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# Contents

## *Women's Studies Association (NZ) (Inc.)*

The Association is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality and class as well as sex. We acknowledge the Maori people as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

Full membership of the Association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members.

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# Editorial:
## Feminist Debates and Constructions

**PHYLLIS HERDA, May 1999**

This issue of the *Women's Studies Journal* brings together a wide range of articles concerned with the construction of gender, sexuality and identity as well as with issues of long-standing feminist debate. The *Women's Studies Journal* continues to focus on scholarly discourse of interest to feminists and to concentrate on Aotearoa/ New Zealand and the wider Pacific region.

**Sally Simmonds** examines notions of justice in cases of domestic violence. Simmonds' paper focuses on the case of Gay Oakes and how it was read within the dominant political discourse. **Giselle Bähr** and **Ann Weatherall** report on their study exploring the significance of women's decisions about their surnames at marriage. In addition to addressing issues around the feminist debate on this subject, Bähr and Weatherall identify four interpretative repertoires or discourses surrounding cultural naming practices. **Linda Hill** explores the constructions of masculinity inherent in beer advertising in Aotearoa/ New Zealand in her article, 'What It Means to Be a Lion Red Man'. In her paper, **Liz Stanley**, a 1998 Senior Research Fellow in the Women's Studies Programme and the Institute for Research on Gender at the University of Auckland, asks searching questions about the current state and standing of feminist thought and theory.

**Amy Jamgochian's** essay, 'The Eventually Untrue Adventures of Two Girls in Felicity: The Problem with Truth in *Dare, Truth or Promise*' was selected by a committee of the editorial collective as the overall winner of the 1999 Student Essay Competition. The competition was open to Stage III undergraduate and first year graduate students enrolled at New Zealand universities and polytechnics. It attracted essays of a high calibre with an array of fascinating topics. This year's competition will close on 31 December 1999. Eligible students (Stage II undergraduate or first year graduate at a New Zealand university or polytechnic) should mail their entries to Phyllis Herda, Women's Studies Programme, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Jamgochian was a first year M.A. student in English at the University of Auckland in 1998. Her essay,

written for Lee Wallace's 'Sexual Narratives' paper, examines the representation of a lesbian romance in Paula Boock's adolescent novel, *Dare, Truth or Promise*. Boock's novel created considerable controversy in the media in 1998 when it won the New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year Prize.

This issue also marks the first issue of the final year of the present Auckland editorial collective. Our initial plan was to edit the *Journal* for three years, but circumstances surrounding the handing over to the next collective led us to another year. Last year two groups (a collective based throughout the country linked through the Internet and co-ordinated by Lynne Alice at Massey University, and a collective located at the University of Waikato with Hilary Lapsley acting as spokeswoman) expressed interest in forming a new editorial collective. Both proposals, with some at times heated discussion appeared on the Internet (wsanz@massey.ac.nz).[1] The offers are further complicated at this time as Lynne Alice and Lynne Star have withdrawn their names from the national collective proposal and the University of Waikato is in the detestable process of disestablishing the Women's Studies Department.

Two editorial offers were unprecedented in the *Journal's* history and meant that a decision could not be arrived at until the next AGM of the Women's Studies Association (the owners of the *Women's Studies Journal*). This will be at the WSA 1999 Conference in Wellington 5–7 November. (For more information about the conference contact: Women's Studies/Victoria University/P.O. Box 600/Wellington/ e-mail: Women's-studies@vuw.ac.nz.) In addition to making a decision regarding the next editorial home of the *Journal*, members at the AGM will consider changes to the WSA constitution which will set up a system to enable such decisions to be made in the future between conferences. Undoubtedly, the November AGM will be an important one for the *Journal*, so please try to attend.

[1] Claire Louise McCurdy reproduced the proposals in the *Women's Studies Association Newsletter* [19:2 (Summer 1998) pp. 3-5] for those who are interested.

# The Theory/Practice Dilemma in Political Thinking on Justice for Battered Women

SALLY C. SIMMONDS

In 1994[1] the New Zealand Criminal Justice system found Gay Oakes guilty of murdering without provocation and not in self defence her de facto husband Doug Gardiner, at whose hands she had suffered eleven years of severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse. She was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for a minimum of ten years. In 1997 she published from prison an account of her experiences entitled *Decline into Darkness*[2] which she dedicated to her six children. The intensely disturbing, yet all too common,[3] injustice of her story prompted a questioning on my part of the appropriate connection between the critical enterprise of theory – in particular political theories of justice – and the political task of explaining in order to change, the kinds of wrongs experienced by battered women such as Gay Oakes. Within the dominant political discourse, justice is constructed primarily as liberal-democratic, which means the ideals, principles and methods of social justice are centrally concerned with the theorisation of a fair and equitable distribution of goods consistent with the maximisation of the individual's freedom to choose *his* own conception of the good. Nowhere in this context, even in recognised feminist critiques of this idea of justice, such as articulated by Okin and Pateman,[4] is the subject of domestic violence against women addressed as a 'proper' matter for political analysis to attend to. That is, where the subject is dealt with by theorists, it tends to be from the perspective of feminist psychology and legal theory, which might arguably be said to perpetuate a depoliticisation of the issue as a matter for criminal psychology and law rather than social justice.[5] There is also a considerable amount of feminist sociology addressing the subject of violence against women more generally. While this does seek to highlight the gender politics of the issue, it would seem that it rarely focuses equal and sufficient attention on the specifics of domestic violence against women compared to other, perhaps 'flashier'[6] because more explicitly sexual, types of violence against women like rape and pornography.

Where Gay Oakes' story effectively highlights both the urgency

and complexity of the problem of domestic violence against women, it prompts, I think, a fundamental re-thinking of both the ideals and methodologies of political theories of justice that purport to provide guarantees of equal freedoms and rights for all citizens. After recently completing a feminist critique of mainstream conceptions of 'the political' with a focus on the exclusionary tendencies of the knowledge construction process in its capacity to define what is and what is not considered 'properly political',[7] I considered that a worthwhile even necessary continuation of this critique would be an attempt to apply certain of its key insights to a critical examination of the chasm that evidently exists for some groups of people between the professed ideals of social justice within a liberal democracy such as New Zealand, and the appalling treatment they continue to receive at the hands of its so-called justice system. While the Gay Oakes story provides the only empirical data to be directly considered here, there is a need to acknowledge the somewhat limited application of the discussion in particular to explaining the experiences of battered women outside New Zealand. However, in order to convey the argument that domestic violence against women is a proper matter for political analysis, any conclusions drawn here are intended to add emphasis to the author's perception that violence against women in the home reflects one of the most profound and lasting impediments to the full realisation of democratic citizenship. Indeed, one recent analysis of domestic violence legislation in New Zealand has claimed that the Domestic Violence Act passed in New Zealand in 1996 is 'probably the world's most innovative piece of legislation in this field'.[8] So while it is not my intention here to examine closely the merits of any particular piece of legislation,[9] it might be worth noting that if this indeed be the case, then the fact that the arguments for Gay Oakes' incarceration remain substantially unchallenged within this country, and the number of women killed by their male partners in New Zealand actually rose by 30 per cent in 1997[10] reveals a continued failure on the part of the justice systems in New Zealand and elsewhere to effectively address the problem of domestic violence against women.

To consider the question: 'how might a revised conception of justice that responds to the limitations exposed in mainstream political thinking on the subject more effectively address the ongoing issue of domestic violence against women?' is to suggest an answer

that in so far as it might rely on the enterprise of theory at all, must involve identifying mechanisms that more effectively illuminate the 'reality' of domestic violence beyond the prevailing mythology, while working to empower the various agents of change. This would then seem unlikely to proceed without determining the means by which the voices, fears and experiences generally of battered women can be effectively incorporated into the processes by which justice in this area is articulated, measured and delivered. As such, the task of attempting to locate the conceptual mechanisms for illuminating the 'reality' of domestic violence, while empowering the agents of change and in this, working toward a process of justice for battered women that incorporates their voice and experiences throughout, returns with regularity to the same dilemma involving the ongoing tension between the goal of constructing critical concepts and methods in theory that usefully inform the mechanisms of practical – political change. What might be referred to as, 'the theory/practice dilemma', I argue exists as a central difficulty in any political venture focused on delivering emancipatory change to the lives of 'real' people. Where it would seem that the very notion of justice implies an emancipatory impulse given the impossibility of ever eliminating altogether the wrongs in the world, and arguably the essential reason for writing theory is to produce justice, then it could be argued that any debate within theory about the idea of justice must recognise and address this tension if it is to produce a justice of any political use. The following discussion on justice for battered women will then be addressed mainly to illuminating this tension as a necessary foundation on which to begin considering possible re-directions in the campaign to end the profound injustice that is domestic violence against women.

### Historical Context

Any politicisation of this issue must be located in the historical context of liberal democracies in their legal-political response to domestic violence against women. This history might begin in the nineteenth century where the laws in such lands as New Zealand, Britain and the United States were actively engaged in condoning a husband's right to beat his wife,[11] before a change of law at the end of the century legally overturned this right. Subsequent decades continued, however, to be marked by an implicit but (in most ways) equally oppressive reinforcing of the traditional status quo, via the dual ideolo-

gies of the dutiful wife and the male head of household that were upheld by all the major political, legal and social institutions including academic institutions. In this, modern political theory played a central part in constructing its theories of justice based on an idea of the universal citizen as the free-choosing 'rational' man which relies on the exclusion of women from the public realm and the domination of women within the private, and so politically uninteresting, sphere of the home. Indeed, as feminists have long contended, without this implicit exclusion of women from the public realm, the liberal idea of freedom as non-interference could not be imagined, let alone practised.[12] This structural and ideological endorsement of the values that had once legally condoned domestic violence against women [yet in a telling contrast, regarded a wife's acts of violence against her husband as comparable to treason],[13] thus functioned to distort or render silent any resistance on the part of the battered woman who then responded to her predicament in the only way that made sense given this wider context, by taking the blame upon herself. This meant that on the whole there was little scope for her or anyone else to speak out politically about the experience of domestic violence. This created a public silence on the subject as one that apparently did not exist.

In the decade of the 1970s the reviving women's movement began to bring to light the reality of domestic violence and women's experiences of it around the world.[14] In Britain around this time, domestic violence was said to have achieved the status of a 'national scandal', with select committees formed, research commissioned and new legislation passed in an attempt to ensure an end to male violence against women in the home.[15] However, despite such a public raising of consciousness about domestic violence and truly positive measures enacted, such as the widespread establishment of women's refuges throughout most democratic countries, the attitudes that fuelled the traditional endorsement of a husband's right to control his wife now maintained a widespread indifference to and trivialisation of domestic violence against women. This was compounded insidiously by the assigning of political priorities in both theory and practice, the condescension and victim blaming from the legal profession, and the lack of concern and carelessness of police and social service workers reflecting and maintaining a justice system 'ready to accept excuses and justifications for domestic violence'.[16] Entrenched even deeper than this was the attitude of the ordinary person who

mostly continued to turn a blind, even accusing, eye to the women's screams and bruises in secret defence of the man's right to maintain control of his wife, his 'castle' and perhaps especially, his privacy.[17]

Thus, surveys in the eighties and early nineties into the support networks provided for battered women show that initial enthusiasm on the part of justice systems around the world for tackling the problem at a political level has generally waned and with it the promise of reliable sources of funding for women's refuge.[18] However, in the mid to late nineties there appears to have been some revival within a number of countries in the attention given to the problem of domestic violence, reflected in a wider public recognition of the problem and greater significance attached to some of the more subtle and complex difficulties encountered by battered women which require a more specific and concerted response from the justice system. This revival could in part be said to reflect an eventual, though largely misdirected, response on the part of various justice systems to feminist campaigns around the notion 'the personal is political'. The main example of this progression in the legal-political response to domestic violence against women is 'battered woman syndrome' [BWS], the evidential defence for battered women who injure or kill their abusers.[19] As well as this, the policy of automatic or mandatory arrest has emerged in the nineties as a formal acknowledgment of political efforts to respond more purposefully to domestic violence.[20] However, while these and other recent reforms in domestic violence legislation do reflect a heightened commitment on the part of justice systems here and elsewhere to take more effective action against men who abuse their partners, they do not on the whole succeed in offering a more effective response because they fail to incorporate challenges to the entrenched sexism that permeates all levels of the legal-political response to domestic violence against women which means that, in certain ways, they actually work to exacerbate the very oppression they ostensibly aim to counter.

The discussion that follows begins, then, by considering the key tension that arguably exists as a fundamental obstacle in the very process of attempting to formulate empowering knowledge from the subjective position of the 'outsider'. From the point of view of theorising the experiences of (battered) women, this task has been undertaken largely within feminist discourses and so will be discussed in that context. Some exerts from Gay Oakes' account of her experi-

ences as a battered woman will be incorporated into the discussion in an attempt to situate any subsequent analysis, while demonstrating both the necessity and difficulty of doing this beyond any foundational presumption to 'know'. From here it will be possible to begin a critical re-thinking of the concept of justice in a way that does not render it useless for feminist revisions as a discourse that necessarily 'speaks the language of the fathers'.[21] By way of moving the discussion toward some tentative conclusions about how we might begin to work more effectively with the theory/practice dilemma, the final section tries to situate the above analysis within debates about the political efficacy of women engaging with the law as an avenue through which to enact feminist reform. While this project incorporates the feminist argument that for women to engage with the law as a deeply patriarchal institution 'risks invoking a power that will work against rather than for them'[22] in relation to the present discussion on the injustice experienced by battered women. Critical engagement with the theory and practice of law seems, at least, unavoidable.

### Dilemmas in Feminist Theory/Practice

Where the fight for battered women has largely made headway at the grass-roots level of the women's movement, it has tended to deal with concrete matters of removing battered women from immediate dangers and meeting their material needs. That is, it has not progressed to the same extent at the more ideological level of the fight for justice for women. Indeed, the political efficacy of and justification for incorporating into the movement more philosophical points of feminist principle via notions such as 'female empowerment' and 'self-determination' might reasonably be disputed by practitioners in the movement. However, there can be no denying that the problem of domestic violence against women continues to exist to an alarming degree here in New Zealand and elsewhere, and that women like Gay Oakes are imprisoned in large part because of weaknesses in the justice system and largely despite the best efforts of women activists and supporters within the various movements fighting for battered women. As well, there is good reason to believe that much of the inspiration and some of the knowledge required for the success of the women's movement at a grass roots level has come from the ideas and strategies formulated and debated at the more academic level of feminist theory. Today, however, there may be cause to won-

der at the continuing effectiveness of this 'community' between feminist activists and theorists. Indeed, Alison Jones and Camille Guy write that within New Zealand feminism there exists 'a general dearth of theoretical debate [with] local forms of feminism often appearing to reflect … a mistrust of "theory", [while] feminist theoretical discussion is increasingly confined to academic journals'.[23] Certainly it is not difficult to understand any scepticism on the part of grass-roots feminism about the role of theory, given how theoretical debates tend to go on almost in spite of the ravages of life and typically in the hands of individuals who are less than likely to experience such ravages at first hand, myself included. However, there is only so much that grass-roots activism can do to prevent the wrongs enacted against women when campaigns are carried out largely removed from the wider arena of political debates about justice and feminist campaigns to illuminate the problem of sex-based injustice. The active support that Gay Oakes received from the West Christchurch Women's Refuge during her experiences of abuse in New Zealand and then following her arrest unfortunately attest to this point, in so far as the support they provided ultimately failed to exact any more positive influence to substantively improve the outcome for her. Indeed, it could be argued that the fight for battered women has on the whole been denied the political attention it deserves and requires, precisely because it has tended to be seen as a single issue campaign, with women's refuges taking on the status of an interest group, which means having to compete for funds against other, usually more popular, causes such as the Red Cross and then 'a constant battle to get issues on the political agenda'.[24] It is, therefore, central to this discussion that a degree of faith in the possibility, and, indeed, necessity of resolving any fundamental mistrust and tension that exists between theory and practice be retained, but that in presenting this as a key dilemma in attempts to re-think the idea and process of justice for battered women it is also hoped to focus critical attention on the considerable difficulty of this project.

For those feminists fighting for justice for women, the project of grand theory, with its foundational reliance on a high level of abstraction, would seem an unlikely course through which to pursue the ongoing task of formulating strategies for addressing and changing the complex realities of people's lives. To the extent that feminist theory in general can be said to have allocated disproportionately

less of its efforts to confronting the issue of domestic violence against women compared to other types of violence against women, it could be said to have reinforced a process of knowledge construction in which obstacles in the way of applying theory to practice function implicitly as a reason for not attempting to do so. Part of this involves a belief that the nature of the injustice suffered by battered women, which goes much further and deeper than the violence suffered at the hands of their abusers, is such that many women simply fail to relate to it, in much the same way that white women have in the past failed to relate to the experiences of women of colour. As such, any marginalisation of this issue within feminist analysis can arguably be seen as another instance of the failure to address the theory/practice dilemma, while a higher commitment is placed on the task of explaining, in a uniform way, the mechanisms of women's oppression rather than continuing the political fight to empower all women as full and equal citizens. The difficulty of this task is, however, well illustrated in Iris Young's attempt to formulate a differentiated theory of group-based justice[25] that while describing in general terms the nature of the injustice experienced by oppressed groups, also seeks to address the multiple differences between the experiences of the various groups. In her critical comment on Young's theory, Renee Romkens has argued that the face of oppression intended to explain the violence enacted against groups fails to explain the reality of domestic violence against women as a form of violence that is, in important respects, different from most other types of violence enacted more randomly against groups.[26] While agreeing with Romken's point, Young responds to it by expressing doubts that as feminists 'we should risk reproducing a public/private distinction by creating a distinct category of oppression for those enacted through intimate relations'.[27] Indeed, it would seem that this is too great a risk to take and one unlikely to help in the critical task of centering domestic violence within justice discourse. However, it also seems that for as long as such abuse exists as a grave injustice enacted against women, ongoing efforts to try to formulate the conceptual mechanisms to explain and politicise it as such must be a primary responsibility of feminist theorists of justice. Thus, attempts must be made to formulate ways of thinking critically about, while responding effectively to, the needs and experiences of battered women. This could prove to be a task for which there may be no greater obstacle than the

battered woman's decision to remain in or return to the locus of her abuse, as decisions which would appear to most to be both counter-intuitive and irrational, reflecting an 'abnormal' psychological make-up for which there then can be no blame only treatment. Any attempt to re-position the issue of domestic violence against women usefully within political and feminist discourses of justice must then move beyond this foundational obstacle, which provides for some a partial motive and justification for the abuse the battered woman suffers and for others a political justice system ultimately indifferent to her plight.

**Beyond the Mythology**

In order to counter prevailing myths about the battered woman's experience and begin articulating a more contextualised response, it is necessary to take the discussion to those experiences. This means voicing the perspective of a battered woman in whose words only can we begin to understand what we cannot otherwise presume to know. From this we can reveal the inadequacies of our response and possibilities for its critical re-direction.

Reconciliation for Gay Oakes took different forms. Here is her interpretation of three separate occasions which drove her to return to her abuser. She says:

> The girls were miserable and I was lonely. There was no one else at the refuge and the workers only called in every few days to see if we were okay. I started to think of Doug's good points, how he'd been toward me in the beginning and how he'd looked after me when I was ill during my pregnancy. It is strange how, when the immediate danger is removed, it is so easy to dwell on the good times and forget the bad, wishing all could be as it once was ... When he found me three weeks later, I was as pleased to see him as he was to see me, and I agreed to take him back on certain conditions. First, I wanted to go back to Brisbane, second, he had to cut down his drinking and, finally, he was never to lay a hand on me or the kids again. (Page, 104).

Another occasion about two years later. Gay writes:

> He started watching the house and following me everywhere until, eventually, the fear and stress overcame the desire not to be with him and, once again, he began to spend most of his time at my house. The arguments over my not letting him move in permanently and the threats to

> take the children and hurt me, Joanne and Dalane escalated. I was so afraid that I let him move in. (Page, 144)

In the final year of their relationship:

> Over the years I had applied for, and been granted, many non-violence and non-molestation orders but the police and bailiffs were never able to serve Doug with the papers. They were interim orders that were always dismissed after two or three months, I had to pay fifty dollars each time and I came to realise it was a waste of time, and money, getting the orders because Doug would never allow them to be served on him ... When I moved to Hutcheson Street I was about seven months pregnant; I wasn't well and my pregnancy was difficult because of the prolapsed uterus. I always felt depressed and tired, and more so after Doug found out where I was living, because he was constantly there. The emotional blackmail was awful and I repeatedly begged him to leave me alone but he wouldn't listen. I went to Social Welfare and asked them to find some care for my children while I was in hospital having the baby, but they said they were unable to help. Doug insisted on looking after the children and, although I was concerned, I felt I had no other option, so I agreed. A couple of days after I had come home ... I received a letter from Social Welfare to say that I had to pay back the benefit money I had received for the days that Doug had stayed in the house while I was having the baby ... I'd still had to pay my bills and feed the kids, and because I'd also had Doug to feed, I was worse off rather than better...(pages 161-162).

The first episode Gay speaks about situates the battered woman's experience in the reality of a volatile, but in other ways, meaningful relationship, a perspective which would seem crucial to enabling the development of a more empathetic response to the battered woman's decision to return after escaping. That is, in some respects an abusive man, the father of your children, may seem and even be, better than the alternative of no intimate relationship and the hardship of single parenting. Then there is always hope, which in the 'real' world motivates people to act in ways that cannot be simply dismissed as 'irrational'. In the latter passages, the motivations of emotional need are replaced by the burdens of more practical difficulties incurred via the absence of effective outside help to relieve the strains associated with coping as a solo parent of five through a difficult pregnancy. Certainly, what seems apparent throughout is that the fear and pain

experienced by the battered woman is not purely a product of the violence directed against her, and so simply removed by changes in the physical proximity of the two parties involved – if this itself were ultimately possible – but the severity of the battered woman's experience seems to be compounded by the justice system itself in its repeated failure to interrupt the destructive momentum of the situation. In this, the system not only demonstrates its lack of understanding and sympathy for the experiences of battered women, but in focusing its response on stopping the violence itself (though even then, never with any great effectiveness) it succeeds in obscuring and perpetuating the wider social-political problem.

If empowering, non-exclusionary knowledge is to be produced about battered women toward the articulation of a response that does not effectively reinforce the problem, then experiences voiced by the situated subject must be spoken and listened to beyond the prevailing mythologies about domestic violence that have hitherto obscured the path to a better, more thoughtful understanding of the problem. This mythology confirms and maintains the traditional, patriarchal devaluing of the female within a hierarchical male/female dichotomy. It includes the myth about women as masochists who enjoy being dominated and controlled by men as well as the myth about women's generally unbalanced mental state that is said to provoke and perpetuate the battering situation.[28] More specifically there is the commonly held myth that escape for battered women is a simple matter, whereas the reality is that women's attempts to leave their abusive partners actually increase by 75 per cent their chances of being killed.[29] Meanwhile, as Gay Oakes' experience testifies, there are numerous other impediments in the way of women successfully leaving domestic violence situations. There are also familiar myths about the men involved, on which current 'solutions' to the problem tend to be based.[30] In particular, these include the myth of men's uncontrollable anger and general propensity to violence, which Virginia Held has argued operates as the founding premise on which all our legal and political systems are based.[31] Indeed, the Hobbesian hypothesis of the war of all [men] against all [men] that provides the founding premise of mainstream political theory, would tend to confirm this point.

While the consequences of male violence, especially for the lives of women, are all around us to be seen and felt, the question that

needs to be addressed is whether or not such a premise and the subsequent analysis confined by it can usefully inform political change. In so far as it reinforces a simplistic stereotype about men, one in which the consequences for women of male violence are not considered, it cannot usefully inform emancipatory, feminist change. In so far as it fails to challenge, within a political context, the world-wide celebration of masculine strength as a contributing factor to the problem of male violence, it cannot deliver positive change. That is, where the concept of the inherently aggressive male is established as a premise on which to base the theory and practice of justice, rather than render for questioning the political and cultural infrastructure that has grown up on the back of this notion, it merely confirms its suitability for the task where the task becomes then, not to try as a society to prevent male violence, which would undermine the entire system, but more simply to contain it within reasonable limits without interfering with the individual's freedom. In this way, such a premise can function more as an excuse, not only for the violent actions of the individual man, but for the wider society's inaction to prevent it.

### The Difficult Matter of Knowing

If it is possible then to recognise the political imperative involved in moving beyond prevailing misconceptions about the experiences of battered women, it becomes critical to develop a way of thinking about the problem that does not repeat the terms of exclusion and silencing that renders the 'outsider's' response at best ineffectual and, at worst, compounding. In thinking and writing about justice for battered women and women more generally in the prevention of domestic violence, it would seem that a framework for understanding the problem must reject the founding premise of male violence and start more critically from the perspective of its social, discursive construction. This then allows for the possibility of political redress. Such an epistemological approach, if it is to construct truly empowering knowledge, must then incorporate mechanisms for listening to the experiences of the situated subject, for it is directly via this situated, indeed, embodied position that the complexity of the problem is revealed. This point positions the process of knowing within the idea and practice of the political itself, as a process that can either engage with the embodied subject and in this way work toward its genuine em-

powerment, or rest on a pretence to neutrality and objectivity that functions to disempower the voices of those most vulnerable to social marginalisation, including women, and in this way preclude the real possibility for political, emancipatory change. From a position of problematising in order to politicise the process of knowing, comes a politics of voice that highlights the need for contextual rather than abstract judgment, based in actual rather than hypothetical experiences. Where these experiences include the emotional and embodied needs of the subject, they reveal an often contradictory and sometimes chaotic reality that cannot be fairly reduced to scientific or philosophical categories like 'normal', abnormal', 'rational' and 'irrational'.

The politics of voice, however, does not necessarily solve what Andrea Nye has called: 'the problem of knowing'.[32] While situated analysis based on the standpoint of the embodied subject overcomes the 'egoist's delusion of confusing one's perspective with an objective standpoint or truth',[33] it also undermines the critical position from which to choose between the claims of individuals or groups in order to decide whose experience is to count. As Nye points out, this concern not only relates to the possibility of 'false-consciousness', but where the voice of the situated subject is supposed to represent the experiences of the group as it is in feminist standpoint theory, for example, a greater problem lies in the tendency to presume the group's homogeneity, thereby excluding different voices from within the group. Following this line of argument, the experiences of battered women are then excluded when female oppression is abstracted from the embodied actions of individual men and women and located solely in the institutional structure of patriarchy or male domination. However, they are equally not understood critically when reduced to the psychological predispositions of the individuals involved. To effectively engage with the injustices experienced by battered women, critical analysis of the institution of male domination must be contextualised in terms of the actual experiences of the individual women involved in order to incorporate the numerous contradictions and complexities of those experiences constructively. Thus, de Lauretis argues 'the shift from subjects to men and women marks the conceptual distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of political theory and the discourse of reality. While gender is granted and taken for granted in the latter, it is excluded from the former'.[34]

The task for the theorist of change becomes then to incorporate the experiences of the situated female subject not as another foundation upon which to construct analysis, which would take those experiences for granted, but to engage reflectively with the embodied subject within a process that recognises the political necessity of thinking and acting beyond its present subjective location. Scott presents a similar argument when she says that the presumption that 'nothing could be truer than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through ... reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems [while] reifying agency as an inherent attribute of individuals'.[35] It is then this presumption that has to be avoided, not the experiences.

