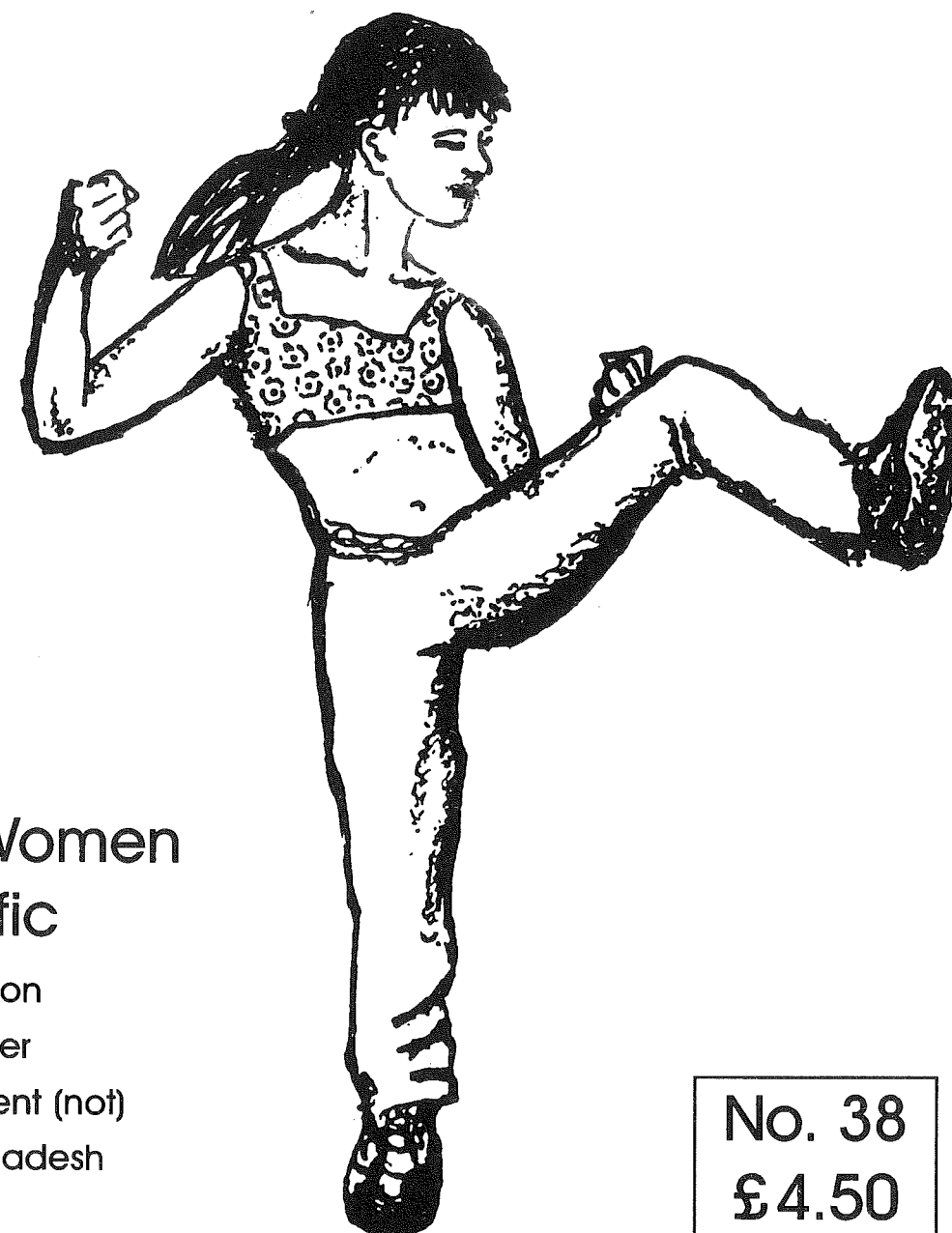


Trouble

The radical feminist magazine

& Strife



Prostitution: Women stopping traffic

Feminist detective fiction

Spice fans on girl power

Boys' underachievement (not)

Acid throwing in Bangladesh

Love is... a problem

No. 38
£4.50

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

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

Cover design: Lou Hart.

Thanks to: Caroline Forbes.

Printed by Sandypress Manchester (0161) 273-7535.

Distributed by Central Books (0181) 986-4854.

Our editorial address is:

39a Eburne Road, London, N7 6AU.

Our subscription address is:

Trouble & Strife, PO Box 8, Diss, Norfolk IP22 3XG.

Copyright is retained by authors and illustrators.

Subscribe to Women's News!

Ireland's feminist magazine

We have news on the state of the movement in Ireland & worldwide, as well as cartoons, creative writing, events & contacts...

Women's News has numerous contributors from Ireland and Elsewhere

If you would like to subscribe, then fill in the form below and send, with a cheque to Women's News: 29 Donegall St. Belfast BT1 2FG

Rates (for 11 issues)	N.Ireland & Britain	S.Ireland	Europe	Overseas
Low/Unwaged	£10.00	IR£11.00	£12.00	
Ordinary	£14.00	IR£16.00	£18.00	£24.00
Women's Groups/Support sub	£18.00	IR£18.00	£22.00	£28.00
Institutions	£28.00	IR£32.00	£34.00	£40.00

NAME:.....
ADDRESS:.....

Lesbians thinking about Lesbians

Lesbian Ethics

LE 4:3 Lesbians and Incest
LE 5:1 Lesbians and Our Mothers
LE 5:2 Lesbians and Community

Radical, passionate, thorough.

3 issues: u.s.\$14; intl. surface \$16, air \$24.
Single issue \$6. To Lesbian Ethics or LE,
PO Box 4723, Albuquerque, NM 87196, USA

Engage with feminist politics-

Read off our backs

Publishing for 25 years, *off our backs* specializes in coverage of feminist conferences, interviews with grassroots women, news, analysis of international issues, reproductive rights, violence against women - all women's issues.

Get a TRIAL SUB today -
3 issues for US \$9
Annual sub airmail US \$30
(Canada & Mexico \$22)

Yes, send to:

Name _____
Address _____

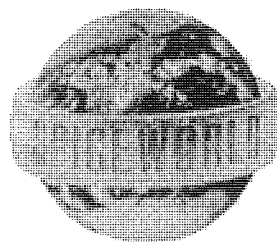
oob, 2337B 18th St NW,
Washington DC 20009
USA

Contents No. 38

Trouble & Strife

Spicing up girls' lives Krista Cowman and Ann Koloski find out what girl fans of the Spice Girls really, really want.....	2
Detect and survive T&S interviews feminist detective writer Denise Mina	10
The idea of patriarchy Sheila Jeffreys's <i>The Idea of Prostitution</i> reviewed by Liz Kelly	15
men@exploitation.com Donna Hughes reveals how the Internet is being used to promote sexual exploitation	21
Giving a damn Patricia Holmes and Val King on FRANKI, a feminist organisation with a radical approach to working with women in prostitution	28
Not for sale Angela Beausang and Eva Hassel-Calais report on Sweden's new law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services	32
Flushing the johns Julie Bindel reports on West Yorkshire's Kerb Crawler Re-education Programme	35
Jeanette Winterson is not the only lesbian Rachel Wingfield discusses three lesbian novelists and their status in the literary mainstream	37
Could do better Debbie Cameron raises questions about boys' educational underachievement	46
Out of the shadows Bina Akhtar talks to Linda Regan about the problem of acid-throwing attacks on women in Bangladesh	54
Love is all you need? Wendy Langford doesn't think so	60
Emma Humphreys Her life remembered by Julie Bindel, Hannana Siddiqui and Harriet Wistrich	69

Spicing up Girls' Lives



Intrigued by the Spice Girls' appeal to such a diverse audience, Krista Cowman and Ann Kaloski set out to discover what fifty young girls thought about 'girl power' and The Spice effect.

If you wannabe my lover
You gotta get with my friends
Make it last for ever
Friendship never ends
Wannabe (1996)

This is how the Spice Girls hit the pop charts and the westernised world in July 1996. A brash song full of energy and — we would argue — feminist-inspired concepts of female friendship, power, and desire sung by a sassy bunch of five 'ordinary' young women — why weren't feminists celebrating in the streets, if not in the clubs? Even as late as a year later one of us (Ann) was at a women's disco in York when the DJ introduced 'Wannabe' with 'Well I never

thought I'd be playing this at a women's dance' — though she had the grace to smile as most of us got up to dance. We women were celebrating — but *what*?

This question stimulated us to begin research into the whole Spice phenomenon. We were intrigued by the powerful appeal of the band and disturbed both by media hype and by feminist silence. The most visible audiences of the band seemed to be twenty-something heterosexual men and pre-teen girls. Surely, we thought, these two diverse audiences can't be reading the group in the same way. And it is the young girls voices that are missing — the twenty-something men

have a say in their own mags such as *Loaded* and *Face*. What, we thought, do little girls actually think about the Spice Girls? And *how* do they think about them — what kinds of theorising do the girls undertake?

Although some newspaper and magazines articles do offer comments from young Spice fans, there appeared to be no systematic empirical work of 'the Spice effect' on this age group. As the maxim 'if you can't find a good article on a subject you're interested in — write it yourself' could be the feminist academic's version of direct action, and we decided to do it ourselves. We immersed ourselves in the Spice Girls,

butch god to teddy bear?: Some thoughts on my relationship with Elvis Presley' written by Sue Wise. In this piece Wise assesses the complexities of feminist responses to a (male) popstar with whom one might have strong ideological differences. She writes of her relationship with 'her Elvis' as one of pleasure and, perhaps more surprisingly, of liberation, and convincingly argues that feminists need to take heed of female fandom. Her mostly autobiographical essay concludes by offering three possible ways to write a feminist biography of stars. The first is similar to a traditional biography, but with 'a sexual political analysis shot through it',



reading Spice books and mags, listening to Spice CDs, watching Spice videos, talking about the group with friends and, increasingly, friends young daughters. It became clear that most writers outside of the Spice industry tend to offer somewhat conservative and straight interpretations of the relationship between fans and idols: Geri is tarty — shock horror! little girls will become debauched overnight. Or: the band are just a product, therefore they offer no scope for girls to think creatively or radically. But as girls we had both been 'fans' (The Bay City Rollers in Krista's case, the Beatles in Ann's) and we *know* that fandom does not work in such direct ways. And most of the women we know have also been fans — it is how many of us came to define our girlhood — and yet there is remarkably little feminist work on the topic of fandom.

One relevant article we had both come across some years ago, and read with delight, is 'From

including the perspective of female fans. Her second proposal is for a feminist overview of relevant existing biographies, taking account of the inherent sexist assumptions. And thirdly she suggests a fusion of star biography and fan autobiography — taking further the methodology of her own article. Wise indicates that such strategies would generate ways of examining the powerful and frequently emancipatory effects of fandom for girls and women, without ignoring the source of their desires. We have found this article a wonderful exposé of the intricacies of fandom. It is also a timely reminder that fan-worship is not the same as having a role model — an important distinction when the idols are also female. Whereas 'role-modelling' is concerned with emulation and (direct) inspiration, being a fan involves — what? We decided to try to find out.

Tell me what you want, what you really, really, want?

We began our research with young potential fans of the Spices and contacted local schools in York to ask permission to talk to their female pupils about girl popbands. As a result, in March 1998 we interviewed fifty girls aged between six and eight in three institutions, an urban, a suburban, and a nearly-rural school. Alongside gender, age, and locality, the other clear structural homogeneity was that, as far as we could tell, all the girls we interviewed were white and certainly all spoke with easy local accents, suggesting they were assimilated into UK/Yorkshire culture, if not UK citizens. Later we'll discuss the consequences of such a white raced group.

This research was conducted before Geri left, before Mel B and Victoria announced their pregnancies, and before Mel's wedding and her solo chart success.

You don't know what we are talking about?

OK. For those readers who have had little contact with TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines for the past two years, and (more likely) for those who just want to check their facts and clarify which Spice Girl is which, we offer a brief biography:

The group came together in 1994 as a result of flyers and a related advert in *Stage* magazine asking for 'streetwise, outgoing, ambitious & dedicated' females aged 18-23 'with the ability to sing/dance.' Eventually five young women emerged — Melanie Brown (soon to be dubbed 'Scary Spice'), Melanie Chisholm ('Sporty Spice'), Victoria Adams ('Posh Spice'), Geri Halliwell ('Ginger Spice') and Emma Bunton ('Baby Spice').¹ By all accounts they were not outstanding singers or dancers, but they did have one thing in common — they wanted to succeed. Interestingly, they did not present (at this early stage) as conventionally beautiful, but as five 'ordinary' women in their early twenties — four white and one (Mel B) self-identified as 'mixed race'.²

The facts (such as we are able to find out) about the band are important: we do not want to use the Spices as some kind of text from which we can deduce all sorts of theories, while at the same time ignoring the real women who constitute the group. While our main focus is on how young fans interact with the whole package of 'The Spice Girls' in order to develop a sense of themselves, how, we wonder, after Sue Wise,

would a feminist and collective biography of the Spice Girls look? This article is mostly about their fans but to represent the band as just a product would be to position them like so many girl bands — manipulated and marketable.



Not that the Spice Girls would stand for this! The people who first brought them together to develop as a group included men. Yet, before success, the Spices jettisoned this original management and chose another who helped them to fame and fortune — and then they ditched him to control their own careers. These men might have thought they were gaining a sweet girly group. If so, they were scuppered by such assumptions. Girl Power?

But what does all this mean for young female fans?

Once in the schools we interviewed the girls in groups of four or five at a time in order to give them space to talk around the band as far as they wished. In each of the schools we were allowed to work alone as researchers without other adults present, although in one school this was on condition we interviewed in an ante-room off the main classroom with the door open. In these circumstances we found the girls ready and willing to open up and share their thoughts with us. We presented our project as a 'topic' to allow the girls to work on familiar ground, and we began each session by talking about girl bands in general in order to ensure that we did not presume pro-Spice responses. Fortunately for our research purposes there was almost unanimous

enthusiasm for the band.

We asked the girls quite simple questions related to the Spice Girls.³

1. Who is your favourite, and why
2. Who is your least favourite and why?
3. What sort of Spice Girl goods do you own? Who buys them for you?
4. Do you listen to the Spice girls alone, or with friends?
5. What is Girl Power?
6. If we had a magic wand and could give you Girl Power, is there anything you would be able to do that you can't do now?

Who do you think you are?

The Spice Girls are clearly differentiated, unlike other contemporary girlbands like All Saints, or B*witched. In this, there has never been a girl band quite like them, although they have been

national press. Yet the 'sexiness' of Geri seemed to pass the girls by: what appealed was her red hair.

Such direct identification had its converse. Victoria Adams — Posh Spice — was not much liked. Her (designer) clothes are seen as boring by the girls: 'She wears black or white all the time' or 'Her skirts are too short.' An incident in the film *SpiceWorld* (of which the band say they 'play themselves') irritated several of them, and Grace voiced the feelings of many:

Everyone else is wearing trousers and they're in the army and Posh is wearing a skirt and high heels... walking on the grass!

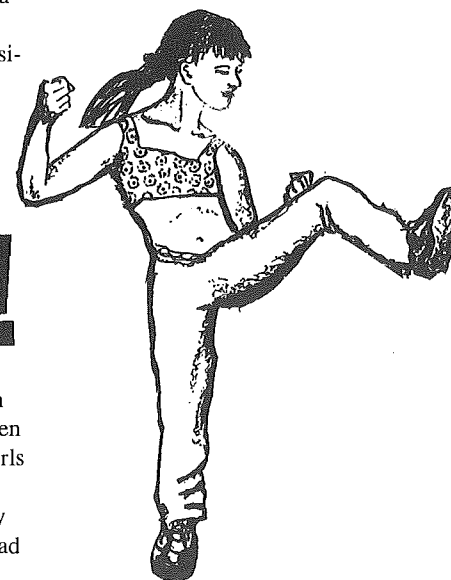
Being too grown-up was a clear turn-off for our respondents, and it would be interesting to see what happens as the girls get older, particularly as we both find Victoria's 'adult' persona funny and ironic — certainly not an image of mature womanhood. For now, the more accessi-

SPICE UP YOUR ROOM!

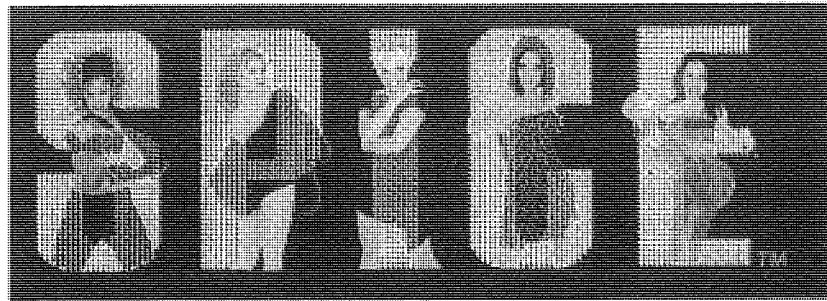
compared to the 1970s gay group Village People, another band of 'characters.' The outright favourites among our respondents were Melanie Chisholm — Sporty — and Emma Bunton — Baby. Mel was universally admired because she could do backflips, but many of the girls also liked her clothes — Mel is seen mostly wearing tracksuits, Liverpool football kits, and tight aerobic tops — and her hair which is long and pony-tailed. Some of the girls mentioned her powerful voice as a reason, but it was 'image' rather than 'talent' which dictated preferences. Emma was liked because she is 'sweet,' 'has lovely hair', and 'wears nice clothes.' A majority of the girls identified with the Spice who looked most like them: we were soon able to predict that the blonde haired, sweet-looking girls would like Emma, the girls in trainers mention Mel C, and the red-haired girls go for Geri Halliwell. This last preference was intriguing. When Geri was part of the group she was the most condemned for her overt sexuality, and some nude shots of her taken before her Spice days appeared in the

ble styles of Mel Chisholm and Emma Bunton were applauded by the girls, and we would even go so far as to say that some of these young girls seemed to think that Mel and Emma copied *them*, rather than the other way around: Sporty and Baby reflected back something the girls had already found in themselves.

But Victoria's adult manner and aloofness wasn't the only factor in unpopularity: Melanie Brown was the least favourite Spice by far with most of our respondents. The girls mentioned her 'too wild' hair and her pierced tongue — 'urgh!' What can we make of this? Our interviewees found Geri's unkempt hairstyle unremarkable, and many liked the other Mel's pierced navel and nose. Melanie Brown is 'mouthy' (her definition) and has the nickname 'Scary', but white Geri Halliwell is hardly demure! Could our white girls find nothing to identify with in the dark-skinned Spice Girl? And, if so, why not? We were concerned by this and tried to pursue the girls thinking, but came up with nothing other than 'I just don't like her.' Given that we both know



young white girls (not in our sample) whose favourite Spice is Melanie Brown, we are loathe to make straight-forward assumptions of 'racism' without more research, in particular through interviewing Black and mixed-race girls fans. Do young sweet-looking Black or Asian girls favour Emma? Do the athletic youngsters have Mel Chisholm as their chief pin-up? How does Victoria — the 'posh' English girl — rate? While we have no doubt that Mel's race is a factor — and our research indicates a problematic factor — in the relationship between star and fan, the precise ways in which race interacts with class, region, subjectivity, and image are waiting to be examined.



Spice Up Your Life

One of the major criticisms of the Spice Girls in the media is that they encourage young fans to buy lots of expensive fan merchandise. There is certainly a lot of it about! T-shirts, stationery, jewellery, dolls, mugs, calendars — not to mention the core items such as CDs, videos, and posters. A few of the girls we interviewed were carrying Spice Girl pencil cases, or wearing Spice T-shirts, or watches. Other girls spoke of merchandise in their homes. Yet one of our most surprising findings was that most of the Spice goodies were unsolicited presents from adults — mothers, fathers, aunts: 'I've got a Spice Girl lunch-box, but I didn't really want it' It became clear that the girls sense of themselves as the fans of the group was not based on the amount of products they owned. Having access to the Spice songs was important, but some of the most ardent fans had taped material from their friends: for these young girls shopping and owning was not the mark of a fan. Most of our interviewees had posters, but these were usually obtained relatively cheaply from magazines. Given the sophisticated Spice marketing machine we think this could be an important finding, and again one which needs following up.

Playing with Spice

The girls we listened to like to 'play' Spice Girls. They do this in three main ways:

1. Through dancing to the records with their friends and family — mothers and girl cousins featured quite strongly here. Sally told us:

When me and my mum were in my room trying to pretend to be Spice girls er... we have to like shout it cos we can't make the voices with just two of us... we have to shout...

US: You play Spice Girls with your mum?

SALLY: Yes

US: Sounds great fun!

SALLY: We pretend to be all of them

Most of these performances were, as you might expect, similarly bedroom or at least home-based acts. And in fact the 'public' — here defined as male siblings or other kin boys — were excluded.

PAT: When we're dancing along to the Spice Girls and my brother comes in and charges in and he goes.. Oh oh.. He ruins it

And we're trying to record it and sometimes he comes barging in and says er get these silly Spice Girls off... And it records it...

Now we JUST shut the door.

This boy-exclusion zone was almost universal. The one notable exception was that boys were allowed in on girls terms — if they 'played Spice' too they could enter the hallowed bedroom. These girls, it seemed to us, had cottoned on pretty quickly to the idea that gender is not an essential attribute, but is about behaviour and attitude: boys who were like girls could play with the girls.

2. Through 'public' Spice-ette performances, in liberal school assemblies or at parish fetes. Here individual girls would take on a Spice personae and replicate dress and dance steps against a background of pre-recorded Spice Girls music. The particular Spice each girl played was predetermined before the act, and always involved them being one of the Spice band (and not an individually coined Spice, such as 'Curly Spice' or 'Booky Spice'). The girls always wanted to be their favourite Spice, and often firmed up their performance through extra role-playing games. The dedication with which these performances are approached is awe-inspiring. When we asked one girl how much work her event had entailed she dismissively said, 'Oh, not much, just every night after school for a week'. and some productions took weeks of practice to get the details right for a five-minute act.

3. Through dismissing boys' teasing and bullying. It might seem odd to deem such acts as 'play' — but this definition comes from the way the girls themselves talked about their defiance of boy-norms. Not only did they link their bravado in school with the gender exclusionary practices at home when they were singing and dancing to the Spices, but many of the girls identified one aspect of 'Spice Power' as the prerogative to stand up for yourselves against boys:

ALICE: boys think we're weird but we do Spice Girls and stuff and they always pick on us

JANE: and then we get our own back

SOPHIE: they don't know we can get our own back on them

ALICE: boys think they're strong just cos they're boys

SOPHIE: and we trip them up

ALICE: we sometimes go like that (sticks out foot) and trip them up.

Though some of the girls behaved in a physical way to 'get their own back' others were able to envision other ways, and this led us on to discussions about 'Girl Power'.

What is this 'Girl Power'?

This is the slogan most associated with the Spice Girls.⁴ Anyone with only a cursory awareness of the band will probably have seen them shout 'Girl Power.' Some feminists have criticised the concept for being a vacuous brand of feminism — all mouth and no substance, all post-feminist individualism and no recognition of structural gender inequalities. But Girl Power makes no claims to be a coherent political theory. Rather, it is a jumble of female insights and hopes. Instead of criticising Girl Power for what it isn't, we want to look at how the concept is articulated by both the band and their fans, and offer some provisional assessment of how Girl Power might function in feminist ways.

The Spices themselves certainly see Girl Power as a valuable idea on the road to women's liberation. The first official book by the band is called *Spice Girls: Girl Power* and the 'preface' ends with a slogan familiar to many feminists 'And remember. The future is female!' The centre pages contain an intriguing representation of this 'Girl Power'. There's a prominently displayed caption:

Feminism has become a dirty word. Girl power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse. Women can be so powerful when they show solidarity.



This is adjacent to a large photo of the band members lying on an unkempt bed, arms wrapped around each other, heavily made up, eyes closed. This is sexy female power, but although it gives an impression of grown-up sexuality, it can just as easily be read as a pyjama party where girls play at being adult women.

Alongside this are comments from the band members on Girl Power. Critics such as Vivienne Westwood who condemned the group as 'animals... who have been dragged up' might be surprised as some of the sensible ideas passed down from the band as Girl Power:

Geri: If the kids in the playground are trying to persuade you to smoke or take drugs or steal, and you really don't agree, make an excuse and leave.

Victoria: When I was at school it was considered a bit tweeby to join a club or get involved in a

Tell mum what you want,
what you really really
want



volunteer project, but it's actually very cool. And it'll get you a lot further than hanging around smoking.

Emma: It's very hard not to give in to pressure, but you should always think something through before you do it... Ask yourself what could go wrong and whether you could hurt yourself or other people — then decide if it's worth doing.

These kind of endorsements of 'Girl Power' by the band are reflected many times over in their other publications. But what did our interviewees make of the concept?

Some girls, particularly those at the older end of our sample — had definite opinions about Girl Power. 'Have you got Girl Power' we asked a group of lively eight year olds. 'Deffo' came the reply. 'And what is it?' This was Jenny's response:

It's doing what us girls do and sticking up for yourselves and not doing what boys think.

We think this is a brilliant definition of girls' feminism, combining collective female consciousness, agency, and a defiance of sexism. It is both pragmatic and idealistic, and elicited a good response from the other girls in her group.

But many of the younger girls were less sure about Girl Power. When we brought up the subject some groups responded with silence, or mumbles. We don't think this response should automatically be used to uphold ideas of Girl Power as meaningless. Our interviewees had all — without exception — been affected by the Spice Girls in varying ways. But if we — as adult, feminist academics — can't explain their power, we can hardly expect the girls to find the 'right' words on cue. Some of the silences were particularly telling. One group suggested that the Spices had Girl Power because they were doing what they wanted and were in charge of their lives. Then a quiet girl spoke:

SUE: But they haven't really got Girl Power, have they?

US: That's interesting? Why do you say that?

SUE: (long pause) because...

US: (encouraging noises)

SUE: they... it's not that simple... they do have power... but...

And that was all she was able to say. We both felt for Sue, trying to articulate the complexities of female life. Given that Girl Power isn't, we argue, a lucid philosophy, it is perhaps best expressed obliquely. For instance, here it is as a kind of female magic:

JENNY: People in class 3 go up on the top of the field and we like play where we've got Spice

Power... we touch each other on the head and then we pass it round.

After such a ritual the girls would return to the playground, empowered, in some way, by their act.

But there was also a more aggressive side to Girl Power — these are some typical comments:

MANDY: I think it (girl power) means... er... that it like kicks something

JANE: I've got it cos I can kick people really hard

ZOE: Well, it's like kicking the men cos they (the band) don't like men and boys

RACHEL: I don't like boys either... they're ugly and they push you about

US: And what do you do when they push you about?

RACHEL: I don't do anything

US: What would you do if you had Girl Power?

RACHEL: Kick them (laughs)

We tried to take this further. Why *kicking*? It soon became obvious: Melanie Chisholm, the favourite Spice, is famous for her karate kicks and her backflips. Although when we had asked the girls why they liked their particular favourite Spice the major stated factor had been image, when approaching this question in a more oblique way other factors arose.

US: What would you do if you had Girl Power?

TAMMY: Do backward flips

YVONNE: You could put your hands on the floor and get your legs over your head

TAMMY: You could do lots of things with your body that I can't do now

or

US: What would you do if you had Girl Power?

GERRY: Karate! Cos when I'm with Sandy and I play with her cos she's my cousin and we have lots of fun doing karate... it's powerful...

US: Is Sporty powerful?

GERRY: Yes!

US: So is Girl Power about being physical?

GERRY: Yes. Well, it's about that and other things...

US: What sort of other things?

GERRY: (silence) don't know...

Other manifestations are more bizarre from an adult perspective:

ALICE: Well with me and Jane, and Mandy well we've got girl power cos we can always act as ponies and stuff like that

JANE: boys can't do it

ALICE: and boys can't do it!

While 'acting as ponies' is a fairly common girls activity in parts of English culture, it was clear that ideas of 'Girl Power' had enabled our interviewees to value their play, and not to gauge it against boys pursuits. They, in fact, could use the currency of Girl Power to develop ideas of femaleness without constant reference to male norms. There is a long history of girls popular culture (school stories, Bunty Magazine and the like) in UK society and it seems to us that these new domains of separatism and empowerment can be viewed in this light. Could the Spice Girls be a nineties version of 'The Four Marys'?

A kick up the arse

So, how can we conclude? The Spice Girls, we suggest, can be a positive and valuable influence on young girls. We have presented a deliberately upbeat article about the Spices and their fans — we want to shake up feminist cynicism and antagonism to the band and to female fandom in general. We also want to encourage other closet feminist Spice Girl fans to be more open and perhaps analytical about their pleasure. Sure, the Spice Girls are no-one's 'ideal' feminist group — but what would that be? We are glad that the group exist, putting a version of feminism on the popular agenda, and confident enough to take risks, to be flirty, feminine, and (arguably) feminist. Sure, we might wish that the band would take minimal wages, and give the rest to feminist organisations. There might be more 'right on' bands — the Riot Grrl movement, for instance, was an earlier less commercial and more politically aware young feminist pop music movement. What is so important about the Spice Girls is their mass popularity. They have, somehow, captured the mood of many girls and young women. If this doesn't fit older feminists' theories, then maybe it is time for feminism to have 'a kick up the arse' We'd like to end by reminding readers of Jenny's definition of Girl Power:

It's doing what you girls do, and sticking up for yourselves, and not doing what boys think.

We wish we'd had that kind of philosophy when we were eight years old! □



Reference

A version of Sue Wise's article was first published as long ago as 1984 in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7(1): 13-17, but we both read the piece in Liz Stanley, ed., *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Footnotes

¹ Emma came later to the group, replacing Michelle Stephenson who left after a few weeks (before the band's first single record). We wonder what story is left untold here, about the young woman who wasn't 'a spice girl'.

² Melanie Brown appeared on the BBC2 show *Black Britain* on 5 November, 1997 and spoke movingly of growing up in Leeds as the child of a white English mother and a black Caribbean father: 'A lot of black girls used to hate me, but then I'd get a lot of white girls not liking me. I'd get it from both ends.'

³ Many thanks to Heather Walsh, a teenage Spice fan, who was extremely useful in helping us come up with valuable yet simple key questions to ask the younger girls.

⁴ Though the term was earlier coined by the band Shampoo in their 1995 song of the same name — many thanks to Louise Livesey for pointing this out to us.

DETECT AND SURVIVE

At first glance, Denise Mina's novel Garnethill follows a classic detective story formula: an ordinary woman, Maureen O'Donnell, wakes up with a hangover one morning to find, in her living room, the murdered body of the boyfriend she was just about to finish with. Viewed by the police as an obvious suspect, Maureen must turn detective and find out who really killed him.

But this detective has a particular history, unusual in fiction if not in fact: she's a survivor of sexual abuse by her father, and of the mental health system to which the effects of his abuse consigned her. Most members of her family regard her as still 'mental' and deny that the abuse ever happened. It is Maureen's understanding that sexual abuse is real which leads her to the truth, and inspires her to fight back.

Garnethill — the title refers to a district in central Glasgow — is Denise Mina's first full-length novel, written while she was also doing research for her PhD on women, mental illness and the justice system. The book got a good reception from the critics and its first hardback edition quickly sold out; it has been serialised on radio and optioned for TV. Here Denise talks to Debbie Cameron about combining popular fiction with feminist politics.

