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WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION (NZ) (Inc.)

This 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. Annual subscription: $16.50 or hardship: $5.50 (both include GST).

Enquiries to: PO Box 5067, Auckland, New Zealand.

Annual Conference: The Association holds an annual conference where members present the latest feminist research and discussion papers, and workshops explore issues important to women. The *Conference Papers* are published annually. Members receive a discount for the conference and the *Conference Papers*.

Newsletter: A quarterly *Newsletter* containing local and overseas news, book reviews, conference reports etc. is sent to all members.

Family Language: Keeping Women Close to Home

Margot Roth

The effect of language on our ideas—or the power of naming—is a topic which has concerned feminists for a long time (e.g. Kramarae and Treichler, 1985; Miller and Swift, 1989; Spender, 1980; Tuttle, 1986). However, some males are still inclined to advocate fraternal solidarity with the rest of mankind, while some women continue to defend their preference for being Mrs-and-proud-of-it.

Sometimes accepted and acceptable language is actually at odds with, or leaves out, the facts it allegedly conveys. For example:

> By emphasising the friendship and common interests or concerns among men, the gendered culture facilitates the maintenance of the egalitarian ethos which is characteristic of New Zealand life (James and Saville-Smith, 1989:10).

Thus the claim that we are all New Zealanders, all with the same opportunities, a-historically sidesteps the real differences that continue to divide us. So the clever phrase, the language that everyone 'knows' to be merely plain common sense becomes problematic when it is incorporated not just into general conversation and thinking, but into policy-making as well.

Hoagland (1989:14), discussing language as a 'tool of domination',

says:

> ...the use of language in structuring reality and trapping us in oppression is not separate and distinct from the manipulation of the material conditions of our existence to structure reality and trap us in oppression. For example, the process of colonisation includes sending in Christian missionaries to write down and categorise the language of colonised peoples. The missionaries set up schools where the children are forced to learn their 'native' language through Christian and colonial categories (for example, deities assume a masculine gender; 'ownership' replaces 'sharing')....

One of the most tortured and tortuous words to affect our lives, to provide us with rewards and punishments — guilt guilt guilt — is 'family'. Like 'community', it is ideologically driven, with messages that vary according to the social and geographical location of the receiver. The two words, in fact, may be used interchangeably, as in the phrase 'community care', which often means that a family member, usually a woman, takes on the unpaid, possibly untrained and not totally willing care of a person/people. Gordon (1986) points out:

> The concept of family autonomy, in fact, as it is manipulated in contemporary political discourse, usually functions in opposition to women's rights to autonomous citizenship.

Particularly for women, then, 'the' family carries far too heavy a burden as an ever present focus for concern, blame, disappointment, expectation and (very occasionally) praise. It is presented as both problem and solution. Both aspects appear in an appeal for funds made in the last few issues of *Grapevine*, a free monthly Christian magazine distributed throughout Auckland.[1] The coupon to send with the donation is headed "YES! I agree with you — the family is worth fighting for.' The text of the advertisement says:

> ...have you seen what's happening in Godzone? Families are struggling... It's all getting a little too much: the pressure to make ends meet, the strain of living alongside one another, plus those negative influences that seem to work against us — spoiling our households and souring our relationships. It's hardly surprising that some families are caving in... if New Zealand is to become strong again, the place to start is *at home!*... Month after month, for the past nine years, this magazine has *fought for the family*... injecting fun and hope and wholeness into homes all over town (Cooney, 1990).

Heartfelt though this assessment might be, like other such guidelines it conflates 'home' and 'family' as if the two were permanently intertwined.

The reality is far more complex. (Living accommodation that consists of an unheated garage or a single room shared by children and adults is hard to equate with the notion of 'home'; state houses and those on the average building sub-division were never designed to fit a Maori family's flexible living patterns.)

Concepts such as 'home' which are associated with 'the family' are largely prescriptive, while remaining very blurred round the descriptive edges. Gilling (1988) supplies a varied list of definitions brought to the Royal Commission on Social Policy, the most sensible of which seems to come from the Social Advisory Council; it begins: 'The meaning of family varies with the occasion, the context and the speaker'. Unfortunately, any or all of these are likely to be hung about with spoken and unspoken constraints of ought, must and should. Consequently, people often think that the fault lies with themselves rather than with the imagined ideal, when their day-to-day experiences of kinship seem to fall short of widely canvassed standards of reciprocal devotion.

There may also be conceptual confusion. 'What a shame those two haven't got any family' or 'When are they going to start a family?' are implied criticisms of heterosexual couples, who may well have siblings, parents, grandparents, nieces and nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles — but 'no family of their own'. If and when the couple do get around to it, they may mention that 'there's a family on the way'.

The anguished lengths to which people will go to achieve this goal include expensive, gruelling and not very successful medical procedures such as in-vitro fertilisation, and expensive, gruelling travel as far away as Rumania to adopt a baby. (Television recently showed a New Zealand couple back home with their Rumanian infant after they had spent fifteen thousand dollars; the happy new mother said she would have sold everything or given up her career 'to have a family'.)

Then there's the 'family man', a product whose development as a New Zealander is traced by James and Saville-Smith (1989:37-41). This phenomenon is not an intrinsically desirable male attribute but an optional extra worth bonus points for his dependants: '...shows more concern with other members of the family than is normal' (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985:162). There is not, of course, any kind of comparable woman, because females are assumed to live out their lives within and for the family. Thus we have 'family planning', a phrase which throws a ring of competence around problematic areas such as sexuality, intercourse, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing and menopause. It also embodies an assumption that women must take responsibility for avoiding/not avoiding pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. For, in what James and Saville-Smith describe as the

practices of our gendered culture (pp. 47-60), women as God's police of the family ideal must be both primary health guardians and moral arbiters.

Future families need to be planned too. The expectations placed on girls as young wombs in need of care and protection were exemplified by the curious policy of our Health Department which immunised eleven year old girls against rubella, but not boys, although immunisation programmes designed to eradicate a disease usually involve all the particular age groups at risk.[2] (There is a faint echo here from the 1869 Contagious Diseases Act, which provided for the compulsory medical examination of women, but ignored the possibility of venereal infection among men.) This exercise was accompanied, until the very recent law change, by a policy of no contraceptive advice. So young women have been taught from an early age to expect the eventual acquisition of a foetus which must be kept safe from them (or from their rubella), while they are really not entitled to knowledge that will help to protect their own health.

Popular descriptive language often reinforces the status of the family as automatic dispenser of mental and physical health, moral and social education and emotional welfare. For instance, 'extended' and 'nuclear' have become part of an exercise in comparative nostalgia rather than a process of clarification — although the Social Monitoring Group provides a specific definition of 'extended families' (Davey and Mills, 1989:147). But the unofficial, what-everyone-knows use of 'extended' draws us back to a mythical golden age when we all lived in the country off the land with Grandma and Grandpa and lots of loving children with everyone showing respect and knowing their obligations to everyone else. In fact, as early as 1846 our politicians introduced an Ordinance for the Support of Destitute Families and Illegitimate Children, which made relatives of the destitute legally responsible for their upkeep. Women and men were equally liable — but to label as criminal those unwilling or unable to provide financial support for kith and kin is unlikely to strengthen family ties. This was also a monocultural reflection of the insecurity of many Pakeha families in a colonial setting. Such a law was unlikely to have any relevance for the Maori, traditionally bound up in mutual reciprocity.

Tennant (1989:146) disillusions us about the good old days:

> Since men aged sixty-five and over were four times more likely than women to come into the 'unmarried' category by 1901, this rapidly increasing elderly population contained a high proportion of men without wife or children. Whatever the emphasis in New Zealand on family support, the fact was that many elderly

> colonials had no close family on whom to call in time of destitution. Given the mobility of New Zealand's Pakeha population throughout the nineteenth century, others had probably distanced themselves from their kin and would not invoke family obligations unless forced to do so.

The a-historical account of a legendary past also assumes that universal linear changes to family structures evolve, over time, into today's allegedly typical 'nuclear' family — the heterosexual couple plus children — described by Luepnitz (1988:111) as 'patriarchal but father-absent'. But in New Zealand, as elsewhere, there has never been only one type of family which 'should' be THE model to which we aspire. Down the ages various family groupings have responded to the political economy of their time and place by adopting a range of survival strategies. Examples are changes in the most common age of marriage, numbers and spacing of children, whether and which children stay or leave home and at what age (Gittins, 1985; Luepnitz, 1988; Smith, 1983). The Social Monitoring Group provides a contemporary example: between 1976 and 1986 the proportion of 15-19 year olds living with their parents increased:

> This may be associated with a deterioration in the income of young adults, itself linked to unemployment and a decline in full-tine paid employment (although the proportion employed part-time has increased). Maori and Pacific Island Polynesian young people are less likely to be in paid employment than Pakeha ...(Davey and Mills, 1989: 'Summary').

Family togetherness in one household, then, may be economically compulsory, rather than a preferred option. Davey and Mills also ask, pointedly (1989:136):

> Does the increased proportion of Maori children, young adults and old people living in extended families indicate that they have achieved their cultural preferences for household living? Or is the trend a result of economic hardship, which prevents people from forming their own households?

Gilling suggests there is a common belief that the nuclear model 'is the normal or natural family'. In fact, she says, in 1986 this category of household accounted for only 37.6 percent of all households. The Department of Statistics describes a one-family-only household as consisting of a husband and/or wife with or without unmarried children of any age living at home: the largest category (68.7 percent) of all households in 1986.[3] But about one in three families consisted of a couple without children at home and in 1986 one out of every five adult women was a spouse in a couple-only family. (It is interesting that the official

language of record turns a heterosexual pair into a family unit: homosexual and lesbian couples, presumably, are not so transformed.)

The fastest growing *household* (up from 15.6 percent to 19.4 percent between 1976 and 1986) is the one-person-only type. In 1986 three out of every five such households were occupied by women, and two of these three women were aged 65 and over. The fastest growing *family* category is the single-parent household which, in the decade from 1976, increased from approximately 8 percent to 11 percent of all households. Here again women outnumbered men — by four to one in this case. Common perceptions like those of *Grapevine* that family life is not what it was are of course true: we have a relatively static birthrate, increasing numbers of unpartnered or single mothers, fewer occupants in more houses, rising marriage dissolutions, an increased life expectancy (for Pakeha and Maori women 77 and 71 years of age respectively, for men 71 and 67), and changing employment (and unemployment) patterns. We also have better ways of collecting and collating more accurate information.[4]

The labels and tables of the statistics cannot, of course, give us the true picture of the extent to which family members dispersed over different households regularly exchange news, goods and services. For example, today's children are likely to have a longer acquaintance with their grandparents than they were in the past, when people died at much younger ages. At the same time, a parental break-up may be as effective as death in banishing a set of relatives, including grandparents, from some contemporary children's lives. According to the Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988: Vol I:158):

> ...it has been estimated that about 38% of children born in 1977 could expect to spend some time in a 1-parent family by the age of 16; and that well over half of the children born into a 1-parent family, or one where the parents are not legally married, could expect to experience at least 2 changes of family circumstances...by the same age...

As historians like Tennant tell us, one-parent (usually female) families are not a new feature of the New Zealand landscape. She suggests there are recurring attitudes as well:

> Notions of discipline, less eligibility and deservedness, and the fear of pauperisation and of inbred degeneracy, are part of the heritage of our welfare state. These ideas made the experience of charitable aid a humiliating one for many in the past, and still they surface. The unemployed and single parents in particular have borne the brunt of this suspicion and of administrative inquiry (Tennant, 1989:201).

There has, however, been a tiny lessening of suspicion of single parents with the removal of some judgemental language from the 1988-1989 *Yearbook*. Up until the 1986 census, the Statistics Department has distinguished between two-parent and one-parent families as 'complete' and 'incomplete' — ideological rather than factual categories in line with Gordon's finding that: 'a female-headed family is, in the common usage, a broken, deformed or incomplete family'. One could speculate that the increase in actual numbers of solo fathers (though proportionately much fewer than mothers) has led to a slight official reappraisal: Man Alone after all (especially as father and Family Man), is something of a complete hero, while woman alone (especially as mother) is assumed to be in urgent need of attention.

As the households of unmarried partners continue to proliferate and married partners continue to dissolve their marriages, two categories in particular seem to receive less notice than previously in the recording of family and household statistics. One is 'ex-nuptial child', the other is 'unmarried mother'. The Social Monitoring Group commented in its first report (1985:16): 'Despite the correlation of ex-nuptial birth with various types of disadvantage...marital status of parents may be less significant than socio-economic factors'. In fact, whether one-parent families are headed by the unmarried, divorced/separated or widowed, they are, on average, badly off compared with other families with dependent children. In 1986 the one-parent family's median income was 41 percent of that of two-parent families and 'the median income for sole mothers was 43 percent below the median for sole fathers...' (Department of Statistics, 1990:78-79). Associated with low income is lack of access to, for example, home ownership, cars, telephones, and household appliances (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988: Vol.I, 170).

According to the Royal Commission (Vol I:151), a 'disproportionately large number of single parents are Maori women', aggravating the already deprived economic status of Maori and Pacific Island Polynesian families with dependent children who 'remain concentrated in the lower income groups' (Davey and Mills, 1989:137). In the final stages of the life cycle (have you noticed women tend to have life cycles while men have careers?) the Maori and Polynesian over 60 age group 'have little or no wealth accumulation in Pakeha terms' (Davey and Mills, 1989:141). This fact, together with a shorter life expectancy than Pakeha, may partly explain why only one in 100 of the elderly women living alone in 1986 was Maori or Pacific Island Polynesian, although 'elderly people from different ethnic groups have different choices as to where and with whom they will live' (Department of Statistics, 1990:45).

It seems obvious, then, that the shortcomings of many individual lives are not necessarily the result of family 'failure', but stem from poverty and inequality. The other side of the coin is to elevate the status of the Maori family by talking sentimentally about 'whanau' and 'iwi', and wishing that the Pakeha elderly could be accorded as much respect as their Maori contemporaries and so on and on — while totally ignoring the fact that 'Maori people are disadvantaged in terms of incomes, housing, employment opportunities, and health status' (Davey and Mills, 1989:Summary).

Plunket Society founder Sir Truby King was only one of many advocating social reform by means of parent education. Gilling says there were nearly 200 submissions to the Royal Commission on Social Policy that mentioned it: 'Many people considered that today's social problems, particularly violence, are largely a result of poor parenting'. Oakley (1990) comments on '...a political invective of *parental* responsibility' which, she says, really means 'maternal', and shows that 'public policy only cares about children sufficiently to make them "someone else's business" '. The word 'parenting' itself is an interesting example of language structuring reality. It tells us that two parents are equally involved with looking after their young; yet, says Oakley: '...it's almost the essence of good fatherhood that a man abandon his children to the care of someone else — their mother'.

Surely what is being talked about here is the ability to 'mother' or 'nurture', and, until the practice mirrors the theory, it would seem far more accurate to call 'parenting' skills 'mothering' skills. This is unlikely to happen so long as the concept of family is based on notions of gender inequality; the target of much political invective is actually a mother, especially when associated with or 'marked' by words such as 'lesbian', 'solo', 'working', 'teenage', 'in-law'. (Comparable adjectives applied to a father hardly compare in vindictiveness.) Criticism of women as deviant mothers is nothing new:

> ...from the 1880s...[w]omen were increasingly judged by their success in rearing good citizens, in catering for their children's emotional as well as physical needs, in creating homes which were germ-free havens for their...offspring. In New Zealand, poor women, least of all, were able to meet these new standards of motherhood, and for them the contradiction between social ideals and their own situation was enormous...they were likely to be blamed for having children in the first place... Once they had children, such women were likely to be blamed for their callousness and neglect of them, for failing to maintain Plunket-defined standards of care in overcrowded cottages, for their family's less

> than faithful school attendance or antisocial tendencies (Tennant, 1989:123).

Tennant's account of yesterday's censure has marked similarities to that of today, when the poorest women, the most likely candidates for public scrutiny, are probably Maori or those with a Pacific Island background. The emphasis on women-as-mothers may be particularly widespread in New Zealand because our colonial developers profited from cheap family labour (family farms and family businesses depending on unpaid women and children), and our small population has always sternly repelled ideas of non-conformity:

> ...nor should aid be so generous as to *encourage* alternatives to the nuclear family unit. Assistance too readily given might endorse men's failure to provide, might encourage women to avoid dependence on men (Tennant, 1989:125).

Attitudes towards women who remain childless — whether or not they have a male partner — are not unlike commonly held views about maternal delinquents without a man. They may be pitied, despised, sometimes envied, or regarded as beyond the pale if there is any suspicion that this might be a chosen option. I believe that we should never make light of the despair women feel when they want, but, for whatever reason, don't have children. However, I also believe it is equally sad that so many women temporarily or permanently without any offspring are exposed to the language of the family which tells them they are 'failures'. Rich (1981:251-2) reminds us that 'childless' women have, throughout history, 'been burned as witches, persecuted as lesbians...' She also reminds us of the debt we owe them:

> ...without Charlotte Brontë (who died in her first pregnancy), Margaret Fuller (whose major work was done before her child was born)...George Eliot, Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir — we would all today be suffering from spiritual malnutrition as women.

Childbirth, accompanied by what Rich calls the 'hypocritical and palliative reverence accorded the mother', does not invariably equate with instant fulfilment. The promotion of home and family as a warm, loving, safe place for all its members is in bewildering contrast with what many women and children know, and with the statistics gathered by the National Collective of Women's Refuges: namely, that every week during 1989 a total of 2453 refuge beds were occupied by women and children fleeing domestic violence (Rosier, 1990).

Warmth, love and non-violent security as part of normal, everyday life are what we want to establish. But the family is not a private oasis

of leisured refreshment set in an arid desert of the public world of work and competition — particularly not for women, because they usually have to whip up the refreshment. It is a handy front for public policy as the name of the blame for phenomena such as dole-bludgers, nymphomaniacs on the DPB, glue-sniffers, the neglected elderly, the homeless and the school drop-outs. This is treating the family as a cause of social ills rather than the location of their effects. The family is not the source of widespread poverty and unemployment, of nuclear testing and dumping in the Pacific, of harbour, river and atmospheric pollution, of overpriced and poorly planned housing, of inadequate public funding for education and leisure, of huge gaps in the delivery of health services, of share-market crashes and business failures.

Such vicissitudes may cause considerable stress to those on the receiving end. Our family language, based on what is assumed to be the 'natural' division of labour in our gendered culture, associates such feelings, and dealing with them, with women and women's work. James (1989) calls it emotional labour, 'not only because it contributes to social reproduction but also because it is hard work'. Emotional labour takes time and organisation:

> To be effective, the 'labourer's' skills must include firstly, being able to understand and interpret the needs of others, secondly being able to provide a personal response to these needs, thirdly being able to juggle the delicate balance of each individual and of that individual within a group, and fourthly being able to pace the work, taking into account other responsibilities (James, 1989:26).

James suggests that these skills are among the range of talents that women acquire in the domestic sphere which go unrecognised and are therefore treated as unskilled if they are transferred to the public domain of paid work.

There is no doubt about the complex emotional labour performed mostly by the women of the New Zealand family circle. Meade *et al.* (1985) refer to the 'hidden contract' between partners over the issue of child care.

Chetwynd *et al.* (1985), Munford (1990) and Opie (1990) deal with the effects on the (mainly women) caregivers of caring for people with disabilities. The Department of Statistics (1990:45) points out that women of all ages are much more likely than men to keep in regular touch with their families, including the relatively high proportion of the elderly living alone.

Gordon, Hoagland and Luepnitz all refer to the way in which women understandably accept the values embedded in the consensus (of which they are a part) about what counts as normal female behav-

iour. Hoagland points out (1989:15) that this is not based on 'a bedrock of female behaviour', but is determined by the concept of 'woman', which is:

> ...held in place by... the kind of research scientists do, advertisements directed at women and also at men, the sorts of things news media report...the ways females are portrayed for men's sexual entertainment or religious edification or medical experimentation or military inspiration.

Hoagland gives the example of 'battered woman' which shows that *'something men do to women'* has become instead something that is part of *woman's nature'*. In New Zealand the ten years of steady development of the refuge movement is accepted and (almost) acceptable, while girls and women are encouraged to attend self-defence courses. The manner of presenting these projects suggests that they are strictly women's concerns, all about taking responsibility for learning how to deal with a possible encounter with a unicorn or some other mythical creature, as men are not named as the attackers.

