiatives. The geographical area and population which DVUs are expected to cover also varies enormously, with some covering part of a London borough, and others a police division with many police stations. The Tottenham unit operated with a pro-active model, the two women officers chasing up cases and challenging fellow officers about the approach they took. They sought to encourage and enable women to take prosecutions forward, taking retrospective statements and pushing for the CPS to carry cases forward.

Not all DVU's, however, adopted or maintained this interventionist model. An internal, as yet unpublished, review by the Metropolitan police found two distinct models

of DVU co-existing: one which emphasised law enforcement building on the model developed in Tottenham; the other offering a version of victim support. It is also evident that units can shift between these models, and this seems to depend crucially on who is working in the unit at any one time. The role of DVU's in monitoring *police* responses to domestic violence seems to have become defunct. Dee Dee Glass (1995) notes:

There are no national guidelines for DVUs. Some are just answerphones where all that happens is that a woman may get a return phone call or letter some weeks or even months later... Even the Metropolitan police in London, who do have guidelines, only call them 'best practice' and rarely refer to, never mind try to enforce them. (p161)

Whilst there continue to be committed women officers working in DVU's and women who are radicalised by the experience, the current situation is no cause for celebration. More and more male officers are either being allocated or choosing placements in DVUs, and at least two divisions have boasted that the evidence of their taking domestic violence seriously in the fact that their DVU is staffed entirely by men. This bothers me not simply in



Jacky Fleming

Basically, we can't
AFFORD to take
domestic violence
seriously, because
there's too much
of it about

terms of the service that this means women get, but as importantly for the implicit message it gives all of us—that issues are important when men take them seriously. In too many DVUs officers serve only six months there, limiting any development of understanding, response and policy. Most DVU's are little more than administrative, collating domestic violence reports and sending out letters of which less than 5% are responded to. Those which have investigative officers assigned (to follow up crime reports) are very much the minority.

Not only this, but having garnered much positive kudos from their development domestic violence has ceased to be a priority for many police forces, and has certainly slipped down the policy agenda at the Home Office. The move in some locations to shift DVU's into child protection or children and families units, or into more wide ranging Vulnerable Person's Units (including racial attacks, homophobic attacks, rape, elder abuse, missing persons) are but one illustration of this movement. Sharon Grace reports out of 43 forces only five had units dedicated specifically to the offence. Her research confirms what women's organisations have been saying for years—that having policies does not in and of itself change practice. Almost all police forces now have a policy on domestic violence, and most police managers seem to work on the assumption that 'it is written down and that's therefore what happens in the police'.

A third of operational officers (constables and sergeants) had not heard of Circular 60/1990 [a Home Office document on police response to domestic violence] at all and over half said they had not received any new guidelines on domestic violence—despite their managers confidence that the guidance had been successfully disseminated. Very few officers had received any training on the policing of domestic violence (Grace, 1995, pviii)

Colluding in crime

In a little publicised agreement between the police, the Home Office, the CPS and, most critically, the government through the Lord Chancellor's Office the definitions of classes of criminal and traffic offences were redefined. This was a blatant cost-cutting exercise designed to decrease pressure on the courts and prisons. Assault charges were included in this process, and what distinguishes levels of assault in law is degrees of injuries.

The outcome has been nationally agreed

He seems a thoroughly
reasonable man to me,
who has obligingly provided
regular beatings to a
remarkably ungrateful wife



Jacky Fleming

'joint charging standards' between the police and CPS for offences against the person which became effective in August 1994 (before those for either traffic or public order offences). Certain kinds of injuries have been shifted out of the category Actual Bodily Harm (an arrestable offence which carries strong potential for a custodial sentence) into common assault (not an arrestable offence which is usually punishable by a fine). The injuries which have been moved out of ABH and into common assault include: black eyes, minor bruising, swellings, superficial cuts, scratches and grazes (an 'undisplaced broken nose' is seen as a 'borderline case'). The injuries most commonly experienced by women during incidents of domestic violence. This has been accompanied in some areas by agreements between local police forces and the CPS to have a 'discontinuance' policy with common assault charges.

The consequences for women are in one sense obvious, but others are less so:

- fewer violent men will be arrested and/or prosecuted for domestic violence;
- the changes offer total justification for officers, managers and teams who seek to avoid/undermine the encouragement of arrest under local policies on domestic violence and the Home Office circular 60/90 (although it is still possible to arrest for ABH and charge for common assault at the station—actions which the CPS actively discourage, or use provisions in PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) which enables arrest to protect a vulnerable person and/or prevent a breach of the peace);
- the changes support historical traditions



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in the police which minimise domestic violence, and compare it unfavourably with 'real crime';

it may have unintended and unanticipated impacts on the willingness of judges to grant injunctions and exclusion orders, and in initial contact and residence hearings and attempts to alter current orders.

These changes have been further underlined by a more recent agreed policy between the police and CPS—what is called 'case disposal'. Under the guise of ensuring consistency of approach to decision making yet another mechanism for down-grading domestic violence has emerged. What this 'system' involves is that each police officer who has made an arrest has to go through a routine process of assessing gravity factors, which are aggravating and mitigating. Numbers are assigned to these factors, and counting them up, subtracting

aggravating from mitigating, produces a figure which determines whether a charge should be laid or not (5 or 4 involves a charge or summons, 3 is marginal, and 2 and 1 involve a caution if there is an admission of an offence, or not proceeded with if not).

There are some strong arguments for making police officers go through a routine assessment of their cases (although no one could be foolish enough to believe that ways round it will not be found where desired). The problems arise in relation to how the aggravating and mitigating factors are defined, as the Table below illustrates.

Whilst several of the aggravating factors can be applied to domestic violence, so can most of the mitigating ones, and too many of the mitigating ones provide officers with exactly the same reasons they have traditionally used for not proceeding with cases. The offer to

The Case Disposal System

| Aggravating Factors | Mitigating Factors |
|---|---|
| Likely to result in a significant sentence/penalty. | Case is 'trivial' and likely to attract a small or nominal penalty. |
| There is a vulnerable victim, attack was personal and involved considerable damage or disturbance. | The offence was the result of a genuine mistake, misunderstanding or single error of judgment. |
| The offender has a history of similar offences, it was a group action, premeditated. | The offender is elderly or suffering from significant mental or physical ill-health. The offence is relatively minor and reparation has been made. |
| The offence was against someone in a public service position. | The offence was committed whilst under provocation, and was an impulsive response to it. |
| The offender abused a position of trust in the commission of the offence. | The offender supplies information that minimises risk or harm to others. |
| If the offence, although not serious in itself, is widespread locally, an agreement can be made to treat it as a prevalent offence. | |

take part in a programme or seek help is particularly alarming, since it constitutes an informal form of diversion in which there will be minimal, if any, mechanisms for ensuring that this has indeed been followed through. The one police division I am aware of which has taken the consequences of this new system for domestic violence policy seriously has reached a local agreement with the CPS to treat domestic violence as a 'local prevalent offence'. This, however, is still dependent on individual officers using that as an aggravating factor in their decision making and their not deciding there are significant mitigating factors.

Thus whilst publicly trumpeting its intention to take domestic violence seriously, to treat it as a crime, the government and all parts of the criminal justice system are complicit in doing precisely the opposite. I am not suggesting that this change was deliberately instigated to achieve this end, I am certain that no-one in the higher echelons cared enough about domestic violence to notice the contradictions between two elements of public policy. To say that this is a policy of 'de-criminalisation' suggests that domestic violence was, previously understood as and responded as a crime. However untrue that was in general, there had been some movements towards this, and some levers for change. These have been effectively removed in this base cost-cutting exercise, which has nothing to do with 'law and order' and still less with justice for women and protection before the law.

Women are still facing a local, regional and national lottery when they call the police, and these recent changes in criminal justice protocols have simply added more numbers (literally in the case disposal system) to the draw.

Forums for change or talk shops?

The other noticeable change in the 1990s has been the emergence of local domestic violence forums or multi-agency working parties. I was part of establishing one of the first of these in Norwich in 1986/7, and we did not limit our remit to domestic violence, but addressed violence to women and girls.

The popularity of these forums, and some of the local successes in raising awareness and extending resources, should not prevent our voicing concerns. In the majority of these groupings women's groups have, or are in danger of becoming, marginal voices and a



I think 'common assault' is an appropriate description. It is... er... very common, and it is... um... assault

lowest common denominator politics pervades much of their work. The most telling evidence for this in my view are the number of forums and local authority initiatives which have already or are very close to defining domestic violence in gender neutral terms. This nonsensical 'inclusionism' results in the loss of any political perspective, any explanatory framework which views violence as occurring in the context of oppressive social relations and structures.

This loss of politics is accompanied by a loss of nerve and teeth, such that agencies can get away with paper policies, sending someone to a meeting every month or so to assuage their consciences.

The examples of co-ordinated responses which I am aware of which have made a difference are based on much firmer ground than most (I know there are some notable exceptions) of the British initiatives. They begin from an uncompromising feminist analysis, and they are determined to effect and witness change. This means agreeing protocols between all the agencies and requiring them to produce both internal policies and regular statistics on what exactly is happening. The most well known locations of these projects are in Duluth, Minnesota and Hamilton, New Zealand.

But even these approaches involve separating domestic violence from other forms of violence against women and girls, and I am

References

Sharon Grace *Policing domestic violence in the 1990s* (Home Office Research Study 139, 1995)

Dee Dee Glass *'All My Fault': Why Women don't Leave Abusive Men* (Virago, 1995)

Home Office Circular 60/90 (HMSO)

Metropolitan Police Special Notice 11/94: *Charging Standards - Offences Against the Person*

Metropolitan Police *Case Disposal - How the System Works* (1995)

Justice for Women Information Pack (1993).

even more convinced now that this is not in our long term interests. What does it mean for feminists, for feminism, that domestic violence stays high on public agendas at the expense of any attention being given to rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, public safety? Wouldn't we gain more locally and nationally if we took a model from London, Ontario of a local Co-ordinating Committee Against Woman Abuse? Here all the local women's organisations working on violence join together and work strategically with other agencies. The principles on which the committee is based are now unapologetically feminist, and each agency is required to demonstrate how they are implementing them internally. The reality is, of course, more complicated—but how many places are there in Britain where that is the basis from which work is undertaken locally? Are there not a whole series of benefits which might accrue to our organisations, to the women who use them, to our desire for the possibility of feminist practice if we found ways to work with each other for strategic goals?

A campaign waiting to happen

At the same time we are approaching the run up

to a general election. Can we make violence against women, and the abject failure of this government to do anything meaningful about it an issue in the campaigning? The fact that there is now explicit support from the UN in both the Vienna and now the Beijing declaration, and from the Council of Europe, ought to make the task of convincing politicians that this issue matters slightly easier.

Could we get ourselves organised enough to act as a constituency of women, lobbying our local MPs and candidates about what their position is on these issues? That we need specific legislation on domestic violence (in New Zealand there is now an offence 'man assaults woman'). That the number of reported cases of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse continues to rise, whilst the proportion of convictions falls. That we are nowhere near even approaching justice for women. If we acted now, in concert and with the support of other women's organisations, the least we might get would be some promises in the manifestos; then whichever party gets in our task would be to hold them to those promises, and develop some more demands on the way. It's not quite changing the world—or is it? □



Notes

¹ The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Homes Act which is currently going through the process of becoming law.

² For a critique of 'syndrome' defences in legal cases see Liz Kelly, Linda Regan and Sheila Burton 'Syndromes and disorders: The dangers of medicalising the impacts of sexual violence in legal cases', *ROW Bulletin*, Autumn/Winter 1994.

ClarNa Women's mBan Agenda for Peace

Submission to the
Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

The moves towards peace in Northern Ireland are to be welcomed, but the voices of women have been noticeably absent in debates and discussions in the UK on the future of Ireland. Women in Ireland have, however, been organising. 'Women's Agenda for Peace' was submitted to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and we reprint it as it appeared in Women's News to encourage feminist discussion of the future of Ireland in women's groups.

Ireland's Constitution does not serve or protect the civil and human rights of all its people. We believe a new constitution is needed—one that will be based on principles of equality for all.

We want a society which enables women to make choices about their lives and which will enable all women to live lives of dignity. This means the right to economic security and the right to participate fully in public, social, economic and political life without having to overcome barriers of accessibility or lack of childcare. It means our right to choose to have children and our children's right to be welcome and valued members of society. We want the right to a future for our children without the necessity of emigration for economic or social reasons. We need the right to choose our sexual orientation and to define and choose our family relationships. The right to equal access to services. We need the right to work and the right to economic security. The right to live and make choices free from fear. The right to freedom from fear of homelessness. The right to control our own fertility. The right to

education and health care. We have outlined below the steps which we think are required to make these rights a reality.

New and Democratic Structures

- A recognition of the effects of British rule in Ireland, ie the damage done to the economic and political life of this country and its citizens by unchallenged sectarianism. This recognition to include immediate remedial action to counteract sectarianism at all levels including government, education and public bodies.
- Fair representation of women in agenda setting throughout the political process, ie at local, regional and national levels.
- The establishment of democratic political structures governing all aspects of public life and policy.
- All such democratic structures to be clearly based on principles and practices that incorporate equality for all including fair representation for all disadvantaged groups.

- Equality proofing to be built into all these structures and these to be actively monitored.

A Demilitarised Society

- An end of British rule in Ireland, the withdrawal of all British troops and the disbanding of the Royal Irish Regiment.
- A regionalised police service throughout Ireland, accountable to local police authorities and representative of local communities.
- The guarantee to trial by jury.
- The means to obtain justice and protection of civil liberties through courts which are accessible to all.
- The guarantee to free legal representation at all levels.
- An end to political interference in the legal system.
- The repeal of emergency legislation throughout Ireland, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Emergency Provision Act, and the Offences Against the State Act.
- The removal of special courts.

Economic Equality

- The recognition of women's contribution to the economy through unpaid work.
- Government commitment to the establishment of a living wage and an end to slave wages in all areas of employment including women working at home.
- An end to discrimination against women through low pay, unequal pay, job segregation, absence of childcare and absence of respite care.
- The provision of training and education opportunities which encompass women's personal and professional development including progression routes to all sectors of the labour market.
- The establishment of community based, quality, accessible and affordable childcare.
- Equal opportunities to employment, promotion and training to be enshrined in law.
- The establishment of an Equality Commission with legal powers to monitor and enforce equality legislation.
- A social security system that treats people with respect, delivers a level of benefit proportionate to average income and is aimed

at the removal of poverty.

- The official adoption and implementation of the MacBride Principles to ensure an end to religious discrimination in employment.

Lesbian Women

- An end to discrimination against lesbians in employment, family law, property settlements, educational and training opportunities.
- Public education campaigns to promote visibility and openness.
- Acknowledgement of lesbian families in all relevant government policies, government publications and government funded publications.

Disabled Women

- The introduction of legislation which outlaws all forms of discrimination against disabled women.
- The establishment of a commission with legal powers to monitor and enforce this legislation and to encourage the representation of disabled women in public life.
- The establishment of complete accessibility to all public buildings and services such as schools, libraries, hospitals, health centres, bars, restaurants, shops, social security offices, job training centres, further education centres and leisure centres. (Accessibility should be interpreted as the means necessary for disabled women to independently use these resources.)
- Adequate financial and practical support services which enable disabled women to live an independent life.

Personal Freedom

- The establishment in law of free access to range of safe contraception and option of abortion. This law to be implemented through widespread, community based services.
- The State to advocate and support diverse family relationships.
- The introduction of divorce legislation which allows for the dissolution of marriage without apportioning blame and guaranteed fair settlements.
- The establishment of a family law system which supports women and children through the process of divorce.

- The guaranteed right to choose legal representation, and legal aid to be available in family and civil law.

Safety

- Recognition of violence against women as being on a par with all other violent crimes in society—this to be reflected in the law.
- Training for police and judiciary in dealing with violence against women, both bodies to work closely with women's organisations in establishing such training.
- State support for services which provide advice, counselling and shelter for women who have been the victims of violence.
- Civil and human rights education to be incorporated throughout the educational system.
- All public information and education material to be published in the minority languages of Ireland
- Every women to be guaranteed a home independent of her relationship with anyone else and without having to prove violence or abuse.
- Security of tenure in all rented accommodation.

Children's Rights

- Every child to be held in equal esteem by the State and its institutions.
- State services to ensure the child will grow and develop in a healthy safe environment, free from poverty.
- A quality, State funded childcare system with a variety of provision to suit various ages.
- Education which meets the child's needs, which incorporates cultural diversity and neither discriminates nor selects.
- Advocacy for children which ensures that the child's voice is heard and respected in all State systems which impact upon the child, ie education residential care, juvenile justice and health.
- The adoption, active implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Culture, Language and Education

- Introduction of anti-racism legislation to cover employment, housing and the provision of goods and services.
- The establishment of a Race Equality Commission with legal powers to monitor and enforce equality legislation.
- The recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group whose rights should be promoted in society and protected in law.
- The recognition of Irish as the official language of the country, and the promotion of the Irish language through all social, educational and economic institutions.
- Equality of esteem for Irish as a language in its own rights and the provision of a sign language in all public services.
- Government publications to be produced in all languages used by communities in Ireland.
- Universal access to education at all stages to be ensure through provision of childcare, respite care, grants, languages (including sign language) and disability aids.

Health

- A national health scheme providing universal, free, accessible, localised, health care delivered at point of need and including preventive health care.
- Adequate provision for the elderly.
- Recognition of the beneficial effects of many traditional/alternative healthcare treatments and making these available under the national health scheme.
- Establishment of local health authorities representative of the communities they serve.

This document is also intended as a discussion paper for women's groups on the future of Ireland and the inclusion of women in a just society. □

Lost in Translation: Non-Sexist Language

Sexism in language is clearly an issue for feminists, even if we are sceptical about the emphasis on non-sexist language as a substitute for doing something significant about women's oppression. While merely unenthusiastic about the proliferation of reformist measures in the equal opportunities industry, Debbie Cameron is incensed by the unseemly growth of a trade in less than handy handbooks for the non-sexist language user. The main reason why these handbooks fail to fulfil even their most limited function, is because the authors and editors are wishy-washy liberals who don't understand the relationship between language and power.

Non-sexist language is one of those feminist ideas that has somehow managed to achieve the status of orthodoxy, not just among feminists, but for a great mass of well-meaning people and vaguely liberal institutions. Of course it has its enemies, and very vocal they are too, but it also meets with pious approval in the most unexpected quarters. I work at a university that was among the first to have a policy on what it was pleased to call 'gender-free language', and when I arrived there I quickly lost count of the number of times men drew my attention to it, almost bursting with pride—while I was still reeling from the shock of being one of only two-and-a-half women in my department. Non-sexist language: the symbolic concession you can make to feminism without ruining your dominant status.

This might seem like a cynical attitude; in reality I'm not quite that cynical. Though it

annoys me when non-sexist language policies are touted for PR purposes to make an institution look more progressive than it really is, I take it for granted that institutions ought to have them (as well as other policies, not instead). I would never take the line that language is 'trivial' or a 'distraction' from more important issues. There probably are more important issues, but political struggle invariably takes place on many fronts at once. No feminist fairy with a magic wand ever comes up and says: 'OK, you can have non-sexist language or equal pay; now which is it to be?'

So my cynicism is not directed towards the idea that something needs to be done about sexism in language. What I'm cynical about—indeed, increasingly appalled by—is the genre of handbooks and guidelines that define the problem and tell people what to do about it. It is now more than 20 years since the first non-

sexist language guidelines for English appeared, and they have not improved with time—in fact I would argue they are actually getting worse. They haven't kept pace with developments in feminist politics since the 1970s, and in certain respects they have regressed from anything that was radical about them originally.

Minimalism and moderation

I don't want to imply that non-sexist language policies were ever particularly radical. Even at their best they could never do enough to satisfy a radical feminist, because 'non-sexist' is inherently a minimalist concept (the absence of overt sexism as opposed to anything more positive). Non-sexist language policies and guidelines are part of a moderate, reformist feminist agenda. But I don't want to dismiss this out of hand, or criticise women who work within the constraints of mainstream institutions for not going beyond reformism. You have to start from where you are. Nor do I underestimate the opposition which even moderate interventions attract in the average organisation. My starting point in this discussion is that reformist initiatives do have their uses, and it matters, therefore, how they are approached.



What worries me is that current approaches to sexism in language are failing on their own (minimalist and moderate) terms. Over time, they seem to have gone from having modest political ambitions to having virtually none, unless you count inoffensiveness as a political goal. In theory I suppose this could be because guideline writers have felt obliged to make more and more concessions in order to win

mainstream acceptance; but actually I don't think that's the case. I would say the climate now is more receptive than it was 20 years ago, and where people remain hostile, their hostility is to the whole idea, and is not mitigated by watering down the arguments. Anyway, whatever the causes, I think it's time for some plain speaking about the awfulness of most guidelines: the blandness of their arguments, their failure to get to grips with even their own definition of the problem, and the increasing idiocy of the solutions they propose.

The Handbook's Tale

For those who wish to adopt non-sexist language in their own practice, or who are preparing guidelines tailored to the needs of a particular institution, the obvious place to turn for comprehensive guidance is to one of a number of published handbooks. Handbooks stand to the guidelines used in individual institutions much as something like the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* stands to a particular publisher's or newspaper's 'house style sheet'—that is, as an 'authoritative' general work of reference—and as such they are the most influential texts of their type. The established ones are revised periodically, and new ones also appear at regular intervals, commissioned by publishers who rightly believe there is a market.

