

Trouble & Strife

The radical feminist magazine

No more fairytales

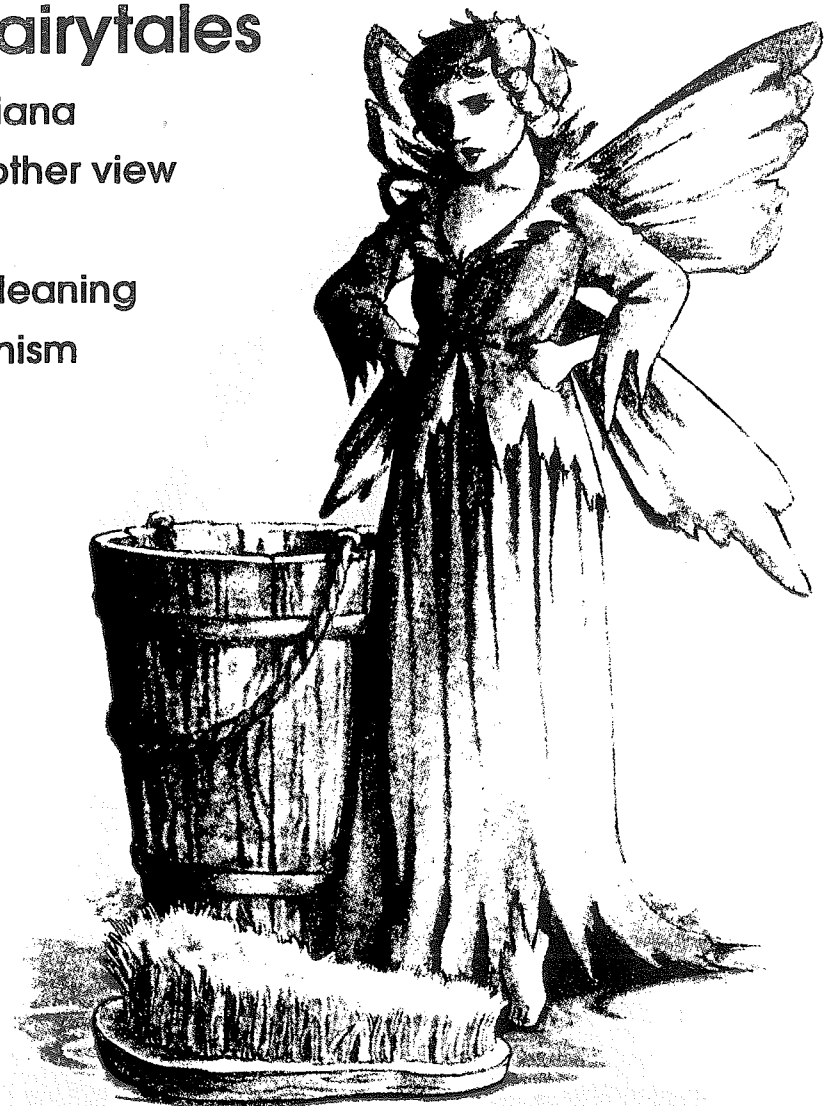
★ Feminists on Diana

★ Dunblane: Another view

Women at work

The meaning of cleaning

Dangerous Darwinism



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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.

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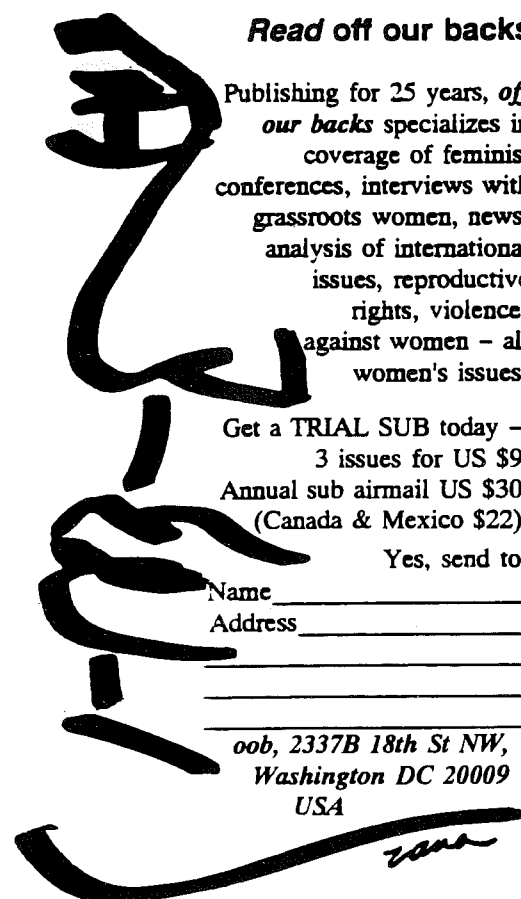
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Letters

Dear T&S

Letterbox Library (the antisexist and multicultural children's bookclub) tell me that they know of no antisexist parents' network, so I said I would try and start one. I have never tried to start anything like this before and would first like to hear from anyone interested who could write to me at the address below. I do hope other radical feminists will want to join.

Rukshana Afia

52 Hill Top Mount
Leeds LS8 4EW

DISPATCHES FROM THE FRONT LINE

Sarah Maguire, an English barrister, is currently working in Bosnia. Here we reproduce the speech she gave at the Rape and Criminal Justice System conference earlier this year.

I want to talk about silence. I want to talk about the silencing effect of sexual violence, both in the national and international context. I want to talk about silence because rape, sexual violence, is one of the most silencing mechanisms that men have for controlling women. Three days ago I was talking with some of the women who have survived the fall of Srebrenitze in Bosnia and they have retreated now into silence because nobody listened then and nobody is listening now.

We have the two war crimes tribunals, what they call ad hoc tribunals — the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (the ICTY) and the International Tribunal for Rwanda (the ITR). The Yugoslav Tribunal is vastly under-resourced; the Rwanda Tribunal is

virtually unresourced — and there's prize for guessing why there should be a difference in funding of a tribunal for a European country and funding of an African one.

All over eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, you ask the women 'what about the tribunal', 'will you talk to the tribunal', 'why not go to the tribunal?' and the answers they give are various. They say 'the tribunal hasn't been here' or 'they came here but they did nothing', or they say 'they came but we won't talk to them', or — and this is usually from men — 'our women are different, our women won't talk, our women have silence, our women have dignity, it's different for our women'. Well, that's a load of complete crap, isn't it? Because it's different for all women, we are all different. It's not always

because those men don't care, it's not always because those men want to hide what has happened to women, but it's easier for those men and for some women — easier for all of us, probably — not to confront the reality of sexual violence. And this holds true for sexual violence in the international or the domestic context. It's easier not to talk about it.

Feminist and other silences

But we have to, because sexual violence affects all of our lives. Yet it's an issue that we rarely discuss, even if we are feminist activists, in terms of our personal lives. We don't like to talk about how we take taxis home when we're coming home late at night. We don't like to admit, even to each other, about being scared of sexual violence. We don't like to tell each other that we fear the step behind us on the dark street at night. We certainly don't like to tell each other, those of us who are still unfortunate enough to be involved with men, (oh dear, did I just come out?) even when living with brothers or fathers that we fear the man behind the closed door. It's the same silence, nationally or internationally. We are expected to get on with our lives; we are expected not to make a fuss.

Here are two examples. We talk about 'date rape'; we don't talk about rape by known men. And the other day, a friend of mine in Bosnia was telling me that the Minister of Health had been to visit their organization. It's a fantastic organization; it works with women exclusively and has done since around 1992. The Minister of Health was very impressed and he said 'you know, it's amazing about our women' — going back again to 'our' women — 'you can beat them and beat them and the only thing that happens is your arm gets tired. Women don't break.' We are expected to maintain silence.

Rape as a war crime

In this context, it's amazing and fantastic that both the ad hoc tribunals have recognized that rape constitutes a war crime; that rape is or can be a constituent of genocide, of crime against humanity, or even, for god's sake, a grave breach of the rules and customs of war. It's the weirdest concept, that it's acceptable to do certain things in war, but if you go a little bit too far, if things get out of hand, then that's a breach of what is normal and acceptable practice when two nations decide that they're going to start fighting each other. Or should I say, when

the men from two nations decide that they're going to start fighting each other.

Rape wasn't recognized in the Nuremberg trials after the Holocaust as a war crime. It just wasn't an issue; it wasn't addressed; it didn't happen, but if it did happen then it was something, again, to be kept silent about. So the fact that rape is recognized by the ad hoc tribunals, and will be recognized by the permanent international criminal court as a constituent of genocide or crime against humanity, is a huge step forward. It's a step forward that we feminists made. We made that step forward because we have insisted for years and years and gone on and on and not been silenced about the need to recognize sexual violence and to name it for exactly what it is.

So rape is now a war crime; it's genocide and a crime against humanity and a grave breach of the rules and customs of war. But what's actually happening? Are men by their score from former Yugoslavia or from Rwanda being prosecuted? Are the prisons full of serial rapists, or of men who order the mass rape of women in schools and other camps? No. The tribunals are failing women. I fully support the tribunals and recognise the need for them, and am an advocate of the permanent international criminal court. But they're failing for various reasons.

A case for the prosecution

First of all if you're going to have a trial, you have to charge somebody, and the tribunals are not charging sexual violence. There are a few indictments, but by and large they're not charging. Part of the reason for that, I am told, is that it's easier to prove genocide. It's easier to prove genocide simply by pointing to the murders of — usually — men. The way that the war in former Yugoslavia was conducted was that, for instance, a village would be targeted — 40 men would be taken from the village, put on a bus, taken to a mass grave and shot through the head. 40 women would be taken, put on a bus, taken to a school or somewhere similar, and raped systematically over a period of weeks or months. But you don't need to charge the rape, because you've got the murders and you can prove the genocide that way. So again there is silence over what happened to women.

Secondly, to charge rape, you have to have a witness, and witnesses have to testify. For a witness to testify, she has to be protected, and not just at The Hague when she goes to the

For information about the transcript of this conference, contact the Centre for Research on Violence, Abuse & Gender Relations, Leeds Metropolitan University, Calverley Street, Leeds LS1 3HE. Tel (0113) 283-6773

Tribunal, but before and after. It's no good dumping a woman back in the refugee centre — they're now euphemistically called collective centres, and there's nothing very collective about them, I can assure you — and saying, 'Thanks very much for giving your evidence, thanks very much for talking to one of our investigators, sit there and wait, and while you wait, the man you accused, who lives probably up the road in the Republic of Serbska, will know that you have given evidence, will know that you have talked to the investigators, and you and your family — what's left of it — will not be protected. But please just sit there and wait.'

Thirdly, to be a the witness, the woman has to believe that what she's been through is not her fault. Now, you'd think, wouldn't you, that for women who have been raped in war, no-one would believe that it was their fault. But even in that context, women can still believe that it was their fault, that somehow they were different from the women who managed to escape rape, and that somehow it was their fault. In this way they are stigmatized and therefore silenced.

Fourthly, the women have to be supported. When I talk about support for rape victims and for witnesses, I'm not talking about sitting around on beanbags and making lots of cups of tea. What I'm talking about is adequate provision for people whose rights the international community claim should be protected. When a woman has been raped, her fundamental human rights have been breached irrevocably, and we the international community have a responsibility to take care of those victims.

A particular crime

There's been a lot of discussion at this conference about whether rape is a particular crime, or whether rape victims are a particular group of victims. Rape is a particular crime because of its relationship with heterosexuality. It's a particular crime because of what it does to women, what it does to its victims — what men do to their victims when they rape. It's not women who are particular victims, it's the crime itself, and that's what we have to recognize. Because of feminist activists and feminist lawyers, there are provisions in the ad hoc tribunals that are useful for protecting victims of sexual violence — ones that could and should be brought into domestic jurisdictions. For instance, it is not possible for a man accused of rape as a war

crime to cross-examine the victim about her previous sexual history. This is not going to happen — it's outlawed. Now if this is possible with somebody accused of mass rape or somebody accused of even raping just one woman in a tribunal at The Hague, then why can't it happen at the Old Bailey? Why can't it happen at the Crown Court in Dublin?

As a lawyer, I would maintain that previous sexual history is *never* relevant. I work as a defence barrister and I refuse to take rape cases, despite the risk of being disbarred. I refuse to stand up there with my advocacy skills, and say to a woman, 'you had sex in the back of a car once, didn't you? You appeared in front of a camera once, didn't you?' How can I do that? How can I stand there with my wig and gown and criticize a woman for being a woman? Because that is what allowing sexual history evidence really means. I absolutely refuse to do it.

The 'consent defence' in war crime

In the ad hoc tribunals, consent can only be an issue where the defense raises it. They have to show that it's relevant to that trial. Some would say that if you're talking about anonymous rape or of somebody who's ordered the rape of loads and loads of women, then of course consent can't be an issue. In fact, many of the women who were raped during the war in the former Yugoslavia, were raped largely by men who knew them very well — by school friends, neighbours or men who lived in the next village, so the defendants could say that consent was an issue, because 'I'd known her since we were schoolmates and, despite me being a Serb and she being a Moslem, and despite the fact that our country — now our countries — were at war, in fact she's always fancied me, and this was just an opportunity'. But at the ad hoc tribunals, if a man wants to raise consent as an issue, he has to show why, and the burden is upon him to establish that consent really is a relevant issue. Again, if it can be done there, then why the hell can't it be done here?

One of the things that is necessary for a witness, is a culture of belief. For example, last August I visited the UNHCR in Zagreb where I spoke informally to a women refugee protection officer about a woman from Kluge I had met who told me that she and all the women from the village had been taken to the local primary school and had been subjected to sexual assault

over a long period of time. The protection officer said, 'oh yes, Kluge, but it happened such a lot that they're all now saying it happened, and you can't believe them'. Now, if you can't believe *them*, who the hell can you believe? Without a culture of belief, women will not come forward and testify. I would not take myself from a village where I was trying to repair my life and my home and find out what had happened to my relatives and put myself in a place where people were going to sneer at me and say 'Raped? Pah! You're making it up.' I wouldn't do it and I wouldn't ask anyone else to do that.

Bringing rapists to justice

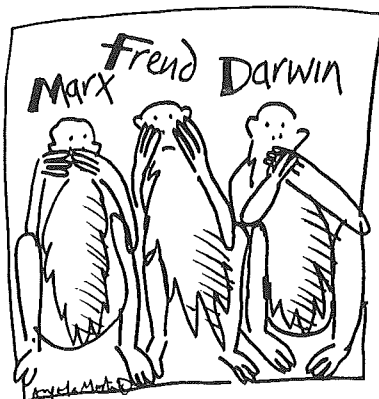
Finally, even if you have all these things — you've got a charge, you've got an indictment, you've got a witness who's prepared to testify, she's protected, she's supported, she's believed, — you then need a defendant. The prisons at the Hague are going to be empty by the end of December. Not because there's a shortage of war criminals, or of *indicted* war criminals. Not because the streets and the walls of Bosnia are not almost papered with wanted posters — made by women's groups, not the United Nations — which list and describe and give photographs of wanted war criminals. There's no shortage of men waiting to be arrested, and there's also no shortage of French soldiers for instance, standing beside them, watching them have a cigarette, there's no shortage of British and Welsh soldiers watching those men having cups of coffee in coffee bars, the big four, as they're known are occupying positions of power and influence throughout the former Yugoslavia. Our elected representatives and others negotiate with them or their representatives on issues of national and international security. Well, the

women say 'why should I bare my soul, put myself in danger, isolate myself from my community, risk being accused of lying and of fantasizing, when the states who are responsible and who do have the power — it's a complete myth that the forces in the former Yugoslavia do not have the power — when those forces and those states do not implement the very law that I am expected to implement — why should I?'

One of my fantasies before I went to Bosnia was to learn enough Bosnian to walk up to Radovan Karadžić and say 'Are you Radovan Karadžić? Pleased to meet you. My name's Sarah Maguire and I've got a warrant for your arrest.' And I talked to my nearest and dearest friends about it and they said 'We'll come to the funeral'. But there are plenty of men, soldiers, in the former Yugoslavia, who we pay for, who could do exactly that. But they won't and they won't because people say we don't want to risk our boys. But we were prepared to risk our boys to go and fight in the Gulf, we were prepared to risk our boys in the Falklands, over territory and oil, but we're not prepared to risk our boys for the lives of women. Once again, women's lives, women's futures are being sacrificed to some nebulous idea of political stability. As women, we know that our lives have no such thing as stability while the threat and the reality of sexual violence against us hangs over us and permeates our everyday lives, we do not have political, or other, stability.

One last thing, and I'm going to return to why sexual violence has become an issue for the war crimes tribunals. It's because of us and because of our feminism and our activism and our bloody hard work. Sisters, never give up. Refuse to be silenced, and keep up our demands for fair treatment for women. □

Back to Nature



Cartoons by Angela Martin

Biological determinism is making a comeback. More worrying still, it is not confined to cranks, crackpots and right-wing extremists; it is becoming dangerously fashionable in spheres of political influence, in the guise of evolutionary psychology. Debbie Cameron here presents us with some of the theories put forward in support of 'human nature' — from the merely ludicrous to the wholly objectionable.

Simone de Beauvoir said it in 1949: women are made, not born. Anatomy is not destiny, and sexism is not explained or justified by the facts of biology. This view is now orthodox liberal wisdom. Belief in biological determinism is confined to saloon bar bigots and the sort of crusty old judge who has never heard of the Beatles.

Or is it? Intellectual fashion is as fickle as any other kind, and there are signs that biolism is becoming respectable again. In the 1970s it was Marx trendy intellectuals talked about, in the 1980s it was Freud, and now it's the turn of a third Bearded Victorian Patriarch, the evolutionary theorist Charles Darwin.

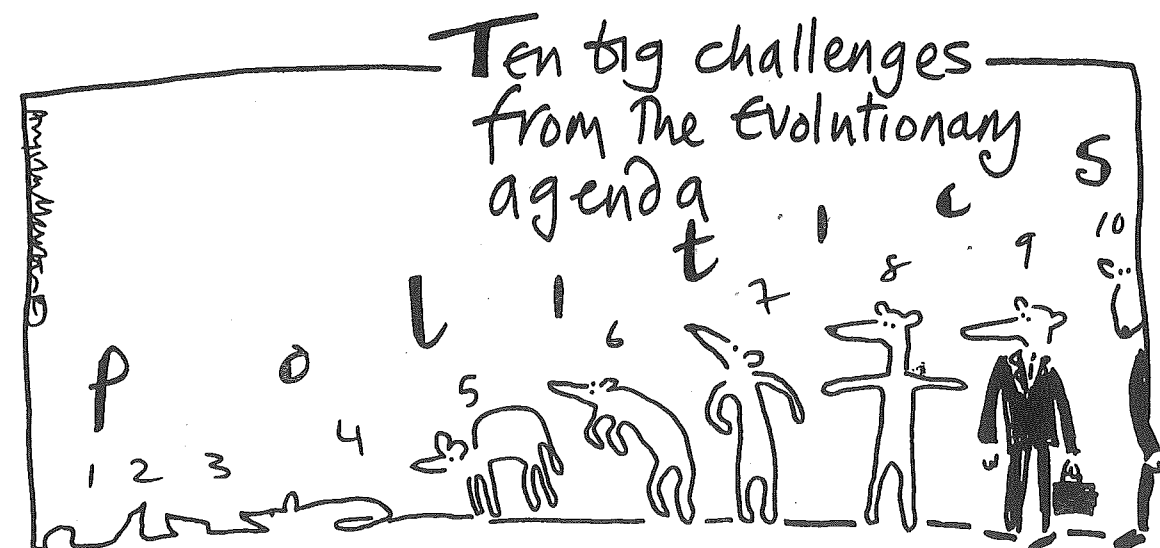
From theory to 'world view': the Darwin Seminar

I first got wind of this a couple of years ago, when a friend put me on the mailing list of something called 'The Darwin Seminar', which

is based at the London School of Economics. She thought I might want to keep a feminist eye on its doings, since as she put it, 'these people are sinister'.

The Seminar proceeded to bombard me with literature: papers, summaries of papers, briefing notes, announcements of meetings. Contributors seemed obsessed with things like the ideal female hip-to-waist measurement ratio and the statistics on step-parents killing their partners' children. Whatever was being discussed, the theme was invariably that Darwin had all the answers. Writers were scathing about social scientists who treat standards of beauty or patterns of violent crime as social constructs.

The seminar's outpourings were sometimes reminiscent of religious fundamentalist tracts — ironic, when you consider who Darwin's main enemies were in his own time. The thought crossed my mind that it might be a front for the sort of right-wing crackpots who gave Darwin



such a bad name in the heyday of the eugenics movement, and who still stir up controversy with their ravings about the 'underclass' or Black people's IQs.

But the Darwin Seminar is much subtler than that, much closer to the liberal mainstream. And the mainstream is increasingly taking notice of what it has to say. Its conferences get coverage in the quality press, books by its participants are widely reviewed, and the fashionable think-tank Demos recently devoted a whole issue of its house magazine *Demos Quarterly* to the seminar's ideas. The issue was called 'Matters of Life and Death: The world view from evolutionary psychology', and it ends with 'Ten Big Challenges from the Evolutionary Agenda', essentially a list of social policy proposals.

This does make me uneasy, since it suggests the new Darwinists are actively courting political influence. Think-tanks are an increasingly important part of British political culture: often loosely affiliated to (and sometimes partially funded by) political parties, their function is to carry out research on policy issues and also to 'think the unthinkable', floating ideas which may then be taken up by politicians and their advisors. The Centre for Policy Studies played this role for the Conservative party during the Thatcher era, and Demos is doing the same for Tony Blair's new Labour adminis-

tration (Blair himself is known to read Demos's reports). If there's a chance people with real power might take it seriously, perhaps it's time to take a closer look at 'the world view from evolutionary psychology'.

Evolutionary psychology: back to (human) nature

Put in its simplest terms, evolutionary psychology (EP) is the application of Darwin's ideas to the study of human behaviour — how we think, feel and act. The main thesis of EP is that there is such a thing as 'human nature': a universal set of mental/emotional/behavioural traits which do not vary across cultures or change over time. These traits have become established, through the mechanism of natural selection, because it was advantageous to ancestral humans to possess particular mental characteristics — just as it was advantageous to them to possess certain physical traits.

To understand what's being claimed here, it's useful to know that present-day evolutionary science has moved on from the Darwinian concepts most of us vaguely remember, such as 'survival of the fittest'. Probably the most important innovation is the theory of the 'selfish gene', according to which it is genes, rather than whole organisms, which compete for survival. For genes, 'survival' means being passed on to offspring. So an 'advantageous' characteristic in



evolutionary terms is not necessarily one that keeps me alive longer or makes my life easier, it is simply one that maximises my chances of having offspring that carry my genes.

Natural selection is the process whereby genes that produce 'advantageous' characteristics become more common in the population, and ultimately features of whole species. These characteristics originally emerge by chance, not design: they are genetic mutations affecting individuals, but if they prove advantageous they will spread.

Textbooks often illustrate this using the example of the peacock's tail. It's a useful example of the restricted nature of evolutionary advantage, because this tail has clear disadvantages for the survival of any individual peacock, such as making it obvious to predators and slowing it down when it tries to fly away. Why was it selected? The answer is, it's good for reproduction and from a selfish gene perspective that's all it needs to be good for.

From peacocks to people

Imagine a population of peacocks where some have a big, colourful tail and others a smaller

drabber one. Now suppose that peahens are attracted to the big tail, and mate more often with peacocks who have one. The offspring of big tailed peacocks inherit the gene for the big tail. By statistical logic, therefore, over time the big tailed peacocks will outnumber the others and finally displace them. Despite its other drawbacks, the tail survives because at one time it made peacocks who had it better than those who didn't at passing on their genes.

Evolutionary psychologists apply the same reasoning to human psychology. Humans reproduce sexually; Darwinists hypothesise that certain ways of thinking, feeling and acting enabled our ancestors to do this more successfully, and so by natural selection they became part of our 'nature'. For example, it's suggested that our capacity for language and for cultural production (art, literature, etc.) originally served the purpose of making individuals who had those abilities more attractive to the opposite sex. Like the peacock's tail, these abilities were useful for sexual display, or in plainer language, showing off.

One of the more obviously barking contributions to *Demos Quarterly* applies this to politics, speculating that when students at Columbia University in New York protested against investment in South Africa in 1986, they were less interested in registering their disgust with apartheid than in advertising themselves to like-minded people who might want to mate with them. The protest functioned as a sort of giant dating agency ('concerned caring liberal seeks similar for reproductive purposes'). Unconsciously, protesters would reason: 'if s/he cares so much about people s/he's never met in South Africa, s/he will obviously be highly committed to the children who carry our genes'.

The 'unconsciously' is important here, for no one is arguing that humans *consciously* reduce every aspect of their activities to the primeval quest to pass on their genes, that they go to political rallies with the intention of picking up a suitable mate and having their children (this would be a particularly poor explanation of women's involvement in feminist politics!) The things we do now do not have to serve the same purpose in contemporary reality that they are said to have served for our distant ancestors (who did not of course go to political rallies at all). Once natural selection has made some psychological disposition the norm, we will go on expressing it in our behaviour

regardless of whether it serves any purpose at all.

This argument is used to explain why we persist in doing things which in modern conditions are thoroughly unhelpful. For instance, there's a theory humans are genetically programmed to like sweet and fatty foods. It was advantageous for our ancestors to be highly motivated to seek these foods out, since their nutritional value was high, and they were scarce. But many humans today live in conditions where they are overabundant. We eat too much of the foods we are programmed to like and as a result large numbers of us die of heart disease.

Demos makes a social policy point out of this argument: since we are 'by nature' vulnerable to the appeal of foods which can kill us, there's a case for restricting the food industry's right to exploit our 'natural' weakness for them. This illustrates that the new Darwinism is more politically ambiguous than old-style social Darwinism. You don't have to be a nutter or a right-wing authoritarian to sympathise with the argument that it's exploitative to peddle junk food. But the potential nuttiness of basing social policy on ideas about 'human nature' as a product of natural selection comes more sharply into focus when you turn to a subject of obsessive interest to Darwinists: sex.



Sex: all in the genes?

When it comes to sex differences (evolutionary psychologists do not believe in gender) the key point is that women and men play differing roles in reproduction, and this is not just a physiological matter. The social costs of reproduction are different for each sex, and during the evolution of humankind it would therefore have been an

advantage for males and females to develop different ways of thinking, behaving and feeling. As Darwin Seminar convenor Helena Cronin, writing in the socialist magazine *Red Pepper*, summed this up: 'Evolution made men's and women's minds as unlike as it made our bodies'.

In support of this argument Darwinists cite studies showing that in culture after culture, men seek 'mates' (scientist-speak for women/wives) who are younger than they are and meet certain standards of attractiveness, such as having symmetrical features and a waist to hip ratio of around 0.7. These desired qualities are supposedly shorthand indicators of female fertility. Men's ancestors reproduced more successfully when their sexual preferences stopped them wasting time and genes on women who couldn't have healthy babies; present-day men inherit the 'advantageous' preferences.

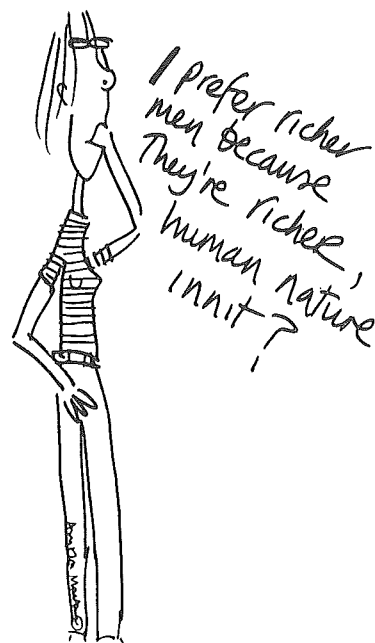
Women, for their part, must invest considerably more time and effort in reproduction — at a minimum, the nine months of pregnancy. They are therefore more interested in whether a prospective mate can provide for them and their offspring; if not, the investment is a risky one. That's why studies find that women rate men on the size of their wallets as opposed to their waists. It's also why women are (allegedly) more hurt by men's *emotional* infidelities than their purely sexual ones. If a man has withdrawn emotionally he may decline to provide for his children. For men, it's women's sexual infidelity that poses the real threat. Women know the children they bear are carrying their genes; men have more reason to be anxious about this. In other words, given the unalterable facts of human sexual reproduction, natural selection would 'logically' favour men who felt sexual jealousy and women who prioritised emotional commitment.