'Partner', implying parity, is a relatively new term now frequently used to denote an adult's significant other, rather than 'husband' 'wife', 'de facto' or 'lover'. It has become part of a language of the family which both denies and distorts the reality of the social relations which govern relationships. By accepting its non-analytical rhetoric, we collude with the gendered culture, 'the structure in which the inequalities of class, race and sex flourish' (James and Saville-Smith 1989:102). In an essay called 'The Future', Russell (1983:90) wrote:

> In any sound system of society, of course, marriage or sex will not be open to women as a career. Women will be expected to help their lovers when they are in difficulty, just as their lovers help them. In the life of both children and adults the needs of their neighbours will be ever present and loyalties will not be restricted to blood relations. I believe that there will be more responsible action in love, rather than less....

Notes

1 According to its editorial information, *Grapevine* is owned by an independent organisation 'involved in publishing, counselling, and video production...has earned the respect and support of major business, community, welfare and religious organisations — but it has formal links with none of them'.

2 There may be some research measuring the outcomes of this immunisation project, but I am unfamiliar with it.

3 I am unclear whether this category includes 'blended' families, i.e. those with children from previous partnerships of either or both the adult couple.

This is another misleading use of language to imply a smooth mixture, when the actual experience may be more like being chopped up by a food processor.

4 I have assembled the above statistics from: Davey and Mills (1989); Department of Statistics (1981; 1988; 1990); Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988, Vol 1: 11, 12, 13); and Gilling (Vol IV).

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Margot Roth has been with the Women's Studies Association since it began. She derives great satisfaction from noting that, in contrast to the Association's early days, over half of her references for this article are from New Zealand sources. She believes that the WSA and its members have made a solid, scholarly contribution to the understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Women Together

A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand

Nga Roopu Wāhine o te Motu

Women Together is the working title of a project getting under way in the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. The aim is to publish a book in 1993 — the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage — which will document and highlight the important part women have played in the making of New Zealand society through the many different organisations they have created. The project's Advisory Committee includes a number of long-time members of the Women's Studies Association. Anne Else, *Women's Studies Journal* editor, was recently appointed as project editor.

Much of women's involvement in the public life of our communities has come about through their work in women's organisations. Yet this work has seldom received the recognition it merits, and such organisations have rarely featured in popular historical accounts.

However, in the short time available it will not be possible to research and write about every women's organisations, past and present, let alone put them all in one book. So the editor and the project advisory committee have decided that the best approach is to divide the book into a number of sections. In each section an 'overview' essay will cover how women have organised in a particular field — for example, health, welfare, education. One section will look at the ways in which Maori women have chosen to organise, for example through the Maori Women's Welfare League and through marae-based groups, besides being involved in other organisations. Other sections will feature immigrant groups and rural women.

Each section will also contain brief historical profiles of about ten different organisations in that field. Organisations will be chosen with the aim of covering as wide a spectrum as possible: past and present, national and local, large and small, encompassing paid and unpaid work of all kinds.

Women's Organisations Archives Project

Although not every existing women's organisation can be profiled in *Women Together*, as many as possible will be invited to take part in a parallel Women's Organisations Archives Project being run by archivist Ellen Ellis, under the auspices of the Women's Studies Association, with financial support from the Heritage Fund. This project aims to encourage the permanent preservation of the records and archives of women's organisations. They will be assisted to identify, arrange and deposit their own records and archives, so that these will be available for future generations of women — especially students of women's history.

Existing organisations, archive repositories and research institutions are now being contacted to find out:

- what records have been collected
- where they are held
- what historical research has already been done.

This basic information is needed both for *Women Together* and for the Women's Organisations Archives Project.

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'Like Father, Like Daughter'?

A Reassessment of the Concept of Male Equivalence in New Zealand

Sandra Wallace

In New Zealand little has been written about those women who decided to become active in mainstream politics at the national level as parliamentary candidates and Members of Parliament. What has been written tends to portray the women in a particular light. Stephen Levine has commented that initially New Zealand women entered Parliament through one of two extraordinary circumstances — a by-election, or by 'securing nomination through relationship with previously active MPs'. Often, of course, the two were closely related. Levine did note that more recently ' women have been able to establish themselves in Parliament without being anchored to an established male reputation'.[1] In an article devoted entirely to women in politics, Judith Aitken noted and reaffirmed Levine's remarks, commenting that many of New Zealand's women MPs have been elected in a by-election and have often replaced their husband or father as the MP for their particular electorate.[2] Such observations have not been confined to academics, nor are they a thing of the past. In the 1990 general election, one radio station announced the selection and candidacy of Judith Tizard (Labour, Panmure), daughter

of Auckland's mayor Dame Cath Tizard and retiring Panmure MP Bob Tizard, by describing her as 'daddy's girl', while Pauline Moran (Labour, Wairarapa) had to overcome the public perception that she was trying to reclaim the seat on behalf of her husband, Reg Boorman, who had been narrowly defeated, amidst much controversy, as Wairarapa's MP in 1987.[3]

Such statements are examples of male equivalence, sometimes also referred to as widow's succession or the substitution factor. They refer to the fact that some women who entered Parliament, particularly the first group of women MPs, were the wives or daughters of previous members for those seats, who had generally died. The relationship between the woman and her husband or father is assumed to account for her entry into Parliament.

The fact that many of the first women parliamentarians have been related to former MPs has been noted worldwide. All of the first three women to enter the British House of Commons, and four of the first nine to enter Australian State Parliaments, can be seen to fit this concept of male equivalence, while more than half of the American women who entered Congress between 1916 and 1963 had at least one male relative who had previously served in Congress.[4]

Despite the widespread use of the concept of male equivalence, it has received little critical attention. One very important exception is Diane Kincaid, who in 1978 examined the concept as it related to American women Congress representatives. According to the generalisation, when a Congressman died in office his bereaved widow was prevailed upon to accept a courtesy appointment to his seat. She reluctantly accepted, fulfilled her duties in a perfunctory fashion, and gratefully relinquished the responsibility once the party had found a more suitable (male) candidate. Kincaid slammed the generalisation as creating a negative and passive image of the Congresswomen concerned, and further claimed that almost every aspect of it was questionable. She stated that only a small minority of women who followed their husbands to Congress were 'apolitical and non-participatory non-entities':

> On those relatively infrequent occasions when widows have succeeded their husbands, they usually had to overcome opposition for their office; nearly half have sought to retain their seats; and significant power was accumulated and employed by those who extended their tenure. The 'typical' congressional widow is not a true picture, but a caricature.[5]

In this paper I would like to examine the concept of male equivalence, particularly Kincaid's critique of it, with regard to New Zealand women MPs and parliamentary candidates. I will focus primarily on the fifty

year period between 1919, when women gained the right to seek election to Parliament, and 1969.

It is important to have a clear idea of the number of women we are referring to. Up to and including the 1990 general election, 36 women have sat in New Zealand's House of Representatives. Just five have been related to the previous member for their seat, while another two were closely related to former MPs. All except one of the women related to a former MP won their first election prior to 1970. Before 1970, more than 50 percent of New Zealand's women MPs had family connections to a former MP; of all women first elected since 1970, the figure is just 4 percent. If the concept of male equivalence has any relevance in New Zealand, it is only for the period prior to 1970.

Elizabeth McCombs was New Zealand's first woman MP. She entered Parliament for Lyttelton in a 1933 by-election necessitated by the death of her husband, Labour MP James McCombs. Elizabeth McCombs herself died two years later and was replaced by her son Terence McCombs. National's Mary Grigg represented Mid-Canterbury from 1942 until her retirement the following year. Her husband, who had been killed in war services, was the previous MP for the seat. Labour's Mabel Howard was MP for Christchurch East/Sydenham from a by-election early in 1943 until her forced retirement in 1969. Her father Ted Howard represented Christchurch South for twenty years until his death in 1939. The first Maori woman to enter parliament, Labour's Iriaka Ratana, was the widow of the previous member for her electorate, who had himself succeeded a male relative — his brother — in representing the electorate. She represented Western Maori from 1949 to 1969. Ethel McMillan (Labour MP for Dunedin North from 1953 to 1975) was the widow of Dr David McMillan, a Cabinet Minister in the first Labour Government and MP for Dunedin West from 1935 to 1943. In 1967 Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan won the by-election in Southern Maori caused by the death of her father, Sir Eruera Tirikatene, who had held the seat for 25 years.[6]

Later in this paper I will also refer to the unsuccessful campaigns run by Elizabeth Gilmer and Agnes Weston. Elizabeth Gilmer contested Wellington North in 1935 and 1938, first as an Independent and then as an Independent Liberal. Her father was former New Zealand Premier Richard John Seddon. Agnes Weston took over as National's candidate in Wellington Central in 1946 after the original candidate, her husband, died mid-way through the campaign.

The first component of the concept of male equivalence identified by Kincaid is that a political party actively sought out and supported the woman to contest the seat made vacant by the death of her male relative.

In New Zealand this was frequently not the case. In 1939 Mabel Howard made it clear to Labour Party leaders that she wished to succeed her father as MP for Christchurch South. Despite her extensive political experience in the union movement, in the Labour Party, on the Christchurch City Council and within the electorate itself, the party, largely as a result of factional in-fighting, did not select her as its candidate. Iriaka Ratana also had trouble gaining selection. Although she led the Ratana church and had the backing of the church, Labour did not initially favour her as a candidate, fearing that traditional Maori opposition to women leaders would cause it to lose the seat. It was only after she began campaigning and indicated her determination to contest the seat, with or without the backing of the party, that Labour belatedly endorsed her as their official candidate. Even Elizabeth McCombs, who had stood on two previous occasions as a Labour candidate and had a great deal of other political experience, was not guaranteed to win the selection for Lyttelton. Party leaders harboured fears that voter opposition to a woman would overpower any sympathy vote and cause it to lose one of its most marginal seats. Although McCombs was opposed by an Independent Labour candidate who argued that Parliament was no place for women, she increased Labour's majority in the electorate.[7]

Clearly, then , this first component of male equivalence cannot be applied to New Zealand, since the political parties sometimes rejected, or did not initially support, the selection of a female relative of a male MP. This first component can also be rejected because it assumes passivity on behalf of the women. It assumes that the parties concerned sought out female relatives and encouraged them to become candidates. It does not allow for the notion that the women took a more active role in their decision to become candidates, and actually approached the party themselves. The actions of both Mabel Howard and Iriaka Ratana must be seen as evidence of a positive rather than a passive desire to stand for Parliament. Agnes Weston also undertook positive action to initiate her candidacy. She made the first approach to National leaders and told them she wished to take over the candidacy which her late husband had begun.[8]

At first sight Mary Grigg's entry into Parliament seems to fit closely the stereotypical generalisation of male equivalence. However, the fact that she did not face opposition for the seat of Mid-Canterbury had more to do with National's recognition of her undoubted abilities, and Labour's decision not to contest the seat (ostensibly on account of the need for national unity as a result of the war effort), than with the chivalry and manipulation associated with the concept of male equivalence.[9]

At the other end of women's parliamentary careers, the concept of

male equivalence assumes that the women retired from Parliament at the first available opportunity. Yet only Mary Grigg retired after serving less than one full term. Remarriage, rather than a distaste for political work, is the most likely explanation for her decision. Lady Polson, as she became, continued to work actively for the National Party outside the debating chamber, often speaking in support of the party's women candidates. Elizabeth McCombs's political career was, sadly, cut short by death; but Mabel Howard, Iriaka Ratana, Ethel McMillan and Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan all served for twenty years or more. These were hardly the actions of women who wished to relinquish their political responsibility as soon as they were able.

While they sat in the House, these women MPs did far more than perform their duties in a perfunctory manner. All who served for more than one term represented New Zealand overseas, while Mabel Howard took on the responsibilities of Minister of Health (1947-1949), then Minister of Social Security and Minister for the Welfare of Women and Children (1957-1960). Elizabeth McCombs pushed for reforms on behalf of women, and was a particularly strong critic of the Government's virtual neglect of unemployed women. Most of the others also spoke on issues of concern to women. None of them neglected issues of concern to their wider electorate or to the country as a whole, however. Iriaka Ratana did not speak often in the House, but worked actively behind the scenes. Two of her key achievements were the passing of the Ratana Settlements Act, which greatly assisted the redevelopment of the Maori community based at Ratana Pa, and the passing of the Wanganui Vested Lands Act, which helped protect Maori ancestral land. Ethel McMillan worked hard to achieve improvements not just for her electorate, but for the entire Otago region. Mabel Howard was noted for her many impassioned and colourful parliamentary interventions on behalf of members of the working class. None of these women could be considered to have performed their parliamentary and electorate duties in anything less than a whole-hearted and thoroughly committed manner. The size of the majorities which they built up and maintained, and the fact that both Howard and Ratana at various times enjoyed the largest majority in the country, is evidence that their constituents were more than satisfied with the representation which these women MPs provided.[10]

The concept of male equivalence is not only inaccurate, but also misleading, since it conceals more than it reveals and actually masks some very important aspects of the political careers of those women who happened to be related to male MPs. The first of these additional problems relates to the fact that male equivalence focuses solely on the

woman's relationship to a male MP as the reason for her success in entering Parliament. In doing so, it ignores the vast amount of political experience which she had accumulated on her own behalf. Elizabeth McCombs had been active in a range of voluntary organisations, including the Canterbury Children's Aid Society, the Canterbury Progressive Liberal Association and, most importantly, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, of which she was Dominion Treasurer and a branch president. She served on the Christchurch City Council, the North Canterbury Hospital Board and the Tramway Board, had been active in the Labour Party, and contested two previous elections in 1928 and 1931. To regard her relationship to James McCombs as the key explanation for her selection and success in 1933 is insulting to McCombs, the Labour Party and the voters of Lyttelton. Mary Grigg had extensive involvement in the National Party, including the Canterbury Women's Division, which she chaired; she was also active in a wide range of voluntary organisations, and served on the Ashburton Hospital Board. Ethel McMillan served on the Dunedin City Council and the Otago Hospital Board, was a JP, held several positions in the lower levels of the Labour Party, and was active in a wide range of community organisations, including the Plunket Society and the Otago High Schools Board of Governors. Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan had been active in student politics. All this political experience would have benefited these women in their careers as MPs. Likewise, Christchurch East voters were not getting merely Ted Howard's daughter when they elected Mabel Howard to Parliament in 1943.[11]

The concept of male equivalence also neglects, or at least downplays, the very real political experience which the women gained as a result of their relationship with their political husband or father. Rosemary Whip has identified MPs' wives as participants in a two-person single career, and has outlined their contribution in undertaking electoral work, attending functions and dealing with constituents, particularly during their husband's absences from the electorate.[12] Virtually all of New Zealand's women MPs who were related to a previous MP undertook such duties and more besides. Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan often travelled throughout Southern Maori with her father and assisted him with his campaign and constituency work; Mabel Howard worked as an organiser in her father's electorate for 20 years and was an invaluable assistant during every election campaign; Elizabeth McCombs helped her husband with his campaigning and electorate duties; and Mary Grigg ran the entire Mid-Canterbury electorate after her husband departed on war service.

Such experience undoubtedly benefitted the women during their

own candidacy. Rather than coming in as strangers who had to make themselves known to the electorate, the women were already well known to both the party hierarchy and the constituents and, through their links with their fathers or husbands, were associated with a record of public service. By concentrating on the existence of a relationship with a male MP to the exclusion of the realities involved in the relationship, the concept of male equivalence tends to trivialise and ignore the political experience which political wives and daughters, especially those who deliberately involved themselves in the work of their male relative, inevitably gained.

A further problem with the concept of male equivalence is that it recognises that women may be influenced or advantaged in their political actions by men, but it does not recognise that a woman can influence or advantage other women, or men, in a similar way. It also implies that advantage and influence can come only from those men directly involved in Parliament, and so ignores other forms of political activity. While all of the women discussed in this paper acknowledged the way in which their male relative contributed to their political career, many also alluded to the influence of their female relatives. During one of her campaign speeches, Elizabeth Gilmer made a point of proudly drawing attention to a brooch which she wore. She told the audience that it was the badge of the Wellington Women's Social and Political Union of which her mother, Louisa Seddon, had been the first president. She spoke briefly of ther mother's political activities in this and other organisations before returning to the main points of her campaign.[13] This is surely the action of a woman whose political activity was influenced as much by her mother as by her more famous father. Similarly, a newspaper advertisement for one of Elizabeth McCombs's campaigns referred specifically to her sisters and their social and political achievements, and attempted to link her to their tradition of public service.[14] Certainly the example of her sisters appears to have influenced McCombs's interest in social and political questions. She was publicly active long before meeting her husband-to-be.

Rita Mae Kelly and Mary Boutilier have indicated the importance of an activist sex-role ideology, whereby female children learn from the example of female relatives that women can and should be active in a wide range of activities, in the backgrounds of politically active women.[15] This certainly seems to have been the case with Elizabeth Gilmer and Elizabeth McCombs. While Mary Grigg acknowledged her husband's influence in her political career, it is more than possible that it was the example of her mother, Mrs Cracroft Wilson, well known for her own interest in public activities, which demonstrated to Mary that women

had a role to play in public life.

The possible impact of these politically active women on their own sons should also be briefly mentioned. Elizabeth McCombs' son Terence succeeded her as MP for Lyttelton — surely an example of 'female equivalence'. Alex, the son of Mary Dreaver (MP for Waitemata 1941-1943), entered local body politics in Auckland. It is more than likely that his decision to do so was influenced by the political example of his mother, at both the local and national level.

An additional problem with male equivalence — not so much with the concept itself but more with the use to which it has been put — is that it is applied to politically active women but not to politically active men. Many of our male MPs have been related to former MPs. Former Labour Minister of Finance Roger Douglas and National's John Luxton (MP for Matamata) are just two recent examples. Yet male politicians who are related to former MPs are rarely included in the concept of male equivalence — certainly not to the same extent as women. The simplication appears to be that while men forge their political careers on their own merits, and any links to former MPs are merely coincidental, such links are crucial to women, for whom any other political experience is coincidental rather than central to their parliamentary career.

So far I have argued that the relationship to a male MP is not the crucial factor or even one of the most important factors in explaining the political participation of those women MPs who had such family connections. Nonetheless, it is important to note the extent to which the women were aware of the benefits which they enjoyed as the wives and daughters of political figures and also the extent to which they attempted to use such benefits to their own advantage. During their campaigns the women often referred to their male relative, his record of public service, and their desire to follow his example. Such statements gave the women some of the advantages, such as a good record of service in a previous term, normally accruing only to an incumbent candidate.

One of the most blatant examples of women attempting to use their family connections to gain political support occurred in 1938, when Liberal supporters (the party itself no longer existed) inserted an advertisement in Wellington newspapers supporting the candidacy of Elizabeth Gilmer, who was standing as an Independent Liberal in Wellington North. The rather large advertisement was dominated by a picture of Richard Seddon, with a far smaller photograph of Gilmer relegated to the corner. The advertisement was captioned 'Like Father ... Like Daughter!' and included the statement, 'He warned against the Menace of Socialism in New Zealand! She strives against the Menace of Socialism in New Zealand! Both Humanists'.[16] Clearly Gilmer was being

portrayed as her father's political successor, even though he had been dead for more than thirty years and she was not even contesting his old electorate. Gilmer frequently referred to her family political connections and the way in which they had influenced her political career. On one occasion she told voters that she wished to enter Parliament because it was born into her. On another occasion she told electors that she refused to be endorsed by either of the main parties of the day because she was born a Liberal and would always remain a Liberal. She often spoke on policies which her father had been associated with, and told audiences that she was 'a member of the old gang' [of Seddon supporters] and wanted to carry out the work that he had started.[17]

Mabel Howard also stressed her familial links to Parliament. Her 1943 election pamphlet assured voters that her zeal and devotion to her work would make her as efficient and popular a representative as her late father had been. She told voters that she and her father had been very close, and often claimed that she only wanted to enter Parliament to keep the family tradition going, to follow on from her father, and to ensure 'there will once again be a Howard in the House of Representatives'. Once in the House Mabel Howard requested the right to sit in her father's old seat, since it made her feel close to him. In 1946, as a result of electoral boundary changes, her seat of Christchurch East was enlarged to include part of the old Christchurch South electorate, which her father had represented, and renamed Sydenham. Howard welcomed this and later boundary changes which brought more of her father's old electorate under her control. In a 1963 newspaper advertisement she publicly welcomed those people who had formerly been represented by her father into her own electorate.[18]

Women's references to their male political relatives undoubtedly helped to allay some fears about women entering the parliamentary arena since, by claiming that they wished to carry out the work of their male relatives, the women could be seen to be acting as dutiful wives or daughters. The benefits of such a perception should not be underestimated in an age when women's public activities were still not totally accepted and when many people believed that women's place was, to paraphrase a modern slogan, in the home but not the House.