The Women's Press for instance has just reissued Casey Miller and Kate Swift's *Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing* (first published in 1981), and has also brought out a new book, *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language*, by Margaret Doyle. Both titles are in the press's 'handbook series', they have identical (and revolting) yellow covers with dark green print, and they cost the same, viz £6.99, which for the 112 pages of the *A-Z* seems a trifle excessive. It's not clear to me why the Women's Press should have chosen to publish both of them, as they cover very much the same ground—the difference is that the *A-Z* is shorter and arranged in alphabetical order, whereas Miller and Swift's *Handbook* is arranged by topic. If I had to recommend one, it would be Miller and Swift; but both of them depress me.

Born in the USA

If I can just get one complaint out of the way, it's notable that both books are written by women from the USA. The Women's Press



have put editors to work taking out the more glaringly American bits and adding a few British touches, but no-one involved seems to have enough grasp on the (extensive) dialect differences to do a decent job of this; we are still stuck with entries that will puzzle or annoy the average British reader.

For instance, Doyle mentions the playful feminist coinage *himmicane* for *hurricane*. If you know that in most US accents *hurricane* sounds like 'her-icane' you will get the joke: but in British English varieties the two vowels are distinct and it doesn't make sense. In addition there are dozens of examples in both books which are more or less intelligible to British readers, but which no-one here would ever actually say or write, either because our idiom is different or our social reality is. Who in Britain needs a non-sexist equivalent for *busboy* ('waiter's assistant')? Who could contemplate *state trooper* as an alternative to *policeman*?

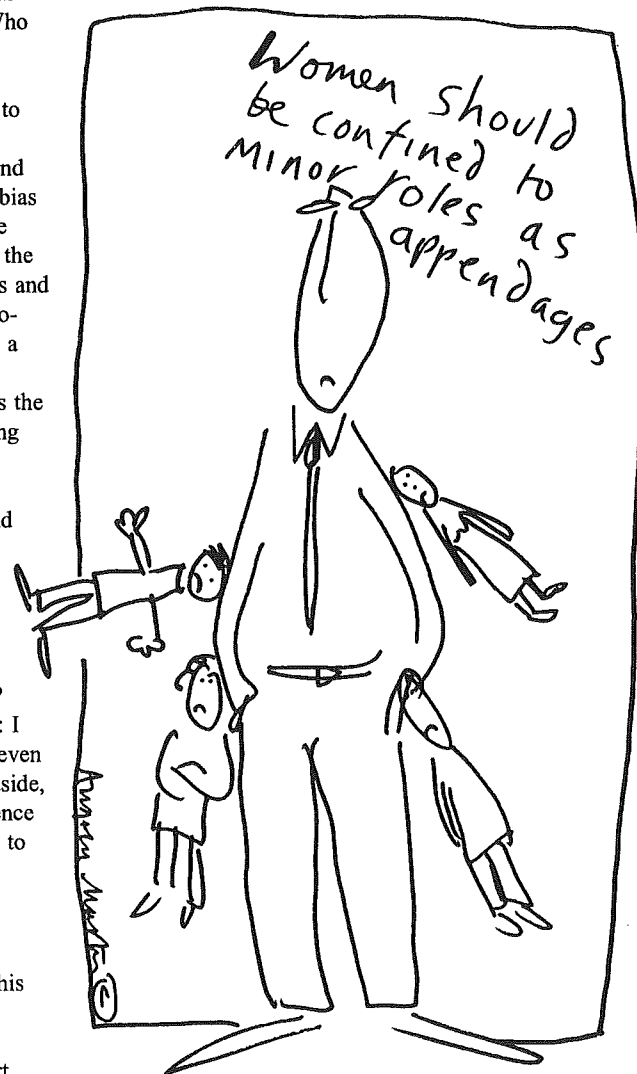
The Women's Press preface to Miller and Swift's book comments that the American bias is 'of secondary importance' so long as 'the message comes across loud and clear'. But the argument that it's what you say that matters and not how you say it seems singularly inappropriate in a book about *language*. Isn't there a rather obvious analogy between expecting British readers to treat American English as the generic norm of English usage and expecting women to take men as the generic norm of English grammar?

The message that comes across loud and clear to me is that America calls the shots in the English-language publishing industry. Otherwise why, after all these years, can a British publisher not commission a native speaker of British English to write a handbook for the British market? This isn't intended to be a chauvinist point: I have nothing against US usage *per se*, but even leaving questions of cultural imperialism aside, you can't produce a useful linguistic reference text if the examples don't relate concretely to the usage of the target audience.

No politics please, we're English-speaking

The obtuseness of the Women's Press on this point is paralleled by the authors' lack of understanding of the politics of language. Margaret Doyle gets off to an abysmal start

with the very first sentence of her introduction, which reads: 'English can credit its survival to its marvellous adaptability'. She is not the first and will not be the last writer to pad out a discussion with platitudes about the unique marvels of the English language (I think they are kept in a large biscuit tin at the back of the office of every publisher, and doled out to authors at random); but a feminist ought not to swallow such offensive nonsense (try substituting the word 'patriarchy' for 'English' and see if you still feel like cheering). A more accurate if less catchy rendition might be: 'English owes its current privileged position in the world to the historical power and current political dominance of some of the nation-states



in which it is the majority language'.

The implication of Doyle's remark is that languages which have not survived, like Cornish, or whose survival is precarious, like Irish and Cherokee, are in this position because of a lack of 'adaptability'. Really, what these languages lacked were speakers with institutional power, and what killed or maimed them was imperialism. Even if English really were more 'adaptable' than, say, Spanish, Arabic or Chinese, the qualities of the language itself would not insulate it from the effects of wider social and historical forces. Look what happened to Latin.

All this may seem irrelevant in a discussion of sexism in language (though linguistic imperialism certainly isn't irrelevant to all women, a point I will come back to later on). However, if someone cannot understand the relationship between language and power in its starkest and most obvious form—which languages survive and which do not—then it is unlikely their analysis of sexism will be any more incisive. One of the most serious problems with most current handbooks is that they do not have anything like an adequate concept of power. They are liberal to a fault, determinedly inoffensive, and as a result totally lacking in clarity or conviction.

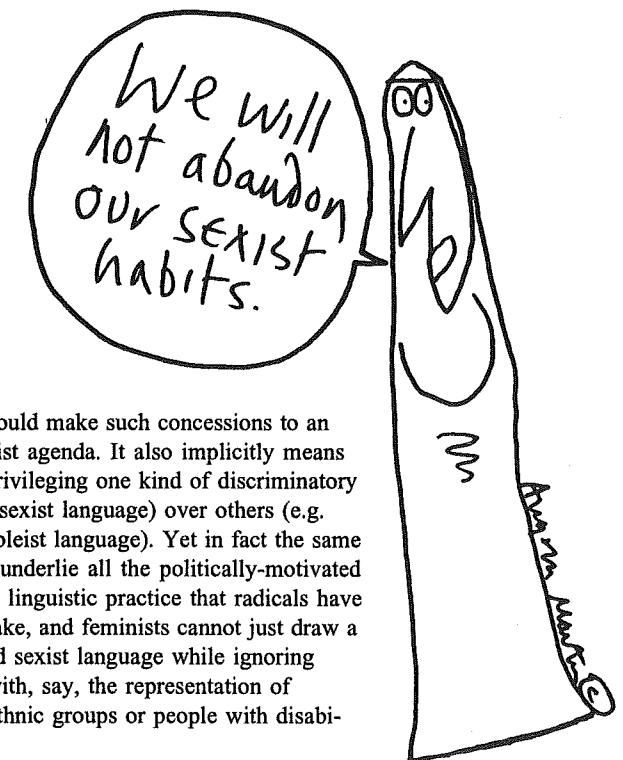
No political correctness please, we're feminists

The shortcomings of the liberal approach are revealed in what is said in the two Women's Press handbooks about 'political correctness'. It's obvious why they feel the need to refer to the issue: since the early 1990s the smear-term 'political correctness' has provided a new pretext for attacking the whole idea of politically-motivated linguistic reform. The subject was bound to come up, but I was hoping the authors would take the opportunity to launch a spirited feminist attack on the new clothes in which anti-feminists have taken to dressing up their ancient and fatuous arguments.

No such luck. What's startling is the defensiveness of the authors' responses. While they do suggest that the PC furore is basically reactionary, the line they take is to argue that fears of censorship and brainwashing are simply mistaken, and particularly unjustified in the case of non-sexist language. They don't engage with the politics, but focus instead on the sweet reasonableness of feminist reforms: Miller and

Swift for instance dwell on how wrong-headed the anti-PC brigade are being when they suggest that 'advocates of equality are attempting to restrict freedom of speech and enforce language rules' (p.x). Later I will explain why I think this is a completely incoherent argument even on its own terms; but first I want to point out another serious political problem with using it in this context.

To put the point briefly, stressing that (liberal) feminists are not authoritarian extremists in matters of language gives rise to the implication (not directly stated, but not denied either) that some of those attacked under the heading of 'political correctness' are authoritarian extremists, and their arguments about language can therefore be dismissed. This is problematic for several reasons. For a start, who on earth do Miller, Swift and Doyle think will be reading their soothing remarks in search of reassurance? The main market for these particular books is women who identify as feminists, and it's insulting that feminist



authors should make such concessions to an anti-feminist agenda. It also implicitly means they are privileging one kind of discriminatory language (sexist language) over others (e.g. racist or ableist language). Yet in fact the same principles underlie all the politically-motivated changes in linguistic practice that radicals have tried to make, and feminists cannot just draw a line around sexist language while ignoring parallels with, say, the representation of minority ethnic groups or people with disabilities.

Missing links and missing words

Far from worrying about excessive 'political correctness', I find it both astonishing and

disturbing that allegedly feminist handbooks are still, in 1995, so completely *inattentive* to the need for guidance on usage in areas where sexism interacts with other oppressions, or where differences exist among women. Among many entries which surprisingly do *not* appear in *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language* are 'black', 'disability', and 'lesbian' (yes, seriously, Doyle skips from *leprechaun* to *liftman* without a mention of the word, though *dyke* is marked 'use with care' and *homosexual* is identified as problematic because it can exclude women—no mention of any other objections to it.)

Partly these omissions are because the *A-Z* is most concerned with telling readers what words to avoid rather than discussing shades of meaning within current feminist usage (a negative emphasis which I find problematic in itself). But the consequence is that if you constructed a picture of British society from the examples that appear in the *A-Z*, it would be as dominated by white Anglo-Saxon middle-class professionals as a 1950s propaganda film, the only difference being that the cast is now all-female. Miller and Swift are slightly better on race, but you won't find any specific guidance in either of the handbooks about, for instance, the forms of naming and polite address used by



women in any British or US community where English is not the only language in use—though this is an area where many majority-group members lack the most basic information needed to address/write about other women in a respectful manner (if only by getting their names in the right order).

If 'political correctness' means paying attention to the implications of *all* the words you use in an effort to avoid recycling disrespectful and oppressive propositions, I would say that non-sexist language guidelines need more of it rather than less. But in any case, as I said before, the argument about why feminist linguistic reform should not be confused with extreme and nasty 'political correctness' is completely incoherent.

Liberal arguments: 'DO NOT USE'

This argument turns on the idea that non-sexist language is *not prescriptive*, not about telling people what they can and can't say or write. Or as Margaret Doyle puts it: 'Inclusive language is not narrow and prescriptive; it does not aim to create a canon of "politically correct" words. It aims instead to clarify and distinguish, to move away from labelling and name-calling' (p.5).

Sorry, have I missed something here? Of course language guidelines are 'prescriptive'; what else could they be, and what would be the good of them otherwise? When Margaret Doyle says, in her entry for the phrase *old maid*, 'DO NOT USE', the reader may have a choice about whether to adopt this prescription or reject it, but that doesn't mean the actual guideline is not prescriptive: 'do not use' is clearly a prescription—and quite right too.

Non-sexist language may seem less 'narrow' than the masculinist norm, but the effect of taking it seriously is inevitably to 'narrow' writers' choices (for instance, they can no longer refer to someone as an 'old maid'). Of course, it is also true of the masculinist norm that it restricts writers' choices, though people are less likely to notice restrictions which have been in force for centuries.

The point is, it is true by definition of all linguistic norms (feminist or otherwise) that they 'create a canon' of acceptable (and unacceptable) usage. There is no point denying this; denying that your guidelines have any particular agenda only means that you will not be able to make a convincing argument for

preferring them to the alternatives.

The idea that non-sexist language aims to 'clarify and distinguish' is so thoroughly confusing that I honestly don't know what it means: do we really have to 'clarify' the fact that women exist? Of course not: the problem is not that some people remain unaware of our existence, it is that they choose not to acknowledge it, or (just as often) to disparage it. As for 'distinguish', frequently non-sexist language is based on the principle of *not* making traditional gender distinctions (like *poet/poetess*)—antifeminists have harped for years on the loss of fine distinctions that non-sexist language entails, a red herring to which Doyle here gives credence. And 'mov[ing] away from labelling' is an odd way to describe an enterprise whose real aim is to *change* the labels we hang on the world, not get rid of them (which would be equivalent to getting rid of language itself).

No offence, please, we're sensitive

The reference to 'name-calling' is also obscure, but I think what Doyle has in mind is an idea which is rapidly becoming language-guideline orthodoxy, and which I find infuriating: the idea that avoiding terms which are racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, etc. is just a matter of 'civility' or 'sensitivity' (the word the BBC chose in its recent guidelines for broadcast language). In other words, you wouldn't want to hurt the tender feelings of Black/female/disabled/gay and lesbian people, who sometimes listen to the radio or read a book, and as we all know are very sensitive about their unfortunate disadvantages.

Apart from being patronising enough to pulverise your brain, this view logically implies that if the groups in question were not represented in a particular audience, there would be no reason at all to bother about linguistic bigotry. It's always a wonder to behold how our ruling elites can reduce political challenges to a gentleman's code prescribing courtesy to those less fortunate than yourself; but when the same argument turns up in feminist writing it's time to get seriously worried. The new commandment non-sexist language gurus urge upon us—'Thou shalt not offend'—is an impossible one to observe while retaining any coherent political outlook at all. When you politicise language, or more exactly draw attention to the fact that it always was political, you are bound to give offence to someone. The only question

is who; and this too is a political choice.

Mixed messages

Overall, what we get from the remarks I've just dissected is a totally mixed message: 'we want you to use non-sexist language, but we don't want you to think that this will restrict your freedom of expression in any way, or make you sound offensive to anyone'. Of course, this is totally spurious. One might have thought the entire point of non-sexist guidelines was to restrict the freedom of sexists to air their prejudices in the public sphere of language, or hide behind 'the rules of grammar' as a convenient excuse for prejudice. The sexists understand this, even if the guideline-writers don't: that's why they do in fact take offence, greeting even the mildest non-sexist language proposals with such weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.



The proposals themselves, and the accompanying arguments, appear to be getting milder all the time. Doyle's use of the term 'inclusive language' as if it were interchangeable with 'non-sexist language' tells us much about what she considers sexism to be: a lack of inclusiveness. The creed of 'inclusiveness' is that language should include everybody, women and men alike; that careless use of words can make either sex feel bad; that expressions like 'women and children first' (do men's lives not matter?) are deplorably sexist, and that non-inclusive language distorts a reality in which women and men are marching side by side towards an ever-more-equal future. Blah, blah, blah.

There are two shortcomings here. One is the liberal failure to see sexism as a systemic relation of power, as opposed to a set of misguided beliefs and stereotypes about men and women. 'Women and children first' is a sexist expression, but not because it discriminates against men: it belongs to a patriarchal discourse in which men are there to 'protect' women and children—the women and children



being by implication men's property, men's to control.

The other shortcoming is the naive concept of language as a purely representational medium whose purpose is to reflect reality accurately. If that were true, then conventional sexist language would do the job well enough, since we (still) live in a sexist world. But in fact language is ideological. The same reality can be represented in any number of ways, and the power of linguistic conventions lies precisely in the selectiveness with which they represent the world, making one way of perceiving reality seem like the only natural way.

'Non-sexist as she is spoke?'

Feminists are of course right to object when it comes to seem 'natural' that the world represented in writing and speech should be peopled exclusively by men, or that women should be confined to minor roles as appendages, victims, nurturers, sex-objects and idiots. But mechanically replacing this picture with an 'inclusive' version of the world has some peculiar implications of its own—notably the curious idea that if only some word or concept can be made 'inclusive', we need ask no further questions about what it actually means.

This reminds me of the assumption behind bad foreign-language phrasebooks: that communication in a new language can be achieved by making a word-by-word literal translation from the old one. The problem is conceived as purely technical, a question of not knowing the Finnish for 'where are the toilets', or the non-sexist for 'I can't wear man-made fibres'. So a typical entry in a non-sexist language handbook is a 'troublesome' expression like 'man-made' followed by a series of non-sexist equivalents ('constructed', 'artificial', 'human caused').

A Portuguese friend once showed me an old phrasebook called *English as she is spoke*, which makes crystal clear that you do not get an acceptable translation by just substituting one word for another. The crucial aspect of language is meaning: the point of non-sexist language is not to change the forms of words for the sake of it but to change the repertoire of meanings a language conveys. It's about redefining rather than merely renaming the world—a point which many current guideline-writers seem to grasp imperfectly if at all.

The phrasebook approach might work for terms like 'man-made [artificial] fibre', but in many cases literal translation is not only hard to do, it is not worth attempting in the first place. Another well-known source of humour in old phrasebooks is their inclusion of bizarre remarks like 'lo, the postilion has been struck by lightning', where the question is not so



much how you would express this in another language as why you would ever want to say it at all. The same question might well be asked about some of the entries in non-sexist language guidelines.

Inclusive instincts

I find it extraordinary, for instance, that *The A-Z of Non-sexist Language* should include an entry telling me what to substitute for the sexist expression 'maternal instinct' (the suggested 'inclusive' alternatives are 'parental instinct' and 'nurturing instinct'). The reason why the first of these options in particular sounds ludicrous is exactly the reason why we do not need a non-sexist expression for this concept: the idea of an 'instinct' to nurture children acquires 100% of its meaning and force from a sexist frame of reference which attributes this 'instinct' to women. Detached from that frame, the whole concept becomes meaningless—why would we use it except to assert that female biology is destiny? The correct thing to do with 'maternal instinct' is file it under 'history of sexist ideas' along with 'wandering womb' (or would the handbook compilers want to revive this term in a new 'inclusive' form like 'wandering gonad'?)

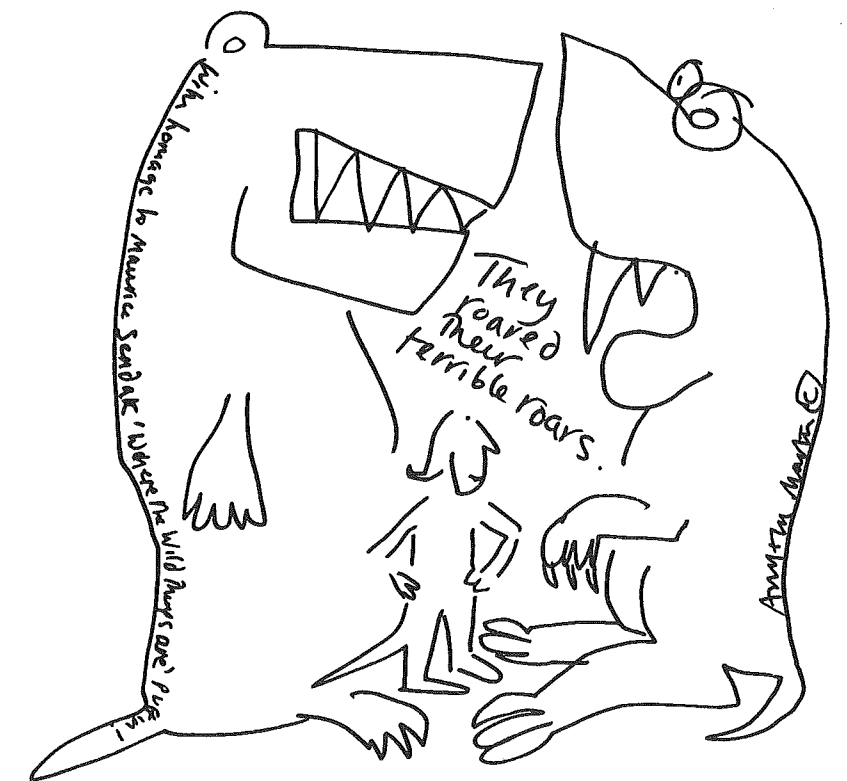
Automatically translating sexist into non-sexist language will be superficial, ineffectual, and on occasion actually counterproductive, unless the process is at some point mediated by the exercise of a writer's critical faculties. Unfortunately, the handbooks and guidelines being churned out nowadays seem designed almost to prevent this critical intervention from

happening. They are, in fact, the feminist equivalent of Roget's Thesaurus: lists of allegedly interchangeable words which have been so decontextualised and so detached from any coherent political analysis of language, we might as well use them as many people use Roget, to do crossword puzzles with.