Debbie Cameron: Tell me how *Garnethill* came to be written.

Denise Mina: I was interested in writing anyway, I'd written comedy before — really bad comedy and none of it had been bought...before that I was writing for the BBC and doing stuff on radio. But when I started writing the book, what I wanted to do was use detective fiction, a kind of narrative that's really easy to read and very engaging, to present a different kind of narrative, a narrative about very disempowered people becoming empowered.

Debbie: A different kind of narrative from what?

Denise: I'd been reading Patricia Cornwell [American author of a detective series featuring forensic pathologist Kay Scarpetta]. She's got a really popular, big-selling thing with a major lesbian character, Scarpetta's niece Lucy, and that's fine, her sexuality is not an issue at all; but at the same time she keeps talking about these criminals as evil...

Debbie: yes, her attitude to law and order's pretty right wing...

Denise: she's unbelievably right wing. So you've got millions of people all over the world reading it and saying 'oh well they must be evil then, because she knows so much about science'.

Debbie: So did you want to use the popular form of detective fiction to make political points, take a more social view of crime?

Denise: Yes. Maybe I'm just obsessed with politics, but otherwise I think it's just self-aggrandisement, and there's not much point in that. When you think about books like, you know, Jeffrey Archer's: there's absolutely no point to them, but nothing doesn't have an angle. There's no such thing as not having an angle. And I think it's good to be very aware and use that, as a medium for getting these ideas into people's heads.

Debbie: What sort of ideas did you want to get across in *Garnethill*?

Denise: You know, the idea that someone apparently with a mental illness can still have a point of view, can be interested in politics or current affairs, they're not just passive, agentless people that things happen to —

Debbie: — and you don't need to have a PhD to be a detective —

Denise: Exactly! In everyday life people are always having to work out what's going on.

Debbie: If you read a lot of detective fiction, not just feminist but mainstream stuff as well, there's more and more examples where the story turns on sexual abuse, but you often feel it's a perfunctory gesture, exploitative even; it's there because it's supposedly 'topical' and also because it's an easy way to solicit moral outrage — put in a bunch of so called 'paedophiles' — or drug dealers, they're another easy target. But what I felt about *Garnethill*, you're not using the issue of abuse in that way, it's far more integral. For instance it's important not only in the mystery part of the story but also in the part about Maureen's relationship with her family, who are basically denying her experience of abuse. You don't treat that as just a subplot. So there are two stories, one of them is the formulaic detective story but the other one isn't...

Denise: Well you know I'm very interested in False Memory Syndrome? I wanted to use the effects of FMS on the ground and get that into the story as well, because it's going to be hugely damaging to a lot of women. Also, the idea that people who abuse are external, they're not part of families and no-one knows these people, they're always loners and that kind of thing, I wanted to deal with that as well by having the two storylines. Because it is familiar, it is people

we know, and it is integrated into people's life stories.

Debbie: Another unusual thing is that your main character is a survivor. You don't find many survivors in most detective stories which touch on sexual abuse. You get traumatised victims and the heroic men and women who rescue them, but you don't get characters who were abused in the past and who've dealt with it in various ways —

Denise: There was a film recently, I read the script, and this woman had been sexually abused, she had been raped, and she was saved by a man. The abuse story is always that the woman is saved by finding a better man, it's not that she doesn't need a man, it's that she had the wrong man. That's always the bottom line in these stories, that the wrong man got her.

I was reading a book called *More than Victims* — it's about how battered women's syndrome has developed in the US, how women have to be presented as utter victims, because the courts won't hear anything else. So it doesn't work for Black women, who tend not to be total victims, who tend to have external networks of support, or not necessarily to live with the bastard — and these women cope, they're not victims, they're survivors. Agencies dealing with domestic violence are saying, these are extraordinary people who survive terrible circumstances, and they should not have to be presented as terribly damaged to get justice.

Debbie: This overlaps with what you do in your academic research, doesn't it? You're interested in the way women get medicalised or pathologised...

Denise: My research is really about the ascription of mental illness to female offenders — the way the labelling process works for women as opposed to men. They're part of different social worlds, they're being labelled with completely different things because of different circumstances, and so they're processed by the justice system in completely different ways.

One of the things I became interested in is the way people's agency is completely ripped away from them by attaching a medical label. Most people have some experience of maybe mild depression, or the grieving process: making that process technical by giving it a medical label takes away from how social it is, you know, the fact that almost everybody experiences this and

Garnethill is published by Bantam Books, and the paperback edition is due to appear in early 1999.

people help one another through these things. I was interested in creating a character who's very autonomous —

Debbie: *Maureen, the survivor of abuse who has been through the mental health system —*

Denise: Yes. Also the fact that she's got pals, because in detective stories they don't usually have pals!

Debbie: *'Down these mean streets a man must walk alone...'*

Denise: Alone, exactly! Quite often what you get now — with some exceptions — are female detectives who are men, really. They don't have the things which are recognisably female, like the fact that lots of women connect with lots of other women and form networks of support: you just don't recognise that in detective stories. But I don't think you have to make your central character a loner for a sense of isolation and alienation to be there. I think most women are very alienated and do often feel quite isolated anyway, even though they have those networks. It's not about not having pals. It's about being a member of an underclass.

Debbie: *I think you do get women friends in feminist detective fiction, but sometimes they're very implausible. I'm thinking of Val McDermid's heterosexual detective Kate Brannigan, who has, you know, a lesbian friend, a Black friend...it seems like a way of bringing those women's experiences into the story which is totally artificial.*

Denise: It's like the United Nations! You know the character Benny in *Garnethill*? Before he became a bad guy he was going to be gay, but then I thought no, that's falling into the trap, that Brookside horror —

Debbie: *But you went to some trouble to have likeable male characters, didn't you?*

Denise: Yeah, you could tell that, could you?

Debbie: *Especially with the character Liam, Maureen's brother — a likeable drug dealer!*

Denise: It's all women that have said to me, I thought it was nice that you had some nice men.

Debbie: *I didn't say I thought it was nice, I just said I thought —*

Denise: That I'd made an effort! I think what women really want to read is stories where all the women are good and all the men are bad, because we've read so many stories where all the

men are good and all the women are bad. But somehow that's not a legitimate desire, you know?

Debbie: *I'll stay agnostic about the men, but one thing I did like was that not all the survivors, the abused women, are supposed to be likeable: one of them, Siobhain —*

Denise: — is a pain in the arse, really.

Debbie: *Suffering doesn't ennoble you?*

Denise: Exactly. If you've been involved in voluntary work or whatever, or in your community, you picture someone and you assume they're always going to stay in that position. And it's really good for people who are being pitied or looked down on to be obnoxious: they *should* be obnoxious! It's not a real connection between people, to pity someone and look after them and expect them always to stay passive. In friendships you have to be equal, you can't be submissive and stay submissive. Siobhain's going to be in the next two books as well; she becomes a sort of family member. Just because she's not been well doesn't mean she has to be receptive to everything everybody gives her all the time.

Debbie: *So you're writing two more books and they're related to the first one?*

Denise: In the next two books the family theme follows all the way through, because Maureen's father has come back to Glasgow. So in the next book Maureen has to go away, leave Glasgow, and in the book after that she comes back and faces up to the family. Her sister gets pregnant in the second book and has a baby and she feels she can't leave her father there with the baby, she's got to come back and deal with it. But there's a mystery in the second one and the third one as well.

Debbie: *So generically they're crime fiction?*

Denise: Yes they are, but there's only three of them, I only want to do three. Otherwise you get into Miss Marple country, with people dropping dead all around her all the time, yet no one's suspicious...

Debbie: *Garnethill's going to be adapted for television.*

Denise: Yes, it's been optioned, but it's a long series of events. What happens is you have to get it developed first, then it goes into production, and it can take anything from two years to 20

years or not happen at all, there are lots of fences it can fall at. But so far it's going really well, we've got a good production company.

Debbie: *Are you worried about transferring it to another medium? Are you involved in adapting it yourself?*

Denise: I'm writing the script. When I met them before they optioned it, I wasn't too sure about it: I thought, if it goes to TV it's going to be really schmaltzy shite, even the casting could alter the balance of the thing dramatically. But they're very keen to keep all the family narrative, and keep the character quite — I think she can be quite unsympathetic in lots of ways, and I want to keep that, because I don't think you get realistic characterisation when somebody's right all the time, and never annoying or just cheeky to somebody. So I was a wee bit worried about it...but they're very keen to keep it true to the book, that was part of the deal. We'll see, anyway.

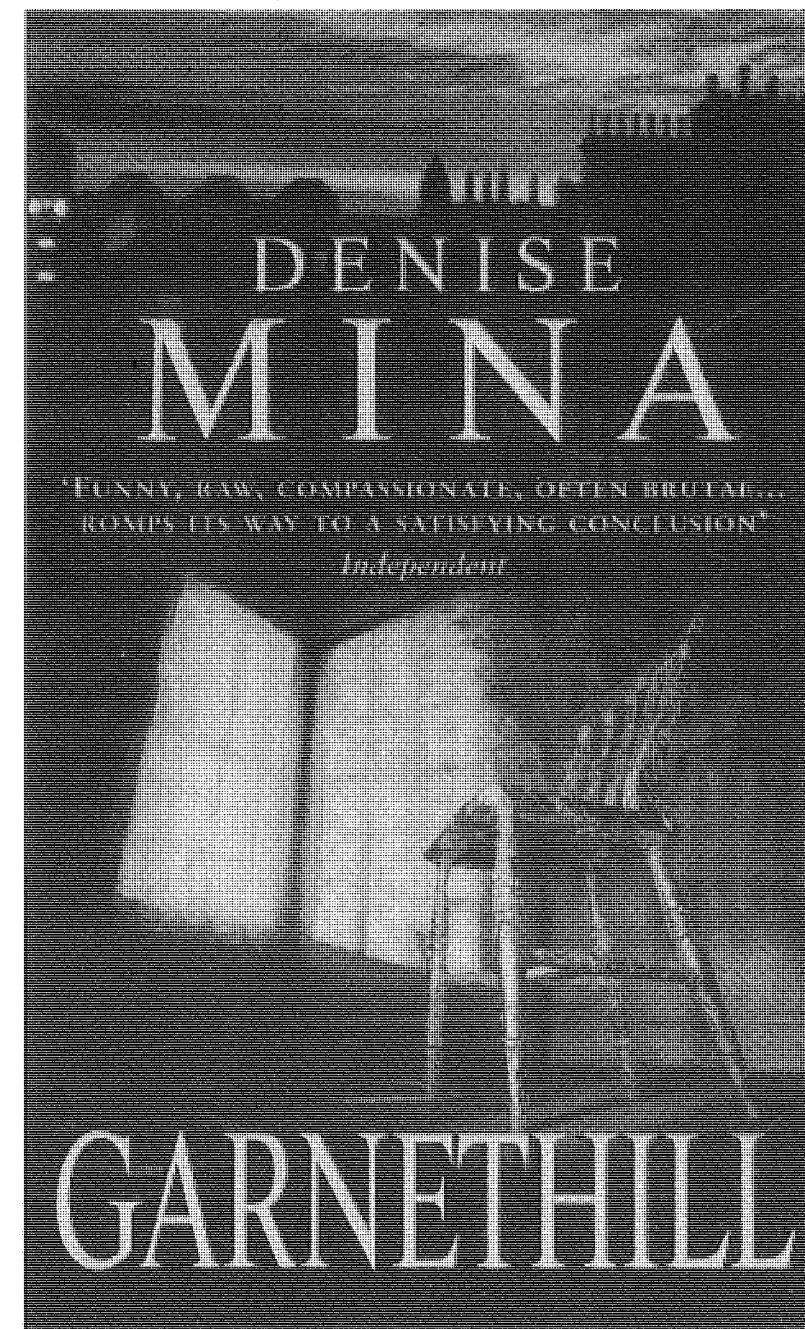
Debbie: *Another theme that runs through the book concerns a sexual abuse scandal in a psychiatric hospital. As well as criticising the way women get pathologised, you're critical of the mental health system as corrupt and abusive itself.*

Denise: I think that is a big, big issue. As long as we say that people we label mentally ill are less autonomous than other people, they don't have the right to be obnoxious and they don't have the right to disagree, as long as mentally ill people are treated as less human than the rest of us, as having fewer civil rights than the rest of us, things like that — rapes of mentally ill people — are inevitably going to happen. I think we need to find more constructive ways of dealing with people who are mentally ill, rather than treating them as childlike or as people with no autonomy. There are other models we could build on. It doesn't have to be a deficit model. They can be different without being 'us but less'. As long as they're us but less, then they're very very vulnerable to abuse.

Debbie: *Have you worked in the mental health system?*

Denise: When I left school I worked for four years with psychogeriatrics in nursing homes, as an auxiliary nurse. I really liked it actually, it was really good. But there was a case of abuse in one of the homes I was working in. And it was never investigated because the patient was senile. That

was a female nurse, and she just got sacked. There was another place, that we tried to have closed down because they were mistreating patients quite badly, locking them in their rooms at night. The case fell because we weren't good witnesses: we'd both been sacked, for complaining about the fact that they were locking patients in their rooms. That home's still operating. And



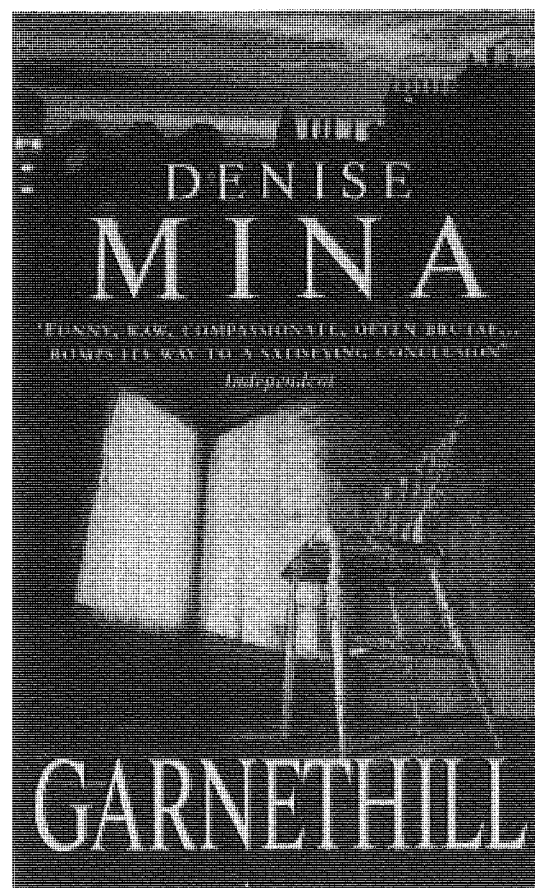
they were drugging them up so these old ladies could hardly get up to go to the toilet by themselves.

Debbie: *Later on you went to university and got a law degree, didn't you? Did you ever practise law?*

Denise: No I didn't. I was doing the diploma you have to do before you can go into practice, and in this tutorial we were talking about corporate loyalty and we had a big debate about corporate loyalty: everybody said you should be loyal to the corporation, and I just thought, I'm going to die if I stay with these people. I went off and got a job as a barmaid, dropped out; I just thought, this is a wank, I'm not doing this for the rest of my fucking life.

Debbie: *So why did you decide to go back and do research?*

Denise: I was interested in the subject; but also, with a law degree — not so much now but certainly at that time — you just learned things



by rote. I went to university looking for an education and I felt like I'd left without one. I'd just started learning how to question things, and I wanted to carry that on.

Debbie: *Do you think that questioning things in the way you're doing now, by writing popular fiction, can make a political difference in reality?*

Denise: I think it definitely can. You know, literature is full of instances where books have presented things and that becomes a narrative norm, and it leads to a change in public opinion. I think that in the grand scheme of things, one book won't do it, but a TV show might do something. Even having a narrative about False Memory on TV showing FMS in a negative light and showing how it can be an excuse to deny women's experiences — that could have such a big effect on the culture generally, just giving that idea currency. It's worth doing it just for that.

Debbie: *So if the aim was to give feminist ideas more currency, did you make a strategic decision to publish with a mainstream publisher rather than a feminist press?*

Denise: Yes. My agent is also Andrea Dworkin's agent, and we were talking about polemics, and she said this is the best thing to do, if you really want to make a statement. I can make all these points in my thesis, but who's going to read that? Not many people: it's going to be me and my pals and other empowered articulate women who have career structures and supportive networks around them.

Bantam was the first publisher we went to, and they've got a committee of men and women, and it got knocked back because the men didn't like it. But the women liked it, and what they did was they re-formed, regrouped and took it back to the editorial meeting. These women, they're really feisty, one of them phoned me up and said: 'it was the men against the women, and the women won this time, darling'. □

THE IDEA OF PATRIARCHY

A new book by Sheila Jeffreys, The Idea of Prostitution, poses the fundamental question: what makes it possible for men to conceive of buying women for sex? Liz Kelly found it a thought-provoking read.

Prostitution has always been an issue about which feminists have disagreed, and Sheila Jeffreys's new book *The Idea of Prostitution* will undoubtedly spark further debate. Both in tone and content this is a more measured approach from a woman who has tended to evoke strong responses — both pro and con. But I suspect that many of the women who have chosen to locate themselves in opposition to Sheila will not notice this. Who women are — and are perceived to be — is all too often more important than what they actually say. This 'you can't win' attitude has limited the possibility of respectful dialogue within feminism. I often wonder these days if there is any possibility of remembering that our

original goal of women's liberation is far from gained, and that there are strong points of connection, as well as disagreement, between us.

Don't misunderstand me, Sheila Jeffreys is uncompromising in locating prostitution as a form of violence against women, but she explores alternative viewpoints with thoughtfulness and precision, and her biting wit makes only the occasional (welcome) appearance.

The title provides the core theme of the book, what makes the idea — and therefore the practice — of prostitution possible. It is not 'the oldest profession' (what a misnomer that has always been), not a reality that has, and therefore will, always be with us.

Sheila Jeffreys *The Idea of Prostitution* (Spinifex, 1998)

'An "idea of prostitution" needs to exist in the heads of individual men to enable them to conceive of buying women for sex.'

An 'idea of prostitution' needs to exist in the heads of individual men to enable them to conceive of buying women for sex. (p3)

The explanation offered for the origins of prostitution draws on Gerda Lerner's much under-rated book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, in which she suggests that prostitution follows the development of slave-holding. Slave owners began renting out 'surplus' women for sex, and both harems and brothels stem from the large numbers of captive women available to successful rulers and chiefs. I find this far more convincing than what Sheila Jeffreys terms the 'myth of origin' explanation — that prostitution's roots are in systems of sacred and temple offerings (of women and girls) to the gods and goddesses of ancient times. Many writers have used this interpretation of pre-history to bolster an argument that all that is wrong with prostitution is the stigma and low status which attaches to women and children involved in it; and that these things were different at one time. But were they? We know that the priests and religious leaders had sexual access to these women, but can we really be certain that they occupied positions of respect?

The language we use

As with all the best radical feminist analysis, the issue of what language we should use is a key theme. Following discussion with activists in the Philippines, the term 'prostituted woman' is recommended, as both a way of moving away from suggestions that prostitution could be some kind of core identity, and to make explicit that this is something which is done to women. Customers are called 'johns', since this is a term invented by women to describe customers

and is nicely contemptuous. It implies that the men who use women in prostitution are generic males, indistinguishable from one another. (p3)

Whilst 'john' has a wide reach in English speaking cultures, I'd like to know if it has become a universal term, or whether women who speak languages other than English have similarly sardonic collective terms for male customers.

The terms 'sex work' and 'sex worker' are rejected, through a complex argument which is summarised later. But 'the sex industry' and 'sexual exploitation' are both used, and considerable stress is placed on the global industrialisation of its now myriad forms.

Perhaps the most controversial discussion of language is the proposal that we limit the reach

of 'sexual violence' to that which 'refers to, is experienced as, or affects the sexuality of, either the man who is abusing or the woman who is abused'. As I understand it the intention here is to distinguish between violence that could come within the frame of 'hate crime' to oppressed groups, and that which is specifically sexual, and therefore particular to women's oppression. I think I would use 'gender violence' for former category. But even so I am not sure the distinction is so easy to draw. How can we know when particular abusive acts affect the sexuality of men or women?

One of the most interesting questions is one I have been thinking about for several years now — whether we too readily abandoned the word 'victim'. The logic of Sheila Jeffreys's argument here bothers me slightly, since she suggests that it is through the adoption of the term 'survivor' that room has been created for the accusation of 'victimhood feminism'. It seems to me rather the reverse — that those who make this accusation have no contact with the literature or services which use the word survivor. Despite this, however, I too am drawn to rehabilitating the word *victim* for a limited range of meanings; naming what has been done to women and children. Toby Summer, who was herself abused in prostitution, comments that the hardest thing for women in the sex industry to do is confront the extent to which they have been hurt: 'One cannot be hurt and not be a victim to the perpetrator' (p150).

Here we go again

One of the most consistent elements in Sheila Jeffreys's work is her reflections on the history of sexual politics in nineteenth and twentieth century western ideas. The first two chapters outline the ways prostitution was an issue for second wave feminists, and the approach of sexologists to the sex industry.

She reminds us of a lengthy, passionate and successful campaign by feminists against prostitution and trafficking in the first half of this century. Even though the language in which these activists spoke is not easy to reconcile with the sophistication we are used to at the end of the century, they were clear that the basic problem lay in male demand.

Then, as now, one of the key divides between women was whether they focused on 'forced' prostitution or all prostitution. The emphasis in international lobbying and policy at

the turn of the century was on forced prostitution, trafficking, through the revealingly named 'white slave traffic'. The League of Nations conducted two investigations into trafficking, but did not use force in their definition. They discovered large numbers of European women were trafficked into Central and South America and to parts of North Africa. Many of the women knew the purpose of their journey but, in their view, this still counted as trafficking since they were recruited. The presence of brothels in the receiving countries was understood to enable and fuel the trade in women. The second study was focused on the 'east', and had to negotiate complex questions of tradition and custom such as child marriage and the *devadasi* system (so called 'temple prostitution') in India. The findings of this enquiry concentrated on the traffic between Asian countries and movement of women from Russia into parts of China. It was only the feminists (again then as now) who were prepared to question cultural traditions.

Two international conventions were signed in 1902 and 1910, before attention shifted to war. A third convention was passed in 1921 which attempted to introduce a range of protections for women and girls who might be trafficked through employment agencies, and migration. The 1933 fourth convention covered trafficking even where there was apparent consent, but only where this involved prostitution 'in another country'.

Sheila Jeffreys argues convincingly that many of the feminists lobbying around international law were, in fact, abolitionists. The progressively more radical conventions were strategic stages in building international awareness and opposition to all prostitution. Their ultimate goal was a fifth convention which would outlaw organising and facilitating prostitution. The second world war intervened, but a version was passed in 1949; this convention, however, never attained the number of signatories which previous ones had (only 67, and countries known for supporting conventions on women's rights — such as Australia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK have not signed).

Some of the activist feminists of this period had sophisticated understandings of the ways in which opposition to prostitution could translate into policies which punished women, through for example repatriation of trafficked women. Some were also convinced that efforts should not be put into 'rehabilitation' but rather prevention,

and a 1943 report from the League of Nations argued strongly for a targeting of male demand. This is not the only story of feminist action Sheila Jeffreys presents, however, and she charts the failure of the focus by some groups on equal moral standards, the ways in which this position conflated the behaviour of men and women, and ended up taking issue with 'promiscuity'.

Sexology to the rescue

At the end of the 1940s, strong international conventions led some countries to take action, such as closing licensed brothels. The rehabilitation of prostitution in terms of public discourse, according to Sheila Jeffreys, came through sexology. All the founding fathers of sexology saw prostitution as not only a legitimate 'sexual outlet', but also as an important resource in understanding 'good sex'. It is here that we find the specious argument rehearsed that men's access to prostitution is a 'safety valve', which reduces rape and sexual assault; conveniently ignoring the extent to which prostituted women are raped by customers and pimps alike, not to mention differentially targeted by misogynist sex murderers.

The content of Alex Comfort's *Joy of Sex* is especially revealing, since here prostituted women are defined as 'professionals' — women who know how to give men what they want. The next logical step in this manual for heterosexual-ity is to encourage all women to behave more like 'happy hookers'. Sheila Jeffreys asks the pertinent question whether it is this 'idea' about prostitution which lies at the heart of sex therapy. The critical difference being that rather than pay a woman to enable men to have 'good sex', the woman 'surrogate' in sex therapy must be a volunteer (presumably in part because the payment in this transaction goes to the sex therapists). Comfort notes revealingly in *More Joy of Sex* that volunteers are preferable because 'Hookers are clued, experienced and sometimes turned on, but the scene is wrong, and a lot of them, by motivation and by experience, are basically hostile to the opposite sex!' (quoted p45-6) The development of the sex industry since has merely deepened this 'idea'; that the kind of disengaged, performative sex which men seek in prostitution, is the model for 'good sex'. And some feminists and lesbians have bought into this, defining freedom as behaving in the ways that men have done.

Sheila Jeffreys argues convincingly that many of the feminists lobbying around international law were, in fact, abolitionists.

Customers are called 'johns', since this is a term invented by women to describe customers 'and is nicely contemptuous. It implies that the men who use women in prostitution are generic males, indistinguishable from one another.'

Challenging stigma

The beginnings of the prostitutes' rights movement in the mid 1970s follows both the 'sexual revolution' and the Women's Liberation Movement. At the outset feminist groups did not defend prostitution, other than as an economic necessity; rather what they addressed were the ways prostituted women were subjected to unjust laws and corrupt police, and stigmatised more widely, including by feminists. These were powerful arguments and struck a chord with many activists. But there was a fly in the ointment for some of us — since we saw prostitution as a patriarchal institution.

Sheila Jeffreys charts the development of the prostitutes' rights movement over the last three decades, and notes the points at which their agenda and a radical feminist analysis came into tension. The most recent development is the emergence of groups working on prostitution, staffed by ex-prostituted women, who work from a radical feminist perspective. The most vocal and organised are WHISPER (see *T&S* 26) and SAGE in the USA, but there is now at least one similar group — EXIT — in the UK.

From work to choice and identity

The notion that prostitution should be understood as a kind of work like any other emerged in the 1970s, but gathered speed in the 1980s. Relocating prostitution from vice/crime into employment, would according to this logic remove the stigma, and enable the development of safer working conditions. Sheila Jeffreys is willing to concede that prostitution is a kind of work, but not that it should not be legitimised, nor that it is just one of a range of forms of paid employment. The chapter on this topic takes us through a number of themes: what kind of work is prostitution; does it involve dignity; what kind of contract is involved; are there links with slavery; how the specific embodied nature of prostitution makes it different to other kinds of paid work.

It is hard to imagine another form of work that is similar, in which the sign of a social group's inferior status is the centre and meaning of the 'work'.... in which workers are required to receive the contempt appropriate to an inferior position in the political hierarchy to the extent of possible brutal death. (p195)

This is not to say that prostitution does not require particular kinds of skills, but in the vast majority of sexual encounters for money men are not interested in 'social skills'. The skills women

need, and develop, are survival skills, and they are markedly different from those needed in most employment. Julia O'Connell Davidson's ethnographic study of one prostituted woman is referred to in this chapter, and the author's profound challenge to social theory, in terms of how prostitution can be understood, quoted; in prostitution a woman becomes 'a person who is not a person, a slave who is not a slave and a wage worker who is not a wage worker' (quoted p183).

The argument that prostitution is a rational choice has developed more recently. Choice here seems to be understood as something which occurs in the present moment, or immediate past, rather than in the context of life history and the wider reality of women's inequality. Sheila Jeffreys opts for the term 'decision' to recognise the fact that some women do have room to act (p155), but notes that this does not imply, or presume that there were positive and viable alternatives to their action.

When thinking about 'choice' we need to ask how many women would choose the sex industry in preference to being a lawyer or doctor? And how many of us involved in raising children would view prostitution as an equivalent option to other forms of paid employment?

In the 1990's a further twist has been added; prostitution is now defined as a form of sexual practice, and even a 'sexual orientation', especially within 'queer theory'. The fact that this is not reflected in women's accounts of how they understand, and manage, prostitution, has not prevented countless academics including prostitution in their lists of sexual variations. But as Sheila Jeffreys points out, the fact that money changes hands and that it has little if anything to do with how women understand their sexual lives, undermines such careless connotations.

The word 'agency' has become as irritating to me in the late 1990s as 'desire' was in the late 1980s, Sheila Jeffreys sums up the problem succinctly, as '... a concern to discover women's agency even in the most apparently unlikely situations' (p128). She is at pains to point out that women are not passive victims without the ability to act; that feminism exists is testimony to this. But at the same time there exists an 'array of forces which exact conformity' (p160) and that women's decision making is often '...an anguished agency much constrained by circumstance' (p156). Considerable use is made in this discussion of Carole Pateman's detailed and

subtle critique of the notions of choice and consent within liberal democratic theory. What I was left thinking at this point is why do so many post-modern feminists see agency and choice more powerfully in women's adaptation to their oppression than in the history and continuity of feminist resistance to oppression? By what feat of upside down logic is it possible to accuse those of us who have chosen to be activists, who use our 'agency' to challenge men's behaviour, of constructing women as victims?

Prostitution as male sexual violence

In this chapter Sheila makes the point powerfully that prostitution should be included on the continuum of violence against women, and rightly takes me to task for not doing so in *Surviving Sexual Violence*. She notes the particular difficulties of naming prostitution as violence against women, since unlike other forms it has not been hidden, ignored and minimised but rather defined as something different. This makes it especially troublesome for women to name their own experience, since the payment of money in some way justifies, and legitimises, the behaviour. Thus, unlike other forms of violence against women, there is little public discourse which encourages or enables women to find different meanings for their experiences.

This argument leads in interesting directions, since there are two levels of violence to be accounted for here; that within the practice of prostitution itself which is defined as 'commercialised sexual violence', and the events which women themselves define as violence — the rapes and physical assaults, which Sheila Jeffreys calls 'unpaid violence'. But even here, as Patricia Holmes's and Val King's piece in this issue illustrates, the abuse women can name is talked about as banal and routine; the multiple victimisations which women in prostitution report are terrifying in their extensiveness.

A number of parallels are drawn here. The temporary ownership which men buy in prostitution is compared with the longer term ownership of marriage, both of which have served to legitimise abuse. And in terms of sexual harassment at work, what women have fought to make unacceptable in most employment — being seen and treated as a sex object — is the basis of the sex industry.

The job of stripping is precisely that of being a sex object so that men can ejaculate. To distinguish between what parts of the job are

sexual harassment that is paid for and therefore not harassment, and what parts are unacceptable and outside the job description, requires a belief that there can be a real difference. (p265)

An important point in this section of the book is that the increasing sexualisation of women and culture more broadly, through the growth of the sex industry, undermines attempts by women to desexualise other areas of employment.

An increasing research literature, and the experience of feminist support projects, documents the consequences of prostitution for women, and the coping strategies women use to 'manage' their work. That these echo those of survivors of other forms of sexual violence, supports the contention that there are harms 'intrinsic to prostitution'. The descriptions later in the book of the extent of trafficking in, from and to developing countries, and the conditions in which millions of women are prostituted makes the harms on a global scale evident.