Women who sought to use their links to a male political figure in this regard sometimes argued that those links gave them a duty to try to enter Parliament themselves. Agnes Weston, for instance, had been a partner in all her husband's activities and continued this pattern after his death, volunteering to replace him as National candidate for Wellington Central. She claimed to feel a responsibility to take up the cause to which her late husband had devoted himself, and said that she stood in her

husband's memory. She did have a political agenda of her own, however, as the following statement makes clear:

> I have undertaken my husband's task not only from loyalty to his memory and a strong desire to support the ideals which meant so much to him, but also from a sincere wish to help represent the women of New Zealand in Parliament.[19]

Elizabeth McCombs also cited her late husband's support and encouragement for her previous political activities as justification for her accepting the Labour Party nomination to contest his old seat. She said she felt she owed it to him. On being elected she again referred to her husband and gave him some credit for her victory, saying 'I know you all loved him and your support for me was because of that love.'[20] Rather than being a denial of their own political activities or an indication of undue modesty, such statements by McCombs and other political women are better viewed as a means of women presenting themselves to the public in an acceptable way. Given their very recently bereaved status, it was especially advantageous for these women to portray themselves as carrying on the work of their male relatives, and so fulfilling the traditional supportive role of wife or daughter, rather than to display naked political ambition on their own behalf. Had they done so, such women would certainly have alienated many voters who possibly harboured views that political activity was unsuitable for women, especially those still in mourning.

In conclusion, what use is the phrase 'male equivalence' in helping us to understand the experience of New Zealand women MPs? While 50 percent of the women first elected prior to 1970 were closely related to a former male MP, the concept encompassed by the phrase does not accurately describe their experiences. These women were not always eagerly and actively sought out and supported by their party. They contributed fully to all aspects of parliamentary life. The fact that most won by large majorities and served for more than twenty years does not mark them out as incompetent, unwilling and reluctant politicians who wished to relinquish their roles. Not only is the concept of 'male equivalence' inaccurate in what it encompasses; it is also misleading in terms of what it excludes. By relying on a traditional 'male equivalence' account of women politicians, we remain unaware that they had accumulated a great deal of political experience both on their own account and through their relationship with their husband or father. We also remain ignorant of the fact that many of the women may have been influenced in their political activities by female relatives outside Parliament to the same or even a greater extent than they were by their male relatives. Since the concept is generally applied to women but not to

men, it also obscures the fact that many male MPs were the sons of previous MPs. Where the relationship to a former MP proved useful, it was in providing the women with a means of overcoming opposition to women's participation in Parliament: they could portray themselves as carrying on the work of their male relatives, rather than fulfilling any political ambition of their own. By focussing more on the existence of a relationship than on the realities, both positive and negative, male equivalence does not really encompass this understanding.

Put bluntly, the concept of male equivalence serves to downplay the political achievements and significance of the women to whom it is applied. Instead of being portrayed as political actors in their own right, admittedly benefitting from their relationship with a previous Member of Parliament, women politicians are portrayed as political surrogates of men. Until we can overcome this simplistic, one-dimensional, inaccurate and misleading stereotype, and begin to ask more pertinent questions about women politicians — for example, questions concerning their personal and political background, the policies they advocate, how they fared in the selection processes operated by the major political parties, how the press and the public perceived them, and the problems they faced — we can never hope to capture the reality and diversity of their careers and experiences.[21]

Notes

1 Stephen Levine, *The New Zealand Political System*, George Allen & Unwin, Auckland, 1979, p. 1070-108.

2 Judith Aitken, 'Women in New Zealand Politics' in Howard R. Penniman, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington D.C., 1980, p. 202.

3 6.30 a.m. news, ZMFM Wellington, 15 November 1989. See *Dominion Sunday Times*, 27 May 1990, p. 2, for comments on Moran.

4 Marian Sawer and Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place, Women and Politics in Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 39.

5 Diane D. Kincaid, 'Over His Dead Body: A Positive Perspective on Widows in the US Congress', *Western Political Quarterly*, 31, 1 (March 1978), pp. 96-104.

6 The seventh woman, elected after 1970, is Labour's Judith Tizard, who in 1990 won the seat of Panmure previously held by her father Bob.

7 David Gee, *Our Mabel*, Millwood Press, Wellington, 1977, pp. 53-55, explains Howard's failed selection attempt. On Ratana's selection, see *Wanganui Herald*, 28 November 1949, p. 4, and R.S. Milne, *Political Parties in New Zea-*

land, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966, p. 268. Barry Gustafson, *From the Cradle to the Grave, A Biography of Michael Joseph Savage*, Reed Methuen, Auckland, 1986, p. 152 outlines the reservations Labour leaders had about selecting McCombs as a candidate.

8 *Evening Post*, 14 November 1946, p. 9.

9 *Press*, 12 December 1941, p. 6, 17 December 1941, p. 7.

10 A quick idea of the work undertaken by these women MPs can be gained by skimming through the Hansard indexes. For Ratana's contribution, see *Evening Post*, 22 December 1981, p. 30.

11 Ann Margaret Burgin, 'Women in Public Life and Politics in New Zealand', MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1967, provides biographical sketches, including political backgrounds, of these women.

12 Rosemary Whip, 'The Parliamentary Wife: Participant in the "Two-Person Single Career"' in *Australian Women in the Political System*, ed. Marian Simms, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 77-88.

13 *Evening Post*, 8 November 1935, p. 4.

14 *Christchurch Press*, 13 September 1933, p. 2. One of McCombs's sisters, Stella Henderson, was one of the first women in New Zealand to train as a lawyer, and an early woman Parliamentary correspondent; another, Christina Henderson, a graduate of Canterbury University College, relinquished her position as First Assistant at Christchurch Girls High School in order to devote more time to the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

15 Rita Mae Kelly and Mary Boutilier, *The Making of Political Women. A Study of Socialisation and Role Conflict*, Nelson-Hall, Chicago, 1978, p. 199.

16 *Evening Post*, 13 October 1938, p. 22.

17 *Evening Post*, 7 October 1938, p. 16, 23 October 1935, p. 7 and 23 September 1938, p. 6.

18 New Zealand National Party Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, MS 1096, Box 30; *Listener*, 20 June 1947, p. 9; Christchurch *Press*, 17 July 1976, *Press*, 8 February 1943, p. 4; Gee, p. 179; *Press*, 22 November 1960, p. 11 and 12 November 1963, p. 23.

19 *Evening Post*, 26 November 1946, p. 5. See also *Evening Post*, 14 November 1946, p. 9 and 23 November 1946, p. 11.

20 *Christchurch Times*, 10 August 1933, p. 8, 14 September 1933, p. 11.

21 One example, which cannot be gone into in greater detail here, is the degree to which the women MPs who succeeded male relatives benefited from contesting a seat which their party already held. Ten of the eleven women who entered Parliament prior to 1970 contested such a seat, and only one of the eleven women selected for a seat already held by her party did not enter Parliament as a result. These figures suggest that the type of seat women contested, rather than their relationship to a former MP, could be a key factor in explaining their success. Research indicates that many women faced difficulties winning selection for a seat which their party had a realistic chance of winning. (See for instance Robert Mark Unsworth, 'Women as Parliamentary Candidates: Asset or Liability?', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1980.) Women who directly followed a male relative into

Parliament had, by definition, gained selection for such a seat. The interconnectedness and relative importance of these two factors has, to my knowledge, never been examined.

Sandra Wallace currently lives in Canada, but is completing her PhD thesis through the Department of History, University of Otago. Her thesis is entitled, '"Like Getting a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle": Women MPs and Parliamentary Candidates in New Zealand'.

Essential Fictions, Fictional Essences:

Some Recent Media Constructions of Child Sexual Abuse in Aotearoa[1]

Chris Atmore

> ...all the couples of oppositions are *couples*. Does this mean something? Is the fact that logocentrism subjects thought — all of the concepts, the codes, the values — to a two-term system, related to 'the' couple man/woman?[2]

Introduction

In Aotearoa, recent media accounts of child sexual abuse have focused on two specific 'events'. The first group of stories concerned the use of child sexual abuse statistics in the 1988 Telethon campaign. The second collection of accounts concentrated in 1989 on the case of the Spence family in Christchurch; specifically, the professional identification of Liselle Spence as a sexually abused child, and the charging of her father with the abuse. The initial articles by the media interacted with one another and produced ripple effects which drew on other discourses. While a range of media institutions produced accounts, I am concerned

here with popular magazines, and in particular *Metro, North and South,* and the *New Zealand Listener.*

What to me 'makes sense' of the apparently disparate and at times conflicting elements of the various media discourses, is a version of feminist post-structuralism involving the deconstruction of binary oppositions (Belsey, 1980; Weedon, 1987; Poovey, 1988; Rabine, 1988; Scott, 1988; Nicholson, 1990). It incorporates my political stance as a lesbian feminist, and specifically my own partial perspective and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) as a white, middle class, academically-inclined member of a particular Wellington lesbian community which has its own specific historical and social relations. My reading is also mediated by my personal experience as a researcher/educator in the area of child abuse from 1984-85. This second connection means that not only do I have some degree of familiarity with the various models of child abuse (particularly child sexual abuse), but that I have also had some interaction with various organisations and professionals in the child abuse field. I am therefore claiming personal experience as a form of knowledge validation, and making that bias explicit, in order to give my account more rhetorical authority. I draw on both this and the vast child abuse literature as general background.

The construction of child sexual abuse must be set within the political conflicts of the time. These involve not only hotly contested definitions of the nature, incidence and impact of abuse, but also theories of causation and prevention, and so, overall, questions of how the sexual abuse of children is related to society as a whole. Child sexual abuse as a public issue began to come to attention in Aotearoa, as in many Western countries, in the 1970s and early 1980s, largely due to the efforts of feminist movements and of organisations previously concerned only with physical abuse and child neglect (see for example Finkelhor, 1982; Breines and Gordon, 1983; McIntosh, 1988). However, as Wini Breines and Linda Gordon (1983) and Gordon (1988) document, child sexual abuse, like many other social issues, has been publicised in earlier historical periods and has then been submerged once more as a public concern. The peak of public interest and alarm over child sexual abuse in the 1980s represented a new phase of an old cycle. Theorists therefore tend to make a distinction between the existence of child sexual abuse as a concrete practice, and the labelling it receives at different times.[3]

However, the points of agreement for various theorists frequently end there. In academic research, work with abused children, and popular accounts of child sexual abuse, there are a number of conflicting positions.[4] Competing accounts have political stakes. The concept of

child sexual abuse encapsulates a vast range of interests, connected to a variety of paradigms in academic research and 'case' practice. Social theorists and crisis workers make up part of the pool of 'experts' from which the media draw source material. How this material is selected and processed by the media is the result of a complex web of interconnections.[5] Media accounts of the issue are therefore drawn into disputes among 'experts' and official sources, not simply conflicts between laypeople and experts. This makes for a complex array of discourses.[6]

Furthermore, gender as a central category is missing from all of the models dominant in the child sexual abuse field, despite feminist efforts in publicising child sexual abuse (Ahlgren, 1983; Breines and Gordon, 1983; *Feminist Review* 28, Spring 1988). Even when gender is acknowledged in describing the parameters of the problem it occurs less frequently as a factor in analyses of the causes of, and solutions to, child sexual abuse. The emphasis of dominant accounts of child sexual abuse on gender neutrality is not simply faulty scholarship; it is also an indication of the underlying politics of the subject. Feminists stress that the sexual abuse of children is close to forms of male violence against women, in that it is overwhelmingly men who abuse predominantly female children.[7] In contrast, as Breines and Gordon (1983:524) conclude about incest: 'At the deeper level the nonfeminist clinical and the popular literature unilaterally absolve the father'. Where non-feminist work cannot omit gender altogether, it uses the popular arguments that the sexual abuse of boys is even more of a hidden problem, or that there are many hidden female abusers (MacLeod and Saraga, 1988).[8]

Not only are differing approaches to method or theories of causation at issue; anchored more deeply still are conflicting epistemologies. Central to these conflicts are conceptualisations of facts, truth, and inequality — particularly in relation to gender and heterosexuality.

Media accounts

Criticisms of Telethon statistics on child sexual abuse first surfaced in 1988 just before Telethon. False and exaggerated statistics were said to be the work of lesbian feminists. Subsequently detailed stories appeared in the *Listener* and *Metro*. The Spence story was 'broken' in detail in the print media by *North and South* in July 1989, following a television *Frontline* documentary. The article took the form of an investigative journalism exposé of the family's anguish over the (wrongful, in the media's eyes) labelling and treatment of the child as abused, and the father as abuser. Lesbian feminists were implicated in depictions of over-zealous professionals. *North and South* also drew on the Telethon statistics story in its

constructions of the Spence case, and later media accounts frequently referred to both the statistics and Spence stories.

A number of dualisms are present in the various media accounts. I conceptualise dualisms in a deconstructionist sense, as pairs of apparently opposite terms, with one having a superior relationship to the other. The construction of each of these dualisms needs to be unpicked in order to examine what is not articulated by such binary opposition. Such concepts either do not appear or are not investigated in any detail in the media schemes.

The Telethon statistics accounts

Media stories about the use of child sexual abuse statistics in the Telethon campaign were written in investigative journalism style and were embroiled in a conflict over the generation, use and interpretation of statistical data. The conflict centred initially on a set of statistics which the media claimed were supplied by the Mental Health Foundation to the agency responsible for the Telethon advertising campaign. The Mental Health Foundation insisted that they had nothing to do with the agency and that the statistics were produced by a public relations person who used the MHF, possibly among other sources, to produce his own set of information. The data was then wrongly combined and misinterpreted in an advertising campaign by the agency.[9]

There were three claims made in the advertisements, which were subsequently contested in popular magazines. The claims are encapsulated in an advertisement featuring a photograph of four babies and headlined 'ONE OF THESE CHILDREN WILL BE SCARRED FOR LIFE'. The text continues: "One in four girls will be sexually abused before they turn 18. Half of them by their own father...' This text is repeated in a second advertisement headed 'IT'S NOT THE DARK SHE'S AFRAID OF' and dominated by a photograph of a man standing in the doorway of a child's room as she lies fearful in bed. The advertisements therefore presented child sexual abuse as a gendered issue, and focused specifically on the sexual abuse of children within the family — incest — because one of the themes of Telethon was 'family violence'.

In press statements and in its own literature (e.g. Haines, 1988; Braun, 1989) the MHF stood by the one-in-four statistic as a general prevalence figure for girls, but pointed out that the advertising agency had obtained the 'half by their own father' statistic by conflating data on sexual abuse — both intra- and extra-familial — with data on incest, and through equating research on general prevalence with officially reported cases. The Foundation suggested that the 'half' statistic might

also have been obtained by pooling all cases involving father *figures*, not just biological fathers.[10] Finally the Foundation disputed the 'scarred for life' claim by pointing out that the effects of sexual abuse varied greatly depending on the actual situation and individual survivors.

Popular magazine articles, however, particularly Carroll Du Chateau's 'How the Mental Health Foundation is Trying to Drive Us Mad' (1988) in *Metro*, disputed the one-in-four statistic and castigated the MHF for failing to publicise the errors fully until after Telethon. The Foundation argued first, that the fault lay with the advertising campaign;[11] and second, that to publicise the mistakes before Telethon would have damaged fund-raising efforts on an important issue. The magazine stories continued to lay blame at the door of the Foundation, and in particular to target its deputy director Hilary Haines, and psychologist Miriam Saphira, whose work on child sexual abuse has been supported by the MHF. The magazine accounts presented their own constructions of what was wrong with the statistics, how this came about, and the effects of these mistakes.

The statistics

There was a range of media criticisms of the research from which the statistics were drawn. For example, one of the key local studies of the sexual abuse of children, which was carried out by Miriam Saphira, was in the form of a write-in survey of readers of the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* (in Saphira, 1981). While this produced a great deal of information about the characteristics of sexual abuse in Aotearoa, and largely began feminist publicising about child sexual abuse here, it was not a survey of local prevalence. Saphira and researchers in organisations such as the Mental Health Foundation have tended to cite overseas prevalence studies, combined with local non-prevalence research, in order to give a commonsense picture of the extent of child sexual abuse in Aotearoa (e.g. Haines, 1988). This linkage was criticised in media articles for relying on studies which were insufficiently random or otherwise faulted. For example, Emily Flynn (1988) has suggested that the high incidence of incest found by some studies was the result of a research bias towards white middle class respondents. This suggestion is unusual, because of what it implies about who is most likely to abuse and to be abused, and because of its apparent concern for the lack of representation of groups other than the white middle class nuclear family 'norm'.[12]

However, the main criticisms were reserved for the definitions of sexual abuse. As Atmore (1984) and Kelly (1988) discuss, defining the sexual abuse of children is fraught with pitfalls, the two most obvious

being the definition of a 'child' and the definition of 'sexual abuse'. The media definitions of child sexual abuse, as these emerged from their criticisms of research, were considerably narrower than those used by the research studies quoted in MHF and MHF-endorsed material. For example, Flynn (1988:17) insists that 'for most people the term sexual abuse implies physical contact' and so rules out, for instance, exhibitionism.[13] Similarly, media accounts disputed the inclusion of peers in a Wellington Rape Crisis survey of sexual abuse experiences of secondary school students. By the media definitions, any sexual contact between similarly-aged children must be consensual (Flynn, 1988; Du Chateau, 1988; McLeod, 1989).

There was a central preoccupation with data on who typically abuses, and in particular with what was presented as the MHF's slandering of fathers:

> The publicity claimed that sexual abuse of children by their fathers is rampant. The truth is that when a child is assaulted the culprit is least likely to be the biological father (Flynn, 1988:17).

Flynn's claim that the sexual abuser is least likely to be the biological father is silent on the necessary qualifying statement: that this is so only if it is males who are being referred to, since women as a group are the least likely sexual abusers of children.

Flynn also makes a distinction between biological fathers and other non-blood-related father figures and male acquaintances. Feminist research suggests that compared to other male relatives (blood kin or not), the incidence of sexually abusive biological fathers is low (e.g. Haines, 1989). However, Flynn also draws on and at the same time shores up dominant constructions of the normal, biologically-based ('natural') nuclear family in constructing child sexual abuse as behaviour which takes place outside of it. Sexual abusers in this story are not normal, natural fathers anyway, and their families are doubly pathological. This normal/abnormal dualism is a common theme in the media accounts.

Flynn (1988) also brings her own definitions and interpretations of the issue to bear in reporting a statement equating child sexual abusers with paedophiles, and in her combination of the various statistics.[14] For example, both Flynn (1988:18) and Du Chateau take the one-in-four and the 'half by their own father' statistics and claim therefore that one in eight fathers are (wrongly) implicated. However, it cannot be assumed that there is a unique abuser for each 'case' of abuse, and many children are sexually abused by more than one man.[15] Similarly, Du Chateau applies a selective criticism in questioning police statistics used in the Telethon campaign. This is on the basis of an amendment to the 1961

Crimes Act over the time period surveyed, and hence a change in the definition of sexual attack:

> .... although it is likely that sexual offending *has* increased, you cannot compare 1986 and 1987 figures to find out by how much (Du Chateau, 1988:144).

Despite evidence of considerable underreporting of sexual crimes (e.g. Stone *et al*, 1983; Russell, 1984) the relationship between sexual abuse and police documentation is presented as unproblematic. Alternatively, the fact that so few cases of violence against women, as a specific example, are reported to the police, and that even fewer of these lead to convictions, is used to cast suspicion on victims' accounts:

> Surely someone should have asked the police why they are so shamefully neglecting their duties (Roger, 1990:9).