Unnecessary evils

I've always been ambivalent about language guidelines because of the risk that they will be applied in a totally mechanical way, without the thought and reflection which I would define as the key point in any truly progressive linguistic practice. In an ideal world I would rather people thought about language and took responsibility for their own use of it (if they're sexists, by all means let them express that clearly and take any flak that results).

But this is not an ideal world, and I concede there is a place in it for guidelines (for instance, in composing texts which represent an institution rather than being attributed to an individual author). It is also true in my experience that many people, while they are not necessarily inflexible bigots, do need clarification of the arguments and assistance with the details if they are to abandon their sexist habits. And



these people are very poorly served by most of the guidelines in common use today.

I have already criticised the liberalism underpinning most efforts in this field. That isn't just because I am politically opposed to liberalism, it's also because liberal arguments about language, placed in the context of a set of guidelines about how to use it, are inherently contradictory and consequently self-defeating.



Once you have made the decision to have language guidelines, it is no good abdicating the authority which comes with the territory, or trying to minimise it with arguments that wouldn't convince even a basically sympathetic audience, let alone the sceptical one many guidelines will actually encounter.

Anyone who has ever been responsible for producing an institutional policy within the 'orthodox' framework I have described will recognise the problems that result. If you confront people with the patently ridiculous claim that nonsexist language rules are not restrictive in any way, you will provoke bitter and pointless arguments which would be better directed to the actual substance of the restrictions ('No, you can't call the students "girls" and this is why'). If you do not explain to people what the *political* rationale is for identifying certain ways of using language as 'sexist', they may stick to the letter of your prescriptions, but they will disregard the spirit.

Margaret Doyle, *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language* (Women's Press Handbook Series, 1995)

Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing for Writers, Editors and Speakers*, 3rd British edn. (Women's Press Handbook Series, 1995).

They will think, or pretend to think, that the problem is not to do with meaning or content, but simply consists of a few isolated forms like 'man', and the solution is to mechanically change every occurrence of these forms irrespective of the context (this is the source of all those side-splitting examples like 'person-agement'). If you do not provide realistic examples consisting of more than single words, you will get non-sexist prose which reads like the minutes of a particularly dull committee meeting translated from the Hungarian by a computer. In sum, if you cannot get people to understand what they are supposed to be doing and why, there is no chance they will do it with any commitment or skill.

For all kinds of reasons, I regard guidelines on non-sexist language in the abstract as a necessary evil. Most concretely existing examples, however, are an unnecessary evil—a dire combination of liberalism, self-righteousness and downright muddled thinking, in whose alphabet A is for Apologetic, B is for Banal and C is for Confused. Guideline-writers should grasp the nettle and do their job, which is both to prescribe and to persuade: not by stroking ('this won't hurt at all') or indeed by guilt-tripping ('better do what I say or you'll hurt my feelings') but by presenting arguments about language and power that will actually bear scrutiny. □



Redstockings Manifesto

Redstockings, a New York based radical feminist group, was founded in 1969, by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis. The name was a pun on the derogatory label 'bluestocking' used to describe intellectual women in the early twentieth century. The much-publicised feminist protest at the 1968 Miss America beauty contest was a turning point in radical feminist history. Two hundred women disrupted this event by shouting slogans such as 'Women are people, not livestock', and inviting women to throw all implements of 'female torture' (such as hair curlers, corsets and high heeled shoes) into a 'freedom trash can'. From that action the press coined the inaccurate but nonetheless germane term 'bra-burners' for feminist activists. New York Radical Women, who organised the protest, later split into various radical feminist groups, including Redstockings, WITCH, The Feminists, and New York Radical Feminists. This core of intensely committed, dynamic and inventive radical feminists in New York City, produced many of the key concepts of second wave feminism as well as a vocabulary with which to discuss them: 'the personal is political', 'sisterhood is powerful', and 'consciousness raising'.



I After centuries of individual and preliminary political struggle, women are uniting to achieve their final liberation from male supremacy. Redstockings is dedicated to building this unity and winning our freedom.

II Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior human beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives. Our humanity is denied. Our prescribed behaviour is enforced by the threat of physical violence.

Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition. This creates the illusion that a woman's relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out

individually. In reality, every such relationship is a *class* relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are *political* conflicts that can only be solved collectively.

III We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. Men have controlled all political, economic, and cultural institutions and backed up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women.

The Redstockings Manifesto is reprinted from *The Vintage Book of Feminism*, edited by Miriam Schneir (Vintage Books, Toronto, 1994)



Grizelda Grizlingham

IV Attempts have been made to shift the burden of responsibility from men to institutions or to women themselves. We condemn these arguments as evasions. Institutions alone do not oppress; they are merely tools of the oppressor. To blame institutions implies that men and women are equally victimised, obscures the fact that men benefit from the subordination of women, and gives men the excuse that they are forced to be oppressors. On the contrary, any man is free to renounce his superior position provided that he is willing to be treated like a woman by other men.

We also reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression. Women's submission is not the result of brainwashing, stupidity, or mental illness, but of continual, daily pressure from men. We do not need to change ourselves, but to change men.

The most slanderous evasion of all is that women can oppress men. The basis for this illusion is the isolation of individual relationships from their political context and the tendency of men to see any legitimate challenge to their privileges as persecution.

V We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalisation and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience.

Our chief task at present is to develop female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist

Grizelda Grizlingham

foundation of all our institutions.

Consciousness-raising is not 'therapy', which implies the existence of individual solutions and falsely assumes that the male-female relationship is purely personal, but the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives.

The first requirement for raising class consciousness is honesty, in private and in public, with ourselves and other women.

VI We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman.

We repudiate all economic, racial, educational, or status privileges that divide us from other women. We are determined to recognise and eliminate any prejudices we may hold against other women.

We are committed to achieving internal democracy. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every woman in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential.

VII We call on all our sisters to unite with us in struggle.

We call on all men to give up their male privileges and support women's liberation in the interest of our humanity and their own.

In fighting for our liberation, we will always take the side of women against their oppressors. We will not ask what is 'revolutionary' or 'reformist', only what is good for women.

The time for individual skirmishes has passed. This time we are going all the way. □



Straight Talking

Heterosexuality: an oppressive political institution or just one sexual identity among others? Discussions of heterosexuality and feminism are fraught with disagreement and confusion. Here Stevi Jackson attempts to find a way through the debate. She points out that one reason why the subject generates more heat than light is that writers are often disagreeing about totally different things. These disagreements may look 'theoretical', but really they are political.

Many feminists have drawn attention to the need to dissociate critiques of institutionalised heterosexuality from criticisms of individual heterosexual women, but this separation has not always been easy to maintain. I believe that this problem is bound up with a wider one: that we have yet to find satisfactory ways of conceptualising sexuality as fully social.

The starting point for most feminists is that the current ordering of heterosexual relations is detrimental to women and implicated in our subordination. In making sexuality a political issue feminists insist that it can be changed, thus challenging the assumption that sexual desires and practices are fixed by nature. Viewing sexuality as socially constructed thus follows from politicising it. While the majority of feminists agree that sexuality is socially constructed rather than natural, there is no consensus on what we mean by social construction, nor on how it should be analysed.

Although feminist analyses of sexuality share a common point of departure, they have developed along diverging paths, guided by differing political and theoretical priorities. Three main strands of analysis have developed over the last two decades, none of which is necessarily limited to any one theoretical or political position but which have, in practice, become associated with particular variants of feminism. What is distinctive about each of these tendencies is the object of their analysis, precisely what they see as being socially constructed. Each emphasises a specific aspect of sexuality—the centrality of male domination, the variability and plasticity of sexuality or the construction of our individual desires. It is my contention that each of these facets of the social construction of sexuality must be addressed and that we should find ways of exploring the ways in which they intersect with each other. What has tended to happen,



however, is that particular groups of theorists concentrate on one aspect of sexuality to the exclusion of others and, because each is pursuing its own political and theoretical agenda, little genuine interchange of ideas takes place.

In mapping out these divisions I am not trying to find some neutral 'middle ground': I write from a particular theoretical and political position as a materialist radical feminist and from a specific personal location as a white heterosexual academic feminist. I want to explore some of these issues and debates in order to seek a way forward for feminist analysis. I will begin by outlining the main issues addressed by the three strands of analysis I have identified, drawing out some of the essential insights that we need to build on, as well as pinpointing some problems and gaps in our thinking.

Sexuality and male power

The first tendency I have identified, which locates sexuality as a site of male power, had its roots in feminist political activism, in efforts to challenge men's sexual appropriation and abuse of women. This form of analysis has been pursued primarily, but not exclusively, by radical feminists. It has given rise to analyses of sexual violence and pornography and, more generally, of the ways in which sexuality had been defined and constructed from a masculine perspective. The social construction of sexuality is here seen as patriarchal, as serving the interests of men, as coercing women into compulsory heterosexuality. It is therefore linked to a structural analysis of patriarchy (as for example, in Catharine MacKinnon's work). Moreover, the erotic itself is understood as culturally constituted, so that current definitions of eroticism are shaped by the patterns of domination and subordination intrinsic to patriarchal societies and written into their cultural representations. Examples of this argument can be found in Susanne Kappeler's *The Pornography of Representation* and Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer's *The Lust to Kill*.

Curiously, radical feminist perspectives of this kind are often misread as essentialist, as implying that men are naturally sexually violent and predatory and that women are innately loving and egalitarian. It is very odd that a perspective dedicated to challenging and

changing both male and female sexuality and to radically transforming our ideas about what is erotic should be seen as biologically determinist. Nonetheless this has become a familiar theme in attacks on radical feminism (see Debbie Cameron's article in *T&S* 27). Our emphasis on coercive aspects of sexuality and on the interconnections between sexuality and women's oppression has also led to the charge that radical feminists cannot deal with sexual pleasure and are simply anti-sex. This caricature both ignores the diversity of opinion among radical feminists and equates opposition to specific sexual practices with an anti-erotic stance.

There are nonetheless aspects of sexuality which are under-theorised from a radical feminist perspective. Radical feminists have not devoted much attention in print to the ways in which sexuality is constructed at the level of our individual feelings, identities and practices. While generally assuming that specific sexual desires and preferences are learnt, we have had little to say about how this happens. Given our emphasis on power, radical feminists need to think more about issues of agency and subjectivity, about the connections between the structural bases of patriarchal power and the ways in which it is exercised, experienced and resisted at the level of personal sexual relations.

The variability of sexuality

Radical feminists endorse the idea that human sexuality is historically and culturally variable. This is fundamental to all forms of social constructionism, since it challenges the notion that human sexuality is fixed by nature and therefore holds out the possibility of transforming sexual relations in the future. Historical work on sexuality has been undertaken from a range of perspectives. Radical feminists' contributions have included Sheila Jeffreys' work on the pathologising of lesbian relations and Margaret Jackson's analysis of sexological constructions of sexuality. The idea that radical feminists regard sexual relations as fixed and unchanging is another false stereotype.

The agenda for much academic writing in this area, however, has been set by other feminists, particularly those influenced by the French theorist Michel Foucault. The appeal of Foucault to feminists lies in his radical anti-essentialism and his view of power as constituting sexuality, rather than merely repressing it.

On the other hand feminists have found fault with Foucault's acutely blinkered attitude to gender and with his view of power as diffused throughout society. This conception of power—as everywhere and nowhere, rather than concentrated in the hands of the privileged—is difficult to reconcile with structural inequalities, with the real material power men have over women. This may explain why Foucault is so attractive to some of those who used to call themselves marxist feminists, who were always reluctant to accept the degree to which individual men act to perpetuate women's subordination and benefit from it.

Feminists working within a Foucauldian framework have made gender a central issue. They have explored the ways in which scientific, medical and legal discourses have historically defined the 'truth' of female sexuality and subjected it to regulation through the power of discourse to name, classify and categorise. (For example, distinctions between 'normal' heterosexual femininity and lesbian 'perversity', between the pure wife and mother and the impure whore, are products of discourse.) Such analyses are often useful in drawing attention to major shifts in the construction of female sexuality, but tend to overlook historical continuities. For example, Carol Smart contends that women were constructed as 'unruly subjects' (as if out of nowhere) in the Victorian era. As a result she ignores the ways in which men have long thought of women as unruly and sought to control their sexual activities. This emphasis on historical shifts coupled with the denial of structural power relations means that Foucauldian feminists fail to recognise the persistence of patriarchal domination and its resilience and adaptability under changing historical conditions.

Sexuality is also subject to variability at any given time. We need to consider the intersections of gender and sexuality with class, race and other social divisions, to think about the ways in which dominant discourses around sexuality have been framed from a predominantly white and middle class, as well as male and heterosexual, perspective. Although some attention has been given to these issues, particularly to the racism embedded in Western sexual discourses and practices, Foucauldian perspectives tend to focus on sexual diversity *per se*, on 'sexualities'. Here the lack of

attention to structural bases of power can become highly problematic especially when coupled with the denial of importance of gender, as in Gayle Rubin's work. There is then no way of establishing similarities underpinning diverse 'sexualities', of relating them to dominant modes of heterosexual practice or of locating them within power hierarchies. Instead attention is directed to the 'outlaw' status of various 'sexual minorities' each judged, from a libertarian perspective, as equally worthy of protection from persecution. That there is a world of difference between a street prostitute and a millionaire pornographer, and between a man who has sex with a child and that child, is not attended to.

Libertarian arguments draw on Foucault only selectively emphasising resistance to power in the name of 'bodies and pleasures', but losing sight of the way power constructs desire. Bodies and pleasures are treated as unproblematic and diverse forms of sexuality are taken as given, already there to be outlawed. This brings us back to the model of repression which Foucault so effectively critiqued. The false equation of the transgressive with the progressive is in fact framed from within the very discourses it seeks to subvert. Both libertarian and authoritarian perspectives on sexuality tend to afford it an overly privileged position; sexual license is seen either as the route to personal fulfilment and social liberation or as leading to individual degradation and social disintegration.

I find Foucauldian analysis interesting in sensitising us to the many, often contradictory, ways in which sexuality has been constructed and regulated. However, its inability to deal with the pervasiveness of patriarchal power, with the ways in which what counts as sexual has been constructed in terms of gender hierarchy is a major problem for feminist theory. The idea that our sense of what is sexual, including our desires and practices, is a product of the particular discourses circulating in our society is potentially useful. But, whereas Foucault sees the concept of discourse as antithetical to ideology, I would argue that we need to retain a concept of discourses as ideological—in that they can serve to obscure or legitimate relations of domination and subordination. Discursive constructions of sexuality have produced very particular 'truths' which have defined male dominance and

heterosexuality as natural and inevitable.

Individual desires

This still leaves us with the problem of the relationship between our individual desires and the discourses circulating within society. Some feminists, notably Chris Weedon and Wendy Hollway, have applied Foucault to the problem of subjectivity by analysing how we locate or position ourselves within discourses. This has not, however, led to a thorough exploration of the processes by which we become gendered, sexual beings. Indeed, when it comes to this question, Foucault is frequently abandoned in favour of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis has established a virtual monopoly on theorising the construction of sexuality at the level of the individual subject, despite the numerous cogent critiques of it. Many feminists and sociologists agree that psychoanalysis is ahistorical, that it rests on essentialist premises. Moreover, psychoanalysis depends upon interpreting children's emotions through a filter of adult assumptions and then makes incredible conceptual leaps from presumed infantile frustrations and gratifications to adult sexual desires and practices. Importantly psychoanalysis makes no distinction between gender and sexuality: the two are conflated and ultimately reduced to the gender of our 'object choice'. As Judith Butler puts it in her critique of psychoanalysis: 'one either identifies with a sex or desires it, but only these two relations are possible' (p 333).

Psychoanalysis has been so influential largely because of the lack of viable alternatives. It is not that there are no other theories, but that they are either inadequate or underdeveloped. Most social scientific models are far too simplistic and mechanistic to deal with the complexities of human sexuality, although some feminists have made use of the sociological notion of 'sexual scripts'. The perspective from which this idea has been developed (symbolic interactionism) concentrates on the ways in which meanings are constructed and negotiated through our interaction with others. Its drawbacks are similar to those of Foucauldian theory, in that it is unable to deal with power and ideology. If this problem could be overcome, however, both 'scripts' and 'discourses' are concepts which could be useful. Both presuppose the existence of particular cultural narratives which shape our under-

standing of sexuality, but they allow for our active involvement or agency in the construction of our individual sexualities. Little progress has, however, been made here. For those who are sceptical of psychoanalysis the lack of a convincing theory of subjectivity is a major gap in feminist theory.

Rethinking sexuality

In theorising sexuality we need a means of understanding how we become gendered and how we become sexual without conflating gender and sexuality, without assuming that particular forms of desire automatically follow from feminine or masculine gender and without positing 'heterosexual desire' and 'lesbian desire' as monolithic entities. We need some understanding of how the process of becoming sexual is related to discourses on sexuality circulating within our culture and how these in turn are related to structural inequalities, particular gender inequality. We need to weave these strands together in such a way as to recognise the force of cultural and ideological constructions of sexuality and the constraints of social structure, but without denying human agency and therefore the possibility of resistance and change. This enterprise, in my view, also requires that we do not over-privilege sexuality.

Part of the problem we have in thinking about sexuality derives from the symbolic weight it is made to carry, the way it is conventionally singled out as 'special', as qualitatively different from other aspects of social life. Gayle Rubin calls this 'the fallacy of misplaced scale' and associates it with 'sex negativity', the ways in which our culture has associated sex with sin. It is, however, as evident in libertarian attitudes to sexuality as in moralistic ones. Feminists need to give more critical attention to this cultural obsession with sexuality, including the ways in which it shapes the theories that we ourselves have produced.

This does not make sexuality any less central to feminist analysis. On the contrary, the cultural significance accorded to sexuality is bound up with the ways in which women's oppression has been legitimated (for example by reducing women to their sexuality). That being so, we should be wary of treating sexuality as important in and of itself, since the importance it is accorded derives from ways in which it is interrelated with other aspects of

women's subordination. If we are to understand sexuality in context, neither giving it causal priority nor treating it in isolation, we must explore these connections.

Gender is of crucial significance here. While I would insist on the necessity of relating sexuality to gender, I am firmly convinced that the latter is more important than the former. (Here my perspective differs from that of some other radical feminists, notably Catharine MacKinnon, who see gender as constructed through sexuality.) My position is derived from Christine Delphy's argument that gender, the existence of 'men' and 'women' as social categories, is a product of hierarchy. Gender is not determined by anatomical sex; rather hierarchy precedes division. Sex becomes a mark of difference because of patriarchal domination. Sexuality, in particular institutionalised heterosexuality, is woven into this hierarchy. From this perspective gender is not simply an abstract idea, or a 'discursive construct', as postmodernists put it. 'Men' and 'women' are materially existing social groups founded on the unequal exploitative relation between them. Whereas postmodernists and Queer theorists (such as Judith Butler) see heterosexuality as founded on the privileging of cross-sex desires, materialist feminists see it primarily as a gendered hierarchy which involves a great deal more than desire. It is rooted fundamentally in the appropriation of women's bodies and labour.

Heterosexuality and feminism

Radical feminists have always treated heterosexuality as problematic and been sensitive to the pervasiveness and ubiquity of power within sexual relations. Power imbalances are not confined to heterosexuality. Radical feminists have also analysed the ways in which the heterosexual framing of desire impinges on lesbian sexuality. Here analyses of heterosexuality have played an important role in anchoring critiques of those lesbian and gay sexual practices (such as S&M) which eroticise power and of the libertarian theorists who defend and celebrate these practices.

If we are serious about endorsing a social constructionist position, we must accept that those who are fugitives from compulsory heterosexuality do not necessarily escape from its influence. We all learn to be sexual in a society in which 'real sex' is defined as

heterosexual penetration, in which sexual activity is thought of in terms of active subject and passive object, in which passion is often infused with fantasies of domination and submission. Thus it seems to me that a critique of heterosexuality needs to underpin all theorising about sexuality.

This is precisely what is missing from many libertarian analyses. In defending sexual 'pluralism' it is often forgotten that feminist theories of sexuality began by questioning the relations of dominance and submission inscribed in conventional heterosexual practice, suggesting that such relations were neither natural nor inevitable but resulted from the hierarchical ordering of gender. Many of the 'sexualities' currently being defended or promoted reproduce these hierarchies whether in the form of sado-masochism or 'cross-generational relations' (Rubin's euphemism for child sexual abuse). There is no questioning of where such desires come from. As Debbie Cameron and Liz Frazer argue: 'the analysis begins from existing desires and thereby takes them to be "natural", immutable and ultimately valid' (*The Lust to Kill*, p 173).

Institutionalised heterosexuality and the question of identity

As it is institutionalised within society and culture, heterosexuality is founded upon gender hierarchy, upon men's appropriation of women's bodies and labour: the implicit terms of the marriage contract. The benefits men gain through their dominant position in the gender order are by no means reducible to the sexual and reproductive use of women's bodies. In marriage, for example, the home comforts produced by a wife's domestic labour are probably far more important to a man's well-being and his ability to maintain his position as a man than the sexual servicing he receives.

Nonetheless, a man does acquire sexual rights in a woman by virtue of marriage and a woman who is not visibly under the protection of a man can be regarded as fair sexual game by other men. Fear of sexual violence and harassment is also one means by which women are policed and police themselves: for example in restricting their own access to public space, choosing where to sit on a bus or train, how they sit and whom they avoid eye contact with. Here we can see the intersection between institutionalised male domination and our

everyday social practices. The institution-alisation of heterosexuality also works ideologically, through the discourses and forms of representations which define sex in phallogocentric terms, which position men as sexual subjects and women as sexual objects.