Those of us who prefer sociological accounts are unlikely to be convinced by this reasoning. It is hardly surprising if women prefer men richer than themselves in a world where the vast majority of communities distribute wealth so unequally between the sexes. Women, by and large, *are* the poor: that in itself seems sufficient to explain why they so frequently marry men who are richer than they are.

Factual selection?

Darwinists are curiously selective about *which* culturally widespread behaviours they choose to





focus on. For example, the abuse of children by their stepfathers crops up repeatedly: statistics suggesting that stepchildren are at greater risk than natural children are seized on eagerly, because selfish gene theory predicts that men have a motive for harming children who do not carry their genes. (This is extrapolated from the behaviour of certain animals which will kill another male's children so their mothers stop lactating and become available to mate with the killer.) One of Demos's 'Ten Big Challenges' proposes that social policy around fostering, adoption, child protection and so on should take account of the deep-rooted tendency to favour one's own kin.

But this argument seems to miss out huge swathes of what feminists know to be reality. We know, for instance, that men's abuse of their natural children is not rare, nor is abuse by men who have no involvement with their victims' mothers (e.g. abuse in residential care). It is also evident that abortion and infanticide (by mothers or their close female kin) are culturally and historically widespread practices. In these cases women decide not to bear or nurture children who obviously *do* carry their genes. Strangely enough, none of the contributors to *Demos Quarterly* discuss the evolutionary advantages of this behaviour or call for the law to reflect its pervasiveness in human societies past and present.

Darwinists' selectiveness on this subject looks suspiciously ideological. The statistics they cite about abused and murdered stepchildren are meant to show that the traditional nuclear family (two parents plus their joint offspring) poses least risk; since this does not follow from the facts about child abuse it must reflect a desire to endorse bourgeois patriarchal 'family values'.

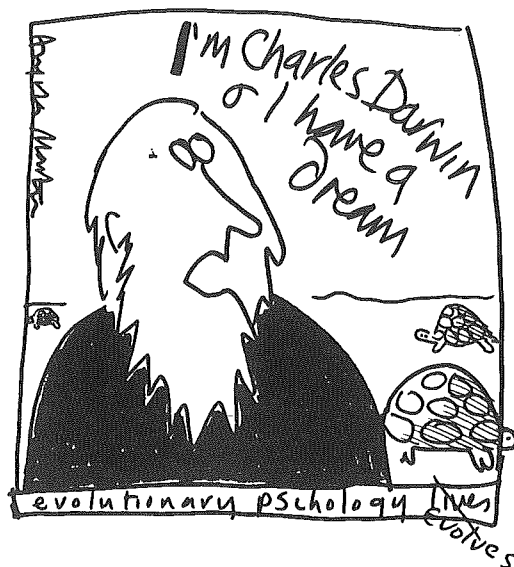
Another good example of 'factual selection' concerns the treatment of homosexuality. It's obvious why this should pose something of a problem. In a universe where sex = heterosexual and its ultimate purpose is the passing on of genes through reproduction, what evolutionary advantage could possibly be conferred by the tendency to prefer one's own sex?

Edward O. Wilson, a pioneer of sociobiology, suggested in 1978 that homosexuality was a 'beneficent behaviour that evolved as an important element of early human organisation'. (What he meant and whether it applied to lesbians is obscure.) But his successors seem strangely reluctant even to

broach the subject. In a review of a recent Darwinist book titled *Why is sex fun?* (a question-begging title if ever there was one), the reviewer notes with astonishment that homosexuality is not mentioned once.

From romance to rape

The assumptions Darwinists make about sex and reproduction lead them to some particularly strange and objectionable conclusions about rape. Robert Wright, in a piece for *Demos Quarterly* titled 'The dissent of woman', argues that the 'anguish' a woman feels after rape is much the same thing as she feels when she has



(consensual) sex with a man who then leaves her. Women have intercourse willingly, apparently, only when they believe the man is committed to any offspring the act may produce. If it turns out the man was only pretending commitment, the woman feels duped. In the case of rape, she knows from the beginning that he is not committed to her or their joint offspring, and that is what makes the act uniquely unbearable. In evolutionary terms, she has been wasting her eggs on a man who is not worthy of them, and the distinctive feature of rape is that she knows that throughout.

If this were not so offensive you would laugh at the sheer absurdity of it, remote as it is from any actual experience of rape. It overlooks the physical and verbal abuse which often

accompanies forced sex; it also overlooks that rape has much in common with sexual assaults which do not involve intercourse and so cannot result in conception. The woman's own body and sexuality are treated as being of no consequence; nor is there any recognition of the anger and outrage women justifiably feel when their wishes as well as their bodies are violated.



Robert Wright suggests that rape is what men resort to 'when other forms of manipulation fail' and there is thus no legitimate way to do what a man's got to do, which is ensure the survival of his genes. The problem men face is that women — the sex which invests more time and energy in reproduction — are choosier than men about who they mate with. Robert Wright describes the 'typical rapist' as 'lacking the material and personal resources to attract women', i.e. too poor, ugly and/or socially unskilled to be chosen voluntarily as a mate.

This shows a typically cavalier attitude to the research literature in disciplines outside biology. That literature consistently stresses how similar rapists are to other men. As one of the women who participated in Sue Lees's research on rape said about the man who attacked her, 'My mother couldn't believe how normal he looked...of course he's a normal looking bloke'. Most profiles of 'typical rapists' apply only to the minority who get caught and convicted,

while those who evade detection or get acquitted are presumably even more 'normal' in their appearance and demeanour. Plenty of rapists also have 'legitimate' sexual relations: several of Sue Lees's informants described their attacker as 'a family man' and Sue Lees herself adds that 'many of [the serial rapists in her sample] are married or have girlfriends'. It is depressing that a scientist like Robert Wright should recycle the myth of rape as the expression of some desperate unmet need to have sex, when all the evidence — 20 years' worth of it — decisively contradicts this view.

The odd couple: Charles Darwin meets Andrea Dworkin

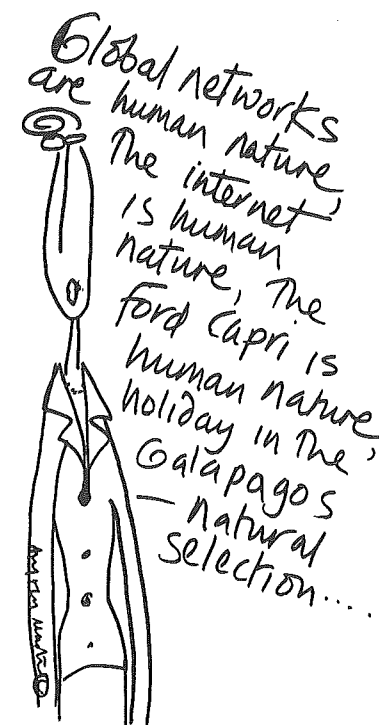
Repulsive and inaccurate though many of his comments are, Robert Wright's overall argument in 'The dissent of woman' has some unexpected points of contact with radical feminist analysis. The feminists this author has real contempt for are liberal 'equality' feminists who vainly imagine that women and men can be held to a single, genderless standard of behaviour. Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon make more sense to him — at least as he reads their arguments. Thus he quotes Andrea Dworkin's statement about what men can do to get sex from women: 'steal it (rape), persuade her to give it away (seduction), rent it (prostitution), lease it over the long term (marriage in the US) or own it outright (marriage in most societies)'. And he adds: 'this would strike some Darwinians as a fair thumb-nail sketch of the situation'.

Robert Wright believes that the mindset produced in women by natural selection makes us 'uniquely vulnerable' in ways that ought to be recognised by the law. One of the 'Ten big challenges from the evolutionary agenda' is:

Male and female psychologies have evolved to be distinctly different in assessing the costs — indeed, the very notion — of anti-social behaviour. Our legal system should reflect these differences if it is to promote true equality before the law (p.48, original emphasis).

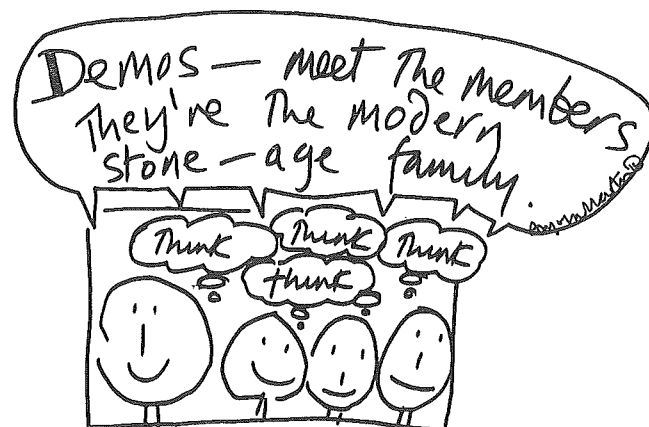
Darwinism and feminism: threat or promise?

Like the proposal to restrict the promotion of attractive but unhealthy foods, the suggestion that women's distinctive 'nature' be reflected in law illustrates a difference between the new Darwinism and cruder forms of pop socio-biology. The latter often seemed to be saying:



'this is how things are; they can't be changed, so get used to it' — where 'it' could be anything from war to sexual harassment to men spending all their time bonding with each other in the pub. New Darwinists not only suggest that we can make better social arrangements (since intelligence and altruism are also part of evolved 'human nature'), some believe this is the most important use to which scientific knowledge about our 'natures' can be put.

Another difference between EP and earlier sociobiology is that the new Darwinists are smart enough to realise that overt displays of



sexism and antifeminism will not help their case. Instead, their strategy is to insist that feminists have nothing to lose, and even something to gain, by taking Darwinist approaches on board: appealing to biological difference actually *strengthens* the feminist argument on issues like rape.

This is a bit like saying that because radical feminists and fundamentalist Christians agree in opposing pornography, they are 'really' political allies. True, if Demos's 'big challenge' quoted above were taken seriously, the outcome might not be a million miles from certain feminist ideas about reforming the criminal justice system. Many radical feminists agree that so-called gender-neutral justice works against women: in certain cases (such as the proposed self-preservation defence for battered women who kill their abusers) feminists do want women and men to be treated differently in law. But the reasoning behind the Demos proposal is light years away from radical feminism: what feminists criticise is not the law's failure to

recognise biological sex differences but its failure to recognise material differences of power.

Another strategy the Darwinists use to neutralise feminist criticism without appearing overtly antifeminist is to appeal to the truth and objectivity of science, branding critics as ignorant, superstitious ideologues. Helena Cronin's piece in *Red Pepper* is a classic example:

Science simply tells it like it is; it doesn't dictate goals. But how can we promote a fairer world — from social and legal policy to personal relationships — unless we understand differences, unless we let truth, not ignorance, be our guide?

Coming from the convenor of a group with overt social policymaking ambitions, this is highly disingenuous. It also glosses over the way scientific 'truth' is shaped by the power structures of the societies in which science is done. Even a cursory glance at the history of theorising about sex differences casts doubt on the claim that 'science simply tells it like it is'. The experts who claimed that higher education would shrink women's ovaries said the same things about scientific truth 100 years ago that Helena Cronin says now, and if we are sceptical about the motives behind the earlier claim (not to mention knowing for a fact that it was driven), why should we take analogous claims at face value now? History tells us that the political costs invariably outweigh the benefits of locating women's 'nature' in our reproductive organs.

Backward reasoning

Another question it is reasonable to ask is whether EP is actually good science. The trouble with Darwinist fundamentalism is that the same Big Idea (everything about us is the product of natural selection) must be used to explain all manner of things, some of which contradict each other. It is hard to see how many of the accounts EP proposes could ever be disproved from within the framework of Darwinist theory; yet the ability to be falsified is supposed to be the central requirement for a properly scientific hypothesis.

Evolutionary psychologists reason backwards. They start with a phenomenon which is cross-culturally widespread now, such as women marrying men of higher status/greater wealth, and assume that if it's so pervasive it must be a product of natural selection. Then they set about

constructing an account of why the characteristic in question was selected, which means identifying the reason it must have been advantageous to our ancestors. This way of proceeding merely projects current social patterns back into the remote past, with nothing to support this strategy except the very theory the researchers are meant to be testing.

It is not surprising if evolutionary psychologists find themselves stuck for hard evidence. When your subject is the evolution of 'human nature' as opposed to, say, walking upright, the reconstruction of pre-history is fraught with difficulty. We can look at skeletal remains and say whether their owners were equipped to walk on two legs, but we know virtually nothing for certain about the social life, still less the psychology, of our earliest ancestors. Feelings do not leave fossil traces. How can we know if early humans felt jealousy, or if the males were attracted to females with small waists? More than once, confronted with some unverifiable speculation about prehistoric lifestyles, I found myself singing under my breath: 'Flintstones, meet the Flintstones, they're the modern stone-age family...'

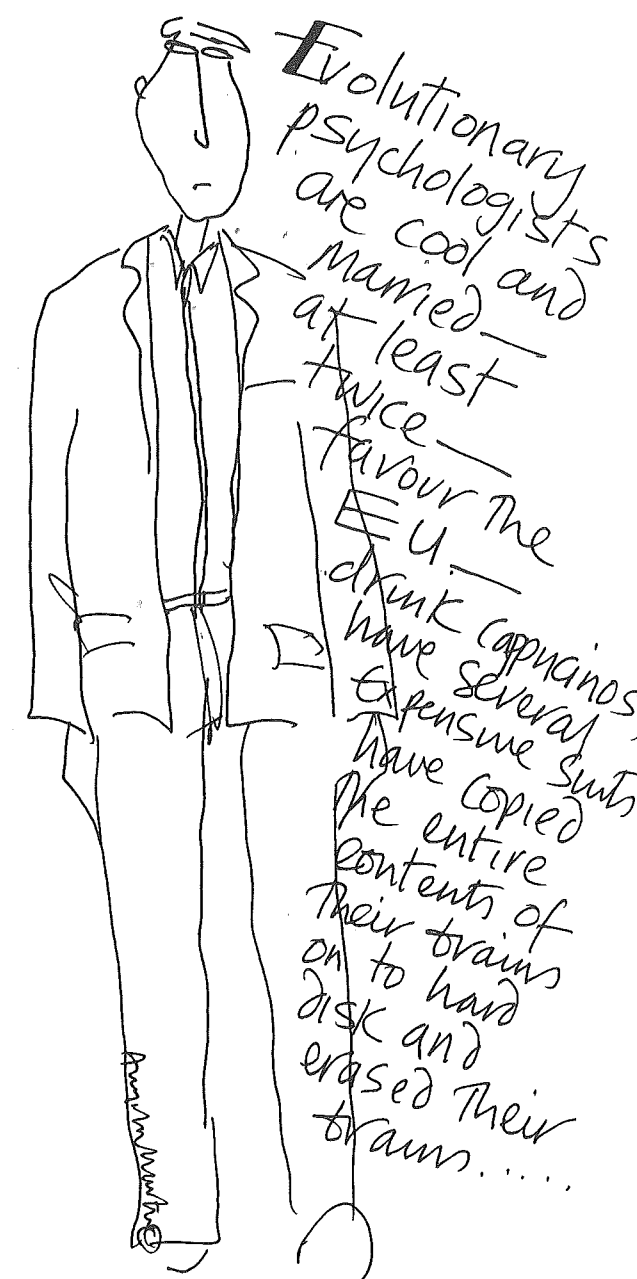
Genes with everything

If you accept the basic principles of Darwin's evolutionary theory (which I do), then it is true that whatever biological characteristics humans now possess must be the outcome of natural selection. But there is plenty of room for doubt about whether particular ways of feeling or behaving really are biological characteristics, encoded in our genes.

Obviously, our genetic endowment sets limits on what we can do. No social conditions or learning experiences will produce humans who can fly, or read minds. But it's quite a leap from this common-sense observation to the notion that there's a gene for everything, right down to such specific emotions/behaviours as 'sexual jealousy'. If there isn't a gene, however, then you can't argue that the characteristic is a product of natural selection.

As a culture we have become alarmingly credulous about claims that this or that — homosexuality or criminality or whatever — is 'in the genes'. Any finding that tends to support this notion will receive blanket media coverage, often not merely uncritical of the scientists but actually exaggerating their claims.

In June 1997, for instance, scientists at the



Institute of Child Health announced they might have found a genetic basis for the superior social skills which are commonly glossed as 'female intuition'. Girls with a condition called Turner's syndrome, in which you only have one X chromosome instead of the two which are normal in females, scored lower than XX girls on tests of 'social cognition'. Boys — who also have only one X chromosome — generally score



lower than girls. The scientists thus speculated that there's a gene for 'social cognition' on the X chromosome which XX girls inherit from their fathers. But no one has found the relevant piece of DNA. Until they do, and prove that its presence affects the social cognition scores of a large sample of individuals in a predictable way, we are entitled to consider it at least equally likely there is a sociological explanation of the test results. But most media reporting treated the gene's existence as a fact.

A handful of salt

Even if we accept that some behavioural characteristic is a product of natural selection, we cannot so easily claim to know *why* it was selected. Stories about it helping our ancestors to pass on their genes more successfully must be taken with a handful of salt: they are easy to make up and difficult to prove or disprove. Even in the case of language — an extremely significant characteristic of our species which clearly does have a biological basis — experts argue about whether the capacity for it conferred some survival benefit in its own right, or whether it was just a spin-off from some other cognitive faculty that had survival benefits.

Darwinists tend to reason that if something survived, the benefits of having it must have been greater than the costs, and the point of

their stories is to elucidate what those benefits were (e.g. the peacock's otherwise stupid tail made it sexually attractive to peahens). At the same time, they stress that the raw material for natural selection is random mutation, and they castigate laypeople for the sin of 'teleology', which means supposing that evolution is automatically progress towards some pre-ordained ideal state. It seems to me they can't have this both ways; but surely that's exactly what they are doing when they explain every tendency we can observe in human behaviour by telling the same story, i.e. 'it must have helped our ancestors pass on their genes'. This implies that present-day humans are perfect reproductive machines, in whose DNA nothing disadvantageous, pointless or simply random has survived.

The dangers of Darwinism

Gross abuses have been perpetrated in the name of Darwin, most notably where half-baked ideas about 'survival of the fittest' have been used to justify the sterilisation or, in Hitler's case, the wholesale extermination of the so-called 'unfit'. By comparison, the political pretensions of evolutionary psychology look benign; at least its agenda is not genocidal. It is, however, potentially oppressive and reactionary, for it rests on the idea that if some arrangement is 'natural', rooted in the fundamental needs and instincts of human beings, it is by that same token the arrangement most conducive to happiness and social justice. Women have heard this a thousand times before, and it has rarely if ever been a politically progressive argument.

The idea that our social and political



arrangements should work with the grain of our 'nature' was not invented by Darwin or his latter day apostles. It runs through the whole tradition of western political thought, where it was well-established long before science arrived on the scene. But the tradition in question is a classically patriarchal one, centring on the nature, the needs and rights of 'Man', i.e. white European property-owning males. At different times, its concept of what is 'natural' (and thus politically desirable, or inevitable) has encompassed the enslavement of Africans, the wholesale destruction of indigenous populations by colonisers and the condemning of poor people in vast numbers to death from disease and starvation. In other words, definitions of the 'natural' have reflected the perceptions and interests of those doing the defining.

That is why I find it shocking when Helena Cronin — a woman and in her own estimation a feminist — affirms that 'evolution made men's and women's minds as unlike as it made our bodies'. I cannot help hearing echoes in this statement of every misogynist thinker — Aristotle, Rousseau, Nietzsche, the fascists of the early twentieth century — who ever proclaimed the same doctrine. Different minds, separate spheres, *kinder, küche, kirche*: even dressed up in new Darwinist clothes, how can such concepts be compatible with feminism?

The short answer is, they can't: modern feminism was founded on an explicit rejection of the belief that women and men have naturally different minds. This is the central plank of Mary Wollstonecraft's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written just over two centuries ago. Mary Wollstonecraft realised that ideas about 'natural' sex difference were a key ideological weapon in men's struggle to maintain their unjust dominance over women. They still are.

Nature versus justice

In order to resist 'the world view from evolutionary psychology', we need not get bogged down in 'nature versus nurture' arguments about whether there really is a gene for female intuition, or ironing, or whatever the scientists have come up with this week. That is fighting on the enemy's terms. The point we have to get across is that nature, or difference, is not the issue. What matters to feminists is not whether our social arrangements are 'natural' but whether they are *just*.

New Human
New Nature.



The point is made neatly if we turn once again to history. When the suffragettes were fighting for women's right to vote, they used the slogan 'justice demands it'. Their opponents by contrast said it was 'going against nature' to burden women with political responsibilities. Nature is the sexists' trump card; justice is ours. And justice demands that we expose Darwinist ideas about men's and women's 'natures' for the half-baked and wholly ideological claptrap they are. □



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- Helena Cronin, 'It's only natural', *Red Pepper* 39, August 1997.
- Demos Quarterly no. 10: 'Matters of life and death: The world view from evolutionary psychology', 1996.
- Sue Lees, *Carnal Knowledge: Rape on Trial* (Hamish Hamilton, 1996).
- Nick Lezard, 'Sex in your molecules: review of Jared Diamond, *Why is sex fun?*', *The Guardian*, July 31 1997.
- Hilary Rose, 'Beyond biology', *Red Pepper* 40, September 1997.
- Helena Cronin's *Red Pepper* article not surprisingly provoked some criticism from readers: the next issue included a direct reply from the feminist biologist Hilary Rose. ('Beyond Biology', *Red Pepper*, September 1997, p.23).
- 'In fact, it is far commoner in absolute terms than abuse by stepfathers. Stepfathers are statistically overrepresented among abusers in the sense that a higher percentage of stepfathers than natural fathers are known to abuse; but this could reflect a number of factors, including the under-reporting of abuse by natural fathers compared to stepfathers and a tendency among child abusers to deliberately involve themselves with women who have children. Anyway, a 'high' percentage of abusive stepfathers still adds up to fewer men than a less high percentage of abusive natural fathers — stepfathers are a minority of men living with children.'

Confronting an atrocity

Marc Dutroux kidnapped and sexually abused a number of young Belgian women. When the case came to light in the summer of 1996 it prompted outrage and raised serious questions about both the investigation and how societies should respond to sex offenders. In exploring this case and its implications Liz Kelly highlights the need for remembering, making connections and developing coherent approaches to child sexual abuse.

Little more than a year ago international consternation and outrage focussed on one case of child abuse — the Dutroux case in Belgium. This short piece has two aims: to pull together what is currently known and reflect on its implications for how sex offenders and child sexual abuse is understood and responded to.

As with many other high profile child sexual abuse cases we are confronted by a paradox: we know both too much and too little. Too much in the sense that the abuse and its consequences were 'unbelievable', too much to bear. Too little in that we have only fragments of information, and even when the legal cases take place the stories that will be presented are unlikely to approximate to any kind of coherence or truth. This exploration is limited by what we currently know. The sources I have used include recent issues of a US newsletter *Believe the Children* and two searches on the Internet — one in May

and one in September (searching on the name Marc Dutroux in May produced 452 hits — mostly from French, German and Belgian newspapers).

To make sense of what happened, and the responses to it, a little background on Belgian politics and the Belgian justice system is necessary. In common with much of Europe Belgium has an investigative legal system. In this model, judges do not merely preside over trials, but are required to conduct an investigation into the case, as part of their responsibility to seek the truth. In serious criminal cases a *juges d'instruction* (instructing judge) is appointed to oversee the investigation. This legal framework also affects how the police are organised; in Belgium there are three police forces — judicial, state and communal (local) — which operate independently, and even in conflict and competition with one another. Long

before the Dutroux case serious concerns about political corruption and political interference into legal processes were evident in Belgium, as were divisions within the judiciary and the police. All of these issues came into play, as did the continuing animosity between the privileged Dutch speaking region of Belgium (Flanders) and the poorer French speaking Wallonia.

Gleaning the facts

At least six girls/young women were kidnapped and repeatedly sexual abused by Marc Dutroux and his accomplices between 1992 and 1996. An Marchal, Eefji Lambreks, Julie Lejeune and Melissa Russo were all killed. The case broke in August 1996 when two other girls were rescued. They had been kept for months in a disguised cellar in Dutroux's house; the cellar had been specially constructed and contained a cage. The two young women said they had been 'raped and taped' repeatedly. Two of the bodies were found at the same time as the survivors. The two other bodies were found two weeks later, following

The couple's three children, aged 12, 3 and four months, were living in the house in which the girls were held captive. Virtually nothing has been said about these children in the extensive media coverage.

further confessions by Dutroux, in a cellar 15 feet deep under a concrete shack. As with the previous atrocity — the West case — police investigated a number of additional properties expecting to find more bodies but the tally remained at four. The police made it clear that they believe Dutroux was connected to abductions of other girls, possibly 15 over a period of 11 years. It is unclear at this point whether this is based on evidence, or the desire of the police to attribute all disappearances of young women to one man/group.

Dutroux has confessed to six counts of kidnapping girls and is charged with four counts of murder. During the investigation over 20 adults were brought in for questioning, including a number of police officers; six have been charged with offences, including Dutroux's wife. The couple's three children, aged 12, 3 and four months, were living in the house in

which the girls were held captive. Virtually nothing has been said about these children in the extensive media coverage.

Apart from his history of abducting young women, the local justice and police had been notified in 1994 that Dutroux was building dungeons in a cellar in which he intended to lock up girls before trafficking them.

Both Marc Dutroux's history, and what emerged about the investigation, ensured that the case took on additional significance. He had been charged in 1983 with the rape and torture of a 50 year old woman, who told police he had put a razor blade in her vagina. The charges were dropped because of lack of evidence. Dutroux was, however, convicted in 1989 of multiple charges of kidnapping, unlawful confinement and sexual violation of five young women aged 12-19. He kept each for 24 hours, tortured them and then let them go. He was sentenced to 13 years. Under the Lejeune Law in Belgium convicted offenders who are of good behaviour only serve a third of their sentence. Dutroux actually served half his sentence, as he spent three years in jail before the trial. He was eligible for parole in 1992, and it was supported by a 4-2 vote in the parole board, on condition he sought psychiatric help. The Justice minister who approved the decision wrote on Dutroux's file 'follow very closely'; this appears to have been done in the most desultory way. Despite being registered as unemployed, and receiving benefit, Dutroux owned seven houses and several vehicles. All of the properties were subsequently searched; in one at Marchat Au Pont three underground cells connected by tunnels had been built.

The parents of the missing girls had been making strong public statements about the failure of the police to thoroughly investigate their disappearances. The details which emerged after Dutroux confessed served to both confirm and accentuate these concerns. Apart from his history of abducting young women, the local justice and police had been notified in 1994 that Dutroux was building dungeons in a cellar in which he intended to lock up girls before trafficking them. Another police inform-

ant had reported that Dutroux was quoting prices for abducted girls, and told a story of two girls being brought to him and his comment being 'The cage isn't ready'. During the investigation of the disappearances, police had searched his house three times. On one visit the sound of children crying was dismissed as coming from outside.

The fact that these leads were not fully investigated by either the police or the investigating magistrate is further underlined by the fact that their records of the visits to Dutroux's house, and the entire investigation were cursory to say the least. In a separate and never connected investigation by another section of the police, Dutroux was charged and convicted for car crime, and spent several months in prison. Two of the young women were captive at this point, and Dutroux maintains he paid one of his accomplices to ensure they received food and water. His account is that on his release he discovered one young woman had already died and the other was close to death through starvation.