Different for boys?

A powerful section of the book is where Sheila Jeffreys pays careful attention to homosexual prostitution, and the argument that both this and gay porn ought to be treated differently. At first I thought she was going to argue that gender relations meant that 'it was different for boys'. But rather than take this easy route, she has found research on, and accounts by, boys and young men which have potent connections with those of girls and women. Whilst recognising that these perspectives are still marginal in the literature she notes:

Critical research into the experience of prostituted men and boys from a feminist anti-violence perspective will provide the basis of a radical challenge to gay male sexual exploitation in theory and in practice. Such research will explore the experience of the young, the poor, the racially oppressed, the sexually abused, who are used and damaged through the exercise of the privileges of bourgeois gay male customers, and provide fuel for a politics of resistance. (p127)

I am heartily sick of the ways in which gay men invoke a form of 'special pleading', and deeply disappointed in the ways many feminists and left/liberals collude with them. The fact that one has been oppressed does not confer rights to behave badly, or justify behaviour which is deemed problematic for other groups. One legacy of this muddled thinking is the way in which everyone in the sexual abuse field falls over themselves to state that most sexual abusers are

The word 'agency' has become as irritating to me in the late 1990s as 'desire' was in the late 1980s

What women have fought to make unacceptable in most employment — being seen and treated as a sex object — is the basis of the sex industry.

The fact that one has been oppressed does not confer rights to behave badly

The development of the sex industry since has merely deepened this 'idea'; that the kind of disengaged, performative sex which men seek in prostitution, is the model for 'good sex'.

The skills women need, and develop, are survival skills, and they are markedly different from those needed in most employment.

not gay. In some instances this is a confusion about 'paedophilia', but in others it is a dangerous form of 'political correctness', since the consequence is a refusal to recognise that some gay men do indeed abuse children. This has had tragic consequences for large numbers of children, since people chose not to blow the whistle on abusive men, because the response might be seen as homophobic.

The language of human rights

Whilst recognising the limitations of 'rights' as a framework, Sheila Jeffreys also credits how activists have used it in a strategic way; to place women's concerns on the international agenda as mainstream, rather than marginal issues. In the process the notion of human rights has been extended from a focus on the public sphere and the state to encompass the private. The thinking and advocacy which has taken place in order to get violence against women recognised as a human rights violations has — as with most feminist activism — challenged the foundations of how human rights are understood, requiring a re-definition of the foundational terms such as 'dignity', 'respect' and 'integrity'.

International argument is currently focused on the right of women to prostitute through making distinctions between forced and free prostitution, between trafficking and prostitution. But would there be such extensive trafficking in women if prostitution did not exist? The forced/free distinction ends up legitimising the 'choice' many women in impoverished countries make; to acquiesce to being sold in order to be able to send money to their starving rural families. As in rape law the word 'force' sets up high levels of proof, which cannot accommodate the many and complex forms of coercion which make the notions of 'choice' and 'consent' so problematic in women's lives.

A new convention has been developed by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (see Donna Hughes in this issue) based on a radical feminist analysis. It approaches the issue from the standpoint of seeking to abolish men's abuse of women in prostitution, whilst at the same time

decriminalising abused women. Penalising the john has not been an element in previous conventions

What I still want to know

Whilst I appreciated the critical approach to the ways in which so called 'temple' prostitution has been discussed in terms of history, there are still important questions which need to be addressed today. How do we make sense of the traditions of 'sacred' prostitution, which continue to my knowledge in some Asian and African countries (and are now often referred to as 'fetish' or 'ritual' prostitution)? What are the connections between religion and prostitution? It is revealing here that most modern day cults have versions of 'sacred' prostitution, in that the male cult leader has sexual access to all the women, and in some cases to girls and children. Is the 'idea' of prostitution a keystone in the development of both historical and modern forms of patriarchy? We need more exploration of why, and how, cultures of legitimised prostitution emerge, and persist; and what the similarities and differences are between them and prostitution which is not legitimised.

I also want to know if there are more complex and effective ways we can connect the realities of the North and South, developed and developing countries — since the issues seem so clear in the latter and so muddled in the former. In countries where poverty is a reality for the majority of the population, and trafficking extensive, the notion of choice has so little currency that connections to women's collective subordination are stark and obvious. The structural, material inequalities which serve to entrap women and girls simply cannot be avoided. Whereas in the west we have become preoccupied with individuals, and a focus on women's 'agency'. But both structure and agency are at work in both contexts, and the agency we need to focus on is that of men the world over who believe in the idea of prostitution, who see nothing wrong in the notion that you can hire a woman or child's body for sexual use. □

References

- Liz Kelly *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Polity, 1988)
Gerda Lerner *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1987)
Carol Pateman *The Sexual Contract* (Polity Press, 1988)

men@exploitation.com

Given that the Internet is a global medium, it is hardly surprising that men are using it to sexually exploit women and children around the world. Here Donna Hughes of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women describes how pimps and johns use the 'information superhighway'.

The Internet has become the latest place for promoting the global trafficking and sexual exploitation of women. This global communication network is being used to promote and engage in the buying and selling of women and children. Agents offer catalogues of mail order brides, with girls as young as 13. Commercial sex tours are advertised. Men exchange information on where to find prostitutes and describe how they can be used. After their trips men write reports on how much they paid for women and children and write pornographic descriptions of what they did to those they bought. Video-conferencing is bringing live sex shows to the Internet.

Global sexual exploitation is on the rise. The profits are high and there are few effective barriers at the moment. Because there is little regulation of the Internet, the traffickers and

promoters of sexual exploitation have rapidly utilized the Internet for their purposes. *PC Computing* magazine urged entrepreneurs to visit pornography Web sites. 'It will show you the future of on-line commerce. Web pornographers are the most innovative entrepreneurs on the Internet'. The pornographers and other promoters of sexual exploitation are the Internet leaders in the developing privacy services and secure payment schemes.

Newsgroups and Web Sites for Men Who Buy Women and Children

The oldest forum on the Internet for promoting the sexual exploitation of women is the newsgroup alt.sex.services (renamed alt.sex.prostitution). Postings from this newsgroup are archived into a World Wide Web site called *The World Sex Guide*, which provides 'comprehensive, sex-

related information about every country in the world.'

The guide includes information and advice from men who have bought women and children. They tell others where and how to find and buy prostituted women and children in over ninety

The World Sex Guide

Where do you want to fuck today?

Web Site for Finding Women to Buy

countries from seven world regions (Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America).

I have a good knowledge of brothels in Brazil, due to my frequent journeys during the last 5 years. (Anonymous, Recife, 7 October 1995)

Having some experience with the scene in New Zealand I would like to offer the following advice. (Anonymous, Wellington, 30 Aug 1995)

Another of my 'catching up' reports on present knowledge of hot spots around the globe, this time from Bristol, England.
(an370191@anon.penet.fi, Bristol 15 Sept 1995)

Details of the men's reports of their sex tours and buying experiences include: information on where to go to find prostitutes, hotel prices, telephone numbers, taxi fares, cost of alcohol, the sex acts that can be bought, the price for each act, and evaluations of the women's appearances and performances. One man includes a rating scale on the likelihood of getting mugged in that neighborhood. The men go on to describe, often in graphic detail, their experiences of using women and children. The scope and detail of this exchange is completely unprecedented.

The women are completely objectified and evaluated on everything from skin colour to presence of scars and firmness of their flesh. Women's receptiveness and compliance to men buyers is also rated. The men buying women and posting the information see and perceive the events only from their self interested perspective. Their awareness of racism, colonization, global economic inequalities, and of course, sexism, is limited to how these forces benefit them. A country's economic or political crisis and the accompanying poverty are advantages, which produce cheap, readily available women for the men. Often men describe how desperate the women are and how little the men have to pay.

The postings also reveal that men are using the Internet as a source of information for selecting where to go and how to find women and children to buy in prostitution. Men describe taking a computer print out of hotels, bar addresses and phone numbers with them on their trips, or describe how they used the Internet search engines to locate sex tours.

This three day trip happened in June 1995. On the flight I read all the information I had printed out from *The World Sex Guide* — I had a lot of expectations of the City of Angels [Bangkok]. (Anonymous, Short Trip, date unknown)

There is extensive information on legal prostitution in Nevada, USA, including photographs of the brothel entrances and road signs leading to the brothels. One man calling himself Cybersuck provides a list of legal 'whorehouses' in Nevada with detailed driving instructions on how to get there.

This rapid publishing electronic medium has enabled men to pimp individual women. Now, men can go out at night, buy a woman, go home, and post the details on the newsgroup. By morning anyone in the world with an Internet connection can read about it and often have enough information to find the same woman. For example, in Nevada, one man bought a woman called 'Honey' and named the brothel where she could be found. Within a couple of weeks other men went and bought 'Honey' themselves and posted their experiences to the newsgroup. Within a short period of time men were having an orgy of male bonding by describing what each of them did to 'Honey.' The men are keeping a special Web site on the Internet for men to post their experiences of buying this one woman. In the last year additional Web sites have been created for dozens of other women. To my knowledge this is completely unprecedented. The implications for this type of pimping in a fast-publishing easily accessible medium like the Internet are very serious for the sexual exploitation of women in the future.

The most voluminous coverage is on Bangkok, Thailand. The men give information on everything from currency exchange rates to how to run a bar tab. The names, addresses and phone numbers for 150 hotels where men will feel comfortable are listed. All the city sections and their sexual specialities are listed and described. Does the man want massage? Discos? Escort services? A lady house? Japanese clubs? A short-time hotel? A blow job bar? There are detailed descriptions of all of them. At these



Web sites the men are presenting an etiquette and buyer's guide on how men should behave and solicit in all of these places.

One slick colourful page on the Web promotes special shows in Bangkok where men can pay to see women smoking cigarettes with their vaginas. The next Web page provides a description of the razor blade show in which a woman dances and pulls two dozen razor blades connected by a string from her vagina. A colour photograph of the act is shown. This web site is owned by a woman named Cleo Odzer. She did her PhD work on prostitution in Bangkok. She likes to present herself as an academic, but she is also a pimp. She refers to the women in the bars as 'my prostitutes.' She has a picture of herself with a pimp named Choo Choo Charlie. The caption to the photograph reads, 'Choo Choo Charlie the tout says, "Psst... you want prostitute? Step right this way into the Patpong Bar. Female, male, katoey... fill all your dreams in the PatpongBar."'

At another site a man describes a show in Bangkok in which a woman dances with two pythons and inserts the head of one into her vagina.

Some of the men posting information on the alt.sex.prostitution newsgroup are quite straightforward about their misogyny and sadism. Other men, who I'm sure, would deny that they have ever abused a woman, reveal quite inadvertently their abuse of women. The reader can get a glimpse of the humiliation and physical pain most of the women endure at the hands of men who buy them by reading accounts of men's 'bad experiences.' To the men who buy women and children a 'bad experience' means they didn't get their money's worth or that the woman didn't

keep up the act of enjoying the men. It means she let her true feelings of pain, desperation, depression and hopelessness show.

The men exchange information on child prostitution. One man says, In Bangkok 'there is child prostitution. I have been offered 9-year-olds, and 14-year-olds are not uncommon.' His solution: 'If child prostitution turns you off, be careful when you select your girl'. Another man described which street corners are the best for finding pimps who can supply pre-teen girls. He said not to worry if you ask the wrong guy, he will probably just direct you to the right one. The men assume that the whole town is there to serve their demand for women and children.

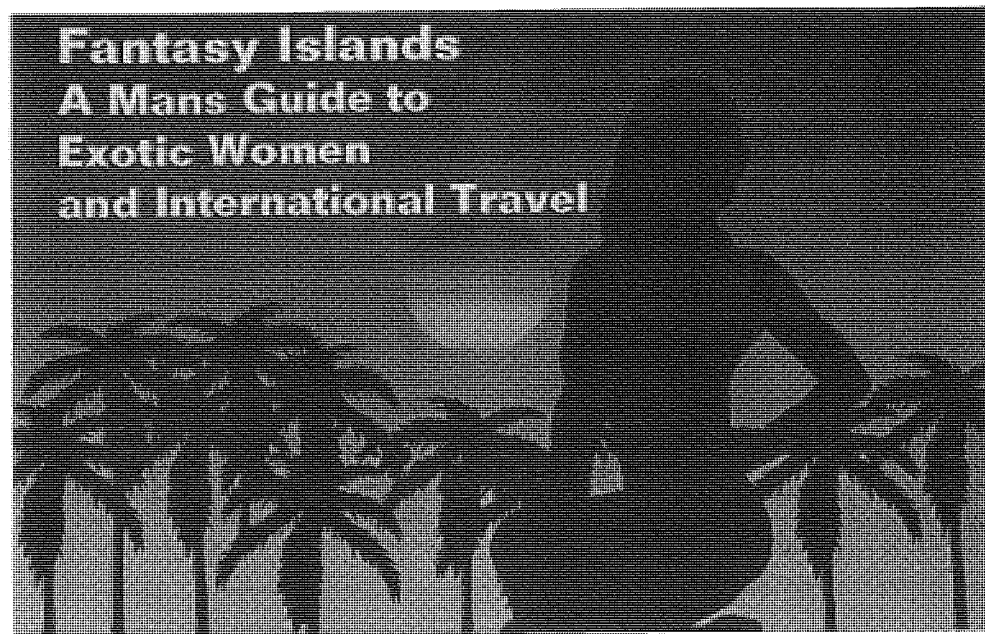
Outside _____ is the best chance of finding guys selling very young girls — pre-teens. You strike contact with the guy, he asks you to meet him somewhere close in an hour, and he will then bring one or two school girls for you to look over. (Anonymous, Bangkok, Date unknown)

Some men describe finding and buying young girls for sex. Although they are clearly seeking and raping children they always insert in their writings that later they found out the girl was really much older than she looked. They are building in legal protection.

My helper [bar attendant-pimp] suggested that perhaps I would be interested in some young ones... Inside the other room sat about 12 little girls watching TV. On a command from my attendant, they all sat back up on the couches and smiled at me. It was obvious that these young things had not yet matured into ladies... their giggles and squirming quickly gave them away. No dummies either, the establishment had made no attempts to dress them sexy, but rather clothed them in young girl outfits befitting their age. My attendant assured me that all of them were suitably trained. I couldn't restrain myself! I had to have one of them. (Anonymous, January 1995)

This man continues with a graphic description of the sex that is so pornographic and abusive I will not reprint it. It includes many references to her 'tiny' mouth and vagina and her 'grimace of pain' when he had intercourse with her.

We know that many of the girls and women in Bangkok's sex industry are virtual slaves. The men who buy them know that. Slavery is accepted and exploited by these men, and their comments prove that. One man on the Internet newsgroup said, 'Yes there is slavery in Bangkok. Some girls work against their will.' He then goes on to describe where the 'kept' women are most likely to be found. He says, 'if this is a



problem for you, simply stay away from [these hotels]. Another way of handling this is, of course, to be gentle and gentlemanly [sic] and give the girl a good time whether she is a slave or not' (Anonymous, Bangkok, Date unknown).

On this newsgroup, the men tell each other that they can exploit the women and girls held against their will for sadistic practices.

The hotel girls are usually younger than most other 'available' girls in Bangkok, 14-15 years old being rather common. They are in effect 'owned' by the hotel, which means that you can treat them more or less any way you want — and many men do. Hotels like this should be like paradise for those of us who are into S&M [sadomasochism]. (Anonymous, Bangkok, Date unknown)

Sex Tours

Centres for sex tourism are also the sources of women trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation to other countries. For centres of sex tourism in European countries women from poor countries are imported legally and illegally to staff the brothels. The largest source of trafficked women today is the countries of the former Soviet Union. Advertisements for sex tours to these countries appear on the Internet.

Sex tours enable men to travel to 'exotic' places and step outside whatever community bounds may constrain them at home. In foreign cities they can abuse women and girls in ways that are more risky or difficult for them in their hometowns.

As prostitution has become a form of tourism for men, it has become a form of economic development for poor countries. Tourism was recommended by the United Nations, the World Bank and United States advisory boards as a way to generate income and repay foreign debts. States set their own tourist policies and could, if they wanted, prevent or suppress the development of prostitution as a form of tourism. Instead, communities and countries have come to rely on the sale of women and children's bodies to be their cash crop. As the sex industry grows, more girls and women are turned into sexual commodities for sale to tourists. In the bars in Bangkok, women and girls don't have names — they have numbers pinned to their skimpy clothes. The men pick them by number. They are literally interchangeable sexual objects.

The Netherlands is the strongest international proponent for legalised prostitution. Amsterdam is the leading sex tourist centre in Europe. In 1997 the Netherlands legalized brothels. The result has been increased trafficking to Amsterdam from all over the world.

Bride Trafficking

Mail order bride agents have moved to the Internet as their preferred marketing location. The Internet reaches a prime group of potential buyers — men from Western countries with higher than average incomes. The new Internet technology enables Web pages to be quickly and

easily updated; some services claim they are updating their selection of women bi-weekly. The Internet reaches a global audience faster and less expensively than any other medium. One mail order bride agent explained why he preferred operation on the Internet.

So when the World-Wide Web came along, I saw that it was a perfect venue for this kind of business. The paper catalogs were so expensive that their quality was usually very poor; but on the Web you can publish high-resolution full-color photos which can be browsed by everyone in the WORLD. (Toms, Santa Barbara International 1996)

The agents offer men assistance in finding a 'loving and devoted' woman whose 'views of relationships have not been ruined by unreasonable expectations.' The agencies describe themselves as 'introduction services', but a quick examination of many of the Web sites reveals their commercial interests in bride trafficking, sex tours and prostitution.

The catalogues offer women, mostly from Asia and Eastern Europe. Pictures of the women are shown with their names, height, weight, education and hobbies. Some catalogues include the women's bust, waist and hip measurements. The women's ages range from 13 to 50. One of the commonly promoted characteristics of women from Eastern Europe is that they 'traditionally expect to marry gentlemen that are 10 to 20 years older' (Toms, 1995).

One agent-pimp complains that the Philippines government passed a law in 1990 banning the operation of sex tour and mail order brides agents in the Philippines. He says, 'The Philippines government is... definitely working against the interests of their own people. These girls want and need to leave that country.' The same agent also complains that the U.S. government will not allow his youngest brides on offer into the country. 'The service itself is not restricted by the American government, although they are real picky about getting your bride into the States — they won't give a visa to a bride under age sixteen' (World Class Service, 1996). In his catalogue of potential brides there is one girl, named Hazel, aged 13; another girl, Eddy Mae, is aged 14. There are a total of 19 girls in his catalogue aged 17 or younger.

The bride traffickers sell addresses to men. Later they offer to arrange tours for the men to come and meet their woman with whom they have been corresponding, or to meet as many women as possible. Men can pay for these

services over the Internet with their credit cards.



Bride traffickers accept credit cards

There are some catalogues which list women with young children. One web site asks if men want women with or without children. On another Web site there are pictures of naked children playing. I think children are being trafficked also in this way. The men are being subtly shown ways of acquiring women and children — all in one package.

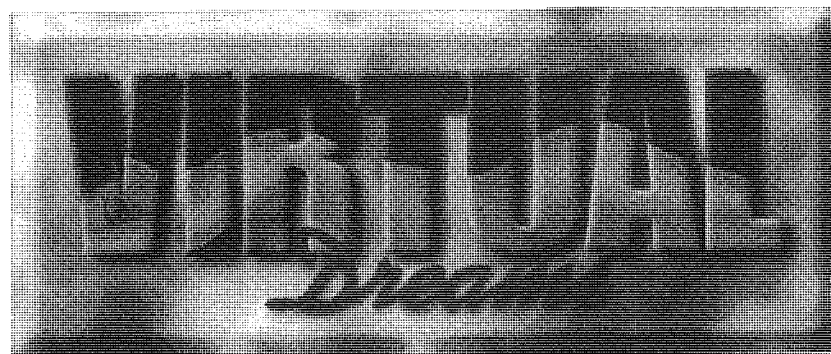
If the Philippines has banned the operation of sex tour and mail order bride agencies, then in international cooperation, the countries which send the men on tours and receive the mail order brides should also ban the operation of such agencies and prohibit the advertisement of these services from computers in their country.

Sexual Exploitation and Organized Crime

Sex tourism, bride trafficking and prostitution are different forms of sexual exploitation. An examination of advertisements on the Internet reveals the links between these types of sexual exploitation and enables us to see that the agents are using women in any way that is profitable.

Most of the mail order bride agents on the Internet also offer tours. Men pay for the addresses of the women in the catalogues, later the tour/bride agent sets up a group tour for men to go to meet the woman or women with whom they have been corresponding. 'The Moscow trip is a logical conclusion to your correspondence efforts. The purpose of the tour is to meet as many lovely ladies as possible as soon as possible.'

Men going to either Russia or the Philippines are assured of getting a wife to bring home, if that is their desire, or they are assured of the availability of many women. Men don't want to believe they are taking home a prostitute as a wife, so the men are assured that they will be introduced to marriageable women, as well as other 'available and willing' women. A man is usually offered the option of paying for an 'escort' for each day. 'Each and every day you will be escorted by your choice of lovely, elegant



Advertisement for live sex show

ladies.' Men are assured that if they have not established a correspondence with a woman, they can still go on the tour to try out the women.

Making the links

A picture of a Filipina tops the first page of *Travel Philippines*. She invites the men to 'Come explore the Philippines with me!' The advertisement describes the Philippines as an 'exotic and interesting place to visit.' Information is given on tickets, lodging, food and water, money changing, night life and the tour schedule.

Prostitution is briefly mentioned as being 'everywhere,' and a price range for prostitutes is listed. Men are told, 'You can partake or not, it's up to you. Most do partake.' Marriage is also briefly mentioned: 'As most of you know, the Philippines is the happy hunting ground for men seeking a wife. There are all kinds of women of every description. It's hard to go to the Philippines and not get caught up in the idea of marriage. The whole lifestyle seems to revolve around love, marriage and kids'.

On the next linked page the man is asked 'would you like to have a beautiful female companion as a *private* tour guide?' or 'would you like to have introductions to 'decent' marriage minded ladies?' If he chooses the *private* tour guide he is directed to the *X-Rated Escorted Tours*. At the top of this page a picture of the same Filipina from the introductory page appears, this time with her breasts exposed. The woman invites the men to 'Come explore the Philippines and Me!'

Much of the same travel information is repeated, but here the man finds out how much it costs to have an 'escort' during his trip. The fee is paid to the travel agent-pimp, *not* the woman. The agent-pimp suggests that the tourist-buyer tip the woman, although it is not required.

If the man chooses the marriage option he is directed to the linked page on *Over Seas Ladies*.

There he is asked if he is tired of watching TV and having women make him jump through hoops. He is told that the women for sale here 'respond to every gesture and kindness, no matter how small.' He is reassured that these women are not concerned about his age, appearance, or wealth. This is followed by thirteen pages of pictures of women from which he can choose.

The agent pimps sells the addresses of the women to the man. For an extra fee the buyer can have a life-time membership which entitles him to the addresses of all the women, those currently available and those in the future. (If the man is seeking a permanent relationship, why he might want or need a life-time membership is not explained.) The whole sexual exploitation racket comes full circle with the next linked page on *Escorted Wife Seeking Tours*. The man is told 'You will meet a lot of beautiful women there. Your penpals that you have been writing to will be happy to see you. The new women you meet will be generally "good" girls, but there are plenty of bar girls there too and you will surely encounter some'. Bar girls, X-rated tours with 'private tour guides,' mail order brides — all are forms of sexual exploitation organized by the same agency for the profit of pimps, hotels and bars.

Even from the advertising it is apparent that these men are operating prostitution rings. I'm sure that police investigations will show that these agents are most likely involved in trafficking of women from country to country as well. There are now numerous cases of successful police investigations of child pornography on the Internet. We need the same kind of investigations of advertisements on the Internet for sex tours, mail order brides and prostitution.

We also need international judicial and police cooperation. If it is illegal to run a sex tour agency or mail order bride agency in the Philippines, then it should be illegal to advertise these services on a computer in the US. The European Union defines trafficking as a form of organized crime. It should be treated the same way on the Internet.

Live videoconferencing

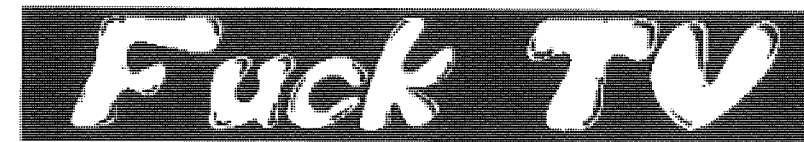
The most advanced technology on the Internet is live videoconferencing, in which live audio and video communication is transmitted over the Internet from video recorder to computer. For over two years this advanced technology has

been used to sell live sex shows over the Internet. Real time communication is possible, so the man can personally direct the live sex show as he is viewing on his computer.

The only limitation on this type of global sex show is the need for high-speed transmission, processing and multimedia capabilities. The software required is available free, but the most recent versions of Web browsers have these capabilities built into them. As more men have access to high-speed multimedia computer and transmission equipment, this type of private sex show will grow. There are no legal restrictions on the kind of live sex shows that can be transmitted over the Internet. Of course, as with all Internet transmissions, there are no nation-state border restrictions. With Internet technology a man may be on one continent, while directing and watching a live strip show, a live sex show, or the sexual abuse of a child, on another.

Regulation

As we all know the new technologies of the Internet have leapt over national borders and lawmakers are scrambling to catch up. Internet users have adopted and defend an unbridled libertarianism. Any kind of regulation or restriction is met with hysteria and predictions of a totalitarian society. Even the most conservative restrictions on the transmission of child pornography are greeted with cries of censorship. The December 1996 issue of *Wired*, the leading professional publication on the Internet, stated that a new state law in United States which made it illegal to transmit indecent materials to minors



A hardcore live sex show web site

was censorship. Internet libertarianism coupled with United States free speech absolutism is setting the standard for Internet communication. Recently, the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the Communications Decency Act, which would have limited some of the pornography on the Internet.

Criticism of the Internet because it permits new forms of sexual exploitation of women and children are dismissed with the argument that pornographers have always been the first to take advantage of new technology — first photography, then movies, then VCRs, now, the Internet.

The solution that is being promoted is software programs that will screen out sexually explicit material. President Clinton just announced that he supported a rating system on the Internet, so pornography would be rated so that software programs will screen it out. This is seen as a way to protect children.

Most adults are only concerned that their children may see pornography. They really aren't concerned about the women and children that are being exploited in the making of the pornography. In any search for a solution to pornography and prostitution it is crucial to remember that sexual exploitation starts with real people and the harm is to real people. □

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

Category II Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council

A World

**In which women's rights are human rights
Where prostitution and sex trafficking do not exist
Where women are free and equal in dignity and rights
Where no woman is sexually exploited
That recognizes and values the great genius of women
In the development of civilization and cultures
Where women have sexual integrity and autonomy**

From The Coalition Against
Trafficking in Women web site at:
<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw>

Giving a Damn

Many agencies providing advice and support to women in prostitution do not begin with a clear political analysis of the women's real situation. This situation, argue Patricia Holmes and Val King, is one in which violence is so pervasive that it is often described by women as if it were a matter of routine. But taking this matter-of-fact presentation at face value risks colluding with women's abusers and failing to provide women themselves with what they need. FRANKI, a radical feminist organisation based in Greater Manchester, has been trying to develop a different approach.

Violence against prostitutes is endemic in their lives: from pimps, clients, partners, and sometimes each other. Many women have experienced violence from an early age from parents, carers and residential care staff; so much so that the telling of the abuse makes it seem routine and unremarkable.

Institutions stigmatise and criminalise prostitutes, and this in turn disenfranchises them from the resources most of us take for granted. Women who are labelled 'common prostitute' are effectively barred from access to other paid work, from having custody of their children, from access to housing. Girls, some as young as nine or ten, and young women who run away from home or leave residential care and work on the streets, are denied their right to protection as vulnerable and abused young women. Criminalisation, child abuse, lack of provision and care for these women translates as a lack of power to effect change. There is clearly a need for support work, campaigning and action against male violence towards women in the sex industry, in order to develop a cohesive strategy which empowers women and works towards changing policy.

FRANKI

FRANKI is a small registered charity, formed initially to work around issues of sexual violence with women in prison and women who work as prostitutes. The name FRANKI is not an acronym; the organisation was named after Franki Raffles, one of the founders of the Zero Tolerance campaign, who has since tragically died. It originated from a Manchester Rape Crisis project working with young women, sexual abuse and homelessness. From this work, we learned important lessons: rather than the traditional way of working, it was necessary to find new ways of reaching women who could not use Rape Crisis but who nevertheless experienced sexual violence. This developed into an attempt to deconstruct the concept of 'counselling' through a radical feminist approach, using proactive work with women on the streets, in prison and at a drop-in group which was established in 1993 in conjunction with Greater Manchester probation service.

The women's drop-in was the focal point for working with women in prostitution. It was situated in the middle of the red light district and was a place women were already familiar with. It

was a women-only space where women could sit with a cup of tea (and a sandwich or a scone) and talk about their lives in an informal support setting. It was never intended to give practical advice, hand out condoms or provide structured, issue-based sessions. But as a group we talked about many issues: sexual abuse, domestic violence, children, motherhood, loss, parents, and many other difficult areas, often introduced by discussion of a soap opera. At the women's request we invited other agencies in to address specific issues, such as when women complained about the way the police treated their complaints of violence. We also discussed ways women could work more safely: for instance there was an 'ugly mug' book in which women wrote descriptions of violent punters and car numbers for other women to access.

In 1998 FRANKI could no longer maintain worker input on a face-to-face basis and it was decided resources should be used in other ways. Although the Manchester group still exists, unfortunately its emphasis has shifted towards a more traditional interventionist approach. FRANKI is now developing a multi-agency approach, working with projects nationwide (e.g. in Bradford, London and Leeds). The aim is to provide guidance on good practice, training resources, workshops, conference papers, information and advice.

Changing the way we work

The usual forms of feminist support do not necessarily provide prostituted women with what they need. The difficulties sexual violence generates are no different for women in the sex industry than for women leading more privileged lives, who visit counsellors or phone helplines or who have strong familial and friendship networks. They all share feelings of shame and guilt, of not being worth anything, of having no control over their lives, of somehow having done something to deserve the abuse they experience. All of us have experienced some level of self harm or self injury: which of us has never overworked, had a couple of glasses too many at the weekend, snatched or missed meals, and generally failed to look after ourselves? But for women working on the streets, the extent of self abuse and harm is much greater. Their exclusion from what most of us take for granted—friends, loving partners, family, a relatively stable environment—just exacerbates the problems. So there are commonalities with other women, but

more importantly, there are differences; and it is the differences that isolate women and prevent them from accessing help.

We would argue that it is the recognition of these differences, of the violence, drug use and abuse which are endemic to the work, that should be the focus for work with prostitutes. However, this is not to suggest that the focus should be only on issue-based 'work'. All too often, workers view self-harming behaviour as 'the problem' or as a 'symptom', whereas it may well be a coping strategy that women develop in order to survive.