While the Telethon statistics are criticised within standard parameters of statistical examination and interpretation, these are applied only selectively and at times are combined in a contradictory fashion. The overall effect of such statistical criticisms, in comparison to the MHF version, is to pare down the incidence of child sexual abuse in Aotearoa and to remove male relatives, particularly fathers, from the spotlight.

The Spence case

'The Spence Case: A public and private nightmare' was the cover story in the July 1989 issue of *North and South*. The cover photograph and accompanying text structure the reader's orientation to the article: in the photograph Liselle Spence is posed between her parents, head inclined towards her father and with her arm around his neck. The accompanying text guides the reader toward a preferred interpretation: 'Who are the experts on child sex abuse, and why should we believe them?' The story inside is titled 'The Jeff and Louise Spence Story: 'A PUBLIC AND PRIVATE NIGHTMARE'. The parents and child are personalised through photographs and the use of first names. This is reinforced by a second photograph accompanying the article, which shows Jeff Spence turned slightly protectively toward Louise, his arm half around her. Liselle and her brother are in the background playing on a slide in what appears to be the Spences' back yard.

It is significant that the headline emphasises the parents rather than the child. As happened in British media constructions of the Cleveland affair (McIntosh, 1988), the dominant opposition presented is one between family and state. The actions of 'the professionals' are pitted against the rest of society, with the latter portrayed as supporting the Spences, since 'they did not receive one offensive phone call or abusive

letter' (McLeod, 1989:45). The expressive code of familism[16] is present in both photographs and text and generates what Stuart Hall (1981:229) calls the 'sentimental effect'. The article typifies the advocacy approach of investigative journalism. It is written overtly on behalf of the maligned, yet still makes claims to balance in its pursuit of 'the truth' (Leitch, 1990:16).[17]

The article uses a number of constructions to persuade readers that Jeff Spence cannot possibly have abused Liselle. Liselle is 'the dearly loved child of an extended family in which grandparents and aunts and uncles play an active part' (McLeod, 1989:46). Despite being 'blonde and attractive to look at', Liselle is not a 'normal' child but suffers from a debilitating illness which affects her behaviour in ways which can be confused with symptoms of sexual abuse. Jeff is a normal and blameless father coping well in a difficult situation: 'Apart from the sexual allegation, nobody has ever criticised Jeff (McLeod, 1989:50).' If there are no abnormal indications, Jeff cannot be a sexual abuser — as one letter to *North and South* put it, 'Real men are not child abusers...'[18] Jeff is not even dominant in an 'average' way: Louise is described as doing most of the talking 'while Jeff defers to her' (McLeod, 1989:61).

The third photograph in the article emphasises the focus on Jeff as the wronged party. While Louise sits in the background, he stands in the foreground with the family cat at his feet. The cat is significant because part of the evidence against Jeff was that Liselle referred to wild animals, a reference from young children that the article claims is often taken by 'experts' as a code for sexual abuse. Jeff's comment about the cat in the article, and the composition of the photograph, suggest that here is the real (and harmless) monster.

But there are still villains in the story: the child abuse professionals. This group comes under attack in several interconnected areas: their choice of methods, their own beliefs and behaviour, and the paradigm within which they are said to operate. The methods of the two female caseworkers assigned to Liselle are questioned on the basis of their imputed lack of competence and training. Implicated in the 'suspect' methods is the controversial use of anatomically correct dolls to elicit details of the sexual abuse. Unlike feminist accounts, the Spence story suggests that children can lie about sexual abuse, especially when confronted with over-zealous and all-powerful professionals.

Combining the accounts

I now move on to discuss the Telethon statistics and Spence story accounts together, in terms of what they present as generally 'wrong' with the construction of child sexual abuse in both cases, and why this

is so. What is presented as a wrong to be righted in both cases is the damage done to the image of fathers, with a secondary issue being the harm to children through misdiagnoses of abuse. Those responsible are described as heavily influenced by radical and lesbian feminism.[19] The statistics are described as false because of the attributed failure of researchers and interpreters to operate within a specific form of scientific paradigm, requiring adherence to rules of impartiality and objectivity:

> Most people are not trained to understand statistics or the methodology of research. There are, however, universally accepted ways of conducting research that may lead to the truth. Those ways are expensive, cumbersome and scientific, but without using them, nobody has the right to make claims for the population at large (McLeod, 1989:55).

The initial constructions of the Telethon statistics and Spence stories were responded to by the Mental Health Foundation in its own publication, *Mental Health News*, and by a range of organisations and individuals in letters to the editors of *Metro, North and South* and the *Listener*. Letters supporting the original articles operated within the same discourses of western male objectivity. McLeod's article on the Spence case was described as a 'penetrating and revealing study' which presented 'the truth', and as a 'balanced, incisive and penetrating article' compared to the 'false data' of the Telethon statistics.[20] The public were indicted as gullible pawns in the hands of over-zealous professionals, particularly lesbian child sexual abuse workers, assisted by some all-too-willing sections of the media.

The double theme that there was a true statistical picture if methods were used properly, and that the way sections of the media operated was at fault, also dominated the pro-MHF/Haines/Saphira replies. As early as August 1988 *Mental Health News* presented its correction of the Telethon statistics, attributing the confusion partly to the 'poor and uncritical' level of statistical understanding of the public, mental health workers and the media (Haines, 1988:23). The media's reliance on '"the facts", unclouded by messy detail' (Haines, 1988:21) was also to blame.

Several writers picked up themes and assumptions used by the original magazine articles and turned them against them. For example, a letter submitted to *Metro* from a collective of 90 people including many child abuse workers criticised Du Chateau's claims:

> ...the article is biased and reactionary and fails to debate the real issues. It is based on sloppy research, confused logic, misinformation and unsubstantiated generalisations.[21]

Du Chateau made 'emotive accusations' and voiced her 'personal

prejudices'. Other letters reinforced these claims. The original discourse was reversed: the need for objectivity and a scientific approach was not debated, but it was not the MHF but rather the original writers who had broken the rules of statistical presentation and interpretation. Journalists had also failed to follow the media's own codes of operation: 'In no way could this be in-depth journalism into facts, into fantasy perhaps?' (Braun, 1989:12). The media had 'got it wrong' about child sexual abuse, for example in conflating physical and sexual abuse.

Both pro- and anti-MHF discourses articulated a view that facts were socially constructed. This view was applied to the presentation and interpretation of statistical data, and to the media stories, but only up to a point. Both sets of discourses emphasised that a true picture could be obtained if correct codes of operation were followed; if the media and the general public were less gullible about statistics; and if the public were more critical of biased media accounts. Issues of media criticism were partially taken up, but were not applied in a radical fashion. The media was not implicated in the construction of reality, but rather presented it inaccurately or got it wrong, deliberately or not.

In both the Spence and Telethon cases, those labelled responsible for the public wrong in the original constructions were the MHF, in particular Hilary Haines, and Miriam Saphira, as well as a general group of child sexual abuse workers and gullible sections of the public and the media. In the Telethon case Haines and Saphira were at the forefront, while in the Spence case it was the actions of particular professionals in Ward 24 of Christchurch Hospital which came under scrutiny, with links being made to the discursive articulations clustered around child sexual abuse, as exemplified by the Telethon issue. Central to both sets of constructions was the idea of lesbian (radical) feminist bias.

The links to lesbian (radical) feminism

The dualisms and discursive chains of connotation in the linking of lesbian feminism into the media accounts are numerous and complex.[22] They start with a core assumption: bias in child sexual abuse work is undesirable (and avoidable); lesbians are biased; therefore their work in the child sexual abuse area is at fault. The researchers and publicists have let their emotions and political biases interfere with their work. This is where the association of the 'false' statistics with radical feminism, particularly lesbian feminism, is made apparent. For example, as one letter to the editor of *North and South* expressed it, the 'falsehood' of the one-in-four statistic is picked up by 'militant feminists, from an incorrect interpretation of limited American data....' The work of Miriam Saphira and Hilary Haines, both named as lesbians and femi-

nists, is 'politically and sexually motivated' (Roger, 1990:9). Haines' other work is taken as a demonstration of her bias. Her book *Mental Health For Women* (1987) is 'more a record of a feminist view of mental health than an impartial document' which 'makes depressing reading on the subject of heterosexual sex', while lesbian sex is 'more hopeful' (McLeod, 1989:54).

The Spence case stories make similar links, claiming wide repercussions which

> concern a crusade that strikes to the heart of the family, impressing on us that we are a society overrun with child sexual abuse that must be uncovered and punished. The origins of the crusade are in radical feminism... (McLeod, 1989:53-54).

As Mica Nava (1988:105) suggests in relation to the Cleveland affair, referred to in several New Zealand media stories (e.g. Flynn, 1989:37; McLeod, 1989), 'the spectre of feminism becomes folk devil'.

Lesbian feminism, in particular, is presented as a conspiracy, with Saphira 'and her followers' (McLeod, 1989:54) pushing the false sexual abuse data past the uncritical masses — 'swept away as we currently are on a tide of belief in the rottenness of the heterosexual family unit' (McLeod, 1989:55). Hilary Haines is linked to Miriam Saphira through their connections to the MHF, one of a group of charities used as 'a vehicle for the theories of activists and to give employment to them and their fellow believers' (*Metro*, April 1989). Both Haines and Saphira are also associated with *Broadsheet* magazine — 'this country's outlet for radical feminism... its writers have a common line' (McLeod, 1989:54).

Other accounts draw implicitly on this articulation of feminist bias, lesbianism and conspiracy. 'Saving the Children' claims that: 'confirming a belief that incest is rampant has become an in-group pastime of numerous middle-class Pakeha women'.[23] Flynn suggests, in contrast to feminists, that white middle class men are *more* easily indicted than other people in cases of child sexual abuse.[24] This explains the focus of 'middle class Pakeha women' on child sexual abuse at the expense of other more common forms of abuse: such women are, in the constructions favoured by magazines like *Metro* and *North and South*, 'soft' on the poor and Maori in comparison to the beleaguered white middle class male. While Flynn does not identify lesbians specifically with this trend, her account articulates discursively with popular linkings of anti-racist initiatives and lesbians,[25] and with the more overt targeting of lesbian feminists in other stories. Lesbian feminists, constructed here as exclusively white and middle class with too much time on their hands and a predisposition towards class and race treachery, jump on another convenient bandwagon.

The same discourses which construct initiatives such as the call for a separate Maori legal system as 'apartheid' conceptualise any translation of lesbian sexuality into a political practice as 'sexist'.[26] This discursive move is connected to two concepts of bias used in the media accounts, both of which oppose lesbian feminism. The metaphor of a set of scales is useful to illustrate the differences and similarities between the two concepts. The first approach simply tips the scales in the reverse direction: it is not the dominant models of child sexual abuse that are biased, but rather the lesbian feminist reworking of them. The second view claims to find bias wherever it looks: therefore a levelling out is proposed through an emphasis on detachment and distance. Both approaches deny that any 'bias' situations, as well as their own conceptualisations, are underpinned by a particular set of power relations. Therefore neither swapping from one side of the scales to the other, nor balancing one weight against its counter, produces an equitable comparison, because the analysis of power is left untouched.

An example of the merging of these two conceptualisations of bias in one account is in Pat Booth's editorial in *North and South*, 'Fatherhood Without Fear' (July 1989:4). He uses, as an analogy to feminists' and lesbians' stance on child sexual abuse, their 'praiseworthy but sometimes unbalanced concern over racial issues, in particular the rights and place of the tangata whenua in Aotearoa, as they call it'.[27] Booth makes parallels between a feminist criticism of the use of official statistics such as court figures to make claims about Maori people, and the distortion of 'the lives and relationships of the nation's men and girls on the basis of bigotry and faulty research'. To be consistent, he argues, is to reject both sets of statistics at face value. The bias as levelling model is presented as the answer to feminist prejudice. Booth does not examine differences in the way statistics are obtained in each case, who interprets them, the nature of the claims being made, which groups are represented, and how each construction resonates with discourses in popular culture. Set directly at odds are lesbian (radical) feminist politics of connection and location, and liberal politics of detachment and distance.

Radical feminist analysis, which conceptualises incestuous abuse as part of a continuum of normal male sexual behaviour, also challenges a binary system of logic.[28] I will briefly discuss the example of the rape of women before linking the critique of dualisms to the sexual abuse of children. Radical feminism criticises the construction of sex and violence as two distinct spheres (MacKinnon, 1982, 1983, 1987; Kelly, 1987).[29] The sex/violence dualism is a concealment of the material realities experienced by women. Such a dualism is central to dominant male definitions

of both consensual sex and rape: in a denial that there is sex in violence and violence in sex, sex is recuperated as unproblematically good (*ibid*). In contrast, radical feminism emphasises continuity and gradation through the concept of a continuum of male sexual violence from much 'normal' heterosexual sex through to 'unambiguous' rape situations. This also means that radical feminists make an important challenge to other dualisms related to the sex/violence opposition: rape is neither rare nor atypical male behaviour.

It is the dualistic approach which is applied in rape cases, and a feminist analysis of this reveals contradictions.[30] Dominant definitions of both rape and consensual sexual intercourse centre on penetration. How they are distinguished relies on legal reference points such as consent and the level of force. It is not in women's interests to abstract out such judgements from a distance, because this is often not how it works for us. Catharine MacKinnon (1982:532) argues:

> If sex is ordinarily accepted as something men do *to* women, the better question would be whether consent is a meaningful concept.

A normative level of coercion in sex with men means that a verdict of rape is less likely, for instance, if the woman knew the man, or 'not much force' was used. As MacKinnon (1983:649) puts it: 'Rape is a sex crime that is not a crime when it looks like sex.'

Although there are important differences between the rape of women and the sexual abuse of children, there are also key similarities. Many of these coalesce around the sex/violence dualism. Child sexual abuse is less likely to be excused as consensual sex, but is trivialised in parallel forms to the rape of women ('she wasn't penetrated'; 'it only happened once'; 'force was not used'; 'the assailant was not much older/more powerful').[31] The differences between popular ideas about adult rape and child sexual abuse rest on an assumption in the latter case of childhood innocence and virginity, resulting in statutory rape laws which are paternalistic in their protectiveness and which eroticise sexual contact with children as taboo (MacKinnon, 1983:648, 1987:71; Kitzinger, 1988).

Male power is such that reality is not only represented in these terms, but constructed upon them, and hence the difficulty for feminists is that 'criticism of what exists can be undercut by pointing to the reality to be criticized' (MacKinnon, 1982:542). For example, as I discussed earlier, the low official reporting rate of violence against women is used as an indictment against survivors' claims, rather than against abusers and their apologists. Violence against women is defined within the dominant dualisms, with this definition being applied 'objectively' in re-

search, therefore determining its 'true' extent. Without any explicit analysis of the far-reaching implications of male dominance, the fact that many women might not seek help from professionals simply locks into the overall paradigm and makes the abuse inconceivable. Claims of survivors which present a different reality are rejected as multiple challenges. Definitions of abuse, of prevalence, and thus of a whole way of viewing the world, are at stake.

As Liz Kelly (1987) argues, the problem of the typical/aberrant dichotomy for male sexual behaviour is that everyday male sexual violence is justified precisely because it *is* normal in the typical, 'common' sense of the word. Warwick Roger (1990:9), for example, challenges a survey (Cox and Irwin, 1989) which defines verbal abuse and sexual harassment as violence:

> '...you're bound to inflate the statistics, even if what you're talking about is really only young men trying their luck in the sexual sense with young women.'[32]

It can't be sexual abuse, because it is heterosexuality. This is the same underlying logic applied by McLeod to child sexual abuse: if it's normal, it must be natural, and therefore impossible to change.

'Child Abuse: The Facts' (Flynn, 1988:18) applies this reasoning from the other end of the normal/unnatural polarity. What is constructed as 'real' and 'serious' sexual abuse must be, by definition, rare, because otherwise:

> 'By making the most horrendous sexual attacks appear commonplace, society may be led to believe this behaviour is normal — and there's little that can be done about it.'[33]

Within this logic, feminist claims therefore trivialise 'real abuse' (e.g. McLeod, 1989). 'Real abuse' is perpetrated by abnormal strangers. Carol Smart (1989b:52) suggests that historically, in Britain at least, the consternation over stranger abuse has nourished the complacency over abuse of children by male relatives. As Smart notes:

> 'It would appear that the more concern is expressed about the threat of strangers, the less close relatives could be brought into the frame. The more child sexual abuse was depicted as a horrible pathology, the less could 'ordinary' fathers be seen as enacting such deeds...'

Telethon's focus on family violence and therefore intra-familial child sexual abuse, particularly of girls, challenged this dichotomy.

The distinction between normal-common-consent-based male sexual behaviour ('sex') and aberrant-rare-coercive male sexual behaviour (rape, violence) is based on an A/not-A model. Nancy Jay (1981) explains the model. First, nothing can be both A and not-A; this is the

principle of Contradiction. Second, anything and everything must be either A or not-A; this is the principle of the Excluded Middle. As Jay argues, the A/not-A dichotomy follows the rules of formal western logic which began with Aristotle. A characteristic of A/not-A distinctions is the threat of chaos if the excluded middle is not maintained. Just as a radical social movement such as feminism associates striving for social change with the abandonment of a rigid gender dichotomy, conservative thought mobilises this threat of chaos to oppose such change, and is often founded on the constructed opposition between male and female.[34] In the child sexual abuse accounts, the A/not-A model is threatened by the feminist argument that male sexual behaviour is both coercive *and* common, both sex *and* violence. The wide-ranging ramifications of this are opposed by appeals to chaos: either 'real' abuse will go unacknowledged (McLeod) and unchallenged (Flynn), or society as we know it, based on 'normal' family relationships (e.g. Booth, 1989), will be destroyed.[35]

This appeal to A/not-A is presented as justification for not changing the situation. It is the advancing and retreating view of the enormity of the problem which is hinged to media backlash. Journalists are implicated personally and bureaucratically in how they construct accounts of the world.[36]

Future directions

I conclude with two 'endings' to this paper, because this best represents to me the ongoing tensions between feminisms and post-structuralisms, particularly in relation to issues of sexual violence. First, I use the results of the post-structuralist analysis to suggest some connections within a largely radical feminist account of child sexual abuse. Secondly, I consider some possible limitations and dilemmas in trying to reconcile the two approaches.

Essential fictions[37]

The media constructions of child sexual abuse and the accepted ways of doing research and media work produce and are produced by A/not-A dichotomies, the classic binary oppositions of phallogocentric language. These oppositions in turn coalesce around notions of gender and heterosexuality which have the man/woman dynamic as the 'natural' base.[38] The oppositions recuperate difference: what is assimilable is drawn in, what is not is rejected and therefore does not exist conceptually in dominant discourses.

In the original media accounts these oppositions construct the realities of sexual abuse:

Positive	*negative*
normal men	pathological sexual abusers
(male) protectors, fathers	(male) predators, strangers
biologically-based, normal family	'unnatural' (not blood related), dysfunctional family
(heterosexual) sex	violence
(common) consensual sex	(rare) rape

The original accounts and to a large extent the responses to them also construct rules for interpreting and presenting reality, according to a bipolar model:

Positive	*negative*
facts	errors
truth	lies
reality	myth
neutrality	bias
objectivity	subjectivity
distance	connection
detachment	involvement
science	politics

Two examples illustrate the complexities of the material and discursive linkages. As Lisa Sabbage (1989) notes in a *Broadsheet* article on the media stories, the father-son relationship was not construed as being at risk, but only that between fathers and daughters. A particular version of the parent-child relationship is conceptualised as unique because of its cross-gender nature, yet at the same time the gender associations are presented as unproblematic. Thus, in the same issue of *North and South* as the lead Spence story, Booth (1989:4) reminisces about the pre-child-sexual-abuse-publicity days:

> They were happy, carefree days then as a father of daughters. Little girls were a particular joy, to be prettied and pampered, doted on, cuddled and loved, given the affection they seemed to demand.

It does not make reading 'sense' to substitute a son for a daughter in this account, any more than in a letter to *Metro* along similar lines in which a man describes an 11 or 12 year old girl as 'attractive' and taking part in a 'delightful chat'.