An epistemological perspective that highlights and politicises the 'problem of knowing', reflects upon the pursuit of justice theory and practice in many ways. Some have argued that such a critical method undermines the possibility of making normative claims thereby disabling political action,[36] while others maintain that such a critique 'provides the very precondition of a politically engaged critique'.[37] The analysis and argument presented here assumes that a moderate version of this critical method can be articulated within a framework of justice, though what is meant by the notion and process of justice will require substantial revision. If this means not anticipating any 'absolute duality between grounding justice in objective truth claims and giving up on it altogether', as Judith Squires argues,[38] then to move beyond such a duality surely depends on the articulation of a concept or process of justice that exists as a response to, rather than a mechanism for denying or oversimplifying by abstracting from, the inequities in the world. This, in turn, relies on an epistemological process that concedes the impossibility of absolutes by focusing on strategies for illuminating complexity rather than the pursuit of order and certainty. For example, in relation to illuminating the complexities associated with the problem of domestic violence against women, the imposition of the public/private dichotomy as a foundational fixture within a liberal justice framework would require critical re-evaluation. While recent domestic violence legislation might have subverted the traditional principle of absolute non-interference, because this subversion has not incorporated any critical re-assessment of the function of such a distinction, it is unlikely to undo any of the difficulties of exclusion associated with the dichotomy and indeed threat-

ens to perpetuate further exclusions.

Certainly, feminists have campaigned around the slogan 'the personal is political', but as with the traditional dichotomy, the presumption to know absolutely where the boundary lies so that it may be upheld or demolished in an absolute way is precisely what forecloses the important and ongoing process of political re-evaluation on which the self-determination of all citizens essentially depends. Instead, a critical method that focuses on the difficulty of locating meaning within fixed categories places the negotiation of the public-private distinction on the political agenda, which means that 'the distinction does not correspond to discrete separate spheres [but] every situation [exists as] an encounter between "private" and "public"'.[39] From this perspective, the theorist's construction of conceptual boundaries and meanings becomes an ongoing matter for philosophical and political debate from which it should then be easier to ensure, for example, that the battered woman's right to privacy is not so hastily disregarded in the name of her own protection as reflected in the recent trend in domestic violence legislation (see later discussion on mandatory arrest/prosecution). So if notions of justice are not to rely solely or even largely upon processes of hypothetical abstraction nor to presume a homogeneous experience of 'rationality' from which to deduce ideals, they must be located beyond mainstream justice formulations in liberal political theory. While the critique of this mainstream has long been underway within certain feminist discourses, the attempt to apply such revision to the matter of extending justice to battered women reveals how, in key respects, the feminist critique has also failed to provide an effective alternative approach to political thinking about justice.

### Justice: a Practical Theory

Where the concept of liberal justice with its universalising tendencies, its rule-based, legalistic discourse, its presumptions to impartiality and its ethic of atomistic, rational individualism has presumed the experiences of 'the rational man', it has precluded recognition of the experiences of women and, thus, the extension of justice discourse to the lives of women. For this, it has taken something of a beating at the hands of feminist political theory, a critique arguably centred around the 'justice/care debate' and the work of Carol Gilligan.[40] In posing an 'ethic of care' in contrast to the traditional

liberal 'ethic of justice', Gilligan located a 'different moral voice' in the relational, nurturing and embodied experiences of women as mothers. As an articulate proponent of this perspective, Virginnia Held has envisaged a political morality that generates a 'post-patriarchal family [and] ... a society that sees the flourishing of children as its most important goal'.[41] This is to be achieved, she argues, via a moral ethic that in 'embracing emotion ... [works to] achieve and maintain trusting, caring relationships ... [rather than] the satisfaction of individual desires'.[42] If there is an ideal expressed in this it is the ideal of non-domination, which incorporates a certain faith in the caring capacities of human beings. Arguably, this faith – or rather the lack of it – is what has served to shape the prevailing notion of justice within liberal democracies, a moral position the ethic of care theorists are highly critical of as that which requires of individual citizens only a very minimal sense of responsibility toward others. That is, for mainstream, liberal notions of justice typified by John Rawls's theory of justice,[43] the only way to ensure 'rational' individuals think about others in an egalitarian and fair-minded way, is to place them behind a 'veil of ignorance' in which they have no knowledge about themselves, about others or about the society in which they live. The presumption being that in 'normal' circumstances, people are entirely self-interested in their pursuit of ends, which means lacking a sense of what is reasonable and fair in terms of the other, so that the most we can expect from people in their relations with one another is a mutual commitment to refrain from interfering with their formal rights rather than any positive obligation to provide active assistance or support. Furthermore, practical considerations of how to apply this highly abstract method of justice reasoning to the task of making justice is typically assumed rather than demonstrated. Such an assumption appears decidedly problematic when, as Benhabib argues, it is only in the context of 'all available and relevant information' that it is possible to decide what is just.[44]

While the methodology of justice as impartial 'rational' judgment, has been exposed as a myth that serves an ideological function to sanctify the status quo,[45] many feminists, including Young and Held, have incorporated in their critique of liberal justice theory the point that much of the injustice or harm suffered by women as well as other marginalised groups occurs at a cultural level in the beliefs and attitudes of a society, in the roles that we are expected to fulfil and in

the everyday actions of people. This critique implies that what is required to challenge discrimination effectively at the informal level of attitudes and beliefs is nothing short of a cultural revolution which will involve a broadening of the political beyond its traditional construction as the administration and distribution of resources in the name of maintaining 'order'. Such changes will involve the political system of justice in much more than the administration of formal rules and rights that allow, if not encourage, people to think and act selfishly. For political theories of justice to engage with such a critical re-thinking of values, they must become involved in the somewhat pragmatic and decidedly complex matter of working out not so much what justice requires in theory, that is according to the requirements of formal logic, but how to make people think more justly without imposing a pre-determined morality upon them from above. Thus Joan Tronto has argued that where morality is supposed to 'provide us with a way to respect and deal justly with others',[46] it requires a deconstruction of the boundary between morality and politics. This implies a critical revision of the politically complacent notion that morality is an inner battle on the part of the individual to be 'good' or rather, to refrain from being 'bad', to the politically engaged notion that 'morality has to in part involve action'[47] and, so, human interaction.

Tronto's point then connects to the above discussion in the way that it recognises the unavoidable link between knowledge and power which precludes the possibility of defining a universal justice based on an objective, moral point of view. However, her motivation remains an attempt to transpose an 'ethic of care' identified in the mother-child relationship onto the political morality of citizens, and in this it tends, rather than politicising the relationship between knowledge and power, politics and action, to assume the relative ease of its relation which admits of an idealism no more useful as a political strategy than the justice discourse against which it positions itself. That is, even the most sophisticated of arguments from the ethic of care perspective, including both Tronto's and Held's, tend to establish care as another foundational premise on which to build an equally grand political theory which assumes the existence and value of care as an ethic rather than attempting to illuminate mechanisms for dealing with the myriad instances of uncaring. In short, they, too, like the mainstream theorists of justice, posit an abstract ideal rather than

respond to a need and as such fail to offer any useful mechanisms for the resolution of the theory/practice dilemma in political thinking on justice for battered women. Indeed, Held's expressed hope that 'the caring characteristic of good relations within the family be extended to the wider society',[48] forebodes real difficulties, even dangers, for battered women to the extent that it denies the reality of human conflict of which domestic violence against women is a profound example. As well, the ethic of care premise, in so far as it takes the relationship between mother and child as exemplary of good human relations, denies the fact that this relationship revolves around hierarchical rather than mutual bonds of dependency where the needs of the child are to be met by the mother's sense of responsibility toward it. In relation to the fight for justice for battered women this could prove a particularly damaging idea in so far as it adds fuel to the fathers' rights movement which is primarily focused on campaigns for equal custody rights following the dissolution of a marriage and is defended largely in the name of children's welfare, a concept which some argue is already in the ascendancy throughout liberal democracies especially when compared to the concept of women's welfare.[49] Thus from the father's rights movement comes the argument that 'marriage bonds and parenting bonds should be treated differently for the sake of the children whose development requires continued contact with fathers',[50] an argument which in principle provides abusive males with a mechanism for achieving control over their children and, by extension, their wives. So while it is not the intention of this essay to detract in any way from the importance of campaigns advocating the greater protection of children, or those genuinely concerned to encourage fathers to take on a greater parental role, it is crucial to point out the injustice involved when public efforts made on behalf of children, who may be only indirectly involved, work to undermine the level of public-political attention directed to addressing the specific and urgent needs of the battered women involved, thereby neutralising the gendered and sexist nature of the violence by conflating wife abuse with child abuse. Where threats from the father to take the children away are frequently used by men who abuse their partners as a weapon to maintain their partner's otherwise unwilling compliance and silence,[51] it may be more opportune to remember, when situating debates about justice in the context of parental rights, that in the United Kingdom the father's entitlement to

final say in all decisions concerning legitimate children was only successfully overturned by mother's claims for equal rights as recently as 1973.[52]

In general, then, it might be argued that much of contemporary feminist theory addressing the debate about justice has not succeeded in providing an alternative ideal or process of justice that would respond effectively to the problem of domestic violence against women. Again it seems that a large part of the difficulty with doing this is related to the problem of situating methods and goals within the reality of the battered woman's experience, that is, the reality of sexist domination. This difficulty is addressed in Iris Young's major work on justice, in which she articulates what is arguably the central point in rethinking justice: to concede the important reality that there can be no final resolution or perfect justice that solves all the inequities in the world, and it is precisely in response to this reality that the idea of justice is required, that is, not as an ultimate ideal, but as a source of political inspiration to always try to do better in terms of improving the concrete well-being of individuals. So, in moving on to the final section in which the above discussion is extended to the matter of revising the legal response to the injustices suffered by battered women, Young's definition of the justice process as that which involves 'listening to, and heeding a call, rather than asserting and mastering a state of affairs, however ideal',[53] is suggested as a probable point of departure from which to begin thinking critically about the 'rule of law' as a principle and process that is only now, and still with some hesitation and irregularity, beginning to heed the call for justice from the millions of battered women worldwide.

### Justice and the Theory and Practice of Law

The law, where this refers to legislative as well as judicial processes of decision-making, presents at least a problematic venue for feminist debates about and campaigns for justice. Much of this is linked to the limitations of legalistic discourse that reduces already limited principles of justice still further within a system that incorporates an overriding commitment to maintaining order rather than fighting injustice. As Martha Minow argues, 'the basic method of legal analysis requires simplifying the problem to focus on a few traits rather than the full complexity of the situation'. This has been justified – she goes on to argue – via the assumption that 'the catego-

ries we use for analysis just exist' so that all we need do is 'simply sort our experiences, perceptions and problems through them'.[54] Such a method of justification, then, reflects a basic idea of the rule of law as a process distinct from the political domain of power, a distinction on which then rests the law's claim to neutrality and so legitimacy, but which conceals an inherent conservatism that sees both judicial and legislative reinforcing of the status quo via the discrediting of those forces campaigning for change.[55] As such, both the reductionism and conservatism of legal discourse can be blamed for the past failures of the law to adequately respond to the injustices experienced by women. Where the rule of law places a premium on consistency with tradition, and then on consistency between cases, it generally precludes the kind of critical, reflexive and contextualised thinking that enables the justice system to respond effectively to complex situations typical of domestic violence cases. Where there are few official avenues through which to incorporate situated analysis of each particular case into the law-making process, what results in the practice of judging is that cultural norms and values enter into the process informally, and so unaccountably via the personal beliefs of the lawmakers.

Instead of ongoing moral/political debate about what is required of justice in terms of particular situations, the law's pretence to impartial and neutral mechanisms of assessment authorises, above all else, scientific knowledge as the ultimate measure of what happened and why. In relation to decisions about battered women who enter the judicial process, the authorisation of scientific knowledge has resulted in an exaggerated emphasis on psychological causes and explanations at the expense of recognising the more complex sociocultural factors involved, [56]not to mention undermining recognition of the battered woman's voice as a legitimate measure of what actually happened. As well it has been argued that the law's reliance on the comparatively 'new' science of psychology has provided a vehicle for the extension of the law's power.[57] The authorisation of scientific knowledge within the law also obscures the effects upon the law-making process of cultural beliefs and norms. That is, the pretence to objective science, rather than open the way tends to obscure the importance of questioning entrenched beliefs such as the widely held belief that 'men are still supposed to be in charge and women are still supposed to be subordinate' and from this, according to Smith,

a way of thinking in which 'wife beating is not unthinkable'.[58]

In a telling illustration of how this kind of belief system generates a legal/political response that fails to deal effectively with the injustices enacted against battered women while contributing nothing positive to the fight against domestic violence; in a recent New Zealand criminal case, a man on trial for the murder of his girlfriend, whose throat he had cut, was found not guilty on the grounds that she had provoked him by stealing from him.[59] By contrast, Gay Oakes' appeal on the grounds of provocation after eleven years of violent abuse from the man she eventually killed, was not believed and she was found guilty of murder. No amount of expert psychological testimony could alter the fact that the argument that a woman provoked a man to violence is considered, within a New Zealand court of law at least, more compelling testimony than the argument put the other way around, that a man could provoke a woman to violence no matter, it would seem, what the varying degrees of provocation or violence are. As victims women struggle to have their voices recognised and taken seriously by the law. As alleged perpetrators of serious crimes, their actions are considered especially grave and evil because they contravene the unspoken law that women, though inclined to provoke men, are inherently passive and good. It is small wonder that feminists have expressed doubts that legal redress can contribute anything toward the goal of empowering women and might even be seen to compound their powerlessness where the law is understood more critically as 'a system of knowledge rather than simply a system of rules'.[60] However, it is from this perspective that the argument for feminism to continue to address the law is made all the more urgent, given 'the extension of law into more and more areas of personal life'.[61] As this undoubtedly applies with direct relevance to recent domestic violence legislation, it seems that the greater risk for feminism and the women it seeks to empower would be to resist, rather than engage with critically, the power of the law.

Such a critical engagement on the part of feminist theory would focus on highlighting the limitations and biases in the law, such as its inherent conservatism, its inability to recognise and respond to the wrongs enacted more insidiously against people in the way of entrenched biases such as stereotypes and then, the overall inadequacy and even danger of formal rights in their 'oversimplification of complex power relations'.[62] An example of this inadequacy exists in the

failure of the battered woman's effective right to remove a man who is violent from her home, rather than being herself, the one forced to leave.[63] Because the right is simply not responsive enough to the reality of the battered woman's situation, an inadequacy evidenced clearly in the experiences of Gay Oakes, it fails in the short-term goal of providing urgent, practical assistance to the victims of domestic violence, and in the long-term goal of empowering all women to be able to make more effective choices in their lives. According to Smart, the main obstacle here to the development of a more effective legal and political response is the fact that the legal right can treat the woman and man involved only as adversaries, which functions to individualise the problem, so obscuring an understanding of the deeper social context on which an effective resolution depends. Moreover, the rights of battered women within the law are only pertinent in the context of the abuser's equal rights which means that justice becomes a competition between individual rights where the onus of proof of violation rests with the individual woman.[64] Given the cultural and legal context of patriarchal bias in which women's voices and actions tend to be measured and defined according to male realities, it might not be overstating the case to claim, as the New Zealand spokeswoman for Victims Advocates has, that 'a man in Gay Oakes' situation would almost certainly not have been convicted of murder'.[65]

It remains then to consider how and why the two most recent and profound changes in the legal/political response to domestic violence against women – the legal defence known as the 'battered woman syndrome' and the policy of mandatory or automatic arrest – have failed to substantially alleviate the injustices experienced by battered women in New Zealand such as Gay Oakes.[66]

### Battered Woman Syndrome

A feminist analysis of the concept of battered woman syndrome (BWS) connects the discussion to a wider debate within feminism that identifies a further dilemma for constructions of justice for battered women in the difficulty of speaking in general terms of a 'women's experience' which, it is argued, admits of a certain reductionism by presuming a homogeneous essence of 'being woman' that relies on and perpetuates the dichotomous logic in which 'woman' is defined as different from and lesser than, 'man'. Were this dichotomy merely to confirm the basic biological distinction there would be

little for feminists to object to. However, it is precisely because it is so often used to confirm and reinforce the historic de-valuing of the female in relation to the male that it becomes highly problematic as a foundation on which to base feminist campaigns for the empowerment of women. In relation to BWS, feminists argue that where it ostensibly recognises the special circumstances that provoke battered women to kill, in so far as it invokes and thus perpetuates negative stereotypes and myths about women as prone to psychological instability and incapable of making 'rational' choices when placed under pressure, it exists as a counterproductive strategy in the fight for justice for women.

In legal terms, battered woman syndrome can be used as evidence to support a self defence or provocation plea on the part of battered women who kill their abusers, but not as a defence for murder in itself.[67] It is based primarily on the theory, defined by psychologist Leanore Walker,[68] that women battered repeatedly and brutally by their partners suffer from a 'learned helplessness', a psychological condition that is said to render them incapable of recognising and acting upon opportunities to leave the abusive relationship. Although the potential of this evidence is 'to assist the jury understanding why the woman behaved the way she did, in many cases contrary to the perceived "normal" reaction',[69] in practice it requires the battered woman to prove that she was not in control of her senses, that she did not know what she was doing, which then confirms precisely the image of woman that prevailing discourses have perpetuated to 'keep them in their place' within the home and subordinate to men, upon which the historical predisposition to domestic violence is arguably based. Within the male/female dichotomy and the logic that grounds it, the battered woman appears as a helpless and hopeless victim whose salvation and continued protection lies at the hands of a male-dominated justice system. In the context of this idea of 'learned helplessness', any assertive acts on the part of the battered woman even when, as is most often the case, these acts are in response to a failure on the part of justice systems to provide effective protection can continue to be judged with added harshness for contravening the implicit 'laws of nature' or science, in addition to being judged for the lethal action itself which contravenes the explicit laws of criminal justice.

To situate the problem in a gendered context, which BWS in part

tries to do, is helpful in so far as it opens the law to the recognition of difference. However, because rather than posing for critical reflection it relies on traditional stereotypes about men and women, it more often than not works against an understanding of battered women whose experience is typically not one of absolute helplessness, but involves an ultimate sense of responsibility to herself and her children to survive. As one expert on the subject who has talked to 'hundreds of women' says, 'battered women are acutely aware. Those who kill do so because they know if they don't they will die'.[70] Surely, only the battered woman herself can know the full extent and consequence of the system's inadequacies, its failures to protect, its inability to appreciate the dynamics and urgency of the situation. As such, it must be from within the context of the battered women's perspective that her actions, thereby motivated, must be considered and judged by the 'outsider'. While the law of self defence in New Zealand[71] technically recognises such 'subjective' data, judges and juries continue to discount their validity in cases of battered women who kill, the trial of Gay Oakes being a prime example. Because the laws of self defence have been constructed on the basis of male experiences, while rarely working in support of women defendants, they have proved considerably more useful for male ones.

As a psychological construct, enacted within a legalistic framework, BWS would seem to be an inappropriate mechanism through which to generate the kind of depth of understanding and empathy required to convince the layperson to change their perception of what might reasonably be called 'normal' behaviour. As Elisabeth Macdonald has commented, the framing of the battered woman's experience as a syndrome presents the experience as:

> beyond the understanding of the lay juror [which] perpetuates a picture of domestic violence as rare rather than common ... [while] the woman is supplanted by an expert [which in turn] reinforces notions of women as lacking credibility as witnesses.[72]

However, many feminist practitioners having to work with BWS on the basis that there is no other legally recognised category through which to explain the experiences of battered women, rather than discard the explanation altogether, have argued that it could be enhanced in terms of the pursuit of justice were it to recognise the inferior physical strength of women compared to men, which would then en-

able a battered woman to claim self defence even if she kills her husband with some degree of premeditation.[73] However, as necessary as this proposal seems to be within the context of no effective alternative to BWS, it is a suggestion that proposes to write into law the physical weakness and inferiority of women compared to men, which in one sense at least might be interpreted as confirmation of the man's natural role as head of the household, the basic premise on which a system comparatively indifferent to the injustice of domestic violence against women is maintained.

**Mandatory Arrest and Prosecution**

Where feminist revisions in justice theories have tended to link justice for women with the less formal right of self-determination, which contrasts with the negative rights to non-interference typically entailed by liberal conceptions of justice in seeking greater powers for women to speak and act autonomously,[74] any further silencing of women's voice would appear to provide great cause for concern amongst those interested in ending gender-based injustice. Indeed, it could be argued that in order to position justice discourse and policy within the political goal of women's empowerment and gender equality, there needs to be far greater attention paid, particularly in legislation primarily affecting women, to challenging prevailing notions of 'woman' and gender identity more broadly, in order to enhance the status of women's voices and deliver to 'real' women the same kind of agency and freedom to determine their own lives that men, by comparison, have. In the context of the argument presented here that domestic violence against women is a direct manifestation of the idea and practice of male domination through which the structural devaluing of the female is systematically sustained, the introduction of a policy that in the name of protecting women from men removes from women the right to control how this is to be done seems both repressive and sexist.

While the policies of mandatory arrest and prosecution do in principle signal an increased awareness and concern for the plight of battered women on the part of the justice system, they do so again by reinforcing women's lowly status as beings reliant on others – namely men – to take the initiative and control in deciding what is best. Indeed, such policies could be said to illustrate effectively the constraints of dominant political discourse in its construction of free-

dom and choice in terms of a positive/negative dichotomy: where negative freedom defines the ideal as non-interference or self-reliance, positive freedom suggests others might be relied upon to achieve self-realisation but, in this way, tends toward the justification of domination by those who are said to 'know better' from which has stemmed the idea and practice of female subordination.[75] In practice, such policies are often inadequate even harmful on their own without government guarantees to ensure women and their children more substantive support in the way of permanent, safe housing and income in order that the immediate removal of the violence in the short term not be replaced with an equal hardship in the long term. Where much has been documented to show the difficulties facing battered women and their children who leave the locus of their abuse including poverty, homelessness, and violent recriminations,[76] it is not difficult to see how set policies of automatic arrest and prosecution could actually function to worsen the situation for battered women by causing them in many cases to refrain from reporting the battery altogether 'which [then] leaves them with no intervention or recourse during or after their emergency'.[77]

As such, I would argue that both battered woman syndrome, as well as the policies of automatic arrest and prosecution, represent something of a backward step for women in general in their countenance of traditional gender mythology. If this was the price to pay for effective short-term gains for battered women then there would be practical grounds on which to defend it against perhaps the more idealistic goals of feminist political theory. However, even while such policies sometimes might succeed in alleviating the violence and injustice experienced by individual battered women, because they also sometimes not only fail in this but work to exacerbate the injustice of the situation, they are ultimately unsuitable as mechanisms in the political fight to end the violence and injustice experienced by battered women. Because the experiences of women (indeed of anyone) vary and admit often of fundamental contradictions, the formulation of a fixed response to sex-based injustice where this fails to incorporate an ongoing questioning of prevailing power relations, not only perpetuates the silencing of different voices but the de-politicisation of domestic violence as a matter of sexed-based injustice tied to the myriad of other institutional and ideological sexisms prevalent throughout liberal-democratic systems of justice.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this discussion it has been argued that because the very idea of justice implies an emancipatory impulse, and the primary reason for writing political theory is to effect justice, then any debate within theory concerned with the subject of justice must also be a debate concerned to address the unavoidable tension between theory and practice, that is, to address the immensely difficult task of locating the mechanisms of a practically empowering knowledge that delivers at least the possibility of justice to 'real' people. In arguing that political discourses of justice ought to be better able to address, in theory as well as practice, the social problems surrounding domestic violence against women, I have challenged the dominant political discourse of justice for failing to effectively address this issue. This failure, I have argued, stems in part from the foundational presumption of male violence that it entails which effectively justifies, rather than posing for questioning, violence against women. With this, its methodology of abstract reasoning from a hypothetical premise that locates justice in the formulation of grand ideals has been challenged not only for its fundamental inadequacy in the practical and political task of responding to the complex needs and experiences of battered women, but also for compounding the injustice of the battered woman's experience by adding legitimacy to the myth that people making decisions whether as judge or jury, political practitioner or theorist, do so with more justice when they are, as much as possible, detached from the experience about which they are passing judgment.

It has been contended that a society professing itself to be democratic should, instead, be actively responsible for endeavouring to eliminate the very situation that battered women like Gay Oakes find themselves in. That is a situation in which a woman can be effectively forced by the system to give up her basic rights in order that she herself and her children might continue to live. A situation in which freedom is impossible beyond the prison walls but exists in the security of a prison cell even when this means being denied the joy of seeing and holding her children for more than two hours of every week of every year of her jail sentence.[78] The kind of political responsibility likely to change situations like these must include an active and ongoing commitment to eroding, at a cultural and institutional level, the impulse that causes so many otherwise 'normal' men to commit unthinkable acts of violence against the women closest to

them. Equally, it must involve the active pursuit in theory and practice of more effective mechanisms for listening and responding to the specific needs of battered women from which might come the possibility of public empathy for her predicament and from this, the hope that when all else has failed, and the battered woman does seize her only chance for survival, her voice can be listened to with an unprejudiced ear and judgments passed more fairly in response to what she has done.

In final conclusion I would argue that if this discussion has enabled any kind of normative proposal to be formulated, it has been intended to suggest the possibility, though also importantly the difficulty, of constructing a discourse/process of justice that relies fundamentally on a maximisation of knowledge. This, in turn, suggests an idea and process of knowing in which understanding is never absolute, which means that the foundational presumption to know is replaced with the altogether more political challenge to question what is 'known', and in this way to locate justice – in response to the inevitability of injustice – in that which effectively delivers the necessity of fighting for change.

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**NOTES**

[1] On 6 September 1994 Gay Oakes was tried by jury and found guilty of murder. Then on 12 April 1995 her appeal in the High Court was dismissed despite the court accepting 'the reality of the [Battered Woman's] Syndrome'. Finally at the Privy Council in London in February 1997, her 'special leave to appeal' was heard and dismissed. For a succinct summing up of these events see the 'afterword' by Judith Ablett-Kerr, QC in Gay Oakes, *Decline Into Darkness* (HarperCollins, New Zealand, 1997) pp. 181-187. Judith Ablett-Kerr was responsible for drafting Gay Oakes' petition to the Privy Council.

[2] ibid.

[3] In New Zealand there is, reportedly, one woman every week killed by an intimate partner. Nan Seuffert, 'Battered Women and Self Defence',

*New Zealand Universities Law Review*, 17:3 (June 1997) p. 292.

[4] Susan Moller, *Justice, Gender and The Family* (Basic Books, New York, 1989). Arguably a definitive critique of Rawls's liberal theory of justice for exposing the implicit countenance of the notion of the 'male head of household' in Rawls's theory. See also Carole Pateman [*The Sexual Contract* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988)] in which she argues that the sexual contract between men and women establishes patriarchal domination and is implicit in the idea of the social contract that is foundational to modern political theory. See also by Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989).