What workers must acknowledge and validate is that although women talk in a matter-of-fact way about horrendous abuse, the reality is that they are damaged, hurt; sometimes they are maimed and killed. The anecdotal style of telling about abuse is often a coping strategy—an attempt to minimise the emotional impact for themselves. Women may clearly identify as their reality a 'hierarchy of violence': a slap from a boyfriend is 'acceptable', a slap from a punter is 'unacceptable'. But although this argument does not sit comfortably with notions of 'nonjudgmental' working, we feel that if workers buy into the concept that there are hierarchies of violence then they collude with abusers. Sometimes it is argued that women dissociate from their experience of violence, but while that may be true in some cases, our experience is that women associate with it on a daily basis, and deal with it by quantifying it, and fitting it into some part of their life.

Working with prostitutes around these issues has compelled us to re-examine our working methods. For example, empowerment work with young women in prostitution must be recognised as being fundamentally different from work with young women in schools. Transposing methods established in other contexts into the context of work with prostitutes effectively disenfranchises these women even further, by detaching them from their support networks, their culture, their income and, importantly, their coping strategies. For instance:

Support networks: if empowerment work encourages women to leave prostitution without appropriate emotional support, they will quickly return to 'safe' ground—a place where the label 'prostitute' doesn't only apply to them.

Culture: in our experience the majority of prostitutes are drug users, are controlled by pimps/boyfriends and have an 'outsider' lifestyle. Although this is clearly neither safe nor

healthy, it is often the only lifestyle they have access to.

Coping strategies: raising women's expectations through an unachievable version of 'empowerment' risks destroying the fragile structure of their worldview. Prostitutes' coping strategies, such as drug and alcohol abuse, self-injury/harm, are often viewed negatively by agencies. Attention is given to addressing these problematic 'symptoms' rather than seeing them as ways of coping.

No such thing as a free lunch

It is important that work is done where the women are, on their own territory. The majority of women are addicted to drugs: their lives are spent in a constant effort to get drugs, pay for drugs and use drugs. As one young woman said: 'the trouble with being on gear is that you never get a lie-in'. Women like her are not going to come into a centre to be counselled.

Women will unfold the details of their lives with surprising and chilling ease. How many times have they trotted out their stories? How many times have they had the details of their abuse noted in their files, by social workers, residential homes, the police, probation service, housing departments, drug projects? When one young woman came to the group for the first time and saw us all sitting around having a cup of tea, she sat down, poured out a cup, and said: 'Right, what do I have to tell you, is this tea free?'. She clearly believed there was no such thing as a free lunch. Although space was made at the group for women to tell their stories, no emphasis was placed on when and how they should tell them.

Although most of the women told their stories easily, having given the details of their abuse they then frequently showed a determination not to talk about it again. This can make things difficult for support workers who want to work on specific issues in a structured way, relating to power and control for example or whatever work is on the agenda. But it is the actual telling of the story, how a woman talks about abuse and how she reacts to it that is important. A woman's story clearly contextualises her life on a personal and institutional level in a society that structurally subordinates women and further discriminates against them on the basis of categories like age, ethnicity and sexuality. FRANKI's way of working recognises that when women talk about the minutiae of their

lives, and react to incidents in their lives, they are not only talking about the here and now but implicitly expressing what has gone before.

Challenging heterosexual 'normality' and 'choice'

A fundamental part of a woman's reality is her sexuality and the way she is defined by it, as every woman is to a greater or lesser extent—whether it is temperament, behaviour, identity or emotion it is seen as an essential characteristic. Prostitutes are wholly defined by this aspect of their lives, sexuality—and theirs is seen as a 'deviant' sexuality. A power hierarchy is in place, set up in terms of women and men who conform to the 'norm', whose sexuality is seen as unproblematic, and 'others' who are defined as problems because they deviate from the norm. Men who have many sexual partners are seen as studs, sowing wild oats, but for women this is translated as 'slags', 'second-hand', usable. If as workers we view sexuality in moral terms, or treat prostitution as an occupation—selling sex—then women who are prostitutes are either defined as deviant and immoral, or else they are seen as a discrete group of working women, which means that prostitution is normalised and sanitised. If workers assume women who are prostitutes necessarily make a choice to be prostitutes, they are failing to question the reality of 'choice'. This serves to render the abuse of women and the sexual exploitation of children invisible.

Too much work with women is underpinned by the assumption of heterosexual normality and of the right to choose. Again, our saying this illustrates a paradox: feminist work is by definition women-centred, rights-based work, but an unquestioned assumption that women have the right to choose, or the ability to choose, colludes with men who abuse women. What woman would choose to be paid £10 to give a man oral sex, would risk being beaten or worse, if there were other choices? One ex-prostitute relating her experiences recalled: 'after a day's work I felt like a spittoon for semen'.

Agencies have consistently worked with prostitutes to get their lives 'back to normal', which often translates as heterosexuality, family, children, etc. This is problematic, particularly when working with women whose experience with men has been of violence and abuse. It is important that the work confronts women's real experiences of men, rather than supposing that

the 'right' man will provide a solution.

Women and girls have often been placed in residential care because of their perceived sexual promiscuity; they have been punished and stigmatised because of their sexual behaviour rather than protected because of their abuse. For too long, the prostitution of young women has not been seen as child abuse, and therefore as a child protection issue—though this is now beginning to be addressed.

Many women come to prostitution via the 'care' system. All these women have intensely sad backgrounds: they catalogue a history of physical and sexual abuse, family breakdowns, several different care placements, poverty. They have limited access to resources, either emotional (friends and family) or material (housing, employment, healthcare). Many are pimped into prostitution, coerced through what started out as a 'romantic' relationship, or through the need to feed a drug habit. Many women share common experiences of homelessness, poverty, addiction, loss of their children to local authority care and criminalisation. They suffer, as a matter of course, systematic abuse on a daily basis. It is so normalised that certain types of violence are accepted as an everyday occurrence. Women talk about rape, knifings, abduction, imprisonment and strangulation in matter-of-fact tones. What is totally unacceptable is treated as commonplace for the simple reason that in these women's experience it is commonplace. This normalisation of extreme violence is what makes these women different.

Yet violence is not part of the public perception of prostitution. Consent, choice, the tabloid image of women dressed in high heels and fishnet tights, enjoying their work and sharing a sense of camaraderie—that is the idea in popular currency.

Prostitution is the result of abuse: not only violent sexual abuse but also abuse by and through the system. As workers, as activists, as academics, we try to bring the reality of working women's lives to public attention and to challenge the stereotypes of prostitutes as 'hot and sexy', the myth that they are saving other women from rape, or 'performing a service'. What other occupation demands an addiction to crack to be able to do it, or accepts that enduring physical assaults is part of the job description? Our inability to imagine the reality, of everyday violence and repetitive distasteful acts experi-

enced by these women, means we must examine our own work methods, our attitudes and our political analysis, and translate this into action for change.

Systematic and structured

It is also important to recognise that male sexual violence is not only part of the lives of prostitutes, or even the lives of a minority of women. It is a systematic and structured violence which subordinates women to secure male dominance in a patriarchal, heterosexual social order. Our work should reflect a challenge to that. Therefore we argue for the importance of a radical feminist analysis of resources and support services, which puts women's and children's interests at the centre.

We need to explore the possibility of woman-centred inter-agency approaches to working with prostitutes. We need to develop appropriate multi-agency initiatives, rather than interventionist approaches which do not take into account the politics of male violence. This is a crucial contradiction facing feminists. While agencies have responded to criticisms of the way violence against women is dealt with, they have done so in a way that completely negates feminist definitions, feminist politics, feminist research and feminist support service provision. Women are heard in relation to agencies' agendas rather than in their own right.

We argue that policies must be informed by women's experience, and they must confront men's right to abuse. Intervention should be political, and should not silence women or gloss over men's behaviour. It should include continuous feminist support for women working as prostitutes, and the women who support them.

The work needs to be at a number of levels:

- Routes into prostitution: for example, a radical review of the care system.

- Support for women who remain in prostitution: custody of children, safety issues, etc.
- Routes for exiting prostitution: employment, legal rights, housing, drug programmes and continuing support networks.

We need to work towards a strategy for supporting women who experience violence in a variety of situations. We need radical feminist work, which recognises the need for different and specific working methods, and which finds ways of confronting systematic abuse on both an individual and an institutional level. □

FRANKI is currently developing a good practice guide for working with young women in prostitution. Comments or contributions would be appreciated. Please contact Patricia Holmes, PO Box 311, Bolton D.O. BL6 5FL. FRANKI will be publishing a collection of poetry in the new year. For more information, write to FRANKI.

NOT FOR SALE

In Sweden on January 1 1999 it will become a criminal offence to purchase sexual services. This legislation — extraordinary by the standards of Britain and other European countries — marks a shift away from the liberal or libertarian attitudes of the past, and has been driven by a radical feminist analysis of prostitution and violence against women. How did it happen, and how will it work? Angela Beausang and Eva Hassel-Calais of ROKS, the Swedish organisation working against sexualised violence, report.

The new law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services is one part of a larger package of measures to combat violence against women. A bill was put before Sweden's Parliament in February 1998. Three government ministries — Justice, Labour, Health and Social Affairs — were involved in producing legislative proposals, following an extensive inquiry into violence against women. Their proposals were intended to fulfil obligations undertaken by Sweden after the 1995 Beijing Conference on women.

When the bill was presented in February, the Swedish government office issued a fact sheet summarising and explaining it. The introduction says:

Sweden is by many regarded as a society in which there is a relatively high degree of equality between women and men. ...In many areas, however, there is a considerable imbalance in the power relations between women and men. The most extreme example of such an imbalance is the occurrence of men's violence against women. Despite several measures, particularly in recent years, thousands of women

in Sweden are subjected to violence. ...Violence against women is therefore an obstacle to the ongoing development towards equality between women and men. Violence against women is also a serious social problem. To take action against this form of criminality is thus a task which has been declared by the government to be given priority in the criminal justice system.

The legislation is wide-ranging. Apart from prohibiting the purchase of sexual services, it also includes new provisions on genital mutilation and sexual harassment; it criminalises 'neglecting to report certain sexual crimes' (e.g. rape, exploitation of a minor) and it introduces a new offence of 'gross violation of a woman's integrity', meaning repeated physical and/or sexual assaults against a woman or child with whom the perpetrator has a close relationship. A feature of the new law is that it considers all abuse of women to be equally important, not excluding women who are prostitutes. Thus a pimp who assaults, threatens or coerces a prostitute he is living with will also be liable to be charged with gross violation of her integrity,

and this carries a prison sentence of up to six years.

In addition the law specifies a set of preventive measures (e.g. supporting voluntary organisations which work to raise awareness of violence, collecting better statistics, investigating electronic monitoring of men who break injunctions) and proposes improvements to the existing support services for abused women. Implementing the new law will require the allocation of significant additional money for policing, prevention and support work — in 1998, 41 million Swedish kronor.

Marking Sweden's attitude to prostitution

The measure which prohibits the purchase of sexual services will come into force slightly later than the rest of the law, in January 1999. This is how the government has summarised its intentions.

Obtaining casual sexual services (prostitution) against payment is to be prohibited. The punishment for this offence is to be fines or imprisonment for up to six months. The attempted offence is also to be made punishable. The offence comprises all forms of sexual services, whether they are purchased on the street, in brothels, in so-called massage institutes, etc.

This new prohibition marks Sweden's attitude to prostitution. Prostitution is not a desirable social phenomenon. The government considers, however, that it is not reasonable to punish the person who sells a sexual service. In the majority of cases at least, this person is a weaker partner who is exploited by those who only want to satisfy their sexual drives.

It is also important to motivate prostitutes to seek help to leave their way of life. They should not run the risk of punishment because they have been active as prostitutes.

By prohibiting the purchase of sexual services, prostitution and its damaging effects can be counteracted more effectively than hitherto. The government is however of the opinion that criminalisation can never be more than a supplementary element in the efforts to reduce prostitution and cannot be a substitute for broader social exertions.

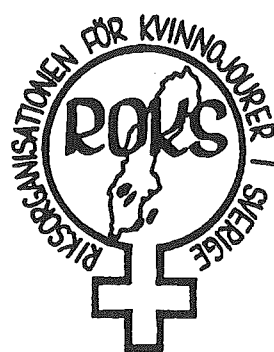
From sexual liberalism to radical feminism

The history that led up to the new law began in the early 1970s, when the Swedish government put together a Commission to investigate sexual crimes. At that time there was a liberal attitude to pornography, prostitution, incest and rape, and it was said that all restrictions should be ended.

The Commission's report proposed that incest should be decriminalised, that pimps should no longer be considered pimps, that the definition of rape should be very restricted and the penalties for it should be reduced. Sexual assault could be excused if the woman's attitudes or actions prior to the abuse were 'inappropriate' in any way, so that women would become partly responsible for their own abuse.

This report provoked an outcry from women in Sweden. In 1976 over half a million women signed a petition protesting and criticising the Commission as being antiquated. This was a time when women were beginning to organise crisis lines and refuges, and speaking out on issues that had not been spoken about in public before. In the same year the author Maria-Pia Boethius published a book about rape, *Skylta sig själv* ['having only yourself to blame', or 'it's your own fault']. As their numbers increased, women in politics became more influential and started networking around issues important to women. Women's organisations, together with women members of Parliament, got together and demanded a new investigation. They succeeded! The new investigation went in the opposite direction: among other things, landlords could now be prosecuted for renting accommodation to someone who used it for prostitution.

In Sweden's penal code prior to the new Violence against Women law, the main provision to counteract prostitution was a prohibition on procuring. An individual can procure, so can the editor of a publication that advertises sexual services, or someone letting property for the purpose of prostitution. Procuring with intent that includes grievous bodily harm, including forcing someone to take drugs, carries a sentence of up to six years in prison. The seduction of young persons is also an offence. The law as it is today — i.e. including a prohibition on purchasing sexual services — came about through a new investigation looking at men's violence against women, and it followed more than a decade of feminist campaigning. In the 1980s, Kvinnofronten, a broad feminist activist organisation, had it on their agenda to fight for the criminalisation of men buying sex. ROKS [the national refuge organisation] had worked for the same thing from its inception (1984). They were joined by the rest of the women's movement, against everyone else, but united. So it can be said that the women's movement, alone, won this fight in the end.



Wide consent

The suggestion that buying women's bodies should be made a criminal offence started a lot of different discussions. The Right-wing party thought it better to have government-controlled brothels; some people wanted to make selling your own body illegal, and some thought it was not worth criminalising any aspect of prostitution since it would only go underground. This threat has been repeated in the media, and some lesbians who claim an affiliation with women in prostitution and are interested in sadomasochism have tried to get discussion going, taking the libertarian position that Sweden is becoming regressive in its attitudes to sexual freedom.

Nevertheless, the new law commands wide consent in Swedish society. Women's organisations and mainstream women politicians have agreed for years on the need to criminalise the johns rather than the women involved in prostitution. Women in the Social Democrat party lobbied for the new law at their last party congress. It is also relevant that prostitution has never been very widespread in Sweden. It is estimated that 2,500 women sell sexual services every year in indoor massage parlours, escort services, call girl services, etc., and that there are around 650 street prostitutes, about half of whom are addicted to drugs. Women in prostitution in Sweden appear to be unorganised and have not made a collective response to the new law.

Implementing the law

The government has allocated money to the police to start working around prostitution, and within the National Police Board a Rapporteur on trafficking has been formed, working with Europol. (Recently there has been an influx of Russian women into the north of Sweden and some men (pimps) are making a lot of money.) The new law states, however, that criminalisation is not a substitute for 'broader social exertions'. The National Board of Health and Welfare has been charged with undertaking development work on questions about prostitution and violence against women. With regard to motivating and helping women to exit prostitution, which is also an aim of the law, there are women's organisations working with prostitutes in several major cities. Some organisations also

approach the men who buy sexual services.

Although we hope the law will be enforced, there may be some problems in practice. One problem is government leadership. Since the election that took place in autumn 1998, the cabinet has been reorganised, and we currently do not have a minister for Social Services — the man who was appointed left because it wasn't interesting enough for him. The equality minister is also the minister for agriculture and is very busy with EU matters. When the government is asked about this, they respond that equality and equal opportunities are inherent in all political work (this is called 'mainstreaming'). Right now it seems thin. In his most recent budget, the Prime Minister Göran Persson forgot to allocate new money for the national Rape Crisis Centre, for instance.

Some issues were left out of the legislation. A new Commission on Sexual Offences is going to review the legal provisions, e.g. whether the definition of rape should focus on consent rather than force, how rape should be treated in relation to children, and how the courts should determine punishment where sexual offences are concerned. A male judge has been appointed to chair this commission. Luckily ROKS has been appointed as one of the voluntary organisations in the advisory group.

According to Swedish law, a Swedish national can be charged in Sweden for offences committed abroad, if those offences are chargeable in the country concerned. But at the same time that Sweden is making it illegal to purchase sexual services, neighbouring Denmark is decriminalising prostitution. 5000 customers buy sexual services every day in Copenhagen alone: how many of them are Swedes, and how are the Swedish authorities going to handle this issue?

Sending a message

Even if there are some problems, the language of the new law is different from previous ones. It had the backing of three cabinet ministers and followed an extensive enquiry by a commission. This law sends a clear message. And, as with all the campaigns we have fought against pornography and other sexualised violence against women since the 1970s, its success has been due to all the women who stood united. □

Flashing the johns

An innovative scheme known as the Kerb Crawlers Re-education Programme has been set up in West Yorkshire. Julie Bindel was at its first day-school.

My mother rang me on Friday evening. 'What are you doing this weekend, pet?' 'Running a school for men who've been caught kerb crawling' I replied. There was silence, and then 'You know what Julie, I've never said anything to you before about your mad schemes, but this one takes the biscuit!'

I knew what she meant, but it does make sense to take a new approach in tackling the problems of prostitution. Traditionally every one with any interest in prostitution — health workers, researchers, police officers — have focused on the women. We know that seventy percent of all street prostitutes in London have suffered some form of violence at the hands of a punter, more than sixty percent were underage when they first started out, and a high proportion of the women are addicted to illegal drugs and/or alcohol. We know it's a grim world inhabited by pimps, drug pushers and other unsavoury characters. But what about the men? What do we know about them? The answer is, very little.

Something is missing between the arguments to either 'decriminalise and tolerate' prostitution or to 'run it out of town'. A focus on the men who create the demand for it has traditionally made people nervous. The aim in setting up the first Kerb Crawlers Re-education Programme was to get these men off the streets and to find out as much as possible about them. Based on a

model in San Francisco known as the 'John School' the KCRP is a diversion from court scheme. In conjunction with the West Yorkshire police, the Research Centre on Violence, Abuse and Gender Relations at Leeds Metropolitan University have set up this pilot project to run for one year. When kerb crawlers are stopped by the police they are given a choice; attend a one-day school run by ex-prostitutes, the police, sexual health workers and community spokespeople, or go to court and run the risk of your name being in the paper.

Since operational officers began to implement the procedure, more men than ever before have been apprehended, and the women left alone. Every man given the choice has, without hesitation, chosen the school. Little did they know what was in store for them. As the trainers were preparing their presentations, the first punter knocked on the door, early. 'I'm here for the prostitution school' he told me. 'No you're not' I said sternly, 'You're here for the *kerb crawlers* school. Please await outside until we're ready for you'. When I looked outside five minutes later there they all were, like that scene from Hitchcock's movie *The Birds* where all the crows are silently perched in a row, looking ahead. They trooped in and sat down, looking straight ahead.

There I was in my severest suit, an uncon-



The Swedish government's fact sheet on the new law on Violence Against Women, including the Prohibition on the Purchase of Sexual Services, is available in English on a website (which also includes other relevant English as well as Swedish language material). The address is www.kvinnofrid.gov.se

First published in *The Independent* 10/11/98
© Julie Bindel

promising look on my face as I introduced the day to them. 'I hope you realise how privileged and lucky you are to be here today' I said, strictly. They looked less than thrilled, more that they would rather be spending a day in the cells than in this purgatory. During the session on legislation, delivered by a teddy bear of a Chief Inspector who had managed that day to look uncompromisingly stern, I dared to take a closer look at this unknown quantity of man. Max was in his fifties — built like a US Marine with grey crew cut and huge shoulders. He refused to look any one of the trainers in the eye and oozed insolence and contempt. I identified him very early on as the group trouble maker and asked the Chief Inspector why he didn't just arrest him now on a charge of having a bad haircut. I watched him during the session on connections between men's attitude towards women and violent crime. He squirmed in his seat when the subject of domestic violence came up.

Simon was no more than twenty — skinny, fair and frightened looking, as if he was going to be personally picked out and made to stand in the corner. Sukjhit was a strikingly good-looking thirty year old in a trendy track-suit. He was listening carefully and was the first to come up with a comment during the strictly monitored five minutes allowed for 'clarification questions' at the end of each session. 'I didn't know so many of these girls started out as children' he said, looking disturbed after hearing about the realities of prostitution. 'I feel ashamed.'

A powerful session

The most powerful session of the day, and the one rated most highly by the men, was by Fiona Broadfoot. Pimped into prostitution at the age of 15, she lived 11 years of hell working the streets. After her cousin, also a prostitute, was murdered by a punter she managed to escape and now runs EXIT, an organisation set up to help women leave the game. Before her session she was terrified, sobbing in the toilets. As soon as she stood in front of them though, she was like a woman possessed. 'Do you know what we (prostitutes) think of you?' she almost shouted, 'Well I'll tell you — dirty, desperate and sick'. She was wonderful, almost like an evangelical preacher in style. Afterwards she hooted with laughter, 'Even if I didn't dent their conscience, I bet next time any of them tries to do business, he won't get it up'.

Jim was forty-ish, balding, with enough

brylcream on his remaining hair to cause an oil slick. He shouldn't be there, he said. 'I only went out for petrol'. 'What made you think that woman you asked to get in your car was carrying any in her handbag?' I asked.

As the day went on, 'US Marine' began to look more and more angry. 'For God's sake', he exploded after the session by Irene Ivison, of Coalition for the Removal of Pimping, whose daughter was murdered after being pimped into prostitution, 'I haven't killed any one'. It was pointed out to him that that fact would not necessarily make him Mr. Anti-sexist.

In the discussion group that followed the presentations, the men were told that it is not acceptable to buy and sell women's bodies as part of their leisure activities, to pass the time. 'Are you now saying I've got to go back to ballroom dancing?' asked Ernie. One of the punters came out with what sounded dangerously close to an early radical feminist analysis of marriage. 'What I'm doing is no different from what my mate Dave does who's married,' he insisted, 'I mean, he pays the wife for cooking his tea, for sex, for looking after the kids'. Another man said that when he'd confessed to his wife what he'd been up to, she demanded £20 for cooking his tea.

Although some of the men minimised their actions ('I was just taking to the girl at the traffic lights') some looked devastated by the information they were being given. I will give them the benefit of the doubt and believe that they really did not know that most women are drug addicted, are regularly raped, and have violent pimps on their backs. One of the men could not stop talking on the way out, telling me that he would 'never, ever, buy a woman again'. He thanked me for helping him 'see the light'. I wasn't quite sure what to say.

The day affected the trainers in different ways. I went out to dinner with a friend and had obviously not got out of my 'strict matron' role. I spoke to the waiter in such a way he answered me, sarcastically 'Yes, Miss, and should I write that out a hundred times?'. Patricia, who had run the small group sessions told me she had sobbed all the way to the car park, thinking 'what the hell am I doing?'. Fiona said she felt 'on top of the world'. 'It was so empowering', she said, 'to stand there in front of them, fully clothed for once, and tell them the truth, how vile a life it was, and how much I always despised them. It was like restorative justice'. □

Jeanette Winterson is not the only lesbian

A new book on contemporary lesbian fiction, Beyond Sex and Romance? examines the politics of writing by lesbian authors today. Here we reprint a slightly edited version of one chapter of the book, in which Rachel Wingfield considers the work of three novelists who have achieved mainstream literary success: Emma Donoghue, Sara Maitland and Jeanette Winterson.

I am beginning with a contradiction. In a discussion of lesbians in mainstream publishing I am going to start with — and keep returning to — the work of Sara Maitland. Responses to this decision to date have ranged from 'Sara Maitland isn't a lesbian. Is she?' to 'Sara Maitland, isn't she married to a vicar?' Personally, I have no doubts at all about including Sara Maitland's writing in a discussion on lesbian fiction, for reasons which I hope will become apparent. Perhaps most contradictory — and interesting — of all is that I have chosen to write about Sara Maitland because as a lesbian feminist I find her work to be more radical, more inspiring and more political than many of the more publicly heralded lesbian authors. Sara Maitland would

probably enjoy this contradiction herself — her own work is characterised by contradictions, doubts and uncertainties. But contradictions provide an opportunity, a key for looking at the assumptions which underlie them and the certainties which appear to prevail the rest of the time.

Sara Maitland's work began to be noticed and read by lesbian feminists in 1984 when *Virgin Territory* was published. At that time, Jeanette Winterson was yet to publish *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Emma Donoghue was still in high school. In 1984, the women's movement continued to ride on the wave of its strength and popularity in the 1970s. Beset by strife and divisions, it had still not received its

Beyond Sex and Romance? The Politics of Contemporary Lesbian Fiction, edited by Elaine Hutton (Women's Press 1998)

crushing blow: the fundamental split which later took place around sexuality, and which focused on pornography and sado-masochism. Feminism hovered on the brink of this great divide, but a dialogue was still open.

This was the time I became a feminist; still at school, living in a small town, beginning to be an activist, I (amazingly) managed to discover feminist books in the local library. *Virgin Territory* was one of them — the first novel I had ever read which included lesbian feminist ideas. It had a profound impact on me, as I know it did on other women.

The prevailing mood within feminism then was that women (all women) were oppressed; violence against women, including pornography and sado-masochism, was a key means by which this oppression was both maintained and constructed. Heterosexuality was defined as a socially constructed institution for the first time — an institution which served the interests of male-dominated society, be it patriarchy, capitalism or some combination of the two, and which posited heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. Debates raged over whether heterosexual practice was inevitably collusion and the idea that lesbianism could be a political choice was put forward. Feminism also identified the various forms of protection and privilege promised to those women who remained within heterosexual boundaries. On offer were two roles: good woman (virgin, wife, mother) or bad woman (prostitute, mistress, 'slag'). You could be either, you could even be both. But until you stepped outside of those categories altogether they were still defining you.

Virgin Territory is set firmly within the context of these debates. Its central character, Anna, is a nun sent to London by her religious order in South America because she has had a 'breakdown' following the rape of another nun, Sister Kitty. The rape has had a profound effect on Anna's psyche — she isn't sure of anything anymore, and in particular she's not sure if she still wants to be a nun. Terrified of the void which may lie beneath all the certainties she has lived by until now, Anna is controlled and bullied by voices inside her head; voices of 'the fathers' who urge her to be a good nun, to submit to the authority of the patriarchal order and not to dare question it.

In London, Anna is faced with two possible alternatives to this order. One is in the form of

her identification with a brain damaged child, Caro, who represents the parts of Anna which she has always felt were unacceptable. Dirty, messy, out of control, not contained by any conventional boundaries, Caro is the 'bad girl' in Anna who existed before socialisation and who refused to submit to it. Anna projects Caro's voice, hearing it talking to her inside her own head, tempting and willing her to give up her connection to the outside world once and for all and to join her at the bottom of the pit before the boundaries which separated form, space and time existed.

Anna both fears and desires this void, but she realises that she does not want to enter it and never come out. The alternative to the order of the Fathers has to be more than simply dis-order: self-destruction is no rebellion. As the Fathers themselves say of Caro: 'Don't be deceived by her power. It is only anti-power. There is no power but the power of the Fathers. There is no other power.' (p72) But there may be. The other alternative Anna finds in London is a lesbian feminist one which sees sisterhood as the positive power, a power which lies outside the patriarchal boundaries and challenges Anna's beliefs about religious celibacy.

A chance meeting with Karen, a lesbian socialist feminist academic, gives Anna access to new ideas and a new way of understanding her virginity:

Look at the archetypes; what have you got? You get the wife and mother, and the sex symbol and the friend-and-companion, and you get the virgin, all in this nice tidy balanced square, polarised, orderly, acceptable. But who's standing in the middle of the square?... Men, that's who, they're doing the defining. And the virgin bit is... a totally negative image: it's the power of not, of not being owned by a man, of not relating sexually to a man... If we want to talk about change and freedom we have to... smash the square. (p131-2)

And Karen knows how the square could be smashed: 'What's missing from the square, is the lesbian. And that's how we break it. The dyke is the positive image of the negative virgin.' (p132) Karen's feminism also enables Anna to understand why the rape had such an impact on her: 'protection' for 'good women' within patriarchy is a con. Even nuns can be raped.

Virgin Territory is also set during the beginning of the debates around sado-masochism. Anna and Karen meet because Karen is researching the Church and women's masochism, studying some of the female saints and

the admiration they gained through harming themselves. Masochism in the novel is set firmly within the context of male power, and the eroticisation of women's submission promoted by powerful institutions like the Roman Catholic Church throughout history. Anna's guilt and self-hatred are shown to inspire her own masochistic fantasies. Her masochism intensifies as she begins to acknowledge her sexual feelings for Karen: the voices in her head say she should be grateful for punishment which may save her from this 'perversion':

She craved it suddenly, physically, her belly melting, wanting, warming: greedy for her own humiliation, her own rape. Christ, she cried. She could not stay here in the church with her head full of such filth. 'Rape me chaste'. She begged God and the Fathers sneered; they would consider it, they told her, if she was very good. If she deserved it. (p52-3)

As some lesbians were beginning to argue that masochism was liberating for women, Sara Maitland provides a clear, convincing analysis of women's masochism as originating in internalised hatred of women and their sexuality — the opposite to the celebratory passion for women espoused by Karen and the other lesbian feminists in *Virgin Territory*.

However, in an increasingly individualistic society — Thatcher was in power, proclaiming alongside the postmodernists that 'there is no such thing as society' — a liberal rather than feminist lesbian politics was to thrive. In 1985 Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* was published to great acclaim, winning the Whitbread Award for First Novel. The book was able to be so successful in the mainstream because it was a beautiful, clever, original piece of work, but also because lesbian feminist politics and publications — including *Virgin Territory* — had laid the foundations. A discourse was in circulation which had already begun to question whether heterosexuality was the only acceptable option for women.

Little of this was apparent within the pages of the novel itself. Not a feminist idea, character or insight crosses the pages of *Oranges* core narrative. There is no context for Jeanette's, the main character's, lesbianism, for her rebellion against her strict, fundamentalist upbringing, except for an 'anti-authority' individualist one — precisely the one rejected by the lesbian feminists in *Virgin Territory*.