Similarly, media accounts of the male sexual abuse of boys never stress the attractiveness or seductiveness of the victim as causal or mitigating factors, no matter how old or young he is, and the trauma is always emphasised. The reverse is almost the norm for girls and women. The assumptions remain that the abuse is somehow really still about heterosexual (normal) or homosexual (abnormal) sex — hence Du

Chateau (1988:146) questions the claim that one in eight fathers molest their daughters '...and its *even more bizarre* corollary that one in 20 molest their sons' (my italics).[39] The view that heterosexuality, normal sex and abuse are connected coincides in part with feminist analysis.

As a second example, there are connections at the level of metatheory between objectivity as a male-defined epistemology and objectification as an aspect of male sexuality (MacKinnon, 1982; 1983). Discourses of Western knowledge emphasise both visual and sexual metaphors for knowing and thinking about the world. Women's accounts of sexual exploitation frequently emphasise the experience of being turned into an object as a prelude to, and as an intrinsic part of, the abuse. Visualisation in the form of the creation of a woman or parts of a woman as 'an object of vision: a sight' (Berger, 1972:47) is often crucial to this process — in pornography, fetishism, beauty contests and sexual harassment. Detachment of the abuser from his victim is part of the same dynamic: survivors of sexual assault commonly carry this experience with them through a feeling of dissociation from their own bodies. These experiences are then treated 'objectively' in research and media.

Fictional essences

I have drawn on feminist post-structuralist theory, and in particular deconstruction, to identify what I consider to be the essential fictions of the media accounts. The radical feminist analysis of child sexual abuse, and my discussion in this paper, attempt to refute the accounts on the grounds of their 'fiction', their appeals to essential oppositions which are 'really' non-existent. However, like the postmodernist blurring of fact and fiction (Hutcheon, 1988), questions of truth and falsity are seen themselves to depend on essences and are no longer, if they ever were for feminists, especially clear-cut in this postpositivist age (see e.g. Harding, 1986; Lather, 1989; Nicholson, 1990). In my story, just as in much of the MHF-supportive discourse, there can be found the same appeals to essential ideas of truth versus falsity, fact versus myth.[40]

As feminists we are constrained by what we oppose in our reliance on statistics, traditionally 'scientific' research, and the use of authority-claiming rhetoric to come up with 'hard' evidence for court cases, policy initiatives, funding and public education. Is our employment of these tools justified even as we criticise their use in others' hands (Alcoff, 1987; Gergen, 1988; Harding, 1990)?

The convergence of challenges from within feminism with the insights of post-structuralism has also produced a suspicion of narratives which attempt to tell grand stories across history and culture and cast aside anything which does not fit imperialising definitions (Nicholson, 1990).

If dominant modes of thought are to be criticised for closure and marginalisation, then feminist post-structuralists must also not only specify the location of our own accounts but make space for their deconstruction in turn. There is increasing acknowledgement that Woman is a totalising fiction, and that 'women' as a category is fractured by sexuality, ethnic, class and other allegiances. Such cross-cutting oppressions cannot simply be added on as secondary to gender. There are, for example, complex connections between rape and racism, mediated by history and culture.[41] When such realities are competing, who adjudicates?

Yet such criticisms can be, and are, used for anti-feminist ends. If male dominance, particularly the sexual exploitation of women and children, is conceptualised as widespread, deep-seated and ineluctably embedded in the construction of gender, feminists are accused of false universalism and over-generalisation. But more than this, male dominance as socially constructed is assigned to the 'too hard' pile; if its processes and continuing reproduction trace back to bedrock, feminists must be arguing for nature and essentialism.

I have my own vested interest in refuting the media accounts. They elicit strong emotional responses from me, connected to aspects of my own biography and social location. Like Hilary Lapsley (1990), I am 'trying to get on in the system and put the boot into it at the same time!' In this double attempt, aspects of post-structuralist as well as more modernist feminisms have productively engaged with one another, but the goal of a smooth unity remains highly problematic. The lack of a 'real' ending to this paper is not merely a post-structuralist feminist device. Feminist analyses of child sexual abuse and rape can benefit from feminist post-structuralism, but so far work against sexual violence seems mainly confined to the modernist side of the divide.[42] Rather than halt at the essential fictions/fictional essences oscillation, it is an area that demands more feminist attention.

Notes

1 This paper is drawn from my PhD work (in progress) on aspects of the construction of lesbians in the print media in Aotearoa, 1980-1990. Thanks to Linda Evans for invaluable access to media resources, to Hilary Lapsley, for background on the Mental Health Foundation's involvement in the Telethon 'controversy', and to Rosemary Novitz, Anne Else and Bronwyn

Labrum for comments on a draft of this paper.

2 Helene Cixous, from 'Sorties' in *La jeune nee* [The newly born woman], Union Generale d'Editions 10/18, 1975, cited in Marks and de Courtivron (1980), p. 91.

3 See also Smart (1989b) especially 'Sexual Abuse and Criminal Law: A Brief History of Consternation and Complacency', pp. 51-57.

4 On the libertarian, psychoanalytic and family dysfunction models see MacLeod and Saraga (1988). For distinctions between psychological, societal and sociological models, see Breines and Gordon (1983). And for some conflicts in political practice see Valentich and Gripton (1984).

5 See Atkinson's (1971) parallel discussion of coroners, suicide and public perceptions.

6 For a similar approach in relation to the Cleveland controversy, see Nava (1988).

7 On the widespread and gendered nature of rape, battering, sexual harassment, other forms of abuse of women and the sexual abuse of children see the references in MacKinnon (1987) pp. 65-67, n1; Russell (1984); Ahlgren (1983/84). The gendered aspects of violence against women are also often ignored: see Hanmer and Maynard (1987).

8 An example of this is cited by Linda Gordon (1988) p. 61, referring to a social worker who argued that 'society has created a stronger prohibition against mother-son incest' because 'it is most likely to occur. This has led to the intriguing situation in which father-daughter incest appears to have a lower natural probability of occurrence, is therefore less strongly prohibited, and in practice occurs more often' (Kate Rist, 'Incest: Theoretical and Critical Views', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 49, 4, pp. 682-691). See also critiques by Russell (1984) and Breines and Gordon (1983). The sexual abuse of children by women appears at present to be acknowledged to only a limited extent by child sexual abuse workers. This form of abuse is only beginning to surface in feminist circles as survivors name their experiences, and is constructed by feminists working in the area as a 'dilemma' to the extent that it apparently undermines feminist claims about the gender politics of sexual abuse. Feminist objections like those of MacLeod and Saraga are not to the voicing of the abuse as such, but to the way this can be used to avoid connecting the dynamics of abuse to the oppression of women.

9 Braun (1989); Hilary Lapsley [then Hilary Haines] (1990).

10 Russell's (1984) research suggests that 28% of women have had at least one incestuous and/or extrafamilial abuse experience before the age of 14; when the age limit is raised to 18, the prevalence figure reaches 38%. (See also Breines and Gordon (1983) pp. 521-522.) Many feminist researchers suggest that even this is an underestimate. See for example Kelly (1988).

11 And also with the Telethon Trust (Lapsley, 1990). There were a number of organisational conflicts behind the scenes of the media constructions. Space limitations do not allow elaboration.

12 The sexual abuse of children, including incest, is not limited to specific subcultural groups and cannot be simply correlated with class, ethnicity, geographical factors or any other specific characteristic, apart from the

overwhelmingly male abuser-predominantly female victim dynamic (Nelson, 1982; Breines and Gordon, 1983; Ahlgren, 1983/84; Russell, 1984). However, profiles of the most common 'at risk' families constructed by some academic theories and popular accounts tend to portray the typical 'incestuous family' as poor and/or Black and/or geographically isolated (Nelson, 1982). See Flynn (1988) for a particularly contradictory mix of such themes.

13 See also Du Chateau (1988). For a refutation of the view that exhibitionism is trivial, see McNeill (1987).

14 Some studies indicate that paedophiles are a distinct sub-group of child sexual abusers (Russell, 1984, pp. 233-243).

15 See Russell (1984). Russell's survey found that 32% of incest survivors reported that their abusers had also abused one or more other relatives. Frequently this pattern ties in with the dynamics of incest as involving secrecy and denial. A classic example is discussed by MacFarlane and Korbin (1983): eleven family members were abused by the same man. They did not learn of one another's abuse until after his death.

16 See the discussion by Morgan (1985) p. 238, of Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh's term (used in *The Anti-Social Family*, London, Verso, 1982, p. 26, fn).

17 I am not making a judgement about this particular case. There can be injustices in intervention in suspected child sexual abuse cases, particularly when the family does not have class or race privilege (MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). Professionals have themselves been implicated in contributing to abuse by ignoring or magnifying its effects rather than alleviating it. On wife battering as one such example, see Stark *et al* (1979). This adds irony to the more recent charges of excessive zeal. Rather, the focus here is media constructions of the issue.

18 Most child sexual abusers, like rapists of adult women, are not psychotic or otherwise classifiable as abnormal in a psychological sense (Ahlgren, 1983/84, p. 493, 496-497; MacKinnon, 1987, p. 84; Russell, 1984, p. 254). When we combine the high prevalence of abuse with findings that usually the perpetrator is known to the victim, the assumption that most abusers must be indistinguishable from 'normal' men seems a commonsense one. As MacKinnon (1987, p. 84) notes in relation to rape of adult women, it is most unlikely that a few 'lunatics' know around half of the women in the United States. I have deleted specific references for the letters due to space limitations.

19 That the various accounts are versions of the same larger story is demonstrated by this excerpt from an article by Warwick Roger (1990) on the report *No Place Like Home, Women's Experiences of Violence* (Cox and Irwin, 1989): 'It's the latest chapter in the long story that began with the politically and sexually motivated work of Miriam 'Saphira' and Dr Hilary Haines; it continued with the telethon that imposed the Mental Health Foundation on us and then let it loose; its later chapters are concerned with the outbreak of child-snatching by unqualified social workers from parents falsely accused of interfering with their children, and with the disgraceful events (exposed by television's *Frontline* and *North and South* magazine in spite of efforts by the Department

of Social Welfare to use the courts to censor them) that occurred in ward 24 of the Christchurch Public Hospital. It's a campaign to try to convince us that large numbers of ordinary, decent New Zealand men molest their own children and violently attack those who are nearest and dearest to them.'

20 The metaphoric resonances are of phallic heterosexuality, invasion and colonisation (MacKinnon, 1983, pp. 636-7, n4; Fox Keller, 1983). See Salmond's (1982) discussion of metaphor in western anthropology. Also evident is the visual trope common to authority- and objectivity-claiming western scientific accounts (Clifford, 1986: Kitzinger, 1987; Norris, 1982, pp. 79-82).

21 *Metro* refused to print this letter, first on the grounds that addresses were not supplied, and later because it was 'out of date'. Other pro-MHF accounts were substantially edited (Lapsley, 1990).

22 I am interested here specifically in the construction of the relation of lesbian (radical) feminism to the truth of its accounts. A broader discussion of the discursive constructions of 'lesbian' in the child sexual abuse stories is part of my work in progress.

23 Flynn (1988) p. 18.

24 The logic of Flynn's use and interpretation of statistics is unclear (and see note 12). On the one hand she argues that white middle class men really do make up a greater proportion of sexual abusers than they do of other types of abusers, so the implication is that feminists simply take advantage of this 'fact'. Alternatively she also hints at the not-new idea that in the current climate it is white middle class males who are unfairly singled out, and so are overrepresented in the statistics. Either way, feminists are constructed by Flynn as only too happy to target such men unscrupulously.

25 For example, Booth (1989). The 'trendy liberal' stereotype is a caricature nevertheless rooted in political practices. In both Maori and tauiwi anti-racist movements in Aotearoa, lesbians have long been at the forefront in terms of activity if not visibility.

26 They also slide from radical feminism to lesbianism, translating political practice into imputations of lesbian sexuality. For this reason while known lesbian feminists were particularly targeted, I frequently refer to lesbian (radical) feminism.

27 Again, for lesbians and feminists, read 'white' or at least 'non-Maori'.

28 This is just one example of the inadequacy of dualistically opposing radical feminism to some forms of post-structuralism; while they conflict in important respects, there is also much that they share, at least implicitly.

29 Not all feminist theories of sexual violence do this. See critiques of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* for biologism, sexual essentialism and a failure to place rape in its everyday context (MacKinnon (1982) p. 528, n4; MacKinnon (1983) p. 646; Russell (1984) pp. 111-113). I agree with MacKinnon's point that such feminist analysis is not radical.

30 I draw here on MacKinnon's (1983) extended discussion of how the law uses binarisms in its definitions of rape. See also Smart (1989a).

31 There are other similarities. Child sexual abuse, like rape of women, meets with widespread denial (e.g. 'they lie', 'she was seductive'). Male sexuality,

even in theories ostensibly condemning sexual abuse, is frequently conceptualised as an essentialist and/or innate drive — 'I couldn't help myself'. For a critique of this in relation to the rape of women, see MacKinnon (1987), Russell (1984), Scully and Marolla (1984). In relation to child sexual abuse, see Russell (1984) pp. 234-237. As Smart (1989b) pp. 51-57, discusses, incest historically has been taken less seriously than the sexual abuse of children by strangers. There are obvious parallels with the rape of women.

32 This is equivalent to a definition of 'ambiguous' cases as 'half won arguments in parked cars': as MacKinnon (1983) p. 655 suggests: 'Why not half lost? Why isn't half enough? Why is it an argument? Why do men still want 'it', feel entitled to 'it', when women don't want them?'

33 See also Du Chateau (1988) p. 139.

34 There are numerous examples. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a lesbian is incarcerated by the fundamentalist rulers for 'gender treachery'. On a recent episode of the Oprah Winfrey TV talk show, a religious conservative argued that allowing lesbian and gay parenting would lead to chaos and total societal breakdown.

35 In a phrase more commonly reserved by male liberals for feminist anti-pornography activists, it seems that ostensibly liberal *Metro* and *North and South* are in this respect at least in 'unholy alliance' with conservatives. This is also consistent with the support of the right wing group Credo for the original media stories, a fact not presented as problematic by either magazine.

36 Rosemary McLeod's columns in *North and South* are an interesting example of this process. Compare, for instance, her resistance to feminist analysis and particularly lesbian feminism, in 'Rape — And The Open Door' (Feb 1989) with the radical feminism of 'Let's Hear It For Pornography' (May 1989). Her work as a body represents a number of contradictory subject positions which resonate strongly with aspects of Nicola Gavey's (1989; 1990) feminist post-structuralist study of heterosexual women's experiences of sexual coercion.

37 Space limitations prevent more than an outline of the position I advance here.

38 I read this connection, rather than a causal or monistic analysis, from Adrienne Rich's (1980) description of heterosexuality as the model for every form of exploitation and control, and from the suggestions of MacKinnon's work (12982; 1983; 1987) that the sexualisation of all hierarchies begins here. See also Clarke (1981), Hoagland (1988).

39 Compare the comment of one MP during the Homosexual Law Reform Bill debate, on rape and incest — 'at least that's normal'.

40 Feminists in rejecting 'hard' positivisms do not necessarily avoid these appeals. See Sandra Harding's (1986) discussion of feminist empiricisms and feminist standpoint epistemologies. In the latter case, '...to speak "from experience" has almost unquestionable authority in much feminist discourse' (Gavey (1989) p. 461).

41 In the segregated American South, for instance, the crime that lynched Black men were frequently said to have committed was the rape of a white woman (Carby, 1985). There are numerous other examples, such as the Mark Curtis

case (a white unionist in the US active in supporting the struggles of people of colour was apparently (when is this qualifier necessary/appropriate?) framed by police on a rape charge). Similarly I read the Kelly Michaels story (Rabinowitz, 1990) ambivalently. The reading that marginally wins out — Kelly Michaels, a lesbian, was wrongly accused of molesting 51 children and is now jailed for 47 years — is uncomfortably structured around many of the dualisms I deconstruct in this paper.

42 For one local exception, see Gavey (1989; 1990).

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Learning to Win the Game: Auckland Feminist Teachers

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On 1 October 1989, coinciding with the beginning of Tomorrow's Schools, Auckland Feminist Teachers held a one day seminar to celebrate 10 years of activity — seminars, meetings, political activity, social events, mutual support for members, term newsletter. Over 40 women attended to recall the activities of those past years and to discuss the future of Feminist Teachers. Given the difficulties of sustaining such groups, which depend on the energy of people who are already heavily committed to their paid occupations, the endurance of Feminist Teachers over 10 years at a high level of activity is testimony both to the calibre of the individual women who have put in the work to ensure its survival, and to the hunger on the part of women teachers for what Feminist Teachers has offered. If Feminist Teachers had succeeded only in providing support, professional development and education for women teachers over the last 10 years, that would have been reason enough for admiration. But in my opinion it has done much more than that. Its members have carried a feminist programme on the position of women teachers, the management of schools and the need for a non-sexist curriculum into the structures of both primary and secondary schools.

I contend that much of the feminist perspective, especially of women teachers, which is apparent in the school system today (limited though that may be) originates with Auckland Feminist Teachers.

Today, Feminist Teachers has 150 members, of whom almost 40 live outside Auckland and 15 are corporate bodies. At the time of the birth of Feminist Teachers, May 1979, the influence of a feminist perspective in education was so slight as to be negligible. In 1975, to mark International Women's Year, the Department of Education had convened the Conference on the Equality of the Sexes which made many recommendations, with the major focus being on the failure of women teachers to achieve promotion in the school system and their lack of voice in education generally, including in the teacher unions. As a result, a research project on the careers of men and women teachers was begun and the National Advisory Committee on Women and Education (NACWE) was established, its first meeting taking place in November 1979. It was to last until 1982 when it was wiped out by the Minister of Education, Merv Wellington, as part of his cost cutting. The committee's actual impact on the system was minimal. One recommendation of the Conference which did lead to tangible results was that the teacher unions should establish 'equality' committees. PPTA responded to this by setting up an Ad Hoc Committee on the Equality of the Sexes in July 1976 — ad hoc to test whether it was needed! — with regional representation from ordinary teachers. It met for the first time in July 1976. NZEI did not see the need for such a committee and did not establish one. It finally created an Education for Equality Committee, with some male members, in 1982. Another recommendation of the conference was that appointments should be made in the Department with specific responsibility for women and girls. One was finally made in 1979 — a time lag of four years.

As a follow-up to the Department's Conference, in 1976 the Auckland Region of PPTA presented a paper on the Equality of the Sexes to the Annual Conference. Accompanying it was a questionnaire for schools on the position of girls which aroused much debate, although the paper itself was passed by the conference with little debate, a testimony to the mildness of its recommendations. That paper had been drafted largely by Charmaine Pountney, then an Auckland Executive member, and Helen Ryburn, Regional Chairperson ('Chairman' at that time), ex-PPTA President (1974) and Headmistress of Westlake Girls' High School. I had offered to work on the paper and seconded it at the conference, with Helen Ryburn (who had taught me at Auckland Girls' Grammar School) presenting it. As a result of my declared interest in matters to do with women and girls, I had been appointed to the new Ad Hoc

Committee on Sex Equality in 1976 for the Auckland Region. I had been to the Annual Conference in 1975 and had been shocked at the small number of women present.

So by 1979, the year of the last United Women's Convention, attention to the concerns of women teachers and non-sexist education had been very limited, with few concrete steps taken to advance the cause: the 1975 Conference, the establishment of PPTA's Sex Equality Advisory Committee in 1976, the appointment of one Women's Officer, Mary Garlick, in the Department of Education in 1979, and the beginning of the Teacher Career and Promotion Study.

At the Convention, an Education Workshop was convened by Lenore Webster, a secondary teacher formerly from Onslow College in Wellington, and in 1979 Head of English at Rutherford High School. Lenore had been heavily involved in the 1975 Departmental Conference; she had also done her own research on the lack of promotion for women in co-educational schools and had it published in the *PPTA Journal*. She was a member of the PPTA Sex Equality Advisory Committee and had continued to represent PPTA on NACWE. As a result of meeting at the workshop, five of us decided to meet back in Auckland to try to set up a group outside the teacher unions for feminist teachers from both the primary and secondary services. We did not deliberately decide to exclude pre-school or tertiary teachers, but because of our own experience we focused on schools. Over the years, some attention has been paid to the pre-school and tertiary areas and some members have worked in them.