[5] Although I have found very few complete texts or even chapters dedicated to the analysis of domestic violence against women as a political issue, [Susan Edwards, *Policing 'Domestic' Violence: Women, the Law and the State* (Sage Publications, London, 1989) and Ellen Bograd and Kirsti Yllo (eds), *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* (Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA, 1988) are two exceptions], there are a number of recent feminist articles and studies produced that could provide useful insights and data for future work in this area. Within New Zealand they include: Ruth Busch (et al), *Domestic Violence and the Justice System: A Study of Breaches of Protection Orders* (Victims Task Force, Wellington, 1992); Nan Seuffert, 'Lawyering and Domestic Violence: Feminist Pedagogies Meet Feminist Theories', *Women's Studies Journal*, 10:2 (1994) pp. 63-96; Elisabeth McDonald, 'Defending Abused Women: Beginning a Critique of New Zealand Criminal Law', *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review*, 27:4 (1997) pp. 673-696. For a more explicitly political theory perspective on the subject, though not within the New Zealand context, see Nancy Hirschmann, 'Domestic Violence and the Theoretical Discourse of Freedom', *Frontiers*, 16:1 (1996) pp. 126-151.

[6] This expression and point were from Elisabeth Wilson, *What is to be Done About Violence Against Women?* (Penguin, London, 1983) p. 202.

[7] S.C. Simmonds, 'A Critical Social and Feminist (Re)vision of the Political', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1996.

[8] Jane Prichard, 'Violence and Women and its Effects on the Girl Child: Challenges for Women in the Next Millennium: Moving the Agenda Forward in New Zealand', unpublished paper, 1998, p. 2.

[9] Seuffert, 'Battered Women' for a comparison of New Zealand and Canadian self-defence laws and Jenny Chapman, 'Interest Groups: A Study of the Women's Refuge Movement in New Zealand' MA thesis,

University of Auckland, 1997, for a detailed critical analysis of the 1996 Domestic Violence Act.

[10] Prichard, p. 2

[11] Angela Browne, *When Battered Women Kill* (Free Press, New York, 1987) p. 54.

[12] Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, pp. 48-50; Hirschmann, p. 131.

[13] Browne, p. 165.

[14] Breines and Gordon, 'The New Scholarship on Family Violence', *Signs* 9:1 (Spring 1983) p. 491.

[15] Wilson, p. 197.

[16] Busch, p. x. See also Edwards, pp. 172-175 for an insightful analysis of these points as they relate to the British and American context.

[17] The words of Gay Oakes provide a graphic and ghastly illustration of this point she says, 'As I walked through the town on my way to Carl's house, you would have thought I was contagious. People I had considered my friends avoided me and everyone moved out of my path. My face and eyes were swollen and black, my arms were covered in bruises, my teeth were loose, my lips were mashed and my arm was in a makeshift sling because I couldn't move it'. In Oakes, p. 72.

[18] Wilson, p. 201. For the New Zealand perspective see Chapman, pp. 84-98.

[19] See Elisabeth McDonald, 'Battered Woman Syndrome', *New Zealand Law Journal* (Dec 1997) pp. 436-438, for a succinct critical overview of (BWS) and how it works in New Zealand to compound the abuse suffered by battered women.

[20] Margaret Schuler (ed), *Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from Around the World* (Widbooks, distributed by UNIFEM, New York, 1992) pp. 33-34.

[21] Nel Noddings, *Caring: a Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984) p. 2.

[22] Carol Smart, *Feminism and the Power of the Law* (Routledge, London, 1989) p. 138.

[23] Alison Jones and Camille Guy, 'Radical Feminism in New Zealand: From Piha to Newtown', in Rosemary DuPlessis with Phillida Bunkle, Kathie Irwin, Alison Laurie and Sue Middleton (eds), *Feminist Voices: Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992) p. 301.

[24] Chapman, p. 38

[25] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, NJ, 1990) pp. 39-65. In this chapter Young outlines

the key critical idea of her 'enabling conception of justice'. The 'five faces of oppression' she identifies as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

[26] Renee Romkens, 'Physical Violence and Dilemmas of Justice: Some Comments on Iris Young's "Justice and the Politics of Difference"', in Selma Sevenhuijsen (ed), *Feminism and Justice Reconsidered* (Working papers, Utrecht University, 1993) p. 21.

[27] Young, 'Response to the Discussion of "Justice and the Politics of Difference"', in Sevenhuijsen, p. 55.

[28] See Lenore Walker, *The Battered Women* (Harper and Row, New York, 1979) for one of the first discussions of the mythology surrounding the battered woman's experience. See also Margaret Martin 'Battered Women' in Nancy Hutchings (ed), *The Violent Family: Victimization of Women, Children and Elders* (Human Sciences Press, New York, 1988) pp. 63-88.

[29] Barbara Hart, 'Domestic Violence: The Facts', *A Handbook to Stop Violence, Battered Women Fighting Back* (Boston, MA, 1988). See also Lenore Walker, *Terrifying Love: Why Battered Women Kill and How Society Responds* (Harper Perennial, 1989) pp. 46-47.

[30] See Martin, pp. 73-75 and Hirschmann, pp. 133-134.

[31] Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993) p. 138.

[32] Andrea Nye, *Philosophy and Feminism at the Border: The Impact of Feminism on the Arts and Sciences* (Twayne Publishers, New York, 1995) p. 91.

[33] Carol Gilligan, 'Moral Orientation and Moral Development', in Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers (eds), *Women and Moral Theory* (Rowman and Litterfield, Totowa, NJ, 1987) p. 31.

[34] Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987) p. 6.

[35] Joan W. Scott, 'Experience', in Judith Butler and Joan W, Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (Routledge, New York, 1992) p. 25.

[36] See Kate Soper, 'Postmodernism, Subjectivity and the Question of Value', in Judith Squires (ed), *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993), for an insightful version of this argument.

[37] Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism' in, Butler and Scott, p. 7.

[38] Squires, p. 10.

[39] Chantal Mouffe, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic

Politics', in Butler and Scott, p. 378.

[40] The initial text from which much of the theory produced around the concept of the justice/care debate within feminist theory comes is: Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1982); see also, Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge, New York, 1994) pp. 77-97, for a critical comment on Gilligan's thesis.

[41] Held, *Feminist Morality*, p. vii.

[42] ibid. p. 52.

[43] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1971).

[44] Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992) p. 169.

[45] See Young, *Justice*, pp. 96-121 for a comprehensive version of this critique.

[46] Tronto, p. ix.

[47] ibid. p. 9.

[48] Virginia Held, 'Review of Susan Moller-Okin's "Justice, Gender and the Family"', *Political Theory* 19 (May 1991) p. 301.

[49] Breines and Gordon, p. 507.

[50] Smart, p. 155.

[51] Edwards (Edwards, p. 169) reports that 'fear of losing custody' is one of the reasons cited by battered women for staying on with violent spouses.

[52] Smart, p. 153.

[53] Young, *Justice and the Politics*, pp. 4-5.

[54] Martha Minow, *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion and American Law* (Cornell University Press, New York 1990) pp. 2-3.

[55] ibid. p. 70.

[56] Nan Seuffert, *Battered Women*, p. 328. In concluding her comparitive analysis of New Zealand, Australian and Canadian self-defence laws, Seuffert argues that a fair judicial process for battered women who kill their abusers depends on concrete evidence given from experts such as women refuge workers rather than psychiatrists and clinical psychologists whose more abstract and scientific 'evidence' tends to confuse public understanding for the battered woman by pathologizing the individuals involved.

[57] Smart, p. 15.

[58] Patricia Smith (ed), *Feminist Jurisprudence* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1993) p. 142.

[59] Trial 22, 1995, Whangarei High Court.

[60] Smart, p. 162.

[61] ibid. p. 163.

[62] ibid. p. 144.

[63] ibid. p. 145. Seuffert (*Battered Women*, p. 316) contextualises this for battered women by pointing out the paradoxical nature of the freedom they are formally granted to leave the violent situation which effectively forces them, and often their children, 'to hit the road like fugitives leaving the assailant the home and belongings'. The right required is, thus, not the abstract right to choose but more situated rights to self-defence, police and community protection and, most importantly, the right to a fair public hearing beyond the entrenched sexism of the system. The dominant discourse of individual rights has also been charged by many feminists for entailing a masculinist bias see Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991) pp. 31-38 for a useful overview of this critique.

[64] Smart, p. 145.

[65] Doris Church, *The Dominion*, 28 March 1995, second edition, p. 16.

[66] Rhonda Bungay, *Scarecrows: Why Women Kill* (Random House, New Zealand, 1998) p. 176, has argued that the self-defence plea for women who kill is particularly weak when used in conjunction with battered woman syndrome 'with its present limitations in clarity in the meaning of "learned helplessness" and the objective factor of having alternative courses of action available'. Hirschmann, pp. 132-136 offers a challenging analysis of the policy of mandatory prosecution from the perspective of considering the battered woman's rights to freedom.

[67] BWS is not set down in the Crimes Act which means it is not officially, or necessarily recognised as a defence for battered women who kill though somewhat inconsistent with this, the Court of Appeal in Gay Oakes's Trial, while dismissing her appeal, did state that BWS 'could provide a motive for murder' (Oakes, p. 182).

[68] Leanore E. Walker, 'Battered Women and Learned Helplessness', *Victimology*, 2:3-4 (1978) pp. 525-534; Walker, *The Battered Woman.*

[69] Elisabeth McDonald, 'Battered Woman Syndrome', p. 436.

[70] Kathleen Kreneck, policy coordinator of Wisconsin Coalition against domestic violence, cited in Bungay, p. 174.

[71] For New Zealand self-defence law in relation to battered women see Seuffert, *Battered Women*, pp. 292-328.

[72] McDonald, 'Battered Woman Syndrome', p. 436.

[73] I refer here to recent feminist campaigns, within New Zealand and elsewhere, to have the notion of self-defence replaced by the notion of self-preservation as an alternative defence plea for battered women who kill that takes account of the differing strengths of the parties involved; see *Broadsheet*, 1994, p. 18.

[74] See especially Anna Yeatman, *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political* (Routledge, New York, 1994) p. 90, in which she defines a woman-friendly political process as one 'predicated fundamentally on the right to give voice and be listened to within a dialogical process of decision making'.

[75] See Hirschmann, pp. 141-145.

[76] See Chapman, pp. 84-98, for a detailed critical examination of New Zealand's policy regarding emergency housing for battered women and their children. What she reveals is a constant and never wholly successful battle on the part of refuge workers to convince the government and the public of the genuine and urgent need for support that these women have. Hirschmann, pp. 136-137, discusses how racism factors into these other variables to make matters even more difficult for battered women from ethnic minorities where, for example, the residency status of immigrant women might be dependant upon them remaining within a marriage. In general, she notes how women of colour 'may be reluctant to call police or press charges because they do not wish to subject either themselves or their abusers to the racism of the criminal justice system'.

[77] Schuler, p. 34.

[78] In the prologue to the account of her experiences Gay Oakes (Oakes, p. 10) writes, 'I am locked up in prison but I have more freedom than I have had for many years. Freedom of spirit, freedom of thought and, most importantly, freedom from violence'.

# Women and Their Personal Names:
## Making Sense of Cultural Naming Practices

GISELLE BÄHR AND ANN WEATHERALL

**Overview**

The Anglo/American practice of a wife taking her husband's name has been severely criticised by feminist thinkers. The current study explored the themes that a sample of New Zealand women and men used when talking about the significance of their names and cultural naming practices. Six adults were interviewed using a semi-structured framework. Discussions focused on the issue of women's decisions about their surname on marriage. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed using a qualitative, discourse analytic approach that has become an important strand of contemporary British feminist social psychology. Four interpretative repertoires or discourses were identified that participants used to explain and make sense of names and name-changing: names as labels, naming practices as tradition, names as identity, and names as social markers. No repertoire was used exclusively to justify or challenge current patriarchal naming practices. Instead, each repertoire was a resource that interviewees used to construct an argument that supported or undermined conventional naming practices. Thus no one understanding of the significance of names was inherently patriarchal or feminist, rather each repertoire could be used to construct arguments for or against dominant naming conventions. Identifying the cultural resources available for understanding naming customs is useful in so far as it provides a rhetorical toolbox that can be used to develop effective arguments to support feminist practices.

**Introduction**

Names and naming customs reflect aspects of the organisation of society. In the case of New Zealand, naming practices reflect the patriarchal nature of Anglo-American society where a male is the head of the family – descent, kinship, and title are traced through the male line. When children are born, they tend to be given their father's surname and when women marry, convention is that they take their husband's surname as their own. The sexism inherent in Westernised naming practices has been criticised and challenged by

feminists for over a century.[1]

The practice of wives taking their husbands' surnames continues even though there is a long history of attempts to convince women to keep their own names.[2] A central argument used against conventional naming practices is the psychological link between name and identity. A belief in this link was articulated as early as 1879 when Lucy Stone, a vocal American feminist, stated that 'my name is a symbol of my identity which must not be lost'.[3] Consistent with Lucy Stone's beliefs are claims by psychologists linking names to personal identity. For example, Allport suggested that names were the 'most important symbol to provide anchorage for self identity throughout life' and that 'our name is ... central, a symbol of our whole being'.[4] The assumption that names are fundamental to a stable sense of personal identity is problematic for women because custom requires that they change their surname on marriage. Questions of how people resolve the contradictions for women which surround the issue of marital name-changing and identity have largely remained unexplored.

Apart from documenting the demographic characteristics of women who decide to keep their name after marriage, existing research on women's surnames has largely focused on two different aspects of marital name-changing.[5] One line of work has measured people's impression of women who comply with or defy convention. For example, Scheuble and Johnson examined White American college students' attitudes towards women's surname decisions. Most respondents thought it was okay for women to keep their own name. However in general male respondents were less accepting of women keeping their name than were female respondents. They found that the majority of women intended to change their name when they married. Women planning to marry later and women planning more liberal work roles after children were less likely to indicate that they would change their name on marriage.[6]

A second line of inquiry investigates factors that correlate with the decision to change or not change names at marriage. For example Kline, Stafford and Reiss compared name-changers with name-keepers on a range of demographic and relationship measures. They found that name-keepers were significantly older, more educated and had higher incomes than name-changers. Name-keepers and name-changers did not differ in terms of marital satisfaction, love towards their husbands, perceptions of mutual control, or commitment levels

but they did consider different issues when making their decisions about marital naming. Women who changed their names were more likely to describe the name change as symbolic of commitment to marriage and family, whereas name-keepers were more likely to mention identity issues.[7]

Studies such as those just described have begun to explore the social and psychological significance of women and their marital name choice. Findings include that, at least in America, the decision not to change names on marriage is largely confined to independent, middle-class women. In addition, college students indicate varying levels of support for women who defy conventional naming practices. While interesting enough, a limitation of the work (apart from its reliance on white American college students) is that it has relied predominantly on quantitative methods. Reported results reveal little about the types of explanations used to account for the significance of names and cultural naming practices and how these support or trivialise new naming activities among women. The use of questionnaires where responses are restricted to ticking and checking boxes may have limited current understandings of the types of beliefs people hold about names and naming practices. In order to broaden the research on women's names, we decided to employ a qualitative methodology that would allow us to explore how people's everyday explanations of their names and Anglo/American naming practices were used to reproduce or undermine patriarchal naming practices.

The approach used in this study was a form of discourse analysis that has become a major strand of feminist social psychology.[8] Discourse analysis is not a new *method* to add to psychology's existing repertoire of tests, surveys and experimental designs. Rather it is a new *perspective* with implications for the whole of psychology. Traditional social psychology has treated language as a medium that expresses and reflects pre-existing psychological and social realities, or as something 'that ... can be taken as a simple description of a mental state or event'.[9] In contrast, a discourse analytic perspective views language not simply as describing the social world but also constructing it. Language is seen as mediating knowledge, power and social action. Discourse analysts are interested in the content and organisation of discourse and what it is used to do in particular social contexts.

In a discussion of what discourse analysis has to offer feminists,

Gill argued that it avoids old divisions between feminists who see language simply as reflecting social inequalities, and those who see language as playing a constitutive role in the maintenance and shaping of power relations.[10] Discourse analysts place a dual stress on language as *constructive* and as *social practice.* Feminist social psychologists have used discourse analysis to explore a range of questions concerning the reproduction of gendered power relations that may not have been noticed by approaches assuming a single, stable cognitive or social reality. For example, a discursive study of talk about employment opportunities found that ostensibly positive attitudes towards equal opportunities could be effectively undermined by other rhetorical moves.[11] The simultaneous invocation of equal opportunities and 'practical considerations' allowed participants to maintain the positive identity associated with the support of equal opportunities while effectively denying the possibility of practices necessary for them to be instituted.

The aim of discourse analysis, then, is to explore the multiple ways in which an event can be described and the implications of that description. To do this the analysis focuses on three features of language: function, variability and construction; and on the analytic unit called the interpretative repertoire. Language is not viewed as neutral but is considered to have a functional orientation. That is, accounts are organised in a way to persuade, justify or perform some other social action. Because talk is used to achieve many functions it is variable. Each account is only one of many possible versions of an event and these accounts vary according to their function. Different versions or accounts are constructed in different ways depending on what they are intended to achieve. The building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, events and other phenomena have been described as interpretative repertoires or discourses – themes that get drawn upon to construct and evaluate actions and events.

Discourse analysis was used in this study to explore the complexities and contradictions present in accounts of naming practices. Of particular interest were how current naming practices were justified, how contradictions for women between cultural naming practices and identity were managed and how feminist attempts to undermine patriarchal naming practices were constructed.

**Data collection**

Three women and three men agreed to be interviewed by the first author. The women were recruited from respondents to a previous survey on names. The men were recruited by asking the women to suggest the names of men they knew and thought would be interested in taking part in a similar interview. All participants had a tertiary qualification, were employed, and Pakeha. Other participant details are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1 Participant Profile*

| **Pseudonym** | **Sex** | **Age** | **Marital Status** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tigger | F | 54 | Married for the second time |
| Margaret | F | 48 | Married for the first time |
| Moth | M | 57 | Married for the first time |
| Thalia | F | 29 | Never married |
| Kenneth | M | 55 | Married for the second time |
| Steven | M | 24 | Never married |

Neither of the married men had changed their names when they got married. The married women had changed their names the first time they got married. The woman who had married twice did not change her name the second time that she married.

All interviews took place in the participants' workspace and were between 30 and 60 minutes long. Participants agreed to take part in an interview on personal names and cultural naming practices and consented to having the interview audio-taped and later transcribed. Each person selected a pseudonym for use in the transcriptions.

The interview followed a semi-structured format with open-ended questions about names and identity, names and relationships, names and marriage, and naming practices and social change. Prompts like 'what does your name mean to you?', 'what do names say about relationships?' and 'why do you think some women still change/do not change their names when they marry?' were used to encourage a detailed consideration of naming issues.

### Analysis and Discussion

The aim of the analysis was to identify the interpretative repertoires or building blocks used to talk about naming and cultural naming practices. The themes that became interpretative repertoires emerged from a process of reading and rereading the interviews. Interviewees' explanations of names and naming practices were identified and organised according to thematic coherence. Attention to the rhetorical devices used to make each theme seem plausible contributed to the emergence of four interpretative repertoires that respondents called upon to develop their arguments. These have been called: names as labels, naming practices as tradition, names as identity and names as social markers. One or more of the repertoires would be used by participants when constructing their responses to the interview prompts. The interpretative repertoires appeared to function in three different ways: to normalise the use of names and naming in general; to dismiss any allegations that naming practices are sexist and to challenge the perceived sexism of naming conventions. The interpretative repertoires were not alternative accounts espoused by individual participants. Rather everyone drew on and combined different repertoires when constructing their accounts of how they understood names and name-changing.

### Names as Labels

*Kenneth: I'm probably don't attach (...) names are labels to me really. At the end of the day it's interesting to know about your name and where it comes from what it means but at the end of the day I really think it's only a label. And ah (.) as long as it does that job.*

One of the interpretative repertoires identified in the analysis constructed names as a neutral label or tag to identify individuals. In the extract above Kenneth's use of a disclaimer (it's interesting ... but) indicates that names can be seen as significant but he is resisting that claim.[12] By describing a name as 'only a label', Kenneth simultaneously acknowledges the importance of names while rejecting any notion that naming conventions have personal, social or political significance. In the extracts below Steven, and then Thalia, also construct naming as a necessary but politically insignificant practice. The use of 'just', in their accounts is a rhetorical device known as a persuasive formulation that makes their construction appear rational and reasonable[13]:

*Steven: What is it for. Just um yeah a means of distinguishing me from from everyone else really.*

*Thalia: My first name is just a way of people communicating and indicating well look this is you.*

The names as labels repertoire functioned to construct names as a politically neutral but important social practice. It also functioned to dismiss any potential allegation that the naming system was biased. Moth pre-empted any suggestion of ideological forces behind cultural naming practices by likening them to a scientific system that is objective and value-free:

*Moth: Well it's a useful identifier isn't it? And everything you do is recorded in that name. And that's all in science names are very important. Names of animals names of plants specific names. I see my name in that same category as (.) a place where you fit in a category you know where people look it up or can consult it.*

The names as labels interpretative repertoire was used to support the current naming conventions by undermining any implication that it could be biased. Moth makes his argument convincing by using an extreme case formulation – a linguistic device that shifts the reason for an action from an individual to a situation, making it appear 'normal'.[14] He conjures up an image of disorder should the system break down:

*Moth: And other members of the family, cousins and so on (.) where they use their married name sometimes and other names at other times and sons are called by one surname and daughters by another and it's ah I see that as very confusing for this record system.*

Steven called upon the names as labels repertoire explicitly to justify patrilineal naming practices:

*Steven: It's a good idea to take on one name. I suppose it has practical uses as well. Things like running, running accounts and running affairs and things (.) and you're if you're going to take one name so (.) it might as well be the the guy's name.*

The extracts described so far using the names as labels repertoire functioned to naturalise and justify conventional naming practices. Given these extracts it would seem reasonable to assert that the names as labels repertoire was inherently conservative and functioned to

support the status quo. However the idea of names as labels was also used to support women who chose to defy social convention. Moth explained how the labelling system did not work well for women publishing in academia. By using a specific example of a friend's personal experience he made his argument for women keeping their name convincing:

*Moth: But I'm pretty sure that when they get married (.) she will keep her surname. [ ] She has worked under that name. [ ] These days where a woman has done (.) a certain amount of work where she's established her name somewhere in a system. Whether it's directly as an author or [ ] just as someone who has a reputation. (.) And you know they they see it as when they change their name (.) they're going to be harder to find, the categorisation [unclear] different, more difficult perhaps.*

Similarly, Thalia used the names as labels repertoire to talk about the importance of women maintaining their profile by keeping the same name after marriage:

*Thalia: Especially in an organisation like the university whereby if you've got any sort of degree, your degree will be under your maiden name. So you're known under your maiden name. [ ] If I made a name for myself as a doctor (.) I wouldn't be surprised if I would keep my [ ] maiden name. [ ] Because, you know you are known in the wider community. You know in the academic community, under a certain name. For you to suddenly change it could cause a bit of problems specially if it the ramifications are you know overseas research and and things.*

The accounts given by Moth and Thalia above illustrate that the names as labels repertoire was not inherently conservative but could also be used to support women keeping their names after marriage. Their explanations worked by avoiding reference to political significance of naming and focusing on the pragmatic aspects of naming conventions. Here a single interpretative repertoire was used to support patriarchal naming practices by denying their political significance but was also used to challenge them by emphasising practical concerns for individual women. Respondents used the same 'building material' to construct arguments both for and against conventional naming practices. In this case the best strategy for supporting feminist practice was by arguing at an individual rather than an ideological level.

### Naming Practices as Tradition

*Moth: So, it's just because it's tradition to have that side that name.*

A second interpretative repertoire that participants called upon to account for names and naming practices we called naming practices as tradition. As with names as labels, naming practices as tradition was used as an assumed explanation of the system of personal names. However, unlike the labels repertoire which was warranted by reference to its logic and utility, the naming practices as tradition repertoire needed no further explanation. The fact that naming had been carried out in a certain way for so long was reason enough for its continuance, although tradition is not immutable:

*Thalia: It's traditional. I mean this is the thing and up until, I don't know, probably ten twenty years ago people did generally change their names, mostly. Whereas now people feel that they've got the choice.*

The concept of tradition not only normalises naming practices but also conceals the gendered nature of naming customs. Thalia effectively depoliticises naming practices by referring to 'people' changing their names when, in fact, it is not people who change their names, it is women.

As with the names as labels repertoire, the naming practices as tradition was employed explicitly by participants to justify current patriarchal naming practices. When Steven was asked why only women changed their names at marriage, he suggested there was no political significance in the way that couples use the male's name. The hesitation in Steven's response and the lack of convincing explanation for his position hints that he is aware that his argument of political neutrality in traditional practice is weak:

*Steven: My preference would be for my wife and me to take my name.*

*Giselle: And what would that mean for you that you both had the same name?*

*Steven: Just um (.) [coughs] um (.) dunno. I haven't really thought of it it's just the um I mean it's just that's the sort of thing that's always been done so.*

The tradition interpretative repertoire functioned predominantly

to support the status quo. However, the rhetorical force of the tradition repertoire did not go unchallenged. Tigger successfully subverted the tradition repertoire by the juxtaposition of it with an individual right to choose:

*Tigger: and um I mean I could say well I don't have any rights here about what I am called and it's determined by by convention and male society and I object most strongly to that.*

The naming practices as tradition, like the names as labels repertoire, functioned to support conventional naming practices by denying they have any political significance. However, arguments using those repertoires could also be used to support a feminist practice by reference to individual circumstances and choice.

### Names as Identity

*Tigger: Well it's my identity isn't it?*

Names as identity was discussed in the introduction as being important in feminist and psychological explanations of the significance of names. It was also evident in participants' explanations of names and naming practices, so we labelled this theme as the names as personal identity repertoire. The concept of personal identity was used to refer to both individual identity (linking names to unique self-concept), and to refer to family identity (linking names to family perceptions of identity). The following examples show that individual identity was used to explain the significance of names and naming practices:

*Margaret: So I suppose I feel deeply that's me that name.*

*Thalia: I mean just to summarise and to say, names are an identity and that's why you get heated discussions (.) because a name is you?*

In the above extracts metaphor was the rhetorical strategy being used to account for the significance of a personal name. Names were being referred to as a representation of the self. The metaphor is successful in as far as it highlights the common sense similarities between one's name and one's individual identity. For example, each individual has a single personal name and each individual has a unique individual identity. The metaphor simultaneously warrants and constructs the irreducible view of a personal name as individual identity.