Because heterosexuality is the privileged norm in our society, it is rarely thought of as an identity and the vast majority of heterosexual women probably do not define themselves as such. Nonetheless many of the identities available to women derive from their location within heterosexual relations—as men's wives, girlfriends, daughters or mothers. Attachment to these identities affects the ways in which women experience the institution and practices of heterosexuality. For example, women's ambivalent feelings about housework, their unwillingness to be critical of the appropriation of their labour, even when they are aware of the inequity of their situation, springs from their feelings about those they work for and from their desire to be good wives and mothers. In sexual terms, too, women's identities are likely to be shaped by heterosexual imperatives—the need to attract and please a man.

To name oneself as heterosexual is to make visible an identity which is generally treated as an unquestioned fact of life. This can be a means of problematising heterosexuality and challenging its privileged status. For women, however, being heterosexual is not a situation of unproblematic privilege. Heterosexual feminists may benefit from appearing 'normal' and unthreatening, but heterosexuality as an institution entails a hierarchical relation between (social) men and (social) women. Resistance to subordination within this hierarchy is fundamental to feminist politics.

It is hardly surprising, then, that heterosexual feminists prefer to be defined in terms of their feminism—their resistance—rather than their heterosexuality, their relation to men (see Julia Swindells in *T&S* 26). Resisting the label heterosexual, though, has its problems. It can imply a refusal to question and challenge both the institution and one's own practice; it can serve to invalidate lesbianism as a form of resistance to patriarchy and to deny the specific forms of oppression that lesbians face. For these reasons many lesbian feminists may share Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson's scepticism about those who 'call for the dissolution of the dichotomous categories "lesbian" and "hetero-

sexual"'.

Questioning this distinction, however, need not be a way of avoiding the politics of lesbianism or getting heterosexual feminists off the hook; it can represent an honest attempt to problematise heterosexuality. Nor is it only heterosexual feminists who are engaged in this deconstructive enterprise, but also lesbian Queer theorists such as Diana Fuss and Judith Butler. When such arguments are framed from a postmodernist stance, this does make it difficult to account for the systematic structural bases of any form of oppression (see my article in *T&S* 25). Nonetheless, treating the categories 'lesbian' and 'heterosexual' as problematic is by no means antithetical to radical feminism: indeed, I think that it is essential. This is not merely a matter of competing identities, but is fundamental to an appreciation of the social construction of gender and sexuality.

The categories heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian are rooted in gender—they presuppose gender divisions and could not exist without our being able to define ourselves and others by gender. If we take Christine Delphy's argument that 'men' and 'women' are not biologically given entities but social groups defined by the hierarchical and exploitative relationship between them, then the division (also hierarchical) between hetero and homosexualities is a product of this class relation. Where materialist feminism differs from postmodernism is that these categories and divisions are not seen simply as discursive constructs but as rooted in real, material inequalities. Within this perspective it is possible to see gender and sexual categories as both social constructs and material realities. 'Women' are a social rather than natural category defined by their relation to men. Contrary to Monique Wittig's assertion that lesbians are not women, lesbianism is defined by gender and in relation to heterosexuality. It is certainly not a category outside patriarchal relations.

The practice and experience of heterosexual sex: power and pleasure

At the level of heterosexual practice, women may either contest or comply with the structural and cultural ordering of heterosexuality. Complicity in and resistance to heterosexual practice involves more sexual relations: it includes such issues as who cleans the bath-

room or who performs emotional labour for whom. In the specifically sexual sense it is here that phallogocentricity, the privileging of male pleasure and eroticised power relations impinges on our physical bodies, where male sexual privilege is acted out. Here, too, women themselves can try to negotiate activities and forms of pleasure which challenge this power and privilege.

Experience and practice are perhaps too closely linked to be easily disentangled; by experience I mean what is felt both sensually and emotionally, while practice refers to what we do and how we do it. Specifically sexual experience encompasses our desires, our pleasure and displeasure. Sexual experience, although felt in its impact on our physical bodies, is not simply accessible to us in raw form as bodily sensation: it is actively worked over and made sense of. How we make sense of it depends on the discourses, narratives and scripts available to us, and it is through these interpretative processes that we link our experience and practice. The way we narratively construct our experience will depend on our location within our society and culture—whether, for instance, we have access to feminist discourses that might challenge dominant, patriarchal ones and thus enhance our ability, in practice, to resist.

Recent analyses of heterosexuality, whether attacking it or defending it, have tended to focus on sexual experience and practice, particularly on desire and pleasure. These debates have been centrally concerned with power and the degree to which women can subvert or challenge it within heterosexual relations. The battle lines are drawn between those arguing that heterosexual sex is inescapably oppressive for women (for example Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson) and those who maintain that men's sexual power is fragile and vulnerable to subversion (such as Wendy Hollway and Lynne Segal). Both arguments are problematic. On the one side are those with an overly deterministic view of male power and on the other those who minimise its effects and overestimate its instability.

From a materialist perspective, desire, as currently socially constituted, is inevitably gendered. This is as true of lesbian sexuality as of heterosexuality. Desiring 'the other sex' or 'the same sex' requires the existence of 'men' and 'women' as socially—and erotically—

meaningful categories. What is specific to heterosexual desire is that it depends on gender *difference*, on the sexual 'otherness' of the desired object. This difference is not an anatomical one but a social one: it is the hierarchy of gender which 'transforms an anatomical difference (which is itself devoid of social implications) into a relevant distinction for social practice' (Christine Delphy, *Close to Home*, p 144). Since it is gender hierarchy which renders these anatomical differences socially and erotically significant, heterosexual eroticism is infused with power—but this eroticisation of power is not reducible to the mere juxtaposition of certain body parts. It is not an inevitable consequence of an anatomical female relating sexually to an anatomical male, but results from the social relations under which those bodies meet. These social relations can be challenged. Even the most trenchant critics of heterosexuality and penetrative sex such as Sheila Jeffreys and Andrea Dworkin recognise that it is not male and female anatomy nor even, in Dworkin's case, the act of intercourse itself which constitute the problem, but rather the way in which heterosexuality is institutionalised and practised under patriarchy.

To argue that the power hierarchy of gender is structural does not mean that it is exercised uniformly and evenly at the level of interpersonal sexual relations, nor that our practice and experience is wholly determined by patriarchal structures and ideologies. There is more room for manoeuvre within these constraints. To deny this is to deny heterosexual women any agency, to see us as doomed to submit to men's desires whether as unwilling victims or misguided dupes. It certainly cannot be assumed that if women like heterosexual sex we must all be wallowing in a masochistic eroticisation of our subordination—the consistent message of the radical lesbian, or revolutionary feminist, position (as expressed, for example by Sheila Jeffreys and by Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson). Heterosexual feminists, here as elsewhere in their lives, have struggled against men's dominance. We have asserted our right to define our own pleasure, questioned phallogocentric models of sexuality and in the process often changed our own desires and practices.

Nonetheless, I am acutely aware that negotiating sexual pleasure with men is often difficult, that it depends on their willingness to

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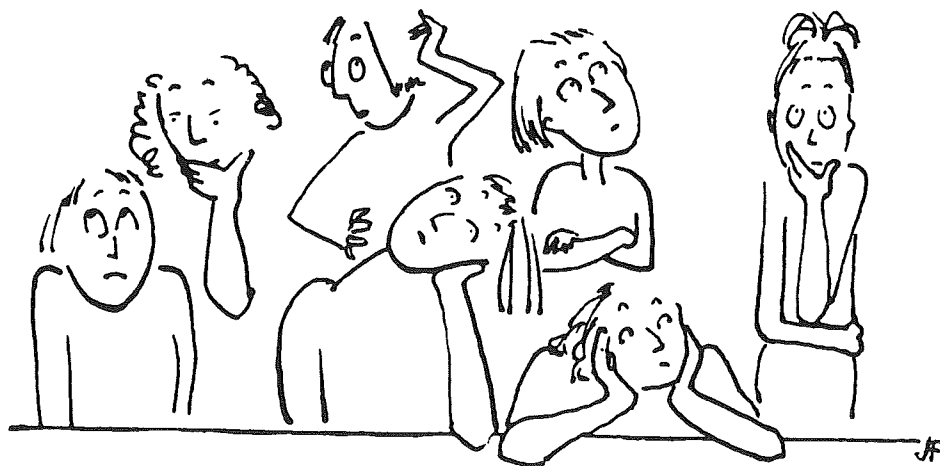
give up conventional masculine prerogatives. That there a few (very few) men out there prepared to attempt more egalitarian sexual forms of sexual practice does not negate the structural power that accrues to men as a group. This is often played down by defenders of heterosexuality. For example, Wendy Hollway demonstrates that women can produce discourses which contest 'the power of the penis', but ignores the structural underpinnings of male power. Lynne Segal maintains that 'sex places "manhood" in jeopardy', threatening the 'masculine ideal of autonomous selfhood'. Yet the dominant patriarchal construction of heterosexual sex is as a means to validate manhood. That this may give rise to some male anxieties should not lead us to think that masculinity is easily subverted.

Power operates at a variety of levels. Although we can contest it at the level of individual sexual practice (and enhance our pleasure in the process), this may have little effect elsewhere—even in our own lives. Moreover, some women are materially better placed to challenge this power than others. Academic heterosexual feminists (such as

Segal, Hollway and myself) are relatively privileged compared with most other women—we have access both to economic independence and to feminist ideas and support networks—hence we are in a stronger position to negotiate the terms under which we enter into sexual relationships with men.

Many women have little option but to accommodate themselves to male desires and seek fulfilment in the giving of pleasure. This attribute of femininity is hardly confined to sexuality: the ethic of service to men is fundamental to other aspects of gender relations, to men's appropriation of women's labour as well as their bodies.

In the end, what heterosexual feminists do in bed has little impact on institutionalised male domination. While the personal is always political, concentrating on the narrowly personal while ignoring the broader political context is not the way forward for feminism. It is impossible to imagine a truly egalitarian form of heterosexuality while gender hierarchy and hence gender division persists; and if that division were eradicated heterosexuality would no longer exist in any meaningful sense. □



What DO women like BEST in a man?

Jacky Fleming



Screening Women Out

There has been a growth in the number of women employed in the television industry and the number of television programmes made for women. Dee Dee Glass argues it has become increasingly difficult to make feminist programmes. How should feminists make sense of this apparent contradiction?

British television, like every other dominant industry in the world, works to prevent potentially disruptive radicals from having any power within it. But television's particularity makes it uniquely important. In addition to employing large numbers of people, it is by far the most potent transmitter of culture and ideology we have ever known. An analysis of the traditional lack of feminism in British television will therefore also enable us to uncover a key barometer of the position of women beyond the industry, both now and in the past. That recent broadcasting developments have meant that feminist interventions are even more difficult to make than before, bodes ill for our future.

First Flush

I began thinking about this article almost twenty years ago. Even before I started my first job in television, as a researcher at Granada in 1976, I had visited other British broadcasters and discovered they all shared the same architectural peculiarity: a singular lack of

women's toilets.

Of course, in those days it was argued that as the overwhelming number of programme-making, managerial and technical staff were men, fewer ladies loos were needed. That a high proportion of the admin and support staff (cleaners, canteen-workers, secretaries, receptionists) were and are women, was and is never taken into account. And certainly the possibility that women might someday occupy boys' jobs was never even considered.

The more technical areas like camera, lighting, sound, and editing, as well as producing and directing, have always been drowning in men. Wardrobe, hair, make-up, costume and those crypto-wife areas of production support—production secretary and production assistant—are almost exclusively done by women.

The implications for women behind, in front of and trying to fathom their lives through the mediation of the camera were as clear to me then as they are now. Nearly twenty years later,

though the number of women let into more responsible production work, some technical and the odd managerial job has changed from a trickle to a stream, even when we do get there, we generally earn only half to two-thirds of the male wage for the same work. But the most interesting question raised by the increase in the numbers of women in television that no one ever seems to ask is: has it had any effect on television output? And is there any connection between the quality or quantity of programming and how different kinds of women have made their way into the system over the years?

The sad fact is that while there are now more women employed (though unevenly) throughout television, it is actually harder to make programmes with any kind of feminist agenda. To begin to find out why, I believe it is necessary to look at the kinds of women allowed in—to explore the depths that have been plumbed—which will tell us a great deal about what the industry (men) think of us—as workers, viewers and programme subjects. Finally, to complete the picture, these findings need to be located within the context of the macro and micro economics of television.

In the 1970s, the British broadcasting system was arguably one of the most regulated in the 'democratic' world. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) controlled commercial radio and television. The BBC Boards of Governors and Management kept a firm editorial and political rein on all its output. Margaret Thatcher made it one of her more puddled, personal crusades to deregulate broadcasting. Thatcherists argued that to do this would make it more competitive, give the audience greater choice and programme-makers greater job opportunities. In fact the reverse has happened: since deregulation, though there is more television output, there is less variety in that output, less choice; there is more job insecurity and ownership has fallen into fewer hands.

More Girls, So What?

But why has it taken me so long to write this? I thought up the original title ('Ladies Loos in British Television'), wrote an outline and the first few pages in the mid-seventies. But I was told by a couple of friends that I was merely washing our dirty linen in public, creating splits that would hurt women, playing into the boys' hands. Criticising other women, in print (in

public) has almost always been seen as divisive—destroying the (fragile) unity of feminism or threatening the alliances of women who cannot even bring themselves to use that word. But what this allegation really does is to perpetuate the fantasy that the women's movement was and is one undifferentiated mass, a dangerous nonsense. It seems to me that in denying our differences, we actually become weaker. What are the three great lies? I'll love you in the morning; the cheque's in the post; and all women are the same. But, of course like most feminists, I was and am extremely vulnerable to the suggestion that I am hurting other women. So I shut up. Till now.

An invitation by *Trouble and Strife* seemed like the perfect opportunity to take out ideas I'd only kept partly hidden for so many years. I figure even if our enemies do dip into my article, in this post-Thatcher age, it is essential



that we keep challenging the simplistic politics of female cultural nationalism that applaud all women achieving men's jobs. We need to resist the notion that a woman boss, any woman boss, irrespective of her politics is a good thing and should (must) be supported.

My original thoughts for this article began with women in television production, for this is where images of women surely come from. The women who joined television in its post-war infancy—when the rare female employee who wasn't a secretary, cleaner, tea-lady or canteen worker had nearly always been imported from

radio (where they had usually risen to the rank of studio manager—a kind of almost-director or producer) and were proud of their indistinguishability from male colleagues. Indeed this species is remarkably hardy. It is not only still thriving in television (and indeed throughout most industries), it also reproduces itself alarmingly. The early eighties was a particularly fertile time: designer power suits, hard, gold jewellery and high heels notwithstanding, these dames prided themselves in being able to swear, drink, make deals and practically piss like the boys.

Because of its necessarily hidden origin I am not sure when the next wave actually began. But where it has emerged, is on top. The second wave was a small but significant number of women who entered television in the early 60s, often started as secretaries, thought television was powerful and glamorous, and fucked their way up. Since this is a false accusation often deliberately made against successful women, I was amazed, when as a (powerless) researcher in the 70s, at the number of more senior women who frankly admitted and even defended such behaviour—as though this was the only way to succeed, and therefore justified. I call these women the second wave, since they reached visibly senior positions later than the first one. They are also still going as strong now as ever. The clue to their real, underlying strength may be that they have survived a route littered with the overwhelmingly more numerous bodies of other women who tried to use sex to get on and failed miserably: finding that men were more thrilled by the chase, by the promise, the desire, than the reality of conquest.

The third wave were those who joined as a result of the sixties—more numerous than previous waves—many with the liberal notions that sprang from the general political climate of the times: that producing television programmes might be socially useful. This wave included a thimble-full of feminists of which I am one. The third wave has ebbed and flowed a lot over the years. Very recently I have met a reassuring swell of young women who are unafraid to lead with their feminist politics (radical, socialist and otherwise).

Amongst these waves have always been the opportunists—going with whatever the flow. Affect-less individualists—who are often the most effective of all, having no scruples to get in their way, using every trick in the book. They

are really only identifiable by their willingness to don any disguise to achieve their goals. They simper, gush, thrust or rail against inequalities as required for their advancement. Like the oppressed of Franz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, these women's desperation is reflected in a willingness, a desire, to be more enthusiastic than their male colleagues in undertaking the boys' dirty work. Shafting and backstabbing with alacrity as they crawl over their colleague's corpses. In order to prove themselves to their male bosses, they will volunteer to sack, exploit or otherwise weaken their colleagues.

Women have traditionally had little access to the two main routes into television—Oxbridge/theatre/production traineeships and print journalism—partly explaining why waves' one and two, as well as the opportunists', have continued to use the same ways of sinking into television's arms. But these women's popularity with the boys—malleable and vulnerable in their individualism though they are—is not just a buoy (a marker in the choppy broadcasting seas) indicating the kind of women who make acceptable employees. Their eternal appeal also lies in television's need to be seen to be addressing internal and external pressures about programme-making and 'equal opportunities'.

What About the Programmes?

For me defining feminist television programmes and programme-making is curiously easier than defining feminism itself. It may be because there is a reassuring tangibility to the former and such an elusive fluidity to the latter. A programme has a material substance and making it is a definable activity.

Neither the product nor the process need to be about or done exclusively by women. However, in both, women must set the agenda and be in control. A feminist programme must not only be consciously, transparently and aggressively non-exploitative of those who do not own society, but it must interrogate, explain and offer alternatives to dominant ideology. It must be awash with clear ideas for change—either overtly systemic or in thinking and then in action. If the conventions of style or content of non-feminist programmes are used, they must either be subverted or carefully analysed and contextualised.

Feminist programme-making is about

treating colleagues and participants with respect and dignity. It means paying proper wages and creating an environment in which challenging any and all oppressive behaviour is encouraged and rewarded. Being able to acknowledge and celebrate (in word and deed) the expertise of those who have first-hand experience of the



programme's subject is essential to the process. These principles can and should flow across the range of television programmes.

Women have always worked disproportionately on women-targeted programmes. But until very recently we were rarely in overall decision-making roles. And a lot of women don't want to work on such shows anyhow. Women in waves one and two, in particular,

usually try to distance themselves as far as they can from other women and women's issues. So the vast majority of women in television are not only not feminists, they are likely to be anti-feminist. If they are forced to work on women-targeted programmes, the possibility of feminist intervention becomes all but impossible. As in Fanon, the boys have cleverly put the oppressed into a lot of the primary gate-keeping jobs: assistant commissioning editors, executive producers, series editors, heads of not-quite-important departments.

An important link between the pattern of women's employment in television and the possibilities for feminist programming is forged in a larger context: the overall state of world economies, often the perceived liquidity of market-places, which has been both our biggest ally and our worst enemy.

In television as in every other industry, when institutions are feeling financially and structurally confident, they are likelier to engage in the fashionable political indulgence of hiring more (apparent) 'others'—women, people of colour, older, larger, disabled, working class, out lesbian and gay men, etc. Most of these, though, like waves one and two and the opportunists, are only superficially 'other'. The boys nearly always hire within their own image—those who agree/can be manipulated. Nevertheless, a few genuinely oppositional voices sometimes seep through. At such times, programmes that truly reflect hitherto ignored aspects of women's (everyone's) lives are slightly more likely to be commissioned.

Occasionally even genuinely revolutionary programmes are made. In the early 1980s, I was involved in a women's production company called Broadside, producing prime time current affairs shows for Channel 4. I am still proud of the films we made. It is no accident that Broadside was commissioned during a period of economic expansion. This same pattern was repeated in relation to other programmes deemed to be radical or minority (eg *Out* and *Out On Tuesday, Eleventh Hour, Open to Question*). When times are good, margins for difference appear. When times are bad, they evaporate—even though when given stable slots as well as decent publicity and production budgets, such programmes often get good ratings. Practically everyone but me was surprised when my 1988 *Inside Story* about the

first domestic violence unit in a police station attracted a lot of viewers.

It is on these margins that I have always worked. In news, current affairs, documentary and drama. I am lucky that I joined television at a boom time and so far have become established enough to carry myself through the dry patches. Though my feminist visions of women's (and even men's) lives are now shared by more programme-makers than before, it is not now, nor has it ever been, a crowded field. And the areas of light entertainment, sport and religion are a feminist desert.

Since the mid-seventies, the images of



women we see on the tv screen have increased only in the number of stereotypes—our reality is as distant now as it was then. Across the whole range of programmes, women are overwhelmingly 'beautiful', thin, white, young, able-bodied and heterosexual in image. I am still shocked when I see the odd female news-reporter who actually looks as sweaty, crumpled and ordinary as her male counterparts.

What has changed radically in the last five years, however, is the structural and financial cosmology of broadcasting. In 1990, franchises to own ITV companies went to the highest bidders. The BBC was told in no uncertain terms that it had to become competitive. The result was a mammoth loss of jobs—pouring tens of thousands of people onto the freelance market—and an obsession with making every facet of the enterprise 'pay'. This has, of course, had little effect on the expense account lifestyles of the top brass or on their generous share options. But it has meant that the time and care that many programme-makers used to lavish on their work has been lost, while speculative or oddball shows are even rarer than before. What small gains had been made in terms of choice have disappeared. 'Competition', whether with regard to ideas or media ownership is meant to have widened, in fact it has substantially narrowed. In reality, with far more women in the independent sector (now the largest constituency of programme-makers) who do have an interest in women's programming, the competition for slots has never been fiercer.