...strong suspicions were voiced in Belgium that Dutroux enjoyed police protection.

He was finally brought in for serious questioning during the investigation of the most recent abductions. Two witnesses described a van, and a boy had memorised the number plate — it was a vehicle owned by Dutroux. It was this piece of evidence which shifted a gear in the police activity, but much of the information about where the young women were was volunteered by Dutroux himself.

A number of revealing additional pieces of evidence have appeared in some of the more detailed reports, but little has been made of them in the attempts to explore the implications of the case. One of Dutroux's business contacts was a Brussels business man; Jean-Michel Nihoul is believed to be the commercial organiser of the sexual exploitation. When questioned he admitted to organising sex parties at Belgian castles, which included VIP guests. He offered this (and no doubt other) evidence in the hope that he would not be prosecuted, but the prosecutor and Judge Connerotte refused to make any deal with him. Dutroux has also confessed to using the young women in porno-

graphy, and many tapes were discovered. The Prosecutor Michel Bourlet has said Dutroux is visible in some of the tapes, and the police have reported that published pornography including Julie and Melissa has subsequently been discovered.

One press report (*Sunday Express* 12.1.97) referred to suspected links between Dutroux and the self-styled Satanic Order of Abrasax based in southern Belgium. A letter found in the house of accomplice Bernard Weinstein (who Dutroux admits he drugged and buried alive) referred to the group and to the need to continue to procure 'presents' — in the form of human beings — for the High Priestess of the Order. The media were asked to withhold this information for many months. A raid on the group 'temple' — an anonymous cottage — resulted in seizure of hundreds of video tapes, racks of computer discs, two human skulls and jars of animal blood.

Cover-up, incompetence or corruption

As the horrific details of what had happened to the young women were augmented by details of Marc Dutroux's history and the failures of the investigation, strong suspicions were voiced in Belgium that Dutroux enjoyed police protection. Belgian Senator Anne-Marie Lizin said:

It's a question of stupidity, incompetence and corruption... Dutroux must be a friend of somebody important. Or else he was being protected because he was known to be a police informant... Stupidity can't be the only explanation.

National and international media reporting both reflected and fuelled public disquiet; in response the senior prosecutor Jean Bourlet stated that he intended to investigate the case "right down to the bone, if they let me". The last phrase served only to confirm the already extensive doubts amongst the parents and public that the Belgian justice system was not just incompetent, but also corrupt.

The drama reached a new crisis for the Belgian people with the removal of the investigating judge Jean-Luc Connerotte. This was requested by Dutroux's lawyer because the judge had attended a fund raising supper for an organisation for missing children; parents of several of Dutroux's victims also attended and the judge ate the spaghetti dinner and accepted a pen from the organising group. The Supreme Court deemed that these events sufficiently serious to compromise Judge Connerotte's

confidentiality and removed him from the case on the 14th October.

This was the final straw for many Belgians. They already suspected a cover-up and the removal of a judge who they had begun to have confidence in fanned the flames. A petition for his reinstatement was organised and a week of unprecedented protests, including strikes, culminated on Sunday October 20th with over 300,000 children and adults marching through Brussels. The march was both a commemoration and a protest, a remembrance of the young women and a demand for truth and justice. The rail companies and unions provided subsidised transport throughout Belgium and public transport in Brussels was free all day.

Recent developments

The promised detailed enquiry into the Dutroux case resulted in what has become known as the 'Dutroux Commission'. It included 280 hours of televised hearings, virtually no details of which were reported in the British press. Its first 300 page report was unanimously adopted by the Belgian parliament on April 18th 1997. Most of its recommendations focussed on three key areas: streamlining the three overlapping police forces; training and new procedures on how to respond to missing persons reports; and fundamental reforms of the justice system. Following publication Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dhaene promised a change to the constitution ending the political nature of judicial promotion. A second report is expected in autumn which is supposed to address whether there was a cover-up, and assess progress on first set of recommendations. The fact that so little of the content and concerns relates directly to sexual abuse and trafficking reminded me of the Cleveland report which also skirted the central issue and confined its recommendations to detailing of how agencies and institutions should conduct themselves. Several key themes thread through both, so that the story is transformed into an account of incompetence, professional arrogance and the favourite institutional fallback — failure of communication. Calls for better training and inter-agency communication have for over a decade been used as a cover-up for inadequate policy and practice. Whilst British feminists are aware of failures in our child protection systems, many European countries have no national guidelines and procedures, and no infrastructure which could implement them.

Commentaries by politicians and experts revealed that in Belgium the predominant understanding of child sexual abuse is a simplistic version of family dynamics/dysfunction that was successfully challenged by feminists in most English speaking countries in the late 1980s.

The fact that so little of the content and concerns relates directly to sexual abuse and trafficking reminded me of the Cleveland report which also skirted the central issue...

The Dutroux case and the media attention it garnered did result in debates on child sexual abuse and trafficking in the European Parliament. One outcome was the Daphne initiative which allocated EU funds to non-governmental organisations working against trafficking and violence against women. But both the content of the debates and the conceptualisation of Daphne suggest that there is limited understanding of the issues within the European governmental infrastructure.

What we weren't told

Whilst there were references in the reporting of the Dutroux case to a number of unsolved disappearances of young women in the 1990s, hardly any media attention was given to a campaign by the young sister of a 12 year old who had disappeared on a trip to a local shop in 1992. This neglect is strange, the story and the determination of the sister to discover the truth echoed the concerns of the parents, public and media. It becomes more understandable when we know that Loubna Benaissa came from a migrant family. It was only the determination of her sister, including writing a book about the disinterest in her missing sister's fate, which resulted in action. Loubna's body was found in early 1997, 200 yards away from her home. She had been kidnapped, raped and murdered by a convicted sex offender who worked at a local garage. He had been cursorily questioned early in the investigation, and all the time her body was in a trunk in a building connected to the garage. The similarities between this and the Dutroux case, and the issues they raise, are obvious. Yet the only references I have found to Loubna Benaissa were a feature article in the

Guardian this summer — many months after the body was found — and a paragraph in a report in the Irish Times in April. Even in the context of atrocity, some young women's lives are worth more than others.

***Even in the context of atrocity,
some young women's lives are
worth more than others.***

Also less well known is that at the same time as the Dutroux case was breaking police in Finland discovered a "massive computer library of child pornography that included pictures of torture, mutilation and cannibalism". The owner was not arrested since distribution of child porn is a minor crime in Finland.

Much of the press coverage implied, or even explicitly stated, that the Dutroux case was the first involving organised child abuse, trafficking and child pornography in Belgium. Whilst I have not studied Belgian child abuse cases I do know that in 1988 16 people were convicted of offences including distributing child pornography. The case hit the headlines because amongst those charged were high ranking officials from agencies founded to protect children, including two senior workers for UNICEF, and a man who headed an offenders programme. The focal point for this group was Brussels.

Long memoried women

We have a stunning ability to forget such cases, to respond to every new atrocity as if it were the first. The poet Grace Nicols entitled one of her books 'I the Long Memoried Woman'; those of us involved in the struggle against child sexual abuse must take to heart the importance of being memory bearing adults — however difficult and painful that may be.

Without long memories we cannot make connections, and an absence of connection means we continue to reproduce old myths, and even create a few new ones on the way. Some commentators did make (albeit very limited) connections to the fairly recent West case, and there were revealing links to be made: a family base into which young women were brought for abuse, sexual exploitation and ultimately death; two men with previous convictions for sex offences; cellars built for the purpose of holding young women captive in order to sexually abuse

them, and filming of some of the abuse; the burying of bodies close to, and even under the house in cellars; potential concerns about the children living in the family, but no clear action being taken by social services and other agencies; a failure to connect the disappearances of a number of young women. We don't know whether the Dutroux's echoed the Wests, in abusing their own children as well as young women they entrapped or kidnapped. In fact in all the coverage of the case not one person has mused on what the lives of the children who lived with Marc Dutroux and his wife Michelle Martin were like.

***Without long memories we
cannot make connections...***

We need to remember the facts that have come to light so far — and take note of what remains and what disappears in the official enquiry and when the case comes to court. There is a possibility that the combination of public outrage and the fact that Belgium has an investigative legal system rather than our adversarial one (Scotland combines elements of the two) will mean more of the facts remain — and even that they are connected and explained. If this proves to be the case then that will tell us something profound about adversarial justice systems. If, however, significant elements of the story disappear (we must note which ones, and endeavour to remember them) that too will tell us something profound about the propensity of a variety of justice systems function to re-construct child sexual abuse; removing the more uncomfortable and difficult elements.

What both the Dutroux and West cases highlight is the necessity to make connections between forms of child sexual abuse. Incest, abuse of children outside the family, child pornography and child prostitution can all exist together. Sexual abuse is a continuum encompassing a range of forms of assault which shade into one another in individual cases and lives. Both cases also highlight the connections between child and woman abuse; both Marc Dutroux and Frederic West sexually violated children, young and adult women. Theory, policy and practice need to be based on a connective model, rather than the separations which currently pervade professional thinking. A connective would limit the extent to which

individual cases could be constructed as aberrant atrocities; instead locating them at the extreme end of a continuum, with a variety of links to the more mundane, everyday abuses which countless women and girls endure.

What no-one wanted to see

One of the fascinating silences surrounding the Dutroux case (and to some extent also the West case) was the refusal amongst journalists and commentators to notice how many of the facts echo elements of accounts by children and adults of ritual abuse. These accounts have been defined as 'incredible' and 'impossible' — countless academic and journalistic sceptics have insisted ad nauseam that they would only believe if material or forensic evidence was forthcoming, and, according to them, none ever has been. Here we had that evidence, but no-one made the connection, no-one chose to remember what they (or their publication) had said previously, no-one took the brave stand of revising their opinion in public. Far better to keep this separate, to not connect it to any previous event or statement.

***What both the Dutroux and West
cases highlight is the necessity
to make connections between
forms of child sexual abuse.***

One of things I have come to understand with increasing clarity is that the most skilled abusers are those who make children believe things which will make their story incredible. If a child tells you they have been locked in cellars for weeks, held in cages, or that they have been abused by Father Christmas, the Pope, the King or the Devil credulity is stretched to the limit. These kinds of stories are not likely to get very far in a legal case. But we need to take a step back here — to remember that adults convince children to believe things we know are not true — Father Christmas, the tooth fairy — for what we insist are good reasons. The question then shifts from whether the child is telling the truth, to exploring why they believe what they do. What might the answer be if we asked who is this Father Christmas, this Pope? One little girl when asked this simple question explained that Father Christmas was her grandfather, who had indeed sexually abused her. That made her story more credible — but she continued to believe

that she was abused by her grandfather and Father Christmas.

A remark by Ralph Hodgson was quoted in a recent Accuracy About Abuse newsletter: "Some things have to be believed to be seen". If adults believed that something has happened to children for them to tell such stories, what might we begin to see? And what might we enable children to see differently? Being tricked into believing impossible things is itself a form of abuse, and work which enables an unpicking of what was real and what was trickery and deception is some of the most important support work that can be done with terrorised children.

Another potential link that was avoided was with the concept of 'Snuff' movies, pornography which films sexual abuse which results in death. Four young women were murdered in the context of sexual abuse and the production of pornography — does the record of their abuse on film count as 'snuff', and if not why not?

Naming the problem

Throughout the reporting Dutroux was called a paedophile, and the word also transformed into an adjective with references to 'a paedophile gang', 'paedophile couple, and paedophile videos'. This both reflected and reinforced the rehabilitation of the concept in the media and policy agendas (see 'Weasel Words' T&S 33 for a more detailed critique of the concept). Marc Dutroux does not resemble the clinical definition of paedophile: he was heterosexual, married with three children. The girls and young women he raped and tortured covered a wide age range from eight to 19, and one of his earlier victims was a 50 year old woman. Kidnapping, forcible imprisonment, coercion into pornography, repeated rape and murder — even in these times of multiple and fluid meanings — cannot possibly be equated with 'love of children', the literal meaning of paedophilia. Rather than accurate naming his behaviour the term was deployed to construct Dutroux as a monster, an 'other' who had no connections to ordinary lives. The name paedophile both disguised the crimes committed, and prevented serious examination of the issues at stake. Child sexual abuse is not about a form of sexuality it is about power and control, and in this and many other cases about exploitation and money. Marc Dutroux is not a paedophile. He is a child abuser, a sexual exploiter, a trafficker, a pornographer and a murderer.

Implications for Policy

Much discussion has taken place over the last few years, especially in the USA and the UK, on how to deal with convicted sex offenders. Both of the Belgian cases involved convicted offenders, so it is worth reflecting on them in the light of recent policy announcements and legal reform. Were Marc Dutroux and Loubna Benaissa's killer English, they both ought to be covered by the recently introduced Sex Offenders Act, which places a responsibility on those convicted of a range of sexual offences to register with the local police for set periods of time. Ironically, however, Dutroux might not be covered in relation to his most recent crimes. There is no provision in the Sex Offenders Act to cover sexual murder — since there is no such crime on the statute book. Also most of the sexual offences relating to trafficking and prostitution were removed at the consultation stage. This was a strange decision given the

'Some things have to be believed to be seen'

increasing recognition that the prostituting of children ought to be understood and responded to as a form of sexual abuse. The Sex Offenders Act was sold to the public as a way of keeping track of some of the more dangerous sex offenders; yet the category most would agree are dangerous — sexual murderers — are excluded. The fact that this was pointed out to the government at the drafting stage, and their response was that it could be dealt with by an amendment (which was never submitted) tells volumes about the extent of commitment to child protection within the previous government. How promptly the Labour Party responds to having these exclusions pointed out will be a test of theirs.

Loubna Benaissa's murder has some parallels with that of Megan Kanka in the USA, which prompted a mass campaign for community notification — the right of local communities to know when a convicted sex offender moves into their area. Whilst the representation of community notification in the British media is misleading — few areas in the US do it automatically for all sex offenders — there are serious issues which need to be debated here. Just looking at it in terms of these two cases, however, it is unclear whether Loubna's killer

lived nearby, we only know where he worked, community notification tends to apply to place of residence. It is unlikely that local community notification would have affected Dutroux that much, since he clearly operated over a wide geographical area and paid others to kidnap girls and young women.

A consultative document was published by the Tory government which proposed creating a new criminal offence which would prohibit convicted sex offenders from applying to work with children. Whilst it is unclear what will happen to these proposals, they would have had virtually no impact on these two men; Dutroux was registered unemployed and working in a garage is unlikely to be classified as employment involving significant contact with children.

Whilst the measures which have been introduced, and are under discussion, to track and monitor sex offenders have a place in co-ordinated approaches to child sexual abuse, it is folly to believe that they will have anything other than a limited impact. The most obvious reason is that most sexual abuse is still not reported, and only a minority of reported cases result in a conviction. The proposals also do nothing to address the serious failures to protect children that were so obvious in Belgium, but which thread through every state across the globe. These limited measures have been used as smokescreens to disguise the fact that our government and most others have absolutely no idea how to tackle child sexual abuse in a consistent, connected and co-ordinated way.

Knee-jerk reactive policies which either only scratch the surface or miss the point altogether are not appropriate responses to atrocities or the prevalence of sexual abuse more broadly. We need to construct and campaign for far more wide-ranging and fundamental changes. In order to do that those of us who are advocates for children need to have long memories, and we must discover better ways of enabling policy makers to face the reality of child sexual abuse. As Judith Herman notes:

To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see hear and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement and remembering. □

Charting troubled waters

In the North of Ireland, the nationalist struggle is at the centre of political discussion and action. Nationalists often make connections with the struggles of other oppressed and colonised peoples, but in reality, argues Shahidah Janjua, the nationalist agenda marginalises other concerns. Racism and (hetero)sexism are common in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, but because they do not 'fit' a one-dimensional model of 'radical' politics, those who experience oppression every day are often alienated and silenced, or compelled to split complex identities into fragments. 'Justice', says Shahidah Janjua, 'does not come in neat little packages'. As a black lesbian feminist living in the North of Ireland, she calls for a politics that can deliver 'justice for all of me'.

I attended a one day Conference held in Downtown Women's Centre Belfast during the International Women's Day celebrations in March of this year (1997). The Conference was entitled Women Building Bridges, and was concerned with women working together across divides in the former Yugoslavia, Israel, Palestine, and the North of Ireland. I was asked, by one of the speakers/activists from Dublin, a Jewish woman, if I would write an article on racism in the North of Ireland.

It is difficult now, seven months later, to describe precisely how I felt about this request. I was conscious that Ronit and I had only just met, and that aside from our contributions to the discussions on the day, and a relatively brief conversation between us, we knew little about each other. At the same time her request

signified a strong connection we had made — despite the brevity of our contact, despite the differences in the environments in which we lived (North and South Ireland), despite the differences between us. This connection was based upon our experiences of being marginal to and alienated from these environments.

I was moved by the generosity of a woman who believed I had something to say, and something to offer, both in respect of my personal experience in the North of Ireland, and my analysis of it. No-one had asked me to speak of my experience of racism in Ireland before this. It was a powerful incentive to write — to give it expression. I wrote a first draft that dealt with racism, in relation to nationalism, while at the same time trying to attach other oppressive experiences to it. However the black part of me

could not be so easily hacked off from other parts, that together make up the whole of me. I was fragmenting my experiences, and thereby the experiences of others.

The following article is a reworking of that draft, and is as true to the perspective and politics to which I hold and live by, as I am capable of expressing at this point in time. I thank Ronit for her original request, and thank especially the women at Trouble and Strife, for their support in encouraging my reworking of the original draft.

Racism is a global reality. Individual and collective black experience bears testament to it, both in the context of lives lived in developed and developing countries. White men insinuate themselves into positions of power everywhere. They are the monetary, military and media backbone of the world. Developing economies are tailor-made to meet the needs of white consumers at home and abroad in manufacture, cash crops and tourism (Taiwan, Kenya, Thailand). White military might will punish ignore or support the bad boys of developing nations in accordance with western social and political values. White western cultural imperialism sets the standards for economic social and political behaviours. The historical track record of a now globalised white supremacy bears witness to the genocide of Native American and Canadian peoples, Africans made slaves, Asian indentured labour in Africa, the colonisation of whole nations, the destruction of whole civilisations (Zimbabwe). Racial oppression is not new, it dates back as far as first contact between white and black peoples.

While living in the North of Ireland I was told with monotonous regularity that Irish people are not racist because they have been, in the case of the South, and are still, in the case of the North, a colonised people. In the context of the North this is a specifically Republican/Nationalist claim. It is a claim which assumes a commonality of experience of oppression with black people. It is true that many aspects of colonial oppression are shared by black and white peoples, and that these may form the basis for alliance. It is also true that the most economically and politically deprived of white people are the beneficiaries of white supremacist thought and action, informed by the historical record, perpetuated through education, religion and popular culture, immortalised in porno-

graphy, practised informally, and institutionally. Irish Catholics are still buying the damned souls of black babies through donations made to Trocaire collection boxes.

The right to dominance

Audre Lorde, black woman, lesbian, writer, activist, gives us a succinct definition of Racism which covers it all:

Racism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.

It is not surprising then that I can offer a catalogue of incidents, personal experiences of racist behaviours, in the North of Ireland, included among them being spat at on the streets, called a black bastard, being asked how much I charge for sex, having my money counted out for me by a shop assistant in her best loud voice, reserved for the deaf and the different, my best unaccented English being to no avail.

In a place where clear boundaries mark the territory between Protestants and Catholics, loyalists and republicans, no such boundaries exist for the perpetration of racial abuse. Whether on the Glen Road of West Belfast, or the Doagh Road of North Belfast, I was seared daily by words, actions, and looks, that branded me with an unbelonging. A black woman acquaintance born and raised in Ballymoney was constantly asked where she came from, Ballymoney was never the right answer, only somewhere in Africa would do.

I have been nurtured on the racially hostile terrain of England since the age of fourteen. None of the above was new to me. Being habituated to abuse removes its cutting edge and holds few surprises. It can also be the fuel for a useful rage that informs both survival and the desire for justice.

In the North of Ireland there is another dimension to racist behaviour which resides specifically in Nationalist/Republican thinking. In essence it is a variation on the patriarchal theme of defining some people as other, lesser, insignificant beings, which serves to perpetuate a hierarchy. This was a surprise to me, and perhaps I need to take a portion of responsibility for my own naivete. Yet when I heard white people make common cause with Black South Africans, Palestinians, Nicaraguans, on the basis of shared experiences of colonisation, I hoped that the connection was both deeply understood

and deeply felt. However, I came to learn that common cause can be claimed for reasons of political expediency, without an inward glance at deeply held prejudices and actions based upon them.

The annihilation of self

The 'whatever you say, say nothing' atmosphere created by the British war machine, an atmosphere of fear, terror, and silence, also has its uses in the nationalist environment, in which discussion is likewise limited to a white male war agenda. The focus of this agenda is concerned with what men have done, what men are doing, and what men will do in the future. Women and children are adjuncts to these actions and strategies, in positions of suffering, support, and sacrifice. Others are irrelevant, albeit in different ways. It is in this environment that I experienced the most profound annihilation of self. Nationalism was the vehicle by which it was achieved. My un-Irishness, without any necessary reference to my skin colour, origins, language or culture, was sufficient to cancel out all experience, thought, emotion, that did not adhere to the nationalist agenda or analysis. Irish dissenters from the nationalist view suffer gravely the vilification, sometimes physical abuse, and even ostracism of a nationalist backlash. A woman told me that when she spoke of her shock at the careless placing of a bomb that had killed a neighbour, she was beaten by her husband, and told that he would shoot her family if she expressed such sentiments again. For Others is reserved a no response, nothingness, denoting a different kind of contempt.

In a context in which hierarchy is the practice, no one escapes being categorised into its many layers. There are of necessity, for those who hold the power of definition, many groups of Others, all of whom fall outside the white, male, young, Christian, heterosexual standard, all of whom are less significant, lesser beings.

As a black, woman, lesbian, with no avenue for expression of any of my many othernesses, the imperative to have each aspect of myself discretely fragmented from the rest in order to be made more palatable for others, is the patriarchy's kick in the teeth for the different. Fragmentation is anathema to personal integrity. Political integrity cannot remain intact through disconnection. Yet, both fragmentation and disconnection are requirements of single issue,

single minded projects. Irish nationalism is such a project. In the words of Robin Morgan:

If I had to name one quality as the genius of patriarchy, it would be compartmentalisation, the capacity for institutionalising disconnection. (p51)

The movement for National Sovereignty, for National Liberation, presents the same oppressive face as any other patriarchal institution, Irish Nationalism is no exception, its basic principle being the acquisition or maintenance of power for its male, heterosexual, and in this case white, members. This is its single issue. This is its single minded project.

After the revolution

It is a well known maxim of nationalist movements that women's issues/liberation must await attention until national liberation has been won. For women also read black, traveller, lesbian, gay, children, disabled, elderly, and every one not white and male, for a measure and identification of the excluded. While governed by these strictures which are made worse by the conditions of war, the past and present experiences of Others are considered anecdotal, hearsay which is not worthy of inclusion in the record of oppressions. The few examples that follow illustrate this claim.

A woman ex-prisoner of Maghaberry jail told of her experiences of being strip searched, not allowed free association with other prisoners, subjected to open visits (no privacy), being denied educational opportunities, having severe restrictions placed upon access to reading materials, specifically feminist, generally political. There have been successful campaigns to stop the practice of strip searching of women and men, although it becomes reinstituted from time to time at the whim of the prison authorities. The other denials of rights however remain a common feature of women prisoners lives, and not of the lives of the men of Long Kesh. The movement did not fight for the rights of women. Moreover, when women prisoners learned that the men in Long Kesh were using pornography, they wrote to them saying that all women are degraded and objectified in it, that it destroyed the equality they felt they had had with their male comrades, and that the men should stop having it and using it. The men's considered reply was that the women were overreacting.

The woman in question was outraged by this inequality of treatment both by the British State and her own male comrades. She described herself as being torn apart in her need to

balance the greater nationalist good with the injustices that women experience. A policy paper she wrote, as a member of Sinn Féin Women's Department, on the conditions of women prisoners was presented to the Ard Comhairle (Chief Council) and subsequently shelved for its strong stance. Her unacknowledged and unaddressed rage is labelled by members of her organisation as neurosis and hysteria.

Hierarchies of oppression

Speaking of her experience in South Africa Teboho Maitse says, 'nationalism brings into relief its own deployment of new and old forms of patriarchal control over women.' Teboho Maitse's voice is one among many women's voices who have warned us of the betrayal of women by Nationalist movements. *Sisterhood is Global*, an International Women's Movement anthology, edited by Robin Morgan and published in 1984, abounds with the voices of women from around the globe who have had similar experiences and issued similar warnings. Our reasons for disregarding them need careful and heartfelt examination. Why do we perceive them as so different from ourselves? Certainly not for reasons of gender. For reasons of colour, culture, religion, history then? If so, how are we connecting with them? Do we select to hear only that which we are comfortable with? Are the men in our movements, countries, homes, better human beings than the men in their movements, countries, homes? Have they stopped the battery and rape of women? Have they stopped the abuses of children? Would they conduct a war for women's right to abortion?

In Long Kesh in the late '80's a Republican prisoner made the courageous decision to 'come out' as a homosexual. His decision was prompted by the tacit refusal of other men to shower at the same time as him, and rumour mongering regarding his being 'queer'. His declaration of his sexual identity became the cause for an open debate amongst heterosexual Republican prisoners as to his rights to 'practice' his sexual preference in the prison environment, and how this would undermine republican prisoners' morale. The same arguments proliferate in the American and British armed forces.

Fear of homosexuality is a terrifically powerful tool in the social manipulation and control of men — all of whom agree that they must be Men — against each other in the futile quest for unimpeachable masculinity. (Andrea Dworkin, *Right*

Wing Women, p122)

In the early 90s several Jewish graves in the Jewish section of a West Belfast cemetery were desecrated. This was of momentary interest to the local press, and did no more than raise a whisper of concern in nationalist circles. Prior to this I was not conscious of the existence of a Jewish community in Belfast. The fact of there being a section of a cemetery reserved for Jewish graves indicates a long term settlement of Jewish people in Belfast.

Outside the geographical boundaries of the North of Ireland Nationalists may generally recognise anti-semitism for the physical and ideological oppression of Jewish people that it is. Within the geographical boundaries of the North of Ireland the practice of anti-semitism by Irish individuals is made invisible. It is not simply subsumed into the Nationalist agenda, it is disappeared. Only racial hatred of the Irish, as experienced by Irish people at the hands of the British, is on this agenda, thus a hierarchy of oppression is instituted, rather than connections and alliances made.

Invisible oppressions

In England Irish people struggle for a recognition and acknowledgement of their oppression, in relation to what the British State is perpetrating against them in their homeland, and in relation to how this State oppresses them as a dispossessed people who inhabit English soil. In England there is another parallel struggle conducted amongst oppressed peoples black and white, who all vie for the position of the most oppressed. Battle scars are compared. It is a male pastime. The results are self evident. The movements of the oppressed are fragmented, differences in lives and experiences not valued, a hierarchy of oppression instituted, alliances not made. Every stereotype that the patriarchal order ever threw at us is embedded in our own hearts, we live and breathe them, and some will benefit from them more than others. Can we be honest with ourselves about the reasons for, and the consequences of this contest, and why it really does not matter to those engaged in it?

The great hatreds that suffuse history, pushing it forward to inevitable and repeated horror, are all first passions, not ideas. Hatred of blacks, hatred of Jews, and long standing, intense, blood drenched nationalist hatreds are forms of race hatred. (Andrea Dworkin, *Right Wing Women*, p12)

At a Lesbian Conference held in Belfast in 1991 one of the workshops offered an oppor-

tunity for dialogue between Lesbians and members of Sinn Féin Women's Department. During this discussion it was stated categorically by the latter group that there are no Lesbians in Sinn Féin. I was put in mind of an article by Adrienne Rich entitled 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in her book *Blood Bread and Poetry* (1987) in which she states,

The denial of the reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community, the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women. The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today afflicts... every organising attempt every relationship or conversation over which it hovers.