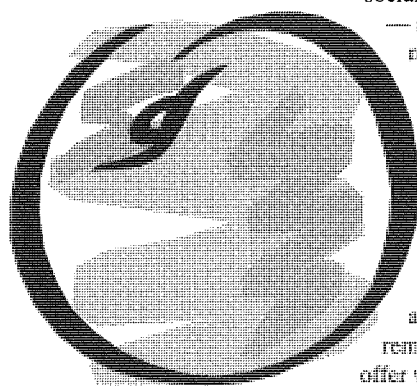
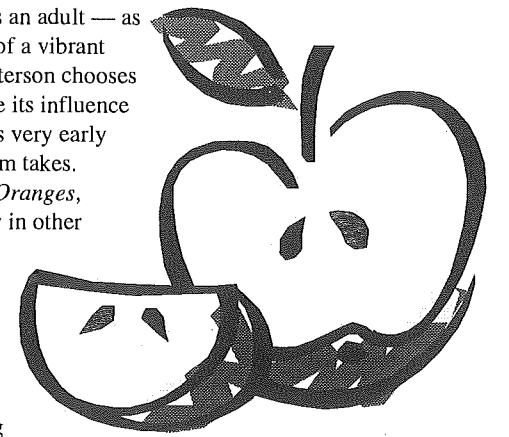
Clearly, Jeanette's story of growing up among Evangelists in a northern town is an

authentic one. However, writing as an adult — as its narrator does — in the context of a vibrant women's movement, Jeanette Winterson chooses to ignore its very existence. We see its influence only in the form which the author's very early foray into technical experimentalism takes. Alongside the central narrative in *Oranges*, Jeanette Winterson retells the story in other forms. The female *Bildungsroman* is counterposed to traditional male narratives of mythical heroism in battle (the King Arthur legends) and to the language of fairy-tale magic. Lots of feminist authors were experimenting with re-writing patriarchal narratives at the time, and have since. Sara Maitland herself was doing it with Michelene Wandor, retelling the story of Noah in *Arky Types*.

Set in a context of lesbian feminist theoretical debates, as well as within a lesbian feminist reality, *Virgin Territory* offers a positive where *Oranges* and others before it had only a negative. The lesbians in *Virgin Territory* are imperfect, arrogant with it, and do not manage half of the time to cope with the contradictions of trying to live their politics within a patriarchal culture. Nonetheless, they are bright, clear and present an alternative which is exciting, rebellious, warm and dangerous. Dangerous because it means losing the little protection their society affords women who remain within the parameters of male sexuality.

Into the 1990s: Feminism without women; sexuality without gender

As we moved towards the 1990s the increasing influence of postmodernist theory and the individualist social and economic reforms which underlay it became evident. Queer politics swept through the lesbian community, reinforcing many of the dominant notions which had existed before the second wave of feminism. Butch/femme and sado-masochism were repackaged as liberating and radical. Feminist theory which saw loving women as involving a political and personal rebellion against patriarchy, was replaced by arguments that sexuality was an individual preference that had nothing to do with politics. This backlash was matched within high theory by postmodernist attacks on any politics which still talked about power structures. As reality became simply a matter of subjective experience, and meaning became endlessly



shifting, fixing any identity — lesbian or woman for example — was viewed as old hat. For feminists this was a problem: how could women be oppressed if the category woman could not be said to exist? Where was feminism without women, and more to the point, where was lesbianism?

These theoretical developments can be traced through the novels of both Jeanette Winterson and Sara Maitland. Jeanette Winterson, more individualist in her approach from the start, went with the flow of postmodernism with seemingly little trouble. The postmodernist preoccupation with writing about writing became more prominent in her later novels, until it seemed that the techniques became the end in themselves; the form not facilitating the communication of the content, but becoming all Jeanette Winterson had to say instead of how she said it.

Written On the Body (1990) fixes Jeanette Winterson most firmly within the mainstream literary community and its preoccupation with postmodernism. The audience is not intended to be feminists, lesbians or even the general public: it is the (male) mainstream literati. The 'experiment' around which *Written On the Body* revolves lies in the androgyny of its narrator. The reader is not allowed to know the gender of the narrator — who presumably is intended to be neither male nor female — nor their sexuality (s/he sleeps with both men and women, though mainly women). In true postmodernist fashion, gender and sexuality 'shift' throughout the novel as the reader constructs alternately the gender and sexuality of the narrator. The story of the novel, such as it is, focuses on the love affair between the narrator and a married woman, Louise, who we later discover has cancer.

Although the novel clearly intends to explore all sorts of themes, including a key one of body as text versus body as biology, its technical experiment dominates all else. Rather than enhancing the work and challenging the reader, the narrator's lack of gender simply becomes an irritating ploy by which the author seems to be playing games with us. Jeanette Winterson's skill in creating characters with whom we easily engage, a feature of her earlier work, immediately goes out the window. The narrator is impossible to engage with — an interesting enough finding in itself you may think — but the novel is never more than a series

of experiments in form, with some rather beautiful, poetic prose to hold it together.

As a reader, I would love Jeanette Winterson to allow some of her other skills to come to the fore again. Some of the writing in *Oranges* is simply stunning in its ability to fuse poetry and prose, to invoke pathos and to make us laugh. Jeanette Winterson can write about loss and betrayal like no-one else. One of the strengths of her earlier writing is its authenticity, its eccentricity and its ability to express directly what it feels like to be on the outside. What perhaps made *Oranges* so popular was the humour, affection and detail with which its fine array of characters were drawn. Her reactive shift into an increasing focus on the theoretical concerns of the (male) literary world has meant that the experiences of lesbians, and women experiencing oppression generally, are written out of her work. The impact of class on women's lives, explored so powerfully in *Oranges*, is again absent from her later work.

Raw and uncontained

While Jeanette Winterson was developing those skills intended to impress the literary critics, Sara Maitland was fine-tuning hers. *Virgin Territory* never received the critical acclaim which *Oranges* did, not least because of its more radical politics. But there were other reasons. In many ways it plays *Wuthering Heights* to Jeanette Winterson's *Jane Eyre* — like its central character, *Virgin Territory* is raw and uncontained. Reading it is an intense experience: it asks us to enter into the world of someone who hovers on the boundary between sanity and madness, who is holding on by the skin of her teeth, peering down into a bottomless chasm. The world she inhabits is a violent, passionate, frightening one where the options are very stark: you either fight back, you collude or you self-destruct. In later novels, Sara Maitland returns to these themes but the novels seem more able to contain their ambivalence. They are easier novels to read.

The characters in *Three Times Table* (1990) face many of the same dilemmas confronting Anna in *Virgin Territory*, including having to abandon the certainties and fantasies they have chosen to live by. *Three Times Table* explores male theories of knowledge — including evolution and theoretical physics — demonstrating their role as patriarchal narratives and therefore social constructs, and takes a hard look

at the implications and limitations for women of living with the reality of their influence. Here again, Sara Maitland is grappling with positive and negative solutions to pain — self-destruction, versus taking control and moving on. All three women in this novel — mother, daughter and granddaughter — know they have to face the future by confronting it. Although the influence of postmodernist thinking is apparent, Sara Maitland as ever manages to hold the contradictions she invokes. While understanding uncertainty to be at the core of living, she also suggests that we have to act on the world despite that. Significantly, she concludes with lesbianism as the hope for the future of the next generation of women. In the context of such doubt, 15 year old Maggie finds some certainty. When Maggie is called a 'dyke' by a gang of boys who have seen her in her friend Hermione's arms, Hermione responds by laughing and shouting to the boys:

'Don't worry...it's probably just a phase we're going through'.

'It's all right' says Maggie, perfectly clear, her bell sounding again uncracked and certain as she had feared it never would. 'My grandmother says that a normal evolutionary phase can last two hundred million years'. (p215)

Clare in *Home Truths* (1993) undergoes a similar journey while suffering from amnesia following an accident in which she lost her hand and her lover David. Clare never remembers what happened to David, and in true postmodernist fashion, Sara Maitland avoids closure here, offering us possible explanations — a natural, biological one, a political one and a spiritual or magical one. Alternatively, Clare may have killed him. He was controlling and abusive and she certainly wanted to.

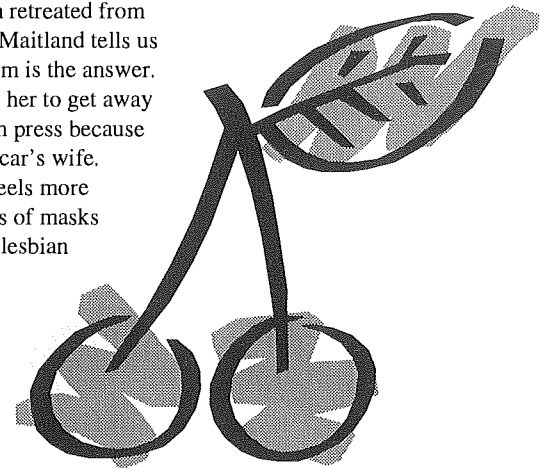
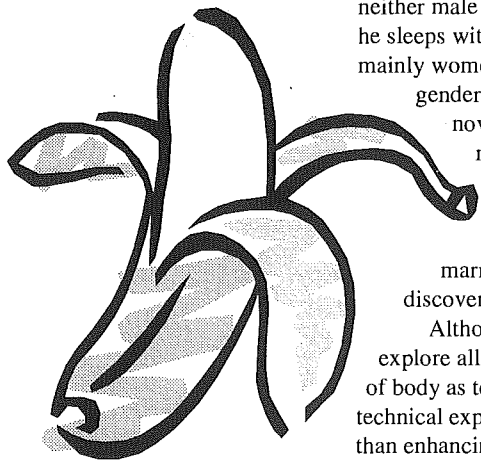
Home Truths is perhaps the most contradictory of Sara Maitland's novels. On the one hand, the influence of postmodernism and queer politics are apparent in both its form and content. We even have a gay sado-masochistic vicar caught out by the tabloids, and endeavouring to convince us that gay sado-masochism is risk-taking and daring, as opposed to the straight sado-masochism between Clare and David which is portrayed as both destructive and stultifying. Nonetheless, Sara Maitland's own uncertainty and contradictions do not allow this trend in the narrative to dominate — whatever the conscious intention. *Home Truths* remains a lesbian feminist narrative at heart, surrounded though it is by seeming uncertainty. All her life Clare had

run from risk and danger. During the course of the novel, she is able to confront and not flinch from her feelings for another woman. Psychically and literally, she moves from hiding in the safety of controlling heterosexuality, towards reclaiming the lesbian passion she ran from. She completes the journey Anna, in *Virgin Territory*, was not able to.

While Jeanette Winterson retreated from lesbianism in her work, Sara Maitland tells us again and again that lesbianism is the answer. One may argue it is easier for her to get away with doing so in a mainstream press because everyone thinks of her as a vicar's wife. Perhaps Jeanette Winterson feels more impelled to hide behind layers of masks because she is known to be a lesbian and now publishes with mainstream houses. However, Emma Donoghue, an Irish lesbian published by Penguin, seems to have been able to do so without either of these defences. The work that Sara Maitland and Jeanette Winterson, among others, did as forerunners has obviously partly enabled this to happen; Emma Donoghue has got away with a lot more, a lot sooner in the mainstream.

Emma Donoghue: An interesting comparison

Emma Donoghue's novels, *Stir Fry* and *Hood*, published respectively in 1994 and 1995, provide an interesting comparison with the novels being published by Sara Maitland and Jeanette Winterson during these years. Unlike Jeanette Winterson, Emma Donoghue does not find it necessary to avoid either her gender or her sexuality to appeal to the mainstream, although she too has certainly been influenced by the backlash against feminism. Indeed, Emma Donoghue seems altogether a lot less self-conscious about lesbianism than either Jeanette Winterson or Sara Maitland, with both positive and negative results. In *Stir Fry*, we read about one young woman's journey towards lesbianism, a theme we meet in *Oranges* and Sara Maitland's novels generally. However, Mariah's journey seems to have very little to do with rebellion against anything, be it patriarchy, or convention; and still less to do with a positive choice based on a passion for women and a desire to maintain her own integrity.



Mariah's 'decision' to become a lesbian does, however, have everything to do with uncovering her own desire for her two flatmates, Jael and Ruth, with whom she shares an extremely voyeuristic relationship.

Away from home for the first time, at university in Dublin, Mariah falls half in love with both of them, only to be shocked to discover they are lesbians, when she sees them kissing one evening.

Jael and Ruth provide two different models of lesbianism for Mariah; Ruth is a feminist, who would like to have a relationship premised on equality, who is committed to her relationship with Jael and to her politics. Much more of a postmodernist invention, committed to

neither lesbianism nor Ruth, Jael has no fixed sexual identity and finds politics boring. Mariah is attracted to Jael, but it is Ruth she chooses.

However, despite the inclusion of a lesbian feminist among the central characters — and even a women's group meeting — feminism seems oddly peripheral to the novel. Ruth's lesbianism seems somehow separate from her feminism — the two never really connect — and there is no articulation of lesbian feminist ideas anywhere in the novel. It is interesting that although the women's movement in Ireland has a different history from that in Britain, the context presented in the novel is very similar to that of the women's movement in Britain. This may in part be due to the fact that Emma Donoghue was living in Cambridge when the novel was written. Lesbian feminism is almost a backdrop, which in many ways it would have been for women of Mariah's generation. The legacy of the women's movement lingers on: the university still has a women's group; it still has lesbians in it, but the group seems to exist more as part of a lifestyle than as a tool for changing the world.

In *Hood* this is even more apparent. The central characters are part of a lesbian feminist community — a far cry from anything either Sara Maitland or Jeanette Winterson were publishing at this stage — but somehow the distinction between this and any other kind of feminism, or indeed from some kinds of heterosexuality

remains unclear. And while *Stir Fry* in its own way presents lesbianism as an enticing option, and quite cleverly unpacks Mariah's attempts to convince herself that she is heterosexual, *Hood*, despite its many attempts at portraying erotic lesbian sex — pages and pages — ultimately presents us yet again with an image of lesbian relationships as romantically tragic, and doomed to failure, as seen with Jael and Ruth's relationship in *Stir Fry*.

It is interesting to note that not one of these three novelists depicts any lasting, positive lesbian relationship for her protagonists. Those early representations of doomed, unhappy lesbians (a teacher of mine once said to me 'I've got nothing against gays but they do seem to be very unhappy people, and they always make each other unhappy') lurk between the pages of our mainstream lesbian writers like ghosts, refusing to be expelled, outliving the growth of and backlash against the women's movement, moving into the 1990s with the message that maybe you can't ever trust a woman....

The Present Impasse: Of Mothers, Lovers, Loss and Betrayal

Having begun with one contradiction, I'm going to finish with another, and perhaps more than one.

All three authors have been seen as important in bringing the fictional representation of lesbians into the mainstream, and Jeanette Winterson in particular has been regarded as a significant figure for many women coming to lesbianism for the first time. Yet even at the points in their literary career when they have been positive about the *idea* of lesbianism, none of these authors seems able to represent lesbian *relationships* in a positive light. Their representations of lesbian relationships are deeply embedded in the traditional patriarchal narratives of lesbian lives which have preceded them. From Colette to Radclyffe Hall, lesbian fiction writers have a tradition of portraying lesbian relationships in a manner consistent with dominant ideas on gender and sexuality. Sad, doomed from the start, passionate but filled with pain, romantic but tragic, we meet again in these novels the stories of our foresisters' fictional (and sometimes real) failures to build sustainable lesbian relationships.

So why has the passing of nearly a century and two waves of feminism had so little impact on even the way lesbians choose to portray their

own relationships? One of the dominant lesbian discourses during this period has been a lesbian feminist one. Yet, even back in the mid-1980s, it is possible to see a deep ambivalence about relationships between women in both Jeanette Winterson and Sara Maitland's fiction.

All three authors link the ambivalence their characters demonstrate in their adult relationships with women to feeling abandoned by, betrayed by or unable to separate from their mothers. As Adrienne Rich writes, our history as women in patriarchal culture has inevitably partially been one of betraying and lying to one another. Our first relationship with a woman — our mother — may be fraught with contradictions in a world which pressurises mothers to collude with women's oppression and prepare their daughters to be 'good women'. We see the legacy of this history represented perhaps most clearly and forcefully in Jeanette Winterson's work. *Oranges* is a very woman-centred world; men seem barely to exist. Men are 'the other', the beasts, and 'beasts are crafty' (p71). The impact of this, however, is not to present a positive image of the bonds between women in the absence of men. Quite the contrary. Jeanette is betrayed by one woman after another — her lover, Melanie; her ally in the Church, an older woman who uses Jeanette's vulnerability as an opportunity to get her into bed; and, most significantly, her mother. Her one friend, Elsie, dies and leaves her just when she needs her most. Jeanette's father is emotionally absent throughout the novel, and barely referred to — so much so that she tells Melanie when they first meet that she doesn't have a father.

The impact of Jeanette's mother's betrayal overshadows all others. On discovering her lesbianism, Jeanette's mother hands her over to Pastor Spratt of their Evangelical church and has her 'exorcised'. Afterwards she destroys all mementoes of Jeanette's relationship with Melanie:

While I lay shivering in the parlour she took a toothcomb to my room and found all the letters, all the cards, all the jottings of my own, and burnt them one night in the backyard. There are different sorts of treachery, but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it. She burnt a lot more than the letters that night in the backyard. I don't think she knew. In her head she was still queen, but not my queen anymore, not the White Queen anymore. (p109)

Later, finding this hasn't done the trick, Jeanette's mother throws her out. From being her mother's 'joy' in this close, strong, rather

enmeshed bond, Jeanette is abandoned by her, first emotionally and then physically. Reflecting as an adult on her inability to trust the women she gets involved with, Jeanette again returns to the emotional language of her mother's betrayal for an explanation:

One thing I am certain of, I do not want to be betrayed, but that's quite hard to say casually at the beginning of a relationship. It's not a word people use very often, which confuses me because there are different kinds of fidelity but betrayal is betrayal wherever you find it. By betrayal, I mean promising to be on your side, then being on someone else's. (p165)

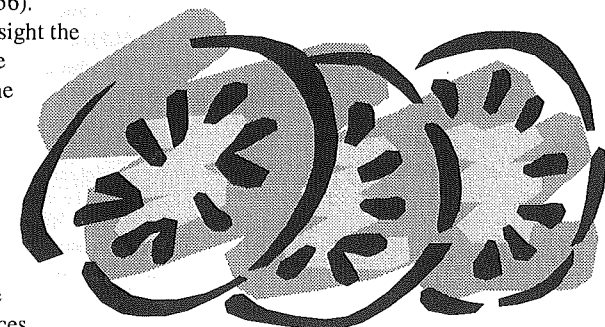
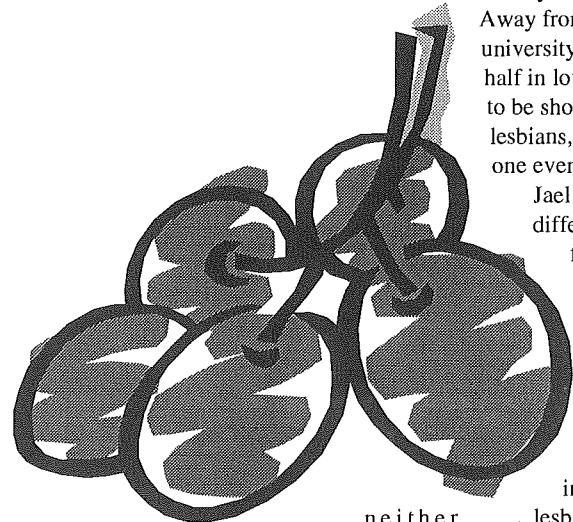
The material patriarchal world behind the misogynist world of the Evangelist church in *Oranges* barely gets a look in, other than in the form of Pastor Spratt. The emotionally female-dominated world of the narrator is so strong, that the material power of male reality does not seem significant. It is no wonder, then, that the narrator does not turn to feminism as a way of understanding her life.

Terror of loss and betrayal continue to haunt Jeanette Winterson's later work, particularly *Written On the Body*, in which the elusive Louise threatens the ultimate abandonment: death through cancer. What the narrator of this novel is forced to recognise however, is that loss is the potential risk in any love and that risk is worth taking. 'It was worth it', s/he realises. 'Love is worth it' (p156).

In a moment of insight the narrator recognises the fundamental flaw at the heart of the 'romance' of the doomed lesbian tragedies and finally tries to let go of them. Love itself — not the dramatics — is the challenge: 'What were my heroics and sacrifices really about? ...Operatic heroics and a tragic end? What about a wasteful end?' (p187)

Yet the ambivalence remains. The relationship which is finally worth risking loss for, can still slip through the net. It may not even be between two women.

Emma Donoghue similarly focuses on themes of betrayal and loss in *Hood*. Pen's lover, Cara, has died, yet the pain she begins to experience after her death is for the losses she underwent before Cara died. Pen begins to ask herself whether she had in fact lost Cara a long



time before her death. And whether Cara was emotionally absent from their relationship from the start.

The novel begins with a flashback: Pen remembers an incident in which she and Cara were out shopping one day and Cara suddenly, unpredictably, runs away from her. Cara never offers any explanation for this behaviour, but the impression given to the reader is that Cara felt a sudden bout of claustrophobia, an urge to escape; that somehow the bonds of this relationship were too tight. Cara was abandoned by her mother as a child and as an adult felt trapped by Pen's presence, but panicked at the thought of losing her. In her relationship with Cara, Pen re-experienced what happened with her own

mother, who also had sudden bouts of 'claustrophobia' wishing to escape the needs and proximity of her children, who were so attached to her. Cara has sexual relationships with other women; Pen does not. Cara endeavours to persuade Pen that this is no betrayal, quoting Jeanette's line from *Oranges* — 'By betrayal I mean promising to be on your side and then being on someone else's'.

She tells Pen 'I'm always on your side' (p215), and Pen does believe her. But the child in Pen who always felt at risk of abandonment recalls:

Sometimes when I was alone in the big house at night and the wind made the panes rattle, I forgot the explanations and I was 3 years old. My mother once said the worst thing about having children was that when she went into the cubicle of a public toilet, we would begin to snivel, and while she was struggling with her zip she would see these little hands come under the door, and would get an overpowering urge to stamp on them. I could understand that, but I could also understand the abased neediness that motivated Gavin and me to put our hands under the door. (p215)

Like Pen's mother, Cara runs from feeling overwhelmed by Pen's needs. Pen can no more give up hope of having those needs met one day by Cara than she could of having them met by her mother. Especially as Cara occasionally seems to offer that promise of fulfilment.

Pen and Cara lived double lives: in the closet to their family and their workmates, but known as lovers in the lesbian feminist community.

Forced to hide behind masks, they also hid from each other. As Adrienne Rich writes, in a comment particularly pertinent to lesbians in a heterosexist society, 'In the struggle to survive we are forced to tell lies, but the risk run by the liar is that she will forget she is lying'. The risk, from Rich's point of view, is that the liar will thus become alienated from herself and those with whom she tries to be intimate. The cost of Cara and Pen's closet life was immense but unrecognised by them, and only becomes apparent when Cara dies and Pen is unable to share her grief with colleagues or family. Yet, the novel raises a complex question here. Were Pen and Cara forced to hide behind masks because of fear of reprisal, or was this life in the closet chosen by them as an evasion of risk, because they both had a history in which intimacy — being one's true self with another — was to be feared anyway? Did the closet provide a convenient means by which to avoid having to dismantle barriers, particularly with parents?

The conclusion of the novel, and the point at which Pen eventually cries, is when she decides finally to try having an open, honest conversation with her mother for the first time in her life. *Hood* closes with Pen sitting at her mother's kitchen table, about to tell her she's a lesbian, prepared to acknowledge that the child within her still needs her mother: 'This birth is long overdue mother. It'll be a tight squeeze. You'd better open your arms to this screaming red bundle, because it's the only one I'll ever bring you.' (p309)

All of Sara Maitland's protagonists are preoccupied with mothers, and their current relationships with women are complicated by this preoccupation. Anna in *Virgin Territory* was, like Cara and Jeanette, abandoned by her mother. Anna's mother left her to be brought up by her father, who expected her to be the adult. When she meets Karen, the 'bad girl' inside her feels she may have found a mother at last. The longing to be held, to be given a hot bath and wrapped up, are finally met by Karen, and therein lies the confusion because Karen is offering lesbian feminism and adult sexuality. What Anna emotionally wants is a mother, and Karen can never be that. Realising in the end that Karen cannot save her, cannot take responsibility for her, Anna goes her own way. She cannot trust herself with Karen, because she does not feel adult enough to meet her on equal terms. But this means the novel is left open. We are not entirely

sure if lesbian feminism is the path Anna will take, for what she was looking for from it was an experience from other women which could somehow put right and heal the loss and betrayal of women in the past. As she herself realises, she is currently confusing her feelings about her mother with those towards the women close to her now: 'Until she found her mother, she could not love her sisters because she could not tell who they were'. (p231)

Anna does not allow herself to express her anger and ambivalence with women in general and mothers in particular until the end of the novel. Even then she projects the anger, hearing in her mind the voice of Caro expressing her anger with her own mother for abandoning her as a child:

You blame the Fathers but I have to ask, where are the mothers then?...The mothers desert the daughters. They sell us to the Fathers, over and over again...They are busy gnawing through the cord so they can sell us off, and their price is cheap. I hate them. I hate them. They go away. They ought to stay with the daughters but they go away. (p218)

Disappointed expectations

In the novels discussed here, we find an array of angry, wounded, motherless daughters, abandoned or betrayed as children — Jeanette, Anna, Cara, Clare in *Home Truths* — alongside characters like Pen and the three generations in *Three Times Table*, battling out the complex process of trying to separate from and at the same time maintain their attachment to their mothers. Both abandonment and engulfment are equally feared — Clare, for example, has two mothers, one representing each of these fears. The security a mother may provide is also a constraint. Jeanette in *Oranges*, sums this up when she talks ambivalently of her attachment to her mother, still as strong years after her mother has thrown her out: 'She had tied a thread around my button, to tug when she pleased' (p171).

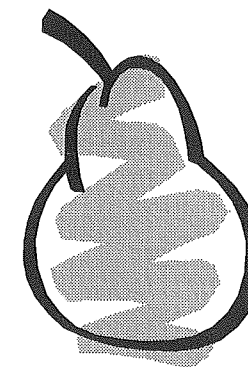
The ambivalence that Sara Maitland, Jeanette Winterson and Emma Donoghue leave us with in their novels reflects the process that has taken place within lesbian feminism itself in recent years. Disillusionment with the possibility of sisterhood, its failure to meet impossible emotional expectations, has bitterly impacted on the movement.² (A consequent idealisation of 'bad' women — dangerous, cruel, violent or just plain cold and hard — has been the result.) Proponents of queer theory and postmodernism

were able to benefit from this disjuncture. The work of all three authors reflects the influence of postmodernist discourse on sexuality and the concurrent backlash against feminism. Of the three, Sara Maitland is the most influenced by, and in dialogue with, lesbian feminist ideas although she is not considered to be a 'lesbian author'.

All three of these authors have made it to the mainstream perhaps partly because their novels represent lesbian relationships in ambivalent forms, in contrast to more unreservedly feminist or idealised representations. None of the authors involves her protagonists in even mildly contented lesbian relationships. There are hopes for the future for characters like Mariah, Pen, Anna and Clare but there are no representations of happy lesbian lovers in these novels.

Jeanette in *Oranges* voices her disappointed expectations: 'The unknownness of my needs frightens me, I do not know how huge they are or how high they are, I only know they are not being met' (p165). All of these characters struggle with the question of how to form attachments with adult women, to take that risk having defended themselves alone for so long. The voices in the texts seem to beg the question, is it worth even trying to build new models of relating to women, in which fear of intimacy and betrayal do not dominate? Or are lesbians after all, doomed — in our self representations — to repeat the dramas, tragedies and failures of our fore Sisters?

These novels remind us that many women do not enter lesbianism loving women, or even liking them much, although the bonds they feel with other women may be strong. In this context, lesbian feminism has to struggle with many more compelling, more mainstream narratives, which offer solutions that can appear to be less threatening, less demanding and a good deal more romantic. □



References

- Emma Donoghue *Stir Fry* (Penguin Books, 1994); *Hood* (Hamish Hamilton, 1995)
- Sara Maitland *Virgin Territory* (Pavanne, 1984); *Three Times Table* (Chatto and Windus, 1990); *Home Truths* (Chatto and Windus, 1993); *A Book of Spells* (Michael Joseph, 1987)
- Adrienne Rich 'Women and Honor. Some Notes on Lying' in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1995)
- Micheline Wandor and Sara Maitland *Arky Types* (Methuen, 1987)
- Jeanette Winterson *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (Vintage, 1985); *Written on the Body* (Jonathan Cape, 1990)

Footnotes

¹ See Sara Maitland's own account of dealing with these responses in her collection *A Book of Spells* (1987).

² This deep ambivalence about relations between women is rather serious for a political force dependent on 'sisterhood' for its success. Lesbian feminism in particular, unlike lesbianism *per se*, has at its base a belief in a commitment to women, a vision of lesbianism as a choice to positively celebrate and value our own, who have been so hated and violated throughout the centuries. In the face of patriarchy's attempts to encourage women to mistrust one another and to battle over men, lesbian feminism argues that we can defeat patriarchy by uniting against it. Looking back to our mothers, we can rediscover the women who have been made invisible by patriarchal narratives and rewrite our own, reclaiming the bonds between women and the struggles they fought as they did so.

Could Do Better

It's official: girls are now doing better than boys in nearly all school subjects. Boys' educational 'underachievement' is prompting widespread concern and even panic. But amid all the hysteria about boys, are feminist concerns being marginalised? Debbie Cameron takes a closer look.

On 5 January 1998 an editorial in *The Independent* said:

The male backlash is here, and it has nothing to do with Robert Bly discovering the wild man banging bongos in American forests. We are talking about boys. They cannot read, write their own names or speak properly. They are physically and socially clumsy. Increasingly they cannot even do boys' stuff, the maths and the science. As a result they fall prey to entrapment by clever women journalists in pubs [a topical reference to Jack Straw's son being tricked into offering to sell dope to a reporter], they are outnumbered in the work force and left to their own criminal devices.

The subject under discussion was the problem of 'underachievement' among boys in British schools. The issue had just been highlighted by the schools minister Stephen Byers, and by a much-hyped *Panorama* documentary titled 'The trouble with boys'. Boys are the newest educational bandwagon, and reports about their allegedly desperate plight have

become a media bandwagon too. But feminists would be wise not to take this at face value.

What seems to be the trouble?

For several years now, we have been bombarded with what look on the surface like alarming statistics. If we take the most commonly quoted figures, on 16-year olds' GCSE exam results, education researcher and writer Bethan Marshall summarises: 'Girls outperform boys in every single local authority in England. And in half those authorities they outperform them by 10 per cent or more'.

What about pupils at earlier stages of their school careers? In a recent annual report, the Chief Inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, claimed that two thirds of girls but only half of their male peers are 'fulfilling their potential'. The statistics go on and on, and they all seem to point in the same direction.

But on closer inspection things are not as

simple as they might look. It is important to understand, for instance, that 'underachievement' does not mean boys are doing worse than they used to. On the contrary, researchers agree that both sexes are doing better overall than they used to: it's just that girls have made more progress than boys, to the point where they no longer lag behind them but have overtaken them. In other words, there is no absolute standard for what counts as 'achievement'; boys can only be seen to be 'underachieving' when they are compared with girls.

This might suggest there is a covert assumption that boys ought to be doing as well as or better than girls; girls outperforming boys is contrary to the natural order of things, and therefore signals a problem. There is also an assumption that the reversal in girls' and boys' fortunes represents something new. Yet as Bethan Marshall points out, on one of the most crucial measures of 'achievement' in the past — the Eleven Plus exam which determined what kind of secondary education a child in Britain would receive — girls consistently did better than boys. This problem was solved by having a different pass mark for each sex: boys could get into grammar schools with lower marks than girls needed. The official justification was that boys were late developers.