Hey Big Spenders

These days, broadcasters are engaged in a mad rush to develop the apparent sophistication and marketing strategies so they can target or try to target (or to think they're targeting or to think they're trying to target) their audience. Before, women were expected to keep watching what was generally aimed at them: soaps, costume dramas, cute documentaries, very occasional early evening current affairs and often locally or regionally produced very low budget afternoon recipe and fashion programmes. The changes in targeting caused by the effects of the Tory's (Thatcher's) Broadcasting Act on both ITV and BBC companies have forced them to go for as high and/or affluent an audience as possible. One of the results is the search for those big-spending female viewers. Yet the

fragmentation of viewing, particularly in these times of economic recession—to cable, satellite and time-shift (video recording and viewing later)—makes broadcasters and advertisers especially jittery. And, anyhow, they really haven't figured out how to get, never mind keep, those high-spending women viewers.

Most obviously targeted at a female audience are *Good Morning with Nick and Anne* and *This Morning with Richard and Judy* as well as the flood of British Oprah clones: Chrystal Rose, Esther Rantzen, Vanessa Feltz and so on. Less overtly populist, lower-profile, but just as important, have been shows which try to appear to treat women and our lives as a bit more than emotional showbiz sound-bites (in the London ITV transmission area we have *Capitol Woman*).

Many have faux current affairs formats—in reality most are magazine programmes in disguise. They are sometimes presented by two women, once in a while by one man and one woman (rather drooling over each other)—every so often one is either black, not so slick, a bit older, or cheeky. In spite of often risibly awful scripts—joking their way into our front-rooms—they have maintained a pretence of offering serious as well as more light-hearted subjects. Unlike the studio-bound formats of the Oprah-wannabes, they produce five to ten minute films about areas like equal pay, teenage pregnancies, Aids, isolated carers, domestic violence, and child abuse. The result of trying to cover such complex subjects in impossibly short snippets is both to trivialise and to make them invisible.

Most programme-makers agree that individual television programmes rarely change people's minds. Even a shoal of committed and angry documentaries about homelessness has not produced the groundswell of pressure that would be needed to change government policy. But what I believe does have a profound influence on both broadcasters' policies and audience attitudes is when television treats a particular subject in the same way over a period of many years.

'We've Done Women This Year'

More than twenty years ago, a friend tried to interest broadcasters in a contemporary documentary series about women. No thanks, she was told, we've done women this year. What do you mean, she asked. We made *Shoulder to*

Shoulder (the story of women's suffrage), they replied. Leaving aside the notion that only one programme a year 'about' women can be made, the very idea that the existence of a costume drama like *Shoulder to Shoulder* could, in any way, preclude the production of a modern factual series is beyond belief. But anyone trying to do anything not considered to be mainstream is used to hearing such fatuous nonsense—to being frozen out in that way. The fact that we have always been over 50% of the population may make such remarks even more ludicrous, but it has never really mitigated the problem. And today, the combined effects of all the economic and political pressures on television present one of the greatest threats to feminist television production that I have seen in nearly twenty years as a programme-maker.

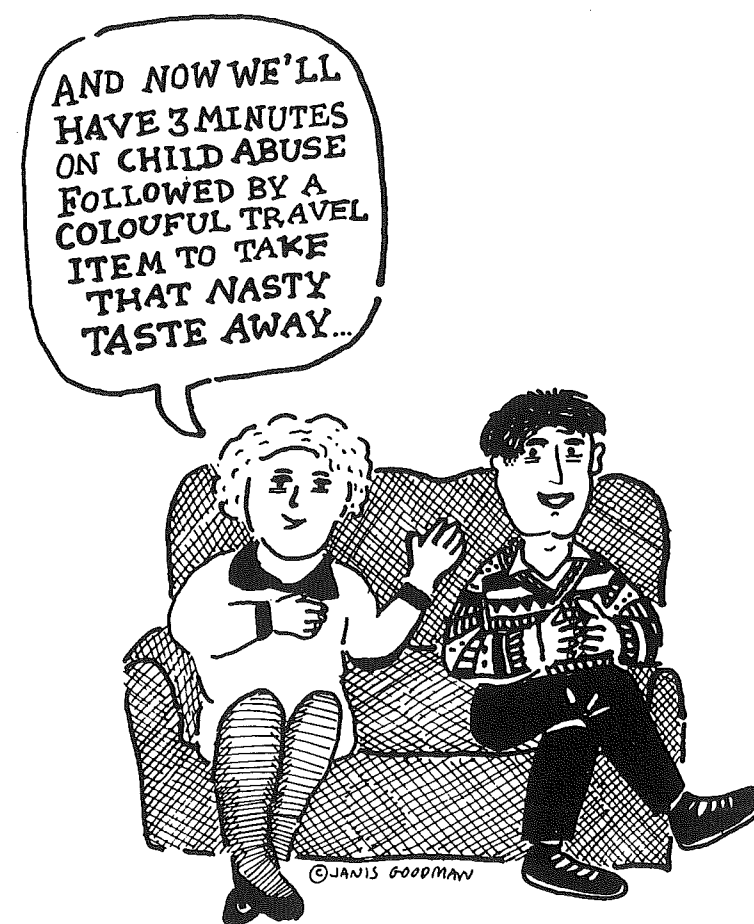
In desperately seeking audiences of female consumers, by appearing to 'do' women's issues in so many programmes, two dangerous illusions are created. The first is that there is no more to say about such subjects. The second is that, in any case, women's issues do not merit serious consideration. It used to be hard enough to get those (overwhelmingly men) who commission prime-time, reasonably(ish) budgeted documentaries and current affairs programmes to even consider programmes about things that appeared to be women's issues (even harder if the women weren't middle-class or white: in the seventies, industrial disputes centring on women workers at Imperial Typewriters and Grunwick's were ignored until white, male trade unionists got involved). The proliferation of 'women's' television, saturating us with lip-glossed morsels of our lives, is now making it increasingly impossible to sell feminist programme ideas either on the grounds of their otherwise non-existence on the box, or because of their great relevance/significance to audiences in search of serious, in-depth programming.

But feminist television is not just about ensuring that we get to see everyone's lives reflected honestly. It is about how any woman who (still?) calls herself a feminist actually goes about producing those images. Being able to treat participants and colleagues fairly and decently should be things feminists take for granted. But in the brave, new world of post-Thatcher television, the cash to pay people properly and to buy enough time to give to participants has largely dried up.

Is there no way to stem this tide? To get more feminists work in television? To extend the whole range of people employed throughout the industry—thus ensuring that all our voices will be heard, all our faces seen?

A few years ago, a male television boss, the one I find least intimidated by feminism (but certainly no wet), asked me, in all earnestness, how he could begin to correct the imbalance of grey men in grey suits in broadcasting. Easy, I replied. Always hire or commission that qualified person whose difference you find the most threatening.

So far, I have no evidence that he's acted on that advice. But television is too important to let the boys just have it all their own way. And though I haven't counted toilets recently, I live in hope that our small, but persistent, feminist intervention will come to affect how many ladies lose in British television. □



Survivors and Supporters: Working on Ritual Abuse

A note on definitions: This article is about Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA), by which I mean continued sexual, physical and emotional abuse inflicted on women and children, by adults, in the name of a satanic 'religion'. This abuse appears to be generally organised by groups, and in groups. These groups appear to form networks, and they also tend to make money from prostituting women and girls, from pornography and from drug trafficking. For many of the women involved in SRA their entire families are also involved, from birth to death, i.e. the abuse is inter-generational.

A note on authors: This article was originally written by me (Kate Cook) based on my experience of supporting adult women survivors of SRA. Having produced a first draft, I handed it on to a woman I am supporting (who chooses to be known here as 'the A-Team'), and this revision includes amendments suggested by her. However, in some places it seemed far more appropriate to have the A-Team's voice heard separately, where the comments are entirely hers, they are indented and in italics.

Feminists are still working out how best to support survivors of satanic ritual abuse, and those involved in support work frequently struggle to come to terms with their own responses, including some degree of disbelief and a concern about providing unconditional support for women who may still be involved. This piece, written by Kate Cook with 'the A-Team' explores the complexities of working on ritual abuse and suggests strategies for support work based on a realistic feminist understanding of survivors' experience.

Satanic ritual abuse (SRA) has received lots of media attention over the last few years in Britain, and much of this coverage has been telling us: 'It's OK, this doesn't really happen'. Well, that's a relief isn't it!

In 1991, when I first met a young woman who was telling of her experiences of ritual abuse, I had to think quickly; did I believe in this? Prior to that, during the news coverage of the Nottingham and Rochdale cases, I hadn't. I'd seen this as another media exaggeration, a story to distract us from the heartbreaking commonality of abuse in women and children's lives, an attempt to dress abuse up as something new, different and weird—separate from ordinary families, ordinary men, ordinary women and children.

However, I did not think this young woman was lying and I do not believe that women make up whole histories of abuse. So my position began to shift. I certainly believed that *she* believed what she was saying and, in retrospect, I can see that whilst I believed most of it too, I resisted parts. Whatever I was

finding the most difficult to believe, I simply told myself, that part was trickery. I had no doubt that she believed it and no doubt that something had happened, but not what she was saying, that was too much to take in. I did believe that she'd been horrifically abused, and by a lot of people, and that she was very, very frightened of what she was doing, in telling about that abuse. But when it came to the murders, routine murders of children, babies and aborted fetuses, I couldn't take that in.

My position in relation to all of this has shifted considerably in the years since, and I will talk more about this, later on.

However, the point I want to make for now, is that SRA is hard to take on board, I know I'm not the only feminist, used to working around sexual violence who has struggled with disbelief on different levels in relation to it, so what chance does the rest of the population stand? The media play into this difficulty most of the time (though there have been some notable exceptions such as the Channel 4 Dispatches programme shown 19 Feb 1992).

Films like Rosemary's Baby and novels like those of Dennis Wheatley also encourage disbelief, they turn reality into blown up unreality and fact into fiction.

Now we have Jean La Fontaine's government sponsored research which tells us that there is no material evidence for the existence of SRA (this despite reporting that evidence was found of an altar in one case and robes etc. in another). She suggests that a type of hysteria developed amongst professionals and that this has happened partly because the professionals don't want to accept that it is family members who are most likely to abuse. As Liz Kelly has pointed out in her review of La Fontaine's report (*Childright*, Nov 1994), this hypothesis ignores the fact that some of those who believe in SRA are feminists. We know that family members abuse and have no vested interest in denying this. And we also know (which La Fontaine does not appear to understand) that family members abuse in SRA networks too, along with others.

But does it have to be like this? Well, the simple answer is No. The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women have undertaken the largest consultation exercise with women and women's organisations, on the prevalence and nature of male violence. In their final report *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence—Achieving Equality* (published by Canada's Government) they include a section on 'Ritual Abuse', where their definition clearly includes what I have defined here as SRA. They say:

We do not know the full dimensions of ritual abuse in this country...The panel did, however, hear from many women from all regions of Canada who named themselves as survivors of ritual abuse. Through their compelling testimony, a phenomenon of violence was detailed that urgently requires recognition in Canada. (p45)

The section concludes:

Survivors of ritual abuse continue to pay a high price for the disbelief they encounter. Without recognition and support it will be impossible for many to come to terms with their experiences. Adding further pain to those who have already been so injured seems at odds with any notion of a just or a more equitable society. (p47)

Women who want to escape from SRA can take years to find support, and every piece of hostile reporting in the media, makes it harder, discourages, frightens and isolates them further.

Women who are involved in SRA are encouraged to disbelieve what is happening to them, and what they are

made to do, (often by the use of drugs) so it is understandable that they find it difficult to get others to believe what they are saying.

There is, however, a growing body of literature that does acknowledge the existence of SRA and that discusses ways to support survivors. Much of this literature is American, though we do now have British practitioners' views in *Treating Survivors of Satanist Abuse*, edited by Valerie Sinason. However, this like many of the American works, is not a feminist volume.

Feminists have always been in the forefront in relation to work around sexual violence, and with SRA, as with all other forms of abuse, a feminist analysis makes the most sense of the dynamics of oppression that keep women involved in the abuse. So, it saddens me to know that other feminists are still having a hard time taking SRA on board. This piece is written in the hope of starting to change that and to discuss feminist responses.

Getting Out—Part 1

It is hard to over-estimate the difficulty of leaving a satanic abuse group, for adult women. As I have already mentioned, finding support is very hard. Add on the fact that the women have usually been involved since birth and that their view of the world is warped by the lies told to them by their abusers, as children growing up. Some of these lies might be: that we all do it; that all children are abused; that all churches are abusive; that Father Christmas rapes children; as do doctors, dentists, policemen and politicians—and I don't mean some of these, I mean all of them.

When looking around for support, most of it is for children. People tend to forget that children grow up into women. Some professionals say children are very vulnerable. This is true. They say adults have the knowledge to see things differently. Is this true? Where do women who have always been abused, and are still experiencing that abuse get this knowledge, when they remain so isolated, within a satanic group?

Then there's the women's own involvement in the abuse. Once a child in a cult is old enough to hold a knife, they are old enough to become abusers, and they are forced to abuse. Clearly this increases her sense of isolation and her sense that there is no place for her in the outside world. By the time a woman reaches

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adulthood and has the possibility of escape, she may have been in prison.

As a teenager it is most common to get arrested for burglary, having been shoved through the windows of people's houses and told to steal.

She is also likely to have a psychiatric diagnosis. She may well have been to her doctor's many times, complaining of pains/illnesses of which there are no physical signs, she will have a reputation with the doctor for self-harm.

In short, anyone she might have managed to trust at all and particularly those who might listen to other women (for example women trying to flee violent husbands) are likely to see these women as liars and completely unreliable. And are feminist services exempt from this? I don't think so. All of us involved in Rape Crisis groups know there are women we have not been able to support successfully, women who sometimes appear very difficult to communicate with, women who perhaps get very angry with us. The question I and other women are increasingly asking ourselves now is: how many of these women were/are survivors of SRA?

There are many ways in which supporting survivors of SRA has informed the rest of the support work I do. Just one example is that now I always ask if the woman I'm talking to is safe now. I no longer assume that, just because she's an adult, her childhood abuser(s) has/have stopped raping her. But in the past I didn't do this, and I know now that that made it harder for any adult woman who was still experiencing abuse, to talk about it.

Multiplicity

Before we can go much further in this discussion of SRA, I need to explain that many of the women who are survivors of this form of abuse have developed a particular coping strategy, they have many people living in one body - they 'are multiple'.

Multiplicity is what the psychiatric profession calls 'Multiple Personality Disorder' (MPD), it is little recognised in Britain and generally misdiagnosed by the medical professions. For example, it can be diagnosed as schizophrenia, as depression in some form or, as (the offensively named) 'borderline personality disorder'.

Most GPs have never heard of MPD and tend to make inappropriate jokes, like

saying that they wish they had it, so that they could forget to pay bills. Clearly, this can break down a doctor/patient relationship and any trust, and thus another avenue for support is closed. Three GPs have made these sorts of comments to us, again we experience other people's disbelief.

Naming is a problem here, many practitioners stick to MPD but this is hardly appropriate from a feminist perspective. Alternatives can tend to sound euphemistic or patronising and I have yet to find a name that suits all situations. For the remainder of this piece I propose using either 'multiplicity' when talking in general terms, or 'women who have others' (i.e. other people inside), more specifically.

Multiplicity appears to be caused by extreme abuse, the American psychiatric literature talks about abuse being found in the histories of 90% of people with MPD (Kluft, 1985). It seems likely that this figure is an underestimation.

Multiplicity is a form of dissociation (also known as disassociation). Those of us who work around violence are familiar with some forms of this, and all of us experience the mildest regularly. Perhaps the easiest example of common dissociation, is that sense of going onto automatic pilot that many drivers experience especially on motorways—when you 'come to' and realise that you've driven 20 miles that you have no recollection of, you've been thinking about something else altogether. What has happened is that you have coped with a boring task (driving down the motorway) by letting part of your mind deal with it, whilst the remainder gets on with something more interesting—you've cut off.

Women who have been abused have often used other forms of dissociation to cope with the abuse, during childhood. They might, for example, have experienced a sense of leaving their body, and watching the abuse happen, from a safe distance. Later they may remember the abuse, but perhaps not remember the pain, fear and humiliation that went with it.

Other women forget their abuse during childhood and regain those memories years later, perhaps in vivid flashbacks and perhaps as a slow trickle. They have cut off from what happened to them, by some reflexive action, to cope.

Women who have others, have done the same thing. As children they have imagined the

abuse was happening to someone else, and this has become their way of coping. Instead of experiencing the abuse they have gone away, and left someone else (some other part of them) to cope with it. Over time these other parts can develop and become quite numerous. The others may be fully aware of each other, or may have some awareness, or have none. These parts can develop quite distinctly, or can shade in and out of one another, they can have their own names, or not. The others can have their own likes and dislikes, they may prefer to wear totally different clothes from one another, like different music, tv programmes, and so on. They do not necessarily get older as the woman does, so she may well have a range of ages of others, some older than herself, all sharing one body.

This is a coping strategy, and to be effective it has to be secret. So, women who have others are very good at 'passing', they may see themselves as very different, but they can convincingly 'impersonate' each other, as necessary. In other words, women who have others are not weird or ill and you can't tell by looking, they just have a different way of coping with life than the rest of us.

For women who are survivors of SRA the position is further complicated. Many of the groups who perpetrate this type of abuse appear to have a good understanding of multiplicity and know how to create it (in very young children) and then manipulate it, to their own ends. As a consequence of this there is often a lot of mistrust within a woman's system of others, and very little communication internally. So women who are survivors of SRA have not only been systematically abused from a very young age, and been forced to abuse others, they have also had their way of coping abused.

One effect of multiplicity is an apparent lack of emotions, which can encourage disbelief:

Women who are/have been involved in SRA may appear different when speaking about painful memories. They don't have the feelings to match up with what they are saying and may seem very calm, which makes it all sound unreal to the listener. It takes a lot of time and effort to find emotions well hidden for years. Sometimes women believe they don't have any emotions at all. Or if they have, they fear the emotions being too big and powerful for anyone to cope with, and so

keep them well hidden so as not to scare themselves, or anyone else. There can also be real fear of becoming out of control and causing abuse/harm yet again.

Getting out—Part 2

For a woman who is in this situation, to get away from her abusers and be able to live a safe life, she must find ways to enable the parts of herself to start communicating, literally to get to know her selves. Without this she is likely to continue to live a fractured existence, she may be aware of what happened on (say) Tuesday, from 2 till 5 in the afternoon but then 'come to' and find it is Wednesday and she has no idea what happened in between. This happens when another part of her takes over, and where there is no (or very little) communication between the others. 'Losing time' in this way also leaves her extremely vulnerable to ongoing abuse.

So, in supporting a woman who is an SRA survivor, this is the first aim, to enable her to create internal communication and so establish her own safety. However, trust needs to be built up first before this work can really get under way, and for any woman who has been abused, trust can be a very difficult issue.

It may well be that the woman believes her abuse to be in the past. She cannot remember any recent abuse (but the others can) and she has cut off contact with her abusers (but the others have not). So, often before any work which might change her situation can begin, a lot of groundwork is necessary, until the others feel enough trust to start speaking of what else is going on.

I have included this quite lengthy explanation for several reasons. Firstly, when I started doing this work I could find nothing (other than American psychiatric literature) which gave me any idea of what to do. It is hard to cope with working with a woman for weeks, months or longer, believing (as she does) that her abuse is over, only to discover later that this was not so. Perhaps being aware of this possibility from the outset, can help others.

Secondly, I believe that in some women's groups/for some individuals something of a mythology might be growing up around this work. I think there is a danger that the knowledge we have is too privatised, that some women are seen as experts in this area, and that the work is seen as too hard/demanding for many women to try. This is dangerous for

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women seeking support, and it is also problematic for those of us working in support services. Relatively few SRA survivors disclose the full nature of their abuse initially. They may say (and believe) that they were abused by their father, and only later be able to speak of other abusers. So, this is not work we can necessarily choose to do/not to do, if we work in rape crisis or other support groups/agencies.

Additionally, some of the women I know who are survivors of SRA have started talking about their experiences to women they are in relationships/close friendships with. This is neither unusual nor surprising, who better to trust (for any survivor) than someone you already know and feel close to? However, the woman who is confided in may well have no knowledge whatsoever of SRA and may find it difficult to find/get support and information for herself. To continue to support her friend/lover however, she will need both of these things.

Role models are very important for SRA survivors. If a supporter denies your multiplicity, abuses you or is not trustworthy in some other way, this can be very damaging/dangerous.

Steadfastness and clarity of support are vital to women trying to leave an SRA network, and so it is very important that anyone doing/starting this work has adequate support themselves.

Women who have got away physically, still suffer emotional abuse for a long time afterwards, so reliability, trust and commitment must never be lost along the way. It would be wrong, for example to think: she no longer has contact, so I don't need to be around so much. She still needs your support to keep safe.