The history of Ireland, while not marked or marred by engagement in the black slave trade, for reasons of its own colonisation by the English, is nevertheless bereft of any record of those slaves, houseboys, housemaids, ayahs, who may have come to the end of their transportation road in Dublin or Belfast, by courtesy of English merchants and landowners. Neither am I aware of any research to discover how numbers of people of African descent have come by Irish names, in cases where interracial marriage or adoption are not the answer.

Colonisation and silence

In any other context the history of a people is recognised as constituting a necessary anchor for both a personal and a national identity. For the nationalist movement the history of colonisation as told by the colonised, the story of domination and their struggles against it, form the bedrock of current political analysis and action, provide the basis for a vision of a different future. Only when we know who we have been can we know who we might be.

The colonisation of black people, travellers, women, lesbians, gay men, in the Irish context, takes on a different meaning if we recognise that as whole communities of people, disparate or not, minorities or not, (women constitute 51% of the population) their stories have rarely and in some cases never been told. Erasure, denial and censure remain commonplace in our lives.

Nationalism typically has sprung from men's feelings of disempowerment, men's humiliation and their hope for war, as well as from the anger at being denied power or turned into a nation of boys.

On what basis then can the nationalist experience continue to claim a commonality of experience with other oppressed peoples, when on its own terrain it becomes the oppressor, sacrificing the past and present lives of those who are deemed to distract from the nationalist project?

Colonisation is not only that which has been done to us by people from another country, it is also, and first, that which is done to us by the people we live with. We are colonised when we cannot speak about who we are, about what is happening to us, when we have to pretend that we are not hurt, when we are afraid not only of the outsider but of our own. This is colonisation of our minds and bodies, and no-one had to cross the water to do this.

Inclusive justice

I started to understand that I could not have justice for myself — my blackness, my sexuality, my woman-ness — when I heard women screaming while being battered at night in Lenadoon where I lived, when the woman working in the community centre opposite my house knocked on my door in desperation, saying she couldn't cope with the numbers of reports made to her of children being sexually abused in the area, when women told me about being harassed, stalked and raped. I understood that the men who fought for their freedom were the same men who were doing these things. When I spoke about this to women in the Republican/Nationalist movement, they said they know what happens to women and what men do. The words Freedom and Self-determination, which I thought I had understood, took on a different meaning for me, and I had believed I was a Feminist.

For women, being a colonised people hurts us, and complicates our lives in many ways. Not only does it mean being silenced by and living in terror of the outsider, but also the insider. It also means that these experiences lived minute by minute, hour by hour, all our lives, makes them like breathing, so normal to our living that they are like the oxygen in the air. We do not see it; we do not see our own suffering. After all we've had many lifetimes of no-one seeing it, or not taking it seriously when they did. For us it means seeing the lives of others as more valuable than our own. It means it is very hard for us to understand that any demand for justice that does not include us, is not a demand for

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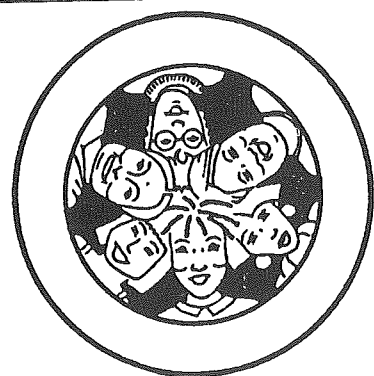
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justice at all.

The Patriarchal order that I have spoken about throughout is male domination, which, whatever else it may do in the name of freedom, democracy, religion, culture, hangs on to its privilege to beat women, rape women, abuse and control women socially, economically and in many other ways. Men hang on to it individually when they violate us, and they hang on to it collectively when they tell us that justice for us will have to wait, until everything else has been sorted out for them. 'Until' is a very very long time, and indications are that it means 'never'.

I want racial justice, but justice does not come in neat little packages. I cannot have it for one part of me and not the rest of me. I cannot get justice from people who are unjust in their closest relationships, in their most intimate associations with others, and who see all women as 'fair game'. They will not understand what I am talking about, because they do not practice it. I will only get justice for all of me when we women desire it and seek it out for ourselves, and for all women. All other justice is dependent on this. □



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We can work it out

Whether by their own choice or because of the way the labour market is structured, large numbers of women work in all-women environments. Here Thangam Debbonaire investigates what goes on in a variety of women-only workplaces, ranging from massage parlours to feminist collectives. She suggests that if your aim is to create woman-friendly working conditions, it is not enough to say 'let's do things differently'. There are issues of structure which feminists need to address.

Tess: It's just, it's so exciting, I mean she takes me seriously. And I think it's because, and I know you hate when I say this, but I think it's because she's a woman, there's none of that chasing around the desk crap, and it's like, she wants to be my mentor, which is exactly what I needed, I mean I feel like I'm finally getting somewhere, Mick.
Working Girl, Mike Nichols (1988)

Ever since I have been working in women-only organisations I have often heard phrases such as 'I thought things would be different in a women's organisation' or 'well of course we've sorted that issue out — we're a women's organisation'. The assumption that there was something different and positive about working in this way was not new to me. However, it was clear that the expectations that went along with this vary enormously.

Looking around where I live, the nursery, the primary school, the health clinic, many local

shops, the small local charities such as PlayBus or the local Scrapstore for recycling waste — a significant proportion is run by women. But the literature on women in the workforce confirmed what I had unscientifically observed — that women are still concentrated in particular professions and levels of workforces. Gender segregation of the workforce is nothing new of course. However, as recently as 1995, available statistics show that there has been little overall reduction of segregation of jobs based on gender over the years. A glass ceiling on women in senior posts in most professions still apparently exists: at most 4% of middle and senior managers are women and the proportions are on the decline. For black women, according to M Davidson, the ceiling 'seems to made of concrete rather than glass' although the lack of ethnic monitoring of management posts means

Cartoons by Janis Goodman



that there is less evidence for this.

The low pay in jobs traditionally held by women (such as cleaning) may have helped to keep them single sex. Other organisations, such as retail firms, changed the responsibility and pay associated with various middle management posts as women began to climb the career ladder, re-imposing gender segregation. It is therefore not surprising that as much as 50% of the workforce or more may be spending most of their working life in single sex work groups. The area of greatest mixing is in middle management, with few women in senior management and manual trades still divided into women's and men's. For example, there are still very few women working on building sites as builders — those that are, are more likely to be either engineers or architects (middle management or perhaps middle class professionals) or administrative posts (from author's communication with building contractors).

Despite the evidence that a significant proportion, perhaps even a majority, of the workforce remains in single sex work groups all their working lives, there is almost no literature or research available on the subject of what is

going on in those work groups. Katherine Iannello's insightful book *Feminist Interventions in Organisation* containing detailed case studies and analysis of three US women's organisations (two of which were working in structures that could be described as collectives of some form), is the only publication I could find that was directly concerned with women-only workplaces.

Katherine Iannello's analysis of the Boston Women's Health Collective (BWHC) has a great deal to offer women's organisations who want to maintain collective principles, but for need other structures in order to organise the vast amount of work they now do. Iannello calls this 'modified consensus'. The BWHC is divided into work groups with different areas of responsibility (personnel, medical, business and outreach). Each has a co-ordinator and the co-ordinators meet weekly. A personnel committee team, including members of the board of management establishes criteria for decisions about terms and conditions. The whole group then participates in such decisions, including staff recruitment, pay and holidays. Katherine Iannello says the group describes this structure as a 'modified collective'. The principles of consultation and involvement in decision making are retained, but co-ordinators have responsibility to ensure work in each sub-group is carried out as agreed by the whole collective. Decisions are divided into 'routine' and 'critical', so that routine decisions can be made by work groups or in some cases co-ordinators, but critical decisions, including changes in organisational policy, still have to be discussed and agreed by the whole organisation. The collective has a 'co-ordinator at large' to ensure communication among work groups and an overview of the whole organisation. This role rotates among members.

Many staff and clients of the health centre had come to the group specifically because it was a service run by women for women. Although some staff felt they had not had their expectations met, interviews with clients describe how nervousness about whether it was 'a real operation' disappeared, 'dispelled by their immediate professionalism'. 'I had a feeling it was a much more co-operative working situation... I felt totally comfortable there'. This description is very similar to comments made to me by ex-residents of refugees in the UK.

Asking questions

There are many factors keeping women in single sex work groups or organisations. However, my experience led me to believe that many women were either choosing to work mainly with women, or, having found themselves in that work situation, made a positive choice to stay. I began to explore the different ways women were formally or informally organising themselves, including the structure and management of work groups and organisations. I also wanted to find out how the experiences varied between lesbians and heterosexual/bisexual women, Black and white women, working and middle class women, parents and childless women.

I interviewed seven women who between them had worked in over 30 women only work groups or organisations. Their experience included: typing pools, a psychiatric ward, health and counselling services, various women's centres, refuge and rape crisis groups, a firm of legal practitioners, women's development organisations in Uganda and Kenya, massage parlours providing sexual services for men, cleaning. All of them also had experience of working for or with men. Their ages ranged from early twenties to early fifties. Three were single parents, four identified as lesbian, one as Black African and the rest white. All were to varying degrees known to me before the interviews. Since the original interviews I have talked to all seven several times informally and also discussed and analysed what I'd found out with other women.

Much has been said but little written down about the mysterious inner world of collectives. In the experience of many women I talked to, what is said informally is rarely discussed formally, unless and until the collective is about to fall apart. At this point, a facilitator is then brought in to try to stick it all back together again or re-structure. This is a pity, because what is said in the kitchen over coffee is often full of useful insight and good ideas. I have therefore included a lot of quotes from women I interviewed originally and from those I talked to in the kitchen.

One all female legal firm with a collective structure for legal and non-legal posts had the same pay and status:

we were all...[on] equal pay and equal decision making power and equal liability. We decided to call the secretaries co-workers and looked at differences to make a new role. [Lily]

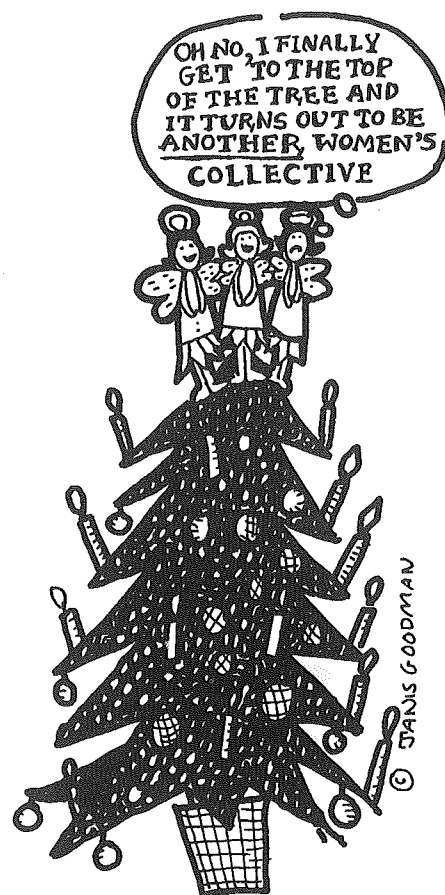
The co-workers had greater opportunities for career development than they might have had otherwise and the solicitors did learn to consider the needs of secretaries.

some co-workers took on client work and saw clients themselves. Co-workers and solicitors paired up in mini-teams in specific work areas and took joint responsibility for the management of case files. With the solicitors there seemed no way of getting away from the giving of instructions to the secretaries, but in giving instructions there was discussion about decisions and they tried to share knowledge.

In another case, Kate said that the nursing sister in charge of her ward had been the ideal boss:

I had a good mentor, she was excellent and an excellent nurse, she loved her patients and she loved her nurses and she made everyone feel cared for.... the sister was also very dynamic, get up and go type, not afraid to tell people what to do, she was aware of what we were doing, showed a lot of appreciation and a lot of care, she looked after her staff.





Having someone more experienced to supervise and train other staff as well as take charge of their work is something that some women working in collectives note the lack of. Where this person is supportive, though clearly not accepting poor standards of work, staff get appreciation of their work, again something that interviewees working in collectives feel is missing:

One of the most important things for support is feedback and validation of work and I think we're bad at that — I get it from people outside the organisation. [Daisy]

Where no-one has responsibility to set work targets and give feedback and appreciation when work is done, then workers fail to provide this for each other. Re-interviewing several women and interviewing some more for this article, most were absolutely certain that they had nowhere to go at work for formal advice or help for work or related problems. 'I go to my friends — but that isn't how I want to do it', one said.

External supervision was a source of appreciation and feedback, but did not substitute for appreciation from colleagues. Some women found regular group facilitation to be a useful way of getting this critical feedback and also appreciation in a safe way. One organisation had this three times a year for the whole organisation, including once with Management Committee as well as staff; another had facilitation once a month.

In the massage parlours Claire worked in ('too many to count!'), the structure is clear: there is a boss, usually a prostitute or former prostitute, and then a rota of women who work shifts on a self-employed basis. The whole operation is usually owned by someone else again (not always a man, but often) who may own several parlours and not spend a great deal of time in them. Women working in the same parlour generally 'looked out' for each other if there was any trouble and women were hardly ever on their own in the building with clients. However, if clients were violent or troublesome, police help was not usually available and women had to rely on the strength of parlour owners to deal with these situations. Claire's immediate bosses in parlours were not usually pleasant to work for but she said that the best boss she had was also the toughest:

She was an absolute bitch to us all, and our training for the job consisted of being taken upstairs by her man, but she could control the punters and she's the longest running parlour boss in the area... another boss was much nicer, taught me more about the job and took a real interest in me and my children, but she wasn't much use when there was trouble and she didn't last. As I need money from work more than a social life, I usually prefer the other sort, though it isn't easy.

If a man tried to negotiate the price, 'I'd ask him if he would try to negotiate on the price of a drink in the pub' but as a self-employed worker it was up to her, and if a customer left without paying, she would still have to pay the door charge to her boss, even if this left her with nothing: 'It's a business and what we're selling makes no difference — I know the score, even if it is a friend I'm working for I know it's my problem not hers.'

Despite all of this, Claire was unhesitating in her assessment of what she valued about the job, which seems to me to be strongly associated with the group of women she worked with:

At its best it's the greatest job in the world and I definitely don't go because I enjoy the actual work part. You spend all day with your friends having a

laugh and ordering pizzas and talking about clothes and makeup; you're away from the kids and if you've got a good baby-sitter you don't need to worry about them; you can have a shower and wash your hair in private, and you only spend about an hour or so in total actually doing customers, which can bring you home several hundred pounds. Of course at its worst it is an awful job...

Collectives: continuity and change

Many of the women I talked to had worked in collectives or were still doing so. Some felt that the collective had had its day:

I'm not sure what it [collective] means... I think that it means different things to different people, for some it's a way of getting out of things, for others it means everybody should do everything which I think is quite dangerous.

Several women felt that being in a collective shouldn't mean that individual skills aren't recognised, simply that they are all equally valued. In practice, it seems that individual skills aren't always acknowledged in collectives. This led some to question the collective structure itself, and others to try to develop a collective structure that did welcome and value individual skill and knowledge. Some involved the use of sub-groups as in Katherine Iannello's 'modified collective'. This seems to be the only way that a work team can hope to remain close to collective principles once it has about eight or more members.

Power differences other than gender mean that other forms of inequality are still present in women only teams, and in fact may be thrown into even sharper relief. Lesbians, Black women and women working in traditionally female roles (cleaner, receptionist) all had criticisms of the way the promotion of equality, even in organisations explicitly committed to it, seemed to be working less well for them than for heterosexual or white women or those working in more powerful posts.

Daisy commented that the workplace had initially helped her to come out:

It was also very good for me... it gave me the opportunity to say 'right I am a lesbian' and I think that this was to do with the organisation, people were very supportive and helped me personally.

However, she said that as time went by and the organisation grew:

It's supposed to be a safe place to be out and I am sort of out at work but not all the lesbians there are out to everybody — in fact one lesbian there I know thinks that another woman who is actually

lesbian is straight as she's got all sorts of assumptions about what it is to be a lesbian so even from other lesbians there are problems. I do feel as if we are tolerated or treated as a factor of 'right-on-ness' for being there rather than being equal.

Susan said of the place where she worked: 'It's the safest place I've ever worked in to be lesbian, in fact I sometimes think the heterosexual women are not really in the gang.'

A heterosexual woman commented that this was sometimes the case where she worked, but that she did not feel this was a problem as it was better than excluding lesbians.

In some organisations the contribution of lesbians is of fundamental importance and not recognised enough. This woman was speaking about Women's Aid:

The organisation largely is built on the labour of lesbians who wanted to do something for women with women, the irony is that the majority of users are heterosexual... they get patched up and go home to abusive men... and this is sort of hidden.

It seems ironic that despite the high





expectations of care from other women, despite the high level of care given by staff to clients, and despite complaints from some women that they were expected to give more attention to colleagues' personal needs than they wanted to, most women I talked to found the lack of appreciation for individual effort at work one of the biggest frustrations with women only teams. Is this because women as a group place more emphasis on personal than professional issues? Do we still really feel that professional success is 'un-female'? Why do so many all-women organisations pay little attention to career development? The organisations and staff in them are often highly successful at providing a good service (such as a well-run safe refuge) but could not acknowledge this explicitly to each other.

The absence of men

Although men may be absent from the work teams, their influence is still felt. Refuges and Rape Crisis groups, for example, would not exist without male violence. Massage parlours provide services for men. Most of the psychiatric patients cared for by nurses interviewed

were men. Funders of voluntary women's organisations were often men. Clearly men still have a strong influence on the way work is done, the nature of the work, and even if there is any work at all.

All the women I spoke to found plenty to say about what they liked about not having men actually in the work group:

I like the fact that I'm not going to have to deal with male egos at work all day and feel that there is a certain understanding between us that helps the job get done... I also value tremendously things that might seem little but aren't, like having Tampax in the loo and at [a women-only firm] we always had toys around and nappy changing gear... I like not having to worry about how a man will interpret a joke or flippant remark. [Lily]

I think that women-only organisations can be creative but in a strange way, like stretching the budget, making things work out of nothing. [Nyakecho]

When it was all women together on the shift, most women just get on and do it, you don't bicker about who helps with a lift or who deals with some shit, you just get on and do it, you do each other favours, you compromise and you just sort of slot in together... when M [a male nurse] was there, whenever a senior wasn't around he just used to sit

in the office and order us around which wasn't really his job, even sister does shit work. [Kate]

Kate also had a part time cleaning job with a women's counselling service, who tried to make a conscious effort to employ her on good conditions, such as a decent rate of pay set at a level which allowed her to keep the money without losing benefits. The reality has been rather different. She has never been paid on time or in cash, has had tremendous difficulty in communicating with members of staff, has never had contact again with the women who interviewed her, has an open-ended job description, has to work on her own and enter the building by an unlit doorway at the back of the building and is expected to pay for cleaning materials out of her Income Support and claim the money back.

Kate was careful not to lay blame on the women who worked in the project. She felt that they were trying hard to provide a crisis service for women without the funds to do it and that she was the first part of the service to get neglected when times were difficult. However, 'because they don't see me it's easy for them not to think about what I'm doing'.

The project concerned has obviously made an effort to think about how to provide decent employment conditions for a cleaner and the conditions she was initially promised were indeed an improvement on most cleaning work. However, the women working there as staff in the team (Kate says quite clearly that she is not on the team) do not seem to be able to consider her position or the working needs of a cleaner. She cannot find a way to communicate basic information to them, and therefore, although she feels she is trying to change the unequal power position she is in, her resistance is being negated by the rest of the staff, even though they are not being overly controlling or threatening. By not hearing or seeing what Kate is trying to communicate, staff are exercising the power to keep issues off the agenda, an effective tool for silencing women. Kate's experiences were very similar to those described by women working in clerical and reception posts in women's organisations.

Managing well

Many women are making active choices to work in women only groups. They are doing so for reasons such as the style of working, new ways of organising and carrying out work to meet

personal as well as organisational needs, the way the building is arranged and equipped. Some women, of course, welcome working without the presence of men.

Some women's organisations, although committed to equality of opportunity and providing good working conditions for traditionally badly treated workers such as cleaners, fail in spite of themselves. Less powerful posts often remain so when colleagues or managers forget to ask certain members of staff what they need or frustrate their attempts to voice their own concerns.

Some women found that although the emphasis on team-working between women was welcome after isolation or competition in mixed or mainly male teams, this stifled their individuality and they were afraid to go for promotion as this was seen as being too pushy. More confident women who are prepared to risk losing friends subsequently miss the support they found in their teams, others left behind would rather remain within a good working environment than take the uncertainty and loneliness of posts higher up the hierarchy.

It is not enough to say 'let's do things differently'; successful organisations have given thought to their structures and seem to have at least one and usually more of the following characteristics:

- they use principles of 'modified consensus' with distinctions between routine and critical decisions;
- they have actively developed their structure as the organisation grew, and even considered moving to a more hierarchical one, but reviewed their commitment to consensus and strengthened it;
- they have acknowledged individual skill, and provided individual training, supervision or other forms of career development;
- they are either still fewer than eight women or are working in sub-groups, similar to the 'modified collective' model.

There is much more to learn from women working in all-women teams. Left to our own devices, women are managing very well. □

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The Beast, the Family and the Innocent Children

Of the acres of newspaper space discussing the killings in Dunblane, very little was feminist, and analysis seemed to consist merely of pop psychology about Hamilton's motives and upbringing. Sue Scott and Linda Watson-Brown look at the fairytale elements of the press coverage and ask whether an emotional response to an event precludes a feminist analysis.

What is the difference between 'normal' men and killers? To ask these questions, it seems to us, is to ask something about men — or more precisely, about the construction of masculine sexuality in our culture. (Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer *The Lust to Kill*, p35)

When I'm with you
I want to be the kind of hero
I wanted to be
when I was seven years old
a perfect man
who kills (Leonard Cohen)

Once upon a time a gunman entered the Primary School in the pretty little city of Dunblane, with its 'closely knit community' and opened fire on a class of five-year-olds. As the world now knows, Thomas Hamilton ultimately killed sixteen children, their teacher, and himself. Hamilton's actions — and his legal possession of four guns — initiated a staggering media furor and public response. Such was the reaction that emotion completely overtook

analysis. We were both at the time working very close to Dunblane — this proximity has made this piece rather more difficult to write than might otherwise have been the case and, in part, explains why it is only now being written, more than a year after the event. In the immediate aftermath we were given the strong impression that analysis was out of bounds — the only proper response was seen to be an emotional one and one in which the proper emotions were displayed. Of course what happened was appalling, of course we felt sick at the thought of it. It would have been inhuman not to be shocked and saddened by such carnage, especially when wrought on small children. There is however something deeply problematic about the tabloid press telling us how we should feel — such manipulation of our feelings should not be confused with a genuinely shared response. The kind of response which was being

generated seemed to us to produce sentimentality, anxiety and powerlessness, turning us all into victims. We feel strongly that emotions should not be separated from ideas and analysis so, despite having been told that what happened that day in Dunblane is beyond analysis and too sensitive to write about, we want to encourage feminist analysis both of the event and the response to it. At the same time as being appalled by the tragedy we were angered by many aspects of the response: Why was there such emphasis on the individual killer, as maniac/animal, and none on his gender? Why was it assumed that all the children were 'safe' until Hamilton happened along? Why was the reporting so fundamentally homophobic? Why was it assumed that only parents can care about children? In what follows we will explore the ways in which what we saw as the key themes in the response to Dunblane: the killer as beast, the family as 'normal' or 'deviant' and children as innocent.

The Beast

The murderer, Thomas Hamilton, was immediately labelled evil, a madman, a psychopath. Of course the idea of the murderer as a maniac, a beast, a fiend, or a monster is not a new one, but what is of interest here are the materials out of which the beast is constructed, by whom, and for what purpose. The media emphasis was on explaining the crime entirely through the individual who committed it. Hence, the many and detailed unfolding stories relating to Thomas Hamilton, the 'Why?' headlines, and the personalised reminiscences of those touched by his existence.

There was a strongly 'religious' theme running through the early discourse of the Dunblane massacre which drew on metaphors of 'good' and 'evil'. The idea that Hamilton was so bad, so decayed, so *different* from the rest of his community was prevalent. The stereotypes well-documented by feminists from the Peter Sutcliffe/Yorkshire Ripper case onwards, were once again presented to us as fact. Thus, Thomas Hamilton was described as 'the evil monster' (*Sunday Mail* 17/03/96), 'a twisted madman' (*Daily Record* 16/03/96), and an 'evil psycho' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96). He was referred to as 'madman', a 'ticking timebomb of a spree killer' (*Daily Record* 13/03/96), and a 'crazed gunman' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96). These terms are from a familiar lexicon which is

applied in situations such as these and parallels were drawn with Michael Ryan and the Hungerford massacre. This emphasis on evil and/or madness appears to be necessary in order to create the maximum distance between the killer and the rest of society, which is by implication made up of 'normal' people. Thus a *cordon sanitaire* is created between 'us' and 'them'. The fact that 'they' are usually 'he' is rarely made explicit. This process, of course, further serves to pathologise the killer to the point where it is difficult to imagine anything other than an entirely individual explanation. In this case, however, it was insufficient to provide psychopathological diagnoses. The crime was defined as so awful that the perpetrator must have been sub-human.

'[A]nimal brutality and lack of remorse continue to function as marks of the beast [...] There has also developed a distinctive vocabulary reinforcing this picture of the sex-killer as a subhuman, lust-crazed demon: its keywords are *maniac*, *beast*, *fiend* and *monster*...' (Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer *The Lust to Kill*, p41)

We were faced with a situation which, if not beyond belief, was portrayed as beyond analysis — evil and madness were presented as explanations, but evil beyond hope of redemption and madness with no hope of a cure. This was not the language of modernity — there was no space for expert help or scientific explanation — this was the language of myth and legend. The act was beyond reason, thus the only legitimate response was an emotional one. We should have realised, we should have acted, but we were all held in thrall — like the citizens of Hamlyn watching the children disappear behind the pied piper!

In Thomas Hamilton's case however, we were, as early as the third news bulletin, offered a further explanation — members of the 'community' labelling Hamilton as 'sleazy and strange', a 'weirdo', 'a sleazebucket', and 'a dangerous pervert' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96). What emerged from this discussion was that Hamilton's private life — as a 'fat, balding 43-year-old, who spoke with a posh Scottish accent' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96) — revealed innuendo represented as fact. Later, legitimate concerns did arise about his treatment of young boys in clubs he ran, but in the first days after the event 'Neighbours told how Hamilton entertained male visitors at his home'; 'Most callers were in their 30s... I never saw a woman. The men would often stay for a couple of hours or more. I



don't know what they got up to' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96). No tenuous or superficial stereotype was too weak for this angle — 'There was something sleazy and smarmy about him — he had extremely clean hands' (*Daily Record* 14/03/96). Even Hamilton's 'single' status was used to condemn him.

The mark of the beast was, of course, clearly visible with hindsight and in fact many, including the police and local MPs were chastised or berated themselves for not having predicted and averted disaster. This is in itself a profoundly problematic response: it is always relatively easy to re-construct the narrative when the end of the story is known. Reliance on such accounts suggests that it is possible to read 'potential murderer' from the activities and characteristics ascribed to Hamilton. While we are by no means attempting to justify Hamilton's prior or ultimate behaviour, we would suggest that the elision of homosexuality and paedophilia and, in turn, paedophilia and murder is highly problematic. The image presented of Hamilton as an animal who was driven wild by being kept away from his prey — feeds, dangerously, into the still popular stereotype of the homosexual as a 'child molester'.