Besides Lenore and myself, the other members of this initial group were Shona Hearn, Gay Simpkin and Jenelle Ingham. Shona was then teaching English at Orewa College, her first position, and was PPTA Branch Chairperson. She had both a strong curriculum interest and feminist perspective. Gay, a committed feminist, was teaching Mathematics at Takapuna Grammar School, newly returned to teaching after a seven year break spent overseas and in library work. Jenelle was a primary trained teacher teaching at Auckland Girls' Grammar School, and with a particular interest in Pacific Island and Maori girls. She went to Australia in 1980. I was about to become Head of English at Birkdale College; I was already an English teacher and Teacher-Librarian there, and newly elected as an Auckland PPTA Executive member, joining Chairmaine Pountney and one man. I had immediately become Spokesperson for Equality (which then meant women) and Executive representative on the Sex Equality Advisory Committee. I had been a branch 'chairman' for five years previously. Lenore and I knew most about the structures of PPTA at national level and felt very frustrated at our lack

of progress there. We believed a group like Feminist Teachers could place pressure on PPTA to become more responsive to the issues raised by the Sex Equality Advisory Committee and could also exert pressure on the painfully slow-moving Department. None of us knew anything much about NZEI, but we hoped our group would attract primary teachers.

So with no idea of the likely response, we called a meeting for the morning of Saturday, 26 May 1979 in the Bayfield School, advertising it by word of mouth. Over 50 women attended. We established our concerns — women teachers' dual role, the conditioning of girls, the sexist structure of schools, the hierarchical nature of schools, the sexist nature of discipline — a communication network and phone pyramid. Individuals volunteered to convene small group meetings on specific topics — Jenelle on Pacific Island girls, Elizabeth England, a teacher at Tangaroa College and later a firewoman, on discipline, and myself on non-sexist literature.

Primary teachers did come to the meeting and I remember being shocked to hear their tales of tyranny over women by male principals, which they poured out in small group discussion. One who attended the first meeting and became one of the greatest contributors to Feminist Teachers over the next 10 years was Pam Hill, now an NZEI Field Officer; another primary teacher active in NZEI, Pat Collings, came to the second meeting and has been a faithful and committed member ever since. She had conflicts with male authority in primary teaching and found it very supportive to meet primary teachers with similar problems. Pam and Pat have been tireless in their efforts to educate other primary teachers in the need to become active in NZEI. Later came Jocelyne Bowden, Maryrose Fitzsimmons and Fiona Johnson, who all contributed greatly.

After the first meeting, the original group put out a newsletter under the guidance of Lenore Webster, who had experience in layout and publishing school magazines. This newsletter came out three times a year for 10 years, an amazing record for such a group. Over the years the newsletter has given reports of seminars and meetings, lists of resources and booklists, articles by members, reprinted Australian resource material, reports on union activities, film and book reviews, information on other feminist groups and activities, successes of Feminist Teachers members, all illustrated by relevant cartoons gathered from other publications. This newsletter has a far wider circulation than the Auckland area, as many Feminist Teachers members live outside Auckland and belong solely to receive the newsletter. To my knowledge, there is no other publication in the country which provides the information on feminist activity in schools which the Feminist Teachers

Newsletter does. If Feminist Teachers had done nothing else except produce its newsletter during the last 10 years, it would be worthy of our everlasting gratitude and respect.

Encouraged by our success, the original group organised a second meeting for Saturday, 28 July 1979. This time 65 women came. The meetings which have followed over the years have covered every topic of interest to women in education, including their own careers, non-sexist curriculum, Maori girls' specific issues, personal assertiveness, political issues, school organisation. Feminist Teachers has done much more than that though. Until the establishment of the union women teacher networks (PPTA in 1986, NZEI in 1989), it was the only group in Auckland providing teacher development opportunities specifically for women. It also provided role models of able, knowledgeable women for women who were at the bottom of the hierarchy in schools and unions. From the beginning, when Saturday morning meetings were used, Feminist Teachers has used a variety of meeting formats and times — weekday evenings, half days or whole days at the weekend, meetings for specific groups or topics, general meetings offering a range of workshops, for which it coined the term 'feminar'.

From the very first meeting, three themes have featured strongly in Feminist Teachers' agenda. The first was the need for women's involvement in the teacher unions. In 1979, those of us already active in them knew they were crucial to the achievement of advances for women and changes to assist girls' education. Before Tomorrow's Schools, very little happened in education without consultation with the unions, especially in the area of teachers' conditions. Over the years, many workshops and sessions were conducted to demystify the unions, coach women in meeting procedure, and encourage women to go to union meetings.

The Auckland PPTA region had always had strong individual women — Louise Gardner, Helen Ryburn, Charmaine Pountney had all been long-serving Executive members; in 1979, Sharon Ellis had become Regional Chairperson and I was an Executive member with Chairmaine and a man. Later, when Maryan Street and Lena Orum became Chairpersons, they, Sharon and myself took many sessions on how PPTA functioned and on meeting procedure. The numbers of women at PPTA regional meetings quickly built up; women spoke up, became conference delegates, stood for office. With the exception of two isolated years when there was a male conservative fight-back, women in Feminist Teachers have been the dominant force in the Auckland PPTA Region, winning a formidable reputation in the rest of the country and initiating most of the advances for women in secondary teaching since 1979.

Since 1979, Feminist Teachers members have occupied the majority

of Auckland regional officers' positions and have provided two of the three national executive positions, with the exception of 1987. This has happened because of the abilities they have demonstrated and their willingness to do the work required by such offices. No wonder Carroll du Chateau wrote in her infamous April 1987 *Metro* article on education in Auckland that 'the PPTA which had formerly been run by conservatives was taken over by a strong feminist lobby'. More accurately she could have written that women at last had taken their rightful place in union affairs and demonstrated their capabilities and concern for education.

As a result of this large feminist involvement and the political skills we had quickly developed, dispelling the myth that women can't cope with male structures, the Auckland Region has initiated through conference papers and at Executive level, via the women Executive members, successful papers on Alternative Career patterns, Multicultural Education and Discipline, remits on Non-sexist Language, Sexual Harassment, Childcare, and the adoption of the Working Women's Charter. We also played a major role in the organisation of the first PPTA Women in Secondary Education Conference and the resulting conference paper in 1985.

Individual women have also had a major role in the development of PPTA policy in all areas through membership of advisory committees, task forces and planning groups. There is no area of PPTA's activities that has not had a Feminist Teachers influence. In 1984, Gay Simpkin became an Advisory Officer in the Head Office dealing with Professional Matters. So it was Gay, with her Feminist Teachers background, who negotiated permanent part-time positions and job-sharing from the Feminist Teachers initiated Alternative Careers Conference Paper, priority return after childcare from the Executive via the Sex Equality Advisory Committee, and, together with Louise Parker and myself, the Promotion of Women Review from the Women in Secondary Education Conference Paper in 1985, originating from the PPTA Women's Conference in which members of Feminist Teachers played a major role.

Because of NZEI's different structure, feminist activists have taken longer to influence policy at a national level, but they have long dominated the Auckland Branch of NZEI. Education on NZEI structure at Feminist Teachers meetings by Pam Hill, Pat Collings and Fiona Johnston, all active in 1979 when Feminist Teachers began, led to increased attendance by women at Auckland and West Auckland Branch Meetings and Annual Meetings as branch delegates. The result was the desertion of the Auckland Branch by men teachers and the perception of the Auckland women as 'freaks' by other Annual Meeting delegates.

This made it difficult for them to get remits from Auckland passed. Pat Collings has been an Executive member since 1985 and Helen Duncan since 1988. Pam Hill has been a Field Officer since 1984 and Lynn Middleton Women's Officer since 1989. Fiona Johnston was the first Trade Union Education Officer in Auckland in 1987, after holding the position of President of the Auckland Branch from 1980.

In 1982, two of the five-member Standing Committee of the Auckland Branch and five of the fourteen Annual Meeting delegates were Feminist Teachers members. That year the Auckland Branch put forward a major remit on the Role of Women in NZEI. In 1989, a paper on the same topic, prepared by an Auckland group, which included Feminist Teachers members, was presented to Annual Meeting. Feminist Teachers members have had a strong influence on primary in-service training in Auckland, holding seminars on non-sexist education and sexual harassment in schools. Feminist Teachers has provided NZEI women with essential support in their struggles to get the Working Women's Charter adopted, to get a first women's conference in 1988, and to get Annual Meeting to approve the appointment of a Women's Officer for 1989.

Since they have had women's officers, both unions have established women teacher networks, which are modelled to a large extent on Feminist Teachers. In 1986, when I was establishing the PPTA network with Women's Co-ordinators in each region and Branch Women's Contacts in every school, and encouraging them to hold seminars at regional level and women's meetings in schools, the vision I had was of locally appropriate versions of Feminist Teachers' meetings. NZEI now have a similar network with positions. These networks have led to vastly increased participation by women in both unions.

So in encouraging women into the teacher unions, Feminist Teachers has been spectacularly successful. The level of women's participation in Auckland has provided support and inspiration for feminist women in other parts of the country and has been an important factor in the increased participation of women overall in both the teacher unions. For the future welfare of women teachers in the profession, this high participation must continue.

The second enduring concern of Feminist Teachers has been promotion for women teachers, not only on the basis of justice for them, but also because the position of women teachers is inextricably linked to the welfare of girls in the system. The publication of the Teacher Career and Promotion Study in 1982 provided a focus for numerous workshops on the promotion structures of both services and how to go about seeking promotion. Members who had already achieved promotion have given

generously of their skills over the years. Women about to have interviews would be given trial interviews which were far tougher than any board could devise. Many members of Feminist Teachers have achieved promotion, greatly assisted by the support and skills provided by their sister members. Certainly Auckland women would have greater opportunities for promotion than elsewhere in the country, but the knowledge offered by Feminist Teachers workshops has been crucial in providing the impetus and confidence for many women to apply for senior positions.

The third area in which Feminist Teachers has had a significant impact is in curriculum. Back in 1979, we were concerned about the male domination of national in-service courses and curriculum development. We worked hard putting in suggestions for in-service courses and women as resource people, and as we gained influence in PPTA, ensured more women were sent as PPTA representatives to in-service courses. Feminist Teachers members became members of the Curriculum Advisory Committee.

At national level, Shona Hearn represented PPTA on the Board of Studies which had responsibility for the Curriculum Review, now disappeared. She delivered an address on curriculum to the 1987 women's conference. Feminist Teachers has had a major influence on the development of PPTA and national curriculum policy. In 1989, I represented PPTA on the charters working group for the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools and was able to push for strong general equity statements and specific goals on a non-sexist curriculum and sexual harassment. Individual members have been very active in subject groups such as Maths Equals and the National Association of Teachers of English.

However, it would be dishonest to pretend that Feminist Teachers has been totally successful in all its original aims. In 1979, women teachers' influence in the teacher unions was weak and women's participation low. So feminist political pressure on unions and Department was essential. We appointed Media Spokespersons for primary and secondary — initially, Pam Hill and Shona Hearn — and actively sought publicity, making press statements, inviting the press to meetings, going on talkback radio. For several years, we wrote letters of complaint and protest when the occasion arose. In 1982, we joined with other women's groups in protesting against cuts in educational spending.

A very successful political campaign was to work for the abolition of corporal punishment and for alternative methods of discipline. By working through a PPTA branch to get the Auckland Region to volunteer a paper on Discipline and Control for the 1980 Annual Conference

and then working with others to write the paper, Feminist Teachers almost managed to get the PPTA membership to agree to the abolition of corporal punishment. We then tried another tactic by holding a workshop on Violence in Education and publicly calling for establishment of a pressure group. Ian Mitchell, now principal of Henderson High School, and Ann Dunphy, now principal of Penrose High School, formed CAVE — Campaign Against Violence in Education — which quickly gained a high public profile. Many other Feminist Teachers members joined and worked actively in the group. Because of the educational work done by CAVE, PPTA did agree to the abolition of corporal punishment at the next conference vote in 1985, although the Government did not take action on it until 1990.

Another area of great interest to Feminist Teachers members was cultural issues. Meetings, workshops and marae visits have been held. In 1981, Sharon Ellis of Feminist Teachers, and PPTA regional chairperson, presented the region's papers on Multicultural Education to the Annual Conference. This led to the establishment of an advisory committee which has since divided into Te Huarahi and Komiti Pasifika and the development of more detailed policy on Maori and Pacific Island concerns.

But as the years went on and those women with the strongest interest in political action moved into union positions and high activity in the unions, interest in being an independent pressure group waned, the positions of Media Spokespersons lapsed and Feminist Teachers became mainly a support and educational organisation. There has not been a new wave of members with a political perspective who have been keen to keep up a public profile and act as a lobby group. By the outstanding success it has had in achieving influence in the teacher unions, by encouraging and supporting women into official positions at school, regional, local and national level, it has destroyed its ability to be an independent political group. I personally consider this to be a serious disappointment and failing. The public commitment to non-sexist or gender inclusive education may have increased since 1979 but it is still mostly token. Resources are extremely limited, and progress at school level has mostly been brought about by the heroic efforts of individual women teachers. Understanding and knowledge of the feminist critique of the education system is still very slight and those of us in the 'system' are always fighting against indifference, incomprehension, hostility and refusal to fund resources and projects. All the pressure possible is needed.

One of the contributing factors to the difficulty of sustaining political pressure has been early wariness about establishing a clear structure

and decision making processes. In 1979, the dominant ideology among feminists was opposed to hierarchical structure and formal meeting procedure — informality, consensus decision making and collectives were the thing. Also, the initial group was unprepared for the overwhelming numbers of women who came to meetings, which rendered our initial informal processes inadequate for establishing our clear political position on any issue. After a few months, one of the regional groups brought up the matter of structure and a very tense general meeting ensued. This led to the establishment of housekeeping and newsletter groups but still no clear processes for making group decision. For a while, a small group met once a month to write letters but this lapsed. We have never had policy-establishing meetings. Therefore, when an issue arises, there is no clear position to be articulated, no person with the authority to give an official Feminist Teachers statement and no process for the initiation of action.

From time to time, concern at the lack of political focus and structure would emerge in the newsletter or at meetings. As early as 1980, Lynne Cargill wrote, in an article entitled 'Where to from here?' 'Let's have purpose and direction. Let's choose a central theme for 1981 and let's be political and published'. The 1985 Annual General Meeting had a discussion on the lack of political direction. But there has always been a general reluctance to institute formal structures so nothing concrete was done. Feminist Teachers' early political profile has faded. I consider this is partly to do with the group's unwillingness to grasp the nettle of structure and work out a process by which policy could be established for public stances to be made. It is ironic that it has been by using the formal structures of the teacher unions that members of Feminist Teachers have been able to achieve real influence in education, while refusing to use them for political ends in its own organisation. The success of Feminist Teachers members in learning how to use the union structures has been to women's advantage once we learn how to use them. We have become mistresses of procedures and tactics. There is nothing more confidence building for women than learning how to cope successfully with formal meetings at school, regional and national level. Feminist Teachers members have learnt how to play the political union game and win.

In Auckland, Feminist Teachers has had great influence through the activities of its individual members in developing non-sexist education in Auckland schools, and the promotion rate of women is higher than elsewhere. The teacher union organisations are strong in numbers of Feminist Teachers members. At national union level we continue to be a major force — both union women's officers, Lynn Middleton and

myself, Gay Simpkin, PPTA Deputy General Secretary Industrial, the 1990/91 PPTA President, Shona Hearn, two Field Officers, Barbara Hill of PPTA, and Pam Hill of NZEI, as well as four National Executive members, Di Moffitt and Jacquie Halliday in PPTA and Pat Collings and Helen Duncan in NZEI, are all members.

When Lenore, Jenelle, Shona, Gay and I decided to call that first meeting in May 79, we were doubtful about the response. We thought we might sit around talking to each other. If we could have been shown a record of what Feminist Teachers would achieve in a decade and where Shona, Gay and I would be, I think we would have passed out from shock.

The era of Tomorrow's Schools creates new challenges and opportunities for Feminist Teachers but the reasons for its establishment still remain:

(1) To bring together women concerned about sexism in education for friendship, support, and sharing of information.
(2) To establish means of changing the present unequal system for both pupils and teachers.
(3) To undertake action to do so, e.g.
    (a) to encourage feminist oriented teaching
    (b) to develop, promote and use non-sexist teaching material.

In 11 years, the concerns of Feminist Teachers have moved from the far fringes of official educational concerns to slightly nearer the centre. We have learned a great deal about how the game is played, won respect as players and even won a few matches. But there's still an enormous way to go before we claim victory.

My sources for this paper are Feminist Teachers Newsletters 1979-89 and conversations with Pam Hill, Pat Collings, Gay Simpkin and Paula Johnston.

Helen Watson, a secondary teacher for over 20 years, has been active on feminist issues in education for the last 15 years, both while teaching and, from 1985 to 1991, as PPTA's Women's Officer. She was a founder member of Feminist Teachers in 1979. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Feminist Education Conference held at Rangiruru School for Girls, Christchurch, 17-20 January 1990.

The Unravelling of a Mad Myth

Ruth Brown

Janet Frame's life shows that New Zealand society encouraged creativity. This view may seem preposterous, and before explaining it I should acknowledge the authority of the opposing perception — that of a narrowly conformist society, hostile to the artistic temperament.

> Both [Janet Frame and Jane Campion] come from a country which doesn't exactly encourage artists to break the mould ...Frame...had a much more difficult life than Campion — she was incarcerated in a mental asylum on and off for eight years — and took much longer to win recognition.[1]

This quotation and my title both come from a review in the *Guardian* of *An Angel at my Table,* Campion's film drawn from the Frame autobiographies. In presenting a bleak view of New Zealand, the reviewer, Derek Malcolm, follows a well-established literary tradition.

'New Zealand is the epitome of a hawk society as Janet Frame sees it, the society that leaves little room for the individual, and for intangible qualities such as imagination and sensitivity', claimed Annemarie Backman in 1978.[2] Mark Williams, in his recent study of Frame, writes that a

> homogeneous mass culture, ruthlessly materialistic, conformist and repressive, that emerged after World War Two — the New Zealand version mimicking the international scene — provided no enclave of resistance into which Frame could retreat... A confident post-war society aggressively extended existing controlling structures such as psychiatric hospitals.[3]

These unfavourable perceptions of New Zealand are upheld by Campion. She has said that she grew up believing that Frame was a 'mad' writer, but that 'the three autobiographies painfully unravel this myth and I wanted to make the story of her life as available as widely as possible'.[4] She has achieved this aim. It is unlikely now that Patrick Evans's warning that not all the events so vividly described in the autobiographies actually happened will be much heeded, at least outside New Zealand.[5] Campion's interpretation is likely to be pervasive, accompanied by the suspicion that, if Frame was never mad, New Zealand society must have been to have locked her up. As one reviewer asks, 'What could be more insane than locking up a talented young woman for eight years simply because she is cripplingly shy?'[6] The idea of a harshly repressive society thus receives new and authoritative emphasis.

Like any well-established myth, this view of New Zealand needs unravelling. Frame should not, of course, have been locked up, but this does not mean that we must identify New Zealand society as the sole 'guilty' party. Easy acceptance of a stereotype tends to blind us to unpalatable complexities: focusing criticism on New Zealand has the effect of obscuring shortcomings within Western society generally.

An alternative to pejorative perceptions of New Zealand society can be found within a most unlikely source — the Frame autobiographies themselves. Paradoxically, texts which delineate most strongly a straightforward conflict between the talented individual and a restrictive provincial society also subvert such a perception. I want to suggest a reading of the autobiographies which portrays New Zealand in a much more favourable light, and even suggests that, if it were not for an egalitarian ethos and enlightened government legislation, Frame might never have even considered a career as a writer.

