

Editorial

Feminist writing is alive and well in Aotearoa/New Zealand and still relevant to women's lives. The publication of our last issue 18:2 Women, Work and Welfare, in Summer 2004–5, coincided with national policy debates around women and paid work and in particular, lone mothers' rights to benefits. This sparked interest from the press and radio in our journal, and a number of interviews followed which allowed contributors and editors to reach a wider audience.

So, now a warm welcome to the first general issue from the current collective at Massey University. This issue covers a wide field and contributors engage in scholarly discussion around a number of intriguing questions facing women. How might Maori women's traditional role of *kaitiaki* (guardianship) shape their response to the GM debate? What are the ethnic and gender biases in science? Is science heterosexist? Who bears the costs of motherhood, and can women be compensated for years spent on non-market caregiving activities? Do images of women vigilantes contribute to feminist social change?

Continuing some of the themes addressed in the last issue of the journal, Ee Kheng Ang and Celia Briar show how women's lives are shaped by the gendered nature of paid (and unpaid) work. Drawing on research with 'returners' (women returning to paid work after a 'career break' to have children) and employers, the authors draw attention to the reduced pay and status of women after taking time out of paid work. This has implications for women's economic citizenship. The article concludes with a number of concrete policy suggestions as to what governments can do to assist mothers returning to work.

Catherine Iorns Magallanes' article, 'Violent women in film: Law, feminism and social change', provides a wide-ranging discussion of representations of violent women in contemporary Hollywood films. Catherine's work considers broad trends rather than the detailed analysis that is used in some approaches to reading film representations. She considers how representations of violent women have changed over time, and how some recent feminist readings have lauded the representation of stronger, more powerful images of women. As a particular focus for her concerns, Catherine considers rape-revenge narratives. The questions she raises about the consequences of such

narratives and their representations of individual acts of revenge for feminist social change are compelling. How do these stories, and the images of vengeful women that they promote, contribute to feminist social change agendas? Is it possible that they may undermine strategies that feminists have engaged successfully towards social change – most especially the influence of feminist advocacy on legal change? These are critically important questions, and Magallanes' arguments are timely.

Jessica Hutchings makes a strong case for the urgent need for a distinct *mana wahine* discourse within the debates currently surrounding genetic modification within Aotearoa New Zealand. She argues that *mana wahine* concerns in relation to GM differ significantly from those of mainstream Maori because these have been 'colonised by colonial and patriarchal ideologies'. Drawing upon her experience with Nga Wahine Tiaki o te Ao, a Maori women's group formed in response to this debate, Hutchings emphasises Maori women's traditional role of *kaitiaki* (guardianship) and their connection to Papatuanuku to argue for an explicit and prominent *mana wahine* voice within the GM debate.

Noting the ways in which neo-colonial patriarchal ideologies have been (and are still) used to discredit and silence the voices of *mana wahine*, Hutchings adds to the work of others such as Aroha Mead, Leonie Pihama and Annette Sykes (among many others) in drawing attention to the threat posed to indigenous knowledge by the life sciences – and particularly biotechnology. It is not, however, science *per se* that Hutchings is rejecting in her discussion. Rather she is suggesting an opening to debate of questions about what (and how) science can contribute to Maori development in a way that both protects the environment and respects *tikanga*. Her contribution to this debate includes a proposed 'Kaitiaki Charter for Science' – a document setting out the boundaries and aims of scientific enterprise that protects both the earth and indigenous knowledge.

From the 1970s feminists have debated the merits of 'good' and 'bad' science. If traditional science is inherently gender-biased, is a gender-neutral science possible or even desirable? What might a 'feminist science' look like? Alongside such concerns have been fundamental debates around the nature of sexual difference and the nature and causation of diverse (non-heterosexual) sexualities. Sara MacBride-Stewart's article 'Health and Biotechnology in Le Vay's

Queer Science traverses these debates in an interrogation of the claim made by Simon Le Vay in his *Queer Science* (1996) that biotechnology can play a positive role in determining a biological basis for homosexuality and thereby contribute to the elimination of oppression against gays. MacBride-Stewart meticulously deconstructs Le Vay's argument that research into homosexuality has been characterised by 'bad science' and, in the process, demonstrates how Le Vay's account of the materiality of homosexuality renders gender almost completely indistinct. At the heart of MacBride-Stewart's critique of *Queer Science* is a privileging of science, men and materiality over social constructionism, women and the social. Drawing on her own research on lesbian health, MacBride-Stewart exposes the gendered binary nature of Le Vay's arguments and questions the efficacy of biotechnology as a vehicle for the removal of stigma and discrimination against lesbians and gays.

We hope you enjoy this issue. We also look forward to receiving more articles for future issues – women and violence, women and spirituality and the next general issue. Remember to renew your subscription!

And now a date for your diaries: The WSA conference 2005 will be held in Auckland, on November 25–27. The theme of this conference is based on the notion Sustaining Women, Regenerating Feminism. See you there.

Celia, Jenny, Leigh, Ang, Mandy and Lesley.