Not only were names talked about as individual identity, they

were also referred to as an important symbol of family identity. Names link kin both within and across generations. The following extracts taken from the interviews with Thalia and Steven illustrate how personal identity was expressed as family identity:

*Thalia: Surname. It groups you with the people that you were brought up with I guess and you all have that commonality that surname.*

*Steven: No there's the the family attachment sort of thing I suppose. It's nice to be able to say oh these are this is my uncle and auntie (.) with the same name sort of thing.*

The understanding that a personal name symbolises the self has been used by feminists to argue women should keep their name at marriage. Participants in this study also used this link to support name-keeping. For example, Margaret and Thalia both suggested that a woman should retain her own name because it is her identity:

*Margaret: I would recommend to a girl now getting married that she keep her own name.*

*Giselle: Why?*

*Margaret: Well I think that it's partly to do with the very reason I gave mine up. And that is that you have to be proud of your identity and acknowledge it accept it.*

*Giselle: What do you think that it meant to her [Thalia's friend] that she didn't change her name?*

*Thalia: I couldn't really say. It was never up for discussion. Maybe she felt she'd lose her identity. Maybe she identified her surname as her family name and didn't want to be associated as the guy that she married in his family.*

Kenneth also used the names as personal identity repertoire to explain why a woman may keep her name on marriage. By retaining her own name a woman is being herself:

*Giselle: What would you think if she [Kenneth's wife] did [ ] come to you and say that she'd been thinking about that [using her own name]?*

*Kenneth: [ ] A couple of years ago I [ ] probably wouldn't have been I would have accepted it but grudgingly. [ ] Today [ ] I'd be quite tickled I think.*

*Giselle: Tickled.*

*Kenneth: Yeah.*

*Giselle: Why is that?*

*Kenneth: Ah. (...) Because it's another expression of her (.) as a as a (.) as a person.*

The names as identity repertoire was used by participants explicitly to challenge conventional naming practices. In the following two examples, references to individual identity helped to justify the need to defy conventional naming practices:

*Thalia: You're associated with your surname. You're linked with your surname. [ ] That's why women have such a blimmin problem with changing it because suddenly they're losing their identity.*

*Margaret: [Women keeping their name is] asserting their identity it's asserting their separate identity um ah it's discouraging people to making assumptions about them based on their marriage.*

In an interesting twist, Tigger used the names as identity repertoire to explain name-changing but suggested that it is the *husband's* personal identity that determined the wife's name choice. If a man has a strong sense of personal identity he would have no need to augment it through his partner:

*Tigger: He's very comfortable with himself and I think I think that helps if men are comfortable with themselves um that they don't need a whole entourage of things they own or they're in control of and that's what it's about um then they don't really care.*

The concept of a name as family identity was also used to challenge patrilineal naming practices. Tigger points out the weakness in that tradition because of the tenuous link between a surname and a biological father:

*Tigger: And I tried to say well actually there was a documentary showing that beyond about two or three generations, in most families there's so much out of wedlock shenanigans that it's a very clever man who knows his father. And that why do men insist on tracing the family name down by their names? It would be much better through the female line. You do generally know who your mother is.*

Thus far all the examples given show how participants used the identity interpretative repertoire to challenge patriarchal naming practices. The common sense understanding of names as personal iden-

tity provides a convincing justification for women to continue keeping their own names when they marry. However, the names as identity repertoire was not used exclusively to warrant opposition to convention; it was also used to justify the status quo. For example, Margaret described several 'benefits' available to women who changed their name when they married. One was the opportunity to avoid being identified as 'feminist' and another was the opportunity to leave surnames unwanted as part of a personal identity:

*Giselle: What sort of reasons do you think they'd [women name-changers] have for doing that [changing their name]?*

*Margaret: I suppose there would be some women who would would rather not be seen to be feminists you know because of think certain associations that that might have.*

*Margaret: I was quite glad [ ] to get away from that name and have a name which just felt like an ordinary name like Smith and Brown and everything.*

Margaret also described a conflict for women between names as individual identity and names as family identity. She talked about the importance of a family identity that is provided by the wife/mother taking on the same surname as the husband and children. She established that a family identity is important and that this is achieved by the wife giving up her own name. Here the incompatibility of individual identity and family identity for women is apparent:

*Margaret: Well I think with [ ] school and your children having the same name as your children that I think that's good you know that works for a family. In many ways a family name is very useful. And probably quite good for the family sense of identity too I don't know. If you think of it as the father's name that's one thing but if you think of it as the family's name (...) it's a difference isn't it?*

The names as identity interpretative repertoire is one that has been prominent in feminist calls for women to keep their own name on marriage. However, the repertoire was not used exclusively to support feminist practice. The link between name and identity was also used to argue that women should change their name on marriage. The link between name and family identity was used to support the status quo. Thus the identity 'building block' was used by participants to achieve contrasting goals; both to support and to challenge naming conventions.

### Names as Social Markers

*Margaret: It tells me it tells people who I am and it tells them a limited amount about who I am. It's a selective view about who I am.*

Another way respondents talked about names was as a signifier or symbolic marker; names were described as indicating something about the named person, their family or society. This interpretative repertoire has a similarity with the personal identity interpretative repertoire in that it is about what names mean to people. However, whereas personal identity is about the meaning that people derive from their own name, names as social markers is about the meaning that people associate with others' names or what they reflect about aspects of society.

In the extract above, Margaret explains how the surname she chooses to use tells people something about her. Names are something that others use to make personal attributions. Not only can choice of name inform people about a specific woman, names can 'say something' about groups of people or society as a whole. Tigger uses the social markers repertoire to explain how traditional naming practices are like the social practice of wearing wedding rings – both customs symbolise the 'syndrome' of social inequity:

*Tigger: You might even say* that *for wedding rings as well which um are a nice symbol, because the ring is supposed to be kind of thing that's eternal and has no beginning and no end and I quite like the symbolism of that but again first of all before I was aware of that symbolism the idea of the women always wearing the wedding ring and men not which was more the convention in those days was and yet another sign that a woman had to indicate to the world whether she was available or not. It was all part of the same syndrome.*

Kenneth perceived an increase in the number of women keeping their own names and believed that this reflected women as a group moving into the previously male domain of paid work. For Kenneth, the fact that many women now keep their names reflected the fact that women had 'come into their own'. In this case naming practices were seen as signifiers of positive social change:

*Giselle: Why do you think it changed. What's changed in those fifty years?*

*Kenneth: Well [ ] To put it very basically, women have ah sort of come into the workplace. [ ] Broken the Victorian type ah stay at home*

*and look after the kitchen attitude [ ] and you know they sort of come into their own.*

However, Steven implies that the increasing tendency for women to keep their own name was symbolic of the higher numbers of marriage break-ups:

*Steven: And marriages don't seem to last and ah and that sort of thing. Um. [coughs]. So I don't know what what's the cause of what.*

The names as social markers repertoire was used by participants to both support and undermine the current patriarchal naming system. When the repertoire was being used to support conventional naming practices, a woman keeping her name was framed in a negative light and a woman changing her name was judged positively. For example, Moth described the confusion if conventional naming practices aren't adhered to:

*Moth: She stuck to her maiden name (.) ah but their two sons are called Wood I think and so they have to talk at school about their mother (.) by another name (.) which I wonder how many people sort of misinterpret that and think you know they they're not married but they are.*

Steven described the negative attributions he makes if other women keep their own names at marriage:

*Giselle: And what conclusions do you draw (.) if they've got hyphenated or separate names?*

*Steven: Um. Well my attention goes go to the woman I'd say and ah I'd think oh she's she's hard. She's standing up for (.) standing up for something [laughs].*

*Giselle: Yep.*

*Steven: She's ah yeah she's that sort of person. I don't think badly of her. (...)*

*Giselle: But she's hard. What's that sort of person? [ ]*

*Steven: A hard type of person. Um. [coughs] (.) Yeah one of these new age feminist type (.) type of people. Sort of serious types of people.*

A far more positive view than that described above was expressed when behaviour complied with convention. Both Steven and Thalia used the names as social markers repertoire to explain the positive

symbolism of a couple sharing the same name:

*Steven: Well yeah definitely. [ ] Well I mean it's all this sort of coming together and becoming one in the marriage sort of thing and taking on one name. And (.) I suppose if you really love someone I'd say (.) it's a (.) I don't know a symbolic thing which I would agree with I guess.*

*Thalia: You know I mean if you change your name over I mean it [ ] also builds that bond between you and if you marry somebody or you are going to live with them that build's a bond in itself?*

In contrast to the above extracts, the names as social markers interpretative repertoire was also used by the participants to undermine rather than to support patriarchal naming practices. Here the woman's decision to keep her name was described more positively. Tigger used naming as a social marker to infer that a woman keeping her name at marriage implied a healthy relationship:

*Tigger: Oh gosh um I'd like to think that it meant that it was a good relationship and that um they really um had discussed the problem and thought well this is what we're going to do.*

Moth supported women's decision to keep their name by suggesting that it symbolised a change towards a fairer society:

*Moth: I would say it was connected with the whole sort of uprising of of equality of of the sexes basically.*

The potential ambiguity involved in interpreting behaviour was recognised by Steven when he proposed two seemingly contrasting attributions he could make given the information that a married woman and man had different surnames.

*Steven: Well two options I suppose either [ ] that's completely okay with them they are both um that's something they both sort of believe in or agree with and it's not a problem to them or there's been a big showdown and either the um [coughs] guy's given in or the woman's stood up for herself enough that that's the way it's happened.*

The names as social markers interpretative repertoire was used to both support and undermine the current patriarchal naming system. There was a wide variety of different things that name-changing and keeping was said to symbolise and signify. The discursive power of the repertoire lay in the shared commonsense understanding that

names are a type of social marker. The repertoire then became a building block to support the particular view being expressed.

**Concluding comments**

This study examined how people understood, explained and justified the existence of personal names and cultural naming practices. From a set of interviews with women and men, four repertoires were identified that were used to make sense of names. These were names as labels, naming practices as tradition, names as identity and names as social markers. The interpretative repertoires functioned as a pool of resources, or a set of building blocks which could be drawn upon to construct an argument about the significance or otherwise of personal names. At any point in the interview a respondent would call upon one or more of these mutually acceptable resources to construct their argument about names and name-changing. So although some of the repertoires (e.g., names as identity) may be associated more with a feminist position, no one repertoire appeared to be exclusively 'feminist' or 'conservative'. Rather, each repertoire could be used flexibly to support or undermine any viewpoint.

A rich variety of arguments was made from a range of different positions during the course of the interviews. However, the repertoire that most strongly countered a feminist position that naming conventions are patriarchal was the names as labels repertoire. This repertoire constructed naming practices as a value-free system necessary to maintain social order. The idea of names as 'just' labels can be (and was) used to dismiss the claim that naming practices reflect cultural beliefs and values. More subversively, however, it was also used to counter the argument that name-keeping is necessarily a feminist political practice. Women who keep their names do not have to align themselves with any political stance, rather they are 'just' using the system to keep their lives orderly. Although the names as labels repertoire dismisses the ideological significance of names, it was still used to support the feminist practice of name-keeping. So effectively the names as labels repertoire was used to undermine the ideological significance of naming conventions. However, practically it could be used to support women who decide to keep their name on marriage. On the one hand women should change their names on marriage because that is how the system of labels works. On the other, women can keep their names on marriage because changing your label dis-

rupts the system – especially if you have a professional reputation.

Naming practices as tradition was a second repertoire reflecting an everyday understanding of the social naming system. This repertoire was used predominantly to argue that the status quo be maintained, that is, women should change their names on marriage because they have always changed their name on marriage. However, the rhetorical force of the repertoire was subverted by an alternative account that tradition undermines an individual's right to choose. Thus, an effective feminist counter argument to 'tradition' is a liberal humanist discourse. No social practice is immutable. Any woman should have the right to choose her name.

The relationship between names and identity was identified in the introduction as a dominant theme in the psychological and feminist literature on personal names. It is perhaps not surprising then that it was also present in participants' explanations of the meaning of personal names and naming systems. Typically, feminists arguing that women should keep their names on marriage have used the names as identity repertoire. However, in the interviews the names as identity repertoire was not used exclusively to support name-keeping. In fact, a characteristic of the names as identity repertoire was the wide range of arguments that this repertoire was used to support.

Consistent with a dominant feminist view was the argument that women should keep their name because it is a symbol of their identity. More creative arguments supporting the feminist position included the suggestion that name-changing reflects men's insecure sense of personal identity. Thus, if a woman changes her name on marriage it indicates the husband is dependent on his wife for his identity. The name as identity repertoire was not used exclusively to support name keeping. It was also used to support the status quo. Here names were constructed as symbolising family identity. From this position it was important that all members of the same family shared a name. Of course, the shared name could be the woman's name but the other interpretative repertoires function to make this less likely. A counter argument to the claim that names are a symbol of family identity was that the association was nothing more than empty rhetoric because of the prevalence of illegitimate children. Despite the counter arguments, the construction of names as a symbol of family identity was an effective argument for name-changing.

The final repertoire that was identified in people's explanations

of personal names was names as social markers. Here names were seen as having a social meaning. For example, name-changing could symbolise social inequity. Alternatively heterosexual couples with different names may signify a de facto relationship. What was clear from this repertoire was that the valence of the social meaning varied with the argument being made. So that if an argument for name-changing was being made, a negative attribution was made of name-keeping (e.g., a thing one of those new age feminist types do) and a positive one for name-changing (e.g., if you really love somebody that is what you will do). In contrast, name-keeping could be framed positively (e.g., as a sign of a healthy relationship). An important point is that there was no single, stable meaning associated with name-changing or name-keeping. The social meaning assigned to a naming decision was used to support the argument being made.

The discourse analytic approach used in this study highlights that there is no single meaning associated with names and naming customs. Past research, including feminist work, has tended to assume that there are relatively straightforward and consistent reasons for a woman's choice to keep or change her name. However, by examining the way people described social naming practices it became clear that name-changing or name-keeping can be differently constructed depending on the argument that participants were making.

Instead of assuming a stable cognitive or social reality concerning names and naming practices the discourse analytic approach enabled the richness, variety, and complexity of the ways people explained women's name change at marriage to be explored. Rather than holding simple static beliefs about the world, people construct different meanings from resources that include commonsense, everyday knowledge about the world. It is important when considering these results to remember that the repertoires did not reflect particular beliefs and attitudes of respondents, but were used by them in a variety of ways to explain, justify and make sense of names and name-changing in Western cultures. Their accounts are not 'individual constructions but personalised versions of a limited number of available culturally and historically specific shared interpretative repertoires'.[15]

Finally, what implications does the present study have for feminist theory and practice? It highlights that a single or simple explanation of naming and naming practices, while compelling, may be in-

adequate for promoting social change. Any single understanding of names can be used to construct arguments for or against dominant social practices. An understanding of the cultural resources that constitute commonsense understandings of social practices combined with an awareness of how they are used to build arguments may usefully empower agents of social change. Such knowledge may function as a rhetorical toolbox that can be used to construct convincing arguments and counter argument to support social change that benefits women.

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**NOTES**

1 See Una Stannard, *Mrs. Man* (Gromainbooks, California, 1977) for a comprehensive overview.

2 See for example Priscilla R. MacDougall, 'Married Women's Common Law Right to Their Own Surnames', *Women's Rights Law Reports,* 1 (1971) pp. 2-34. Also see Dale Spender, *Man-Made Language* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980).

3 Joyce Penfield, 'Surnaming: The Struggle for Personal Identity', in Joyce Penfield (ed), *Women and Language in Transition* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987) pp. 120.

4 Gordan W. Allport, *Pattern and Growth in Personality* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1963) pp. 117.

5 For a recent review see Deborah A. Duggan, Albert A. Cota and Kenneth L. Dion, 'Taking Thy Husband's Name: What Might it Mean?', *Names,* 41 (1993) pp. 87-102.

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[8] See Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzenger, *Feminism and Discourse* (Sage, London, 1995) for an overview.

[9] Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (Sage, London, 1987).

[10] Rosalind Gill, 'Relativism, Reflexivity and Politics: Interrogating Discourse Analysis from a Feminist Perspective', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzenger (eds), *Feminism and Discourse* (Sage, London, 1995) pp. 165-186.

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[12] For a discussion of disclaimers see J. Hewitt and R. Stokes, 'Disclaimers', *American Sociological Review,* 40 (1975) pp. 1-11.

[13] Potter & Wetherell.

[14] For a discussion of extreme case formulations see Anna Pomerantz, 'Extreme Case Formulations: A New Way of Legitimating Claims', *Human Studies,* 9 (1986) pp. 219-230.

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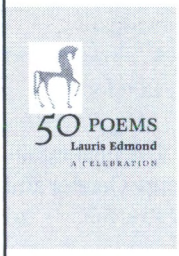


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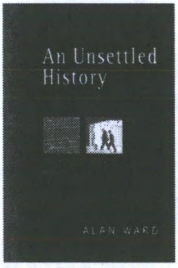


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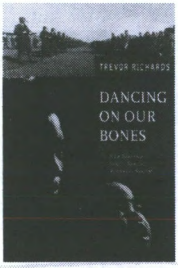


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# What it Means to Be a Lion Red Man:
## Alcohol Advertising and Kiwi Masculinity

LINDA HILL

Why should alcohol advertising be a concern for policy makers and for feminists in these days of café society, 'host responsibility' and 'civilised drinking like in France'?[1]

In a national survey of drinking in New Zealand, nearly a third of all reported alcohol, and over 40 per cent of the beer, was consumed by just 12 per cent of those surveyed: the young men aged eighteen to twenty-nine.[2] Men drank 70 per cent of all alcohol, but the eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds drank as much as all the men over thirty put together. This pattern, evident in other survey work by the Alcohol & Public Health Research Unit, shows that the alcohol industry's key market for shifting product is heavy drinking young males. It is in the logic of such a market that new generations must continually be recruited. This paper argues that alcohol advertising on the broadcast media plays a key role in this, and does so largely through constructs of Kiwi masculinity.

Advertising uses images to produce messages, meanings and market share. One of the ways alcohol advertising works best is as part of the cultural wallpaper. It normalises alcohol as a product like any other, through ads interspersed among those for other commercial and cultural products. The images used must comply with advertising standards, but the industry Code on Liquor Advertising barely touches on what is most problematic: the social relations expressed and reproduced through the ads.[3]

When television ads for alcohol brands and sports sponsorship are seen end to end, the masculinist pattern is overwhelming – and deliberately so – as this paper will show. It is the advertisements for beer that most clearly show young Kiwis 'what it means to be a man'.

### Background

As the alcohol industry points out, there has been a decline in overall consumption since the late 1970s.[4] But at 8.9 litres per adult aged fifteen-plus New Zealand's alcohol intake is well above pre-war levels and three times the level of much publicised possible ben-

efit to older males at risk of coronary heart disease.[5] Alcohol is not a product like any other, but one associated with public health concerns such as road fatalities, crime, suicide, drowning, injuries, unsafe sex and domestic violence. Alcohol has been estimated to cost the country $16.1 billion a year, in health service and policing costs, loss of health, loss of life and consequent loss of productivity – equivalent to 4 per cent of GDP.[6]

There is growing international evidence that alcohol advertising has a small but contributory impact on drinking behaviour and on alcohol-related harm.[7] Moreover, longitudinal studies show that the age at which people start to drink is predictive of alcohol-related problems in later years.[8] The link between alcohol advertising and early onset of drinking is made by New Zealand studies showing the responses of children and young people to television advertising.[9]

In the 1995 national drinking survey, the males aged between eighteen and twenty-four, though less than 7 per cent of respondents, drank nearly a third of the beer. This was the age group most likely to be heavy drinkers and to report alcohol-related problems, such as fights and drink-driving.[10] This pattern is reflected in statistics on road crashes and breath alcohol.[11] For this age group drinking large amounts in hotels, taverns and clubs is an important predictor of alcohol related harm, such as getting into a fight or drink-driving.[12]

Almost a quarter of sixteen to seventeen-year-old males and one in ten fourteen to fifteen-year-old males in a 1995 national survey were drinking six or more drinks on a single occasion at least weekly. A third of the sixteen to twenty-four-year-old women were drinking enough to feel drunk at least once a month, and one in eight once a week.[13] An analysis of trends in Auckland surveys over the 1990s has shown teenagers are binge-drinking increasingly large amounts.[14] Among the eighteen to nineteen-year-old drinkers, this trend was particularly associated with drinking in nightclubs, and among the fourteen to seventeen-year-olds with drinking at other people's homes – that is, drinking takeaway alcohol from off-licensed premises. The number of Auckland off-licences has doubled over the 1990s. Nationally, underage drinkers have reported meeting few refusals when purchasing takeaway alcohol, but off-licensed premises are seldom monitored unless they come to police attention.[15]

The years fourteen to twenty-four are clearly risk years for sons,

but also for daughters. Of the young people involved in the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study of Health and Development, 10 per cent reported that alcohol was the main reason for first intercourse, and more said it was one factor; 29 per cent of the women reported 'unwilling' participation.[16] NZ Family Planning has reported that a third of the teenage girls seeking emergency contraception said they were drunk when they had had unsafe, and sometimes unwanted, sex.[17]

> I ask adolescent girls when they come to see me, do you ever get drunk at parties. Almost 10% say they do. This is especially so with the under 16s. Quite a few of them say that they get drunk when they go to parties because they don't really want sex but they can't stop it so it is better to be drunk. (NZFPA nurse)

> There is no question about it, getting drunk is accepted as part of growing up for every group I work with. It stuffs up their judgement ... They say that everyone is doing it and it's part of being grown up. They also are very uptight about building a relationship and the alcohol gives the them the confidence. The guys get belligerent when they get drunk and I know that the idea of getting consent from a partner isn't important any more. Also condom use.[18]

### Responses of Young New Zealanders to Increased Alcohol Advertising

A series of policy changes in New Zealand have permitted increased alcohol advertising on television, paralleling policy shifts towards a commercial orientation in publicly owned broadcast media and permitting private ownership of additional stations. Television ads for alcohol outlets, then corporate and sponsorship ads were followed in February 1992 by alcohol brand advertising, and the number of alcohol advertisements on television quadrupled.[19]

The alcohol industry argues that alcohol advertising is about brands competing for market share, and that falling total consumption shows that advertising does not lead to increased drinking, despite research and advertising industry comments to the contrary.[20] Nearly all alcohol advertising on television is by Lion or DB, who account for 90 per cent of the beer market and the major brands of spirits and carbonated soft drinks, as well as DB's ownership of Corbans Wines.[21] Alcohol advertising in all media is currently valued at $43–44 million a year plus costs of ad production benefiting the advertising, film and music industries. The 1992 policy deal allow-

ing brand advertising included free airtime for alcohol health promotion on television, but in 1997 alcohol ads outweighed alcohol health promotion ads in a ratio of 4:1.[22]

The Advertising Standards Authority's voluntary Code on Liquor Advertising requires that, 'anyone portrayed in alcohol advertisements as drinking alcohol or visually prominent shall be at least 25 years of age', and television ads may only appear after 9 pm. Research in 1993 showed that the typical boy aged between ten and thirteen was watching television for about two hours after 9 pm every week; boys aged between fourteen and seventeen watched for six hours. In 1995 the average five to fourteen-year-old boy saw almost 300 alcohol ads per year, and ten to seventeen-year-olds saw almost 400.[23]

Research has also shown that alcohol ads on television may be particularly important in shaping younger people's views of alcohol. Asked about several ads being shown, youngsters aged between twelve and sixteen said they like the 'Lion Red – Blood Brothers' pub scene best; most thought people in this ad were 'drinking heavily or getting drunk'.[24] Among fourteen to seventeen-year-olds, those who expressed the greatest liking for the ads were also the heaviest drinkers; partly because liking the ads was linked with feeling that 'drinking makes life more fun and exciting' and 'people get on better together when they've had a few drinks'. Half the ten to thirteen-year-old boys said that they knew more about drinking from watching alcohol ads.[25]

A longitudinal study of teenagers found that those who recalled more alcohol ads when aged fifteen years were drinking larger quantities of beer at age eighteen.[26] How much the same young people liked alcohol advertising when they were aged eighteen also had an effect on how much they were drinking at age twenty-one. Those who liked the advertising the most drank more later, irrespective of how much they were drinking at the earlier age.[27]

Alcohol advertisements on television abide by Advertising Standards Authority rules against portraying drinkers under twenty-five or 'identifiable heroes of the young'.[28] Nonetheless, they are well designed to meet important needs among young people growing up in New Zealand society.[29] Alcohol advertising portrays drinking as part of attractive adult lifestyles that appear within the reach of normal aspirations, and are designed to appeal to particular personality types.[30] As noted by a psychologist in an advertising industry journal: 'More

and more, it seems, the liquor industry has awakened to the truth. It isn't selling bottles or glasses or even liquor. It's selling fantasies.'[31]

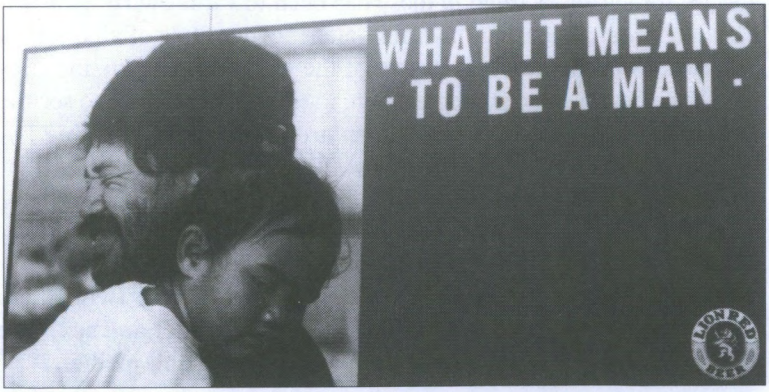
A similar view is taken by Erik Kortharls Altes, Chief Executive of DB, seconded from the Netherlands as part of DB's deal to handle Heineken: 'Alcohol advertising is very much about emotion.'[32]

Lion Nathan's most recent advertising campaign for beer provides overt examples of this. The product and drinking is not shown at all; a Lion Red logo is simply added to a series of images about 'what it means to be a man'.

**'Reflecting the Kiwi Male to Himself'**

At the Alcohol Advisory Council's 1998 conference, a top executive gave a presentation on Lion Nathan's advertising strategy in which his sole focus was masculinity.[33] Lion ads aimed to 'reflect the New Zealand male to himself'. No other concept or emotion routinely used as a 'hook' by advertising was mentioned. Reflecting the 1990s male, he said, was behind the shift from 'Blood Brothers' to 'What it Means to be a Father'.

Stratful admits that Lion has been a little slow in catching on to the 1990s male. A decade ago their research identified the archetypal Kiwi male as 'Frank', a railways stores clerk in Penrose, a sport fan, 'not a big spirits man'. Frank's idea of heaven was drinking with his mates in the public bar of the Star Hotel. His wife might be there too, in the lounge-bar with 'the girls', and if he hasn't had too many jugs to remember, he'll top up her 'chateau cardboard'. In 1996-97,




*'What it means to be a man', or maybe, what it means to have a drunk for a father.*

when 'being a man' still meant Frank, Lion Red billboards included the slogan 'If you want me to spend time in the kitchen, put more beer in the fridge'. Recent slogans are less offensive to the female gaze, but loyal Frank continues to be reflected in point-of-sale marketing where he picks up his supplies.