The present picture is also complicated by significant differences within each gender group. One group of researchers has found that among the lowest achievers, pupils who leave school with no qualifications, are disaffected in class and/or habitual truants, girls and boys are about equally represented. The gender gap is not constant across social classes. Other research has suggested there are significant differences between ethnic groups. It has been claimed that Black (African-Caribbean) girls are doing better not only than Black boys but also than white girls. Asian boys (except those of Bangladeshi descent) do better than other groups of boys.

The statistics may also reflect the way some boys' schools, under the regime of more parental choice introduced by the last government and continued by the present one, have become unpopular and unable to attract higher achievers (parents with clout often want single-sex education for their daughters, but not for their sons). There is evidence that when a school's intake becomes unbalanced in this way, 'average' achievement falls.

It seems then that reality is a lot more

complex than the way it has been represented. The newspapers are full of sweeping generalisations about 'boys' and 'girls' whereas the research shows important differences within each group; the shock-horror headlines assert or imply some sudden recent change for the worse, whereas statistics gathered over time suggest something else entirely. The available evidence could be interpreted in a number of ways, but on no reasonable interpretation does it prove that boys overall are illiterate unemployable failures. Which might prompt us to ask: why are so many people so determined to convince us that they are? Is there a hidden agenda here? And might that agenda have something to do with anti-feminism?

The Full Monty

The *Independent* editorial contains more than a hint of anti-feminism, with its remarks about 'entrapment by clever women journalists' and men being 'outnumbered in the work force' by women (in other words, 'they're taking our jobs'). Behind this sort of commentary lies a real male fear. What is feared is the scenario dramatised in the film *The Full Monty*: a post-industrial Britain where the traditional skilled (and relatively highly paid) occupations of working class men, like steelworking and mining, are no longer an option. In this scenario men are either unemployed while their wives bring home the bacon, or else reduced to doing 'women's work' — represented in the film by stripping. Even privileged men who are not directly disadvantaged by changes in the working-class labour market have reason to feel threatened. These changes constitute a very obvious challenge to traditional notions of masculine identity, and to at least one traditional source of men's power within the home and family, i.e. earning more money than women.

This is the context in which people have started to worry — indeed, panic — about boys' educational 'underachievement'. The implicit argument is that if men can no longer hope to make a living wage on the basis of physical strength and skill, they can only stay ahead of women, or even just keep up with them, by gaining the qualifications which jobs in the new economy require. If women are doing better than men on the educational front, it adds insult to injury: women will have men over a barrel.

Feminists might well be suspicious of this argument, however, because it seems to assume

that the labour market operates on a principle of 'the best person for the job', with 'best' being defined in terms of exam qualifications. Against that, it might well be pointed out that common or garden discrimination continues to flourish in the nation's workplaces. Discussion about boys' alleged problems tends to stop at the school gate, without asking if their underachievement relative to girls actually is disadvantaging them in the job market. It bears pointing out that some of the research findings about girls getting better exam results go back almost two decades, to the early 1980s. If girls leaving school have been better qualified than boys for 20 years, and if qualifications are so important in predicting career success, one might ask why, for example, the pay gap between the sexes does not seem to be narrowing. Why are women not being paid more for their superior credentials?

Bethan Marshall provides one answer. Citing research done for a 1995 report on industry and education, she comments: 'It is not at all clear that employers are even looking for the best-



qualified candidates'. Many employers continue to emphasise ill-defined qualities of 'personality' and 'self-presentation'; unlike paper qualifications these are to a large extent in the eye of the beholder, leaving plenty of room for prejudices and stereotypes.

A number of researchers have wondered if the same qualities which underlie girls' school success (most girls get on with the task at hand rather than showing off or constantly drawing attention to themselves, whereas a fair number of boys do the opposite) may also be responsible for their lack of success in many employment sectors. In order to be noticed and rewarded at work, you often have to be not just competent, but able and willing to advertise yourself. In the 'real world', bullshit matters just as much as paper qualifications.

It has also been suggested that even if we ignore the bullshit factor, the things girls are good at, and which the examination system rewards them for, are not the things that matter in today's economy. Put crudely, the argument is that a boy who prefers computer games to homework may actually be doing a better job of preparing himself for the future than a girl who spends her evenings conscientiously writing essays on *Romeo and Juliet*. Personally I am sceptical about this argument. My own experience of being asked to write job references does not suggest that if only young people had the right skills they would all be getting highly-paid jobs in computing or other technologically-oriented industries. The people I write references for are university graduates rather than school leavers: increasing numbers (of both sexes) end up with service or sales jobs which do not make much use of their skills and qualifications, because those are the jobs on offer. For the present, at least, high technology is not where most of the available work is; explaining gender inequalities in employment with reference to girls' less developed IT skills seems to me a distraction from the main issue, which is sexism.

Girls may be doing better at school than boys, but the fact is that women across classes still usually lose out economically and professionally to men. If we keep that in mind, there is surely something worrying about arguments that boys are now the real losers, and that more resources should be directed towards their educational needs. A particular worry for feminists is that the resources in question may be resources that were previously earmarked for

girls under the banner of equal opportunities. That might sound like paranoia, but I don't think the possibility can be dismissed out of hand, when some contributors to the debate on underachievement are openly questioning whether feminism in education has 'gone too far', leaving boys to pay the price.

Blaming women

In an article titled 'New Lads, New Panics?' Debbie Epstein identifies a number of key themes or 'discourses' in the current debate on boys. The first one she labels 'Poor Boys', a discourse in which women, and especially feminists, are blamed for boys' failures. One recurring complaint under this heading concerns the supposed dominance of women in the teaching profession. Because of this dominance, schools allegedly have a 'feminised' culture, against which boys will 'naturally' tend to rebel. A version of this argument was recycled by Stephen Byers, the government minister whose comments prompted the *Independent* editorial. He suggested that boys needed more male teachers to act as role models.

As Jane Miller has pointed out in her excellent book about women teachers, *School for Women*, this is very far from being a novel suggestion. Since the advent of mass schooling in the nineteenth century it has persistently been claimed that merely by being female, women teachers are harming their male pupils. Jane Miller quotes the school superintendent who said in 1911:

I am strongly of the opinion that the presence of women as teachers of boys...causes thousands of boys to become disgusted with and to leave the schools...because of their intense dislike to being (using their own words) 'bossed by women'.

Also quoted in Jane Miller's book is an article that appeared in the *Times Educational Supplement* in 1994, which reported recruiters' concerns that 'the knock-on effect of a predominantly female teaching force will be to stereotype the profession further and deprive children of male role-models'. Apparently it is bad not only for boys but also for the image of the entire profession if teachers are 'predominantly female'. Recently Nigel de Gruchy, leader of one of the teaching unions, used the need to get more men into the classroom as an argument for increasing teachers' pay. He noted that while a teacher's salary might be acceptable as a second income, it would not attract someone who expected to be the family's main breadwinner —

a role Mr de Gruchy evidently allots to men, though one imagines there are plenty of single mothers among his members.

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that in the secondary school sector, where there is so much concern about boys' performance in public examinations, women do not currently outnumber men teachers; in the primary school sector they do significantly outnumber them, but men are disproportionately represented in authority positions — almost half of primary head teachers are male. The idea that there are too many women teachers and that they 'dominate' the profession seems to be based on some strange assumptions about what the 'right' number of women would be. We might also suspect that underneath the modern jargon about 'role models' lurks the same old male 'dislike to being bossed by women'. An equitable approach to recruitment, promotion and pay would challenge that attitude rather than pandering to it.

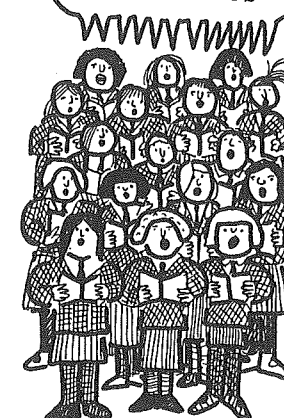
Another recurring argument about boys' underachievement is that boys do badly because they see academic pursuits as incompatible with masculinity. Debbie Epstein calls this the 'Boys will be boys' discourse, and she points out that once again it is nothing new. A government report in 1923 suggested that boys have a 'habit of healthy idleness'; there is nothing wrong with their natural intellectual faculties, they simply choose not to apply themselves. More recently, Bethan Marshall found in her research that even the most academically able boys dreaded being seen as 'boffins': caring about schoolwork was for girls.

Once again, the solution to this problem is often seen to lie in providing more male role-models, especially in areas such as reading, where boys lag significantly behind girls. As one researcher was quoted in a newspaper report explaining: 'A lot of boys only see their mothers reading at home and female teachers reading in the classroom. Reading is seen as a female pursuit not a masculine one'. This researcher called, once again, for more men in the classroom and more involvement of fathers in their sons' education.

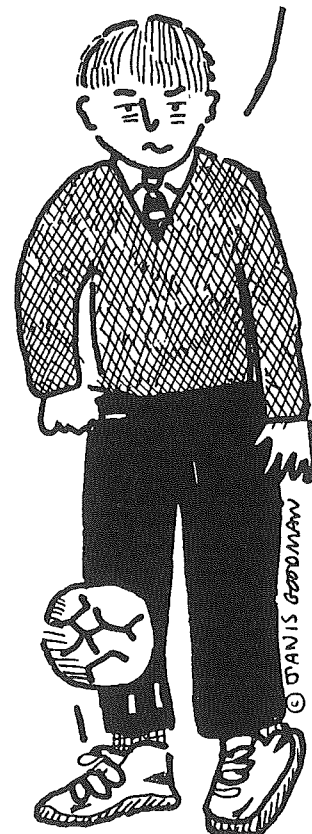
The idea seems to be that if boys saw their fathers, and male teachers, reading, they would cease to regard the activity as a threat to their masculinity. But this seems like a confusion between cause and effect. The author of one recent book about gender and literacy found that many boys did see their fathers reading things

BACK TO BASICS: THE SCHOOL SONG

LET US NOW PRAISE
FAMOUS MEN
AND OUR FATHERS
WHO BEGAT US



IT'S
NOT FAIR
HAVING TO DO
GIRLY
THINGS
LIKE READING,
WRITING AND SUMS



like newspapers, instructional manuals and documents related to their jobs. When this was pointed out to them, however, the boys said it wasn't real reading! Their conviction that reading is 'girly' seems to override their actual experience of observing men engaged in it, and this suggests that the 'more male role models' solution is simplistic.

Perhaps the problem is not so much a lack of role models as it is an extreme and stultifying notion of masculinity among school-age boys. The gender stereotypes held by both boys and girls are of course something many feminist teachers have seen it as their business to address

through anti-sexist work in the classroom. The question is, though, how will the new focus on under-achieving boys affect this kind of feminist work?

Challenging masculinity?

I put that question to several feminists I know who train teachers and/or do education research, and found there was some disagreement among them. One view was that the new interest in boys need not entail shifting attention or resources away from girls, or from the issue of gender equality. Such a shift was unlikely to happen, because most of the researchers involved have an explicitly feminist agenda. They see masculinity as the problem, and anti-sexist work which takes a critical approach to masculinity as the way forward. Some feminists welcomed the current eagerness to fund research on boys, feeling that although there was always some risk of being co-opted, if researchers were careful they could use the opportunity to advance a radical agenda. Debbie Epstein's article exemplifies this view, concluding:

The current moral panic around boys' 'underachievement' has produced a key opportunity for challenging gender inequalities in schools, but it is one which is fraught with danger. ... A reactionary recuperation of feminist insights and concerns is also possible. The task of the moment is to ensure this does not happen.

Other women I spoke to, in contrast, thought the 'reactionary recuperation' had already happened. They worried that work with and about girls was being pushed into the margins. One told me she found it 'ironic' that she had several times applied for grants to do research on girls and been unsuccessful, whereas the first time she submitted a proposal on boys she got funding. Another said it was all very well to point to the feminist political agenda of most researchers, but that agenda was not filtering through into policy documents.

This woman illustrated her point using a report that had just come out from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) called *Can Do Better: Raising Boys' Achievements in English*. A good example of Debbie Epstein's 'Boys will be boys' discourse, this document makes numerous generalisations about boys — for instance, that they 'have difficulty discussing emotions' and 'need well-defined tasks' if they are not to lose interest — but it does not treat these characteristics as problematic. On the contrary, the point seems to be that this is just

the way boys are: teachers who are aware of boys' strengths and weaknesses will be able to design more relevant activities and tasks for them. The document does stress that boys' needs should not be met at the expense of girls', but the researcher I discussed it with felt that putting its suggestions into action would almost inevitably marginalise girls.

On balance, I am not persuaded that the official agenda — what the QCA refers to as 'raising boys' achievements' — fits comfortably into a feminist framework emphasising anti-sexist work around masculinity. In feminist educational circles it may be obvious that masculinity is the root of the problem, but that is not the way it is being presented to everyone else, either in official policy documents like *Can Do Better* or in media reporting. These are the sources from which most people — including most teachers — get their information; and it is difficult to argue that the message they put across has much to do with feminism. If anything, the reverse is true: in its more 'populist' versions, the panic about boys taps into some highly reactionary ideas floating around at the moment, both about gender and about education.

For instance, the evidence that boys are often badly behaved in class and perform poorly in certain subjects (like English and foreign languages) gets wheeled out to bolster the currently fashionable theory that most male-

female differences are really biological. While educational research continues to assume that nurture is more important than nature in explaining what happens in school, other forms of academic inquiry (e.g. psychology) and popular common-sense are increasingly being pervaded by crude biologism (see 'Back To Nature', *T&S* 36). TV science programmes like this summer's *Why Men Don't Iron* advance the thesis that boys' genes make them good at some things and bad at others. So if we want them to do better in school, the only effective strategy is to design the schooling we provide around their 'natural' aptitudes and preferences. 'Boys will be boys', in other words.

Also relevant to the 'male underachievement' issue is the reactionary educational philosophy known as 'back to basics', which was promoted vigorously by the Conservative government during the late 1980s and 1990s, and has not fallen out of favour with the advent of a new Labour administration. It has been claimed repeatedly that 'progressive' teaching and assessment methods favour girls whereas 'traditional' methods are more congenial to boys. On that basis it has been argued that one reason girls have recently been doing better at GCSE is that assessment no longer depends entirely on traditional exams, but includes coursework as well.

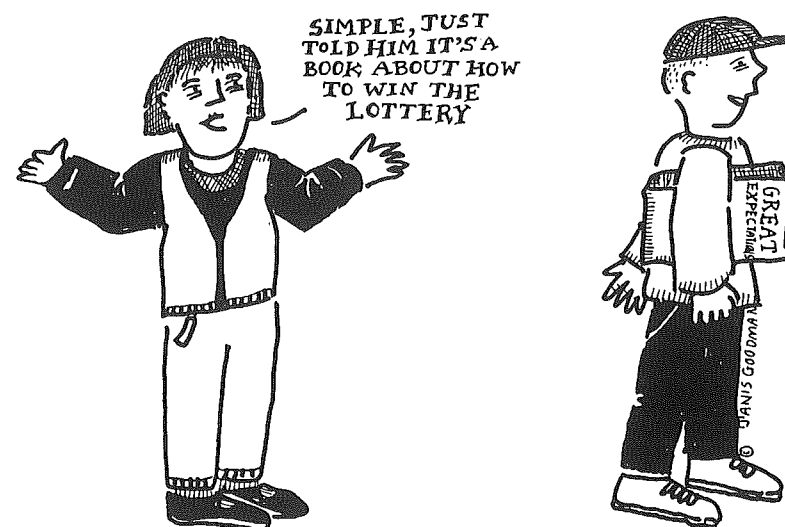
This line of argument is both objectionable



I'M
NOT PREPARED
TO JEOPARDISE
MY MASCULINITY
BY DOING MY
HOMEWORK
MISS

and inaccurate. One objectionable thing about it is the automatic assumption that girls' success is a mere artefact of particular teaching methods — not coincidentally, the very methods politicians would like to get rid of anyway in the name of 'going back to basics'. But in addition the whole argument is based on stereotypes which the statistical evidence does not support.

Bethan Marshall argues quite convincingly



that coursework does not particularly favour girls, though continuous assessment — which gives you an immediate return on your efforts — may enable low educational achievers of both sexes to get more out of schooling than they would otherwise. Be that as it may, in many subjects girls were outperforming boys at GCSE before coursework was introduced, and the tendency has persisted — indeed, the gap has widened — since coursework was drastically reduced amid hysteria about 'falling standards' in 1992. Even if the stereotypes were accurate, though, it is still striking that some people would be happy to discard assessment practices introduced for independent educational reasons, simply because they result in girls doing better.

Controlling teachers

Debbie Epstein links what I have been calling 'back to basics' with the new managerial approach to education in general. In the last decade, successive British governments have been obsessed with exerting more and more control over what is taught in schools and how.

They have introduced management dogma to education: you standardise and constantly measure everything, you set targets and benchmarks, you publish the results. Hence the national curriculum, hence school league tables, hence the 'naming and shaming' of schools that are not measuring up. Within this approach, boys' underachievement is addressed as part of a wider problem of 'failing schools'. Debbie Epstein finds this unsatisfactory, but more because it is apolitical than because it is directly anti-feminist.

My own view is slightly different. I think managerialism is, among other things, a deliberate and conscious attack on feminism, and other radical political ideologies such as socialism and anti-racism, in the teaching profession. The Conservatives who enacted far-reaching educational 'reform' in the 1980s saw education as the last and most entrenched bastion of so-called 'political correctness' and social egalitarianism. Their propaganda referred to a left wing 'educational establishment' which supposedly ran schools in accordance with its own vested interests and crazed political theories rather than acting in the interests of children. The power of this so-called 'establishment' had to be smashed, and it has been. An important aim of the new managerialism was to curb the autonomy of education professionals, and while this disempowers all teachers, I would argue that it has been particularly disempowering for those who dissent — as feminists and other radicals do — from orthodox wisdom about the aims of education.

Professional autonomy has been undermined by leaving less and less scope for teachers to decide how they organise their own classrooms. The national curriculum tells teachers what to teach, and increasingly they are being told by government agencies what methods to use (they are now required to teach reading through a daily 'literacy hour', for example). The government has even mooted using pre-packaged standard lesson plans, ostensibly to save teachers time on preparation and allow them to concentrate on teaching — as if deciding what and how to teach were not an integral part of the activity.

Educational research done in universities and colleges has also been publicly attacked as incompetent, biased and useless. This judgement is based on a report by a notoriously right-wing 'expert' (one Professor Tooley) who read precisely 41 of the thousands of papers published

between 1994 and 1996 before drawing his conclusions. Lending credence to the suspicion that the agenda was not purely 'managerial' and 'apolitical', Professor Tooley was particularly scathing about research on class, race and gender. (He remarked that 'concern about gender is only concern about girls, and boys don't seem to matter at all'. Isn't it amazing how fast things can change!) Labour minister Tessa Blackstone told the *Times Educational Supplement* that future research must focus on practical issues 'so that teachers and policymakers know what works' (quoted *TES* August 28 1998). It seems academic researchers are no longer supposed to raise theoretical (and political) questions such as 'works for what?' and 'works for whom?'. Told what to teach and how, denied access to any ideas which do not have the stamp of official approval, teachers will become like technicians, passively implementing policies handed down from on high and firmly discouraged from thinking for themselves. In this regime there will be no room for radical politics.

Another thing there appears to be no room for in the brave new world of managerialism is the idea that education could be worthwhile in itself, or that schools might legitimately have different values from the 'real world' and the 'world of work' — phrases which are, in fact, euphemisms for 'capitalism'. When teachers are told off by David Blunkett or Chris Woodhead for using 'soft' (which also implies, 'feminine') methods like group work and continuous assessment, or for encouraging self-expression at the expense of 'basic skills', the voice I hear is the calculating and philistine voice of the employers' lobby, demanding that schools should do no more and no less than prepare young people to take up their allotted place in the capitalist order.

Countering new myths

Whatever the problems of schools today, and of girls and women in them, from a feminist perspective changes in education must rank among the success stories of the last 25 years. Schooling is, arguably, the biggest and most important social institution where feminism has made a noticeable difference. Girls are receiving more and better education than ever before, and

even if they still face disadvantage in the wider world, they are no longer routinely treated as second class citizens in the classroom. As Jane Miller says, though, these huge and positive achievements on the part of girls and feminist teachers have been 'greeted with a wringing of hands and a reminder that what girls have gained, boys have lost' (p.1).

Jane Miller was prompted to write her book by a strong feeling that the achievements of girls, and the work of women teachers, should be celebrated, not ignored or disparaged. I agree: there is a strain of real contempt for women and girls in recent commentary on gender and education, and feminists need to speak out against it. The message that comes across to me is that boys and men still count in a way girls and women don't. Even when boys and men are being represented as a problem, it is considered to be everyone's problem, whereas the problems (and in this case, the achievements) of girls and women remain a minority interest.

But what really prompted me to write this piece was an uneasy feeling that even feminists are beginning to be swayed by oversimplified arguments peddled by the media and politicians about boys' academic underachievement, their lack of positive role-models and their dire future employment prospects. Most feminists would say they want equality with men, not male subordination, and they are consequently receptive to what look like reasonable arguments that boys now need special help. Until I looked more closely at the evidence, I was half persuaded by these arguments myself. But on inspection, the arguments do not stand up, whereas the underlying thread of anti-feminism is all too obvious.

Many feminists are involved with schools, not only as teachers but also as parents and as governors. I think feminists in these positions need to be on the look out for dubious claims about boys' situation and proposals to improve it which might prove detrimental to girls. We must be ready to defend the achievements of feminism, and prepared to counter new educational myths. And we should also oppose, as a threat to both women and feminism in the classroom, the current desire of politicians and employers to make teachers stop thinking and just do what they're told. □



References

- Debbie Cameron 'Back to Nature' *T&S* 36, Winter 1997/8
- Debbie Epstein 'New Lads, New Panics?' *CREG News* 1998, London Institute of Education
- Bethan Marshall 'Boys go to Jupiter to be more stupider, and girls go to Mars to be superstars' *Critical Quarterly* 40.2, 1998
- Jane Miller *School for Women* (Virago 1996)
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority *Can Do Better: Raising Boys' Achievements in English* (QCA, 1998)

Out of the Shadows

Recently in Bangladesh women's groups have begun organising against acid-throwing. Here Linda Regan interviews Bina Akhtar, a survivor of this particular form of male violence against women, and we report on the activities of Naripokkho, a women's group dedicated to breaking the silence and achieving justice.

Linda Regan: Can you tell us something about acid throwing, what type of thing this is, who does it, in what circumstances, and how often it happens?

Bina Akhtar: It is usually uneducated and unemployed men who throw acid. They do this when they are rejected by women who are better educated than themselves. Sometimes these men propose to the girls again immediately after they have been turned down; they throw acid as revenge if they are refused a second time. Dowry is another reason for acid throwing.

Linda: So when you say that it's men who are doing it to women who refuse them, is it women who refuse to marry them or women just refusing to have relationships with them?

Bina: If a woman happens to be attractive and does not want to marry the man who fancies her and the man realises that he stands no chance of

marrying this woman, they throw acid so that nobody else will marry her, leaving him free to do so.

Linda: So it ensures the woman cannot get involved with someone else?

Bina: That is right — they want to ruin the looks of the woman and thereby prevent her from marrying anybody else.

Linda: And is it usually young women this is happening to?

Bina: Yes — girls from 11 up to 18, and for dowry reasons up to 24.

Linda: What happens in a dowry situation, how is that different?

Bina: Lots of things are given to the in-laws as dowry. Then, within three to four months after the wedding the in-laws ask the woman to get more money from her parents. The woman

mentions what her parents gave as dowry — the money, the bicycle, nice things for the house — and asks why they want still more money. Acid throwing happens when the woman does not comply with the wishes of the in-laws. A husband could throw acid even after twenty five years of marriage when the children are at university and college.

Linda: Why do they do this to older women?

Bina: For money. If the husband is an alcoholic, takes drugs, lives with another woman or leaves his wife for another woman, the wife objects to this and tells him to stop. They have a mighty row and he beats her up. The woman then refuses to depend on her husband. This hurts his pride and he throws acid at her.

Linda: How widespread is this? Have you any idea about how many women this is happening to in a year?

Bina: As far as we know, this happened to 108 women during 1997 in Bangladesh. There were quite a few instances in 1995-1996. This is from the newspaper cuttings we collect. The number of cases for 1998 up until now is about thirty.

Linda: Is that the main way you hear about cases — through newspaper reports?

Bina: That's right. I take cuttings from papers if they are on acid burns. But it is not always possible for me to go and visit them straight away. The women who suffer this often live in villages. They are taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital if they can not be treated in the village. I visit the hospital every Saturday. I saw five acid burn cases last Saturday. One woman was pregnant, one had just only got married, and another woman had been married for three years and was eight months pregnant. All these women were hit because of dowry reasons. Eight months pregnant — she was screaming with pain. On top of this she is probably going to have the baby.

I am not worried about myself. What is going to happen to these women?

There was this Hindu girl from Manikgunge called Shukla. She was a very attractive girl. She was out one day when some boys got hold of her and did things to her, including kissing her, against her will. But they did not do her any real harm. Soon after this she was asleep in her room when these men dug a tunnel under the floor and gained entry into her room. They dragged her out of her room. In all there were eleven men in the

gang and they all raped her. She pleaded with the man who was taking her clothes off and said that she would let him have his way with her but not the others. But they took her clothes off just the same and after they had all raped her, they threw a bucketful of acid over her naked body and they ran away. She was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital immediately but sadly she died. Four women victims of acid attacks I know have since died.

Linda: Is it usually a man doing this on his own or are there many cases where there are more than one man involved?

Bina: One man on his own could never drag a woman out of her home and throw acid at her. Usually a few friends get together to do this. Sometimes there are fifty, even sixty men in the gang — let alone eleven men! A group of men do it together because they know that they will never get away with it if they get caught doing such a horrible thing. The family might even kill them. That is why they cover the area well by positioning themselves at a yard or so from each other. They even do things like cut off the electricity line around the house before they attack.

Linda: So some of the cases are extremely well planned and organised.

Bina: Oh yes, they start planning a year before the attack. They never attack without any planning.

Bina's story

Linda: Can you tell us your story Bina, what happened to you?

Bina: I was fifteen when this happened, I am seventeen now. There was only a couple of days planning the attack on me, and the men involved were terrorists, there are two political parties in Bangladesh — the BNP and the Awami League, they belonged to the Awami League, the ruling party.

Linda: So do they use acid in other ways to help the party?

Bina: Yes they do. There are quite a few tanneries where I used to live. They use cowhide for making shoes and other things. In this tannery they use sulphuric acid for melting iron. These men asked for some acid, and the man in the tannery refused twice. So they beat him up and left with a container full of acid.

Out of the Shadows

Recently in Bangladesh women's groups have begun organising against acid-throwing. Here Linda Regan interviews Bina Akhtar, a survivor of this particular form of male violence against women, and we report on the activities of Naripokkho, a women's group dedicated to breaking the silence and achieving justice.

Linda Regan: Can you tell us something about acid throwing, what type of thing this is, who does it, in what circumstances, and how often it happens?

Bina Akhtar: It is usually uneducated and unemployed men who throw acid. They do this when they are rejected by women who are better educated than themselves. Sometimes these men propose to the girls again immediately after they have been turned down; they throw acid as revenge if they are refused a second time. Dowry is another reason for acid throwing.

Linda: So when you say that it's men who are doing it to women who refuse them, is it women who refuse to marry them or women just refusing to have relationships with them?

Bina: If a woman happens to be attractive and does not want to marry the man who fancies her and the man realises that he stands no chance of

marrying this woman, they throw acid so that nobody else will marry her, leaving him free to do so.

Linda: So it ensures the woman cannot get involved with someone else?

Bina: That is right — they want to ruin the looks of the woman and thereby prevent her from marrying anybody else.

Linda: And is it usually young women this is happening to?

Bina: Yes — girls from 11 up to 18, and for dowry reasons up to 24.

Linda: What happens in a dowry situation, how is that different?

Bina: Lots of things are given to the in-laws as dowry. Then, within three to four months after the wedding the in-laws ask the woman to get more money from her parents. The woman

mentions what her parents gave as dowry — the money, the bicycle, nice things for the house — and asks why they want still more money. Acid throwing happens when the woman does not comply with the wishes of the in-laws. A husband could throw acid even after twenty five years of marriage when the children are at university and college.

Linda: Why do they do this to older women?

Bina: For money. If the husband is an alcoholic, takes drugs, lives with another woman or leaves his wife for another woman, the wife objects to this and tells him to stop. They have a mighty row and he beats her up. The woman then refuses to depend on her husband. This hurts his pride and he throws acid at her.

Linda: How widespread is this? Have you any idea about how many women this is happening to in a year?

Bina: As far as we know, this happened to 108 women during 1997 in Bangladesh. There were quite a few instances in 1995-1996. This is from the newspaper cuttings we collect. The number of cases for 1998 up until now is about thirty.

Linda: Is that the main way you hear about cases — through newspaper reports?

Bina: That's right. I take cuttings from papers if they are on acid burns. But it is not always possible for me to go and visit them straight away. The women who suffer this often live in villages. They are taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital if they can not be treated in the village. I visit the hospital every Saturday. I saw five acid burn cases last Saturday. One woman was pregnant, one had just only got married, and another woman had been married for three years and was eight months pregnant. All these women were hit because of dowry reasons. Eight months pregnant — she was screaming with pain. On top of this she is probably going to have the baby.

I am not worried about myself. What is going to happen to these women?

There was this Hindu girl from Manikgunge called Shukla. She was a very attractive girl. She was out one day when some boys got hold of her and did things to her, including kissing her, against her will. But they did not do her any real harm. Soon after this she was asleep in her room when these men dug a tunnel under the floor and gained entry into her room. They dragged her out of her room. In all there were eleven men in the

gang and they all raped her. She pleaded with the man who was taking her clothes off and said that she would let him have his way with her but not the others. But they took her clothes off just the same and after they had all raped her, they threw a bucketful of acid over her naked body and they ran away. She was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital immediately but sadly she died. Four women victims of acid attacks I know have since died.

Linda: Is it usually a man doing this on his own or are there many cases where there are more than one man involved?

Bina: One man on his own could never drag a woman out of her home and throw acid at her. Usually a few friends get together to do this. Sometimes there are fifty, even sixty men in the gang — let alone eleven men! A group of men do it together because they know that they will never get away with it if they get caught doing such a horrible thing. The family might even kill them. That is why they cover the area well by positioning themselves at a yard or so from each other. They even do things like cut off the electricity line around the house before they attack.

Linda: So some of the cases are extremely well planned and organised.

Bina: Oh yes, they start planning a year before the attack. They never attack without any planning.

Bina's story

Linda: Can you tell us your story Bina, what happened to you?

Bina: I was fifteen when this happened, I am seventeen now. There was only a couple of days planning the attack on me, and the men involved were terrorists, there are two political parties in Bangladesh — the BNP and the Awami League, they belonged to the Awami League, the ruling party.

Linda: So do they use acid in other ways to help the party?

Bina: Yes they do. There are quite a few tanneries where I used to live. They use cowhide for making shoes and other things. In this tannery they use sulphuric acid for melting iron. These men asked for some acid, and the man in the tannery refused twice. So they beat him up and left with a container full of acid.

Linda: And why did they target you?