My reading begins with Frame's perception of her parents. Their example appeared to show that an inner creative core could not survive everyday working life. Frame thought of work as a prison, seeing her parents going about 'their endless work, which might better have been know as "toil" in all its meanings — trap or snare, battle, strife, a spell of severe, fatiguing labour'.[7] Her mother had loved poetry and encouraged her children to see the world through the eye of wonder, yet her creativity appeared to have been silenced by toil. 'Mother had never

lived in her "real" place... her real world had been her life within'.[8] 'If only she had been able to speak for herself'.[9] Frame thought at one stage that a similar fate would befall her: 'It was a fact that most of the girls who left school early went to work in the woollen mills',[10] and the mills are linked with Caversham, an industrial school where wayward girls were held. She assumed that a future either in the mills or 'locked in the industrial school at Caversham...would fall first on Myrtle before it reached me'.[11]

But she did not have to leave school early: government legislation made it possible for her to stay on. She recalls how the dream of a high school education 'might have ceased had not that year, 1935, become the year of the first Labour government with its promise of Social Security, free medical treatment, free hospital treatment for all'.[12] Relieved from constant worry over medical bills, the Frames went for their first family holiday in a spirit summed up in a popular song of the period:

> There's a new day in view
> there is gold in the blue
> there is hope in the hearts of men...[13]

Frame could attend high school and teachers' training college whereas her elder sister Myrtle (also, apparently, strongly creative) had been destined for the woollen mills. Frame could stay within the education system long enough to become increasingly immersed in visionary English literature, and to form images of herself and of society influenced by her reading. She envisaged the 'commercial' girls being prepared for work in offices as being caged, like the boy in Alfred Noyes's poem 'Old Grey Squirrel':

> He is perched upon a high stool in London
> The Golden Gate is very far away.
> They caught him, and they caged him, like a squirrel.
> He is totting up accounts, and going grey.[14]

Her friend Poppy, one of the doomed commercial girls, recites with 'passionate intensity' from Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', as if 'making, reluctantly, her declaration of withdrawal from childhood', knowing that soon the 'hungry generations' would tread her down.[15] Frame saw her school uniform as society's way of preparing her for adulthood, its various items effectively sealing, capturing and imprisoning her body.[16] About to leave school, she expected that weighty and frost-like custom would soon lie upon her: Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', which she knew by heart, said so.

Attending teachers' college did not mean avoiding 'work', but merely postponing it. Her family could not afford university so she

knew she 'would have to train as a teacher, for teachers, unlike university students, were paid'.[17] By this time she was quite convinced that she was going to write, confiding in her diary: *'they* think I'm going to be a schoolteacher, but I'm going to be a *poet*.'[18]

The conviction that she could be whatever she wanted may have been encouraged by the approved national self-image, that of New Zealand as God's Own Country, an egalitarian society. She appears to have believed it, despite first-hand evidence that her own poverty-stricken background was vastly different from, for example, that of 'the group', girls from wealthy families who were the trend-setters at school. She recounts in *The Envoy From Mirror City* that her first experience abroad confirmed an impression acquired at home that 'overseas was poor, not as civilised as New Zealand'.[19] At school she had been taught that 'Maori and Pakeha had equal opportunities and I believed what I had been taught'.[20]

> In New Zealand...there had been jokes about our claim to be God's Own Country, and although I, too, had mocked the claim, I believed it.[21]

Frame as a young New Zealander appears to have received two contrasting images of society. The first, acquired from English literature and confirmed by her perception of her parents, portrayed work as intolerably destructive of the creative impulse, no less in New Zealand than in the English system from which it derived. The second, learnt from the school's teaching of New Zealand history and partly confirmed by her family's improved situation after 1935, portrayed New Zealand as God's Own Country where there were equal opportunities for all. If the first message was that being a worker was intolerable, the second suggested that, in the glad new socialist dawning, being a writer or a scholar gypsy was a career open to anyone.

Derek Malcolm writes in the *Guardian* that New Zealand doesn't exactly encourage artists to break the mould. But it is unlikely that a working-class young person from a more obviously class-based society in the 1940s would even have thought of being an artist: they would be more likely to accept that a mute inglorious Milton born into the wrong class would stay mute — or at least expect to carry on teaching until a career as a writer was financially possible. Frame, however, had a strong image of herself as a writer, an image which took no cognisance of class barriers, but which was problematical in that God's Own Country could not deliver the opportunities it promised.

With no prospect of living as herself as she knew herself to be,[22] no one to turn to and nowhere to go, Frame tried to kill herself. She was persuaded to go to hospital for observation, and after three weeks was

judged to be sane and merely in need of a holiday at home. But home for her meant endless toil, sadness and arguments, and when her mother came to collect her Janet screamed at her. Apparently no thought was given to alternative accommodation; instead she was reported to have 'refused to leave hospital',[23] and she remained in mental hospitals on and off for eight years.

Would a supposedly more tolerant society (Britain, say) have coped any better with a working-class woman who apparently couldn't work and wouldn't go home? Frame herself, and also Frank Sargeson, thought that New Zealand was particularly prone to locking up its dissidents. After her eventual release, they both thought that she should leave the country before someone decided she should be re-admitted.

It is possible, however, that New Zealand had to be the more repressive to counteract the effects of its own propaganda. People were encouraged to think they could be what they chose, when in fact they could not: New Zealand was a capitalist country despite attempts at insulation from external pressures, and as such it needed to maintain the division of labour to fulfil its economic requirements. The categories of worker and writer became confused as a result of national ethos and social reform. The confusion then producing a reaction which reasserted the difference between them. Like Frame, Sylvia Ashton-Warner found that New Zealand encouraged a creativity it could not contain: she was glad to 'escape'. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the advantages of having been brought up there: 'With men balancing nature, people were born and educated with minds larger than size.'[24]

Frame made it, eventually, into the category of writer. She was released from mental hospital when *The Lagoon* won a literary prize; a psychiatrist recognised here as the author and refused to allow the leucotomy for which she was destined. She was classed as 'sane', therefore, when the acclaim given to *The Lagoon* established her as a 'writer' and no longer as a 'worker'.

The terms of her release indicate an assumption, common in the English cultural tradition but likely to be questioned in God's Own Country, that as long as the specially talented are free to be creative, the others do not really matter. In *David Copperfield*, young David suffers for a while washing bottles ten hours a day in Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse. He is eventually released, and the episode, based on Dickens's own life, tells us that sensitive spirits like David's should not be exposed to such degradation and toil, but that ordinary mortals like Mealy Potatoes and Mick Walker must carry on.[25]

The assumption that 'the writer' is a special case, meriting different treatment, is both confirmed and subverted within Frame's autobiogra-

phies. It is confirmed in that she was naturally pleased to be out of hospital, living in Sargeson's bach and receiving an income which enabled her to write. 'I thus had everything I desired and needed as well as the regret of wondering why I had taken so many years to find it.'[26]

She did not, however, abandon all concern for those left behind. She was worried about the fate of her fellow-patient Nola, who was also scheduled for a leucotomy but who had no powerful authority figure to reclassify and rescue her. 'My friend Nola who unfortunately had not won a prize, whose name did not appear in the newspaper, had her leucotomy.'[27] Frame was also very concerned about her mother, whose poetic imagination she wanted to revise and link to her everyday life. The attempt at combining the two worlds of the imagination and the everyday is centred on her mother's dream of a picnic on the flat, an attractive sunny place within walking distance of the cheerless house where Mrs Frame worked all day. But the picnic which Frame arranged was a failure because her mother's conscience told her that she should be working. When they packed up and went home, the sun disappeared and 'the frost-bound hill leaned over the house gripping it with a claw of everlasting winter.' Time and work conspire to keep imagination out of the everyday: her mother was imprisoned by them as surely as Janet had been by the watch-dogs of conformity. Having been rescued herself she was unable to rescue her mother, and she reacted miserably: 'I'm never coming back to Willowglen.'[28] When Sargeson informed her, 'in a tone which said that working-class was "good"', that she was working-class, she clearly did not share his enthusiasm.[29] Had the increased prosperity which Sargeson condemned as bourgeois reached Oamaru earlier, Mrs Frame might have been rescued by a washing-machine and a few other labour-saving appliances.

Frame's sympathy for Nola and for her mother subverts the idea that only the especially sensitive should be liberated. One should not have to be a professional writer in order to avoid a leucotomy, or to be able to exercise one's creative imagination. Frame's life is, as *The Independent* says in a review of the film, the 'saga of a woman liberated by the power of her imagination',[30] but the story as Frame herself tells it is more complex than that. She shows how she benefitted from Labour's attempt to provide equal opportunities, and how, perhaps as a part of an egalitarian national ethos, she believed that liberation should be available for all, not just the talented few.

The film, however, along with the reviews I have quoted, aligns Frame's life with traditional perceptions of New Zealand society and of the separate status of the artist. The sufferings of the untalented are made to seem insignificant. Naturally enough, we see no more of the

mental hospital after Frame has left it. Nor does anyone in the film appear to be worn down by constant wearisome toil. There is a brief scene in which Frame fails to inveigle her mother into a picnic on the flat, but it is balanced by one in which Isabel persuades her to put her feet up, on the train to Picton. Mrs Frame is shown to be sad because of family tragedies, but we do not see in the film the additional grief of being unable to live in her real place, in her imagination. Poppy similarly appears less restricted in the Campion version. She likes 'doing commercial', she says, and when she recites enthusiastically from 'Ode to a Nightingale' there is no implication that she is bidding farewell to freedom. Campion contributes to the tradition that the particularly sensitive who need to live creatively are a class apart, even though the artistic communities in Ibiza and London are not portrayed with deferential admiration. Attention is diverted away from the restrictions which the ordinary untalented all share to some extent in our culture.

From 1935 some of the harshest features of capitalist society were successfully ameliorated in New Zealand: the resultant confusion, in which a gifted artist was locked up, is the fault not of New Zealand society but of the system it tried to soften. If we are to unravel myths and decide who or what is 'mad', it is neither Frame nor New Zealand society, but a way of life which continues to demand from most people work so boring and uncreative that the only escapes are into full-time jobs in the arts and literature (*Nice Work* if you can get it, as David Lodge's novel implies), or into various compensations, including the comfort of material possessions. Improvements since the young Charles Dickens suffered at a blacking factory, or since the Frame parents endured their fatiguing labour, might be less significant than we would like to believe. Lesley Middlemast, a contemporary poet in the worker-writer movement in Britain, writes:

> the local school,
> swollen like a pregnant mother,
> churned out numerate, literate souls,
> educated with a blind acceptance
> of a system they could never hope to change.
> Not for them the hallowed halls of learning.
> Nor for them the passport to better things.
> Instead the chill-like welcome of the factory gates
> and the inevitable embrace of clockcard monotony.[31]

There must be alternatives, but perceiving New Zealand as so much worse than anywhere else, and applauding the triumph of the especially talented, diverts us from the need to find them. Frame was concerned about her mother and Nola, those whom nobody liberated: sadly, our

cultural tradition is less caring. It would be really 'nice work' if professional artists could use their passports to better things to explore ways in which the wonders of childhood imagination, so movingly recaptured by Frame and Campion, could extend into at least a part of everyday adult working life.

Notes

I am very grateful to Heather Murray, post-graduate student at the University of Otago, for her help in compiling and placing this article.

1 Derek Malcolm, 'Unravelling the Mad Myth', *Guardian*, 26 September 1990, p. 38.
2 Annemarie Backman, 'Security and Equality in *The Rainbirds*', in Jeanne Delbaere (ed.), *Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Essays on Janet Frame*, Dangaroo Press, 1978, p. 96.
3 Mark Williams, *Leaving the Highway*, Auckland University Press, 1990, pp. 34-35.
4 Quoted by Derek Malcolm in 'Unravelling the Mad Myth'.
5 Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 1990, p. 269.
6 Suzanne Moore, 'Electric Shocks', *New Statesmen and Society*, 28 September 1990, p. 28.
7 Janet Frame, *To the Is-land*, Paladin, 1987, p. 40.
8 Janet Frame, *An Angel at My Table*, Paladin, 1987, p. 112.
9 *ibid*, p. 179.
10 *To the Is-land*, p. 64.
11 *ibid*.
12 *op. cit.*, p. 91.
13 *op. cit.*, p. 103.
14 *op. cit.*, p.99.
15 *op. cit.*, p.120.
16 *op. cit.*, p. 144.
17 *op. cit.*, p. 159.
18 *op. cit.*, p.163.
19 Janet Frame, *The Envoy From Mirror City*, Paladin, 1987, p. 12.
20 *op. cit.*, p. 13.
21 *op. cit.*, p. 23.
22 *An Angel at my Table*, p. 63.
23 *op. cit.*, p.66.
24 Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *I Passed This Way*, Virago, 1980, p. ix. The expression is repeated on p. 59: 'Many a mind larger than size sprouted in these country schools. Rutherford was one and Barret-Boyes; Alley, Hodgkins and

Hillary.' Bryan Gould, Shadow Cabinet Minister in Britain, told Radio 4 listeners that in New Zealand possibilities were less restricted than in Britain, where the lower classes accepted their lot (*Any Questions*, 1 January 1988).

25 George Orwell makes this point in 'Charles Dickens', *Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays*, Penguin, 1965, p. 87.

26 *An Angel at my Table*, p. 137.

27 *op. cit.*, p. 109.

28 *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

29 *op. cit.*, p. 145. In the light of Mrs Frame's hard life, Sargeson in his enthusiasm for working-class virtue appears as fanciful as the Indian Congressman who opposed the introduction of piped water and electricity on the grounds that it would be morally bad, especially for the village women who would be denied valuable exercise and become sluggish. V.S. Naipaul tells this story in *A Wounded Civilisation*, Andre Deutsch, 1977, p. 151.

30 *The Independent on Sunday*, 9 December 1990.

31 Lesley Middlemast, 'Turning the Tide', in *Once I was a Washing Machine*, Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, 1989, p. 24.

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Staging Women's Talk

A Discussion of Selected Works by Violet Targuse

Carol Stevenson

Amateur theatre was an important social activity in New Zealand during the 1930s and women, organised in groups such as the Country Women's Institute, were in the forefront of the movement.[1] By February 1931 *Home and Country*, the journal of the Country Women's Institute, could report that most of their groups were mounting plays and play-readings.[2] When Elizabeth Blake, producer of Wellington Players, sought to establish a branch of the British Drama League (BDL) in New Zealand, she was therefore hopeful that the Institute would be actively involved. In a supplement to *Home and Country* in 1933 she enjoined members of the Institute to pursue their dramatic interests through the fledgling BDL.[3] Not surprisingly then, the concerns of rural women were reflected in the plays entered in the BDL's one-act play competitions, which began in 1933. Unfortunately these plays have received little critical attention beyond a superficial and unfavourable comparison with the work of Alan Mulgan.[4] Consequently, while this paper will attempt a re-evaluation of Violet Targuse's work in relation to that of Alan Mulgan, it will also attempt an analysis of her work in relation to

the portrayal of New Zealand women on the stage — something which has hitherto been neglected. In the interests of brevity not all of Targuse's work will be discussed here. Rather the paper will focus for the most part on those works which are most directly comparable to Mulgan's 'For Love of Appin' and 'The Daughter'.[5]

Violet Targuse generated seven plays for the BDL's amateur play-writing competitions, and all of them were published in the BDL collections. Like Alan Mulgan, whose *Three Plays of New Zealand* was published in 1920, Targuse sought to explore social themes relevant to the lives of contemporary New Zealanders, and focused in particular on the situation of women living in rural areas. Targuse had considerable success, winning the first BDL competition when two of her plays were placed first equal.[6] In 1934 the editor of the BDL annual publication, *Seven One-Act Plays*, wrote that, 'Of the plays included in last year's volume those by Mrs Targuse, "Fear", "The Touchstone" and "Rabbits" commanded probably the greatest popularity for reading and production.' [7]

Although it is difficult to substantiate this claim, it certainly appears that Targuse's work was well represented in the BDL's Annual Festivals of Community Drama. Between 1933 and 1934 the South Taranaki Area Festival, the Wellington Area Festival and the Southern Hawkes Bay Area Festival were all graced with performances of Targuse's play 'The Touchstone'.[8] In addition Targuse's 'Rabbits' — regarded by Professor James Shelley of Canterbury University as 'the high water mark of New Zealand drama at that time' — was also performed at the South Taranaki Area Festival.[9]

However, despite the acclamation Targuse's work received when it first appeared, these works have been dismissed by modern critics, who have concerned themselves instead with the work of the New Zealand expressionists, and plays written by New Zealanders for professional performance in Great Britain.[10] In my view Targuse's work, although considerably marred by the constraints of the one-act form, represents an important phase in the development of women's roles on the New Zealand stage.

That Targuse did not always meet the challenges of the BDL's beloved one-act form successfully is nowhere more apparent than in 'Fear', which disintegrates into melodrama as character development is sacrificed for the sake of compacting the plot. The central character is Finola, wife of Simon Murdoch, a freezing works manager. She is possessed by an intense fear of her first husband, Blake. She believes Blake, who has an unsavoury character, died in the Murchison earthquake. Consequently, when he reappears as an employee at the works

Finola is justifiably dismayed, especially as Blake sets about blackmailing her.

The play's success lies in the degree to which the audience identifies with Finola. Unfortunately Finola appears only after her psychologically disturbed state has become fully manifest, and the audience has no opportunity to see her as she might have been prior to Blake's arrival. Consequently, Finola is in no state to tell her own story, and Simon is made to recount details of Finola's past for the sake of the exposition. Effectively this denies Finola any personality of her own, so that she appears hardly more interesting than the one-dimensional victims of nineteenth century melodrama. Blake's timely death in an industrial accident (news of which arrives in the play's last moments) similarly tips the play out of the naturalistic mode in which it opens into melodrama.

Similar flaws, although less significant, occur in other plays by Targuse. However, they do not detract from her contribution to New Zealand play-writing which, as Howard McNaughton points out, followed in the vein of realism begun by Alan Mulgan.[11] 'For Love of Appin' and 'The Daughter' are naturalistic in style and are staged in a recognisably New Zealand setting — 'The kitchen-living room in a small farmhouse in the back-blocks of New Zealand'.[12] Targuse makes similar use of the domestic scene in 'Rabbits', 'The Touchstone', 'Men for Pieces' and 'Ebb and Flow'. For both playwrights, a kitchen setting provides the context of work and routine in which the plays develop. Central to both playwrights' portrayal of the rural kitchen is their representation of women's work. Women, in Targuse's and Mulgan's plays, are generally engaged in domestic chores from which they emerge to take up their role in conversation. In 'For Love of Appin' Mrs Buchan is just finishing some ironing as the curtain rises, and she continues with various domestic chores throughout the play, such as preparing a cup of tea for Harding and fetching a meal for her husband Angus. In one stage direction Mulgan explicitly indicates that Mrs Buchan 'warms the pot and makes the tea as she talks'. Even in Targuse's plays, where women are less frequently portrayed in a direct service role to men, female characters frequently work and talk. Throughout 'Ebb and Flow' Rachael and Mrs Flett busy themselves with cooking and wool-winding. In 'The Touchstone' Kate continually oscillates between her involvement in the dialogue and the completion of her jam-making. Effectively the setting and on-stage action of both playwrights' work emphasises the serial nature of women's leisure, which is often interspersed with and interrupted by domestic chores.[13]

Targuse's and Mulgan's female characters share other characteristics besides their involvement in domestic work; they may be classified to

some extent as belonging to one of two broad categories. Either women are portrayed as being in need of support, encouragement or reassurance, or they are portrayed as acting in a supportive fashion in their interactions with another person, as the following chart shows.

Play	*Women Seeking Support*	*Women Providing Support*
Mulgan		
'For Love of Appin'	(Mrs Buchan)	(Mrs Buchan)
'The Daughter'	Margaret Bailey	
Targuse		
'Men for Pieces'	Jean	Mrs Lane
'Ebb and Flow'	Rachael	Mrs Flett
'Rabbits'	Maggie Blake	Mrs Benson
'The Touchstone'		Kate and Nellie

Mrs Buchan in 'For Love of Appin' partially defies this schema, as she initially seeks reassurance from Harding, but she acts in a steadying or supportive capacity in her later interaction with Angus. As Mrs Dobson's support for her husband Charley in 'Men for Pieces' takes place offstage, she has not been included in the chart.