The face of Lion's new television advertising reflects and targets 'the 1990s man'. 'Brad' works sixty hours a week as a software programer in Ponsonby. He lifts weights at Les Mills, plays 'rugger for Varsity', but regularly baby-sits his sister's children. He paces himself at three to four drinks a night, but his choice varies with the occasion: Lion Red after rugby, Steinlager when feeling patriotic, or a Stella Artois with the gym crowd (male and female) 'making sure the label is turned out'. He'll drink the occasional Chardonnay with his GPK pizza, and he's been trying 'those kinky little pre-mix numbers to give him a kick at each of the five parties he will drop in on before heading home'.

DB has also moved away from ads portraying tough men in rough pubs and Rottweilers in sunglasses. Its most recent advertising campaign features male and female flatmates in their twenties, having fun and 'exporting themselves' to overseas experiences.

In 1990 retail and alcohol industry executives expressed an interest in developing 'a more feminine perspective' by marketing beers that were 'more modern and less overtly aggressively male'.[34] 'Natural' was launched with 'green' imagery, then reverse sexism was tried. Of the advertisements taped over summer 1997/98, the non-gendered ads are for spirits. A trend in these has been towards swirling, magical imagery emphasising the 'mind-altering' qualities of alcohol – a point taken up in the 1998 review of the Code on Advertising Liquor.[35] The new beer ad strategies seem to expect the women to see the world through 'Brad's' eyes. Women are depicted as admiring bystanders in Lion ads, while the new DB tribe accepts them as flatmates provided they drink the right brand.

### Masculinity and the Code on Liquor Advertising

If the marketing of beer centres on 'reflecting the Kiwi male to himself', how do advertising standards handle gender and sex? The Code on Liquor Advertising[36] lays down that ads in all media:

> Shall not depict or imply offensive, aggressive or unduly masculine themes or behaviour, [and]

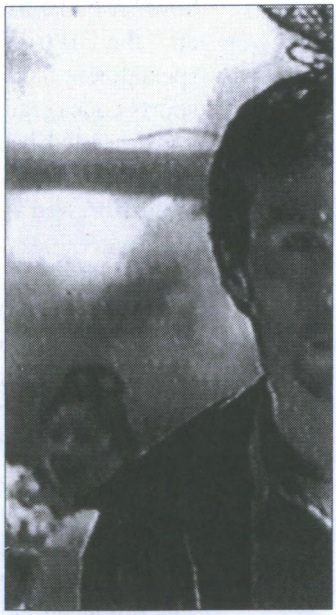
> Shall not suggest a relationship between liquor and sex by placing immoderate or immodest emphasis on romantic situations or by using illustrations or poses which are provocative or suggestive.
>
> Shall not imply that liquor noticeably contributes to or is a reward for success or achievement, including ... sexual success.

Though worthy in themselves, these rules are irrelevant to the two main ways that television advertising uses masculinity to push the product.

The first way is by associating alcohol with those 'old signifiers of masculine potency and pride', rugby players, and with other male sportsmen.[37] Limited recognition of this association was given by a 1995 change to the Code stipulating that ads may not portray individual 'heroes of the young'. The images in recent ads are not 'unduly' masculine, nor is aggression to be depicted in association with alcohol. The ads show a traditional masculinity and merely the level of violence inherent in 'normal' understandings of male contact sports. In 'reflecting the Kiwi male to himself', the ads associate alcohol with slowly changing but nevertheless normative constructions of masculinity.

The second way masculinity is portrayed relates to sex, but here the Code is even further off the mark about how the association works. The archetypal example is a recent Leopard Black Label ad. A young man in his late twenties, slightly unkempt ('cool'), strides to a pulsing beat and pulsing image-bites through a covered market, unidentifiably 'exotic'. He strides past two separate good-looking women, seated, admiring. He ignores them completely, attention directed straight ahead to his goal - a bottle of Leopard Black Label. The message is clear, and traditionally masculine: a good Kiwi bloke will walk past any sheila to get to the beer.

Leopard is DB, not Lion, but this ad also



*Leopard Black Label man strides past yet another admiring sheila.*


*DB Bitter: Apparent confrontation between tough looking males, Pakeha and Maori, in a pub turns out to be the homecoming of a mate.*

shows 'what it means to be a man'. The ads portray the men that teenage males aspire to be. US research has shown that adult men drink primarily to feel stronger; alcohol increases thoughts of social and personal power.[38]

So what fantasies and aspirations might alcohol offer teenage boys? A bloke having a good time with his mates, the 'Blood Brothers', the DB tribe, or 'Brad' and his flaties. An acolyte, as player or spectator, in the Kiwi religion, rugby – or one of the other main male sports codes – all now with a Lion or DB totem. 'Southern Man', in a half-hearted, half-pissed search for the perfect woman. A Man Alone, the strong silent bushwhacker of 'Taranaki gothic' novels, drinking an 'ice-brewed', 'extreme brewed' beer, label while out in Ponsonby.

**Masculinity in the 1990s**

An insight on gender that is not recent, but that continues to receive attention from feminists, is Simone de Beauvoir's contention that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'.[39] Judith Butler sees 'woman as a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end'.[40] Defined in patriarchal relations as 'other', 'the sex that is not one', woman 'is' rather than 'does', and much of what she is permitted to be is 'a body', a body that works – a paid, unpaid and sexualised servant in the marriage of convenience between patriarchy and capitalism.[41] But the marriage has produced clothing, food, image and media industries of global magnitude that profitably feed on that 'becoming' to keep the girls-can-do-anything generation merely 'being' – preferably being Elle

MacPherson or Posh Spice.[42]

What about adolescent boys? One may be born male, with that little 'signifier', but the 'Law of the Father' rules boys as well as women. Becoming, and being accepted as, an adult male, is harder to achieve than it was. Economic and labour market crises mean an extended education/training period for some, and increased marginalisation and social exclusion for others. Once, adult status was conferred by employment around age fifteen to seventeen. Now dependence on parents is officially assumed until eighteen, with reduced entitlement to tax-funded supports until twenty-five. How does a young Westie get his foot on the first rung of the 'homo-social' hierarchy that assures the good life through capitalist-patriarchal privilege?[43] And if that's not enough for an adolescent male to worry about, there's sex - or worse, 'sexuali*ties*'.

Adulthood is marked not only by a foothold on the patriarchal ladder but by new patterns of socialising as an adult man. Drinking is a powerful symbol of this. The strongly gendered nature of Pakeha culture and the place of alcohol in it has been well charted.[44]

Does one have to be a beer-swilling macho man in the 1990s? The television comedy *Men Behaving Badly* is successful because the behaviour is problematic, but common enough to be instantly recognisable. At the same time, there has been a rash of male writings on masculinity (including an essentialist backlash). In *Proving Manhood,* Californian writer Timothy Beneke says he doesn't intellectually subscribe to stereotypically male behaviour, but still reacts with anxiety at the thought of engaging in certain women's activities - sewing is his example. He lists some assumptions held by sexist men:[45]

- Men and women are inherently different.
- Men are superior to women, and superior to men who don't live up to models of masculinity.
  ['Failed men', known in New Zealand as 'wimps' and 'homos']
- Activities normally associated with women are demeaning for men to be engaged in.
  [And presumably the converse would apply to male-only activities.]
- Men should not feel or express vulnerability or sensitive emotions; the manly emotions are lust and anger.
- Toughness and domination of others are essential to men's identity.
- Sex is less about pleasure and relating and more about proving man-

hood and asserting power.
- Gay men are failed men.

This list is particularly disturbing when alcohol is added to the equation. These are stereotypes 'stated at their most extreme', but in Beneke's view, 'it is safe to say that all men in American society must – to some degree – negotiate their identities by way of such ideas.'[46] It is safe to say the same about young men growing up in New Zealand.

To reflect on such stereotypes, or on 'Kiwi masculinity', is not to 'naturalise' these traits or to undervalue the 'different, incommensurable and plural masculinities' or 'transgressive' renderings of macho discourses that can be readily acknowledged in the real world.[47] It is to recognise the 'ideal types' of manhood that Pakeha culture presents to youngsters who do not yet have the experience, maturity of judgement and range of acquaintances they will later have. The importance placed on good role models is part of the same recognition. My argument is that such known stereotypes are evoked in the powerful broadcast media by much subtler images of adult masculinity and behaviour.

### How to Socially Construct Masculinity

The second to last item in Beneke's list offers the starting point for another way into masculinity; through feminist analyses of sexuality. The view of sex it expresses is what Sheila Jeffreys would call the 'eroticisation of inequality',[48] which links dangerously to the 'lust and anger' in the fourth item.

Views of sexuality as socially constructed, challenging biological determinism, are an important political strategy for feminists because they conceptualise both sex and inequality as changeable.[49] Sexuality is 'constructing and constructed of' power and sexual politics.[50] Catherine McKinnon critiques post-Foucaultian accounts in which this power is diffuse and the sexuality is constructed as impersonally 'as a highway constructs traffic patterns'. The ubiquitous male subject has conveniently disappeared. But we need to know – our young man needs to know – how masculinity is done. And alcohol brand advertisers will prefer a masculinity that is never quite done.

Jeffreys draws on the work of Jackson, McKinnon, Monique Wittig and Robert Connell for an explanation. In hetero-sex, 'men' and

women', the two categories of social life and sexual politics, meet in:

> ... a potentially intimate activity which involves the very organs which represent the status category of the participants ... this 'sex' is likely to be the activity most constructive of the category 'men'.[51]

This analysis will be familiar to radical and other feminists. Jeffreys' account of the prostitution industry's role in reproducing 'eroticised inequality' by inculcating new generations of johns is convincing. But in the alcohol ads, the Leopard Black man just keeps striding past the sheilas. Jim Beam gives the girl a sardonic look and leaves for a bar that serves real bourbon. The Ice man talking to his fridge in the Arctic clearly has no sheila at all. And the 1990s Lion Red dad rushes home to his little girls. What's going on?

What the alcohol advertising offers is an alternative construction of masculinity through drinking. It is a construction that passes the scrutiny of 'homo-social' peer review, traditionally in male only venues or as part of male-only activities associated with drinking, reinforced by the 'mateship' themes of beer advertising. It is so traditional a construction of masculinity as to constitute a 'reification of gender' in Kiwi society, carrying its own pressures of 'becoming'.

> Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the 'congealing' is itself an insistent practice, sustained and regulated by various social means.[52]

To suggest that drinking itself is a reification of Kiwi masculinity is to take one step further Cathy Banwell's statement that alcohol has always been an artefact of Pakeha male culture, by recognising the sexual politics around alcohol, its rituals and its regulation.[53] The early colonial population, which introduced alcohol to Maori, was disproportionately male. Drink and drowning while drunk were leading causes of accidental death. Breweries became established and whisky was replaced by beer, though much stronger than today's.[54] The extent of alcohol related problems, and the consequences for families, gave rise to the historic battle between the liquor trade and the temperance movement. This was 'first wave' gender politics: temperance feminists campaigned for women's suffrage so they could use their votes to get alcohol laws, and the alcohol trade lobbied strongly against both.[55] This historic battle between drinking men and non-drinking women shaped alcohol regulation through heavily

restricted licensing until the Sale of Liquor Act, 1989.[56] It also shaped gender segregated patterns of socialising and hospitality until the 1960s. Drinking only became respectable for women with the end of the 6 o'clock swill and the development of a local wine industry in the 1970s.[57]

Grant Paton-Simpson shows that, for New Zealand men, 'under-consumption' of alcohol is a form of deviance.[58] Through various processes abstainers are encouraged to drink a little, 'moderate' drinkers are encouraged to drink sociably, and 'social' drinkers are encouraged to drink heavily. The first mechanism for this is the internalisation of drinking norms, although Paton-Simpson acknowledges the complex relationship between norms and behaviour. Other mechanisms include the desire to 'fit in', to avoid disapproval, for a positive self-image, and to avoid wider personal and social costs of labelling as deviant.

These are the adult norms teenager drinkers aspire to and comply with, and on which alcohol advertising builds, both directly and indirectly. Of a sample of ten to seventeen-year-olds, the older fourteen to seventeen-year-olds who liked the ads (as distinct from having high recall) were more likely to be drinkers and to drink larger quantities.[59] However, for the whole ten to seventeen age group, those with best recall of alcohol ads were most likely to say *their friends* would think it okay for young people of their age and gender to 'drink alcohol at least once a week', and to 'get drunk at least once every few weeks'. The more they recalled seeing the ads, the more frequently they thought their friends drank. This perceived frequency of drinking by friends (much higher than actual behaviour among this sample) was strongly and consistently associated with the respondent's own drinking. That is, the teenagers did not feel themselves to be directly influenced by the ads, but seeing so many made them think that everyone else drank a lot and they were influenced by that perception. In this way the advertising was contributing to pressure to not 'under-consume'.

The way the research question was framed allowed this to be analysed within age/gender norms.[60] The effect was similar for both girls and boys. However, a further influence helps construct drinking as reified masculinity. This is the association of alcohol, both in advertising and through various types of club sponsorship, with another traditional reification of masculinity and symbol of Kiwi nationalism, the All Black.[61]

**The National Game for 'Hard Men'**

Jock Phillips has charted the connection between masculinity and rugby via compulsory sport in schools, regarding the game as training 'hard men' for war.[62] Other historians of Empire have mapped the way the British colonised first countries, then the leisure time of the male inhabitants through rugby and cricket.[63] These sports, learned in English public schools and universities by the emerging middle class that Empire made possible, inculcated in Englishmen and natives the masculine virtues of competitiveness, discipline, self-sacrifice, fair play and the stiff upper lip. The many working-class men who escaped landlessness and unemployment by emigrating to New Zealand may have been 'flotsam and jetsam' but they aspired to better things, and their 'finest hour' became an All Black test match. As Star puts it:[64]

> According to the logic of sporting phallocracy, excesses of ritualised toughness, insensitivity, violence and machinelike self-destructiveness are apparently needed to 'prove' manhood.

The above virtues, essential to carving out and protecting colonial empires, are useful to corporate empires as well. A feminist reading *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* will recognise its principles as masculinist ones.[65]

Star explores the darker side of Phillips' linking of rugby and war, in the inherent but 'unofficial' violence of action and commentary language that gives matches the attraction of 'carnivale' and codes it as 'hegemonically masculinity' for viewers.[66] 'Unofficial' violence is also coded into sports reports: only in New Zealand would the 6 o'clock news devote so much time to groin injuries.

In Pakeha historical mythology, rugby competes for credit with Gallipoli and clearing 200,000-odd sq.km. of Maori land for forging New Zealand's identity through bonds of mateship.[67] Kathy Hood adds to these nationalistic narratives the winning of the (BNZ) America's Cup in 1995, with 'fetishised' red socks, and a tickertape parade that 'overtly celebrated Kiwi men and Kiwi manhood'.[68] She points out the entirely gendered nature of this national identity:

> The exclusion and denigration of women has been the necessary flipside of the equating of masculinity with national identity and an imperative step towards the preserving of such male exclusivity.[69]

This is difficult to challenge, she argues, because nationalism is understood as a homogenising concept and national identity claims to serve the interests of all citizens. Her account of America's Cup celebrations illustrates how women are expected to share in national events and national identity by identifying with their men's involvement, while men participate and identify directly.

### Proving Manhood

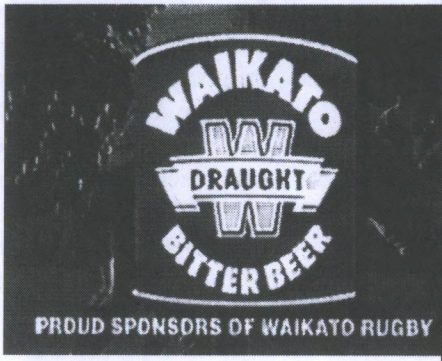
These threads of feminist argument and masculinist archetype come together in considering 'what it means to be a man' may be about for young males growing up in New Zealand. For a well-meaning young 1990s bloke, proving manhood through unequal sex may be problematic, in that 1990s women may not appreciate the need. (This in itself may support Jeffrey's views, including those on the growth in prostitution and pornography.) But the New Zealand Family Planning evidence from both teenagers and older women suggests that alcohol as a 'disinhibitor' can play a role here too.[70] In such a context, some instances of 'hegemonic masculinity' might well be better named as 'date rape'.

Alternatively, outlined above is a set of traditional Kiwi alternatives to sexual relations as a means of constructing, demonstrating and having one's mates verify adult masculinity: drinking, rugby and nationalism. The nationalism is usually in relation to rugby or another male-only team sport, and so is the drinking. But if the club is closed, or the match isn't on, real men talk rugby. Or, if you are an urban 1990s sixteen-year-old, resistant to such parochialisms, you can just drink the beer. It's cheap, available almost anywhere at any time, certain labels make you 'cool' and, the advertising tells you, it is 'what it means to be a man'.

### Linking the Brand to Male Culture

Adverting agencies as well as alcohol consumers are operating within this shared cultural environment, rich with ideas about and images of masculinity.[71] Last summer's selection of alcohol ads showed themes that link alcohol strongly to sport and nationalism. All the meanings of masculinity, all its reified forms, come together to be symbolised by alcohol brands.

From 1987 alcohol was advertised on television via corporate




*Making the masculinity, sport, regionalism link through a sponsorship ad.*

and sponsorship ads. This has continued alongside alcohol brand advertising, with sports programmes and promos for sporting events displaying DB or Lion logos, and signage visible on clothing and field barriers. Sponsored programmes and promos may appear before the 9 pm stipulated by the Code on Liquor Advertising for ads for alcohol brands. A video recording of every alcohol ad shown on television between 1993 and 1996 reveals high level of alcohol company advertising associated with sport both on television and on the field. At the time of the Advertising Standards Authority review of the Code, the NZ Sports Assembly encouraged its members to make submissions supporting alcohol advertising and sponsorship with a brochure entitled '$50 million is a lot of money!'

Although the longest and strongest association is with rugby, all the main codes of male sport are now coded either Lion or DB. The breweries compete through different beers for different types of football or other sports for different kinds of blokes. Rugby was devised under the modernist sign of heterosexual masculinity.[72] But masculinity is not monolythic. In these post-modern, free market times, it is pluralist and differently branded.

DB does a rousing line in nationalism, but Steinlager is the patriotic, cosmopolitan beer Kiwis drink everywhere. Nationalism is also regional, with Waikato Man and (Lion) Speight's 'Southern Man's Search for the Perfect Woman'.[73] Southern Man's rejection of the Auckland woman with the box at Eden Park illustrates Hood's perception that denigrating women is a common aspect of masculine nationalism.[74] The move from depicting mates in pubs to mates in flats or on rock faces belatedly reflects the breweries move into off-licence ownership, but mateship continues as a theme in the new ads depicting younger drinkers, now female as well as male in the DB ad. The Man Alone ads appear to be targeting an older, serious drinker.

The whisky ads carry masculine messages, but many of the ads

for spirits, also owned by Lion and DB, do not. Spirits are often more attractive to young women than beer, and so are the new pre-mixed drinks: one new 'alcopop' ad features good-looking women extolling the drink's low calorie count. The Coruba rum ads are about partying, and the most recent example crosses over into the swirling, sophisticated, hallucinogenic imagery used in some of the other alcohol ads. For young people, this is drug imagery. The alcohol advertising has picked up on health and medical perceptions of alcohol as a drug, a mind-altering substance.

## Conclusion

Alcohol advertising plays a small but important role in ensuring a continuing market for alcohol, in particular through the recruitment of new generations of heavy drinkers as a core component of that market. The resources of a duopolistic New Zealand alcohol industry, the technical and psychological skills of the advertising industry and the power of the broadcast media to project imagery and messages into lives and living rooms are brought together in television advertisements for alcohol.

While women, and alcohol products likely to attract women, are receiving increased attention, this paper argues that traditional reifications of Kiwi masculinity in sports and nationalism continue to be harnessed to promote drinking by young men. In addition, new, more subtle presentations of manhood and attractive adult lifestyles are being linked directly to the brand. Lower machismo imagery targeting the 1990s urban male should not obscure, for those concerned with improving public health or gender relations, the central message to young people that being a man means booze.

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## NOTES

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# The Day Kadi Lost Part of Her Life

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# Debating Feminist Theory:
## More Questions than Answers?

LIZ STANLEY

In this discussion I 'survey the scene' of contemporary feminist theory, not by looking in detail at the content of specific writings or topics of debate, but instead by asking some broad questions about 'what's happening' in it and to it in general and overall as a body of work.[1] These questions initially arose in part through my starting to write a book on feminist social theory and, in part, through being asked to review an edited collection concerned with feminist thought in New Zealand. Following this, I became involved in discussing these and additional questions with a larger number of people internationally.

In the first section of my discussion, I sketch out some questions and issues that arose out of writing the book review. In the second section, I outline and comment on the wider discussion which took place, around four questions which arose from the initial set of reflections on feminist social theory. In the conclusion, I call for other people to join this debate about 'the practice of theory' within the international Women's Studies scholarly community.

### Some Beginning Thoughts

The broad question of 'what's happening with feminist theory?' was one which initially arose for me through the lens of a set of inquiries sparked off by being asked to review the collection edited by Rosemary Du Plessis and Lynne Alice, *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Connections and Differences*, at the point that I was about to leave the United Kingdom for a six- month Research Fellowship in New Zealand.[2] A number of interrelated questions came to mind as the result of reading this interesting collection, questions which I ask here about feminist thought within academic feminism/Women's Studies 'full stop'. Of course, these are not questions I am asking about ideas and writings 'out there'; they involve me as much as any other academic feminist or pro-feminist, whether located in Women's Studies or elsewhere in the academy. Consequently, these are questions I am asking about my own approach to

feminist theory, including how I present and use it in a teaching situation, as well as of 'us' as a scholarly community, albeit a community of a highly diverse and internally fractured kind.

I don't see the issues that I shall go on to discuss as being the 'fault' of particular people or work, but instead as ones which occur as the product of more general features of the way our particular scholarly community has developed. Consequently, I pose these questions and the issues that arise as general rather than specific ones. Also I most certainly recognise that they are capable of being discussed and addressed from a variety of positions, including in ways which are likely to be antithetical to the viewpoint I shall go on to outline. Consequently, I hope my discussion here will be seen as an opening one in what I hope will become a debate; and I hope it will stimulate other people to think and write about 'the practice of theory' as they see this.

The first question I became engaged with is what we mean when we invoke 'feminist theory' these days. That is, there is a kind of taken-for-grantedness about feminist theory, an assumption that we all know what this is, what it is composed by, and agree about its status and organisation if not specific claims which arise from particular instances of it.[3] We invoke it, teach it, construct reading lists about it, characterise our own work and that of other people as feminist theory or not, and so on. However, apart from the assumptions built into the way feminist theory appears in course outlines and within the now proliferating existence of edited collections offering 'overviews' of it, there is little structured public discussion of what 'it' is, the appropriateness or otherwise of its defining concerns and its organisation, and its relationship to 'the rest' of what academic feminism, in general, and Women's Studies, specifically, is concerned with.

The related question which arises here concerns whether there is a sub-strata of feminist theorising in the form of a foundational set of ideas on which we all ground our work (and that there is, even if this is neither named nor delineated, seems to me implicit in course design and book contents). If there actually isn't anything which is foundational, then I find myself wondering what kinds of claims to the ownership of ideas are being made when people write, invoke, speak, 'feminist theory', rather than simply state or promote their own ideas and position. My own view is that there is no shared

foundational academic body of 'theory work' that all pro/feminists share. Insofar as we share anything foundational, it seems to me this is rather a commitment to feminist politics, minimally conceived; that is, the stance that 'something is wrong' and can and should be changed even though we may not all agree as to the precise content of the 'something' and the 'change' here.

My observations derive from a recent concerted reading of feminist and Women's Studies journals, textbooks and monographs, and also feminist writing in a wide variety of mainstream discipline journals, which was undertaken as part of writing my book on feminist theory. My conclusion is that although a great deal of feminist theory is being published, very little of it addresses these basic questions about the nature of the enterprise in question, what its assumptions and working practices are, and where it might be taking us, collectively speaking. Another way of expressing this is to comment that there is surprisingly little feminist work being published which has meta-theoretical concerns, by which I mean, not the writing of entirely abstracted 'social theory' as the supposed 'queen' of theory, but, instead, work which constitutes an inquiry into the organisation, form and claims of theory within feminist inquiry.

These matters together with the absence of a feminist debate about them take on a certain urgency in the light of two important changes which have occurred over the last decade or so in the organisational context in which the conjunction of 'feminism/theory' takes place. One concerns the fact that the relationship between feminist theory and feminist practice has markedly changed as a consequence of the institutionalisation of feminism as Women's Studies, Feminist Studies or one of a number of other variants (including within some mainstream disciplines).[4] The other concerns the related fact that 'theory' has become more and more the specialist preserve of academics, indeed of very particular groupings of academics, rather than 'ordinary pro/feminists',[5] with the effect that feminist practice is now considerably more on the peripheries of the production of feminist theory than it has been previously.[6]

The result is that what 'feminist theory' is within academic feminism, what it looks like, how we recognise the beast and distinguish it from others, has changed immensely, but there are disconcertingly few published discussions of this. If my premise – that feminism is basically a political enterprise concerned with injustice towards

women and the ramifications of this for social life more generally – is accepted, then it is clear that academic feminism should continue to be constituted as a *praxis*: the point is to understand but also to change the world. However, the situation we are now in is one in which feminist theory is done, written, categorised and criticised as a largely taken-for-granted activity which some particular kinds of academic feminists, those who are the feminist theorists, produce while others read about this and consume it.[7] However, the relationship between these groupings within academia as the presumed site of feminist theory and 'ordinary pro/feminists' remains largely unquestioned on the part of academic feminism/Women's Studies, while what is all too frequently seen as the abstracted, esoteric, often unreadable and inward-looking nature of much present-day feminist theory within academia is seen as an important element in the claimed irrelevance of feminism for younger women 'out there'.

My next broad area for reflection is related to this last point and concerns what has become the now largely unexplicated relationship between academic feminism and Women's Studies on the one hand, and between these academic groupings and feminists 'outside' the academy on the other. Of course, this distinction is by no means either absolute or so neat, but the disjuncture is now more evident than at any point over the last three decades, mainly because of the professionalisation of feminisms within the academy and the higher barriers to entry. And also who 'the theorists' are is something which changes over time and is not only contested but also subject to the vagaries of intellectual fashion.

I am interested in particular here in the genealogies of those who have sought theoretical status or have had this thrust upon them, and their relationship to the broader and more catholic mixtures of people as full-time staff, part-timers and casual teachers, contract researchers, graduate students, undergraduate students, who are interested in and make use of feminist ideas and feminist theory. Those who write and publish what is seen as feminist theory have 'homes', organisationally speaking, and looking at affiliations here suggests that these are more frequently disciplinary homes than they are the interdisciplinary one of Women's Studies: they 'belong to' organisational spaces and places which are those of philosophy, political science, literary or cultural studies, or more rarely other disciplinary areas. However, their work is consumed 'elsewhere', for by and large

the production of mainstream theory in the conventional disciplines still remains largely impervious to feminist ideas and feminist persons. And, of course, the consumers of feminist ideas and feminist writings are not just 'audiences' and 'readership' for these, but a diverse grouping with its own specialist knowledges and competencies and the members of which are as likely to be producers of ideas as consumers of them. To use a term reworked from Erving Goffman, they are not 'theory dopes'. This applies as much to those people who are entirely outside of academia (organisationally speaking) as to those inside. At the same time, it is also important to recognise that location and positionality are important for what these different groupings and collectivities of people not only think about this work but also what they might do with and to it. For some, it is likely to be a matter of 'take it or leave it', for others it may be that it is the source of ideas as tools, and for yet others an unknown or unknowable irrelevance.