Finally, I wanted to illustrate the complexity of 'belief' in relation to women who are survivors of SRA. A simple non-judgemental listening ear is of little use to women who are routinely being horrifically abused. It may be that the woman you are working with was ritually abused and has found a way out of that life. However, if she drops hints that this is not so, or if she is losing time regularly (as illustrated above) then as her supporter you need to pick up on these issues. This can seem a very uncaring (and unfeminist) way to behave as, in simple terms, you are not believing her. However, we need to remember that women who are involved in these groups are also being forced to abuse others, regularly. So, to continue to support a woman who is involved

can eventually become a form of collusion in abuse.

I said early on in this piece that I initially believed that some of what I was hearing about was trickery, well I still believe that. However, what I think has shifted. I do believe now that girls and women are impregnated and their babies aborted and killed, but I don't know whether this happens as often as the women I have worked with believe themselves. It is clear that large quantities of drugs are used during satanic 'ceremonies' and that children are often not fed or given anything to drink for some days beforehand. They are therefore in a very disorientated state during the most horrific abuse. We also know that many, many lies are told to these children. The abusers also use 'trigger' words/phrases to restart memories of abuse, to instil fear, to control children and to punish them.

They use trigger words to get others to come out for their own use. So, for example, eating chocolate cake may have a very simple meaning to you but can mean something totally different to an SRA survivor.

How I try to work now is to listen to the memories as they are told to me and be clear that I know that the woman believes this is exactly what happened. However, where a woman is telling me something I know to be impossible (for example that 'the water was on fire') I will then talk to her about how that 'trick' could have been made to happen. This is important, as women need to start to see how they have been lied to, in order to break away. Ultimately they can start to work out for themselves how much of what happened was 'real' and I hope that soon women who are survivors will be able to speak and write more and help the rest of us understand this abuse better. But, in the meantime, I do know that simply believing everything as it is told is not good enough.

Feminist Responses

So, how as feminists can we understand this abuse now? It presents us with a number of problems, some of which I have already discussed. Others include: the involvement of women, including the women we are supporting, in abusing children and the apparent 'differentness' of this type of abuse.

Throughout this piece I have tried to indicate that I see SRA as another part of the

continuum of male violence. I think that the level of organisation is quite unusual, but then we know that some of the trafficking of children from East Asian countries is intensely organised, with large networks of abusers involved, so it is not unique. These children also have other experiences in common with SRA survivors, in extreme cases they are tortured and locked in rooms for days and weeks on end.

It is easy to see SRA as 'different' in that even women involved in support work for many years have not heard some of these stories of abuse before. However, if we pooled our knowledge I think we would find that there is nothing really new, it is simply the amount of abuse (of different types) that has happened to each of these women which creates a sense of difference.

It is also true to say, that for many (even most?) of us, this is our first knowing encounter with multiplicity. There is much for us 'singletons' (those with 'one or less personalities' see Sandra Hocking and Company, 1992) to learn, if we want to treat this coping mechanism respectfully. Again, for many Rape Crisis groups, SRA raises issues of how to secure safety in adult women's lives: something we have relatively little experience of and few resources for, in comparison to refuges. And, multiplicity complicates these issues.

There is a temptation, created by SRA survivors' apparent inability to guarantee their own safety, to 'rescue' women. Again, this is not new and many feminists involved in support work can tell stories of 'rescues' gone wrong. This is true in relation to SRA too. Both within and outside of the Rape Crisis network, women (and indeed professionals) have taken women into their own homes/stayed with them in their homes in attempts to keep them safe. The result has been to create tremendous dependencies and sometimes even to remove such control as the woman had. I, and other women I know have done some of these things in the past, so I am only too well aware of the temptation to see this as the only way forward.

What I believe now is that this is no solution. None of us can offer 24 hour surveillance, for indefinite periods, and that is what it would take to break the links with the abusers. Just as women who are experiencing domestic violence need to make their own decisions to leave, so do women experiencing SRA. The

challenges are: to enable women to know that they can do this for themselves, and to find appropriate ways to offer support.

What I do think is 'different' about SRA, is the way the coping strategy of multiplicity has been manipulated in a systematic fashion. From this stems one of the more confusing aspects of SRA, that adult women can have so little control over their own everyday lives, whilst appearing to live 'normally'.

Women who are multiple need to learn how to cope outside the abuse. They don't know how to cope without being told what to do next. For example, as a child in a children's home, we had to be shown how to drink from a cup and how to use a toilet, these were things we were not used to.

However, as women don't know how to react in different situations, they become excellent impersonators of what they see other people doing, so that they can fit into any category at any time.

At first, it might seem difficult to consider supporting a woman you know (or at least suspect) to be involved in horrendous abuse of others. However, when one starts to ask what the 'choices' given to a woman in a particular situation were (and these abusers, as any others, are very keen on encouraging women to believe they have 'chosen' the abuse) then the answers are quite familiar. They may have been told it was a 'choice' between them hurting a child, or someone else doing something worse. In other situations there may have been no specific threat (choice), the abusers may simply have relied on years of fear, control and punishment leaving the consequences of not doing as instructed to the woman's imagination. Whilst I do believe (as I have said) that there is a point where continuing to support a woman who is still going to meetings is collusive, it is equally unrealistic to ask her to simply stop as soon as she starts to receive support. To do that would be simply, to ask her to lie to us.

Women need to take time to stop contact altogether. They know internally that this has to happen and they want it to happen. They have put a lot of effort and courage into finding help to start with. Women need to be sure of safety in another world, to overcome the fear of being alone, and have the support/help to cope differently. After all, when a woman is involved, for her, a different type of safety is set up. She has her own limits of what she can cope with, in terms of getting out, and needs not to be told what to do, or pushed into

Just as women who are experiencing domestic violence need to make their own decisions to leave, so do women experiencing SRA.

it. She needs to decide for herself, not feel she is leaving the power of one group and replacing it with a different type of power over her.

SRA groups have been talked of as though they are made up of both male and female adults, acting autonomously, choosing to be involved in this abuse and recruiting others to join. As I have already indicated it seems to me that the women who are involved are abused at least as much as they abuse others, they are forced into prostitution and into drug trafficking too. It is also important to understand the normality of abuse in these women's lives, it is very hard for women who have always experienced abuse to be clear that it is wrong.

In these networks men make women abuse so it's hard for the woman to understand. Women abuse her and so she abuses. In her eyes women have power too, which can be very confusing for her outside of the network.

Some women have people inside who are there to abuse others and don't know anything else. They think it's OK because whoever taught them, told them it was. They need to be taught different.

The women I have met have not made any kind of informed choice to abuse, they have been controlled by groups of people and it appears that ultimately (and unsurprisingly) the power within these groups does rest with a few powerful, white, able-bodied (and often wealthy) men. These men use devil worship as part of a very complex, mechanism to give them access to women and children to abuse, to gain money and power.

We (those of us not involved) are not supposed to believe that SRA exists, they ensure that the stories women and children have to tell are impossible to believe and I'm sure they derive great pleasure in thinking up new 'impossible' scenarios of abuse, to keep making it harder for anyone to listen. □

Advice to supporters from two women who have experienced SRA

- Honesty and respect between a woman and her supporter.
- Reliability—stick to your commitment, one let down can damage trust.
- Some awareness of SRA would be useful, but a willingness to learn is just as important—no one knows all the answers, and there are no step by step instructions on how to improve things.
- Awareness that things in our lives are unsafe, whilst not getting caught up in our fear.
- It is not always helpful to believe everything that is said to you, but at the same time you need to understand that what someone is saying is real to them at the time.
- Guidelines about work (boundaries if you like) should be flexible, there may be emergencies out of office hours.
- We ourselves have an understanding of what needs to change in our lives, and what our support needs are. No one can do the work for us.
- If a woman is multiple don't keep secrets or conceal things from others. Always share information between personalities.
- Be aware of things which may be said to you which may be intended to make you reject us—this is often built into our systems and for some women rejection is easier than acceptance.
- As in all relationships be aware of inappropriate touch, always check it out first.
- You need a good support system if you are going to support us.

by The 'A' Team and Anne Richardson

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Fundamental Questions: From Southall to Beijing

Coverage of the UN Conference on Women in Beijing was minimal in the British media. Rachel Wingfield interviews Hannana Siddiqui from Southall Black Sisters about her experiences and impressions. Hannana talks of frustrations and limitations as well as what she regards as the successes of Beijing, especially the courage of women who spoke out against fundamentalism, and how the final document can be used in feminist campaigning.

Rachel Wingfield: *How did Southall Black Sisters (SBS) get funding to go to Beijing?*

Hannana Siddiqui: Pressure of work meant we weren't really able to organise ourselves, so we didn't know if we were going till the very last minute. We managed to raise some money from various bodies in America and Britain—Womankind and a trust called the Anti-trust in Britain and the Sheila Adams Foundation in America. Four of us went, one of us was funded by Women Living Under Muslim Law which is based in France.

So we didn't prepare in the way we would have liked to, we hadn't really got involved in all the pre-meetings. We went to some of them where they were looking at the draft Platform for Action [the final document to come out of the government conference] and made suggestions, but we weren't sure if we were going to be there or at what level we would be able to contribute to such a conference. The amount of international work we have done is limited, we've done far more local and national.

We decided to go in the end because we had the money, but also because we thought it would be a good opportunity particularly to go to the NGO Forum and meet women from

across the world to discuss their experiences, to exchange information, to network and to discuss strategies that they may have employed and which they found useful and effective, and where we could pass on information to them.

We arrived there a few days before the start. Before we left, there were a lot of problems sorting out things like accommodation, visas. There were discussions at the conference about whether or not there was a deliberate strategy by the Chinese to keep out certain groups of women, those they didn't want there. I do think some of that was going on, not necessarily from this country but in other places like Taiwan. But also there were a lot of problems around organisation and inefficiency and incompetence.

It was a very repressive atmosphere, you had guards everywhere—not in your rooms—in your hotels, they seemed to be on every floor. We heard from other women at the conference of women's movements being controlled, even whether or not they could go into each other's rooms, although we personally didn't have that problem. Some thought that their rooms were being searched, telephone calls were being listened to. Some complained of being

The Beijing conference is the last in a series of UN conferences on women, the first was in 1975—International Women's Year. Each conference has had two elements; a governmental conference at which the wording of the official document is wrangled over, and an NGO Forum. NGOs are Non-Governmental Organisations, and their meeting has tended to emphasise workshops and networking between women as well as lobbying the governmental conference. Copies of the Platform for Action can be obtained from the Women's National Commission, Government Offices, Horse Guards Road, London, SW1P 3AC.

Look at the World Through Women's Eyes ngo forum on women beijing '95

Foro de ONG sobre la Mujer
Forum des ONG sur les Femmes
非政府组织妇女问题论坛
منتدى المنظمات غير الحكومية للمرأة

30 August - 8 September

followed. There were people taking photographs. Workshops were being filmed. Certain human rights literature had been confiscated by the authorities. The Chinese defence was to deny most of the complaints. We walked into a press conference where we were not supposed to be. They were asked questions there about a lot of these issues and the response was 'no, no, no, no' none of this was taking place. The only thing they admitted was taking away literature, I think it was around Tibet, I'm not quite sure, on the grounds that it was anti-Chinese propaganda. It threatened their sovereignty and so they had taken it away, that was their justification.

There were a lot of problems, we did have a



Opening ceremonies in the Olympic stadium

sense of being watched, being monitored. Every time you saw the TV—you couldn't get CNN or much TV from outside of China—information was controlled. What you saw was very defensive and you felt very cut off from what was happening because you couldn't get outside news. We all seemed to be grouped in hotels without the journalists; we were kept separated. The Chinese media seemed to use conference issues to have a go at countries they don't like. So the comfort women issue was a major one at the conference and the women were very organised, but that issue was used to have a go at the Japanese.

There were also a lot of problems with the conference itself, getting around, because the NGO site was about a hour's drive away from Beijing. So there was a governmental conference site in Beijing, and then there was the NGO Forum site an hour away. So logistically it was very problematic to interact between the two conferences.

Controlling women

Rachel: So did it feel like two separate conferences?

Hannana: Yes. I spent a whole day at the government site trying to get information which wasn't readily available for NGOs—like an agenda paper, the draft Platform for Action. In fact I walked into the press room and got it from there! The governmental conference had all this information that the NGOs didn't. The NGO forum was certainly a very low priority as far as the Chinese were concerned. The conference for them was a public relations exercise, they were frightened of the NGO Forum and therefore wanted to segregate it and separate it off from the main conference, but primarily to limit access for the Chinese people. They didn't want the Chinese to be open to the kind of political arguments that were being made by the NGOs so the site was cut off. There was a limited bus service, at certain times of the day; that was another way of controlling women, where they went at the end of the day and how. All the demonstrations were only allowed on site. If you demonstrated outside you would be arrested. That was another way the Chinese people were prevented from interacting with the visitors who had gone to the conference. In fact there were many Chinese women at the conference, but they were not very critical of their own government,

maybe they were only allowed to attend if they were not critical. Obviously you knew the pressures they were under—if they were more critical then they would be in trouble. But we never got to know what they truly thought because they were so defensive.

When we had some discussions with Chinese women, what they said often boiled down to the idea that problems—if they did exist—were poverty, and economic crisis. There may have been some problems in rural areas where people are poorer, but that women had progressed well under the Communist regime, that there is far more equality than there ever used to be and that they were doing much better than women in other parts of the world. So that was the kind of picture that you always got.

Rachel: Even when you talked informally?

Hannana: We did talk to one woman informally about the Chinese one child policy and about domestic violence. She runs a hot-line, although there are no other resources—no refuges—they rely very much on the police and the criminal justice system there to protect women. Occasionally they will say 'yes it's not as good as it should be, you do get problems where the police don't take it very seriously' but at the same time you got a sense that there is a lot more confidence in the system, I think the reality is probably far worse than their confidence suggested.

They said women went to their families for support and the families didn't reject them which I also found very difficult to accept because I think Chinese culture is very much like Asian culture. We know Asian women get rejected by their families for having left their husbands, where there is a sense of dishonour and religion and culture are used against them. I am sure these kinds of cultural values do exist in China as well. If you look at its history, if you look at the notions of honour, if you look at how women are treated in the family, they don't have equal status and those values I am sure continue. How they explained the problem was not that the families rejected women but that they couldn't keep them because there was a housing crisis and it's for this reason that women often ended up going back to their husbands and turning to the police for protection. They also talked about things being resolved at a village level through village committees, but we know from our own work

how village committees are male dominated and how they don't necessarily work in the interests of women. They just encourage women to try harder and make their marriages work. So those kinds of things just didn't ring true, you just didn't get a sense of enough of a critique from Chinese women themselves.

About the one child policy, one woman said that in the rural areas there have been changes. You can have a second child, after the first child is 6 years old. She said the British documentary that was made called *The Dying Rooms*, which showed unwanted girls being abandoned in orphanages and then being left in



some rooms to die, was exaggerated—that there are lots of orphanages where children are very well cared for, and Chinese families take them in at weekends. The Chinese Government felt a need to defend themselves in response to that particular documentary, because they did a reply to it on their TV which was very defensive and which said that the British journalist had been biased, had been exaggerating the problems. I think there may have been some exaggeration, but what the Chinese programme didn't say was that the British documentary did look at some good orphanages where children were well cared for. So they weren't saying that neglect was the standard practice in China. But if you looked at the conditions the children were kept in, being tied up, they appeared to be very ill, you couldn't help but think the child had been left to die. Most of the broadcasting and the media there was very pro China, it was very controlled.

I don't know how many women at the conference got out to try to really talk to



Protest by Korean 'comfort women'

ordinary Chinese people, they weren't even allowed into the hotels. We managed to do that because we had a bit more extra time. We went to a party before the conference where we met English-speaking Chinese women.

There was one Chinese woman in particular at the conference who was very interesting. She was the only one who made some guarded criticisms, I think she was American-Chinese. There had been a tribunal of crimes against women and she was one of the judges. At the end of that day she gave her statement and said that the tribunal was obviously very moving, that we had heard a lot of women talk about how they have had lack of freedom in their own countries where they are not allowed to express their views and have human rights. Then she said there are some of us here at this conference who have the same problems, who don't have the freedom to express their views. When she said that the Chinese interpretation suddenly stopped and they were saying it was a technical hitch—they always said that there was a technical hitch when the Chinese wanted to control a situation. So she just started speaking in Chinese so basically they couldn't shut her up. Really she was one of the most critical ones, she spoke in one of the major events, and it was a pity we didn't get to talk to her. There was also a Chinese judge who talked about women being kidnapped, abducted, and sold as

sex slaves. There were some women from America we met who ran Asian women's refuges there. They had women come to them who had been sent to America from China. These women faced a dilemma seeking help because if they were deported, they would have to face Chinese organised crime. They were too frightened for their lives to take any action against the people who were holding them in the USA.

One of the good things that did come out of the conference was that the Chinese women at least got together. They may not want to be open with us, but they can't fool each other, they have to start talking to each other. They also saw women from all over the world who were far more critical, far more open about themselves, their countries.

Making your own agenda

Rachel: Did you focus on anything particular at the conference itself?

Hannana: I did. I gave up on the government conference, it was just taking up too much time; we decided to concentrate on the NGO Forum. I think everybody probably got a different sense of the conference because it was so vast. There were hundreds of conferences going on at the same time really. The issues I decided to concentrate on were violence against women, migrant women's issues and religion, religious fundamentalism. SBS spoke at a number of workshops. So in that sense we felt the contribution we made was at those workshops, discussing issues, and we met some very interesting women.

There were women from migrant communities in America who talked about how they had taken on the laws there. In this country [Britain] we have been campaigning against an immigration rule known as 'the one year rule' which entraps women in violent marriages; if they joined a settled spouse and they leave the marriage within 12 months then they face deportation. In America there is a two year rule and these women were talking to us about how they managed to get support from a state coalition of women's organisations who work on domestic violence to lobby the state to make exceptions to the rule in relation to domestic violence. So that was a success story since an amendment has been passed. They are not quite sure how it is being implemented at this stage, but obviously it is something we can learn from

here. They said they didn't have to do a lot of campaigning because they were able to lobby this coalition at state level. It won't apply to the whole of America, and the state they are talking about is very liberal. It has created a conflict of policy between the state and the federal government.

We don't have that kind of political structure in Britain, so we would have to do far more campaigning and convince more people at many levels, including Parliament and even women's organisations, such as Women's Aid.

Rachel: Are they not supporting the campaign at the moment?

Hannana: The Black women's movement hasn't necessarily had a lot of support from the white women's movement in Britain. What we want to see is far more support for the issues that Black women are having to cope with, such as immigration problems. We are about to launch a national campaign on reforming immigration law on domestic violence, and we want to know where the white women's movement stands including organisations like Women's Aid. What we want to know is are they going to make a stand and support us, because for a long time it's an issue that has been ignored, in the sense that issues like immigration and other racist practices have not been central to their political agenda.

Rachel: Are Black women's refuges having some kind of dialogue with the national organisations about it?

Hannana: What SBS have been concentrating on at the moment is meeting and sorting out our demands, our publicity and our campaign. When that information is ready then we will be quite happy to talk to everybody, start lobbying and talking and see where we get the support from. It's going to be interesting because traditionally we have had problems with the anti-racist movement who may be supportive on immigration campaigns but not necessarily supportive on women's issues. On the other hand the wider women's movement has been supportive on women's issues like the Kiranjit Ahluwalia campaign. That resulted in some good alliances with groups like Justice for Women because it was about domestic violence. But generally the wider women's movement has not been good on questions of race. This campaign brings the two together, race and gender, and we have had individual campaigns around women who have been

facing deportation where the two issues have come together and we have had a mixture of criticism and support from both the anti-racist movement and the women's movement. For instance, some anti-racists asked 'why are you talking about fundamentalism?' when we had one woman who had been raped who was being deported to Pakistan. There she was going to be locked up for what the state said was unlawful sex. Under the Islamic laws in Pakistan, as rape



is extremely difficult to prove, she was accused of being guilty of unlawful sex and would have faced very harsh punishment. So we argued that she couldn't be sent back to a fundamentalist regime where the Islamic laws discriminate against women. We were criticised for raising this. The anti-racists feared that such arguments would undermine the anti-racist and anti-imperialist movement, as it entailed 'washing our dirty linen in public'. Whereas the women's movement has not necessarily been active around racism, and has never really been central in the anti-racist movement, such as anti-deportation campaigns.

Rachel: Do you think that more established women's organisations might not want to be seen in direct conflict with the state?

Hannana: Yes. At the moment we are in a strong anti-immigrant climate, very racist, where neither the Government or the Labour Party wants to be seen as encouraging more migration to this country. Because of this, established conservative women's organisations may well feel that their membership won't

necessarily want to address issues around race and immigration. The focus of our campaign is on domestic violence. We want to expose the Government's statements about supporting abused women as a sham, as they discriminate against women with immigration problems by denying them the rights that are available to other battered women. That's going to be the focus of our campaign, although we think the one year rule is not defensible in any circumstances.

Universal or feminist sisterhood

The violence against women workshop I did with some American women was about mainstreaming migrant women's issues, and the obstacles and barriers we face in doing that. A lot of the meetings and workshops I went to were very very positive. Sometimes I felt it was too positive about how well we were all doing and 'sisterhood'. I didn't necessarily feel there was sisterhood there. If you just looked at the very conservative religious women who were there, what they were arguing for would ultimately discriminate *against* women. So you can't say all women there were part of some great sisterhood where we all could work together. There were major political differences about what we thought worked in the interests of women, and not everyone there was a feminist. It wasn't self analytical enough about the women's movement and what we were all fighting for and arguing for and what the barriers were—the conflicts, internal conflicts as well as those external to us.