The Family

There have been a number of ways in which the notion of 'family' has been represented in the aftermath of Dunblane the main ones being: the importance of the 'normal' family, the dangers resulting from the 'deviant' family and the community as an extension of the family. From the first news bulletins parents (ungendered) were drawn into a network of common understanding and common grief — it was clearly stated that all parents would understand and, that by implication, that those who were not parents could not. An idealised picture of family life in Dunblane was set against Hamilton's own family background which was portrayed as aberrant to say the least. We were presented with tabloid psychoanalysis as it was revealed that his parents had separated before his birth, and that Hamilton's father had not seen him for over forty years. Under a headline 'I wish my son had never been born', Mr Hamilton senior said, 'I'm sorry I planted the seed that created him' (*Daily Record* 15/03/96). Hamilton's father then insisted he had nothing to do with the child's upbringing — this was presented as

a claim for absolution rather than cause for condemnation. This illustrates one of the many contradictions in the piece — Hamilton was depicted as both intrinsically bad and also as the product of a strange upbringing. The media were having it both ways, blaming nurture as well as nature, grasping at any plausible or implausible straw to explain the seemingly inexplicable. After his father's desertion, Hamilton was adopted by his maternal grandparents, and grew up believing his mother to be his sister. This tale of family irregularity was completed with the revelation that 'Bizarrely, they [his grand-parents] had also adopted Agnes herself [his mother]' (*Daily Record* 15/03/96). Thus, we can see an implicit suggestion that, in situations where families are 'unnatural', evil will out. Hamilton's mother was, of course, singled out for blame with such 'revelations' as, 'Mother is a gun film fan... [she] adores violent movies... and even has a budgie named after Death Wish star Charles Bronson' (*Daily Record* 15/03/96). If it were really so easy for women to influence men the world might be a different place!

The geographical specificity of the story was also much exploited. From the outset, there was a sense of disbelief, not just at *what* had happened, but in relation to *where* it had happened. Amongst stories of the 'community's anguish' (*Daily Record* 15/03/96), we were told, 'It is inconceivable that a tragedy like this could have occurred in this country and particularly in Dunblane' (*Daily Record* 15/03/96). Similarly, 'you usually expect these things in Miami or the Bronx' (*Daily Record* 13/03/96), but not 'a very Scottish town in the very centre of Scotland' (*Sunday Mail* 17/03/96 editorial). Big cities were by implication imbued with danger — haunted by spectres of crime and violence — suffering from the loss of community. The 'community' of Dunblane became globally symbolic — it was a place where many commuter-families lived, parents were said to have moved there, often from inner-city Glasgow, for the benefits they perceived in raising their children in a small, 'close-knit' area. This romanticised story of a small Scottish town reads rather like nostalgia for the imagined community of Tannoch Brae. But the boundaries had been breached by an outsider — much was made of the fact that Hamilton came from nearby Stirling — and an alternative symbolism was required to repair the breach. The twin

pillars of church and family were invoked then to provide the strength to ward off further evil. Faith had been shaken, but not abandoned and Dunblane Cathedral became a symbol of strength offering the support which the community needed to go on. The clergy were called upon, from all sides, to give a 'clear' moral and spiritual lead in the aftermath of the tragedy. We were presented with nostalgia for a world, based on moral absolutes, in which the church, Christian, of course, is the final arbiter: a world which, we are often told, has been lost — eroded by immorality, family breakdown and of course feminism.

Innocent children

The dominant discourse of childhood in the twentieth century has been woven around images of innocence with increasing emphasis latterly on children as innocent victims. While we would not wish to underplay the very real abuses of power which occur between adults and children, or to deny children's rights to be protected from such abuse, we would suggest that the abuses of power are reinforced rather than disrupted by representations of children as angelic and powerless. Also, as Jenny Kitzinger points out, the symbolic use of innocence to provoke public reactions to child abuse can backfire: 'the notion of childhood innocence is a source of titillation for abusers. A glance at pornography leaves little doubt that innocence is a sexual commodity.'

There is also a parallel discourse of children as unruly, even evil, very popular in the nineteenth century and increasingly invoked in the context of events such as the murder of James Bulger. In the reporting after Dunblane, however, it was as if the media had total amnesia — and children were equated with angels. Even as we write a request has been issued that we 'light a candle for the angels' to mark the first anniversary of the murders in Dunblane. While lighting candles may have symbolic value, the failure to focus on the humanity of children is unhelpful. Both views of children, as 'little angels' or 'little devils' are problematic and serve to separate them off from the 'real world' of adults — who have the power to define. The images of childhood presented to us in the aftermath of Dunblane were redolent with evocations of an idealised childhood filled with loving parents and siblings, sunny classrooms, Clarks sandals and

teddy bears. The result was a reification of a particular white, middle-class, British, childhood which potentially renders all other versions problematic, and conceals the nightmare of many children's lives behind such a facade. The anxiety which events such as Dunblane generate also serves, potentially, to curtail children's activities in ways which may restrict their potential for autonomy and their opportunities to develop the necessary skills to cope with the world. Although the parents of the 16 children who died could hardly be found guilty of having sent them to school — other parents, and especially mothers, will be seen as culpable if they allow their children some independence and harm comes of it. However, as we well know, the major risks to children come from abuse from men who are known to them, men driving cars and accidents in the home. Having said this, it is important to stress that children are not safe anywhere simply by virtue of the context — surely the mythology of home and school as intrinsically 'safe havens' should have been exploded. The reporting of Dunblane, rather than taking seriously the balance of risks to children, simply served to reinforce the myth of Stranger-Danger — back to the pied piper and the wicked ogre!



This famous and horribly realistic illustration of an ogre cutting the throats of his daughters comes from Perrault's fairy tales, published in 1862. It shows how firmly the ogre/child-killer motif is embedded in cultural tradition; it also shows how depictions of the killing of 'innocent children' have long been used to shock and titillate.

Feminism not fairytales

A not insignificant aspect of the Dunblane story has been that so many of the spokespeople in the aftermath of the event have been women. Women were given a platform, as mothers, as legitimate representatives of the private sphere, of the emotional realm and often of moral conservatism. Women were seen to be the voice of the community — but only because the tragedy had involved children. The voice of feminism has, on the other hand, been largely silent. The individualism of the media reporting allowed no space for a feminist analysis of male violence or for a more collective and social response to it. Of course as feminists we must rail against sexual abuse and sexual murder, but we must also rail against accounts which suggests, however elliptically, that all non-heterosexual desire is potentially mad, bad and dangerous. The conflation, by the media, of Hamilton's violence with his sexual orientation is, we suggest, overly simplistic and avoids any analysis of power. Most violence is perpetrated upon women and children by heterosexual men — the common thread here surely is gender not sexuality.

The homophobia of much of the media reporting, coupled with the implication that only parents could really understand, fuels the myth that those who do not have children are at best emotionally stunted and at worst potential predators. As feminists we must continue to support those women who choose not to be mothers (as well as those who are mothers). We should argue for children to have the opportunity to form social relationships with adults other than their parents. Otherwise we reinforce the notion of the fairytale family. The implication of the reporting and the effect of the anxiety which it generated is that the home is once again reified as a safe haven. The outside world thus comes to be seen as too dangerous for children. This line of thinking is deeply problematic for

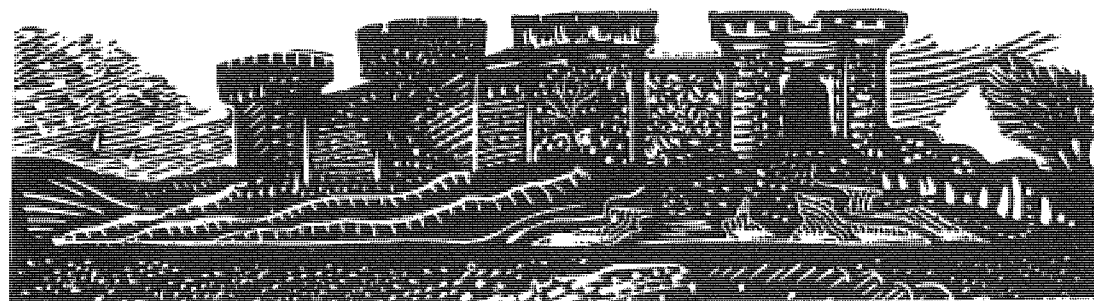
women who are in no position, even should they wish to be so, to spend 24 hours a day watching over their children, but who will be seen as responsible for keeping them safe. It is not a very big step from here back to a view of the public realm as too dangerous for women — the safest place is in the home! But as feminists we know better than to fall for that old story.

As we have pointed out earlier the response engendered by the media was a major outpouring of emotion. Of course feminists have long argued that emotion has an important and legitimate place in everyday life so we would not wish to condemn such legitimisation out of hand. However, the orchestration of public grief which renders us passive and unable to politicise the situation tends to produce more victims. It must be possible, even in the face of the greatest abomination, to be sad *and* angry *and* to act for change. There was evidence of this in relation to the campaigns for gun law reform, but, important though this issue is, without an analysis of gender and masculinity we are in danger of avoiding the key issue. Indeed, the ensuing debate about the reform of the 'gun laws' has been entirely gender free.

Media accounts, following the massacre in Dunblane, failed entirely to make any connection between what occurred and male violence more generally. By labelling Thomas Hamilton a beast it was possible to abdicate from any social responsibility for legitimating problematic aspects of male behaviour. Such a position made it possible to perpetrate the myth of an ideal world of happy families who must be protected from the present day equivalent of trolls, giants, wolves and other monsters who manage to break through the stockade. Feminists should not be silenced by such fairytales; we need all our energy, emotional and analytic, to continue the struggle against real threats in the everyday/evernight world. □

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All in a day's work?

According to some feminist analyses, prostitution should be regarded as 'sex work': a job like any other. Here Ruth Swirsky and Celia Jenkins question the assumption that prostitution is only a form of labour, and not a system of sexual exploitation.

The logic of the position that prostitution is sex-work, an occupation comparable to any other, would be to offer jobs in the sex industry to the unemployed. This is exactly what has happened. Last year JobCentres advertised work in massage parlours, escort agencies and strip clubs. Following complaints from the unemployed expressing fears that they might lose their jobseeker's allowance if they turned down such jobs, the Employment Service has banned such adverts (*Guardian* 6 February 1997). Yet this is the logic of constituting prostitution as sex-work, little different from other gendered female occupations.

There are broadly two major feminist approaches to prostitution. The first views prostitution as epitomising the use and abuse of women by men, to be resolved by changing male sexuality. The second views prostitution as a legitimate form of labour which is freely chosen by women who earn their living as prostitutes. Those who subscribe to the latter position argue that their starting point is the experiences and

needs of women working as prostitutes, in keeping with the feminist principle of respect for the realities of women's lives. There is, however, no necessary and inevitable progression from seeking to understand the experiences of prostitutes and supporting their needs as women to viewing prostitution as a legitimate form of labour.

We want to expose the implications of promoting prostitution as sex work, to question whose interests are being served and to reinstate a definition of prostitution that extends beyond individual women's experiences to challenge the institution of prostitution as exploiting women. In short, we are against prostitution and for the rights of women in prostitution. Nonetheless we recognise that a feminist analysis of prostitution needs to face up to the contradictions which are inherent in criticising the institution of prostitution whilst supporting the civil and human rights of prostitutes.

In defining prostitution as the sexual exploitation of women, we attempt to keep the

definition broad and inclusive at the same time as recognising different women's experiences of prostitution in a way that defining prostitution as sex work does not. For example, it may be pragmatic to define child prostitution as abuse but only insofar as it allows for harsher legal sanctions in terms of child abuse against the offender/client. However if child prostitution is defined as abuse, it seems to imply that at some notional age prostitution is transformed from coercion into free choice. It is this connection between age and choice which has to be severed to promote an effective feminist analysis of prostitution which acknowledges the different constituencies of women and children involved, without losing sight of the exploitation entailed in any prostitution encounter.

Prostitution as work

The perspective on prostitution as work is exemplified by Mary McIntosh's argument in a paper 'Feminist Debates on Prostitution', that it is 'an activity with its own skills and ways of operating'. The preferred concept of 'sex worker' means 'that these are women who are paid for what they do, who earn their living by sex [and] that what they do should be respected as a skilled and effortful activity'. This view is gaining widespread currency, not only among some feminists; for example, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recognises prosti-



tution as work. This idea is developed to suggest that sex work simply entails using different parts of the body to other workers. In the February 1994 issue of *New Internationalist*, which was devoted to prostitution, a prostitute is quoted by Nikki van der Gaag as saying, 'You might sell your brain, you might sell your back, you might sell your fingers for typewriting. Whatever it is that do, you are selling one part of your body. I choose to sell my body the way I want to and I choose to sell my vagina.' This is a particularly specious argument which side-steps any analysis of the relationship between gender, sexuality and power. Only by denying the potency of sexuality in gendered power relations could one equate physical, mental and sexual activity in this way.

The conceptualisation of prostitution as a form of 'legitimate' work in some ways comparable to service work, structured and conditioned by women's general economic disadvantage, depends on a distinction between 'enforced' and 'free-choice' prostitution. Within this framework, enforced prostitution is narrowly defined as trafficking in women and especially child prostitution, while British (and other Western) prostitutes would fall into the 'free choice' category. In support of this position, there is a tendency to draw upon the views expressed by individual prostitutes to legitimate the argument that women freely enter prostitution and to challenge any denial of 'free choice' prostitution. So for example, a prostitute is quoted by Sanders in *New Statesman and Society*, in 1990, as saying, 'I want to work with feminists who understand that I have a right to do what I wish with my body'.

Advocates of 'free-choice' prostitution focus mainly on women in the elite forms of prostitution, working in escort agencies, massage-parlours, hotels and flats. An article by Watson in the same issue of *New Statesman and Society* suggested a leakage from public sector work into prostitution, with women claiming to prefer prostitution, not only because it paid better but also because of the greater fun, freedom and autonomy they enjoyed. These women said they felt less exploited and more in control than in their former professional work. In particular, ex-nurses pointed out similarities between nursing and sex work, both in terms of physical contact with men's genitals and emotional labour in humouring them.

In tandem with the international movement

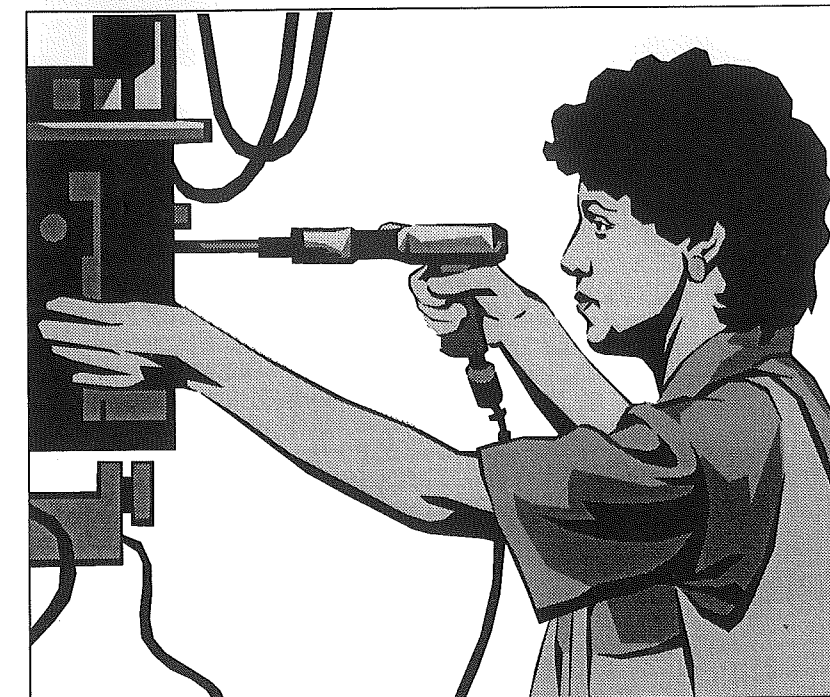
towards the rights of prostitutes, decriminalisation of prostitution is favoured (where it is treated as a matter of free choice) for two reasons. Firstly it is argued that all that differentiates prostitution from other work is the way in which it is perceived. For example, in her book *Vamps, Virgins and Vampires*, Robin Gorna contends that the lives of prostitutes are rendered more complex than other women's *only* (our emphasis) by factors that influence their work as prostitutes (such as drug use, for some) and the stigmatisation they experience from the 'moral' minority and also feminists. Secondly, public resources (including police protection and funding) are less accessible to prostitutes because they are seen as less deserving. Prostitution is not prioritised when it comes to allocating public funds for health projects, except in relation to the perceived threat to male clients of transmittable diseases, in particular HIV. The positive advantages of treating prostitution as work are stressed by health-care professionals who constantly struggle for funds to support projects with prostitutes. It was for this reason primarily that the Royal College of Nursing voted to decriminalise prostitution at their annual congress in 1995. Experiments in zoning in Holland have been presented as a means of providing a safer environment for prostitution where health services can be provided and the area can be policed — though in fact, it seems that these areas have become no-go areas for the police, and women are harassed entering them. Alternatively, zoning may be seen simply as a measure to keep prostitution away from 'respectable' residential areas, without any concern for the safety of the prostitutes.

The phrase 'commercial sex work' has been promoted by prostitutes' organisations in response to the stigmatisation of prostitutes. Indeed the preferred terms for prostitutes and prostitution in much contemporary sociological literature are 'sex-worker' and 'sex-industry'. Robin Gorna argues that these terms are helpful, not only in focusing on the fact that these activities are work, but also cutting across moral judgements of the women who work as prostitutes. However, by concealing the words 'prostitute' and 'prostitution' these terms also obscure the exploitative nature of the institution of the prostitution and the experiences of prostitutes. We therefore oppose the sanitisation of prostitution through the use of the more

innocuous concept of sex workers and prefer to talk about 'women involved in prostitution' as a means of focusing critical attention on the institution.

Prostitution as exploitation

Although it was a contentious issue, the Beijing conference made the distinction between free and forced prostitution, viewing only the latter as a violation of the rights of women. This lends some urgency to the need to re-examine the arguments on prostitution as work. The notion of prostitution as 'free choice' is hugely problematic in a capitalist economic system



characterised by patriarchal institutional and ideological relations. And choice is rendered increasingly less free in a worsening economic and organisational climate. In any case, as Janice Raymond argued at the international conference on Violence, Abuse and Women's Citizenship in Brighton, November 1996, how could force be proved in court and how feasible would it be for women to prosecute pimps and traffickers?

Raymond argued that there are significant dangers in the redefinition of prostitution as commercialised sex work, which implies professionalisation and dignifies the work. On the contrary, she argues, professionalisation



doesn't dignify women but the sex industry, which is controlled by and benefits men. The deregulation of prostitution in the Netherlands, Germany and Finland paved the way for trafficking in women and the exploitation of women by the international sex trade. Clearly, the transformation of prostitution into commercial sex work benefits business which is controlled by men, enables governments to factor the profits into national accounting systems and relieves governments from the responsibility to expand women's employment opportunities. It legitimises the sex industry as work, a business, a way of making a living — without empowering the women. Prostitution is part of the international sex industry, including pornography, strip shows and sex tours from the West to Third World countries. It entails the display and appropriation of women's bodies thus reinforcing for both men and women, what Carol Pateman, in *The Sexual Contract*, calls the patriarchal right of access to women's bodies. Prostitution is a market for men; women are paid for sexual services performed on/with/for men to satisfy their sexual needs, while the prostitute herself experiences no desire or satisfaction.

Prostitution-as-work supporters argue that the worst thing about prostitution is the stigmatisation. Norma Hotaling, an ex-prostitute who addressed the Brighton conference on Violence, Abuse and Women's Citizenship asked how we are trained not to see the harm done to the women involved in prostitution. What women in prostitution endure would be described as abuse or harassment in any other work setting. The exchange of money apparently

transforms sexual harassment/sexual violence into work. Given the physical, psychic and emotional damage wrought in the necessary transformation into a prostitute's role that has been so well documented by feminist research into the experience of prostitution, the question remains as to whether it is worthwhile for women to treat their bodies as capital and realise their assets. Cecilie Høigård and Liv Finstad's study of street prostitution in Norway, *Backstreets: Prostitution, Money and Love*, describes the impoverishment and destruction of the women's emotional lives. The emotional costs involved in being a prostitute are not so much the fear and experience of physical violence — though that is considerable — but the loss of a sense of self. Women describe the various strategies they employ in attempting to protect themselves against this, strategies which essentially revolve around maintaining a split between the 'public' and 'private', dissociating themselves from their bodies. This is exemplified by Lisa saying, 'Ugh, the whole thing is sickening. I close my eyes and ears. I cut all my feelings off. It's never, never okay.' But in the longer term, these strategies cannot be wholly effective, as Anna indicates, when she says, 'My body isn't mine when I work there. Anyway I'm a dirty slut. When I myself feel so dirty there's nothing okay about having a relationship.' Or when Inga says, 'I'm bitter. I think I've been misused. I'm getting more wasted and worn out.' Høigård and Finstad conclude that 'regaining self-respect and recreating an emotional life is ... as hard as reconstructing a hundred crown note from ashes.'

Prostitution has to be understood within a context of the privileging of heterosexuality premised on an inequality of power between men and women, in a capitalist economic system developed in articulation with patriarchal relations. In the context of the pervasive ideology of hierarchic heterosexuality, when men purchase sexual services from prostitutes for money they transform female sexuality into a commodity. Although far less research has been done on male clients than on prostitutes, a New Zealand project undertaken by Elizabeth Plumridge and her colleagues, in co-operation with the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective (NZPC), provides fascinating insights into men's self-serving interpretations of how they benefit from patronising prostitutes. These men posit such encounters as emotional relationships

while at the same time asserting that all obligations associated with relationships are discharged by payment. The ability to engage in this mental juggling which enables men to construct such a fantasy onto an economic transaction is dependent on the power inequalities of hierarchic heterosexuality. Payment apparently absolves them from responsibility for the emotional damage to women wrought by prostitution.

Prostitution and marriage

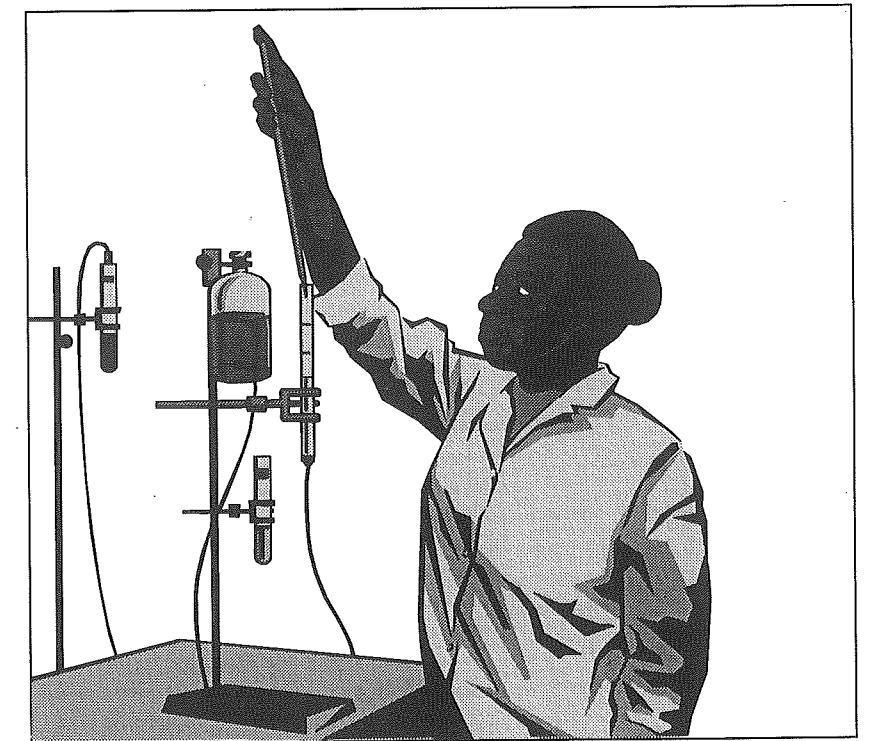
One of the curious features of the new discourse on prostitution as legitimate work is the way in which the familiar juxtaposition of prostitution and marriage in the formulation of sex as a form of currency on a continuum from marital obligation to commercial sex is being used. Twenty years ago in a different political climate this same juxtaposition was used by feminists as part of a critique of marriage as an institution. Today in a climate of 'moral indifference' this analogy is used to legitimate prostitution as not so different from other contexts in which women engage in sexual activities, a clear reversal of more familiar feminist analysis.

Becoming either a wife or a prostitute might be seen as part of an economic, social and sexual bargain. It is a familiar argument that in marriage, a man acquires rights to a woman's body and to her labour for open-ended usage, whereas in the prostitution transaction (in Britain, at least) sexual services are generally sold by the piece, in a commercial exchange which involves an explicit agreement to perform a specified and limited service or task. Indeed male clients frequently complain of the cold-bloodedness of the transaction when they would prefer to believe they can buy a brief relationship involving women's emotions and desire. In a sense, both prostitution and marriage are ways in which women can look to gain some measure of economic security. But in neither case is economic security guaranteed. The wife may find herself beaten, raped and thrown out, while violence is endemic in prostitution. The prostitute constantly risks rape and violence, and it certainly isn't a career with security and a pension. And in both marriage and prostitution, it is men who benefit.

The point here is not to criticise either group of women — those who marry or those who enter prostitution — but to consider points of continuity between the two institutions. Treating

marriage and prostitution as analogous is of course not a new argument. One can trace that argument right back to Mary Wollstonecraft who called marriage 'legal prostitution' in 1790. Just as any analysis of marriage must distinguish between the relation of any one particular husband and wife and the structure of the institution of marriage, so the relation of any particular prostitute and client must be distinguished from that of the institution of prostitution. Kathleen Barry makes this point in *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, when she argues, 'Marriage and prostitution are experiences of individuals but they are also institutions.'

If we stick with the analogy of marriage, one of the great achievements of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s was to develop a trenchant critique of violence against women and the institution of marriage in general. Feminists set up refuges for women escaping domestic violence and campaigned for legal recognition of rape in marriage. In fact, these early critiques of male violence described the experience of battered wives in terms that contemporary research would recognise as consistent with the experience of prostitutes. Among those women who have sought refuge from the violence they experienced from their





husbands and partners, some returned to the men they had left. Those women apparently made a 'free' choice. However, those choices they made did not invalidate feminist critiques of marriage and male violence. Similarly, many women who have chosen to work as prostitutes may have decided pragmatically that this was the best, or least worst, option available to them. That individual women have made these choices does not itself close the debate.

Campaigning against prostitution as work

The debate about whether prostitution should be seen as sex work or as exploitation has different political ramifications for feminist activism. Prostitutes' rights organisations such as the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) and the NZPC represent the former position and campaign vigorously to improve the working conditions of prostitutes. Their perspective is informed by prostitution-as-work arguments, preferring the term 'sex work' to dignify prostitution with professional status. The logical consequence of this is to support the decriminalisation of prostitution. It is clear that historically, the main British laws addressing prostitution serve to punish prostitutes, especially street prostitutes, who would not be doing what they do were it not for the demand from male clients. Even the Sexual Offences Act of 1985, aimed at kerb-crawlers, rarely hits its target. In fact, it causes real problems for the women working on the streets who are more likely to get into cars

quickly so that clients are not prosecuted but this reduces the time they have to assess the risk of going with a client. Nonetheless, any attempts to decriminalise prostitution need to be carefully scrutinised to find out whose interests are served. However, moves to reduce the intrusive controlling strategies directed at women in conjunction with greater regulation and punishment of male users of prostitutes would be welcomed by feminists opposing the institution of prostitution too. Critical analysis of prostitution has been attacked as being inconsistent with the commitment of feminism to reflecting the reality of women's lives and listening to women's own versions of reality. Confrontations between feminists opposed to prostitution and prostitutes' rights organisations are legendary and, coupled with accounts from women who claim they are better off in sex work than other professional work available to women, the effect has been to silence feminist critiques. But for every woman who may feel empowered by her experience of prostitution, there are many others for whom it is not empowering — which calls into question which women's accounts are privileged.