I am extremely curious about what these wider groupings of pro/feminists think about what the scholarly community of academic feminists are doing, what they think and understand about feminist theory in particular. My conjecture is that, by and large and with some exceptions (which are likely to differ in composition between different national contexts), feminist theory, as it is presently constructed and promulgated within academia, is not much read by the feminists 'out there', and, thus, the gap exists that the Katy Roiphes and Camille Paglias of 'popular' feminist writing have filled. A related observation is that this necessarily remains a conjecture, a supposition; there is very little published work that explores this substantively.[8] In addition, this typically difficult relationship of 'ordinary pro/feminists' to academic feminism/Women's Studies does not exercise feminist theory as it so often exercises the lives of many of us who work or study in the academy.[9] Within what is now seen as constituting feminist theory there is little attention given to any idea of a women's 'movement' or politics in different parts of the world outside of academia, nor any very apparent recognition of the importance of engaging with the relationship between 'us' in the academy, in feminist theory, and 'them' in the world we live in and presumably want to change. I should emphasise that I am referring here to what Sue Wise and I in 1983 called 'theory with a capital T', and Jackie Stacey, in a 1997 discussion, terms 'Feminist Theory, capital F, capital T';[10]

and I am fully aware that much feminist writing does engage fully with such things. My point is that while this 'other' writing would have once been seen as feminist theory, it is no longer. 'Feminist Theory' now has specific characteristics which align it considerably more with mainstream social theory. The consequence is that in order to be seen as 'Theory', feminist work has to have these characteristics or else be assigned – by editors, publishers, reviewers, readers – to the category of 'non-Theory'.

The topics of concern in 'Feminist Theory' in this sense are, instead, largely abstract ones abstractly discussed using other abstract discussions as 'the data', rather than material drawn from 'the world out there'. The concerns of feminist theory as it is presently being defined and categorised are not those of pro/feminists 'in life', and nor does this mutual disengagement appear to be a matter of interest or its possible consequences for the long-term future and longevity of feminism in the academy remarked upon or seen as a crucial topic of inquiry for feminist theory. By and large (and of course with exceptions) the 'theory gaze' is on something else, somewhere else.

The third broad general set of reflections I want to introduce concern 'difference'. Given the emphasis over the last decade and more in academic feminism on notions of 'difference', and specifically the differences between women, I am interested in what this entails for feminist theory, what impact it might have had on it. A shorter way of expressing this is to ask whether 'difference' has made a difference to the theory that feminists produce. Have some groups of feminists, for instance, resisted a theoretical project altogether?[11] and have others produced feminist theory of a radically different style, with a different structure, different concerns, a different 'voice', and treating its readers in a significantly different way? My observation here is that 'difference' has had little or no impact on the *form* of feminist theory (what it is and isn't seen to be, how it is articulated, the 'voice' it is articulated in), or on the *structure and practice* of feminist theorising (who is and isn't a feminist theorist, the subjects and objects of such theory, the hierarchies of who 'speaks' and who is spoken for and about), while at the same time the idea itself is a component of some of its *content* (what is 'said', what is silenced, what can and cannot be spoken of as a topic within it). This is a paradox, and an interesting one; but, again, it has not been a matter for discussion or comment in the writings of feminist theory.

There are other puzzling and intriguing questions which cohere around the notion of 'difference' in addition to these. The world, and (former) national entities, are subject to massive movements of peoples and massively consequential immigrations and emigrations, with resultant shifts in patterns of inequalities. Succinctly, things change in the world, time passes and oppressions continue to occur. However, to a marked extent the difference that 'difference' is concerned with is the difference of 'race' and racism defined in surprisingly narrow ways.[12] The 'other Others', the other people, other women, other feminists, to whom wrongs are being done are in a sense being put on political and theoretical ice while the unfinished business of the past is dealt with. One instance here is that while difference is much written about in terms of silencing and marginalisation within feminist theory by Anglo-American commentators especially, by groups and collectivities justifiably concerned about their exclusion from the theoretical high ground, the other differences of women's position within, say, the sexual terrorism of genocide in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia or within the decimation by hurricane and earthquake of whole countries and economies in South America, are not theoretical topics.

While I certainly recognise the importance of the historic wrongs of 'race' and racism and their continuing reverberations in the present, can the business of these 'Other' differences be bracketed while the present-day manifestations of one set of historical wrongs are sorted out? That is, can there be a kind of *ceteris paribus* in matters of oppression and inequality, or will these other Others return to haunt feminism at some other time? My view is that our current *de facto* if not *de jure* acceptance of hierarchies of oppressions is not only ethically dubious but also politically explosive and will rebound on the next generation of academic feminists.

There are theoretical concerns here regarding the political issue of which, and whose, 'difference' is the difference that counts, the ethical implications of hierarchicalising oppressions and sufferings, and what the future intellectual and political consequences of this might be; but they don't make much of an appearance within Feminist Theory. There is only a limited sense in which 'difference' has made a difference to the structure, organisation and written outputs of feminist theory, including its objects, methods, questions which are preoccupying, and its written outputs. This is a matter of intellec-

tual interest, but I would argue that it is also a matter of ethical, political and theoretical concern and its implications need to be confronted. One simple way of proceeding here is to ask what kind of feminist theory we each of us want and whether we are satisfied with the present form that it takes. This isn't simply a matter of encouraging more people to become feminist theorists, or of tinkering with the definition of canonical texts and/or authors, or even of replacing these with others. It is rather to propose that as a scholarly community, but also as feminists who live in the world 'out there' too, we need to look analytically at the structure, organisation, assumptions, working practices, outputs and knowledge claims of feminist theory and ask some serious feminist questions about it.

The fourth broad set of reflections I want to outline are those that arise around this scholarly community as a 'community of knowers', to use the philosopher Quine's term, or as an 'epistemic community' which encompasses feminists 'out there' as well as 'in here', as I prefer to phrase it. There have been powerful epistemological currents at work in feminist thinking over the last three decades. These have argued that ideas are the shared social productions of epistemic communities, and not the unique productions of 'great minds'. They have emphasised that 'knowledge' is a dominant discourse resulting from competing knowledge claims, and that all knowledge is marked by the politics of location and inevitably takes the form of situated knowledges, howsoever objectified expressions of it may be.[13] There are implications here for feminism *tout court* as well as for feminist theory, but they have particular resonance for feminist theory because these ideas are epistemologically-loaded ones which have immediate implications for how theory is formulated and the claims it makes. That is, they emphasise that all knowledge-claims emanate from a point of view and that point of view makes a difference – a significant difference – to what is seen, how it is seen, how it is represented, and, therefore, what kinds of claims are made about it and on whose behalf. Succinctly, these epistemological currents treat knowledge production as a highly politicised process in which there are dominant discourses which gain superordinancy by systematically excluding others.[14] And, of course, these processes occur within academic feminism/Women's Studies as without; we are not immune.

**Asking More Questions**

The process of thinking and reflection I have sketched out above was both an individual and then also a collective one, for these thoughts were discussed with a good many other people, and their ideas and views have helped shaped the result outlined here. Having reached this juncture in my process of reflection, I was intrigued and wanted to know more about the way that other people think about feminist theory and understand its current form and position.

To this end, and these collaborative thoughts in mind, I posed a number of questions under the heading of 'what's happening to feminist theory?' to something over a hundred people of my email acquaintance. These people are composed of women and men, some of whom are academics, while others are graduate students, librarians, publishers and people in a variety of different kinds of employment. I received twenty-eight replies to my questions, ten from people in the United Kingdom, four from people in New Zealand and the USA, three from people in Australia, two from Ireland, and one each from France, Japan, China, India, and Canada; two of the replies were from men and the others from women. Around fifteen of the replies received were from people with academic jobs, while the rest were 'academic related' – graduate students, librarians, publishers; and I think it notable that none of the non-academic/related people whose views I canvassed replied.

I should emphasise that the circulation of these questions wasn't carried out as a 'scientific' research exercise to produce a 'representative sample'. The aim was simply to see what a cross-section of people who might have views about this would think about such matters. Consequently, I make no claims for the 'representativeness' or 'generalisability' of the replies I received, and these are outlined below as suggestive rather than summative ones.[15] My purpose here, too, is to encourage reflection and debate, and I will return to this in my conclusion.

Q1. What is 'feminist theory'? and where are you in relation to it?

Interestingly and quite unexpectedly, there was a good deal of agreement regarding this question. The 'baseline position' that was sketched out and sometimes elaborated upon in the replies is that 'feminist theory' is a means or a tool for understanding, and also in some way helping to change, the situations of women. It accepts no-

tions of difference but also proposes that inequalities, oppressions and systems of domination characterise all such differences. This feminist theoretical project is seen as *a priori* an emancipatory one concerned with praxis; and, as well as informing and underpinning practice, it is also seen to be grounded, local, and to result in a range of sometimes competing knowledges. Its fundamental concerns are seen to be understanding 'sex/gender', although there is also recognition that this can be conceptualised in radically different ways and is always coexistent with, for example, the differences of 'race'/ethnicity and class. These patterns of inequalities exist at both 'macro' and 'micro' levels concerning structure and action. Also associated with this 'baseline' position, the replies characterise feminist theory of this kind as the absence of canonical forms and the presence of an openness to changes of mind and understanding.

Alongside this, seen as competing with it and now largely dominant over and in some sense against it, is a very different formulation of what feminist theory is. This second version of feminist theory in the replies is characterised as a sideshoot of mainstream social theory, in which the highest status is accorded to work of the most abstract and esoteric kind. This approach to feminist theory is seen as dominated by ideas which come from 'high theory' within cultural theory, literary theory, and philosophy. It is seen as dominated by groups and individuals who claim or are being accorded an élite status within academic feminism, and concerned with producing a would-be canonical status for what is only one narrow approach to theory. This variant of feminist theory is seen to be not only in the ascendant but also increasingly seen by 'beginners' and 'outsiders' as constituting the only approach to feminist theory possible; that is, no real alternatives are seen to exist.

A third formulation of feminist theory was also commented on. Here ideas are engaged with as and when people work on particular projects, develop particular research and writing concerns, teach or supervise students with interests and concerns they then engage with themselves. As part of this, the literature associated with these areas of inquiry then becomes the particular variant of 'feminist theory' that preoccupies people and which then acts as a lens through which they view other developments in the 'landscape' of feminist theory more widely. This kind of feminist theory is seen as highly flexible and open and as coexisting with, or beneath, the dominant 'high

theory' version of feminist theory, that is, 'Feminist Theory with a capital F and a capital T'.

As for 'where are you?', the replies are overwhelmingly concerned with the people making them feeling completely other to the dominant version, or more strongly as alienated, excluded, annoyed, an outsider to a feminist theory project which is seen as theory of an abstract, esoteric, exclusive and ultimately masculinist kind. This version of feminist theory is seen to be the antitheses of local and grounded; it is also seen to be the antithesis of emancipatory and praxis-oriented, and, so, in some sense oppositional to the political project of feminism. This kind of feminist theory is seen as existing for itself alone, in the sense of having no praxis; and as also creating high status elites within academic feminism who abrogate or are accorded a superordinate position over others. At the same time, there is an awareness that 'theory games' can be interesting and engaging and that ideas are exciting and fun. It is the *de facto* promotion of a masculinist mode of engaging with ideas and creation of a theoretical elite which produces a sealed body of 'knowledge' that is objected to, not the fun of 'ideas in themselves'. And alongside this, it is important to note that a small sub-set of the people who replied saw their position in relation to 'Feminist Theory' very differently, welcoming its complexities and seeing its ideas and debates as crucial ones for themselves and students and rejecting its appellation as exclusive. There are no obvious grounds for the very different responses that exist, for all of these people see themselves as involved in and engaged by ideas and theory; and it seems to be more a matter of political analysis and choice about both theory and the structuring of academia that is involved here.

Q2. Which people/pieces of work are being read and/or referenced as key feminist theory at the moment?

A range of different kinds of referencing of feminist theory is commented on in the replies. None of these is seen as mutually exclusive; some of them are seen to characterise student work more than the others, but none of them exclusively so. It was pointed out that referencing can take very different forms in different areas of work and around different topics, and also there is the kind of referencing which indicates the personal intellectual journeys that people make when they embark on a piece of writing. Another feature of the

way that feminist theory is referenced that was commented on is the now frequent practice of referring, not to original sources, but, instead, to extracts of work contained in edited readers. This was seen as a way, more often problematic than not, by which editors not only shape what is 'seen' and so reference as feminist theory, but also prescribe its meaning and worth, through what is extracted and their interpretations of the 'real meaning' of this. Similarly, textbooks about feminist theory which provide 'guides', particularly but not exclusively used by students, are also seen to be widely referenced but to provide odd, out-of-date, over-categorised and sometimes quite erroneous impressions of 'the field'.

Alongside this, the existence of favoured and fashionable areas and topics which are referenced, again perhaps particularly but by no means exclusively by students, was noted. These include, in no particular order, work concerning: identity; 'race', and particularly here including black American writers; methodology and/or epistemology; patriarchy; post-structuralism and postmodernism; 'French', psychoanalytic and/or literary theory; post-colonialism and nationalisms; work which is concerned with the nature of ideas and theory. As well as fashionable topics, there are also fashionable theorists; and around this it was commented that referencing occurs so as to indicate 'the company we keep'. That is, this kind of referencing demonstrates allegiances and acts as a form of intellectual/political credentialism.

'Fashionable' referencing is linked to the phenomenon of 'travelling theorists', people whose names crop up across all the other categories. Some of this represents the vagaries of present fashion, others indicate longer-lasting influences, including the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf. Another group of 'travelling theorists' is composed by people whose work has had or is exerting a significant impact in relation to generic ideas that have currency across the whole sweep of interests in feminist work. Here a range of names were mentioned, with the current predominance of the work of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz being noted, sometimes positively but more often not, with it being the 'star' status accorded to this, the often inappropriate 'company we keep' referencing of these theorists, and exclusionary aspects of their work, which was objected to rather than their work itself.

In addition to the strong impact of fashion and the importance of

credentialism, there are also seen to be strong national patterns in what is treated as important and significant bodies of work. However, cutting across this is the existence of a hierarchy of presumed importance, with Anglo-American work, the misnamed 'French feminism' (in particular Irigaray), and the almost omni-presence of American-originating feminist theory, at a presumed apex.

Q3. What pieces of feminist theory have most influenced you? and has this changed?

As might be supposed, the replies to this question were extremely heterogeneous, but, again, there were patterns. The influence of ideas, particular producers of ideas, or particular pieces of writing, on the people who responded were all seen to have changed, sometimes markedly so, over time. However, for many people there were particular ideas, authors, writings, from the past which they perceive as having a pervading influence on them. The ideas, here, include those concerned with equality and the injustice of inequality, social constructionism, 'sisterhood is powerful', and the impact of black feminist writing. The reading involved includes novels, autobiographies, 'popular' feminist writing, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and, not surprisingly, feminist writing from the 1970s and early 1980s. The particular authors were much more heterogeneous, but again Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir were noted. The newer interests more at the front of people's minds now are seen as more specific and directed, around teaching or research interests, or ongoing research and/or writing projects, or through an interest in the work of a particular feminist theorist or theorists.

One aspect of the impact of feminist ideas which was particularly commented on was the way these often act as starting points for the generation of energy which is then used more widely; with theoretical ideas, interests and reading, and also referencing, subsequently broadening out from this. The feminist ideas which have been the most powerful sources of influence in this way were seen to be those which had impacted upon how people 'go about thinking' about and 'go about doing' things; and, here, work on methodology and epistemology was picked out.

Q4 What do you think are the feminist ideas that will last, that have made major changes to 'life as we know it'? The two ideas mentioned to me have been expressed as shared ones rather than the invention of particular theorists and are:

- 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'
- 'the personal is the political'

The people who replied to these questions frequently commented that disentangling the feminist ideas that are *most likely* to have long-term effects from those that they themselves *want* to have lasting effects meant that this was the hardest of these four questions for them to answer. There was general agreement that the two ideas which were suggested, 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' and 'the personal is the political', were among the feminist ideas most likely to have this kind of long-term capacity to effect change, although the meaning accorded to them was seen as contentious and highly variable.

Indeed, the very contentiousness of these ideas and the lasting disputes around them is one of the indications that they may indeed have permanent impact. One analogy mentioned here is with Durkheim's ideas about suicide: no one just kills themselves any more, they 'commit suicide', although the specifically sociological origins and meaning of this concept are now lost sight of; and another analogy noted is with ideas about criminality and labelling, where the notion of labelling underpins public policy theory and professional practice, but again with the academic origins and specific meanings being lost sight of. That is, the feminist ideas that will last are not likely to do so with their feminist core or meaning intact and their feminist origins clearly recognisable; instead, like ink or dye in a large amount of water, these ideas will spread and have influence in homeopathic proportions and in much changed forms. As well as those mentioned in the original e-mail, there are a number of other feminist ideas which are seen to have a similar kind of transformative impact and potential through the ways in which these ideas are being 'translated' socially.

Notions of equality, equal worth, the idea of 'equal but different' and the full citizenship of women, were seen as the basis of a now powerful current for change in the world, one which also recognises

the existence of male power as, in some sense, a problem. Even though these related ideas are contested and frequently denied, they are contested and denied in the light of their existence around principled statements of women's rights to equality and citizenship, for example in United Nations charters and those of the European Community.

The social constructionist basis of 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' was felt to have wider ramifications and to be in the process of becoming, or already to have become, a truism. One particular effect of this is in relation to the increasing acceptability of the idea of the socially constructed basis of sexuality and the existence of 'heterosexuality as an institution', as sets of pressures, choices and politics, rather than an unchanging given, an essence.

Ideas about 'difference' and the importance of recognising difference are felt to have been promoted by feminism and subsequently to have gained wider currency in a form which 'will last'. And here 'difference' involves gender but also the multiple forms of difference that include but are not restricted to 'race' and ethnicity, sexuality and class. Coexisting with 'difference', the idea that the situations of women contain similarities as well as differences around inequality and that these create bonds, even though troubled ones, was also seen as an idea that will have lasting impact. The slogan that 'sisterhood is powerful' is still thought to summarise some of these ideas, in spite of its highly contentious standing. This and 'difference' are seen to mark each other in complex ways, but to be symbiotically related within feminist politics.

A set of feminist ideas concerning the nature of knowledge is seen as already having had an important, although unacknowledged, wider impact in relation to the recognition of the social and political dimensions of knowledge claims and 'knowledge itself'. Here ideas about 'the politics of location' and 'situated knowledges' summarise in slogan form some of the work carried out under the rubric of feminist epistemology. The strong feminist commitment to reflexivity, and the recognition that all knowledge is produced from a point of view which makes a difference, cohere around the idea of 'local knowledges' and the understanding that competing knowledge claims are political as well as truth claims.

All of the feminist ideas which are seen as potentially lasting are ones which have informed feminist politics 'out there' as well as 'in

here' in the academy and exist in well-known shorthand slogan forms. The fuller list is:

- *equality & citizenship*
- *'the personal is the political'*
- *'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'*
- *social constructionism & sexual difference*
- *heterosexuality as an institution*
- *difference*
- *'sisterhood is powerful'*
- *situated knowledges*

**More Food for Thought?**

The replies to my questions which I have outlined and commented on are, as I noted earlier, suggestive rather than summative. They contain food for thought. My intention, in outlining my reflections on the current state of feminist theory in the first section of this discussion, and this summary of these people's reflections on it in the second, has been to encourage a wider debate.

As a consequence of these two linked inquiries, I have been very struck by what I am tempted to call a 'missing link' in feminist interventions within the academy. There has been a powerful and, indeed, transformative feminist debate sustained over more than two decades which has been concerned with questions of method on the one hand, and questions of epistemology on the other. This debate and the ensuing high quality work which has been produced from it, and howsoever aspects of its 'message' may have been resisted, have changed things about knowledge and science within feminism in substantial ways. However, search journals and books and inquire among colleagues as I have, I cannot discern a comparable process of sustained critique and debate about the *nature* of social theory within academic feminism. Its *content*, yes, certainly: in some respects and for some academic feminists this has been preoccupying; but not its nature or form.

What it seems to me is missing is a parallel debate concerned with the meta-theoretical issues I have sketched out in this discussion. In effect, these matters of theory have been bracketed while those concerning method and epistemology have been focused upon. However, as I hope I have indicated, these are not side issues; indeed, they are of fundamental importance to any kind of transformational feminist project.

Consequently, I would like to suggest that some kind of debate about these matters is called for. For some readers, my premises may not be seen as valid and certainly my point of view may be disagreed with. However, the fact that a good many academic feminists whose views have influenced the comments in the first section of this discussion as well as those pro/feminists whose views I have summarised in the second, feel either ambivalent about current feminist theory or see it as a largely separate enterprise and characterise it as almost indistinguishable from malestream/mainstream social theory, is surely of concern to us all. Some of the questions still in my mind about this include: Are these thoughts and feelings more widely shared? If not, then what kinds of factors are producing these very different kinds of responses to the present configuration of feminist theory? If they are more widely shared, then is this for similar or different kinds of reasons? And what if anything can or should be done about it?

As part of the process of encouraging debate on these and related questions, I and Heather Worth from the Institute for Gender Research at the University of Auckland organised a roundtable discussion at the 1998 annual conference of New Zealand's sociological association. In organising the roundtable, we argued that 'feminist theory' writers have proposed that the feminist critique of the social theory heritage has been superseded by its reconstruction, the project engaged upon by feminist theorists over at least the last decade. However, many other feminist academics share the perception that, while substantive areas of many disciplines are now marked in all manner of ways by Women's Studies/feminist work, 'theory' remains largely untouched and inviolate. And this is a shared perception, not so much of the specific 'middle range' kinds of theories that all multi/disciplines produce, but of 'social theory' itself. The disjuncture between these two views can be explained 'by reference' to work produced by feminist academics concerned literally with references and specifically with the referencing practices of 'theory boys'. Here, for instance, feminist commentators on postmodernist theory, political theory, sociological theory and philosophical theory have all noted that feminist theory writing in these areas takes full cognisance of and references mainstream/malestream social theory, while malestream social theory here takes cognisance of and references only other malestream work. Succinctly, it seems there are *parallel projects* at work in social theory: a self-sealed malestream project

that claims 'theory itself', and a feminist theory project that has positioned itself as a part of the theory game, except that 'the boys' won't play.

The questions we posed in the roundtable are also pertinent to the kind of debate about feminist theory I hope to encourage and can usefully close my discussion here: Why has the feminist reconstructionist project made so little inroads on 'theory itself'? Should feminist academics join the boys' theory game? Should social theory be reconstructed within itself and not in a parallel version? If so, how should it be changed and in what respects?

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**NOTES**

[1] I am extremely grateful to the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland for awarding me a Senior Research Fellowship during 1998. This present discussion has been written as part of a project I have been engaged on while in New Zealand, which is concerned with feminist theorising and its relationship to practice.

[2] Rosemary Du Plessis and Lynne Alice (eds), *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Connections and Differences* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998). The review is Liz Stanley, 'Review of *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa/New Zealand*', in *Feminist Studies in Aotearoa Journal*, 59 (December 1998) <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~wwwms/fmst59.html>.

[3] The increasingly confident tone taken in readers on feminist theory is one indication of this (along with the putative claims of the disciplines that editors belong to as actually 'owning' it); see for example Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds), *Feminisms* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997).

[4] I am using 'Women's Studies' as a shorthand for the existence of organisational entities which people can 'belong to', and, of course, I recognise that not all of these will actually bear this title, and that some will have more, and others less, of an independent organisational existence within the academy. I use 'academic feminism' as a

broader term, collecting into it all feminists who work in academia; pro-feminist men and their work are referred to as such.

[5] A shorthand term for every pro/feminist who isn't also an academic.

[6] An extremely interesting roundtable discussion on this topic was published in *Signs*. See here: Heidi Hartmann, Ellen Bravo, Charlotte Bunch, Nancy Hartsock, Roberta Spalter-Roth, Linda Williams and Maria Blanco,'Bringing Together Feminist Theory and Practice: A Collective Interview', *Signs*, 21 (1996) pp. 917-51.

[7] Thus, for example, in response to a discussion of 'feminist standpoint theory' by Susan Heckman, Sandra Harding notes that the authors later associated with this term as used by Hartsock were working independently of each other, some of them predating Hartsock's interventions, and she concludes with the question of 'Whose locations, interests, discourses, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge are silenced and suppressed by taking the administrative standpoint on standpoint theory?' (p. 389). However, Harding fails to dismantle the presumed authority of Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hills Collins, Sandra Harding and Dorothy Smith as 'the theorists' here; and nor do any of these theorists object to their positioning as 'authorities', although Dorothy Smith certainly objects to the 'invention' of the category of standpoint theory under which major and minor figures have been assembled. One minor indication of the problem here is that a chapter I co-wrote with Sue Wise is footnoted in Heckman's article as 'part of' standpoint theory, whereas we rejected both this appellation and also the 'real' existence of something called 'standpoint theory'. See Susan Heckman, 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited', *Signs*, 22 (1997) pp. 341-65; Sandra Harding, 'Comment', *Signs*, 22 (1997) pp. 382-91; Dorothy Smith, 'Comment', *Signs*, 22 (1997) pp. 392-8.

[8] A partial exception here is the special issue of *Hypatia* concerned with so-called 'Third Wave Feminisms', which at points contains some extraordinarily American-centric observations and claims about this. Work within this draws substantially on Barbara Findlen (ed), *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (Seal Press, Seattle, 1995); and Rebecca Walker (ed), *To be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (Anchor Books, New York, 1995). See also the special issue in *Hypatia*, 12:3 (1997).

[9] These and related matters are discussed in Liz Stanley (ed), *Knowing Feminisms: On Academic Borders, Territories and Tribes,* (Sage Publications, London, 1997).

[10] Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciuousness and Feminist Research* (Routledge, London, 1983); Jackie Stacey, 'Feminist Theory: Capital F, Capital T' in Diane Richardson & Victoria Robinson (eds), *Introducing Women's Studies* (Macmillan, 2nd edition, London, 1987) pp. 54-76.

[11] Barbara Christian's extremely interesting discussion of 'The race for theory' has opened up useful discussion here, although paradoxically it has been accorded a kind of canonical status as a statement of a theoretical position in spite of its central argument resisting the 'race for theory'. See here Barbara Christian, 'The Race for Theory', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988) pp. 67-79.

[12] I am thinking here of the comment of many Chinese and Japanese graduate students in confronting the literature on 'difference' that this term actually means people who are black, and, more often than not, specifically people who are black Americans.