Bina: We used to live in Bogurah, we decided to come and live in Dhaka for two months, all our family came. This man Dano, whose proper name is Maksud Rahman, used to visit the house we rented. He became a regular visitor, but we never used to come out of our rooms. Dano had heard about us though and was curious as well as eager to see the 'Pakistani' girls. One evening we sat down for our meal, Dano was standing by the door eating a piece of meat and making faces at my uncle. He said nothing, he was just shaking his head. Dano left soon after this and my uncle asked the landlord who the man was. The landlord said he was a relative of us, and that he was a decent man.

One day my two younger brothers were on their way to school. Dano confronted my brothers and asked them why we were going back to Bogurah. My brothers told him because we did not like the area we were living in. I was standing by the side and Dano was making snide comments about girls from Bogurah, saying that they were like hot chillies, they don't talk to anybody, they are so proud and conceited about their beauty.

Dano then started to send us something everyday, things like letters, guavas, garlands. But we never accepted them. One day he sent us

a garland with some sedative in it. A little girl brought it over. My cousin smelt something very strong emanating from the garland, she threw it away. The little girl went back to Dano and said we had thrown the garland away. This annoyed Dano and the next thing he did was propose.

Unknown to us, he saw our landlord and told him he intended to propose. The landlord advised him against this, that my family would not let me marry him, and we would get married when we got back to Bogurah. This annoyed Dano and he said there that he would put a red stamp on white skin — you know acid makes skin go red first and then it turns black.

On the evening of 26 August we all had our meals and went to bed. We were asleep. About 2.30 in the morning a gang appeared in our room; there were seven of us sleeping in that room. Dano came in first and had positioned his mates at different points in the room to cover the area, and then he came into the room where I was. He shone his torch to look for me. He found us — my mother my sister and myself. He kept on shining his torch, I had big eyes and the eyelids did not quite close. The torchlight shone on my half open eyes. I sat up and saw a tall man standing in front of me. I saw somebody standing at the door, I then saw that somebody was throwing something at my sister. I stretched out my arm to prevent this stuff going on her and

some of it fell on my arm and the rest went on the floor. I then felt the heat from the stuff, I pushed my sister out of the way and went and stood in front of this man. I decided that if somebody had to die, it would be me. At this point they threw the acid on my head. I started to scream. It felt as though I was on fire, the whole room was on fire. My hair and eyebrows got singed and came off. My nose then came off. I thought they were pouring boiling water on me. I started to run out of the room. My uncle followed me out, they beat him up.

My mother then put her arms around me and started to scream. She then felt a few drops of the stuff on her and she tried to wash it off. I did not do that — I did not stop to put water on mine. Instead I ran out looking for my

uncle and found him lying unconscious in the alleyway. I then started to cry as there would not be anybody to look after me if he died.

This was three o'clock in the morning. There was a lot of shouting and screaming going on. My whole body was on fire though I did not realise that it was acid. I did not lose consciousness. While we were screaming Dano and his men sneaked away. Nobody, neighbours or anybody else, came out to help us. People were scared of them, and felt they would get killed if they said anything. Everybody was scared, these people were known terrorists. There was just my family — my uncle lying there and me. Somebody appeared with a bed and I was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The hospital didn't have the injections I needed, they were very expensive. At that time they did not have much knowledge on how to treat acid cases. A long time had elapsed since the acid had been thrown and I started to scream. All they were doing was looking at my raw flesh. I was screaming but I was fully conscious and knew exactly what was happening around me. I could not bear the pain, no injections, and I punched a doctor saying 'why aren't you giving me any injections?' I ripped the clothes off a nurse.

Just before five in the morning they told me that they could not give me the injections without the consent of a doctor, because my case was something out of the ordinary. Eventually they gave me twelve injections all at once and put about five fans around me, took all my clothes off and put me under a mosquito net. A few days later they tried to get the burnt patches to rot, but they were not able to do so. They then used some equipment to scrape the black skin off my body. They cut off the bits of my clothes which still stuck to my flesh. My head and face had swelled up. They operated on me seven times.

They had had some acid cases before, but they were not as serious as mine, did not need a lot of treatment and medication. Mine was the most serious they had — twice a week they used to have case conferences on me discussing what operation next, how they could make muscles grow. Dano came to the hospital disguised as a doctor, he intended to kill me. The doctor said that I was going to die anyway, so he did not need to kill me!

They had operated on me six times, and we didn't have the money for the seventh operation

— we had sold our cars to pay for the operations. Naripokkho used to visit me in the hospital. They do not provide financial help themselves, but they liaise with other organisations for money. They arranged with an organisation to give my uncle the money for my seventh operation. My uncle was on the way to the hospital to pay, Dano and his gang got hold of him, beat him up again and robbed him of the money.

My uncle was very concerned, I needed blood transfusions as I was anaemic, and it was imperative I had the seventh operation. My uncle went and saw the doctor. He is a very proud man, my uncle, but he began to cry, pleaded with him to operate on me, and promised he would pay the money when he could. This doctor then paid for my operation and medicines. I was in hospital for eight months.

It ruins peoples' looks. An Italian doctor, who comes every year to Bangladesh for a few days to do plastic surgery, looked at my eyes in the early stages, and there was nothing left of one eye. He treated me like his own daughter, because I had been good at sports. He operated on the eye, and they are saying that they will do work in the other one if this work is a success. He came for fourteen days to do this. I now have one eye which is cured, whereas the other has a screen in front of it.

I have had to go to Bangladesh for some my operations, and there are still a few to do on my eyes, lips and nose. There are only two plastic surgeons in Dhaka. But they couldn't do any more for me.

New crime — same response: blame the victim

Linda: Has acid throwing always happened?

Bina: There were not that many cases previously. I think it gained momentum in the mid 1990s. Acid is easily available these days. Whatever you say, whatever you do, they throw acid at you! From 1995 onwards about 12 acid cases take place every month.

Linda: What about the other women this happens to, what happens to them?

Bina: The girls who were in the hospital when I was there used to marvel at my ability to talk to everyone despite the sufferings I had been through. At the same time I think they thought I was a bit bold, but I told them life has to go on! The doctors gave me three years to live, two of the three years are now gone. If I survive three

Combatting Acid Violence



Bangladesh

years — fine! If I don't — well I shall die! The girls see me working with Naripokkho, and they are inspired by this.

In the beginning they do not want to go home, because of the way they look. They stay at home and never go out. Some parents, who have three or four other children, cannot afford to feed or clothe the girl. They worry about how to get them married off. Then slowly they realise that these are also their daughters and they begin to accept it.

From my experience friends of a woman who has had an acid attack do not want to know her anymore, let alone her neighbours! Neighbours make all kinds of snide remarks, like the woman herself wasn't very nice, and that was why acid was thrown at her. I have not been back to Bogurah where all my relatives live, I do not think they would give me any support at all. Perhaps they feel I am a girl of loose character, that is why they threw acid at me. I go to so many places, but to this day I have not been back to Bogurah. All the friends I have now are victims of acid attacks.

Linda: *So the community blame the victim, is any action taken against the men?*

Bina: Oh yes they blame the women. Men who are decent to try to object to the whole thing — but they don't get very far. They have children of their own and they are scared they will get kidnapped, they don't want to risk their own daughters because someone else's daughter was attacked with acid.

Activism makes a difference

Linda: *Tell me about Naripokkho, how did it start and how did you get involved?*

Bina: Acid attacks are one part of Naripokkho's work, it has other women's projects on violence, maternity issues and other things.

The newspapers wrote about my case on the day after it happened, Naripokkho read it and came to visit me in hospital. They boosted my spirits, we tried to inspire each other, and that's how I got involved. They gave me hope, told me I needed to get better for my athletics, but that I would have to work hard to get better. I asked if I could join them in their fight against acid, to inspire other girls. Often they contemplate suicide because of their looks, and I wanted to stop this and encourage them to work for Naripokkho like me.

I started work when I left the hospital. I had

seen an American doctor who had said my eye was alright but needed to be operated on, but nobody dared do the operation. It was after this that I began work, but from time to time I get very worried about my eye, because without this operation it will be impossible to save it.

I work in the office on the days that I don't go out, photocopying, faxing, typing — I have learnt how to type, but I cannot type for long because it makes my eyes water. I am going to learn to use the computer next.

I take newspaper cuttings on violence or acid attacks, file them, write to the women. I also go visiting to the hospital once a week. Sometimes the newspapers do not publish some acid cases. And some girls are frightened to talk of their experiences because they are scared of the men. I visit these girls and they talk to me. I then contact the journalists about the attacks and they are published.

We also organise events for pregnant women who keep losing their babies soon after they are born. We go there and light little lamps for them. I also take part in women's marches — we march with torches, on March 8th, about rape of girls by young boys and the police. We have also gone on marches about acid throwing, and to demand capital punishment to those who throw acid. We campaign on lots of different issues. I also speak at lots of meetings, there are so many pictures of me on marches, speaking at mikes, loads and loads of pictures! When I speak women look at me and realise what pain I have been through. I say to the men, if there are any decent men in the audience, that they should think of me as their sister. I tell them, plead with them that this should not happen if a girl refuses to accept their love or a proposal of marriage, they should not deprive a girl of her parents or her community.

We organise workshops for girls who will not leave their homes. We do not have a lot of money, and it costs a lot to organise a workshop. We have done two so far. First they talk about themselves and explain their own histories, sometimes their families are there as well. The families talk too, because everyone is traumatised. They go to different places in group without covering their faces. Some have gone back to studying after the workshop, and some are taking exams now. We can usually find some sponsorship for education.

Linda: *Do the women keep in touch with each other?*

Bina: We keep in touch with them through letters after they go home from the hospital. They all want to get together again, but they live quite a long way away, fifty and hundred miles from Dhaka. We cannot afford to pay for their travel, accommodation, food etc. That is why we have not had a workshop for a few months now. We will organise another one when we have the money.

Linda: *And what about the men, are any of them prosecuted?*

Bina: One of the main parts of Naripokkho's work is to help with the legal case. We give all the help we can, but not many men are prosecuted — about four have been caught and are now in prison, a few are awaiting bail. Some people who live in the villages bribe the police, the father and brothers of the attackers stand bail for the young men. Two people from Naripokkho including a lawyer go and see the head police officer and tell him that there is a bail application, and the village police are contacted and told to refuse bail. We go to court with women.

Paying for hospital fees is still a big issue. It costs a huge amount to bring doctors from

abroad to do plastic surgery. A doctor from India came, and we organised a big function. He agreed to operate on the serious cases — including myself — in Bombay. Nothing has happened since. The Law Minister came and promised that acid burn cases would be treated free of charge, but there again nothing has happened. People make empty promises. Lots of people agree to give us money, but that is where it ends, they never pay up! Someone saw my story in a newspaper and offered to pay for my treatment, but only if it was in Bangladesh. But there isn't anyone there who can treat me.

We take them to lots of places, like the theatre, to cheer them up. We organised a big show in which all the girls who have suffered acid attacks took part. Some sang, some acted in a play, I sang. It was a very nice show. We try lots of ways to lessen the pain the acid burn girls suffer. They have to deal with effects of the attacks — how to keep themselves fed, how to deal with the legal case, their whole life changes. I have accepted the situation, not everybody can. It is just not possible! □

Naripokkho (Taken from the organisation's leaflet 'Combating Acid Violence')

The group was founded in 1983 to advance women's rights and resist violence against women. It is primarily a voluntary organisation, and currently its main areas of work are: violence against women and human rights, reproductive rights and women's health, gender issues in environment and development, representation of women in media and cultural politics.

Acid violence was taken up as an issue in 1995. The first recorded acid attack took place in the early 1960s. Currently one attack is reported every three days. The increase is due to the increased availability of acid, and the willingness of young men to use it for vengeful acts, when they have been 'rejected'. It is women and girls' faces which are targeted. Attacks usually take place at night when the victim is asleep, and children who are sleeping next to the victim also suffer acid burns.

Naripokkho has two aims — to support survivors of acid attacks and to seek justice through working on the police case. The first workshop for survivors was held in April 1997.

Bina Akhtar... motivated all the girls to take off their veils, which concealed the scars and to share their stories. She was determined that the workshop should not only be for grieving but an occasion for joyous celebration because they were all alive and life was still worth living.

These are the problems the girls identified: lack of proper medical care for severe burns, cost of health care, lack of proper care for eyes, the victim and her family being threatened by the perpetrators and their family if a police case is filed, negligent police investigations, bribery of the police, harassment of the family, being in public with a disfigurement, feeling unable to go back to old lifestyle/school, not being safe at home because of harassment, economic losses because of health care and legal costs.

Survivors are encouraged to write their own stories which are then published. Naripokkho's work with acid survivors is on the empowerment of the survivors so that they continue with their lives with renewed vigour and become active in the movement against violence against women.

Naripokkho, House 91/N, Road 7A, Dhanmandi, Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh. E-mail convenor@naripokkho.pradeshta.net

Love is all you need?

Wendy Langford reflects on the relationship between feminism and love over the last 50 years and argues that the radical feminist critique of love is as relevant today as it ever was.

During the course of the 20th century, major changes have taken place in respect of couple relationships. Social, religious and legal dictates which aimed to uphold the ideal of a formal (heterosexual) marriage that was hard to dissolve have been eroded. A more liberal climate has emerged where, more than ever, the existence, content and duration of couple relationships are determined not by overt regulation, but in accordance with individual desire. This change is reflected in, and supported by, such developments as the liberalisation of divorce laws, the advent of 'shameless' cohabitation, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and advancements

in contraception. At the same time, social life in general has undergone a process which sociologists term 'privatisation': we live in smaller and smaller units and centre our lives on a few 'special' relationships. The ideal basis of these relationships is held to be emotional attachment. Perhaps the most 'special' relationship of all is seen to be the couple, formed through mutual attraction and falling in love. Indeed the very term 'relationship' has come to be synonymous with coupledness; we do not think it odd when someone who relates to many people nevertheless declares that they are 'not in a relationship' at the moment. The 'bond' between a couple is

Wendy Langford's book *Revolutions of the Heart: Gender, power and the delusions of love* will be published by Routledge in May 1999.

seen to provide the basis for everyday companionship, emotional satisfaction, sexual fulfilment and a sense of personal security. We hope that being part of a 'loving couple' will meet our most important human 'needs'.

How should we view this 'culture of intimacy'? The prevailing view is that it is progressive. We tend to believe that in contrast to the 'bad old days' or to societies which practise arranged marriage, individuals in modern western societies are 'free' to love — no longer oppressed by outdated economic, religious or moral dictates. It is true, of course, that the regulation of love is, and has often been, cruel and repressive, and has represented patriarchal and heterosexist values. However, does the shift to 'free' love imply that we really are free to love happily, intimately and equally ever after?

The radical feminist critique

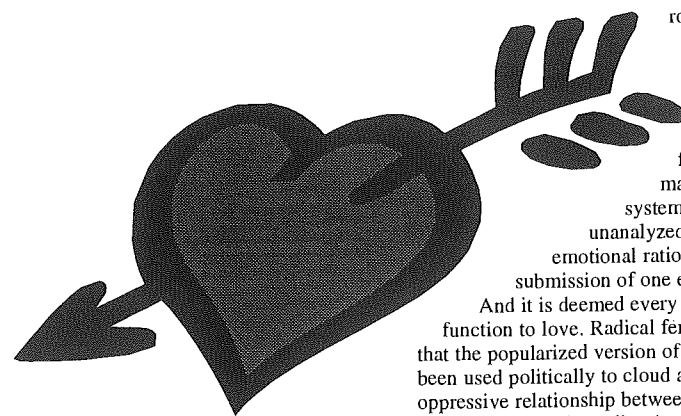
There has been surprisingly little critical reflection on romantic love. One striking exception is the radical feminist critique which has fundamentally questioned the association of love with freedom. Feminists have argued that, particularly for women, 'falling in love' is more likely to lead to a damaging self-denial. A landmark in the feminist analysis came in 1949 with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir argued that romantic love is ideological in that it helps to reproduce and maintain gendered forms of consciousness which underpin patriarchal societies. Love *appears* to offer women a possible way to go beyond the limitations of feminine conditioning and give our lives meaning and significance. It is a compelling strategy because, at first, it appears to work. Love's 'transcendence', however, is an illusion. What happens is that women project our longings for freedom and self-determination onto an idealised other and then 'merge' with them through falling in love. This can feel wonderful and liberating but, paradoxically, it involves *giving up* the possibility of a free and self-determined life. We fall in love partly to escape from 'feminine' anxieties concerning autonomy and, once we are 'in love', we do not want to see how love reproduces dependency and self-sacrifice. So, rather than face up to the dangers and limitations of love relationships, we get caught up in all kinds of manipulative and self-deceptive behaviour in the effort to avoid taking

full responsibility for the direction of our own lives.

Two features of de Beauvoir's analysis are of particular importance. Firstly, she stresses how love reproduces women's complicity in patriarchal social relations. Love relations operate in the power mode, not simply because women are victims of male dominance — although men often are domineering — but because of women's own deep investment in love. In order to try and get what she wants, a woman 'will humble herself to nothingness' before her love (p653). 'If need be, she herself *tyrannizes over herself* in the lover's name' (p660, my italics). Secondly, women's complicity operates at the level of desire. Rationally, of course, it is quite easy to see that liberation is not to be attained through servitude! Desire, however, comes from the more unconscious parts of our experience. Attraction can be powerful and irrational and lead us to act blindly — to engage in what de Beauvoir terms 'bad faith'. Thus love itself is not innocent and power is not something imposed from without. On the contrary, while following our heart's desire may *appear* to set us free, it ultimately leads us to reproduce whatever we hoped to be liberated from.

From the late 1960s onwards, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, romantic love and sexual relationships were central themes in the western Women's Liberation Movement. Feminist writers developed de Beauvoir's argument that love stopped women from seeing the truth about their lives. Love was deemed to be a predominant form of 'false consciousness' which serves to obscure how gender relations operate as power relations. Love, Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote in *Amazon Odyssey*, is nothing more than 'a special psycho-pathological state of fantasy' which operates as a response to gendered power relations and also supports them through the delusion that it is 'the most desirable state for any woman to find herself in' (p43-44). While some writers stressed how love can obscure power relations, others stressed how it constituted them. The New York Radical Feminists, for example, saw male power as operating at the psychological level through the ability of the male ego to have power over the female ego. Central to the maintenance of these 'politics of the ego' is love, which acts as a kind of:

emotional cement to justify the dominant-submissive relationship. The man 'loves' the woman who fulfils her submissive ego-boosting



role. The woman 'loves' the man she is submitting to — that is, after all, why she 'lives for him.' LOVE, magical and systematically unanalyzed, becomes the emotional rationale for the submission of one ego to the other. And it is deemed every woman's natural function to love. Radical feminism believes that the popularized version of love has thus been used politically to cloud and justify an oppressive relationship between men and women, and that in reality there can be no genuine love until the need to control the growth of another is replaced by the love for the growth of another. (New York Radical Feminists 1971: 442)

The radical feminist analysis of love had many strands including an incipient critique of privatisation and individualism. It was argued that once women's energies become focused on the exclusive project of 'our relationship', they lose sight of their wider political and social situation. They fail, especially if they are heterosexual, to develop and value their friendships with women. They do not put energy into working co-operatively with other women. And they stop looking for ways to develop their own potential. Such concerns appeared in many influential texts of the 1970s — feminist writers like Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone and Andrea Dworkin all saw love as divisive and destructive for women. Their views were, however, in sharp contrast to those of 'malestream' sociologists who responded to the developing 'culture of intimacy' by portraying a rather 'romantic' picture of the (heterosexual) couple as an increasingly 'symmetrical' and humane relationship between intimate equals.

Feminists did not suggest that love was inevitably destructive, merely that women need to ask themselves crucial questions and answer them honestly: were their love relationships in any way demeaning, possessive or draining? Relationships having these characteristics were seen as undermining and therefore as hindering the feminist struggle. The radical questioning of love and sex opened up whole new areas of debate in the pursuit of sexual relations which were not, as The Feminists put it in 1973, 'programmed to support political ends' (p376). The desirability of monogamy was debated. The importance of friendship was stressed. Lesbian

relationships were redefined as a positive option for women. And, in sharp contrast to the ethos of the emergent 'sexual revolution', some feminists argued that celibacy should be seen as an important political option for women.

The feminist critique loses impetus

The 1970s were heady times for the women's movement. Anything seemed possible. Women, so it appeared, were no longer prepared to be constrained by social conditioning and feminists dreamed of what might be achieved if women's resistant energies were channelled into effective personal and political transformation. It was no accident that the question of love was a central concern at this time. Collective feminist struggle depended upon harnessing women's resistance. Falling in love is also a form of resistance, a reaction to conditioning — an expression of the desire to escape from suffering and attain freedom. Feminists were right in identifying love as a crucial threat. Women can't change themselves and the world if their aspirations are channelled into the individualistic and self-abnegating delusion that freedom can be won through falling in love. But can freedom be won through feminist politics?

In this respect there are important lessons to be learned. The resistant energy which had expressed itself in revolutionary optimism and radical questioning dissipated in the 1980s. Romance as a cultural form continued to be subject to critical analysis within the academy, but feminists lapsed into silence on the question of 'actual' love. No sooner, it seemed, had a whole range of crucial and insightful questions been raised, than the will to answer them became inhibited. There were probably several reasons for this, including deep tensions within the women's movement itself which were there from the beginning. Feminists aspired to forms of politics and knowledge which were grounded in, and informed by, women's lived experience. Yet at the same time the development of divisive 'identity politics' made it increasingly difficult for women to be open and honest about what that experience was. Patricia Mainardi, for example, lamented that even in the early days of US feminism, 'the movement no longer looked for the truth about women's lives'. To suggest one wanted to end inequality *within* relationships with men 'was to open oneself to ridicule and condemnation'. Thus heterosexual women feminists hid their private lives and made

excuses, while 'lesbians portrayed their lives with all the reality of a 1950s movie'. By the 1980s, writers such as Hilary Allen and Bea Campbell told of how the open and honest exploration of love had become impossible. Radical feminism became caught up in essentialist theories which limited rather than developed understandings of the relationship between love and power.

These feminist conflicts should not be viewed in isolation from wider social and political trends. The shift towards individualism and privatised social life undermined all collective political struggle and the questioning of love was not easy in a culture which increasingly emphasised an ideology of personal fulfilment in 'intimate relations'. Meanwhile, the belief that freedom can be attained by following the path of desire was given a massive boost by the 'sexual revolution'. Radical feminism was often in direct contradiction to these trends. Dana Densmore, for example, warned feminists to maintain independence from the sexual revolution and to remember that all desire arises from conditions of social inequality. Many feminists strongly opposed individualism, promoted an ethic of sisterhood and sought to establish women's collectives. However, at the same time as feminists questioned the politics of 'special relationships', compelling historical currents produced an equation of women's liberation with sexual liberation and supported the view that freedom and happiness are best pursued through cuddling up with someone special. These powerful trends were bound to have an effect.

The personal and political shifts of the 1970s and 1980s were mirrored in the small ads of *Spare Rib* feminist magazine: listings for women's consciousness-raising groups all over the country grew and then dwindled. At the same time, ads for one-to-one relationships appeared and then proliferated. It seemed as though the Women's Liberation Movement — a movement which had produced one of the most radical critiques of love in the 20th century — had itself succumbed to the 'culture of intimacy'.

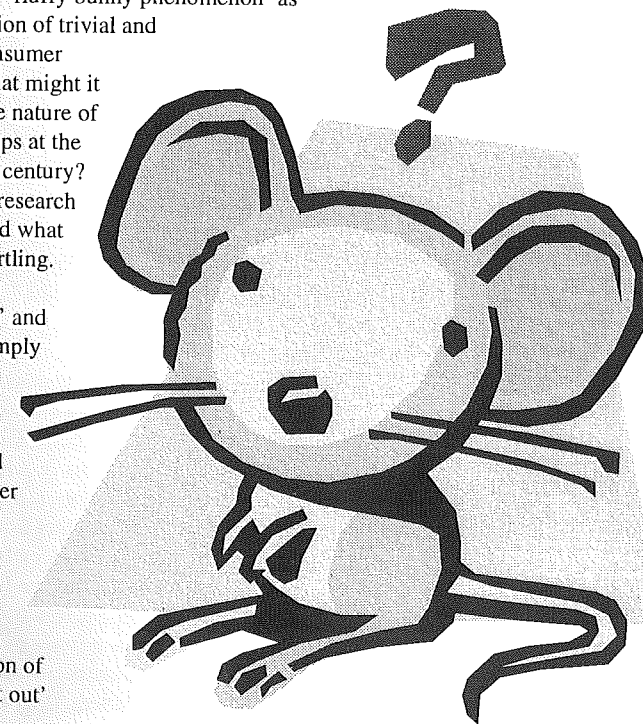
In the 1990s the feminist silence on love as experience began to be broken. Stevi Jackson bravely declared that 'even feminists fall in love' and some feminists finally admitted, if somewhat sheepishly, that they had been doing it with men all along. The time had come, it seemed, for some mature and honest reflection on the nature of the relationship between love and power. But

was the radical feminist analysis still relevant? Just as in the 1970s, prominent social theorists in the 1990s were claiming that love is no longer characterised by domination. They argued that the 'success' of the women's movement, combined with an increased emphasis on intimacy, has led to the 'democratisation' of couple relationships, which are now more intimate and equal than ever before. Has everything really changed? Some of us are not so sure.

Fur-ever yours?

One thing can certainly be conceded. Love may often appear innocent enough. Indeed, in some respects, love could hardly appear more innocent. For example, while the 1980s and 1990s have seen a proliferation of explicit sexual imagery, imbued with gendered fantasies of domination and submission, the same period has also seen a boom in rather less 'adult' expressions of desire. I speak here of the veritable army of bears and bunnies, piglets and hamsters who declare their love publicly yet anonymously every Valentine's Day; of chains of high street shops bursting at the seams with cute soft toys marketed with 'grown up' love in mind; and of greetings cards for every occasion bearing pairs of cooing, snuggling creatures. It would be easy to overlook the 'fluffy bunny phenomenon' as a mere expression of trivial and sentimental consumer culture. But what might it tell us about the nature of love relationships at the end of the 20th century?

I did some research on this topic and what I found was startling. While for some couples 'Teddy' and 'Fluffy' may simply be superficial nicknames, for others they are well-established identities or 'alter personalities'. Some couples project these identities onto soft toys which serve the function of puppets and 'act out'

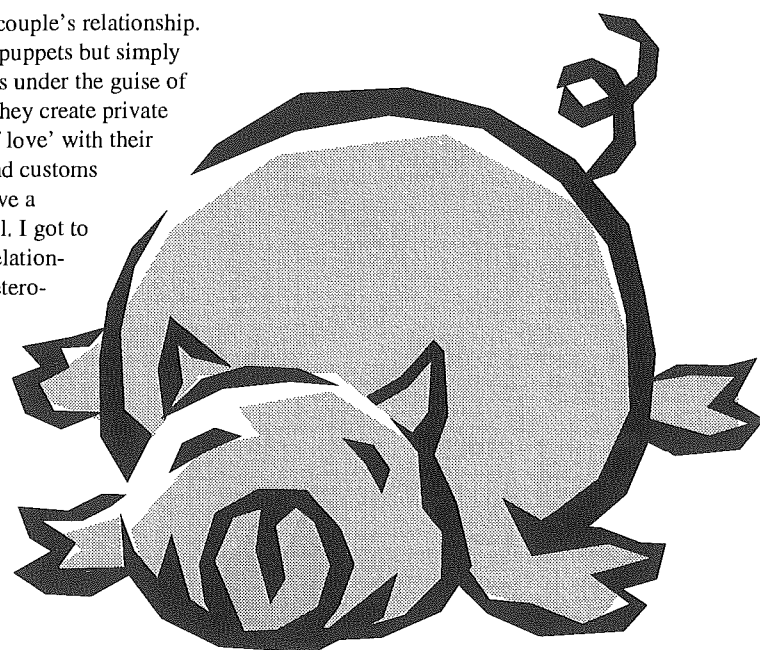


some aspect of the 'real' couple's relationship. Other couples do not use puppets but simply conduct their relationships under the guise of their alter personalities. They create private and exclusive 'cultures of love' with their own vocabulary, codes and customs and may even cease to have a 'human' relationship at all. I got to

hear about several such relationships, both lesbian and heterosexual, and was also able to carry out a small number of interviews. One committed feminist told me of how she spend much of the 1980s living as a 'gerbil' with her 'bear' partner and another, during the same era, busied herself playing 'Piglet' to her partner's 'Pooh'. The secrecy and sworn

pledges of confidentiality surrounding these interviews are testimony to the reluctance of alter personalities to 'come out'. In more than one case at least, this was probably due to the 'double burden' of being both heterosexual and a soft toy.

So what do 'alter relationships' tell us about the 'culture of intimacy'? What are they like? Why do they start? What is their function? And what relationship, if any, do they have to the question of power? In two previous articles I put forward some thoughts on these questions. To begin with, the alter personalities I came across differed from their 'hosts' in that they did not seem to actually fall in love or commit themselves to a relationship. Rather, the alter relationship developed at some later stage, when the human couple had already come into being. Another difference was that they were not explicitly sexual. Rather, bonding takes the form of the mutual creation of a more or less elaborate imaginary world which the couple 'inhabit'. A wonderful insight into this is given by Virginia Woolf in her short story about a couple who spend their evenings together as 'King Lappin' (a wild male rabbit) and Queen Lapinova (a shy female hare). As they sit by the fire, the 'alter couple' talk about their exciting adventures roaming the woods and fields of their 'territory'. The antics of such alter personalities appear as playful and light-hearted. Their imagined worlds



are full of magic and innocence. They have more fun than their 'hosts'. They subvert adulthood and collude against a mundane and oppressive 'real world' which does not understand them or their 'childish' desires.

Alter relationships then are 'underground' relationships — refuges from a disenchanted and hostile world. This is reflected in experiential accounts, in literary representations, and in Valentine's messages. All convey the pleasures of snuggling up in burrows, nests, caves, dreys and dens. Alter worlds are safe and warm. Their pantries are well-stocked with honey, nuts, acorns and other nice things to eat. Their inhabitants look after one another and protect each other from the uncertainties of the big cold world outside.

The affection and friendliness shown by bears and bunnies often appears in stark contrast to the strains of human love. Conflict is not a feature of alter-worlds. Piglets and squirrels do not have 'talks' about 'the future of our relationship'. They just know their love to be timeless and lasting. The contrast between furry beings and their hosts appears particularly striking in the case of males. Literary and empirical examples reveal human males who are distant and unloving, unable to reconcile adult masculinity with the demands of 'intimate coupledness'. These difficulties seem to evaporate, however, once the persona of a cuddly bear is adopted.

This was the case, for example, with 'Furball' the feminist 'gerbil' I mentioned earlier and her 'bear' partner 'Monster'. Their 'loving relationship' continued for years beyond the time when their human love had become untenable.