There has been good work done in many



countries in tackling violence against women and that was very good and positive to see. But one of the other major things that really came through was one woman saying how ten years ago at the Nairobi conference religious fundamentalism wasn't an issue. Religion wasn't a big deal and here we are ten years later and religion has become such a major issue and fundamentalists are attacking women's rights all over the world. It felt as if we hadn't made any gains in the last 10 years. There were fundamentalist Christian groups at Beijing but they weren't as vocal or as visible as the Muslim groups, a lot of whom were probably sponsored by Iran. A lot of the women were wearing full 'bourkha'. These women were demonstrating on the streets, holding workshops all over the place. There were a number of workshops I went to where you got a whole range of religious opinion—you got the fundamentalists, including men, who were sitting there preaching to the rest of us. In one workshop I went to there was a North American man who was preaching. Muslim women in the audience got up and said 'well what right have you got to speak for us?' Then there were the women who were religious who were also 're-interpretationists'—they weren't secularist. They were talking about how to reinterpret the Koran in order to enhance women's rights.

The problem is that there are a lot of contradictions in their arguments. The contradiction—I can't see how they can overcome it—is the fact that they say that it is all a question of interpretation; that the text itself is pure and correct and about equality. The problem is just the way it's been interpreted over time by those with power, particularly men, who then interpret it against the interest of women. Therefore it's up to women to reinterpret it as it should really be. I think they will reach a point where this breaks down because there are things in the text of the Koran which are blatantly discriminatory, so how can you reinterpret them? For example part of the text says that a man can chastise his wife if she's not obedient and can beat her lightly. How do you reinterpret that? These are major problems that re-interpretationists are not prepared to confront really. That's the basic problem for everyone who is a re-interpretationist around religion—how far can you deal with the text?, what do you say is so pure? how can you pick and choose? can you really pick and choose

from what you say is the word of God?

It is virtually impossible to engage in a discussion with fundamentalists because they are not prepared to discuss anything; but with those who are more liberal religious thinkers you also reach these points which you just cannot resolve within the text.

The most damning and the most courageous thing

One of the best things that happened at the conference was we eventually got to meet some



women who were secularists and who said that religion cannot provide the answers. I mean secularist in the sense that they want a separation between the church and the state. That's something that we want as Women Against Fundamentalism. We recognise that people will have personal beliefs, that there may be a question of spirituality and religion offers something important, but that this is personal. It is not something that should be imposed upon others and certainly the state should not be used as an instrument to impose religious values on others. The secularist women we met had all faced the stark reality of fundamentalism in Algeria, Iran, Afghanistan and the Sudan. I went to a demonstration which was organised by the Algerian women, it was spontaneous, not in the programme, towards the end of the

conference. They decided to come out and be open. I knew a lot of women there were very frightened of being open because of the presence of fundamentalists, and the way information would get back to their own countries.

The Algerian women had a demonstration and then they had a workshop. The Iranian, the Sudanese and the Afghani women came to a press conference after the workshop which involved all these women. The Iranian women set it up, but then they invited everyone so it

was a coming together of all those women who had to face the stark reality of fundamentalism in their daily lives. Some of them were in exile but some of them weren't, some of them were in hiding in their own country. That day three journalists in Algeria had been killed, two men, one woman, and it was a very emotional day because the news had just reached the Algerian women and everybody was very upset. These women said that other people have gone back from such conferences where they have been open and critical of fundamentalists and have been killed. So the risk they were taking by being so open was immense. That was the most courageous thing I saw at the whole conference and it was the most damning. There was such a stark reality there which meant that all the other discussions you had around religion didn't

really matter any longer—you had to fight this. You have to fight this kind of abuse, and the use of religion for political ends. There has to be a separation between the church and the state. What am I trying to say is that it is important to take a secular stand rather than trying to reinterpret religion.

At the workshop the Algerian women showed a video of a tribunal that had taken place in Algeria. It was basically testimony by relatives of dead girls, girls who had been killed by fundamentalists. One man was the father of a little girl of four who had refused to wear the Hijab, she was the only girl in her village who had refused to wear it, and she had been beheaded by the fundamentalists. The father gave a moving tribute to all women fighting fundamentalists around the world. Then there was a mother who had dressed up as a ghost, and said: 'I have come back as a ghost because I want to tell the living how important it is to fight fundamentalism'. Her two daughters had refused temporary marriages with fundamentalists, they had been raped and killed. It was a very moving video and it really just showed how important it was to continue to fight. We in England, even though we have had to deal with fundamentalism, it's not on this scale, and it doesn't involve the risks these women have taken.

What all the women there wanted was support, international support and solidarity from the rest of us. That is something I would like to follow through and I'll be raising this in Women Against Fundamentalism, to see how effectively that can be done.

Taking stock

So in terms of the conference overall we got some very useful information around organising against violence, using strategies, pushing forward minority women's issues and also finding out what is happening to women in places like Algeria and Iran. Sometimes you know things in theory, but then you meet some of the women who are struggling in their daily lives, taking such immense risks, and it becomes so much more real. That is something I personally gained from being there.

As far as I can gather the Governmental conference was having ridiculous arguments around words, wordings and phrases that had been agreed already at some of the other international conferences. So some people were

trying to take us backwards, especially the whole attack on lesbianism. I heard via other women at the conference that the Chinese had told mini-cab drivers and hotels that all the women attending were 'lesbians and prostitutes' and to be careful not to let them strip in public—they were given blankets in case women decided to strip in public, so they could cover them up! I heard that women from known lesbian groups had problems getting visas. There was a lesbian rights demonstration at the NGO Forum which we supported. There was obviously a need to do that because of the kind of attacks that lesbians experienced before and during the conference. At the Governmental level there was one thing I read which was a whole argument about whether or not sexuality can be defined as a human rights issue. There was a huge debate around sexuality in the governmental conference, and reproductive rights became an issue because of religion and because of Chinese policies, problems around infanticide and the one child policy. They were also arguing about whether they should have the words 'universal human rights' or not. A lot of the wording in the Platform for Action was quite forward-looking and there were attempts to take the radical edge out of the whole programme. Then the problem was that even if you got it through, would it ever be implemented?

Rachel: The left here has been very critical of the conference for various reasons, partly because it was held in Beijing in the first place and there were a lot of arguments about whether women ought to boycott it or not and then because isn't the whole thing just a fiasco anyway? Isn't it just a way for the West and the Americans to make it look as if they are doing something when nothing is being done?

Hannana: I sympathise with most of those arguments. Yes, there were attempts to erode the gains that had been made at other international conferences. And there is a huge problem about implementation because not much had been done since Nairobi. So you felt that not much was going to be achieved at the governmental level. Although there were heads of governments there, and I heard that Benazir Bhutto in her speech was critical of fundamentalism. But very few government heads were critical of China. The only person who made any guarded comments about China was Hillary Clinton. She was also the only one of the

leading world figures who went to the NGO Forum. I didn't hear her speak but others told me that she criticised forced abortions. She was the only one who commented on the problems that women had in getting to the conference, issues about censorship. Everyone else I heard said how wonderful, what excellent organisation had been done by the Chinese. So Hillary wasn't very popular with the Chinese.

At the NGO level you can't say the conference was a total waste of time, not when women like those we met from Algeria, Iran and Afghanistan saw it as an important venue for them to get their message out to the international community and to ask for support. I think the Algerian women managed to get a letter to Hillary Clinton. They were looking for international support and I hope they get it, and I hope it was worth the risks that they took—they obviously thought that this was important enough for them to spontaneously come together and take that risk.

The human rights strategy

Rachel: What do you think about the focus there has been from some women's organisations on the 'women's rights are human rights' angle?

Hannana: I think it is a very good strategy. Human rights organisations have got to wake up to feminism, the whole issue of women's human rights and start taking that on board, fighting for it, arguing for it and supporting feminists. Not by bypassing feminists and not by taking over the agenda, but by supporting feminists. I think on the whole that feminists in Britain still haven't caught up on the human rights debate. And there were very few British feminists at the conference. It is a debate that we could use and utilise.

Rachel: I agree, but isn't there a danger that it has a sort of liberalising effect on organisations. That you get agendas which basically say, if we have this particular number of rights within this context then we will be equal. As opposed to an analysis which sees that the problems are structural, embedded in society as a whole?

Hannana: I see what you mean. But my definition of human rights abuses is that they arise out of structural inequalities, from patriarchy, racial dominance and so on; that there is institutionalised inequality. I think the

kind of influence feminism can have on that debate is through extending the definition of human rights, by saying that it's not limiting, you have to recognise power divisions, you have to recognise that there is such a thing as patriarchy and there is gender inequality. So if your worry is that if you bring these issues into the wider debate they get watered down, I think that's a danger that feminists can be alert to and argue against. And it doesn't stop us from working outside of that debate simultaneously. But the human rights debate is growing as an issue internationally, partly because of the way we are trying to re-define it.

There is a problem about the wording around 'universal' human rights—how do we define 'universal'. What we are saying is that universal includes notions of patriarchy, structured inequality and therefore women demand certain things which are specific to them, not to be watered down in the wider debate.

One woman at the conference said that the women's movement is the biggest movement in the world at the moment, and it is one of the most vibrant and the most active. The very fact that there is this whole conference dedicated to women is part of that, and at this conference we are turning the language of human rights on its head to benefit women. Obviously in something like the Beijing document there will be some watering down, because there are so many governments to get agreement from. But I think there are ways in which people listen and wake up, the world listens and wakes up, if you say this is an abuse of human rights, and when you





define human rights to include women's human rights. That it's not just about the traditional notion of human rights—of individuals being locked up for their political beliefs in some countries—it's happening here in our own country and if you think abuse of human rights is awful then you have got to condemn this here.

A platform for embarrassment

Rachel: So what about strategies for using the Platform for Action, do you think it can be useful in any way?

Hannana: Oh I want to use it, I need it. I am waiting for the final version and yes I will wave it about at the government and I will say you haven't done this and you haven't done that and you agreed to this. You try to use it through the media to embarrass the government like any other declaration. There are loads of them we can use already. Governments ignore them all the time, so at that level I will use it in order to get maximum embarrassment value out of it. If there is any kind of statutory instrument or any kind of legal instrument that I can make use of I

will do. Think about how many cases get as far as the European Court of Human Rights at the moment—not many. And it is always a long battle. But I still think it is something we should think seriously about, including how we can get cases through to that level if we can't get redress in this country.

Rachel: The ruling today about the killing of the IRA members in Gibraltar involved the European Court of Human Rights ruling against our government and that made first item on the news. It's provided a space for various people to say the government ought to be taking human rights seriously in Ireland.

Hannana: Exactly and that's good. One thing I did notice at the conference was that Europe seemed to be missing. Maybe I just didn't pick it up. During the whole day tribunal on crimes against women Europe was not talked about, apart from a woman from Ireland who talked about domestic violence. She said that the government, the state, had failed to protect her from violence, and that the Catholic church had denied her rights because she couldn't get a divorce. There was an American lesbian who talked about how, because she was a lesbian, she'd been locked up in a mental hospital, there was a woman who killed her husband and she talked about battered women who had been driven to kill. All those kind of testimonies from America but hardly anything from Europe. I think it was a big gap and a lot of women from countries from the South noticed it. So I am a bit worried about how much Europe didn't get criticised by the NGOs. On balance though the NGO conference was more progressive than not, because most of the plenaries that involved major speakers were quite critical of fundamentalism and conservatism. My sense of it was that at the NGO level at least, fundamentalists and conservatives didn't have it all their way, the balance was more progressive. I was glad to see that, because there was this strong trend around conservatism which women who were there found disturbing. Have we made any gains if the moral right were there is such numbers? It's a reflection of what is happening internationally at the moment, the attack on women's rights. Somebody did say that this is a time of both great opportunity and great danger for women, so grab the opportunities, demand rights and defeat these trends. She also said that if we didn't fight we could lose it all. □

EQUALITY NOW: Update

Readers of Trouble & Strife will remember Liz Kelly's interview, in the Summer 1993 issue, with two of the founders of EQUALITY NOW, an international women's human rights organisation based in New York.

Tess Rumble, who is helping to promote EQUALITY NOW in the UK, explains why she believes the time is right for women in this country to get involved with human rights.

Many women feel that the 'mainstream' human rights organisations have nothing to offer them, that there is no place within their tightly defined and interpreted mandates for the abuses we know occur with terrifying regularity. EQUALITY NOW is different in both its structure and its definition of what constitutes a human rights violation.

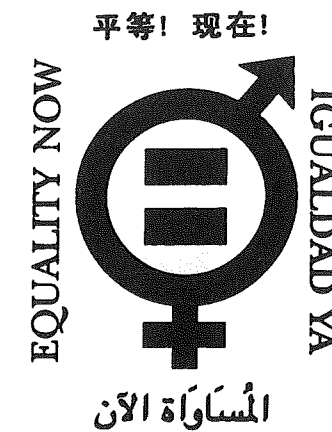
Whereas the traditional emphasis in the field of human rights has been on abuses perpetrated directly by the state, or those acting in its name (ie within the public sphere), any understanding of the situation of women in most parts of the world shows that their relationship with the state is usually indirect—mediated through their male relatives or community leaders—and the abuses they suffer mostly occur in private. But is the state any less responsible if it allows abuses to go unpunished?

Another way that a narrow definition of human rights can leave women out is through the traditional emphasis on 'civil and political rights', without consideration of 'social and

economic rights'. With the reality of women's lives around the globe centering on basic survival for themselves and their children—food, shelter, healthcare—civil and political rights may have limited direct relevance. Women need to have all of these rights not only protected, but promoted as well.

Women's human rights cover all these elements—civil, political, social and economic—and the list of issues that are worked on by EQUALITY NOW, which is by no means finite, includes abuses not usually considered by 'mainstream' human rights organisations.

The issue of women's human rights has taken off over the last few years—with some considerable success. In Vienna in June 1993 at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights, it was generally recognised that of all the 'special interest' groups lobbying governments there, women came away with the most. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the conference states that violence against women in public and in private, as well as all forms of sexual harass-



ment and exploitation, are violations of human rights.

This success was achieved by a dedicated global women's movement, which has continued to push for these issues to be recognised, along with a commitment to positive action, at all subsequent United Nations World Conferences. The challenge now is to ensure that these promises made on paper are not diluted or distorted by governments back on their home turf, and that the progressive *language* that has been so hard fought for is translated into real

progress.

In the UK, human rights have too often been seen as something which does not apply to us—abuses happen to other people in other countries and our role is to campaign on their behalf. I first noticed the beginnings of change in this aspect at the Liberty 'Festival of Rights', held in London earlier this year. There I was inspired to see a great diversity of activists and campaigners, groups and individuals, applying human rights concepts and terminology to situations here in the UK—from the right to

EQUALITY Now is an international human rights organisation dedicated to action for the civil, political, economic and social rights of girls and women. Taking advantage of both traditional and 'high-tech' action techniques such as letter-writing and fax campaigns, video witnessing, media events and public information activities, EQUALITY Now mobilises action on behalf of individual women whose rights are being violated and promotes women's rights a local, national and international levels. Human rights issues taken up by EQUALITY Now so far include: rape; trafficking in women and girls; domestic violence; female genital mutilation; reproductive rights and gender-based discrimination.

Information about specific abused and on-going violations is gathered from an international network of activists and organisations and by EQUALITY Now's own fact-finding missions. EQUALITY Now carefully scrutinises the objectivity and evaluates the accuracy of all the information it receives. Appropriate actions and strategies are established in collaboration with local experts and are rapidly publicised and implemented through the Women's Action Network.

Join the Women's Action Network:

- * Provide information: let EQUALITY Now know about urgent or ongoing human rights violations against women.
- * Receive information: learn about specific human rights abuses and women's issues around the world
- * Take action: participate in EQUALITY Now's urgent and ongoing actions.
- * Reach out: keep your friends and colleagues informed and involved.

Women around the world need your help
You *can* make a difference
Join now.



Maricris Sioson

On September 14 1991, Maricris Sioson, a 22-year-old dancer from the Philippines, died in Fukushima, Japan, where she had been working for several months as an entertainer. Japanese doctors said Sioson died of hepatitis, but when her family received her body in the Philippines for burial, they found she had been beaten and stabbed. An autopsy concluded her death was caused by head injuries and documented two stab wounds, one in the thigh, and one in the genital area indicating a blade had been inserted vertically. The Japanese police insisted that Sioson died of natural causes, despite the autopsy findings.

The story is not unique. An estimated 75,000 Filipinas went to work in Japan in 1991, the vast majority as entertainers. These entertainers are often at the mercy of their Japanese employers, who confiscate passports and withhold salaries until the end of their employment. Women who go to work in Japan are often forced into prostitution. The Yakuza, an organized crime network, is alleged to be heavily involved in the trafficking of women for the sex and entertainment industry in Japan.

Please write to Mr. Yasumitsu Kiuchi, Commissioner General, National Police Agency, 2-1-2 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan. Express concern over the death of Maricris Sioson and the failure of the Japanese government to investigate evidence that she was killed. Call for an investigation of her death, and prosecution of those responsible, to demonstrate the commitment of the Japanese government to the rule of law and to justice for Sioson and her family.

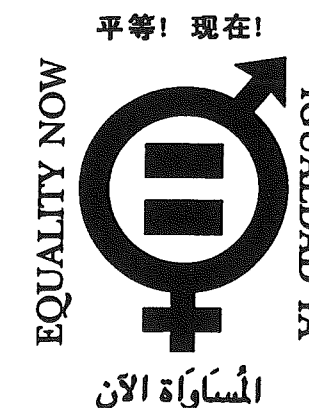
Send copies of any responses you receive to EQUALITY Now, PO Box 20646, Columbus Circle Station, New York, NY 10023.

silence to the right to 'rave'. It was also hugely encouraging to see that women's rights as human rights was not in itself a contentious issue but accepted as a fact on which we should move forward.

Another event here in the UK that has helped to underline the concept of women's rights as human rights was 'The Testimony of Women' organised by the National Women's Network for International Solidarity to coincide with the UN Conference on Women in Beijing this September. This event was inspired by the Global Tribunals on Women's Human Rights that have become a regular feature of the parallel non-governmental activities at UN World Conferences. At 'The Testimony of Women', in contrast to the UK Government's report to the Beijing Conference, individuals

spoke about the real issues facing women in this country, from a personal perspective. A panel of commentators then placed the issues into wider contexts and looked for ways forward—including the possible implications for women if the UK were to adopt a Bill of Rights. Through this event a huge variety of women's groups and local campaigns from around the UK could see their issues placed in a human rights framework, possibly for the first time. I believe that this framework could become a new driving force behind women's activism in this country.

By using individual examples, EQUALITY Now highlights in a more personal way the many human rights abuses that disproportionately affect women every day around the world. And it by reasserting the value of the



individual that it becomes clear how we can work for the benefit of all women, everywhere.

EQUALITY NOW's current actions include protests against judicial misconduct in the UK, where a judge's statements in the trial of a man found guilty of murdering his wife sympathised with and appeared to condone the murderer's actions; appeals to the government of Egypt to revoke its law that condones and medicalises female genital mutilation; calls on the government police in South African to provide protection for homeless women living on the pavement outside Durban railway station, where they are frequently subjected to rape and violence; calls for the government of Japan to investigate the death of a Filipino dancer, a case

which highlights the vulnerability of tens of thousands of Filipinas working in the Japanese entertainment industry; and calls to the UN for immediate and effective action to stop the genocidal rape and killing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and for international action to ensure the prompt arrest and trial of Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and others indicted by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for war crimes.

To join EQUALITY NOW's Women's Action network, or to find out more, write to 4 Wild Court, off Kingsway, London, WC2B 4AU, and if possible send a financial contribution of £10, or more, cheques made payable to EQUALITY NOW. □

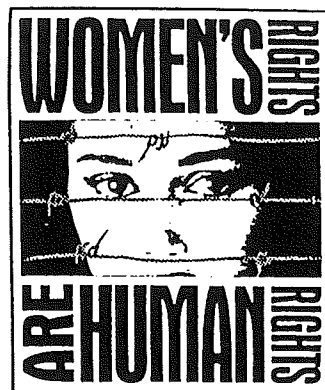
Flor de Maria Salguero de Laparra

On May 17 1995 in Guatemala City, Flor de Maria Salguero de Laparra, a trade unionist working in the maquiladora industry, was kidnapped from a bus on her way to work. She was drugged, beaten and raped three times. On behalf of the women's committee of FESTRAS, the Guatemalan food workers' union, Flor was representing 27 women employees at the Modas Simon garment factory (which produces dresses for the US label Leslie Fay). The women had accused the factory owner, a US citizen named Grek Sung Bang, of sexual harassment and illegal firing of workers involved in organising.

Prior to the attack, during a meeting in March 1995 to discuss sexual harassment charges against Grek Sung Bang, and the firing of five workers involved in unionisation attempts, Bang insulted and threatened Flor. He told her that he would be sending her 'a little present'. Subsequent to the attack, Flor received phone calls asking if she liked her 'little present'. She has lodged a complaint with the Public Minister and fears that she may be 'disappeared' at any time.

For over a decade, Flor has been fighting for the rights of Guatemalan women workers. Despite the threat to her personal safety, Flor continues to work for the rights of Guatemalan women workers to organise, to be paid adequate living wages, and to work free of sexual harassment.