[13] Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry : Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (Norton, New York, 1986); Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: *The Science Question in Feminism* and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988) pp. 575-599. See also Liz Stanley, 'Methodology Matters!' in Diane Richardson & Vicky Robinson (eds), *Introducing Women's Studies* (Macmillan, 2nd edition, London, 1987).

[14] Heckman ('Truth and Method') notes this about 'standpoint theory' and, while I find the invention by commentators of standpoint theory every bit as annoying as Dorothy Smith does, although for somewhat different reasons, it seems to me that these epistemological ideas about 'knowledge itself' have a much wider feminist currency than this, and their implications are fundamental ones for *all* 'kinds' or 'types' of feminism (see Smith, 'Comment').

[15] They appear here in this form with the agreement of the people who responded, which was given after reading the full draft.

# The Eventually Untrue Adventures of Two Girls In Felicity:
## The Problem With Truth in *Dare, Truth or Promise*

**AMY HOPE JAMGOCHIAN**

> 'Surely one of the main criteria ought to be the book's suitability to the readership. In my opinion such material is inherently unsuitable. It is a sad reflection on the warped moral values that children are now confronted with, and such a choice of books only adds to the pressure they have to deal with daily.'
>
> (Christian Heritage Party leader Graham Capill on *Dare, Truth or Promise* winning The New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year prize in 1998)[1]

'I'm in love with that girl',[2] Louie Angelo says aloud to herself, when she realizes how strangely enthralled she is to be in a smelly gym watching Willa compete in a fencing competition. Louie's ostensibly uncomplicated statement illustrates four challenges in the novel *Dare, Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock: romance ('I'm in love'), adolescence (with a 'girl'), lesbianism ('I'm [a *girl*] in love with that *girl*'), and the structure of the closet (Louie relishes saying it aloud, but only says it to herself). The novel posits itself against the ubiquitous young adult hetero-romance genre and within a quest for the possibility of lesbian narrativity. These are daunting tasks. First, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it 'Heterosexuality [has] presented itself as the totality of Romance'.[3] Another critic attempts to describe the difference between the adult romances and young adult romances, claiming that the teen romances 'contain no sexuality'.[4] This interesting wording reveals the insidious inseparability of heterosexuality and romance. According to the ideology these books emanate from and furiously attempt to reproduce, heterosexuality *is* romance, and need not exist as a sexuality at all. 'Sexuality' in this view and in the above quote signifies heterosexual sexual intercourse (what else?).

A representation of a non-heterosexual romance must disjoin the complex historical binding of heterosexuality with romance. This problem is also one taken up by critics like Judith Roof who states, 'If the intertwined ideologies of narrative and sexuality produce the

metaphorical position of lesbian, narrative might not be the best venue for trying to change cultural ideas about actual lesbian people'.[5] Just as a lesbian romance is an oxymoron in heteroideology, so is a lesbian narrative an impossibility, in Roof's view. Moreover, a narrative in which an adolescent arrives at an identity category of 'lesbian' is read in such an understanding as a narrative in which a girl willingly inserts herself into the same heteroideology. Such complications, as I have mentioned above, are inherent to a lesbian young adult romance in the current climate. Yet adolescent suicide statistics in New Zealand belie such defeatism.[6] Not only does New Zealand repeatedly rank as having one of the highest teen suicide rates in an industrialised country, but an estimated third of all teen suicide attempts are by homosexual teenagers.[7] Judging from the furious conservative response when *Dare, Truth or Promise* won The New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year, representations of gay and lesbian teens must still be smuggled in to the public sphere. Theoretical musings about impossibilities of representation are therefore ineffective, if not deadly. I would like to argue that Boock displaces heteronormative narratives in *Dare, Truth or Promise* and creates a space for lesbian romance and sexuality which is fulfilled in the novel through performativity. At the same time, she addresses the adolescent desire for identity and the paradoxical workings of the closet through constativity.

The field of writing against which *Dare, Truth or Promise* places itself, the young adult heterosexual romance, is a large and challenging arena in which to attempt to make a space for a lesbian. Publishers of these novels sell millions of the books a year. Studies show that their adolescent readers often read an average of six young adult romance novels a month, and over a third of the books checked out of school libraries are these romances.[8] Some of the readers interviewed claimed that these books were far more important to their lives than any other reading they did. Teen romance fiction, clearly, has a strong influence over adolescents, but not necessarily in a straightforward manner. In her study of the romance genre, Janice Radway shows that romance novel readers are not passive consumers, but read the novels more critically than previous cultural theory had presumed.[9] Radway also argues that 'Romance reading addresses needs created in them but not met by patriarchal institutions and engendering practices'.[10] In other words, the novels reflect both the situations of the

readers and the ideologies by which they have been interpellated and even work to protest these positionings of women. At the same time though, they 'solve' the issues they raise by merely repositioning women 'happily ever after' in the very ideological space that caused all of their problems. This situation is compounded in the case of an adolescent readership. As Linda K. Christian-Smith explains, 'Romance fiction reading occurs at a time when young women are negotiating the relations of power and desire constituting their gender subjectivities'.[11] At this crucial moment in development, teenagers are heartily consuming romance narratives which reflect a narrow range of societal positionings available to young women, highly patriarchal gender roles they are supposed to strive for, and the normative heterosexuality they are expected to mimic. Despite the concomitant problems portrayed with these themes, once again the solution the books offer consists of a repositioning of the heroine in the same narrow heterosexual patriarchal ideology that generates the anxieties the books ostensibly allay. As much as the active reader may see through the hegemonic agenda of the novels, she is not offered any alternatives to the society they reflect. Instead, she is given strategies to dull her unanswered needs.

*Dare, Truth or Promise* attempts to answer the ideological paucities introduced by the teen heteronormative romance. A comparison yields many obvious differences. The two main characters of *Dare, Truth or Promise*, Willa and Louie, are clearly not obsessed with boy-catching. Nor are they bent on futures of marriage and children. They have career goals that they are pursuing instead, as well as serious hobbies and after-school jobs. Louie has a nuclear family, but Willa's mother owns a pub and her father is dead. While some of these contrasts merely betray the difference between mass-produced series novels and an author-inspired, self-published work, others are more clearly directed at the deleterious themes in the series novels. Neither Louie nor Willa worries constantly about her appearance or has a makeover or loses weight in order to invite love, a stock plot line in the heterosexual teen romances.[12] It is only when Louie and Willa are forced apart that Louie loses a dangerous amount of weight. Two of her friends (hetero-romance readers perhaps?) congratulate her, but Willa is concerned. Pam Gilbert describes another 'popular plot twist':

> Girls are 'worriers' who need to look after their girlfriends and boyfriends. They are 'helpers' who unselfishly do what needs to be done for others to find happiness – usually romantic happiness. By helping others, they, too, often find their own romance.[13]

In *Dare, Truth or Promise*, Willa initially suffers a similar 'codependency'. As her mother, Jolene, explains, 'She can't carry everyone's problems. She thinks she can though, like I do, and like Bliss [Willa's sister] does. It's a weakness in the women of this family'.[14] This character trait, modestly ascribed only to the women in Willa's family and not women in general, is one that obstructs Willa's pursuit of romantic love in the novel instead of enabling love (albeit damaging and unequal love) as it functions in the heterosexual romances. Willa has to firmly refuse to allow herself to be a 'helper' before she can have a relationship with Louie.

Marilyn R. Farwell, like many other critics, contends that 'the narrative system, not simply the character images, must be the site of transgression'.[15] In so far as the traditional narrative structure of building tension toward one final climax is said to be analogous to male-centered heterosexual sexual intercourse, *Dare, Truth or Promise*'s narrative structure can be argued to be analogous to an egalitarian version of lesbian sex. The book is written in third person and the chapters alternate point of view, back and forth from Willa to Louie, neither therefore narratively active or passive, top or bottom, giver or receiver. There are at least two 'climaxes': one when Willa's ex-girlfriend threatens suicide and another when Louie is in a car accident. Judith Roof would tend to relegate even this structure to heteroideology. She writes:

> Coming stories, even lesbian ones, are already the effect of a particular way of understanding a) that there should be cause and effect at all; b) that cause precedes effect; and c) that cause/effect relations ultimately produce something beyond themselves: pleasure, ending, reproduction, death.[16]

To the extent that these lesbian characters may be said to occupy a heterosexual narrative structure, however, this occupation effectively displaces the heterosexual characters and their narratives. In the same sense that a drag queen performatively destabilises and denaturalises the category of femininity, two girls in love can performatively lead to a reevaluation of essentialist notions of the heterosexuality of 'true'

romance.[17] The double move of inserting lesbians into the traditionally heterosexual romance form, and then shifting the form to fit and to reflect the lesbians' needs, acts to separate the normative coupling of heterosexuality and romance, while also countering the values in the narrative form of the romance genre.

The beginning and end of *Dare, Truth or Promise* are also non-normative. Instead of the usual romantic strategy of love at first sight, the book starts, 'There was a moment, later, that was a lightning strike. But the first time Louie saw Willa she had just begun the coleslaw'.[18] Louie is working at a fast food restaurant when her boss introduces Willa:

> Kevin presented Willa like a new car, smug; he steered her around the kitchen, hand pressed to her back, his eyes running over her face as if he were polishing the paintwork. Then he ran into Deirdre, and you could almost hear the brakes squeak.[19]

Louie is unimpressed with the automotive/heterosexual display her boss uses to introduce Willa and only warms to Willa when she threatens Kevin that if he continues his harassment, 'I'll cut off your goolies and sell 'em for chicken nibbles'.[20] These exchanges are indicative of the unromantic place to which the novel relegates heterosexuality. This displacement of heterosexuality at the beginning works to clear a space for the lesbian romance the book portrays.

While the conclusion of the book involves Willa and Louie vowing love for each other as in the conclusion of a typical hetero-romance, the narrative continues after this moment long enough to reinsert the displaced heterosexual narratives. In the two paragraphs that conclude the text the reader is given a recitation of closures of all the other narrative threads in the book. Most are heterosexual plots. One of the most successful heterosexual closures is that of Louie's father, Tony, who 'inspected his newly painted and repaired Mercedes and patted the steering wheel in relief'.[21] This continues the narrative thread of heterosexuality as automotive cathexis. Indeed, Tony's admission of a homosexual adolescent crush turns out to have been more automotive than anything else. '"And he had a car", Tony grinned ... "a Citroën"'.[22] The sexuality involved in heterosexuality in this case is shown to be less normative romance than a literal 'traffic in women' or a replacement of women with traffic.

The other successful heterosexual closure involves Jolene and

the co-owner of her pub, Sid. As Jolene describes their relationship, 'He's my best mate. And that's all ... you could wring his brains out and be left with a lump of ear wax.'[23] At the end of the novel, 'Jolene was confiscating a plate of chips Sid had helped himself to'.[24] This heterosexual union is a platonic and comfortable relationship of mutual protection in which Jolene is more often the protector. This loving heterosexual pairing is another instance of heterosexuality occupying a different space than the normative passionate romance.

The characters who work in the book more assiduously than Tony or Jolene to block homosexuality have less successful romantic closures: Louie's mother, Susi, cathects nervously and repressedly with her decorating magazine. Keith, who sabotaged Willa's first relationship, stalks a girl who resembles Willa, and Kevin, the harassing boss, is alone and revenged with bureaucratic woes. Finally, Cathy, Willa's first girlfriend, forms another dependency relationship, with her therapist, and is left in the act of writing her a 'long' letter. These conclusions appear to be neatly tit-for-tat. Yet this tidy scheme explores the possible outcomes of the dislocation of heterosexuality from romance, allowing for those heterosexuals most amenable to this scheme the most success in it. To the same extent that *Dare, Truth or Promise* separates the heterosexuality from romance, a reciprocal movement reveals some of the actual objects of relationships that operate under the alibi of heterosexual romance: ownership of women (like cars), comfortable but platonic partnership, bureaucracy, and attainment and showcase of wealth and status (Susi constantly redecorating her home). Displacing heterosexuality from its usual status in romance as the centre of all meaning, the narrative consciously relegates heterosexuality to the margins and reveals in these margins a heterosexuality possibly more familiar to the reader's eyes than the fantasy narratives of the romance genre.

By extracting romance from the grasps of heterosexuality and replacing the unhealthy operational modes of relationships in patriarchal heterosexuality with solutions to some of the issues elided in traditional romance narratives, Boock clears a ground for lesbian representation. The correct manner in which to achieve such a representation is a point of much contention. Gregory W. Bredbeck separates recent political views about the proper representation of homosexuality into two categories: 'queer critique' and 'gay critique', specify-

ing that gay critique is 'centralized by a programme of visibility and cultural integration'.[25] Queer critique, on the other hand, is a 'pure critique', which 'seeks to expose a system in its entirety *as a system*'.[26] I argue that Boock achieves a delicate balance between the two strategies, as contradictory as they may seem. While *Dare, Truth or Promise* always returns to a strategy of queer critique, it also allows in the narrative for what Bredbeck terms 'visibility', otherwise known as identity and self-signification.

The necessity for lesbian visibility in a book geared towards an adolescent readership can be understood by an argument queer theorist Julia Creet makes that 'Coming out for the adolescent lesbian marks a coming into consciousness of the incongruity of her sexual object choice with her social role. Identity is thus formed as a defense against the repression of what may be a continuous desire'.[27] Creet argues that adolescence marks the time of a sort of a second Lacanian mirror stage. At this moment the lesbian adolescent needs to achieve greater self-signification to ward off the consequences of refusal to name herself, while accepting a measure of psychic loss at the necessity of this identification.[28] However, Creet shows that this stage need not be seen as a naturalised understanding of lesbianism. It is rather a stage demanded by a psychic need generated by the normative essentialising notion of gender-oriented sexualities.

The novel presents lesbian self-signification and the denaturalisation of sexuality in several ways. First, the characters in *Dare, Truth or Promise* are mouthpieces for different homophobic naturalisation strategies. One is the old vampire story, with Willa as the vampire.[29] When Susi catches Louie and Willa in bed together, she tells Willa to leave and waits in the hall:

> There was a soft knock at her bedroom door and Susi appeared. She sat on the side of the bed and gave her a hot drink. She murmured words of reassurance, she smiled like a mother, she patted her arm. She made noises for a long time; once she sounded stern and forced Louie to look at her, but it hurt Louie's eyes. They were hot and burning, so she looked back into the icy glass where it was cool and there was no reflection of a mother.[30]

This scene is Susi's attempt to enact a metaphoric transfusion. Louie does not respond to this attempt, except to make a break from her mother by looking in a glass that does not reflect Susi. Louie's renun-

ciation of her mother can also be seen as her break into the symbolic order, the realm of language, that Louie only partially realises in this confused moment. Back at home, Willa despairs:

> With Louie, Willa had thought there might be a future, a chance – she'd trusted her. But it was exactly the same. Sicko Willa, corrupting poor, straight Louie. That's what her family would tell her, that's what Louie would believe, and maybe, maybe that was the truth?[31]

Willa begins to believe Susi's hasty diagnosis of the nature of their relationship, that it is only through Willa's vicious touch that Louie has fallen prey to this terrible phenomenon. Louie's parents then take her on vacation, where '[they] left her alone, convinced that time, sun and fresh fruit would do the trick'.[32] This move effects another metaphorical transfusion, this time concentrating on cleaning Louie's bowels and browning her skin. However, Louie becomes ill and near-anorexic as a result of the separation from Willa and the pressure to rethink her lesbianism, proving the ineffectiveness of this view.

A variation on the vampiric treatment of homosexuality is the view of the lesbian as a fallen woman.[33] Willa, who at the beginning of the book disdains alcohol and cigarettes because of her pub upbringing, does start drinking and smoking. She does not do so, however, until she has been separated from Louie. The novel shows Willa drinking and smoking only in order to block the constant heterosexuality being thrust at her. When her friend Marcus hands her a beer at a party, 'Willa took her time drinking the bitter liquid, thinking if she kept the can at her mouth, Marcus wouldn't be able to kiss her. Then she lit a cigarette on the same premise'.[34] Instead of degeneracy causing homosexuality, the narrative shows the 'bitter liquid' of homophobia, enforced heterosexuality, and prohibitions on homosexuality as causing degeneracy. The narrative reiterates this point when Susi tries to set Louie up on a date with a friend's 'lovely' son. Louie thinks, 'Stephen Dingwall was lovely all right – a lovely druggie who supplied half the school'.[35] Susi is so desperate to disprove Louie's homosexuality that she unwittingly pushes Louie towards this 'lovely druggie'.

Louie's doctor offers another 'solution' for Louie's lesbianism: 'Try not to dwell on it, and it will go away'.[36] Sid echoes this idea and 'puts it all down to raging hormones'.[37] These assertions speak to a homophobic strategy especially dangerous to proto-gay adoles-

cents, the 'just-a-phase' theory. As Sedgwick notes, this strategy allows for any number of destructive attempts on the part of adults to force the adolescent 'back' into heterosexuality (which is not often figured as a phase).[38] Louie's father also attempts this line of attack when he tells Louie about his false proto-gay experience with the Citroën owner. He tells her, 'It's easy to get caught up with someone strong-minded [Willa again figured as lesbian predator] and make too many decisions too early'.[39] Louie and Willa both attempt heterosexuality and are miserable failures, eventually proving the 'phase' claim to be wrong.

While exposing the fallacies of these different homophobic naturalising strategies, the narrative also shows lesbianism as a constructed category. This is achieved mostly through Louie, who has never been with a girl before. When she first realises how she feels about Willa, Louie says, 'I'm in love with that girl.' This statement has several emphases as I have mentioned above. First, that Louie is in love. Next, that Louie is in love with *that* particular girl, (and not just *a* girl). Third, of course, that Louie is in love with a *girl*. Finally, that it feels good to announce it. While it is inescapable that it should occur to Louie that this love is not heterosexual, this fact is jumbled with several others, equally important. When Louie tells her best friend Mo that she and Willa are together, Mo says, 'I just never knew. How could I have never known?'[40] Louie answers, '*I* never knew. Well, not properly. It just – happened ... the only other person I fancied was – don't tell a soul – Mrs. Ashton'.[41] In this answer Louie sounds for the first time like a coming out story. She pinpoints an old crush on a teacher as a proto-lesbian experience, in the typical coming out story move of reviewing the past through lavender-tinted glasses. Mo, however, bursts this naturalizing bubble. 'Mo laughed out loud ... "Oh, Louie, everyone's got a crush on Mrs. Ashton, that's nothing special".'[42] Louie eventually comes to a more serviceable solution about how to view her lesbianism. She finds a Marcus Aurelius quote, 'It loved to happen',[43] which she decides describes her situation with Willa perfectly. This quote exhibits a lack of agency, an indeterminate subject, and a vagueness that only work to specify the joy Louie feels in being with Willa. Instead of searching to define what the 'it' is that has happened, or *why* it happened, Louie locates the importance of her sexuality in that it occurs in a state of felicity. Later Louie quotes to Willa, '*What need have you of the black tents of your*

*tribe, who has the red pavilion of my heart?'* and explains to Willa, 'I have to give up the black tents'.[44] Louie does not see herself as moving from the heterosexual camp to the lesbian camp, but as giving up the notion of 'tribal identity' altogether for love.[45]

Father Campion, the priest Louie talks to, is another mouthpiece for this denaturalised sexuality. He tells Louie, 'It is my view that the issue is more a matter of love, than sexuality',[46] and even proceeds to describe his own passionate love for a man (Jesus). Later Father Campion voices the same opinion to Willa, in what appears to be unconscious wordplay. After Louie gets hurt in a car accident, Father Campion approaches Willa at the hospital and tells her, 'There's nothing internal.' When he sees Willa's confusion, he corrects himself, 'Nothing wrong internally, I should say.'[47] Although the priest's intended meaning has to do with injury and it is implied that Willa's confused interpretation has more to do with a frightening notion of total organ damage, the priest's first garbled statement also has ramifications in queer theory. 'Nothing internal' can also speak to the idea that there is no inner essence that specifies a person as male or female or, consequently, as straight or gay. Judith Butler writes:

> Acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.[48]

If there is 'nothing internal', as Father Campion says, no 'organizing gender core', sexuality is just a category used to control people.

In lieu of a dejected depiction of homosexuality that a story about naturalised lesbianism like *The Well of Loneliness*[49] portrays, *Dare, Truth or Promise* creates a more 'queer' shape of lesbianism, one enacted through performativity. This sexuality is thematised by the adolescent heterosexual mating ritual game, 'dare, truth or promise'. Each unit of the game unfolds as a step in the process towards a performative model of sexuality.

The first time the girls play the game, they both choose truth. Louie asks Willa, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' After saying no, Willa asks Louie, 'Have you ever been in love?' and although Louie answers, 'Since I was about twelve years old with someone or other',[50] she feels 'silly' about having said this. The truths the two girls tell are

not truths about their sexuality, but disavowals, refusals to affirm heterosexual truth. This first unit of the game is significantly *not* linguistically performative, but enacts the girls' understanding of each other as outside the heterosexual loop of signification. They do not come out, but simply disavow specific sexualities. Specification is not necessary for their attraction. Instead, they choose *not* to claim any sexuality.

Knowing these 'truths' or disavowals about each other galvanises their relationship. They fall in love and begin a relationship. The 'truth', as they perform it, is not that they are queer or are lesbians, but that they are in love with each other. This lack of need for self-signification can be seen as analogous to the Lacanian subject prior to naming by the Law of the Father.

The idea of lesbianism is irrelevant to Willa and Louie until others discover the truth about their love for each other. Their 'sexuality' formed in disavowal ends up failing though, precisely because the truth Susi and Tony see in Louie is *lesbianism*, their definition of which they refuse to accept as a signifier for their daughter. Because the girls cannot control the significations of their togetherness, the 'truths' that others view in their being together, they must move to a different performative stage for their sexualities to succeed. When pressed to accept the status of lesbian as 'truth', both girls hesitate. The strategies with which the parental and authoritative figures in their lives present lesbianism in order to negate it create in the word a denial of the truths with which Louie and Willa have hitherto defined themselves. At this point in the book Louie tries to gauge her sexuality:

> She looked at the figures walking on the beach: beautiful men, beautiful women. She tried to find them attractive; first men, their strong legs and bulky muscles, their tight bottoms and bronze shoulders. She watched them dive powerfully into the crashing sea, she watched them twist at the hips stitching up the waves on their surfboards. Then the women; their long slim legs and neat waists, the flight of their hair, the sway when they walked. But she felt nothing. She failed both tests. All she knew was that when she thought of Willa, her flaming hair and small kind hands, the soft smell of her neck and the gleaming oyster-coloured skin of her belly, Louie's head swirled and she felt as if she were falling from an aeroplane.[51]

Instead of being able to desire gender-specific images, Louie finds herself thinking about Willa's hair, hands, neck and belly. Louie's attempt to force her desire to co-ordinate with naturalised gender categories fails. Once Willa and Louie's relationship is public, though, they cannot control the proliferation of significations assigned to them and need to create a sexuality that is more than a disavowal to combat the homophobic responses they attract. This need corresponds to the lesbian adolescent need for identity and self-signification that I have mentioned above.

The failure of 'truth' as a performative mode of sexuality can also be viewed in terms of the word's historical weight. The idea of truth connotes the existence of a referent for every signifier. Requests for truth about sexuality, truth about gender, are demands for naturalisation, for the calling up of a core essence or a historical referent, which this book repeatedly refuses. While the girls both feel in their bodies a truth about desire for each other, this desire is always attached specifically to each other, and not to gendered possibilities. The most substantial truths they come up with are denials of other truths in this stage. This, however, proves to be a weak strategy for daily life. In fact, what this strategy amounts to is keeping their relationship a secret from all except those who they are sure will read their truth the same as they do. The collision of 'truth' with lying and secretiveness eventually starts to bother the two, before they are even caught together.

The first to choose 'dare' is Willa, whom Louie dares to take her clothes off. This occurs in a windy and cold carpark on their first date, though, so both know it is a joke, an intimation of the sexual tension between them. However, it establishes Willa as ready for risks, while Louie remains more comfortable with 'truths'. Willa makes several comments about it, 'Don't you ever choose dare?'[52] and 'You always say truth',[53] but Louie will not choose 'dare' until the end of the book. Because of this delay, 'dare' can be seen as a stage that Louie has to work up to with her sexuality and in her relationship with Willa. This work involves Louie's attempt to assess her culture's definition of 'lesbian'. It also involves events in which Louie helps others to shift their perception of the meaning of 'lesbian' or homosexuality, although some, like her mother, settle for uneasy toleration of Louie's lesbianism. Once these changes are in place, the stage is set for a sexuality beyond truth. At this point Willa dares Louie to

enact another heterosexual mating ritual, the date. Moving their relationship into the public realm opens it up to free-roaming signification, indicating that the girls are accepting lack of control over signification, but at the same time they are asserting a female-female relationship, lesbianism instead of their previous agreed upon 'truth' of mutual cathexis born in disavowal and fed in hidden trysts.

'Dare' is linguistically performative. When Louie finally picks 'dare', Willa responds, 'Come to dinner with me.' Although Willa leaves the performative unsaid, actually spoken it would read, 'I dare you to come to dinner with me.' In saying this, Willa binds Louie into a relationship of challenge. Louie is, once Willa has spoken these words, effectively dared. A dare, though, is not a promise but a test. Even after accepting Willa's dare, Louie must prove herself to have moved into the phase in which she is willing to articulate a sexuality instead of a disavowal, and live with the significations of others that she cannot control.

A lesbian couple performing ostensibly heterosexual rituals can distort the viewer's conception of the inherent heterosexuality of the form they are inhabiting, and a dare is linguistically performative. However, the action of the dare itself is not performative but constative.[54] Unlike the performative, the constative can be queried as true or false (True or false, does Louie go out on a *date* with Willa?). The constative is, however, not a historical or essentialist referent, but a social truth. It is the social prop of the performative, which permits the performative the extra force of meaning in its citationality. It is only within a network of constatives that the performative can function. Sandra Petrey explains that the constative works by 'denying representation's orthodox definition while perpetuating its orthodox form'.[55] Since Louie does agree to make the relationship public, she also agrees to accept a measure of definition by and within heterosexual and probably homophobic ideologies. Louie and Willa's decision to date in public within these ideologies represents their acceptance of the constative, the social world that is the system that names them, although they have discovered its lack of connection to any true referent. In this sense, Louie compromises her previous 'truth' method of avoiding induction into the symbolic order, in order to have a relationship in and with her culture. This compromise fuels the last phase of Louie and Willa's performative sexuality.

Louie passes the test of the date. Because Louie and Willa have now accepted the constative in their relationship and opened their relationship up to the names their society gives them, they have a new arena for self-definition besides the personal. This last performative step is 'promise'. Louie chooses promise in their game and Willa says, 'Promise to love me'.[56] 'Promise' is another linguistically performative word. However, it does not perform when Willa requests it. Willa is requesting that Louie instigate the performative this time. Louie says, 'I promise'. This exchange works like the classic example of performative language, the wedding vow, except it is not externally requested by a heteroauthority. It signifies a bond directly between Willa and Louie rather than one that ties the two together with a rope called 'state' or 'religion'.