Feminist activism opposing the institution of prostitution and its legitimisation as work must resolve the contradiction inherent in this position by also finding ways of supporting the rights of those women working as prostitutes. Norma Hotaling, speaking at the Brighton conference as an ex-prostitute, argued that if we promote prostitution, we ultimately endorse trafficking in women. She stresses that male perceptions of women change as a result of using prostitutes and that many men using adult prostitutes eventually go on to pay for sex with children. Hotaling asks whether in supporting prostitutes' rights we aren't supporting pimps and punters' rights to abuse, exploit, damage and kill women. As a survivor, she emphasises firstly the importance for women in prostitution to have access to the same services as other women and to have support to exit from it, and secondly for a shift in focus onto men's engagement in the abuse of women in prostitution.

One effective US example which focuses on men is the SAGE project (Standing Against Global Exploitation), which contributes to a programme for men prosecuted for using prostitutes; ex-prostitutes (such as Hotaling) give their perspective on the prostitution encounter to effectively counter male fantasies

of their own power and women's enjoyment of it. The project is funded by the fines men pay and used to assist women to exit from prostitution. The strategies to exit prostitution include safe houses, alternative training and employment prospects as well as medical, social and emotional support. In the Midlands, an example of successful feminist activism by a voluntary organisation, Prostitute Outreach Work (POW), was described in the Rights of Women Bulletin in 1994. Women in prostitution played a crucial role in developing multi-agency services which more effectively meet the needs of and support women in prostitution, facilitate exit strategies and promote useful, women-centred research and activism to change the laws surrounding prostitution.

Following the Brighton conference, there have been two feminist initiatives in relation to prostitution in 1997: a national conference on violence against women and children in prostitution organised by the Research Centre on Violence, Abuse and Gender Relations (based at Leeds Metropolitan University) and a national network, Women Against the Prostitution of Women (WAPOW), formed to provide a national voice against the institution of prostitution whilst supporting the rights of women in prostitution. Both initiatives attempt to break the silence and drown out the clamour for prostitution to be seen as a job like any other whilst trying to bridge divisions between women working as prostitutes and feminist activists. In its first newsletter, WAPOW has identified its general aims as promoting the safety of, and services for, women and children in prostitution; developing exit strategies; opposing legalised brothels; removing the life-long labelling of

women as 'common prostitutes'; campaigning for the prostitution of young people to be treated as a child protection issue.

It is claimed that the advantages of treating prostitution simply as work are that it removes the stigma attached, decriminalises prostitutes, recognises the skills women bring to their work and attributes employment status and attendant rights to welfare services and benefits. However the disadvantages are greater because in the first place it depends on the distinction between 'free' and 'forced' prostitution. In defending a notion of prostitution as a freely chosen occupation, the burden of proof is shifted onto women working in prostitution to demonstrate that they have been forced into it. The reality for women in prostitution is likely to be somewhere between the kind of force that might be recognised in a court of law and truly free choice. Moreover the impact of this spurious distinction between free and forced prostitution is to the detriment of campaigning against trafficking in women. Secondly, the reduction of prostitution to an economic transaction involving women's labour effaces the exploitative and emotionally damaging effects of prostitution on those women. The sale of sex to men by women cannot be understood separately from the wider patriarchal organisation of socio-sexual relationships. The transformation of female sexuality into a commodity necessarily entails an exploitative use of those women. This analysis of prostitution as exploitation is informed both by awareness of women being damaged by prostitution and the wider feminist goals of eradicating prostitution and its causes on a global scale. □

just another job?

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Sweeping statements

More than any other activity, cleaning is traditionally seen as women's work, whether at home or for derisory wages in the casual labour market. How do we feel about cleaning then, whether for ourselves or others, and what do we think about the politics of employing someone else to do our cleaning? Is this a major issue for feminism or is it merely a storm in a tea-cup? In this roundtable discussion, Dianne Butterworth, Debbie Cameron, Jill Radford and Joan Scanlon wash their dirty linen in public and risk having a dust-up about the economics and ethics of cleaning.

Debbie: I could never pay anybody to clean and I'm always really taken aback when I come across people who I think have a similar politics and they do or have paid somebody to clean, and they're not sick or disabled — they just don't have time. It's not that I want to go around condemning people it's just that I can't reconcile it.

Jill: I feel I should respond as someone who does pay someone to do my cleaning. The young woman who cleans for me is 14 or 15 and if she wasn't cleaning for me she'd have jobs which her mum and herself would feel are less safe, like paper rounds or jobs that stretch over several days like her school friends who work in a shop for an hour every day — whereas she earns £10 doing a couple of hours at mine on a Sunday and it saves me having to do. Having

said that I do have to clean up before she comes otherwise it would be too awful; it forces me to have a real tidy and clean up so I don't leave any real shit work for her to do — I wouldn't leave all the dishes in the sink or a scummy bath.

Debbie: There's a political argument that you're right and I'm wrong; since I've got enough money to pay someone to clean I could be creating work for another woman who needs paid work. So I'm wondering what's behind my feeling that it's unconscionable for me to do that. I don't feel that way about cleaning institutions at all; I used to clean in a hospital and obviously I feel they need to be cleaned. My concern there would be about the working conditions and the pay and so on. It's when it's your own house that I can't countenance it.

Joan: Would you feel it was OK to pay

another woman to do anything for you?

Debbie: Only something I didn't have the skills to do myself. I don't feel that I ought to have all the skills on earth, that I ought to be able to rewire my own house. But that's stupid isn't it; it's saying that male skills are worth something and women's skills are not.

Jill: And obviously if you eat out you are paying someone to cook for you and wait on you. And presumably when you're on holiday, if you rent a place for instance, they generally have someone to come in and clean up.

Debbie: Yes, though I've always found that really uncomfortable, when someone's in a position of cleaning up after me. I think it may be as much about my privacy as about exploiting someone else. Also, what kind of social relationship is that? I have occasionally stayed with people who have had servants — not in Britain — and found that extremely uncomfortable, and when I was a student and somebody cleaned my room I found that really uncomfortable as well.

Jill: Though sometimes in that context, like the holiday situation, the cleaner is a kind of agent for the property owner and is keeping an eye on the holiday makers — or the students — and will report back if she finds things that she considers untoward.

Debbie: I think it's basically about class. The working class woman who cleaned the house I lived in that was owned by Oxford University was old enough to be my mother and you wonder what must she feel about spending her life cleaning up after privileged young women like me who could perfectly well do it themselves.

Jill: But if she wasn't doing that maybe she'd be unemployed. And in terms of women and work, not all of us enjoy everything about the work that we do. We often work because we need the money more than for job satisfaction.

Debbie: Sure, but it's the particular relationship between the cleaner and the cleaned up after which I think becomes totally different when you are talking about a school or a hospital rather than someone's domestic living space.

Joan: I agree that these issues don't arise in quite the same way when you are talking about institutional cleaning. Although, like Debbie, I don't think I could pay someone to clean up after me, I would pay someone for other work that I do have the skills to do myself, for

instance painting and decorating. I think it's about the nature of the work itself. I find it extremely hard to believe that anyone who cleans routinely as their main or only paid work could get any satisfaction or sense of self-worth from it, and I haven't met anyone who's said that they do. It's compounded by issue of class, age and race. And then, within the cleaning itself, it gets worse depending on the kind of work involved; whether you're dealing with shit and mess that's generated by people, or things like dust which are largely out of their control.

An (un)familiar relationship

Debbie: I don't think it's the activity; I think it's the social relationship. I do know people who have cleaners. I'm thinking of two people in particular whose houses I often visit. They're not feminists. There's this sense that the



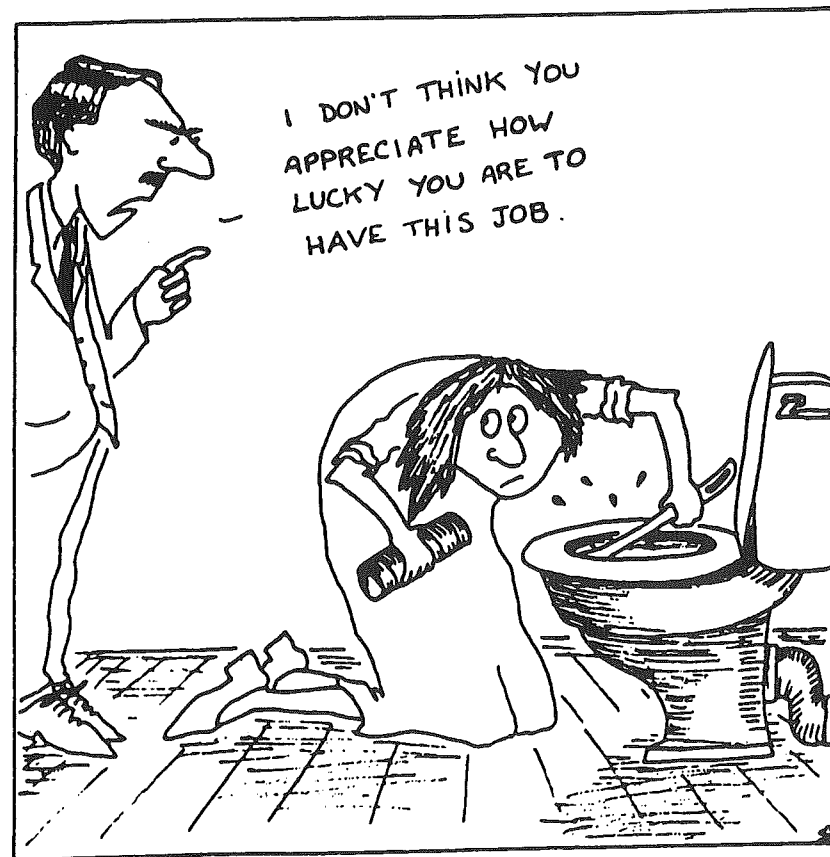
Rona Chadwick

Cartoons are from Diane Atkinson, ed. *Funny Girls: Cartooning for Equality* (Penguin 1997)

cleaner's part of the family; they sit down to lunch together or an evening meal before they take her home. But that just strikes me as a feudal relic of the old relationship with the domestic servant and I'm not able to cope with that, partly because of a theoretical analysis of what that's all about, and partly because three generations ago I would have been the domestic servant and not the employer. I wasn't raised to be as ease with that kind of relationship and I find it cringe-making.

Joan: I think it's also true about staying in houses that other people clean that it's difficult to negotiate those relationships. When I lived in university accommodation, the women who cleaned the residences had a particular relationship with some of the ex-public school male students who lived there, who they saw as their 'boys', creatures who couldn't fend for themselves, and who they'd do all sorts of things for, including waking them up — and they really resented those of us who asked them not to bother to clean our rooms or empty our rubbish, as if we were denying them their rights of access

Cath Jackson



to our rooms somehow, and were being disrespectful or dismissive of their role. They also clearly made judgements about us on the basis of what time we got up etc., which we were acutely aware of.

Debbie: That's bringing up something else, about how maybe women feel from the employers' end. Something most of us have socialised anxieties about is: are we dirty? We are afraid that someone we get to clean up after us will think: 'Yuck, she's disgustingly filthy'. I've often wondered how cleaners can not have contempt for the people they clean for.

Mixed feelings

Dianne: I don't think I could ever employ someone else to clean, but I wonder how much of what we are saying comes out of our feelings ourselves about cleaning. Sometimes I get into it, and sometimes I get a lot of satisfaction from it.

Joan: Do you get satisfaction out of the activity or out of the result?

Dianne: Sometimes both. It depends on what I'm doing and what kind of mood I'm in. You put loud music on and have some time out.

Debbie: It depends on the circumstances. I think sometimes it can be enjoyable, and that's where I disagree with what Joan was saying earlier about not being able to imagine anyone getting anything out of it. When I was a hospital cleaner I did get considerable satisfaction from it, and that's partly because you have so much better tools than you have at home. You had this BIG dry mop, and this endless supply of buckets of hot water, and an overall. It sounds mad, but even though some of the cleaning I did was much worse than just cleaning shit off toilets, I still felt a great deal of satisfaction, and I didn't feel contaminated or disgusted, because there was a whole protocol around it, it being a hospital, and you felt you were doing a worthwhile job — and there was no sense of blaming these really sick patients for their own shit. It's different even in your own home, let alone someone else's — I hate hoovering, for instance, since no one has invented a hoover without a cord and which weighs nothing.

Jill: I think you're right about the tools. When I was really poor and had the kids, and we didn't have vacuum cleaners, I remember at one point living at the top of a Victorian house with stairs that seemed to go on for ever and they were your responsibility even though you only

went up and down them, you didn't live in them. I used to spend hours sweeping the stair carpet with a dustpan and brush and it would be in your hair and eyes, and you'd be coughing... Whereas now I've got a state of the art hoover and that sort of cleaning doesn't seem quite as bad. In fact I quite enjoy playing with this hoover as it's one of those with no bag that you can see into, and it hasn't broken down.

Joan: I mind doing it less if you've got the tools, but the only time I ever actively enjoy doing it with a vengeance is when the alternative is marking essays, and then cleaning seems like a positive pleasure.

A matter of judgement

Debbie: All the women I've ever known use cleaning as a displacement activity, whereas very few men I know of do that. We have this automatic set of activities that we're supposed almost genetically to know how to do that we can always put in place of something even worse. But the flip side of that — the bad side of that — is that it's very difficult as a woman to let the cleaning go, isn't it? Because you have this paranoia about people judging you to be a slut. It is something that women, including feminists, feel entitled to be quite judgmental about.

Joan: We have different thresholds. I wouldn't judge someone for having layers of dust on everything, and plants dropping their leaves everywhere, and cat fluff floating about, but I wouldn't be happy about being invited to sleep in a bed with dirty sheets, or having to use a really scuzzy bathroom.

Debbie: And we would take it as a reflection almost on the morality of the person concerned. It's a really ingrained thing about cleanliness having to do with respectability being the dividing line in the working class between the absolutely feckless and worthless and those who are poor but honest. Of course standards have changed, and who the hell cares about their front door step now, and nobody black leads the grate and all of that, but we always had standards of cleanliness that were set for people who had a domestic workforce to achieve it, didn't we. When all those fine so-called labour saving devices came in they didn't actually save women any labour they just upped the standard of expected hygiene.

Joan: There are all those wonderful extracts from Nella Last's *War Diary* where

finding productive and significant activity or employment outside of the home suddenly make those previously oh-so-important domestic tasks seem far less important. There seemed to be this massive shift in the value system of women which wasn't about accepting a lowering of standards, it was about questioning those standards and reassessing which tasks were essential in the house.

Dianne: And there are others who can't let go of these bizarre standards of cleanliness. A woman I worked with not only cleaned her loo every day... she disinfected her carpet once a week, and she thought she was being slack because her mother disinfected the carpet every day.

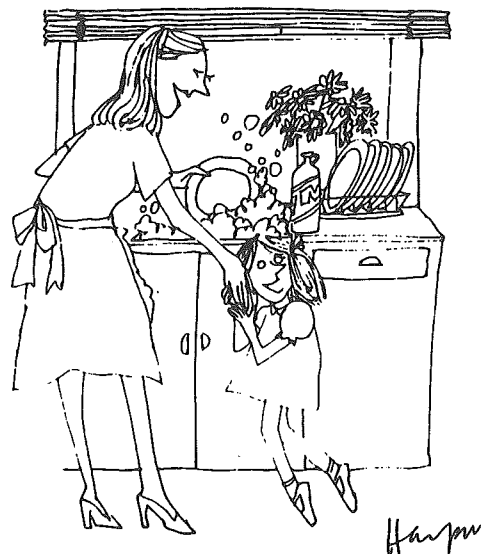


William Augustus

Senseless chores

Debbie: My sister's boyfriend was in the marines for a while, and he couldn't stand it, and one of the reasons was that the military used pointless cleaning as a form of discipline. It was basic training, and one of the things they had to do was to endlessly clean these pieces of copper piping. Their training area was actually on land but they pretended it was a ship for some reason, it was called 'going ashore' when they let you off the base, and you couldn't go ashore unless you had cleaned this copper piping, and you had not only to clean it at one in the morning but then on first getting up. Of course nothing had happened to it in the meantime, it hadn't got dirty, and so he once questioned why

Merrily Harpur



'Yes, darling! Mummy has to keep her hands lovely in case she ever wants to go back to brain surgery.'

they couldn't just get up and give it a good rub down for the day (ready for whatever use it was put to) and he was branded a trouble maker for that. So it was obvious that pointless cleaning was the army's first weapon in trying to break men's spirit and their desire to ask why. I think that's interesting because it points to a kind of brainwashing function of cleaning that many of us have to some extent imbibed as well.

Jill: Certainly in women's prisons they use cleaning as a penalty so that if you'd gone and done something incurring disciplinary you might find yourself on the cleaning rota. And what makes it particularly punitive is that in prison they refuse to get the tools or the technology so you're still cleaning with inadequate or useless equipment.

Joan: One of the things that many women say is that if they get their external world in order, which usually involves cleaning, then they can get their head in order as well. It's certainly true for me.

Debbie: But there's an obvious reason for that, which is that men usually have someone else to set their external world in order so they don't feel the need to comment on it.

Joan: It may come back to what you were saying about the fear women have of being judged, and the way they have internalised that so they feel better about themselves when their

domestic space is clean and ordered. Because I think that even where men are responsible for the state of their external world, and live on their own for instance without a woman to clean up after them, they often don't give a shit about it, and live in filth. Men's cars for instance are the most sordid and smelly modes of transport available; it's like being in a travelling dustbin.

Debbie: There's also the issue of how far your mess impinges on other people if you don't clean up after yourself. So if you squirt juice on yourself you're the one with the consequences, whereas if you squirt it on the floor someone else has to deal with it if you don't. I used to know this woman in San Francisco and I stayed in her house and she employed someone to clean for her, and she had two girls of about eleven and fourteen; and one morning one of them spilled an entire glass of orange juice and it was about 9 am and we were due to go off to work and I automatically reached for the kitchen towel, and she said to me — honestly — 'The cleaner'll be here in a couple of hours. Just leave it.' And you wondered, since the cleaner came about twice a week: would she have been able to live with that spill of orange juice for three and half days if it had been necessary? It was a good example of how some people can see cleaning as altogether out of their ambit because they employ someone to do it.

Hierarchies of work

Dianne: What about the argument that if a woman is really busy, and she pays another woman the same hourly rate that she earns to clean for her, then it gives her an extra 3 or 4 hours to do work that she needs to do, and is already pushed to find time to do. What about that argument?

Joan: I don't like the idea of paying someone else to do your shit-work so you can do things you consider more important.

Debbie: It's true that it rests on a hierarchy of work — you're saying: 'I have more important skills whereas this woman has only got the skills to do this'. I can't for instance imagine saying 'My house is really dirty so why don't I clean it and employ a woman to write my lectures'. In other words, you can't imagine it the other way round.

Joan: I can actually. I would happily pay someone to write a piece for me for *Trouble & Strife*. In fact I'd do their cleaning as well as my own if I could persuade them to do it.

Jill: But, seriously, we are being encouraged to buy ourselves out of teaching in universities to free us to do other stuff.

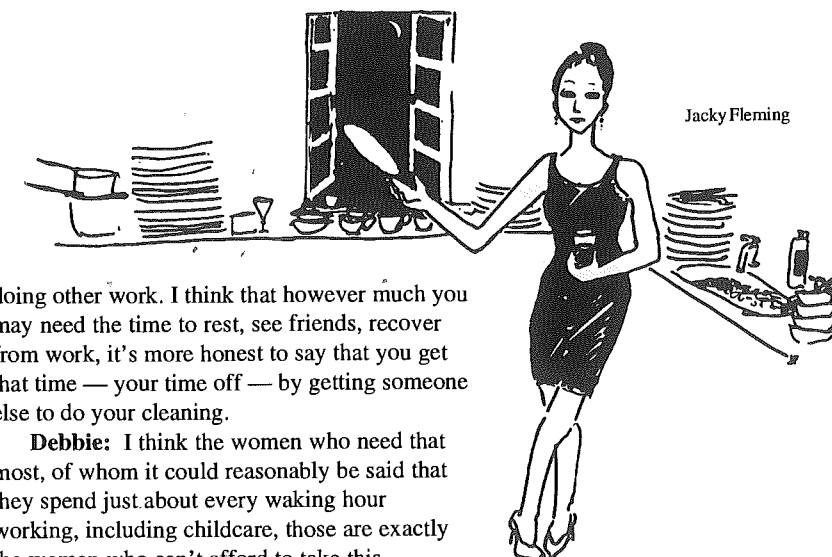
Debbie: Precisely. That's because teaching has become like cleaning in universities. Teaching is the housework of an academic department, compared to research, and those things are always gendered. It's women who tend to be positioned as the good teachers, dealing with all the pastoral stuff, and men who go grant-hunting and doing all the research. It's the same with the cleaning: it's stereotypical bottom-of-the-heap women's work, although interestingly it's the kind of work that if you're short of money you can always pick up. It's women's casual labour par excellence. I don't recall that I ever got any training.

Unequal relationships

Joan: I think from the cleaner's point of view, institutional cleaning is probably mostly worse than cleaning for an individual employer. Cleaning up after students for instance must drive you mad; I remember the communal kitchens in one of the student residences I lived in in York. Filthy greasy mess left day after day by male students who cooked nothing but chips. Then there's the endless suspicion of cleaners — if something goes missing, if something goes wrong, they're the first to be suspected of stealing. Then there's the endless moaning, even where I work now, about the standard of cleaning. It's about the invisibility of the work: nobody sees it when you do it; people only notice when you don't — which isn't true of other kinds of work.

Debbie: That would probably be my prime political argument about why even if you can afford to pay you shouldn't. It's one of the things we have always said about men that they don't understand what it takes to reproduce the existence of a person let alone more than one person. They don't understand how much labour goes into enabling them to go out and do whatever brings in their salaries. I think if you want to keep track of what's going on with that I think you should do your own housework. You should be aware of how much dirt you make, of how much labour there is in making your living environment liveable and you shouldn't just shuffle that off onto someone else.

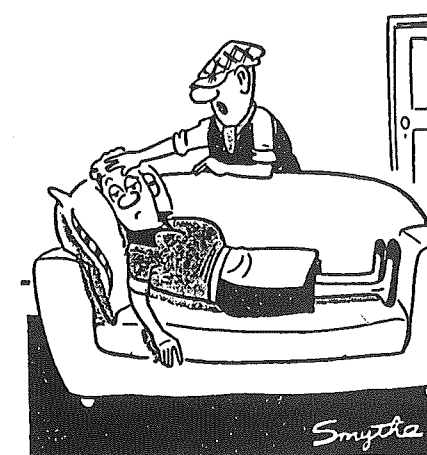
Joan: I also think it's a self-deluding argument that those few hours that someone else does your cleaning are the hours that you spend



doing other work. I think that however much you may need the time to rest, see friends, recover from work, it's more honest to say that you get that time — your time off — by getting someone else to do your cleaning.

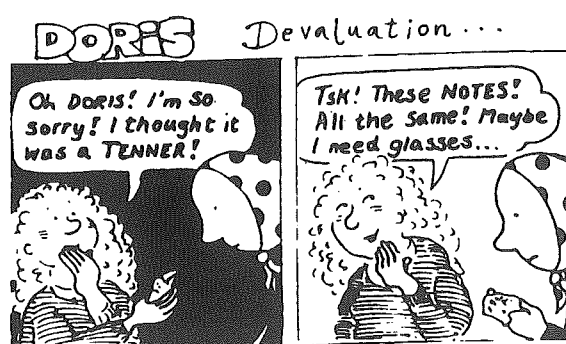
Debbie: I think the women who need that most, of whom it could reasonably be said that they spend just about every waking hour working, including childcare, those are exactly the women who can't afford to take this solution. If a woman does piece homeworking for instance which does take a lot of hours to earn very little money, and have kids with them, they might have a case for saying: 'I haven't got time to clean the toilet this week', but they can't afford to get someone else to do it. But I do see Jill's point about the economics of it, and since those of us who could afford to pay a cleaner are not so pure about other areas why are we so neurotic about this issue?

Jill: I simply feel as someone who has brought up two kids and having cleaned up after myself and them for a number of years, I've reached the point that I don't want to do it any more if I don't need to. It's not that I don't understand what's it's about and what it involves. It's only in the last 8 years or so that



'Yer look proper poorly. Florrie, don't yer bother about the washin'-up tonight — do it in the mornin'.'

Reg Smythe



Ros Asquith

I've had a cleaner, after 40 odd years of doing it myself.

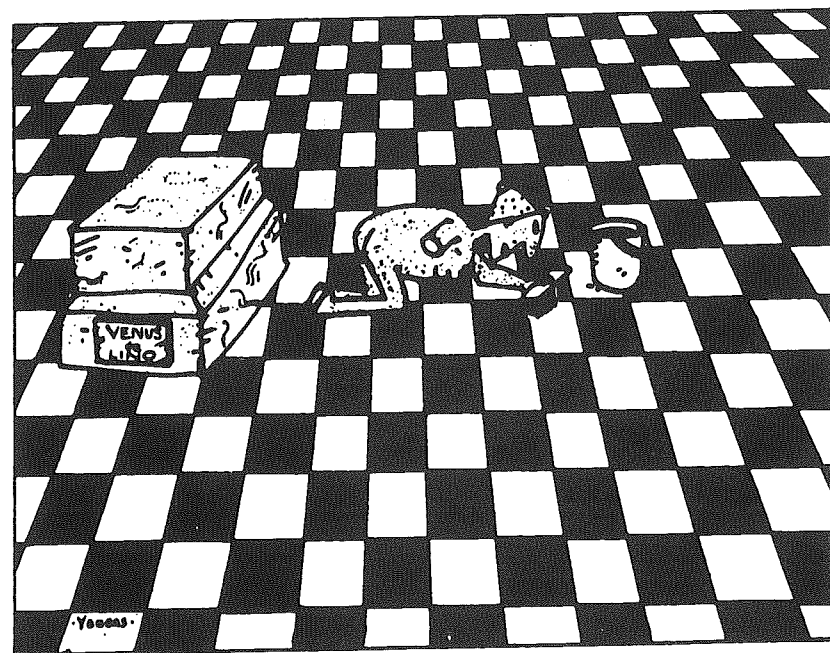
Dianne: Would you feel the same if the person you had cleaning for you was a thirty or forty year old woman rather than a teenager?

Jill: Interestingly, when I first moved up north I found a traditional 'woman who does' via one of my colleagues, and she did my house two or three times. Then I when I had unpacked and got the study sorted I asked if she would do that room and she sacked me. She must have taken one look at my bookshelf.

Debbie: Do you mean that she didn't think you were respectable?

Jill: She didn't say as much, but everything had been fine until she went into my study, where all my books are, and then suddenly she hadn't got time to do the job and had to leave.

Paula Youens



Ros Asquith



Dianne: Didn't you have a man cleaning for you at one time?

Jill: Yes, I had a lad who was the son of some lesbians I knew, who was 15 or so and coming up to GCSEs and again he needed pocket-money, and strangely at that time he had a thing about cleaning and really enjoyed it, which is pretty unusual. With the young woman I have now, I try to keep out of her way when she's there, but I do interact with her more. When I had a older woman, she used to come in while I was at work, and I didn't interact with her; she'd just leave a note saying 'You need to get some more polish' or whatever, and I'd leave her a note in reply.

Work and identity

Debbie: The bottom line is that you're kidding yourself if you think you can have an equal relationship with someone who does that kind of personal service for you, whoever it is. If I was ever in a position where I was injured, for instance, and felt I had to employ someone to do my cleaning, then the first person I would look for would be a student or someone like that, who wanted to take on an extra job. So it would be more difficult to stereotype them as a domestic servant.