Please write to President Ramiro de Leon Carpio at National Palace, Guatemala City, Guatemala. Urge him to investigate the attack on Flor de Maria Salguero de Laparra and to prosecute those responsible for it. Also urge that Flor be provided with protection to ensure her personal safety. Send copies of your letters and replies to FESTRAS, 6 Ave. 15-41, Zona 1, Guatemala City, Guatemala, as well as to EQUALITY NOW, PO Box 20646, Columbus Circle Station, New York, NY 10023.



Feminist Political Consciousness vs Ideology

Kathleen Barry's recent book, *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, develops a feminist human rights analysis of sexual exploitation, whether through trafficking in women, military prostitution, sex industrialisation or the normalisation of prostitution, in which this exploitation is understood as being fundamentally oppressive and a denial of women's human rights.

In this extract, she looks at what 'consent' means in a gendered, patriarchal society, and points out the alliances between the right and liberals (some of whom identify as feminists) in denouncing radical feminism. Because liberals lack a political consciousness of women's oppression, they collude with the right in 'protecting' men and male privilege, under the guise of 'personal choice' and individualism.

Over the last decade, as I have listened to women's responses to my first book *Female Sexual Slavery*, I have heard from some women that they found the book 'too painful to read' or 'depressing', while others were 'empowered' by it because their experiences had been revealed as exploitation and slavery, or simply because domination had been named and explored.

Yet another reaction has been to classify this work as 'victim feminism', or 'male bashing'. In the United States this is more than backlash. This highly vocal, media hyped assault on feminism as a *liberation* movement is aligned with conservatives and liberals, who

both attack feminism for 'political correctness' (p.c.). They silence social protest and political consciousness not only of sexism but racism, homophobia, and the environment by denying women's oppression. Anti-feminism in the form of women's defense of men is not new to the women's movement. But the alignment with right-wing anti-'political correctness' forces is new. Katie Roiphe [author of *The Morning After*] typifies a dangerous women's movement collusion with both the right and the liberals against what they call the political correctness of feminism. With no data of her own, citing flawed critiques as her sources, Roiphe has challenged the existence of date rape and Mary

Kathleen Barry *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York University Press, 1995).



Koss's date rape statistics that reveal that 1 in 4 women will be raped in college. Roiphe, raising a women's movement defense, is concerned that women are being seen only as victims, or 'that men are lascivious, women are innocent'.¹ Roiphe questions women's agency when rape takes place after a woman has been drinking or has taken drugs, as if the society is not gendered, is not patriarchal, and has no relationship individual behavior.

Since the emergence of the U.S. women's movement in the late 1960s, the political left has consistently tried to delegitimize feminism on the same terms that, today, Wendy Kaminer defended Roiphe in the *New York Times*: 'protesting their sexual victimization enables privileged, heterosexual white women to claim their share of the high moral ground ceded to victims of racism, classism and homophobia'.² Kaminer's support for Roiphe suggests the origins of the anti-feminist women's movement in the left. Right-wing accusations of political correctness build from the left wing's 25-year campaign to delegitimize independent feminism, denouncing it as privileged or bourgeois. Yet until now, until it became politically incorrect to indicate one has been raped, or that men oppress women, it had been impossible for the left wing to invalidate the women's movement, precisely because the movements against sexual exploitation raised feminism beyond only issues of economic class.

Political consciousness vs. personal choice

Roiphe is representative of some women who have come to the movement in a general apolitical climate and who have learned about women's issues from books, the media, lectures, and through women's studies. By and large, women's studies, having dissociated itself from feminist activism, is an increasingly apolitical study of women. Where feminism originated in the 1960s in consciousness raising that raised the personal to the political, many women replace feminist consciousness and political liberation with personal choice (the real p.c.). The movement, increasingly emptied of political consciousness, approaches issues in terms of personal choice, an inheritance from the earlier 'me' generation that is almost a perfect fit with the ideology of American individualism. It treats issues as if they exist outside of, apart from, and indeed irrelevant to

any social conditions and power arrangements in the immediate or distant environment, that is, anything that exists outside of their own conjuring.

In the 1990s we risk repeating history. By the 1890s the women's movement that had originated in the 1850s was emptied of political consciousness. The movement was rapidly reduced to apolitical reform that blindly supported prevailing national ideologies, ideologies which aside from the narrowed concept of women's rights then, were exploiting the rest of the world. That generation brought feminism to an end. It invoked the silencing of confrontation against sexism for over 60 years until the 1960s.

By the mid 1990s, it appears that the women's movement is going in the same direction, which intensifies the isolation of feminists whose commitments to women's liberation is framed from hard-won, difficultly achieved consciousness. And what is at the root of the reactionary positioning of the women's movement? Their term 'male bashing' is more than accusatory; it is representational. First, it represents collusion between women who identify themselves as feminist and the most reactionary forces of the right wing, particularly Rush Limbaugh, who originated this term. Now, in a reactionary alignment between right-wing agitators and sexual liberals, some women are identifying their feminism as that which will protect men, racists, heterosexists, and polluters from being 'bashed'. The strategy is not direct nor is it straightforward. As sexual relations of power have surfaced through consciousness and in activism with other movements, presumably some men, some whites, some heterosexuals, some environmental polluters have become uncomfortable as their groups and some specific members are increasingly identified as perpetrators of injustices and exploitation. Rather than confronting sexual power, these women turn on women who are exposing oppression and confronting injustice and charge that we are reducing women to victims, a concept that could only create attention in the absence of political consciousness as consciousness recognizes victimization as other than passive. As Janice Raymond has put it,

Once upon a time, in the beginnings of this wave of feminism, there was a feminist consensus that women's choices were constructed, burdened,

framed, impaired, constrained, limited, created, shaped by patriarchy. No one proposed that this meant women's choices were *determined*, or that women were passive or helpless victims of patriarchy. That was because many women believed in the power of feminism to change women's lives, and obviously, women could not change if they were socially determined in their roles or pliant putty in the hands of patriarchs.³

We are faced with a movement that is not only not remembering that history but is increasingly driven by women who were not there when consciousness ignited, and for the first time decades of deadening silence, women created new possibilities for themselves which were possibilities for their class. The critiques of power relations that characterized the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s have been replaced by the apolitical emphasis on the personal choice of hopelessly mired individualism. This is the sexual liberalism that Sheila Jeffreys defined as 'a set of political beliefs and practices rooted in the assumption that sexual expression is inherently liberating and must be permitted to flourish unchecked, even when it entails the exploitation or brutalization of others'.⁴ It is now evident that neither 'sexual liberalism' nor 'backlash' are adequate terms to identify the nonconscious ideology of personal choice as it is interlinked with the agendas of the right wing as well as liberals.

Placed on the defensive

Under these conditions, the women's movement is increasingly compelled to prove extreme force in order to charge rape, and to ignore how the sexual relations of power seep into daily life, shaping particularly male-female interaction in the society. Being laden with the burden of proving extreme force is a reversion to where we were in 1970 when we first launched the movement against rape in the United States. This is how the women's movement against sexual violence is placed on the defensive as it has been since the beginning of the Reagan administration's threatened cutback of social services and its censorship of social protest. Many rape crisis centers and wife abuse shelters began to limit their services or restrict the kinds of cases they took. Trying to look more like social service agencies, they hoped to protect the precious little funding they have. Roiphe and the vanguard of women who are intent on protecting men from supposed

male bashing now perpetuate the self-imposed limitations initiated in the reactionary administration of Reagan and perpetuated by Bush. It is a curious and dangerous allegiance between the right wing, fundamentalist, and political reactionary stance and these women who promote personal choice to treat rape as normal sex, to promote pornography, to treat racial hatred as a personal preference for a racially 'pure' environment, to treat homophobia as the personal choice to live and work outside of association with lesbians and gay men. Hyper-individualism and elevation of personal choice as the only and therefore ultimate condition of freedom, if it prevails over the feminist movement, will be its final deconstruction.

The harm of personal choice politics and campaigns against political correctness is intensified for oppressed groups as it is another manifestation of capitalist market liberal ideology that emphasizes individualism to serve market competition and promote consumerism. but more than that, it creates an ideological environment that elevates personal choice above *any* concept of a common good or collective well-being. The idea is that freedom is defined as personal choice in a context of structured, politically imposed inequality that ranges from male-female relations to the relationship between Western nations and the Third World. Ultimately the reduction of political consciousness to personal choice reverts all issues to the liberal construction of consent. At base this is how market economy ideology promotes patriarchal domination in post-industrial society.

Problems of 'consent'

While the slogan of the movement against sexual violence, 'No Means No', firmly asserts that individual women refuse to be cajoled into sexual experiences they do not want with men they reject, it also suggests that *sexual* victimization of women takes place only when consent is not given, when women explicitly say no. It suggests that when women do not say no, when women actively consent, they are not violated. Defining rape in terms of violation of consent shifts the emphasis of political consciousness from the act of victimization, the use of sex to exploit, to individual will; it shifts oppression from a class condition of sexual exploitation to individual experiences of it. That is how women in prostitution are excluded from being

recognized as sexually victimized. Prostitute women are made to be the 'other'—the women for whom the act of abusive, violating, dehumanizing sex is meant—because their consent is established in the market exchange, where they take money for sex.

The patriarchal power of sexual liberalism has deployed ideologies that narrowly construe consent in the context of social normalcy of impaired judgment. Patriarchal law can address individual conditions of coercion but it will not help women confront conditions of collective oppression. It is not a crime to oppress women through sexual exploitation where those lines blur. The law will not resolve women's subjection to sexual power. Nor will it correct its own liberal ideology that individualizes every case so that there is no recognizable collective condition. Only a collective liberation movement's struggle with analysis of oppression can do that.

The facts of women's subordination often lie in relations that are obscured in silence or normalized in acceptance but that nevertheless dehumanize and brutalize us as women even when we do not directly experience their most extreme manifestations—unless we bring to them consciousness of women's condition as a political reality.

Consciousness: making it political, making it feminist

Breaking silence and facing the brutal realities of sexual exploitation require feminist political consciousness. Consciousness transforms brutal facts and painful realities into new knowledge that exposes power and ignites action. Confronted with sexual exploitation, to move from not knowing to awareness without *political* consciousness of power relations leaves one confronted either with prevailing liberal ideology or raw pain, and therefore unable to know that because sexual exploitation is not inevitable and has been politically constructed, it can also be deconstructed—by women.

The common denominator in all sexual exploitation is the disruption of and violation of a woman's identity, that sense of 'who I am' and 'who I can be'. Prostitution and incest abuse are twin acts—they are the terrorist models of female subordination in that they invoke girls' and women's splitting from their selves, segmentation of the unsegmentable, partitioning of human realities that can only be

whole. Consciousness of sexual politics in confronting oppression restores the whole from its segmentation. It is the foundation for healing and action.

Feminist political consciousness moves feminism back and forth in a dialectical interaction between the personal and the political, the particular and the general, inevitably taking us from our own cultural and national specificity to the international community and global feminism, and back again. Political consciousness extends our awareness of our social location from our homes to our communities, from nation-states to the international economy and the global political order. International feminist activism leads us logically to analysis of patriarchal power.

Consciousness requires being able to see the conditions by which sex is exploited, and that requires considering what occurs in the sex exchange. Consciousness is not only an intellectual awareness; rather, political consciousness allows us to know women's experiences of *individual* exploitations and of *oppression*, not only as painful subordinations but also as potentialities for their transcendence. I am not speaking of transcendence in only spiritual or ephemeral terms. Feminist consciousness recognizes the fuller terrain of male domination—oppression. Consciousness of *oppression* makes strategies clearer, vision fuller, and action deeper.

Popular criticism of feminism alleges that it reduces women to victims. But women's knowledge of themselves as victims, as 'empowered', as oppressed, and/or as liberated is knowledge that is realistically accessible to women only through political consciousness. Due to fear of the potential of consciousness to produce change, this dynamic, powerful knowing has been reduced to 'political correctness'. But, in fact, the power of political consciousness is that it is personally liberating because it enables vision of the world of patriarchal domination as it is. Without consciousness, in the suppression of consciousness, prior to consciousness, knowledge is isolated to individuals and in that isolation it goes unnamed, unspoken. As knowledge is produced in interaction with others, isolation relativizes it and relegates it to intra-individual psychological conditions. While feminism is charged with reducing women to victims, women's isolated, suppressed anger and pain

from domination is reduced to clinical conditions, material sources of the pain. Objective knowledge is located outside of, as well as within, the self. It can either function as an exterior determination of the self as it does in oppression or as the basis for collective action as it does in consciousness.

Personal empowerment that treats overcoming objective domination as an act of will, a psychological state, is an idealistic approach that traps knowledge of oppression within individualized, personal feelings and preferences.

Consciousness reframes personalized, isolated knowledge of objective conditions, recognizing them as political conditions. Reformulating knowledge redefines victimization, which is no longer recognized as an intra-individual experience and therefore is not a matter of consent or will of individuals.

Thus, the crucial difference involved in knowing the worst of patriarchal domination for women turns on political consciousness of women's oppression. Consciousness, as I am discussing it here, is a political knowing of the personal reality that is carried into action that not only confronts but also includes the knowledge and conviction that it can/will/must transform present realities. It is active knowledge, found and created in social action, surpassing the patriarchal limits of the possible to imagine and to know another reality as possibility.

Consciousness is the basis of activism, of project, of new knowledge and political confrontation generated by the feminist movement against sexual exploitation. Because it is the consciousness of sexual politics and because it confronts the political and social realities of domination and oppression, that same consciousness is the foundation from which it is possible to find ways for women individually and collectively to heal from rape, prostitution, and all forms of sexual exploitation. Consciousness of sexual politics forms the supportive network that women find coming off the streets, running away from home, and/or going into therapy. That consciousness becomes constructed in political struggle and knowledge.

Most importantly, political consciousness is feminist only if it is multidimensional and inclusive. Therefore, if it is not global, it is not consciousness; if it does not embrace the range of conditions that constitute oppression, it is

merely reform of patriarchy, to make it work better with modifications. Feminist consciousness is diminished if the movement confronts and effectively addresses only one issue, such as pornography in the West or trafficking in the Third World, without addressing the entire matrix of sexual exploitation. Therefore single-issue feminist is a contradiction to feminist consciousness of oppression. So is missionary feminism, which occurs when Western women do not recognize that which exploits women in the Third World springs from their own experience of sexual politics. Likewise, precisely because of the power of prevailing misogynist ideologies, in the superabundance of poverty that appears impossible to see beyond, in the intense sexualization of women that seems to be all there is, feminist consciousness must see the possibility of a future that is the rejection these present realities.

Consciousness vs. ideology

Consciousness is not a matter of having the correct political analysis or knowing the right answers. That is ideology. Ideology is a structured, preformed set of ideas that justify particular power arrangements. Ideology replaces political consciousness either with an embedded taken-for-grantedness of the present situation or with a prefabricated political analysis. Consciousness, on the other hand, exposes every day realities as power relations, making it possible to see and identify that which is taken for granted as structured power. Consciousness is accessed through critical reflection, which reveals power, dominance, and subordination in the dailiness of life. Feminism must confront dominant ideologies not only in the state but also in the home, not only in public but also in bed. In the West, the liberal legalism that rationalizes the market economy and promotes individualism often remains unquestioned as feminists struggle for legal change for women. The first failure of consciousness occurs in feminism when one assumes that she can be immune from the influences of her national and cultural ideology.

The limits of liberalism

Personally, I have had to confront the limits of legal liberalism many times in order to try to shed its ideology from my work. This is an ongoing condition of consciousness. In 1983 I met with Hanna Olssen, the Swedish researcher

who was responsible for a major government study, *The Prostitution Report*. Hanna and I had previously had the opportunity to discuss our research on prostitution in Sweden in 1981. We had been struck with the fact that, in different parts of the globe, unknown to each other, we had not only researched the same subject but had come to very similar conclusions that were published at the same time. In *The Prostitution Report*, she spoke of the 'loveless male society' while I discussed befriending and love (terror bonding) as pimp procuring strategies in *Female Sexual Slavery*. In 1983, getting away from the pressing business at hand in the international meeting I had convened, she candidly asked me, 'My god, Kathy, why did you have to call it slavery?' Realizing that she knew very well why prostitution was enslaving and that was not the question, I mentally searched for the issue behind her question.

Of course. Unwittingly, I had fallen into the 'free-force' dichotomization of women's choices, which had led me, in *Female Sexual Slavery*, to propose decriminalization as the appropriate legal strategy for confronting prostitution. At that moment, I felt refreshed, having been caught in what I now perceive to be the trap of the American mind, which must contend with a U.S. concept of rights limited and distorted by the individualism that promotes market exchange. Intense hyperindividualism narrows rights to individual rights and in so doing it instrumentalizes them. Under an individualism that promotes market economics, rights are reduced from being enhancements of the full human condition to serving the instrumental end of market economics and therefore promoting the competitive edge of individualism. Reducing human rights to individual consent instrumentalizes the meaning of rights as they serve the market economy. When instrumentalized, rights are not primarily concerned with the quality of human experience. In the extreme represented by U.S. sexual liberalism, rights are understood in market-economy terms, in terms of a deregulated human condition that emphasizes individual choice and human will over the equality and content of human experience.

Feminist human rights: beyond 'consent'

According to the feminist human-rights concepts I am developing in this work, 'con-

sent' is not the indicator of freedom, nor is absence of consent the primary indicator of exploitation. The liberal construction of consent narrows the feminist analysis of oppression to individual wrongs and drowns feminism in the ethics of individualism. It confines sex to a matter of consent and will and does not consider how sex is used, how it is experienced, and how it is constructed into power.

Individually and institutionally, the lived experience of dehumanized sex harms women and sustains the gender class condition. It is oppression. Consent to oppression or an apparent 'will' to be objectified is a condition of oppression. It is never a state of freedom. Sexual exploitation is oppression, and that means that it will be accepted and even promoted with the oppressed class. That is what oppression is! This is how every form of oppression is sustained. Violating consent may then be an aspect of exploitation, but it is not its defining feature. Therefore, freedom cannot be confined within a unidimensional concept of consent; it must expand to the full human condition—the female condition. It must be inclusive of the full range of exploitations visited upon women as a class. In that context the movement against sexual violence or violence against women is one challenge to a broad-based condition of sexual oppression that includes prostitution just as it includes sexual subordination of women in marriage and of teenagers in dating.

And thus I find that the issue of consent and the concept of force have falsely separated prostitution from rape, legally and socially. In marriage, in dating, and in rape, what women have to prove is not that they were abused but that they are not whores, that is, that they are not sexed bodies. In response, movements against sexual violence are increasingly confined within 'no means no' campaigns that treat rape not as sex but as aggression, as the two could not be considered together. That is too little for a liberation struggle to demand. Fully confronting sexual power will only take place when women are determined, as we have been, to win our full liberation. □



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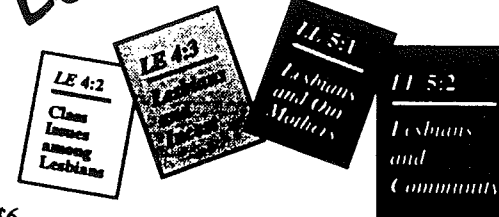
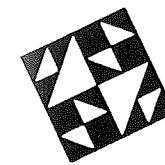
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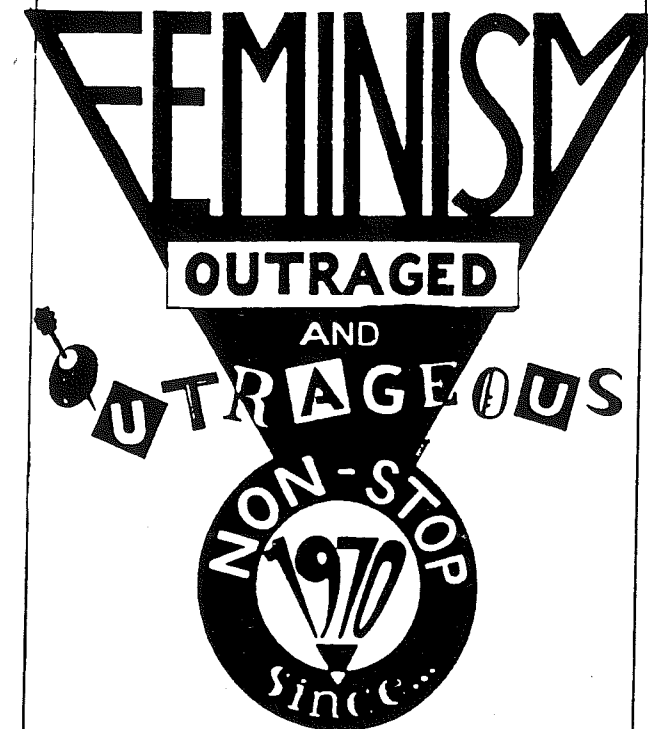


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Footnotes:

¹ Katie Roiphe 'Date Rape's Other Victim' *New York Times*, June 13 1993, 40.

² *New York Times*, September 19 1993.

³ Janice G. Raymond 'Sexual and Reproductive Liberalism' in Dorchen Leidholdt and Janice G. Raymond, eds *Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism* (Pergamon Press, 1990) p 103.

⁴ Dorchen Leidholdt 'Introduction' in Leidholdt and Raymond, ix.

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