This last performative unit reasserts the Willa and Louie's original emphasis on love rather than homosexuality. It determines once and for all that this novel is not a coming-out narrative. While the constative dare stage shows agreement with the need for the social identity assertion of narratives like coming-out stories, Willa and Louie do not conclude the narrative with self-naming. Instead they opt for this last assertion of inhabiting sexualities based on each other. This is not the same as their truth stage, however, because in the truth stage they disavowed any sexuality. In this new promise stage they publicly assert what will be read as homosexuality for better or for worse, and privately assert that they are bound together, but that this bind is of love and desire for each other, not one nameable by the construct of sexuality.

The weight the word 'promise' bears historically is one that can be dangerously weakened with repetition. Any performative also has escape hatches. If for instance, Louie refuses ever to see Willa again after this promise, her promise will become what J.L. Austin would term an '*infelicitous* performative'[57]. The sense in *Dare, Truth or Promise* is, however, that the fact that Louie has never chosen promise before indicates her seriousness about this word. She will only cite it if she means it. One of the historical values of the word promise is that it is *not* one of the classic performatives used in the wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony has a highly debated effect in its attempted inhabitation by homosexuals, many of whom consider the taint of divorce court, child abuse, capitalism, and all the other concomitant projects of patriarchal heterosexuality to render

the term too ironic to use productively.[58] 'Promise', instead, mimics the wedding ceremony, but places the burden of the bond on the Willa and Louie, rather than on a state apparatus. Its similarity in this context to the wedding ceremony allows Louie's use of 'promise' to borrow 'the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices'.[59] At the same time, though, Louie and Willa are not attempting to enact in their relationship a political performative that 'works' in Judith Butler's sense in that it 'draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized'. Instead, they are attempting to forge sexualities within and in terms of a relationship. The word 'promise' affords them a vague performative citation (and vague covering over) of the wedding performative but a concrete valuing of the love upon which they feel their relationship is based.

Like approximately two hundred teenage girls a year in New Zealand, Willa's ex-girlfriend Cathy attempts suicide.[60] She says later, 'I think I'm possessed or something.'[61] Cathy is a victim of having obtained all of her information about homosexuality from the church. Whether a pure representation of a lesbian is possible becomes a moot point in the face of such staggering self-destruction and widespread homophobic misinformation. Butler writes:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from *resources inevitably impure*.[62]

Perhaps Judith Roof is correct to think that lesbian narrativity is virtually impossible, that the impurities of society would inevitably infect the narrative and its politics. Even if this idea is true, Roof's suggestion, like the implicit advice offered by the heterosexual young adult romance, does not offer a viable solution for an adolescent lesbian like Cathy.[63] Instead, representation must involve a compromise. Boock uses the 'impure resources' of the heteronormative romance form to create a representation that, however infected with the taint of a heterosexist society, engages in the performativity that creates a unique sexuality out of the wreckage of both the marriage ceremony and the romance format. This representation salvages a measure of

these forms for usage in an adolescent lesbian format and works to dispute more damaging views of lesbianism in circulation. One major drawback of this model is that Louie and Willa's occupation of their performative sexuality is dependent on their being a couple. This sexuality is so specific to their case that it would wear somewhat thinner when applied to a single adolescent lesbian. While *Dare, Truth or Promise* remains a useful model of representation of a denaturalized lesbian sexuality, it remains to be seen how Boock could apply this model to a single lesbian adolescent, and twist the romance format one step further.

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**NOTES**

1 See <http://www.planetout.com/pno/newsplanet/article.html?1998/04/10/3>.

2 Paula Boock, *Dare, Truth or Promise* (Longacre Press, Dunedin, 1997) p. 55.

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer and Now', *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1993) p. 11.

4 Mariam Darce Frenier, *Good-bye Heathcliff: Changing Heroes, Heroines, Roles, and Values in Women's Category Romances* (Greenwood Press, Inc., Westport, 1988) p. 8.

5 Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1996) p. 123.

6 Public Health Commission, *Intentional Injury in New Zealand* (Public Health Commission, Wellington, 1995) pp. 22-23.

7 Martha Feinleib (ed), *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1989).

8 See Linda K. Christian-Smith, 'Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novels' and 'Constituting and Reconstituting Desire: Fiction, Fantasy and Femininity' in Christian-Smith (ed) *Texts of Desire: Essays on Fiction, Femininity and Schooling* (The Falmer Press, London, 1993).

9 Janice Radway, 'Reading the Romance' in Julie Rivkin and Michael

Ryan (eds) *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell Publishers, Inc., Oxford, 1998).

[10] ibid., p. 1043.

[11] Christian-Smith, p. 55.

[12] See Pam Gilbert, '*Dolly* Fictions: Teen Romance Down Under', in Christian-Smith (ed) p. 74.

[13] ibid.

[14] Boock, p. 153.

[15] Marilyn R. Farwell, 'The Lesbian Narrative: The Pursuit of the Inedible by the Unspeakable' in George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (ed), *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature* (The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1995) p. 167.

[16] Roof, p. 123.

[17] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, New York, 1990).

[18] Boock, p. 7.

[19] ibid.

[20] ibid., p. 10.

[21] ibid., p. 180.

[22] ibid., p. 130.

[23] ibid., p. 116.

[24] ibid., p. 180.

[25] Gregory W. Bredbeck, 'The New Queer Narrative: Intervention and Critique', *Textual Practice*, 9:3 (1995) p. 479.

[26] ibid., p. 480.

[27] Julia Creet, 'Anxieties of Identity: Coming Out and Coming Undone', in Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (eds), *Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects* (Routledge, New York, 1995) p. 190.

[28] This surrender to language is also similar to Lacan's conception of the function of symbolic castration, although Creet does not make this comparison. For an interesting view of the adolescent girl's different relationship to symbolic castration, see Judith Feher Gurewich's article 'Toward a New Alliance Between Psychoanalysis and Social Theory', in David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (eds), *Disseminating Lacan* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996).

[29] See Christopher Craft, '"Kiss Me With Those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in Elaine Showalter (ed), *Speaking of Gender* (Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., New York, 1989).

[30] Boock, p. 109.

[31] ibid., p. 113.
[32] ibid., p. 122.
[33] See Havelock Ellis, 'Sexual Inversion in Women', in Jonathan Ned Katz (ed), *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (Harper and Row, New York, 1983).
[34] Boock, p. 169.
[35] ibid., p. 163.
[36] ibid., p. 128.
[37] ibid., p. 116.
[38] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'How to Bring Your Kids up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys', *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1993).
[39] Boock, p. 131.
[40] ibid., p. 85.
[41] ibid., p. 86.
[42] ibid.
[43] ibid., p. 158.
[44] ibid., p. 177.
[45] This quote is interesting as well in that it rejects the word 'tribe' as a useful term for gay signification. While this seems an obvious exclusion from a perspective of cultural criticism, at least seven gay or lesbian publications have come out in America in the last five years which use the word 'tribe' in the title to signify general homosexual grouping. (The figure I quote is from the A Different Light queer books web page: <http://www.adlbooks.com>.)
[46] Boock, p. 155.
[47] ibid., p. 173.
[48] Butler, p. 136.
[49] Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Avon Books, New York, 1981).
[50] Boock, p. 42.
[51] ibid., p. 123.
[52] ibid., p. 42.
[53] ibid., p. 106.
[54] See J. L. Austin, 'How To Do Things With Words' in Rifkin and Ryan (eds).
[55] Sandra Petrey, 'Castration, Speech Acts, and the Realist Difference: S/Z versus *Sarrasine*', *PMLA*, 102 (1987) p. 161.
[56] Boock, p. 180.
[57] Austin, p. 98.
[58] Judith Butler writes, 'If the performative operates as the sanction that

performs the heterosexualization of the social bond, perhaps it also comes into play precisely as the shaming taboo which 'queers' those who resist or oppose that social form as well as those who occupy it without hegemonic social sanction'. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, New York, 1993) p. 226.

[59] ibid., p. 227.

[60] Public Health Commission, p. 23.

[61] Boock, p. 144.

[62] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 241. Emphasis mine.

[63] Roof, p. 123.

## CONFERENCE NOTICES

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# Book Reviews

## THE LOVING STITCH: A HISTORY OF KNITTING AND SPINNING IN NEW ZEALAND

**Heather Nicholson**

***Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1998***

*The Loving Stitch* is a passionate social history and a useful addition to the slim resources about our textile and garment heritage. Heather Nicholson is a staunch defender of and crusader for the craft of knitting, especially with wool fibre yarns, and pleas for us all to learn how to knit or to take it up again. She estimates that at the height of knitting's popularity in New Zealand half a million of us at least were knitters. However, while we still wear many garments of knitted fabric structures, hand-knitting and the garments thus created have become unfashionable, as manufacturers and importers have provided alternative knitted clothing at reasonable prices. Wool, especially that of coarser fibre diameter, has had a bad press for its prickle when compared to cotton or the synthetic fibres.

Nicholson provides a brief account of the European history of hand and frame-knitting, then concentrates on the New Zealand story, taking a more or less chronological approach from European settlement to the present in nine lively chapters. The last seven chapters are topic-based studies of yarn manufacture and retailing, knitting patterns (or recipes as Nicholson often refers to them), children's and men's knitting efforts, the contribution of many knitters to charity fund-raising, and knitting as a form of protest. The arrangement allows for much of Nicholson's wealth of research to be included, but does lead to some repetition, and a few strange anomalies in the text, where items are mentioned, but not explained until later in the book.

Nicholson's intimate knowledge of her subject provides those of us who have forgotten most of what we knew about knitting with many reminders, as well as considerable new information. Her explanation of garter making and wearing (p. 29) was succinct and picturesque. The extent to which nineteenth-century settlers spun their own yarn will never be fully clarified, but Nicholson makes a good case for its being part of many rural settlers' routine work (p. 42–3).

A major contribution to New Zealand's textile history is the charting of the rise and demise of nineteenth and twentieth-century knitting journals and recipes. Imported into New Zealand or mail-ordered from Britain from the 1880s were Weldon's and Leach's guides to needlework of all kinds, but Nicholson has also searched out women's personal collections of knitting recipes. After the Second World War a considerable number of local texts were produced for craft knitters and spinners, as New Zealand became a leader in spinning wheel production, dyeing and working with wool fibres.

Women have done most of the knitting in New Zealand, but much of it has been for males. Soldiers from the Boer War to World War II, explorers of Antarctica, and sportsmen have benefited from the comfort, warmth and protective qualities of woollen jerseys. The quantities of balaclavas, socks, gloves and scarves produced for the armed forces by family members or organised groups of knitters was phenomenal. Nicholson has combined official records with personal reminiscences to moving effect in the chapters dealing with knitting for the troops. The stories of dedicated spinners and knitters such as Harriet Gardner, who knitted socks throughout World War I, Amy Hutchinson, who experimented with dyeing using NZ native plants, and Aileen Stace, who organised the Eastbourne spinners, provide tantalising glimpses into women's lives. Also recorded is the substantial contribution of voluntary knitting done by New Zealand women for aid projects, CORSO and other funds. Charity knitting dates back to the first journals which contained patterns to allow middle-class women to knit for workers or the destitute.

In places, *The Loving Stitch* seems to be written for fellow knitters. Knowledge is assumed of some technicalities (a glossary is provided, but did not answer all my questions), and the significance of some people is unexplained. In other places the author's passion for quality hand-knitting and knitting design, and for suppliers to treat knitters as intelligent beings, is almost tangible. The book is an important contribution to our textile and garment history. While histories of textile manufacturers have been produced, this is the first attempt to document a source of textile and garment supply that has been almost invisible, especially in official records if not in Parliament.

JANE MALTHUS, *Clothing and Textile Sciences, University of Otago*

**THE SEA IS A JEALOUS MISTRESS:**
**'TO THYNE OWN SELF BE TRUE'**

**Denise Tilling**

***Butler Printing, 1998***

'... in February of 1969 I ran away to New Zealand to become a woman.'

Denise Tilling writes of her transition from boyhood in wartime England to womanhood in 1990s' New Zealand. It is a story of courage and determination: initially the determination to avoid cross-gendered feelings at almost any cost, and, finally, the determination to live openly as a woman.

A casual reader, who by-passed this book because of its uninviting cover and title, would certainly be missing out. Going beyond the cover and title, the reader encounters a story told with sensitivity, warmth and humour. In an age of ever-increasing public interest in transsexuality, this is perhaps the first transsexual autobiography to be published in New Zealand. Other New Zealand trans-biographical writings include the biographical work *Carmen* (1988).

Denise, born David, entertains the reader with David's endless efforts to avoid confronting his gender conflict from heavy drinking, through desperate attempts at marriage, and repeated escapes to sea. Despite being captivated by Denise's warmth and humour, one is frequently reminded of the deeper emotions at play. In recalling her story, the author skilfully interweaves the jovial, playful aspects of her personality with intensely painful recollections: memories of fear, doubt and the deep loneliness which accompanies self-denial.

As Denise's hormone treatment started to take visible effect, she knew that her life as a British Ship's Officer – one of the blokes, always in for a few drinks and a laugh – was about to shatter. Ultimately, her decision to undergo gender transition and settle in New Zealand was spurred on by a tragedy. During one of David's earlier shipping voyages, he had become friends with a Danish radio officer who, like David himself, secretly cross-dressed. David discovered their similarity too late

> Varne was quietly spoken and had this peaceful air about him which belied the turmoil that racked him from within. ... On three occasions Varne made abortive efforts to tell me something. On each occasion I recall that I encouraged him ... But on each occasion he would shake his head and say 'No, David, it's okay!'

At six o'clock one morning, when the Captain needed to send a telegram to Denmark and could not find Varne, David was summoned. Denise recalls finding Varne:

> I opened the door to find Varne lying in a pool of his blood. It spread across the white tiles starkly red, turning dark. I knelt down in his blood and lifted his head upon my knees. He stared up at me with a look of utter hopelessness in his eyes, and then he died. Then something within me died too. I swore ... that I would never ever commit suicide.

This author is not afraid to share with us the pain, passion, and intensity of her experiences. She tells us of her friendships with a tenderness surprising in one whose life had set out to harden her. She also tells of the relationships that went badly wrong – the wives left wondering for interminable months – as David struggled to be the 'man' everyone expected him to be.

Denise's work presents itself as a timely tale, in an era when the legal rights and psycho-medical 'treatment' of transsexual and transgender people are being debated internationally. Transsexuality is the topic of the decade. Discussions about transsexuality abound on the Internet, in academia, and in politically radical circles. The past four years has seen major companies publishing transgenderists' works. Titles like: *Gender Outlaw*, *Transgender Nation*, and *Transgender Warriors*[2] scream at us from the bookshelves, daring all people to consider the postmodern challenge to 'gender' that transsexuality may present. Questions that resonate between autobiographical works, such as Denise's, and academic or political writings include: Must one have sex-reassignment surgery to be considered as transsexual? What does it mean to live as the 'other' gender without seeking surgery? Is it more reasonable to consider transsexuality as a psychiatrically defined disorder or as a matter of personal identity? What does it mean to be a woman?

Initially, Denise intended to live as a woman without seeking surgical alterations, but after some time of living as a woman and undergoing hormonal changes, she became determined to pursue

surgical reassignment. She describes how her feelings about bodily transition changed:

> I had grown to hate [my penis] with an all-consuming hate that was painful in its intensity. I had to honour my commitment and have the damn' thing removed.

This book is intended for a broad audience. It could equally be informative for those who live their genders unquestioningly, inspiring to those who trans-gender, and thought-provoking for those wishing to develop a critical understanding of transsexuality.

[1] Carmen, *Carmen: My Life* (Benton Ross, Auckland, 1988).

[2] Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (Vintage Books, New York, 1995); Gordene Olga MacKenzie, *Transgender Nation* (Bowling Green University Press, Bowling Gree, 1994); and Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1996).

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**A FOUCAULT PRIMER: DISCOURSE, POWER AND THE SUBJECT**

**Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace**

***University of Otago Press, Otago, 1998***

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This is a brief and well-written book, intended as an introduction to Foucault's work for (mostly) an undergraduate audience. For McHoul and Grace, Foucault's analysis stresses the regional and microscopic particularities of power, its circulation, and the importance of 'attending to the practices and methods of power's exercise' (p. 89). However, as a primer to the concepts of 'discourse', 'power' and 'the subject' in Foucault's work, it is somewhat quirky because, rather than a simple overview, much of the second half of the book is an engagement with the feminist writings on Foucault. This slightly awkward combination is a result of (what the authors confess to being) the collaboration in book form of Alec McHoul's more generalised approach as a university teacher with Wendy Grace's dissertation on the feminist reception of Foucault. Grace's engagement with feminism and Foucault is also

the most compelling aspect of the book and the one on which I will concentrate in this review.

In the second and third chapters of *A Foucault Primer*, McHoul and Grace offer correctives to feminist readings of Foucault. Their argument is that, basically, feminists get Foucault wrong in a number of ways. The central shortcoming in the feminist interpretations of Foucault is their failure to fully grasp his notion of power. McHoul and Grace's major point is that, for Foucault, there is 'no *global* "ethos" indebted to a *generalised* "other"'(p. 122). In contrast, they argue, the feminist interpretation of Foucault still insists on a top-down version of power held by men over women,[3] This is not a new criticism of feminism's reading of Foucault (see, for example, the writing of Judith Butler, Jana Sawicki and Gayatri Chakravrti Spivak).

For example, they assess Lois MacNay's book *Foucault and Feminism* as failing to grasp Foucault's insistence on the specificities of power. McNay's argument is that men's power over women is both generalised and universal, while in contrast, McHoul and Grace contend that, for Foucault, power is a phenomenon which is differentiated historically: 'modern society heralds the existence, unique to itself, of a new "mechanism of power" ... into ensembles concerned with management and administration of "life"' (p. 62). Foucault, they argue, is concerned with the historical specificity of (female) subjects and thus rejects any general notion of patriarchy.

McHoul and Grace are disparaging of feminists' use of Foucault in theorising a relationship between bodies and power. Not only is McNay included in this critique but so too are Sandra Bartky, Rosalind Diprose and Rosie Braidotti. These scholars are charged with trying to 'make good Foucault's gender blindness' while, at the same time, incorrectly positing a general Foucauldian theory of relations of power and the body. Feminist authors do this by arguing that male disciplinary power in the form of normalisation produces female docile bodies. However, McHoul and Grace's point is that Foucault has never been interested in a general theory of the body (or even of power) but rather in the ways in which relations and techniques of power have changed such that our present conceptions and the material realities of the body, power and the subject come about. He interrogates the configuration of historical and social conditions in which bodies are enmeshed, thus his 'retheorisation of the concept of power cannot reveal to us how a "female" body is turned into a "feminine" one ...

What he *can* account for is why female subjects today are *different* from those in the past' (p. 75, their emphasis).

*A Foucault Primer* also argues that Foucault's account of resistance differs from the Foucault-inspired feminist accounts of Diamond and Quinby, or Bartky. While for the feminist scholars resistance is a reaction to pre-existing power, or something exterior to power, McHoul and Grace's reading is that in Foucault 'power is nothing more or less than the multiplicity of force extant in the social body' (p. 84). The conditions of existence of power consist of networks of struggles, confrontations, paradoxes, inequalities whereby both domination and resistances reside.

In the last chapter, McHoul and Grace tackle the feminist reaction to Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. They argue that while feminist scholars such as O'Farrell and McNay believe that Foucault's last work is a return to, or a refiguring of, the subject, his concern throughout his work was the historical conditions by which the subject came into existence. Scholars such as Diprose do not register Foucault's insistence that 'contemporary subjectivities and the ethics derived from them are based on scientific conceptions of "life" tied to recent devices of power' (p. 120-1) Her understanding is dominated by logocentrism as an elementary relationship to which subjectivity can be reduced.

Are McHoul and Grace right and feminist scholars wrong? There, certainly, are difficulties in the ways feminists have commandeered Foucault's work, often utilising less than subtle renderings of his account of power and its effects. Often it seems that the naming of Foucault is now purely a way of providing feminist academic credentials. On the other hand, McHoul and Grace are so wedded to the correctness of Foucault's account that they cannot/do not pick up on the paradoxical way in which Foucault proposes no 'outside' to power, while at the same time setting up the erotic (*ars erotica*) as something exterior to *scientia sexualis* (sexuality as we now know it).

Interestingly, McHoul and Grace only touch on (in the introduction) what I consider to be one of the most promising aspects of Foucault's work for an intervention into feminist scholarship. McHoul and Grace pick up on Dreyfus and Rabinow's take on Foucault's work as 'beyond structuralism and hermeneutics'. Feminist scholars can often accept a 'beyond' structuralism. But in their engagement with Foucault, a hermeneutic approach is often central. Much of the femi-

nist use of Foucault (particularly in empirical ethnographic work) elides critique of the phenomenological approach which gives priority to a self-conscious subject. In contrast, Foucault views subjectivity not as liberation, but rather as subjection, a prison-house of self-reflection. This is an area ripe for further (feminist/Foucauldian) analysis.

However, as a note of warning, feminists should be properly wary of a too easy dumping of their central concerns and concepts. Their readings of Foucault are a way of marking the ambivalence to the all too easy discarding of the universalising ethos of Western philosophy which disavows women's placement as an underlying geomorphic structure of otherness. Of pivotal importance to the feminist project, this seems to have escaped *A Foucault Primer* and is, thus, its chief problem.

[3] Lois MacNay, *Foucault and Feminism* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992).

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**THE DICTIONARY OF NEW ZEALAND BIOGRAPHY. VOLUME FOUR. 1921–1940**

**General Editor: Claudia Orange**

***Auckland University Press and Department of Internal Affairs, Auckland, 1998***

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Reviewing a volume of the *Dictionary* is unlike reviewing any other book. Some reviewers, it is rumoured, read the volumes from cover to cover. Most, I imagine, dip, both purposefully and serendipitously. To review *Volume Four*, which includes people whose major activities occurred between 1920 and 1940, I used the notes provided by the *Dictionary* team, including its assessment of 'key' people. There are 27 'key' people: 9 of them are women. At 33 per cent , women are more fully represented among the 'key' people than by their 31 per cent of the total entries. Women judged as 'key' to the period include Maud Basham, Jean Batten, Robin Hyde, Ngaio Marsh and Miriam Soljak. Reviewing their entries as my starting point, I then read the first entry for a woman for every letter of the alphabet, in the process turning over each page and reading other entries as they caught my eye. Finally, I used the categories index to identify

trends that might be significant and individuals who might have been overlooked.

The *Dictionary* project, established over fifteen years ago, has the business of collective, dictionary-style biography down to a fine art. Each volume is a slice of New Zealand history, charting change, establishing continuities, reminding us of people who have become icons, those half – and those mostly- forgotten. *Volume Four* roughly covers the period between the wars. The decades are disparate in nature. The 1920s are usually seen in New Zealand history as quietly desperate, a lost time. In contrast, the 1930s are seen as momentous, with formative economic depression, social conflict and political change.

Claudia Orange's editorial identifies sport, science, the media, technology, the arts, and politics as emerging or changing areas of importance. Women's activities are said to be expanding. For a review in this journal it seemed appropriate to examine these claims in particular.

One might expect that the heavy loss of male life during World War I would bring women into the limelight in this period. There would be fewer talented men to take the high positions, proportionately more women who might embark on careers. The foundation laid by the girls' secondary schools and the universities from the 1870s might have produced a generation of highly educated young women who could engage in the emerging areas of importance. So, how do women fare in these new arenas? Were they making their way at the 'cutting edge'? And what sort of lives did these significant and representative women lead?

The first point to note is that the proportion of women in *Volume Four* is only marginally larger than that in *Volume Three* (31 per cent compared to 30 per cent). The second point is that they are concentrated in three categories: community service and welfare, health, and education. One hundred and thirteen individual women, 60 per cent of the total of 187, are listed in these three categories. The categories of community service and welfare (which are combined) and health are overwhelmingly populated by women – in the former 64 per cent and in the latter 66 per cent of the entries. Education is less dominated by women, because, although there are plenty of women teachers, they are far outnumbered by men in the sub-categories of

educational administrators and university lecturers and professors. Because individuals can appear in more than one category, there is some overlap among these three categories. For instance, 40 per cent of teachers and nurses also win a place in the indices of community leaders and workers. In this way we can see a strong continuation of women's nineteenth-century activities in teaching, health and community work. In these areas women were highly successful.

If there are continuities, what about the role of women in the newer areas of significance, especially in sport, science, and communications? In sport and recreation, ten women make the grade in 70 biographies; in science six in 44. In the previous volume ten women were also listed in sports and recreation. Four of the ten sportswomen in both volumes were mountaineers, a rather isolated but hugely challenging activity where the individual is pitted not so much against other sportspeople as against nature. It seems to be a sport that takes organisation and stamina – things that women were practised in. Two of the others in *Volume Four* are the tragic Auckland Lumley twins, rising sports stars, killed in a car crash at eighteen. Would they have made the *Dictionary* if they had lived? The scientists have increased their numbers from one between 1900 and 1920 to six between the wars. Three were highly educated, skilled and had successful careers. A fourth, with solid degrees and a good publication record, fitted a series of part-time and temporary teaching and research positions around her family. One, Perrine Moncrieff, was a self-trained ornithologist and Amy Castle was trained as an entymologist on the job in the Dominion Museum, becoming highly professional before being retrenched during the Depression and fading from public sight.

However in the emerging area of media and communications women did break down barriers. Broadcasting and journalism provided opportunities for women. Broadcasting is an entirely new subcategory and seven women, including the incomparable Maud Basham, Aunt Daisy, are among 26 broadcasters in the *Dictionary*. Journalism was not a new profession for women – there were five women among 27 journalists in *Volume Three*. But there are now 17 out of 41, an astonishing 41 per cent . Some women journalists were drafted into the women's and children's pages – there are a number of 'Aunty Dots' among them – but one must remember that such pages were very important to the readers and to the financial viability of

the inter-war newspaper. Other women journalists published local newspapers and contributed to a range of urban and specialist publications.

Where else were the women? We are often told that literature in this period was dominated by women. However women comprise only 21 per cent of the literature and scholarship category, dominating among novelists, producing no critics, no ethnologists and only one historian. They are more numerous among artists and craftspeople where they rate 39 per cent . In national politics only the two women MPs, Elizabeth McCombs and Catherine Stewart, and the two members of the Legislative Council, Mary Anderson and Mary Dreaver, appear. In local politics there were more women, but still only six out of 23.

The *Dictionary* confirms the conventional view that women did not succeed in markedly altering their status and role in the inter-war period. This should not detract from the stories of the women who do appear or from the assertion that women have a significant history in this period. The women here are remarkable and significant. That is what a dictionary of national biography is about, despite the 'subversive' intent of our own *Dictionary*. But the trajectories of the lives of remarkable and significant women were very different from the lives of other women. In a period when most women married, entries in the *Dictionary* record over and over again 'she never married', or 'she remained single'. Others record lives of late achievement, attained after the death of parents or of husbands who had been cared for. The domestic orientation of women's lives continued to prevent all but a few from entering the arenas of public significance. The *Dictionary*, while illuminating the individual life, also points to the patterns of the past.

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**Contents**



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