Joan: And also because by employing a student, for instance, the cleaning does not become their work identity. It's a lot easier to deal with a job like cleaning, or any other bum job like being a waitress or an office temp, when you know that it's temporary and what you really do is different even if you don't make a living doing it — whether you're a student, an actor or whatever. And I think people treat you differently if they know you are only doing it as a 'holiday job' rather than as your main occupation. Women I know who've done cleaning jobs as their only work outside of their

own home have often been treated like shit. Some women that they have worked for have so keen to get their money's worth, and so mistrustful, that they have done things like sprinkle talcum powder on the carpet to check if it's been hoovered.

Jill: Also, if you're cleaning individual women's houses you're very much isolated and you may go to two or three different houses a week; whereas in somewhere like a university there's a gang of you and even if you are working on your own you do at least come together and have a bit of crack at the end of the shift.

Debbie: What interests me is this issue of working for other women. It's invariably the case that when you're cleaning for a whole household it's the woman you are seen to be working for, and who pays you at the end of the day, when most other work involves women working for men. My own experience of hospital working is about the only job I can think of where there was no sexual harassment.

Jill: I was thinking back to my mum, who

did a lot of cleaning jobs in her life. She did a lot of casual work when we were children, including cleaning and factory jobs in Nottingham, and then at one point she got a more white collar job and did start to employ a cleaner. Again I think she found she couldn't fit everything in her day. She would ring home when the cleaner was there, just to say things like: 'I've left the money under the clock', and she would get really cross if the cleaner had left half an hour early, because it was hard and she was having to struggle to find the money to pay the cleaner although she couldn't reasonably find the time to do the cleaning herself, being a single mother and all that.

Joan: I'm still very uneasy with the argument about providing employment for other women. Because actually what you are doing by freeing yourself to do other things is maintaining the kind of economy of labour or a job market that depends on women doing shit work to enable others to go out and do other kinds of work — which is what men do. □



Viv Quillin

Don't ask her, she's just the cleaner

Here Norah Al-Ani describes her experience of, and feelings about, working as a cleaner in a Women's Resources Centre. The piece was originally written in 1987 for a collection of writings by young women, Surviving the Blues: Growing Up in the Thatcher Decade (Virago 1990). Ten years later, Norah Al-Ani still works at the Centre as a course co-ordinator.

When I first started working at the Centre I was fourteen. My aunt asked me one day if I'd like to earn a little pocket money doing some cleaning at her workplace.

I knew nothing about the Centre; I'd never even heard of it before. I started work assuming that my aunt had employed me and that she was my boss, but as time went on — approximately six months — I discovered quite accidentally that the Centre was non-hierarchical and a co-operative.

With this new-found information I was thrown into confusion: (1) Who was I answerable to? (2) Who paid my wages? (3) Who do I complain to? As time went by the more frustrating the job became. Although I was only there for an hour a day, that was sufficient time to realise that I was a very insignificant member of

the Centre. I was never told anything. I'd always be the last one to know when the Centre was shut, when people borrowed the cleaning equipment, etc. It wasn't until I'd been there a year that, again by mere accident, I found out that men were not permitted to enter the building.

It became quite an adventure finding things out in this way.

Cleaning is one of the world's most hideous jobs — I HATE IT. If it weren't for the money I'd have left exactly one day after I'd started! When you do it nobody notices, but when you don't everybody does. It's positively degrading picking up other people's sanitary towels from the floor and scraping out the bottom of a dustbin after someone has thrown up in it.

I found myself apologising for being in a

room, for using the Hoover. I constantly felt in everyone's way. I felt too inadequate ever to join in a conversation concerning the Centre. There were also physical difficulties with the job. I would sometimes miss my last bus home simply because I was too afraid to ask people to leave a room because I wanted to clean it. As the Centre is an informal place people would come in late, in distress or just for a chat, and there followed the birth of the art of cleaning around people — one of the world's most frustrating things ever to exist.

There came a point, approximately one year later, when I began to feel unneeded. I was convinced that someone, somewhere, felt that my job was a waste of time and money.

There followed the skiving stage. A period of time in which I couldn't, or maybe wouldn't, bring myself to go within a mile of the Centre. What with thinking no one appreciated my work and worrying that I was to be got rid of.

I was bitterly ashamed of my job and the Centre for a long time. When people asked me what I did, I'd say 'a bit of this and a bit of that'. When the question arose as to where I did it, the reply would be 'in an office'. I didn't know what went on in the Centre and so felt stupid if asked questions about it.

I had always considered my job as the lowest of the low, and knew that's how the world viewed it. All the old stereotypes come to mind: Mrs Mop, no brains required for the job, only thick people cleaned up other people's shit for money. Miserable middle-aged women unfit for anything else.

At first I went into the job knowing and accepting these views, but in no time at all I'd burn up inside when women looked at me in the same way they'd look at the contents of the toilet I was cleaning.

The thing I hated most — and still do — is not feeling a part of anything, not knowing who the people were that I cleaned up after, and most of all feeling guilty about asking for my wages. But above all I hated not knowing who to turn to when someone or something upset me, and so my dearest and most loyal friend, who stuck by me through all my ordeals, the Hoover, suffered badly! I have lost count of how many times I damaged the Hoover out of frustration. It wasn't much of a listener.

One such incident stands out in my memory. I was hoovering the big room upstairs and feeling very sorry for myself about not being

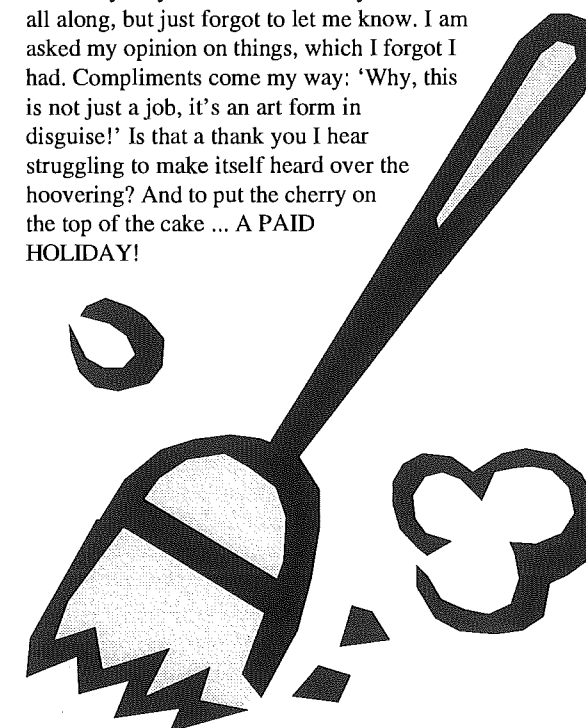
able to do anything better than clean. The more I hoovered, the more angry I got about everything. I stubbed my toe on a chair and before I could think I'd picked up the Hoover and was just about to throw it through the window. It was held above my head ready for off when I remembered it cost £11 to replace a window-pane and I earned only £10.

I never really truly considered myself as a worker. I can never see myself up there with the teachers, co-ordinator this and co-ordinator that, and I say 'up there' because that's what it looks like from where I'm standing. After all, I am only there for an hour a day. My loss is important but me, Norah, I am replaceable in a flash. My job may be as important as teaching, but the teacher is more important than me.

Some of these thoughts are stated in the past tense, but many — maybe too many — are stated in the present tense.

Meanwhile time passes, approximately three years, and one fine day my little world of cleaning is turned on its head. What's this I hear, people actually taking the time and trouble to explain things to me, all those unanswered questions of many moons ago! With amazement I hear people speak in my defence. Is that the sound of concern I hear in the distance? For the first time the centre spotlight was on me!

Everybody 'understands'. They have done all along, but just forgot to let me know. I am asked my opinion on things, which I forgot I had. Compliments come my way: 'Why, this is not just a job, it's an art form in disguise!' Is that a thank you I hear struggling to make itself heard over the hoovering? And to put the cherry on the top of the cake ... A PAID HOLIDAY!





With all my new-found fame and fortune came knowledge! Oh that wonderful milk of life I'd been waiting for from my first day! Knowledge handed to me on a silver plate. What more could I want? ... TO HAND IT ALL RIGHT BACK!

Oh yes, I got what I'd been screaming for: 'All you ever wanted to know about the Centre but were afraid to ask'. And how wonderful it all looked on paper and how magical it all sounded. The ideals, the aims, the very roots of the place I'd been working in for so long. Oh yes, it was all so enlightening, I would almost go as far as to say it was a spiritual experience, but I won't!

Equality for all women amongst women. The chance to relax and be yourself, express yourself with no fear of ridicule. Non-hierarchical, 'everybody is as significant and important as the next woman'. It's all very lovely on paper if you don't look too closely.

But one question remains: if all these policies and ideals founded the Centre and nurtured it, then why oh why have I just written the last three pages? Surely I couldn't have imagined it all, could I? It's harder now than ever it was, simply because of having the knowledge that the Centre states that it intends to do one thing and yet never quite seems to follow it through.

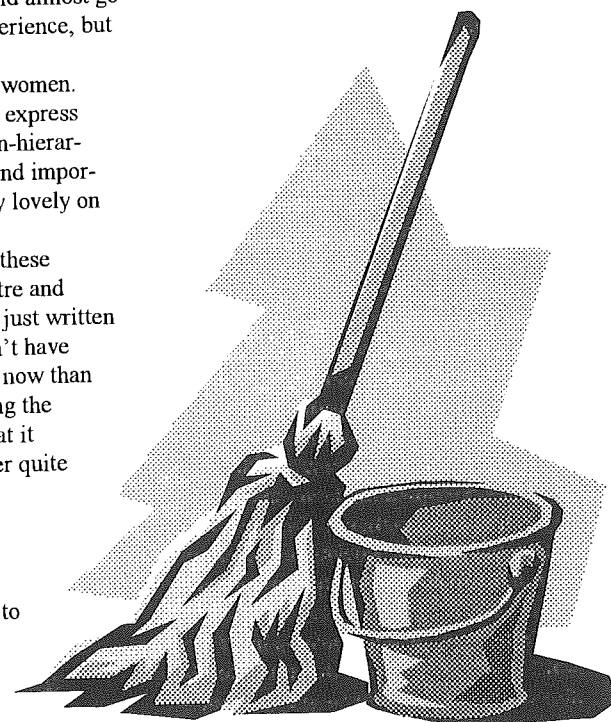
Dare I say it, but wouldn't it be easier working somewhere that blatantly admits it's a bastard of a system, at least you'd feel justified to just spit in its face, but working somewhere that wants to be fair and caring but finds it hard to do so.

It's like potty-training a child, you know you hate them shitting on the Persian rug, but you know they're trying and that they might make it to the potty in time next time!

I might just say that despite everything I've said, I think I can find a place in my heart for the old place, and I know I've been treated fairly well and am grateful for the wage I got from it. Maybe I could write another essay one day about all the good times I've had. But it's so hard to see things — anything — nicely when you're standing knee-deep in other people's crap.

But with my hand on my heart I can say that one of the nicest things ever to come out of the Centre are some of the people; to hear them thank me and be comforting means more to me than my Hoover, and that's really saying something. But the one thing I've come to realise more and more over the years is that cleaning is important — it's a bastard, but it's as important as almost anything — but the people who do it aren't.

So there you have it: what happened, what didn't happen, what I got, but most of all what I want- forgot to mention it earlier: to work on reception. □



Whose sexual agendas?

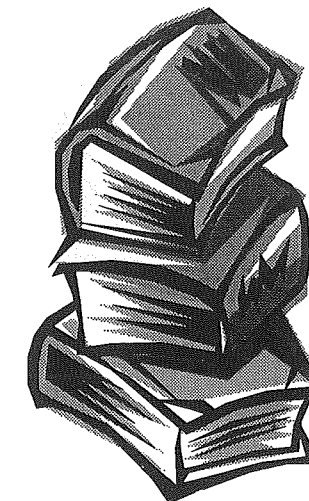
Pontificating about sex and sexuality is something of a growth industry in the academic world; but a lot of recent academic writing on this subject has only the most tenuous relationship to feminist politics or the realities of women's lives. Here Stevi Jackson takes a critical look at the latest tome to land on her desk, Lynne Segal's New Sexual Agendas. She warns that from a radical feminist perspective, the 'agendas' pursued in this collection of articles are neither 'new' nor illuminating.

New Sexual Agendas, edited by Lynne Segal, is a collection of papers from a conference of the same title held in London in 1995. The contributors are mostly well-known academics, including feminists, gay men and theorists of masculinity. Neither the conference nor the book were framed by specifically feminist interests, but feminists are among the constituencies addressed and invoked by the contributors, and women are among those deemed to benefit from the new agendas under discussion. Given its own terms of reference, it would be unfair to criticise this anthology for being insufficiently feminist, but it is fair to say that the represen-

tation of feminism within it is decidedly partial. Lynne Segal's preface draws attention to the way in which sexuality has become contested terrain among feminist and gay activist and theorists and gives the impression that the book will engage with all shades of opinion, but it does not. Only some feminist voices are heard; others, notably those of radical feminists, remain silent.

Affirming diversity and excusing men

The new agendas of the title are set against old agendas which privilege heterosexual men and which it is clearly in feminists' interests to





oppose. But feminism is not the only oppositional stance and feminists, as we are all well aware, are often divided on issues of sexuality — hence the necessary plurality of any new sexual agendas which arise out of the varied political interests of those currently challenging the status quo. However, the pluralising of the term 'agendas' entails more: the editor's commitment to pluralism, 'the acceptance of plural sexualities' (p. xviii). This endorsement of diversity produces all those other currently fashionable plural terms such as sexualities and feminisms. Yet, for all its emphasis on diversity, pluralism can produce its own singular agenda — an agenda based on liberal individualism.

Lynne Segal sets up this perspective in her preface. Despite its brevity, it still gives her the opportunity to wheel on her usual hobbyhorses. There are the predictable sideswipes at radical feminism although, thankfully, this time Lynne Segal refrains from some of the grosser forms of misrepresentation she has been guilty of in the past. Instead radical feminists are gently chided for tying 'women's sexual engagement with men ineluctably to women's subordination' (p. xiii). She concedes that 'dominant sexual discourses and iconography' have linked female sexuality with 'submission', but not as 'seamlessly' as feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Sheila Jeffreys suggest (p. xiii).

There is something interesting in the way this is put. Even while appearing to give some ground, Lynne Segal represents the radical feminist position with an emphasis on women's subordination and submission. Male dominance is curiously absent, as if women are subordinated by or submit to nothing or no-one in particular. While voicing, as she always does, a routine condemnation of sexual coercion and violence, it seems that she wants to absolve men of any blame. The following passage is illustrative of this tendency.

The fact that many men don't feel individually powerful in relation to women, despite institutional arrangements and cultural discourses which continue to subordinate women, serves only to fuel the tensions between women and men which are apparent in much sexual fantasy and practice and spill over, all too often, into men's use of sexual harassment, coercion or even violence against women. (p. xii)

Even Lynne Segal would not be so crass as to suggest that men are violent simply because they feel powerless, but she is suggesting that men's sense of powerlessness increases the

likelihood of violence. There is little evidence to support this contention. Empirical studies of men who commit crimes of sexual violence against women, such as Diana Scully's study of convicted rapists in the US, do not paint a picture of men whose feelings of impotence spill over into violence, but rather of men who are all too aware of the power of terror used against women. Many instances of sexual violence, from harassment in the workplace to child abuse are perpetrated by men whose power over their victims is institutionalised and sometimes virtually unassailable.

There is another strategy for excusing men at play here, evident in the language Lynne Segal uses. It is institutional arrangements and cultural discourses which keep women subordinate — yes of course, but whose interests do they serve? To whom are women subordinate if not men? And what part do men play in maintaining their power? Yes there are 'tensions' between women and men, but 'tensions' can exist between social equals. What of the inequalities between women and men? Lynne Segal's words seem carefully chosen to distance real, material, embodied men from being implicated in the maintenance of women's subordination. Having admitted a connection between heterosexuality and subordination, this is then brushed aside.

There is a further issue here. Whereas radical feminists are concerned with the collective subordination of women, Lynne Segal's emphasis is on individual agency and freedom. This is evident in the ways in which she implicitly defines her own position as one which seeks to 'replace the old sexual agendas maintaining the heterosexual male as the uniquely empowered sexual agent by asserting new affirmations of sexual diversity, mutuality and respect' (p. xviii). It is not clear here whether mutuality and respect are to be sought within sexual relationships or whether they are prescriptions for the way we should treat those whose sexuality differs from our own. In either case, both the problems (intolerance or men's monopoly on sexual agency) and the solution (being nicer to each other) are located within individuals. If she means the former she implies that the male monopoly on sexual agency should be challenged (presumably by women as sexual agents) in the name of 'mutuality and respect'. Again the issues are individualised. Of course 'mutuality and respect' are desirable goals

within sexual relations, but we need to consider the structural inequalities which prevent these ideals from being realised. The problem is not merely that men are 'empowered' as sexual agents, but that this represents institutionalised power over women. Moreover, if we do not pay attention to the social origins of power we have no means of setting limits on 'affirmations of diversity'. The usual solution — everything sexual is fine as long as it is consensual — produces a naive one-dimensional view of power (it does not exist unless there is observable coercion present) and inhibits critique of sexual pleasures and practices.

I have a strong suspicion that what underpins many arguments of this kind (not just Lynne Segal's) is the idea that sex in itself is a good thing. It is intrinsically positive and only happens to become perverted to coercive or oppressive ends by social and cultural conditions external to it. This is a form of essentialism that places 'sex' outside the social. If we seriously consider sexuality to be socially constructed, then there is no essential sexuality, good or bad. This also means, of course, that violence and coercion are not intrinsic to sex *per se* (since there is no such thing), but they are fundamental to the construction of sexuality within a patriarchally and heterosexually ordered society.

A woman's right to fuck?

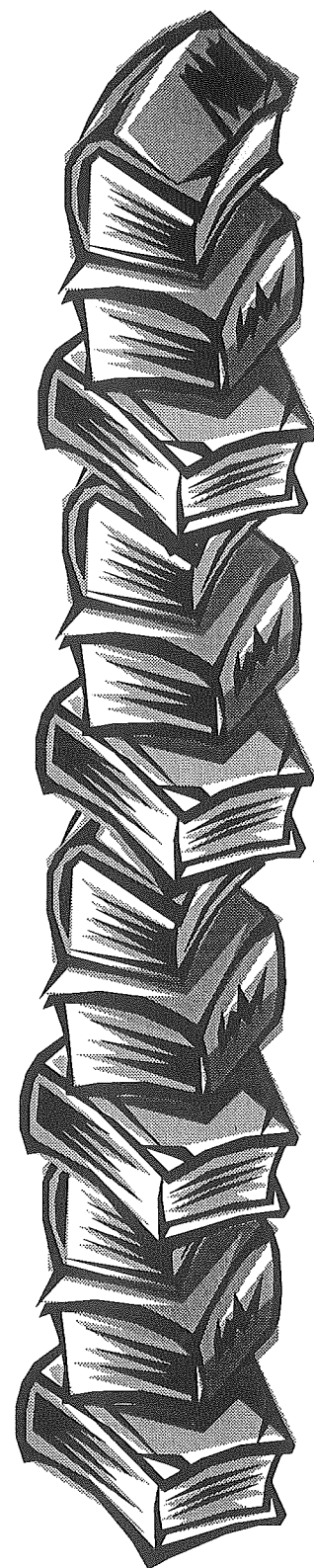
There are only two chapters with the words 'feminist' or 'feminism' in the title, and these are the most problematic in the book: Lynne Segal's own chapter and that of Mandy Merck. Both of these are primarily directed towards critiques of feminist perspectives.

Lynne Segal's own contribution is in keeping with the argument she presents in her book *Straight Sex*: a defence of the pursuit of heterosexual pleasure. As a heterosexual feminist I have interests in common with her. I, too, want to believe that heterosexual pleasure is not intrinsically masochistic, that equality and mutuality in sexual relations between women and men might be possible. Where I part company with her is that I do not think these hopes can be realised in the absence of a thoroughgoing critique of heterosexuality.

Lynne Segal seems to assume that sexual violence and exploitation have nothing to do with heterosexuality itself, that women's powerlessness in heterosexual relations is the

result of cultural assumptions now being rendered redundant by new, more assertive styles of female sexuality. My own view, which I have argued elsewhere (see *T&S* 32) is that heterosexuality is not about anatomical males having sex with anatomical females, but is an institutionalised sexual practice which could not exist in any meaningful sense in the absence of the hierarchical division between men and women. Coercion and inequality are not accidental features of heterosexuality, but are constitutive of it. Heterosexuality as we know it is heavily institutionalised as part of wider social structures and processes which maintain male dominance. Lynne Segal recognises that the institutionalisation of heterosexuality is integral to the oppression of lesbians and gays, but seems unwilling to recognise that this involves more than its being a privileged norm. It is not just the normativity of heterosexuality that is the problem, but the subordination of women which is integral to it.

These fundamental inequalities will not magically disappear with the march of progress. True, changes are occurring, in part as a result of feminist struggle, but is a mistake to overestimate these. Lynne Segal draws on large scale, quantitative studies, such as the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, to demonstrate that feminism (and particularly radical feminism) is 'out of step with many women's dreams and desires' (p. 80, her emphasis). These studies demonstrate that more women are engaging in heterosexual activities outside the bounds of marriage and monogamy, that there has been some erosion of double standards of morality and that women are actively seeking sexual pleasure with men. I would not have thought this was news to most feminists, since these are trends that were already observable way back in the 1970s. Indeed the critique of the sexual revolution arose out of precisely these conditions. Moreover, some of these surveys — particularly Lillian Rubin's US study — reveal persistent inequalities between women and men and the continued pervasiveness of coercive sex. Lynne Segal admits this — which somewhat undercuts her critique of other feminists. There are limits to quantitative surveys. They cannot tell us in any depth about how women make sense of their sexual experiences. Qualitative research (including some presented in this volume) demonstrates, time and again, the difficulties





women, especially younger women, face in trying to establish intimacy with men.

Lynne Segal is not simply defending heterosexual sex as it exists today — she does want to find new, transformative ways of engaging in heterosexual activity. As in *Straight Sex*, she sees signs of hope in the feelings of vulnerability and loss of control which, she argues, are experienced by both women and men when in the throes of sexual passion. In my view it is a mistake to conflate these emotional responses with the social relations within which sexual activities take place or to assume that these emotions are unaffected by wider social relations. Hence I am highly sceptical of her view that sex 'easily threatens rather than confirms gender polarity' (p. 86, her emphasis). For all her commitment to transforming heterosexuality, she sometimes writes as if it had already been transformed:

In consensual sex, when bodies meet, the epiphany of that meeting — its threat and excitement — is surely that they great dichotomies (activity/passivity, heterosexual/homosexual) slide away. (p. 86)

Could it be that it is Lynne Segal, rather than the feminists she criticises, who is out of step with many women's experiences? Sex can be consensual yet still involve the re-enactment of highly gendered practices. Most of the available research suggests that fluidity she describes may not even be imaginable by many women — and much of the evidence she herself cites suggests that this depiction of consensual sex is far from typical of the average heterosexual encounter.

Lynne Segal's punch line is similar to that used in *Straight Sex*, and gives rise to the same problems. 'Straight women, like gay men and lesbians, have everything to gain from asserting our desire to fuck if (and only if), when and as we choose.' (p.89). Quite apart from the semantic peculiarity of this sentence (can one assert a desire?) it has the tone of demanding a basic right. Who, exactly, is threatening this desire, denying this right? You've guessed — it's those moralistic, guilt-tripping, killjoy radical feminists again. But are they doing so? Of course not. No lesbian feminist has ever challenged my right to sleep with men — at least not since the height of the political lesbianism debate in the late 1970s and early 1980s — and that was a long time ago. I have no doubt that many of my friends think I'm

misguided in my desires and are concerned that having sexual relationships with men is doing me no good but they are not preventing me from having those relationships, nor making me feel guilty about them. Engaging in critique of heterosexuality is not the same as criticising individual women for being heterosexual. I would have thought that this simple distinction had long since been established

Lynne Segal's assertion covers for lack of critique, in particular her failure to take on board the extent to which sexual desires and the choices that follow from them are constructed — and that the choices we make are constrained in a variety of ways other than by our desires. Sexual experiences, practices and relationships are social, and hence governed by social convention and cultural meanings. They are conducted in the context of institutionalised inequalities and power structures. In treating desires, choices and practices as given, Lynne Segal is guilty of essentialist assumptions that run far deeper than those she habitually attributes to radical feminists.

The masculinisation of MacKinnon

Mandy Merck's bizarre little contribution, only five pages long, is offensively entitled 'Death Camps: Feminism vs. Queer Theory'. It begins with the usual complaints against radical feminists who, according to Mandy Merck are part of a feminist legacy 'ascribing women's social inferiority to their sexuality' (p.232). (Strange, I always thought radical feminists saw male sexuality as the main problem.) This legacy according to Mandy Merck, places feminism and fucking at odds. It is from this premise that she launches into the main argument of her chapter, a discussion of a much cited paper by one Leo Bersani entitled 'Is the Rectum a Grave'. Leo Bersani's celebration of sex as 'self abolition', his explorations of the convergence between sex and death, would hold little interest for most feminists. However, what makes him extremely unusual among male queer theorists is that he engages seriously (within his own logic) with the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon — and this strikes Mandy Merck as highly amusing and provides an occasion for having her own dig at them.

What concerns me here is that Mandy Merck is one of those engaged in a critique of Catharine MacKinnon which is rather different

from the one we know so well. Tired of simply castigating her as an anti-sex moralist in cahoots with the moral Right, many social theorists have recently discovered a new line of attack: Catharine MacKinnon, apparently, wants to be like a man. This idea originated with an essay in Drusilla Cornell's book, *Beyond Accommodation*, but is now being recirculated in other academic papers. Mandy Merck cites Drusilla Cornell as an authority for maintaining that Catharine MacKinnon's 'identification of sexual penetration with personal violation' reflects a specifically masculine fear (p.236). Drusilla Cornell asks 'What is the worst imaginable disaster to the masculine self? To be fucked.' This may be so, but why? Precisely because to be fucked is, within the patriarchal imagination, to be subordinated, made like a woman. The existence of this fear in men does not undermine Catharine MacKinnon's arguments, but reinforces them. To say that any woman who resists subordination is trying to be like a man is simply to echo a tired old anti-feminist put-down. (This impression is heightened by the fact that Mandy Merck uses Drusilla Cornell's arguments without reference to their theoretical context.)

The clincher for Mandy Merck, what apparently 'proves' Catharine MacKinnon's masculinist aspirations, is even more dubious. Drawing on an article by Wendy Brown, she refers to Catharine MacKinnon's 'phallic' prose, quoting (as Wendy Brown does) from a passage of polemic in which Catharine MacKinnon uses the words 'I'm getting hard on this and am about to get harder'. Mandy Merck finds Catharine MacKinnon's words 'hilarious'. The hilarity is that of the small child who hears someone inadvertently uttering a 'dirty word' — and she pursues this line of argument with to the end with school-girlish glee. That the crudest of crude Freudianism can be used in this way would itself be risible were it not widely regarded as a serious academic argument.