Such alter relationships are not a new phenomenon. Literary references in the work of famous writers such as Henrik Ibsen, Virginia Woolf and John Osborne suggest they have been a feature of coupledness for more than a century. However, although we have no way of knowing for certain, cultural evidence suggests a proliferation and intensification of these private cultures of love. Why might this be? And what conclusions can be drawn? What is perhaps most striking about alter relationships is how they approximate to the 'new romantic ideal'. They epitomise 'privatized' social life, offering personal identity, a sense of 'intimacy', existential security, everyday companionship, somewhere to belong — everything, indeed, that modern coupledness is meant to provide (with the probable exception of hot sex). Bears and Bunnies do not have rows. They do not cheat on their partners. They do not get divorced. Alter relationships appear to be 'democratic'; they are negotiated through their mutual constructedness. And they do not appear to involve violence or the exercise of domination; some creatures may be big and scruffy while others are little and squeaky, but no-one wants to hurt anyone in Hundred Acre Wood. In all these respects, alter relationships appear most successful. The only problem is... they are not, well — real.

So what is real love like? Is it really so impossible for adult humans to achieve the romantic ideal that they are driven to such regressive measures as living in hollow trees and eating acorns? During the 1990s, I carried out a study on women's experiences of heterosexual love. Even from the very brief account I have room for here, it will be easy to see that 'real' love involves tendencies which distinguish it sharply from the kind of democratic union enjoyed by Tigger and Heffalump. The main reason for this is that 'real' love is not 'real' at all.

Revolutions of the heart

At the rational level, most women in the study rejected outright any idea that they needed a partner in order to be happy. Yet the *desire* for love was compelling and underpinned a powerful conviction that life *is* more secure, more

meaningful and less lonely for those who have an intimate relationship with someone who thinks they are 'special'. And when women described their experiences of falling mutually in love, it was clear that their lives *did* seem to change for the better — quite dramatically. They described how they 'found themselves' and felt confident and vital. One woman described how love made her feel like 'the most wonderful person on earth'.

Having found such a love, it is not surprising that a person would decide to make it a central focus of their lives and try their best to 'make the relationship work'. But what is it that we want to 'work'? While love feels utterly real and very crucial, it tends to be an experience which is also quite mysterious and hard to explain. This is because most of what causes our powerful emotions remains unconscious. One useful way of trying to explain how love works is through the concept of 'projection'. We 'project' onto another person all the qualities that are repressed or undeveloped in us — all the things that, unconsciously, we ourselves would really like to be. As a result we feel a strong attraction to the other person. If they respond we may 'fall in love' and experience a powerful sense of bonding or merging with them. This creates the illusion that we have 'become ourselves' at last.



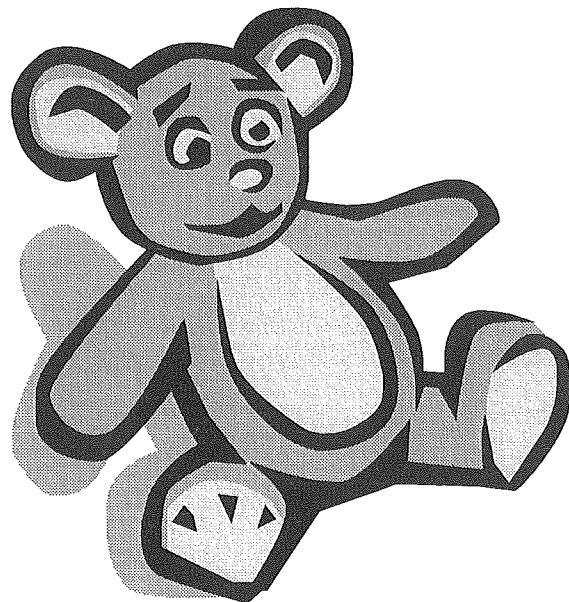
Our inner tensions are resolved and we feel confident and self-expansive. In particular, falling in love can involve the 'realisation' of aspects of ourselves that our gender conditioning normally inhibits. In my study, it was significant that some women described how love, quite ironically, had made them feel confident and so independent and that they could 'do anything' without the need for a partner! Women also described men in love who appeared very different from what men were normally like — tender, devoted and emotionally open.

If love has such good effects, does it matter if it is all based on projections? Well it does if we want to 'make it last'. This is where the problems really begin. Because our projections are unconscious, we make the mistake of thinking that our experience of happiness is caused by the fact that we have found someone very special, someone who loves us for who we really are. It may be true that both we and the other person are nice and, in our own ways, special. But this is not the point. The point is that to the extent our feelings are due to idealisation based on our own projection, we do not really love the other person for who they are at all — even though we may feel certain that we do.

In the beginning, love can seem easy enough. There are lots of positive emotions flowing in both directions and we feel generous and warm-hearted. But what happens when a gap begins to appear, as it inevitably must, between reality and illusion? What happens when the other person starts to seem less than perfect, or less interested in spending all their time with us? What can happen is that our new-found sense of well-being starts to falter and we may begin to feel anxious about 'the relationship'. After all, we do not want to 'lose' what we have 'found'. We may begin to feel dissatisfied with the other person: they are not behaving how they should! They may begin to feel dissatisfied with us for being dissatisfied with them. Initially, having a great deal invested in the relationship, we may repress or cover up such feelings. But already, perhaps quite subtly at first, and almost certainly unconsciously, each lover may begin to try and close the gap between the reality they experience and the way they thought things were in the first place. This is where the power struggle begins.

There are two basic methods of control

and manipulation: domination and submission. Domination is usually the most obvious and straightforward: various means are used to override the other person's point of view and get them to conform to your view of how things should be. Submission is usually a less obvious attempt at control. It can even appear to be the opposite. Nevertheless, the hope is that if you don't assert yourself, if you override your own point of view, you won't upset the other person and they will therefore give you what you want. Both domination and submission undermine the possibility of real intimacy. Intimacy is only possible to the extent two individuals are confident in expressing their point of view and are able to recognise the other person's point of view. If you attempt to dominate someone, you are not recognising their point of view and you make it difficult for them to recognise you either. Domination undermines your own confidence anyway — it hardly confirms your point of view if you suspect someone is only going along with it because you have forced them to. Submission is equally problematic. If you submit to someone, you undermine your own confidence and you are not really recognising the other person's point of view — merely going along with it in the hope of getting what you want. Again, it should be stressed that we may be very largely unaware of these motivations. Each of us will probably simply think we are being 'reasonable'. With submissive behaviour, we may even claim



that our deferral to the other person is for their benefit — evidence of how 'loving' we are.

Domination and submission are not essential qualities of men and women. Everyone has the capacity to employ either strategy, depending upon the circumstances they are in and the strength of the particular habits which their conditioning has produced. In my study of heterosexual love, the development of domineering and submissive tendencies was very apparent and, not surprisingly, there was a strong polarisation along gendered lines as relationships became established. While love initially felt equal and intimate, women complained that men soon began to 'back off' and become distant. They stopped talking about their feelings, hid their vulnerabilities and became less affectionate. They evaded women's attempts to 'talk about the relationship'. If women did express their point of view, male partners might dismiss it or overtly disparage it, arguing that it was 'irrational'. Men's 'withdrawal' had a demoralising effect on women. They felt abandoned and hurt. However, women's accounts also showed that the development of their partner's domineering attitude was paralleled by their own progressive self-denial. In order to try and close the gap between the love story they wanted to believe in and their partner's 'non-compliance', women developed an exaggerated sensitivity to their partner's emotional state. In the effort to 'work him out', they actively silenced their own point of view, made efforts to please him, put up with things they saw as unfair, colluded in avoiding conflict and took undue emotional responsibility for 'keeping it all together'. And the reason they did all of this was because they wanted to make love more like it was in the beginning, when it had 'made' them feel happy and confident.

In my study, then, love appeared quite tragic. The more that partners tried to make love into what they had thought it was in the beginning, the more they destroyed the possibility of the happiness and intimacy they sought. In some relationships, where power struggles became intense, the results were very destructive. Men tended to express their growing aversion by becoming very distant indeed and adopting an abusive or coercive attitude to their partners. Women tended to turn their frustration inwards and become depressed and even more overtly submissive. In short, while love disposed men to tyrannize over women, it disposed women, as Simone de Beauvoir observed, to tyrannize over

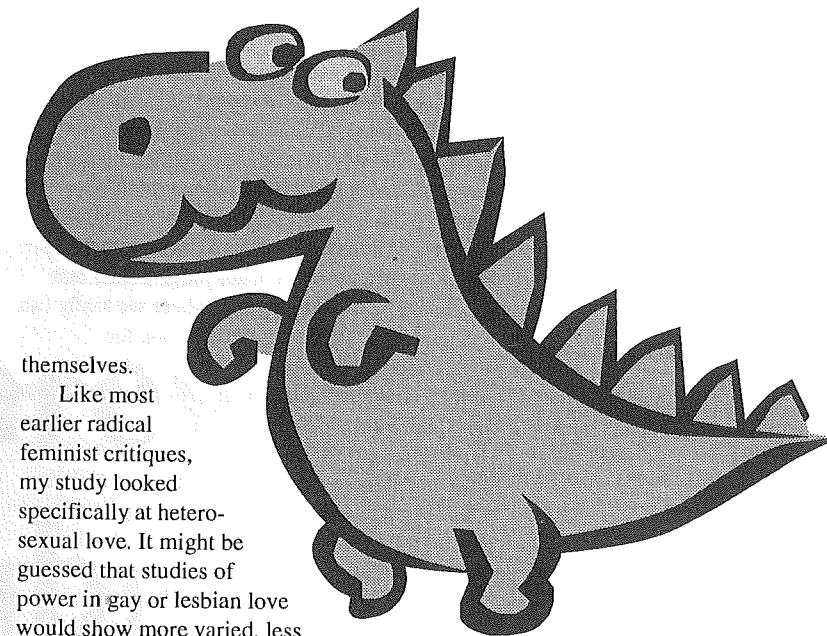
themselves.

Like most earlier radical feminist critiques, my study looked specifically at heterosexual love. It might be guessed that studies of power in gay or lesbian love would show more varied, less predictable, patterns. There is clearly much scope for important and interesting research in these areas. What can be stressed here, however, is that since power dynamics are fuelled by love itself, by our own attempts to 'live happily ever after', the question is not *whether* any love relationship is a power relationship, but *how* and to what extent.

Treacherous desire

Given the trials and tribulations of trying to 'live happily ever after', it is no wonder that we devise some interesting strategies to delude ourselves about the nature of our relationships. Some truths are very hard to bear. One possibility, as we have seen, is to abandon human adulthood altogether and retreat to somewhere safer and kinder. After all that relationship trauma, what a positive relief it must be to snuggle up and share a pot of honey or two. Personally, I find the prospect most appealing... However feminists must remember that the personal is always political. Fun and respite *are* important and we may find all kinds of creative responses to the frustrations of love. But we must not allow ourselves to become trapped by our own forms of escape, whatever they may be.

All forms of escape run the risk of merely recreating or sustaining the very conditions which they are meant to end or transcend. There is nothing of which this is more true than romantic love itself. There can be few of us who



References

- Hilary Allen 'Political Lesbianism and Feminism — a space for sexual politics?' *m/f* Issue 7 pp 15-34 (1982)
- Ti-Grace Atkinson *Amazon Odyssey* (Links Books 1974)
- Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (Pan Books 1988)
- Beatrix Campbell 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't' in *Feminist Review* (eds.) *Sexuality: A reader* (Virago 1987)
- Dana Densmore 'Independence from the Sexual Revolution' in A. Koedt, E. Levine and A. Rapone (eds.) *Radical Feminism* (Quadrangle 1973)
- Andrea Dworkin *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (Harper and Row 1976)
- The Feminists 'The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles' in J. Hole and E. Levine (eds.) *Rebirth of Feminism* (Quadrangle 1971)
- Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (The Women's Press 1979)
- Germaine Greer *The Female Eunuch* (Granada 1970)
- Wendy Langford 'Snuglet Puglet Loves to Snuggle with Snuglet Puglet: Alter-Personalities in Heterosexual Love Relationships' in Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (eds.) *Romance Revisited* (Lawrence and Wishart 1995)
- Wendy Langford 'Bunnikins I Love You Snugly in Your Warren: Voices from Subterranean Cultures of Love' in Keith Harvey and Celia Shalom (eds.) *Language and Desire* (Routledge 1997)
- Patricia Mainardi 'The Marriage Question' in Redstockings (eds.) *Feminist Revolution* (Redstockings)
- New York Radical Feminists '1969 — Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for New York Radical Feminists' in J. Hole and E. Levine (eds.) *Rebirth of Feminism* (Quadrangle 1971)
- Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds.) *Heterosexuality: A Feminism & Psychology Reader* (Sage 1993)

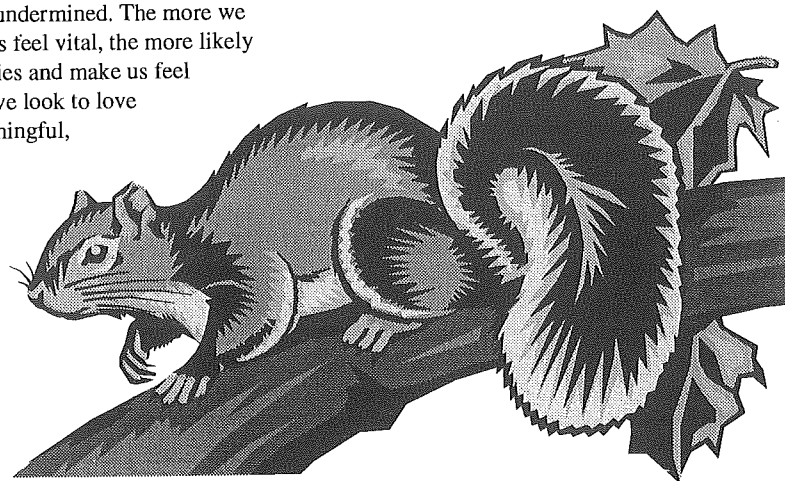
have not experienced feelings of loneliness, insecurity and self-doubt or felt at times that our lives are mundane and limited. Then, even if we are cynical about love, the possibility of 'romantic transformation' can have a powerful emotional appeal which is only intensified by deep feelings of hurt and disenchantment left over from previous loves. When we feel strongly attracted to someone, we really *want* to believe (often against our own better judgement!) that *this* could be the relationship where we really can 'be ourselves', to which we can look for friendship and companionship, and where we will be cherished and cared for — a love that will be equal, intimate and lasting.

In the current 'culture of intimacy', there is little to counterbalance our compelling desires. On the contrary we are only encouraged to assume that the most important and valuable kind of human connection is the one we make when we fall in love, and to build upon it an exclusive world where we will be safe and happy. Few alternatives present themselves — how else can we be happy? But it is this very emphasis on love which makes it so dangerous, for it creates the 'hothouse conditions' where love will have its worst effects. The more it appears that our salvation lies in finding someone 'special' and 'making it work', the more likely it is that love will prove destructive. The more we look to love for a sense of 'security', the more likely it is that love will make us feel insecure. The more we look to one 'special relationship' to be the mainstay of our social life, the more likely we are to end up distanced from the person to whom we are 'meant' to be closest. The more we look to love to give us a sense of value, the more likely it is that we will end up feeling worthless and undermined. The more we look to love to make us feel vital, the more likely it is to drain our energies and make us feel depressed. The more we look to love to make our lives meaningful, the more likely our lives are to feel mundane and uninspiring.

It is not that love is all bad. Love can, temporarily, make us feel very happy and excited and give us the exhilarating illusion that all we

ever wanted has come to pass. The problems lie with the strength of our desire to see this illusion as real and our powerful tendencies to resort to habitual modes of control and manipulation in the effort to 'make it last'. Rationally, the dangers and limitations of love may appear obvious; to expect happiness, security, personal value, self-fulfilment and a meaningful life from one relationship seems optimistic! But our investments in the romantic ideal are not rational.

The feminist analysis of love has had its ups and downs over the last 50 years, but it stands as a cogent critique of the romantic ideal. Perhaps the most crucial insight of all is that it is our very desire for radical transformation that we focus on love. It is the vital energy we need to enact that transformation which is temporarily liberated when we 'fall' and which is channelled into the reproduction of all that love was meant to overcome. The current view that intimacy and equality come with the 'freedom' to pursue our heart's desire is false. It merely helps to obscure how the most insidious exercise of power comes, not from love's repression, but from love's *expression*. And while our desires and our energies are tied up in the treacherous effort of trying to 'make the relationship work', we may have little left over for the most important question of all: How can we begin to realise a world where human relationships do not operate on the basis of domination and submission? One thing is certain; we won't get too far if we spend all our time 'cosying up in the love nest', however seductive the prospect might appear. □



Emma Humphreys Remembered

Emma Humphreys's memorial was held on October 31st this year. A number of people spoke movingly about the ways in which Emma had touched their lives. Here we print edited versions of three such tributes, from Harriet Wistrich and Julie Bindel of Justice for Women and Hannana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters.

Harriet Wistrich

When Emma died in July this year, a number of people asked me, 'What happened?'. For those of you here who didn't know Emma except, perhaps, through having supported her campaign for justice at the Court of Appeal three years ago or seen the media coverage, Emma's tragic death at such a young age may have come as a great shock to you. Sadly, for those of us who knew Emma well, whilst her death was terribly shocking and certainly not inevitable, it was a possibility we sometimes dreaded.

Whilst there can be no simple explanation for Emma's death, I want to describe a little about the pain she lived with and her constant struggle to get through each day. In my mind there is no doubt that she wanted to continue living, but she

may not have fully appreciated how close to the edge she lived her life.

I first met Emma in January 1993, seven years after she was imprisoned for life, and I had what turned out to be the honour of recording her life story and working directly with her in preparing for the appeal. During that time, we often came into conflict with the prison system and sometimes I wondered whether we were doing the best thing for Emma. But she was always determined that the only way she was coming out of prison was after she cleared her name and proved she was not a murderer. However, even after the great victory at the Court of Appeal, Emma continued to be wracked with guilt for having taken someone else's life. However much she accepted on a rational level that she had acted under extreme provocation,

The first Emma Humphreys prize was awarded to Fiona Broadfoot for her work with EXIT, enabling women to leave prostitution.

she was never really able to forgive herself and she always felt her case was much less deserving than those of all the other women who we campaigned for.

It was that guilt, together with all the other damage that had been done to Emma which made living such a constant struggle. She had witnessed and experienced horrific violence at home at the hands of her stepfather. She ran away and as a teenager lived between children's homes and on the street being abused as a prostitute. By the time she was sixteen and living with Trevor Armitage, she was already seriously damaged. Had she not been facing a criminal justice system that was unresponsive to issues of violence against women, perhaps she would have received help in coming to terms with the events leading to her murder conviction. Instead she was incarcerated for life in prisons that dealt with her internal pain by sedating her with medication.

By the time of Emma's release ten years on, she was addicted to a horrific cocktail of medication. Because she came out of prison through the appeal process, the prison system took no responsibility for providing for the difficult transition to freedom. Instead, Justice for Women (and Linda Regan in particular) were left to set up the links with social services and sought to ensure that Emma was not suddenly without the medication that she had come to rely on. Emma stayed with Julie, Sarah and me in the first few weeks following her release until a place became available at a residential therapeutic community.

During the first week of Emma's freedom, we all came to the realisation that the life outside prison which Emma had yearned for was also terrifying to her. Within five days of her release, Emma was in the Whittington hospital having overdosed on chloral hydrate. During the first eighteen months of her freedom, Emma ran wild. She drank and took all manner of drugs to excess; she continued to self-harm by cutting up, through serious anorexia and by getting into dangerous situations with the sort of men who prey on vulnerable women. She was thrown out of the therapeutic community she was living in, having broken every rule; she was likewise thrown out of a mental health hostel and a number of other forms of accommodation found for her.

Things began to change after she was seriously assaulted by a stranger. Perhaps she felt

she was no longer invincible and she started to reduce the risks she had been taking with men. Also at this time, social services agreed to find her her own flat; this was always what Emma wanted most after years of living in institutions.

In the last fifteen months, Emma lived less than a mile from our home in Crouch End. We were able to maintain very regular contact with her and she formed a special bond with our friend Rosie. Most Sundays, Emma would come round for the day and we spent Christmases and birthdays together. Life, however, continued to be a struggle for Emma. She coped by obliterating painful thoughts and memories with drink and her medication.

Three weeks before Emma died, Julie, Rosie, Cheryl and I took Emma on holiday to Italy. I shall never forget the look of ecstasy on Emma's face as she looked out of the aeroplane window, over the clouds. During that week in Italy, I was confronted with the serious danger she was in as a result of the amount of medication she was using. For three days she could barely get out of bed. But we had a lovely time together none the less. On our return, Cheryl and Jane began to make arrangements to help Emma to reduce the amount of medication she was taking.

Tragically, on Friday July 10th, Emma died from an accidental overdose.

Hannana Siddiqui

The last time I saw Emma, it was her 30th birthday. Rosie had given her a kitten, and said to her that the kitten was something to live for, to care for and to take responsibility for. The idea was that if Emma had something else to care for, she would take good care of herself. Emma loved the kitten instantly and did take good care of it. Perhaps the kitten is one symbol of Emma's determination to recover from the trauma of her past, which had made her ill and over-dependent on drugs. In the end, however, her desire to live was sadly overtaken by a fragile body, resulting in her tragic and sudden death.

For those of us working with women experiencing violence and abuse, Emma's whole life is also a symbol of the love and courage women have in their struggle to survive and their struggle for freedom from abuse. In recent years, Emma was one of the women who propelled the issue of domestic violence onto the national agenda. Along with women such as Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia, Emma's conviction and imprisonment represented the

failings not only of the criminal justice system and the homicide laws, but also of the state and society's inability to help and support women experiencing domestic violence.

Emma's death has been heart-breaking for those who knew her personally, but grief and a sense of loss reverberate across the women's movement and beyond. Whilst we hold her memory dear in our hearts, Emma's death is not in vain. Her case is currently highlighting the failings of a prison system which makes women over-dependent on drugs and the miscarriages of justice as exemplified by the cases of Zoorah Shah and Diana Butler. As an individual Emma fought for justice and freedom, not only in her personal life but also as a campaigner for other women. As a movement, we will not mourn her death in vain, but continue to fight with greater strength, courage and determination.

Julie Bindel

I want to tell you all a little bit about Emma's life with those of us she defined as 'family', that is primarily Rosie and Harriet and me. In the last fifteen months of her life she had her own flat, which made it more possible for us to visit her and therefore for Emma to have a far more settled life.

We would all look forward to Sundays, when Emma and Rosie would come to our house and spend the day with us. I'd cook lunch, which Emma always ate; Emma and Rosie would listen to music and chat, I always seemed to be telling Emma off about something or other, either her overuse of medication, or her losing weight, or inviting some creep back to her flat when she didn't really want to. But we'd have nice chats as well, and it became obvious in the last year of her life that, mainly as a result of her friendship with Rosie, she had learned to empathise. She would ask me about my life, and I'd sometimes tell her things I hadn't told any one else. Emma had been, in the beginning, someone I had helped, taken care of, worried about, but one day I realised she had become my friend.

I would speak to Emma on the phone nearly every day, and she would tell me what she and Rosie had been doing, how Tiger the cat was — little things we take for granted, but that for Emma were the things that kept her alive. Emma was changing from the wild, uncontrollable, self-destructive person she was when she left prison, to someone who could see the future, make friends, care about herself and others. Her sense

of humour was also coming into full flow. In a way she became more childlike, because it was safe to do so, surrounded by love from her friends and family. She could be stropky, stubborn and cheeky, and she would take liberties with us on a regular basis. She began to recognise her own worth, and believed us when we told her we loved her, and that she was special.

Emma was indeed very special. She helped me realise the true and total cost of male violence, in a way I had not fully grasped in eighteen years of feminism. She helped me face realities about women and children's lives that I had previously seen more abstractly. I remember one day feeling disillusioned about the work I was doing, and then I thought about Emma, and what she had achieved, and I vowed never to give up, because if Emma can challenge the law, men's behaviour and so many other things, then so could I. Many of us here today know that the reasons why we become involved in the struggle against male violence are the very same reasons why it can be hard for us to do so, but Emma was an inspiration to us all. Her spirit never gave up even at the worst of times, and I know that, had she lived, she would have gone on to achieve even more.

Emma worked with me in the fight against the prostitution of women and children. It is entirely down to Emma that I started to look at the devastation caused to women and children who are bought and sold for sex. And it is also partly down to Emma that I began to be able to face working around the issue of child sexual abuse — a topic I had previously been reluctant to deal with.

Emma was unique for all those reasons. But another legacy of Emma is the knowledge we now have that there are girls and women like her all over the world, in families, in children's homes, in prisons, in hospitals. It is not that the damage is irreparable, or that they are too far gone to live decent lives. We must never think like that. The tragedy is that they are being ignored. The realities of some women's lives are too painful for many of us to face. But we must face it, we have to confront the worst, the most horrific things that are happening to women and children before we can begin to make a difference. What Emma showed me was that there is always hope even for the most damaged women if they are not ignored and left to die. Most of us here do at least something in our lives to

Diana Butler's murder conviction was quashed on 20/11/98 and she has been granted a retrial.

Contact Southall Black Sisters for information about the 'Free Zoorah Shah' campaign. Zoorah lost her appeal earlier this year, but SBS is exploring other avenues, including a new appeal and submissions to the European Court of Human Rights.

Southall Black Sisters
52 Norwood Road
Southall, Middx
UB2 4DW
Tel (0181) 571-9595
Fax (0181) 574-6781

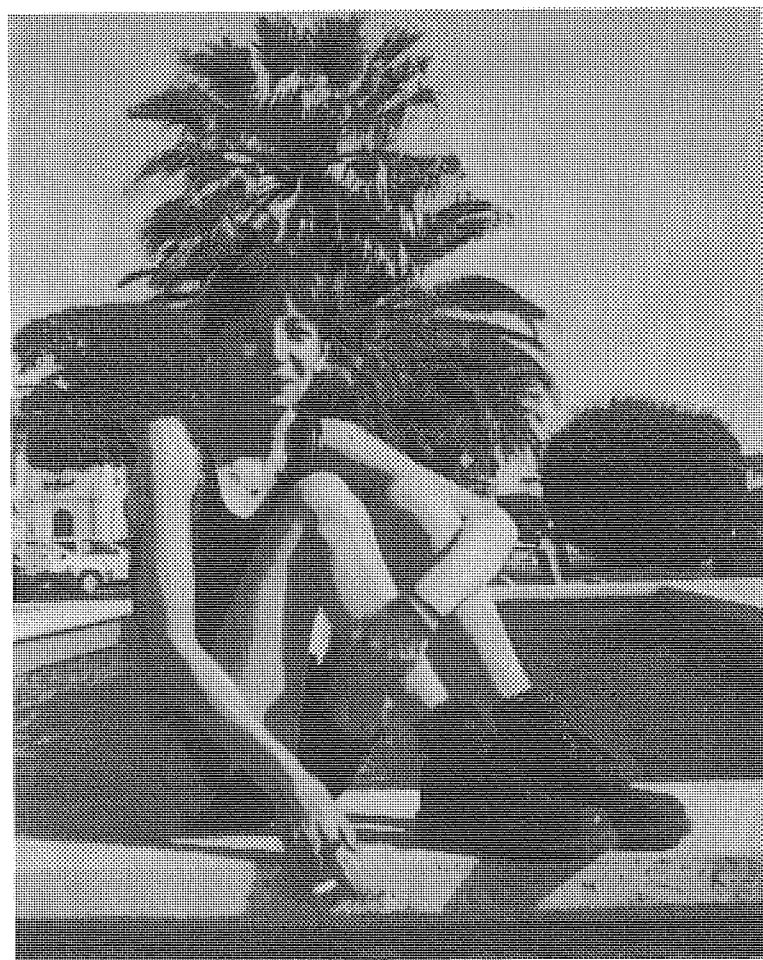
challenge violence against women and children. We must bear in mind that it probably isn't enough, and allow Emma to be our inspiration when we feel like giving up, or not facing the worst.

The world is a different and better place for having Emma in it, albeit for a tragically short time. I have far more to thank Emma for than she does me, and I'm glad I told her that only weeks

before she died. Her life was one of the best things that happened to me, and her death undoubtedly one of the worst. She did not have to die, it was not inevitable. She is not, as someone who meant well told me, 'better off now she's gone'. She had much work to do, and it's now up to all of us to do it in her name, and to remember Emma as the extraordinary person that she was. □

Emma Humphreys

Writer, Campaigner



Born October 30, 1967
Died July 11, 1998

Justice for Women
55 Rathcoole Gardens
London
N8 9NE
(0181) 340-3699

EVE'S Back

Only
£1!

BI-MONTHLY

MANCHESTER WOMEN'S NETWORKING MAGAZINE



News, articles, reviews...

Comprehensive Women's Listings

For Sale in Frontline Books,
Cornerhouse, On the Eighth Day &
many other outlets in Manchester

Eve's Back, Dept 65, 1 Newton St, Manchester, M1 1HW

Trouble & Strife

Subscription rates/ Back issues

Subs for one year/2 issues:

Individual

Britain and Ireland £8.50
supporting sub £25.00
unwaged sub £6.50
Surface mail worldwide £10.00
Airmail worldwide £13.00

Institutions

Inland £25.00
Overseas £35.00
Subscribers outside the UK, please
pay by International Money Order.

Back issues nos. 3-18, 20-24:

Britain and Ireland £1.65
3 copies £4.00
Surface mail worldwide £2.50
3 copies £6.00
Airmail worldwide £3.60
3 copies £8.00

Outside the UK, please pay by
International Money Order.

Please send me Trouble & Strife for one/two years, starting issue # _____.

I enclose a cheque/money order for £ _____, including a donation of
£ _____.

Please send me back issues nos. _____.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Trouble & Strife subscriptions. PO Box 8, Diss, Norfolk, UK IP22 3XG.

SEPConnection Newsletter

for Dyke Separatists only

SEPConnection is a newsletter for, by, & about Dyke Separatists. It is published four times a year. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide support for and connections among Lesbian Separatists.

For information, send a long self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

SEPC
P. O. Box 1180
Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180
USA

NO POSTCARDS

Winter 1998/99

Spicing up girls' lives <i>Krista Cowman and Ann Koloski</i> find out what girl fans of the Spice Girls really, really want.....	2
Detect and survive <i>T&S</i> interviews feminist detective writer <i>Denise Mina</i>	10
The idea of patriarchy <i>Sheila Jeffreys's The Idea of Prostitution</i> reviewed by <i>Liz Kelly</i>	15
men@exploitation.com <i>Donna Hughes</i> reveals how the Internet is being used to promote sexual exploitation	21
Giving a damn <i>Patricia Holmes</i> and <i>Val King</i> on FRANKI, a feminist organisation with a radical approach to working with women in prostitution	28
Not for sale <i>Angela Beausang</i> and <i>Eva Hassel-Calais</i> report on Sweden's new law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services	32
Flushing the johns <i>Julie Bindel</i> reports on West Yorkshire's Kerb Crawler Re-education Programme	35
Jeanette Winterson is not the only lesbian <i>Rachel Wingfield</i> discusses three lesbian novelists and their status in the literary mainstream	37
Could do better <i>Debbie Cameron</i> raises questions about boys' educational underachievement	46
Out of the shadows <i>Bina Akhtar</i> talks to <i>Linda Regan</i> about the problem of acid-throwing attacks on women in Bangladesh	54
Love is all you need? <i>Wendy Langford</i> doesn't think so	60
Emma Humphreys Her life remembered by <i>Julie Bindel</i> , <i>Hannana Siddiqui</i> and <i>Harriet Wistrich</i>	69

£4.50