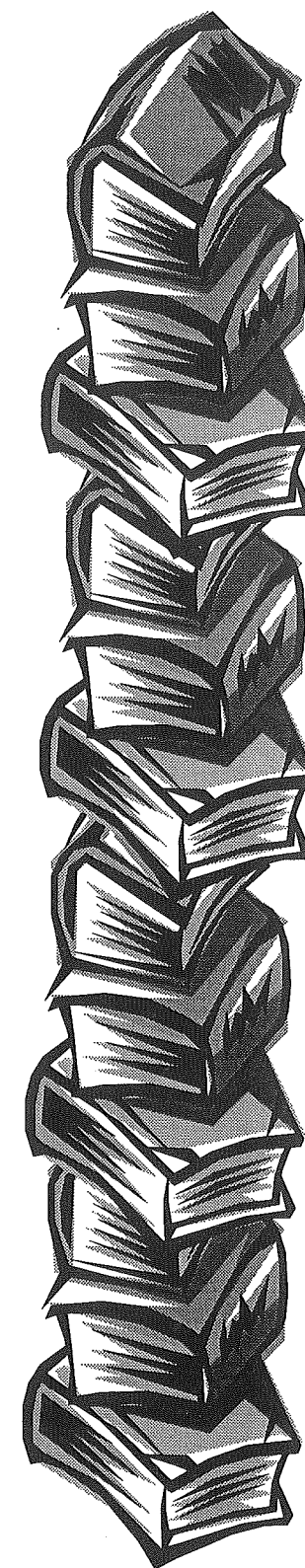
Gender and power

I would not want to give the impression that none of this book is worth reading. The contributions I found most interesting were those based on empirical research of which discussed everyday social practices. Shirley Prendergast and Simon Forrest base their chapter on observations of group conflict between boys and girls in secondary schools. They observe that

heterosexual desire and excitement arise out of this context, rendering heterosexual relationships highly problematic. The difficulties of overcoming this conflict within relationships is exacerbated by the very limited ways in which it is possible to discuss sexual feelings and practices within heterosexual relations — a problem highlighted in Jill Lewis' chapter on everyday sex talk.

The only chapter which deals explicitly with power in heterosexual relations is Ine Vanwesenbeeck's discussion of her work with prostitutes and with and other young heterosexual women in Holland. What emerged from her data on the latter group was very similar to the findings of the Women Risk and AIDS Project (WRAP) in Britain: lack of sexual pleasure, sex being used for instrumental purposes, women taking responsibility for men's feelings and a lack of ability to negotiate what they wanted from sex beyond 'yes or no' or 'whether or not'. Sex was still being defined and negotiated in male terms. This is a far cry from the mutual blending of bodies and pleasures which Lynne Segal seems to think happens in consensual heterosex. However, Ine Vanwesenbeeck shares Lynne Segal's optimism and her concern with promoting female sexual agency. Like the WRAP team, she found a small minority of young women who were more confident in asserting their desires and sees in them hope for the future.

At first glance I had assumed that there was nothing in this volume on pornography, but I found it discussed in Jane Ussher's chapter on 'the lesbian phallus' (a concept much in vogue in certain academic circles at the moment). This chapter does raise some interesting ideas on the relationship between material and discursive analysis of sexuality in the context of hard-core pornographic videos. Her emphasis is on the construction of phallic mastery in pornography, which she sees as central to the affirmation of masculinity and to many men's fantasies and desires (even if their own penises can't match those of the porn stars). It is when she moves on to use of the phallic dildo in lesbian erotica and sexual practices that most T&S readers would part company with her. Here, she believes, the disjunction between phallic power and the material reality of penises is exposed, with the result that lesbians using the phallus disrupt our



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usual assumptions on the naturalness of gender and sexuality.

Off the agenda

While many, indeed most, contributors pay attention to gender, often more emphasis is placed on difference than on hierarchy. Radical feminism is alluded to (in the preface) only in order to be dismissed and there are no recognisably radical feminist contributions. Hence the debate this book intended to foster excludes certain participants. It thus compares unfavourably with some other recent collections, such as Diane Richardson's *Theorising Heterosexuality* which is genuinely inclusive of a wide range of feminist opinion. What is not on the agenda is illuminating. The lack of serious discussion of sexual violence or coercion, and the little on the power relations underpinning heterosexuality

indicates that the politics underpinning much of this volume may be problematic for feminists.

The new sexual agendas of the title are largely defined in terms of freedom from sexual oppression. Now this is an admirable goal and one which most feminists would endorse in principle. The problem is that not everyone agrees about what is oppressive and which freedoms should be pursued. Certainly freedom from oppression cannot be equated with freedom of expression. In a hierarchical society one person's right to do their own thing (sexually or otherwise) can very easily end up as someone else's subordination. The main barrier to women's freedom from sexual oppression is male violence and coercion, in all its many forms. Any sexual agenda which excludes or marginalises the problem of violence has little to offer women. □

Not a happy ending:

Some reflections on the impact of the death and funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales

Public reactions to the death of Princess Diana in the Paris car crash in the early hours of Sunday, 31st August, were passionate and profuse. Crowds thronged the Mall, threatening to storm the palace if the queen failed to fly the flag at half mast and show some respect for the late princess. Amongst the millions of mourners were not only staunch anti-royalists and die-hard socialists, but gay men, members of the black community and all manner of feminists. What, then, are we to make of this very 'neapolitan' show of mourning, and what, if anything, was the significance for feminism of the life and death of Diana Spencer?

Surviving in public

In spite of a longstanding, and at times rabid, dislike of the royal family (I caused scandal in my Ulster protestant family when I spoke as an anti-royalist on a TV talk show in 1984) I was a big fan of Diana. I did not know her, I never met her, but I admired her and looking back on her life I think that feminism has things to learn from it.

First and foremost for me, in her life Diana was a survivor, a woman who had lived through being victimised and come out the other side, with strength and humour. In *Diana: Her True Story* Andrew Morton documents how Diana was chosen to be essentially a 'brood mare', an attractive virgin who would be a suitable mother


for a royal heir. Buckingham Palace thought that it would be an easy task to manipulate and control such a young and naive woman and Prince Charles was happy that he could carry on his long standing relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles, a relationship that he did not have the guts to publicly choose. They had not reckoned with Diana nor with the reaction of the public (especially women) to her.

Breaking the silence

From the beginning, Diana's story was no fairy tale romance. She was treated within the royal family as someone who did not matter, who was only of value as a breeding machine and publicity tool. Her response to being so marginalised and undervalued and to having so little

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control over her own life, was self-harm. She developed bulimia and injured herself through falling down stairs. Self-harm is a common coping mechanism used by many women when they are made to feel worthless and powerless.

Receiving no support from within the royal family, Diana found the courage to deal with her pain and to move on. (Perhaps if a few more feminists found the same courage we would not have so many women's groups wrecked by the destructive behaviour of a few women who won't deal with their own shit). One step in this was her public admission that she had suffered bulimia. The limited public discussion of eating

'People sensed that her life was doomed, fragile, hurtling like a car out of control towards disaster'

A.N. Wilson, *Evening Standard*, 1/9/97

disorders prior to that point had focused almost exclusively on anorexia, presented by the media as 'the slimmers' disease'. Diana instead presented eating disorders as a coping mechanism, as a response to pain and trauma. It was a brave thing to do, to put herself forward and take on a stigmatised label. And it had a huge impact not only on public perception, but also on individual women with eating disorders. It encouraged many women who had previously been isolated to come forward and get support. Some of these women appeared on TV a few days after Diana's death, talking about how the trigger for them getting help and even setting up services themselves, had been her public admission of her own self harm. She gave women in a similar position a sense that they were not mad and the hope that they could find other ways of coping that were not so self-destructive.

Like many other women, especially those with histories of self-harm, my liking of Diana came from an identification with her as a woman, particularly as a woman who had been made to feel that she did not matter but who was fighting back against that judgement. She learned how to use the media to her own advantage in her battle against the royal family and Prince Charles, laying the blame for the problems in their marriage at the door of his infidelity and coldness. She refused to keep their secrets, rejecting their definition of her as the problem, and instead exposing their treatment of her as the real issue. She took them on, and largely she won. This, for me, was partly why I felt initially so upset by the manner of her death. It reinforced for me the fear that you can't take them on, that they always win in the end.

Active resistance

But our only hope is fighting back, activism the only way of changing things. And in many ways Diana herself was an activist. Not overtly a feminist one, though she visited Refuge, donated money to them and met with Kiranjit Ahluwalia. But her work for charities, particularly in recent years, was at least as much about addressing policy issues as it was about interacting with individuals. Her involvement in the campaign for a global ban on landmines shows this. Her approach to campaigning put an emphasis not on high theory but on the potential impact of policy changes on individual lives. It is an approach that has also been employed by feminist campaigns such as Justice for Women who have used the cases of individuals such as Sara Thornton and Emma Humphreys to highlight the wider issues of domestic homicide. In many ways Justice for Women went against the trend of recent feminist politics which has become bogged down in theories, developed often within academia, which have lost sight of the lives of individual women. But to be successful not only in getting media attention in the first place, but also in engaging people's interest in an issue, requires the 'human interest' angle beloved of journalists — using the experiences of individuals to make a problem 'real' for those not directly affected by it. If we really want to change the world we need to engage a much wider constituency of women in feminist politics. The best way of doing this is not by starting with theory but by starting with human interest.

Diana was dismissed during her lifetime, particularly by middle class 'leftie' *Guardian* readers, as not very bright, a manipulator and an airhead. Such an image is contradicted by her clear grasp of how to use the media not only in her campaign against the royal family, but also in her campaigns on issues such as landmines. For me it was an image clearly rooted in misogyny, a way of undermining her and the causes for which she campaigned. Yet the 'airhead' opinion was accepted by a number of feminists that I knew. During the planning of the Brighton conference a number of members of the steering group suggested that Diana be invited to open the conference. We wanted her there as she was an important symbol for many survivors, she had given money to services for women and children escaping domestic violence and, most importantly, her presence would create the level of media attention that the event deserved. But the suggestion was rejected by others in the group who dismissed her as a privileged, manipulative and brainless woman. They refused to see her strength and courage, refused to recognise what she represented to many women not only in Britain but across the world. It was as if the fact that she was from a very privileged background stopped some of the radical feminists in that group recognising that Diana could still be oppressed as a woman. This was certainly the position of most socialist feminists who argued that Diana's wealth and privilege put her beyond the power of sexism and misogyny. But it is hard to understand why a similar position was adopted by any radical feminist. Unlike socialist feminists we see gender rather than class as the fundamental oppression and Diana's life supports our argument. If we did not live in a woman-hating society she could not have been so easily dismissed as an airhead and her self-harming behaviour could not so easily have been seen by the establishment as symptoms of instability and weakness.

'Asking for it'?

Diana had the intelligence to work out how to use the media, but she did not have the power to control them. She was subjected to virtually constant harassment and at one point described the paparazzi's intrusive aggressive photographing of her as feeling like she was being raped. Whilst I would not agree with her making this comparison in this way, I think there are

parallels in the treatment of Diana and that of women who have been raped. It was said, implicitly if not always explicitly, during her lifetime and even more so since her death, that Diana had brought the media attention on herself. The argument goes that since she sometimes tipped photographers off as to her location or sometimes leaked stories to them herself, then she had created a situation where the press would not be able to tell when she wanted to be photographed and when she did not, when she wanted to have stories in the press and when she did not. In other words because she had co-operated with the media once, she should co-operate with them at all times in all situations: since she sometimes said yes she never had the right to say no.

In spite of the constant harassing media attention, Diana tried to find a new role for herself after the end of her marriage to Charles. Again I found this interesting as a feminist and lesbian, to watch this woman grappling with the limitations put on her and trying to define for herself a new way of being, a new way of living; trying to find positive ways to use her power. It seemed important to her in this that she be taken seriously, not dismissed as a 'loose cannon' but recognised as someone who actively wanted to 'do good'. It was only after her death that we discovered that Tony Blair had been in discussion with her about taking on formally some type of ambassadorial role. Blair recognised at least some of the positive qualities that she could bring to such a role. In the weeks after her death stories emerged about people she had cared about — ordinary people that she came across in her life and who she made time for, not only at points of crisis or illness, but checking up weeks and years later to find out how they were getting on. Perhaps that is something for us all to learn from.

Hilary McCollum

Including others

I had been adjusting my view of Diana for several years. At the start of her public life I proudly wore my 'Don't Do it Di' badge, and wandered the empty streets on the day of the wedding wishing we had arranged a feminist alternative. For many years I studiously avoided the media reporting, but every now and then something caught my attention. The first time I paid proper attention was when her visit to

'Shy girl who fled from the cameras became a supreme manipulator'

Paul McCann, Independent, 1/9/97

Refuge was televised; there was something about how she greeted the women and the expressions on her face which communicated an understanding, a feeling *with* abused women rather than just about them. There were moments in her famous television interview that moved me, as they did later during a documentary about land mines.

It was only her death that made me think about why — why had I been moved by this woman? What was it that I thought I saw? And more importantly perhaps what was it that many women thought they saw and understood in her and from her?

Why women?

If there was one thing that infuriated me about all the media coverage more than any other it was the repeated failure to notice that 'the public', 'the nation' was overwhelmingly female. Even the reflections by feminists in the 'quality press' by Ros Coward and Bea Campbell only mentioned this in passing. To me it said something important about the woman herself; using South Kensington Tube in the week before the funeral, the fact that the crowds carrying flowers were women, and many looked like mothers and daughters, fascinated me. The easy explanation is that this was simply the product of the glamour and preoccupation with her in best selling women's magazines. That seems insufficient to make sense of the enormity of the response, the resonances through varied and disparate communities.

Somehow this woman who came from an acutely privileged background managed to transcend some of the expectations of her and make a different kind of connection with those she met and many she did not. This was not just respect or shock, but something felt in a more profound way — a loss that was both public and private, symbolic and real.

Bridging differences

This sense of connection seems to me to link to one of our basic feminist concepts: the personal is political. One didn't need much feminist theory to understand that Diana had been used and abused by a powerful man and an extremely powerful family. What mattered about her to many women was surely that she fought back, refused to be silenced and sidelined. That she did this under a public spotlight whilst maintaining some kind of quiet dignity must have resonated with countless women who have conducted their own resistances in private. She refused the stoicism and silence which has been the lot of generations of women, and is still expected in the higher echelons. She placed herself alongside women who dare to challenge and refuse tradition and power structures. And within this she used the personal, her own experience of pain and humiliation, as a way to make connections with others.

The media reporting amplified what had been obvious for some time — this woman had an extraordinary ability to create human connection across many differences. I found it impossible not to be impressed and moved by the previously untold stories involving her maintaining connections with gay men beginning new courses of treatment for AIDS, with children who faced repeated hospitalisations. A friend of mine began to notice in the endless retrospectives how she unerringly headed for the person in the room least likely to be able to gain her attention, that she sought out those who were most 'outside', those who could most easily be ignored and forgotten. Maybe she didn't have a theoretical analysis of power relations and exclusion, but she certainly practiced inclusion in her public life. The issue which feminists and other political groupings endlessly agonise about at a conceptual level, she simply did at a human one.

There were two messages I took from her death and the response to it. It made me aware of my own mortality; the importance of making sure that those close to me know how much I value and care about them. On a more general level it was a reminder of why experience is important in feminist politics. It is not our personal experiences in and of themselves which matter so much as the way in which we make sense of them and communicate about them enabling connection with other women.

Liz Kelly

A gilded cage

I won't say I felt nothing when I heard Princess Diana had died. When you hear of anyone dying unexpectedly and unnecessarily you feel regret; but I felt no more than that. Without doubting the sincerity of other people's grief, I was puzzled by the extravagant displays of public mourning. As the funeral approached I felt more and more alienated; I stopped buying the paper or listening to the news, because I just couldn't share in the widespread sense of tragic loss.

I also found myself at odds with some of the sentiments being expressed about Diana by feminists. What bothered me was the attempt to claim Diana as 'ours' in some way: as a subversive, a survivor and maybe even, in her secret heart, a sister. I'm sorry, but I just don't buy this. I think it is an example of what literary critics call 'reading against the grain', and what the rest of us might well call 'ignoring the obvious in favour of the implausible'.

A questionable role model

Let me, then, state the obvious. However much we might have cheered when she publicly put the knife into her husband and her in-laws, when all's said and done Diana was a powerful symbol of gender conservatism, not subversion. She came from a class, and married into an institution, whose outstanding characteristic is anachronism. Aristocratic and royal women are the only group of women in contemporary British society of whom it can still accurately be said that marriage is their trade, and that they, along with their children, are chattels. Such women live in the proverbial gilded cage: their extreme class privilege is conditional on an equally extreme gender subjection. Diana's personality was formed by this regime, and however unhappily, she adhered to its archaic notions of proper femininity — which, boiled down to their essence, are about pleasing men — in just about every respect.

Actually, she did more than adhere to them, she was a particularly effective advertisement for them — a 'role model', as the media kept telling us, for women of all classes and ages. Young, pretty and personable, she represented a feminine ideal which other women of her generation had consigned to the dustbin of history, and made it seem acceptable, even desirable, again. I do not blame her for this; her upbringing and education equipped her for little

else. But in the light of it I find it difficult to see her as in any way 'subversive'.

Admittedly there were aspects of the traditional, upper-class female role which Diana could not stomach, such as the treatment of women as brood-mares to be cast aside when they had produced a legitimate male heir. But she was less critical of the idea that for women, power and agency are extensions of feminine sexuality. Women act on men (using their beauty, glamour and charm, always assuming they are lucky enough to be endowed with these attributes), and men act on the world on women's behalf. If that counts as power, no woman on earth in the late twentieth century possessed more of it than Diana, and no one was more skilled at using it, whether for her own advantage (as in the Panorama interview) or for the good of others (as in her campaign against landmines).

'the best we can hope for is that she can now be remembered, in the way she longed to be, as the princess who became queen of all our hearts in a fairy story which has no ending'

Christopher Hudson, Evening Standard, 1/9/97

True, Diana was unusually upfront about the limits and the high emotional costs of this particular kind of power. But at the same time, so far as I can see, she was unwilling to give it up and unable to imagine any alternative to it. That was the reason why she fought the royal family so fiercely after her divorce. She wasn't resisting tyranny or looking for some abstract justice, she was trying to hold on to her power base as the wife and the mother of future kings. Again, one cannot blame her, since this was the

only power base she had or was likely to have. But it seems to me that pity would be a more apt feminist response than admiration.

The perfect princess

Feminists who admired Diana cite her strength, her courage and her humanitarianism. But even if I am prepared to grant her these attributes, I cannot help feeling there was something else going on, something feminists would find hard to admit openly. To see this, we need only ask why Diana was so much more popular than the other royal women of her generation, Princess Anne and Sarah Ferguson, and why, even before her death, her plight and her response to it got so much more attention than Sarah's or Anne's. There are, after all, many points of similarity: any of the three of them could symbolise women's unhappiness within and desire for independence from an archaic patriarchal institution. But some symbols are more equal than others.

It is clear that Sarah Ferguson, like Diana, felt oppressed by the rigid gender-codes of the royal family, and when she divorced her royal husband she was treated with similar contempt. Like Diana, Sarah gave voice to her unhappiness and spoke, in particular, of her troubled relationship to her body and to food. But Sarah's revelations were treated quite differently. Her problem took the form of overeating, not bulimia; a fat, frumpy and loudmouthed princess does not excite the same sympathy as a thin, designer-clad and dignified one. In public perception Diana was ill-treated and righteously angry, but Sarah was merely embarrassing and vulgar.

Princess Anne has been portrayed for many years as a charmless, horsefaced harridan. She has worked as hard as Diana ever did for humanitarian causes, but somehow the effect is not the same. Anne, who once said in public that she wished she could have been a lorry driver, was arguably the first woman to play the part of 'reluctant princess'. It is, perhaps, more difficult to make her into a symbol of resistance to the royal family, since she belongs to it by blood rather than marriage; but I don't think that is the real issue here. The issue is femininity, and at the crassest level, looks.

Diana became the 'people's princess' because she, or more exactly her public image, fitted the people's idea of what a princess ought to be: beautiful, glamorous, gentle, sweet and

kind. Not to mention vulnerable. No doubt many people also admired her more 'feminist' qualities — her refusal to tolerate her husband's infidelity, her resistance when her in-laws wanted her to fade gracefully into obscurity. But as we see when we compare her with less favoured royal women, the strength she demonstrated at various points during her life would not have been acceptable if it hadn't been grafted on to the more traditional package, of fairytale beauty and glamour and charm.

A contradictory role

The way some feminists have talked about Diana since her death reminds me of a narrative formula that used to be popular in fiction and autobiography during the early years of the WLM: the 'how I woke up to injustice and became my own woman' plot. Applied to Diana, there is something to this, but not much. There are some injustices she seems never to have woken up to; the woman she became was no less dependent than the one she left behind on femininity and male approval as sources of identity and power. To the extent that she was critical of the role she was forced to play, she was caught up in a basic contradiction: people were prepared to sympathise with her complaints about how hard it was to be a fairytale princess, only because she personified that stereotype so well. She had it both ways. Feminists cannot.

Debbie Cameron

The horrors of heterosexuality

When the news of Diana's death first broke, I was in Manchester staying with friends who had taken more of an interest in her life and doings than I had ever done. I hadn't even bothered to watch the Panorama interview a couple of years ago, although I regretted it later simply because it had generated some heated debate in the most unlikely quarters. I wasn't sure at first what I thought or felt about the news, apart from a certain sadness and an awareness that for some people (I'm not sure exactly who I was thinking of — probably her children) this was a shocking and tragic loss. I assumed that news of Diana's death would be met by other women I knew, similarly, with varying degrees of regret: (depending on how far they had followed either the Royal Family saga or Diana's involvement in the AIDS issue and, more recently, the anti-

'At the height of her beauty she will be forever thus' Mimi Spencer, Evening Standard, 6/9/97

landmines campaign). Instead the intense and extreme public response was mirrored in the reactions of women I know well. I was also surprised by the strength of my own eventual response, which grew into a fulminating fury against the various men who were involved in commenting on Diana's life or death and an increasing empathy with the hordes of women for whom the event had such symbolic force.

Mourners or maniacs?

That women were behaving out of character, or at least contrary to expectation, was epitomised by my mother's rather puzzling reaction. A lukewarm royalist, who listens as a matter of form, but without great enthusiasm, to the queen's speech at Christmas, my mother has never been a huge admirer of Diana. In fact, in disputes amongst her peers, she would incline towards a defence of Charles if critics seemed 'to go too far'. Moreover she would blame his upbringing and his austere and disagreeable father for any faults laid at his door. It was with some surprise therefore that I learned, following the funeral service, that she had been impelled to go down to the Finchley Road and watch the cortège go by. She had also stopped buying her *Daily Mail* (her daily rag for as long as I can remember), because it was one of the papers to have bid for intrusive photographs of Diana and Dodi Al Fayed.

Less than a fortnight later I asked my mother if she was maintaining her boycott of the *Daily Mail*, and she retorted that she'd tried all the others but they didn't suit her, mostly because they were the wrong size. More recently she made some passing remark about the 'mania' following Diana's death, and when I asked her why, then, she herself had gone to see the funeral cortège pass by, she said, with startling honesty: 'I suppose I was one of the maniacs'.

My own view is that the overwhelming public response to this event was not a homogeneous one; there were those who felt a genuine sense of loss directly connected with what this particular woman represented, those for whom

the event triggered immense feelings of grief in their own lives and provided a legitimate pretext for expressing these emotions, those for whom the event had a historical significance that they felt a need to be part of, and 'maniacs' like my mother.

Icons and pin-ups

While the broad public response may have been influenced by the media, in my view it was not created by them. Journalists and broadcasters alike were all trying their utmost to ensure that their coverage reflected the public mood in the way that Tony Blair's initial statement appeared to do, while at the same time making miserably ineffectual attempts to analyse the phenomenon.

What was of course noticeable for its absence was any coherent feminist commentary on the whole chain of events and their representation. Even those women journalists who tried to establish what Diana stood for, and acknowledged that the majority of mourners were women, fell into the trap of idealising her, or translating her into a kind of feminist icon, which she mostly clearly was not. They also mostly reproduced uncritically the view, expressed by most male commentators on the event, including her own brother, that it was blessing (for whom?) that she died while she was young and beautiful. This idea was subtly reinforced by Elton John's adaptation of his tribute to Marilyn Monroe, another vulnerable and exploited woman in the public gaze whose early death turned her into a twentieth century icon. This was the kind of angle, in my view, that linked Diana's fate to that of thousands of other women, for whom objectification is no compensation for harassment or abuse. In other words, being trivialized, patronised and pursued is the price women pay for the alleged benefits of being valued by men for their looks.

Men, mafia and masonry

What came to infuriate me as the week following Diana's death unfolded was the incessant commentary of men — men who had previously

treated this woman with little respect — talking in hushed and reverential tones on the radio and the television, and asking each other what was her secret. There were all the dark suits and ties, broken voices and pious platitudes, and the undertones of competition: 'Well, you had lunch with her at Kensington Palace as often as I did, dear boy'. Then there were the men and boys in 'casual' suits following the hearse on the gun carriage, making it look more like a mafia funeral than a state ceremony, with the Duke of Edinburgh wearing a more masonic and sinister demeanour than usual. It seems to me no wonder that all sorts of conspiracy theories have emerged to explain the car crash in which Diana died. The sheer relentlessness of the coercive presence of men in her life and death struck me as I watched the television coverage — she was harassed by men in life, she died at the hands of men (whether it was the paparazzi or a drunken driver) and was literally man-handled and surrounded by men after her death — whether it was the uniformed hearse-bearers or the motorcycle outriders on the last leg of the journey to her burial. Yes, the island seemed an amazing symbol of escape, a flower-strewn idyll after all this — and yet what do we see on the television the next day? Earl Spencer squatting amongst the floral tributes on the island, posing for a photographer.

Pimps and voyeurs

All this brought out murderous tendencies in me. I went down to Kensington Gardens the day after the funeral simply to be where the women were and to calm down. The atmosphere was that of a Hindu temple or a feast day in a Catholic country — it was remarkably un-English. Although it was fast becoming a tourist attraction, with numbers of men waving their cameras about, women were still walking quietly along the perimeter fence reading the tributes or building new shrines of candles and flowers in makeshift vases under the outlying trees. Christian Wolmar had written in *The Independent* the day before — the day of the funeral — that he had been 'caught' by a fellow socialist amongst the mourners at Buckingham Palace, and 'it was like being caught by one's partner leching at the topless beauties on a St Tropez beach'. While I suppose in some ways this was no worse than the 'another rich bitch dead' view freely expressed by many leftwing men around this time, the comment confirmed

my gut feeling that, for some, the event had been turned into a kind of death porn.

This is the only explanation I can give for the rage it produced in me. For all the moral righteousness about the images of the car crash that agencies in France had put on the market before news of Diana's death has been announced, the so called 'serious' press and media here were in my view doing something very similar in an insidious way. It was as if, smiling from every shop window and newsstand, Diana had been transformed through death into a symbol of the perfectly desirable woman. What was so hateful about all this was the caring-sharing rhetoric that went with the canonisation of Diana by commentators who were far more interested in her affair with Dodi Al Fayed than in her 'good deeds' scarcely a week before. And by the by, where had all the racism gone suddenly? How had Dodi become transformed so swiftly from a playboy and a 'foreigner' (worse, an Arab) into a perfect lover, the source of all Diana's happiness? She was always surrounded by men, most of them unspeakably awful — but are we to say then that her life has no relevance for us? On the contrary, her life and death seem to me to symbolise the full horrors of heterosexuality, internalised and lived out by a woman for whom it caused nothing but damage.

Sexism and idolatry

I think I understand better now than I did at the time the significance of this event for those women who had followed the events of Diana's life and made some connection with their own. For many, the way in which her life offered a public record of the private struggles that women have — around eating disorders, self-harm, broken relationships, divorce, family strife, depression — made her death come to symbolise a battle lost, and their own grief was commensurate with this. I can also see how if you avoided turning on your radio, resisted the press and television coverage, and determinedly stayed away from London on the day of the funeral, you could have remained quite detached from the whole sequence of events from the first news of the car crash to the funeral itself. But I defy any feminist who followed the events of that week to have had no response to the visual imagery and hideous mixture of sexism and idolatry that we were fed throughout that time.

Joan Scanlon □

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