Despite these categorisation problems, it is possible to see a number of similarities between the women portrayed in Targuse's and Mulgan's work. The women who seek support tend to exhibit a dissatisfaction with their immediate physical surroundings or with their daily routine. Many of these women also perceive an emotional gulf widening between themselves and members of their immediate family. In 'Rabbits', Maggie Blake longs to leave the Canterbury railway siding she has been forced to accept as home. Anticipating a change (she expects news of her husband's transfer to the city), she describes the Canterbury Plains environment and weather as if it is driving her insane:

> ....nothing can be seen on three sides but a sea of tussocks, and on the fourth a gravel pit! .... And the summers!.... those nor-westers that shriek across these plains without let or hindrance until they tear at this crazy shack like so many fiends; they lift the gravel and play a devil's tattoo on the iron roof till I feel that the pebbles will come through and beat on my brain, and send me stark, staring mad![14]

This speech is remarkably similar to one of Margaret Bailey's speeches in 'The Daughter':

> Cows, cows, cows—nothing but cows, morning, noon and night. Nothing but milking and housework, and housework and milking.[15]

Although the environment is perceived here as a less destructive influence than the monotony of the farm routine, Margaret Bailey, like Mrs Blake, is struggling to retain her sanity in an arduous rural situation. This feeling is intensified for Margaret Bailey as she watches her daughter Grace grow away from her. Grace, unlike her mother, is prepared to accept the constraints of her rural situation and defends her local friends. It is Grace's intention to marry Charlie Stevens, whom her mother considers 'a boor with no manners and not an idea in his head'.[16]

The emotional distance between Mrs Bailey and her daughter has much in common with Rachael's and Coral's situation in 'Ebb and Flow'. Rachael, like Margaret Bailey, has attempted to live her life vicariously, providing as far as she could the best of everything for her younger sister. Inevitably, as Coral has moved further and further away from her rural beginnings she has ceased to value Rachael's friendship. Consequently, Rachael has become emotionally isolated. Like Margaret Bailey, who sees her dreams ending with her daughter's engagement to Charlie Stevens, Rachael feels that Coral's death signifies the death of something in herself.

While the trials of rural life and the destructive effect they have on family relationships is a theme common to the work of both playwrights, only in Targuse's plays do women turn to one another for support. Mulgan's Mrs Buchan and Margaret Bailey cannot be represented in relation to female counterparts who provide them with support. Rather they must derive their support from personal communications with men. When David Forrest arrives on the farm in 'The Daughter', he not only reminds Margaret Bailey of her university days and her past aspirations, he also acts as her confidant. However, Forrest's male presence inevitably affects the emotional quality of the exchange and the way in which she gives voice to her concerns. Even after reminiscence and laughter have given way to a discussion of Margaret Bailey's rural lifestyle, Forrest maintains a relatively autonomous input. He challenges her 'with a touch of raillery', and later recommends that she accept her daughter's decision to marry Charlie Stevens — as if there is some scientific law which justifies his reminder 'that it is a rare mother who chooses her own son-in-law'.[17] The effect of such rejoinders is to put the conversation on an intellectual plane, rather than a personal one (leaving aside Forrest's confession). Consequently, when Forrest retires to bed (after a perfunctory handshake) Margaret is left alone — uncomforted but for her son's embrace. Despite Forrest's good intentions, the male-female communication in 'The Daughter' does not fulfil the same emotional needs as the talk which is staged between women in Targuse's plays.

Deborah Jones, a New Zealand contributor to *Women's International Quarterly*, has studied and described women's talk or 'gossip'. She defines gossip as:

> ... a way of talking between women in their role as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation.[18]

In the light of this definition the confidantes and female friends in Targuse's plays may be seen as affirming presences, through whom the women in need of support come to know themselves better.

When Rachael in 'Ebb and Flow' is stricken with grief, she turns to Mrs Flett, who encourages her to talk about her sister Coral's death. Having started Rachael talking, Mrs Flett is content to take a lesser role in the conversation. From her line 'Yes, I know' to 'She was a sweet baby', Mrs Flett simply affirms Rachael's grief. When Rachael seeks to continue, interrupting Mrs Flett ('She certainly was all that, but I still don't —', the older woman again subsides, quickly ceding the floor to Rachael. By allowing Rachael the space to talk freely, Mrs Flett encourages Rachael to come to terms with herself and her grief.[19]

The importance of women's talk in re-affirming personal identity is also evident in 'The Touchstone'. Two families are aware that someone is engaged in a sheep-stealing operation in their neighbourhood — both families have lost stock in this way. However, because the McLeans and the Balfours have known each other for years, they are unable to level accusations at one another. Consequently, the discovery of the responsible third party is not made until late in the play, after Kate McLean takes the initiative and stages a confrontation scene. Kate's development up to this point is crucial, and much of her determination to overcome the impasse stems from a seemingly unimportant exchange of gossip with Nellie Balfour. Domestic concerns are the chief reason for this interchange, in which Nellie shares news of her son Brownie and the two women finalise their plans for Christmas. Precisely because of its domestic nature, Kate finds this conversation useful in making her decision. Kate's sense of self is closely bound up with her relationship to Brownie, Nellie and Geoff Balfour — something that this everyday gossip session brings home to her. As a consequence of this conversation with Nellie, Kate decides that she cannot continue to ignore the sheep-stealing incident and determines to confront the situation.

Neither this episode nor the interchange between Mrs Flett and Rachael in 'Ebb and Flow' contain the subtlety of language or complexity of character which New Zealand audiences today have come to

expect of writers such as Renee and Hilary Beaton. But if these consciously feminist writers are to be viewed in historical context, then the work of early women playwrights like Targuse must not be dismissed. Like Alan Mulgan, Violet Targuse effectively portrays the domestic setting of women's leisure and represents women as supportive (affirming) figures, or as individuals in need of support. However, Targuse also seeks to explore the nature of women's interaction, which Deborah Jones has described as an essentially affirmative form of inter-personal communication. The effect of such communication, as we have seen, is to sustain women in difficult personal circumstances. It is this notion of female solidarity which the 1980s playwright Renee adopted as the backbone for her highly successful domestic work 'Wednesday to Come'.[20] For all their flaws and similarity to Mulgan's works, Targuse's plays must be regarded as the first attempt to portray the interaction of New Zealand women on the stage — an interaction which has developed into a key element of New Zealand women playwrights' work today.

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Notes

1 Howard McNaughton, 'Drama', in Terry Sturm (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, pp. 283-5.
2 *Home and Country*, 4, 2 (Feb. 1931), p. 1.
3 'British Drama League — New Zealand Branch Supplement', *Home and Country*, 6, 3 (Jan. 1933), pp. i-iv.
4 Howard McNaughton has recently compiled a more substantial account of Targuse's plays, but he still considers that 'Mulgan's achievements... slight as they were, had not been bettered by 1939...' McNaughton, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
5 See **References** for publication of the plays discussed in this essay.
6 McNaughton, *op.cit.*, p. 283.
7 *Seven One-Act Plays*, British Drama League — New Zealand Branch, Wellington, 1933, p. 91.
8 Schedule Festival of Drama, Hawera (8-10 August 1933), unpublished programme; Wellington Area Second Annual Festival of Community Drama (9-12 August 1933), unpublished programme; Second Annual Festi-

val of Community Drama, Southern Hawkes Bay Area, Dannevirke (11-13 July 1934), unpublished programme.

9 Joan Sheppard to Howard McNaughton, qu. McNaughton, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

10 In his bibliographical essay, 'Writing About New Zealand Drama' (*Australasian Drama Studies* 3:1 (Oct 1984), pp. 129-137) Howard McNaughton dismisses the BDL plays as 'generally unremarkable' (p. 130) and in his discussion of New Zealand drama during the inter-war years (in *New Zealand Drama*, Twayne Boston, 1981) he focuses on Merton Hodge, who wrote for the British stage. He also considers Eric Bradwell and J.A.S. Coppard who wrote in an expressionist genre (pp. 28-37), but Violet Targuse's work receives no mention. John Thomson's *New Zealand Drama, 1930-1980* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1984) provides better but by no means comprehensive coverage of her work (see pp. 16, 21).

11 McNaughton, *op.cit.*, p. 282.

12 Alan Mulgan, 'For Love of Appin', p. 7.

13 This concept of women's leisure is derived from Ervin-Tripp's definition of the domestic setting of women's talk. See Deborah Jones, 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture', in Chris Kramarae (ed.), *The Voices and Words of Women and Men*, Pergamon Press, Illinois, 1987, pp. 193-198.

14 Targuse, 'Rabbits', p. 123.

15 Mulgan, 'The Daughter', p. 43.

16 Mulgan, 'The Daughter', p. 42.

17 Mulgan, 'The Daughter', pp. 41-2.

18 Jones, *op.cit.*

19 Targuse, 'Ebb and Flow', pp. 83-4.

20 Renee, *Wednesday to Come*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1985.

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_____ 1934. 'Ebb and Flow', in *Seven One-Act Plays*. British Drama League — New Zealand Branch, Wellington.

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Archives:

Eleanor Baker McLaglan and Sex Education in the 1920s

Margaret Tennant

The New Zealand School Medical Service was established in 1912. It soon provided a haven for beleaguered women doctors, many of whom had faced and tired of the struggle to gain acceptance in hospitals and general practice. Public and professional hostility pushed some into low status and unpopular areas of medicine, such as child health, which were thought appropriately 'feminine' (Hughes, 1988:128-31). Eleanor Baker, New Zealand's sixth female medical graduate, was one such refugee when she joined the Service in February 1914.

Baker's early career had led her to maternity training in Dublin and a six month appointment as Assistant Medical Officer at Seacliff Asylum, and later at Ashburn Hall. Unable to make a living in private practice, she took up another temporary position as Superintendent of Te Kopuru Hospital in North Auckland and, in the varied setting of a rural community, rapidly gained in confidence and experience. Further temporary positions followed and then, in an attempt to gain further experience, she applied for a position as house surgeon at Auckland Hospital. After a period of controversy, she was appointed against the

wishes of a medical superintendent hostile to women doctors. Struggling against the 'organized ill-will' of her male colleagues, Baker was eventually engineered into tendering her resignation. After a period of 'black, black despair', she accepted a position in the School Medical Service even though, as she later wrote, she thought it was the end of 'real' medicine for her. But if bureaucracy seemed tedious, state employment at least provided security and a steady if unspectacular income. By her mid-thirties, Baker was ready for both.[1]

Normally a decidedly positive personality, Baker soon discovered that school medicine was not without its rewards. It was, she told a meeting of Christchurch parents in 1922, 'the most constructive, most altruistic branch of medicine, and the richest in fruitful possibilities'. Unlike infant welfare, it dealt with children in masses, and at the stage when they were being integrated into social life and civic responsibilities.[2] Although school doctors spent the larger part of their time in routine examination of thousands upon thousands of primary school children, they were increasingly charged with the moral as well as the physical guardianship of children in schools. Some of the more outspoken doctors had never hesitated to pass judgement upon the moral 'tone' of the communities in which they worked; on parenting skills, social life, the iniquities of late night radio broadcasts and the cinema.[3] Baker was far more moderate in this respect than some of her more idiosyncratic colleagues, whose school visits could strike terror into the hearts of pupils, teachers, and not a few parents. The pragmatism and good humour evident in Baker's autobiography *Stethoscope and Saddlebags* is confirmed by her letters in Health Department files and archives. Less than enthusiastic about the role of moral arbiter, she was often acutely aware of the absurdities of her situation as all-round expert on matters affecting children. One school principal called on her to remove from his school grounds mating dogs which were 'demoralising' the children; another accused school doctors of failing to reform the morals of New Zealand children — a miracle that all the clergy and several hundred teachers were unable to achieve, Baker protested.[4]

One of the tasks urged upon school medical officers during the 1920s and 1930s was that of sex education. Sex education had been debated in New Zealand since at least the 1890s, when groups such as the White Cross League, an Anglican organisation founded in the 1880s to promote social purity among young men, gave talks on the dangers of masturbation and 'impure thoughts'.[5] It is significant that the terms 'sex education' and 'sex hygiene' were often used interchangeably, for one of the aims of those promoting sex education was to warn young people about the 'horrendous diseases' which could result from 'unclean'

behaviour.

Even in the 1900s women doctors were occasionally invited to address senior school girls about sexual matters, or to give talks to women's groups on the best way to deal with small children's inquiries. On the scanty evidence available, it seems that these addresses tended to emphasise the 'sacredness' of the sexual act as a precursor of motherhood and to be less graphic than the lecturers of the White Cross League about the dangers of masturbation and disease. In 1911, for example, Wellington doctor Kate Hogg gave a talk to the New Zealand Moral and Physical Health Society on 'A Knowledge of Sex for Boys and Girls'. Hogg disagreed with those who sought 'to inculcate virtue with a dissertation on the many kinds of vice'. It was, she said, quite sufficient to tell people about the meaning and use of the sex organs; detail about their misuse was profitless, and might only awaken lifetime feelings of revulsion.[6]

With World War One and associated concern about the spread of venereal diseases, the more punitive approach prevailed. Moral exhortation was increasingly overlaid with warnings about the physical danger posed by sexual misdemeanours (Fleming, 1988). As the document which follows shows, Eleanor Baker herself was very perceptive about this hijacking of medical teachings, noting that she was often expected to preach medical punishments in place of 'out-of-date hell-fire'. In 1922 a Committee of Inquiry was established to look into the issue of venereal disease in New Zealand. Its Report commented at length on the way in which children were 'allowed to grow up in ignorance of sex physiology or with perverted ideas due to the want of proper instruction'. Ideally, it concluded, sexual instruction should be given by parents, but few seemed willing to fulfil their duties. Teachers should therefore be trained to deal with individual queries while school doctors or other qualified practitioners could give occasional talks to older boys and girls. However, the Committee members felt concerned that not all doctors could be entrusted with such a delicate matter; only those who had shown themselves especially adapted by sympathy and tactfulness, and 'preferably those who are parents' should be chosen for the task.[7]

As far as the School Medical Service went, this was the sticking point. Ada Paterson, the second head of the Service, clearly had doubts about the suitability of her staff on a number of counts and was, in any case, against class instruction.[8] Sex education in schools remained in the domain of a few more dedicated school principals and doctors, or visiting lecturers such as those of the White Cross League (their addresses somewhat ridiculed by the more sophisticated children of the

1920s, Baker reported!).[9] The few publications available appear to have been on the same level of non-specificity as Edith Howes' *The Cradle Ship*, a popular book for younger children in which instructional fairies drew attention to 'stamen-fathers' and 'pistil-mothers' in flowers, to baby bees and birds, but where the closest reference to human reproduction related to the 'silken baby-bag' in which babies grew beneath their mother's heart.[10] Concern that detailed instruction would inflame interest and experimentation rather than releasing children from 'playground smut' meant that sexual instruction remained sidelined.[11]

It was against this background that a Mr H.E. Field conducted his inquiry into sex education during 1926. Field was a student of Professor James Shelley of Canterbury University, and as part of his thesis research he sent questionnaires on sex education to more than 200 'representative people' in New Zealand (by which he meant teachers, doctors, educational administrators, clergymen, barristers and social workers).[12] Eleanor Baker McLaglan, now a married woman and Senior School Medical Officer in Canterbury, was among those surveyed. Her detailed eight page response survives in Health Department records at National Archives in Wellington, allowing us an intriguing insight into one professional woman's views on morality, sexuality and social life in the 1920s. Her comments were all the more candid because they were written under an assurance of confidentiality. While Baker McLaglan was a product of her time and social class, her comments were characterised by a tolerance, wisdom and pragmatism which were certainly not shared by all school medical officers.

It was inevitable that Baker McLaglan's responses would be conditioned by her medical training and membership of an elite profession in New Zealand (albeit one of its more lowly branches). Although very much in favour of sex instruction by 'wise & gifted mothers', she was suspicious of others with inadequate 'scientific' credentials for the task. She was hostile to the claims of religiously motivated people to lecture on sex education ('mawkish and over-sentimental') and felt that in 'these days of atheism the religious aspect must be carefully handled to avoid exciting ridicule'. As her concluding remarks (reproduced below) indicate, she did see a place for an emotional religion in saving 'fallen' women — but even here it is largely presented as the lesser of two evils. She was indignant about books such as Marie Stopes' *Married Love* which, she claimed, 'deliberately inflamed the emotions under the guise of giving scientific information'. *Married Love*, she somewhat caustically suggested, owed its vogue to Stopes' use of the title 'Dr', the author's PhD giving her medical authority in the eyes of the public. Nonetheless, Baker McLaglan was quite favourably disposed to Stopes' *Wise Par-*

enthood and could not understand why it had been banned when it explained 'how to prevent the conception of children one is unable to provide for inadequately or perhaps give legitimacy'. This, she affirmed, was important knowledge:

> When adults, or even adolescents with emotions already awakened are seeking accurate scientific knowledge, they have the right to be able to get it straightforwardly set forth by the sanest most wholesome brains in the country, without adding to their difficulties by involving it in a lot of stuff inflaming their emotions.

In suggesting that contraceptive knowledge was preferable to the conception of ex-nuptial children, Baker McLaglan was probably some distance ahead of her medical peers. In other respects, too, her responses were relatively restrained. She regarded masturbation as undesirable but impossible to eradicate — after all, she pointed out, babies did it in their cradles. (Only a few years earlier her Wanganui-based colleague, the formidable Dr Elizabeth Gunn, had expressed herself 'appalled and aghast' to find that little boys had been masturbating in the grounds of one of her district schools. Gunn's response was typically excessive: she recommended constant supervision, plenty of work, military drill, corporal punishment ('not given by a woman') and plenty of teeth-cleaning, since rotten mouths and rotten morals were clearly connected. Baker McLaglan seems very low key by comparison.)[13]

There was also a personal tone to McLaglan's replies, especially where she takes the discussion beyond the instruction of young people, to consider the need even of adults for information on sexual matters. She was responding as a woman on issues which had clearly touched her personally and, in the extract below, she ticks Field off for assuming that someone in her position was male, stressing that her opinion was worth getting as much for her sex as for her position. In 1923 Eleanor Baker had married Captain Leo McLaglan while on a visit to England. The couple returned to New Zealand and street directories show them living together in Christchurch until around 1926.[14] The marriage was apparently short-lived. There is no mention at all of a husband in Eleanor's autobiography published in 1965, nor in obituaries, though her death certificate describes her as a 'widow'.[15] As a woman who was a spinster until her mid forties, Baker McLaglan was possibly writing from experience when she stated that

> young unmarried women, or even fully matured unmarried women, will sometimes get more help and comfort from another single woman whom they know has herself experienced the frustration and wounded pride, and other complex emotions

> they suffer. They feel (and often justly), that many married women have often had that side of themselves fully satisfied, — often fulfilled ad nauseam, so that they have no conception of the difficulties of the unmarried, nor their desire for simple, clear instruction.

One of the few points of commendation Baker McLaglan found in Stopes' *Married Love* was its presentation of a woman's point of view and needs which, she thought, might be useful for men about to marry: 'The necessity for preserving a woman's self-respect by never taking her consent for granted, but always wooing her for a favour, also to expect periodicity and intermission in her desires, would seldom occur to a man of its own accord'. Again, was McLaglan speaking from experience?

McLaglan could not, of course, distance herself from her middle class background. In the "General Observations' which follow, she writes as one apart from the 'lower classes', to whom she attributes vulgarity and crudeness in sexual matters. On the other hand, she acknowledges that social and economic conditions make middle and upper class standards of behaviour irrelevant for many and she ends on what was for the time a quite remarkable note of moral relativism. 'How can anyone of us state what is and what is not right for another person...' she asks, before concluding that it was an impertinence for the middle-aged to dictate to the young the management of their sexual lives. Her final sentiments might gain a nod of approval even in the 1990s.

H.C. Field's thesis on 'A Consideration of the Problem of Sex Education With Special Reference to New Zealand Conditions' was presented to the University of New Zealand under the pseudonym 'Aglow' in 1927. Insipid and wordy, it in no way reflects the vigour and challenge of McLaglan's response, though her comment about doctors being called upon to preach medical punishments in place of hell-fire and damnation is quoted. The thesis ends by calling for a greater frankness about sex ('but not excessive frankness') and it endorses the prevailing preference for individual rather than group instruction in sexual matters, while noting the difficulty of finding suitable people to carry it out. It rather pompously concludes that, 'the existence of an earnest co-operation between elders and youths in this most intimate of matters can have a profound effect upon the outlook of both'.[16] Sex education would continue to be stymied by disagreements over who should do it and in what contexts, and by the fear that knowledge would lead to experimentation.

Eleanor Baker McLaglan retired from the School Medical Service, but not from medicine, in 1940. At the age of sixty she became once again a

house surgeon, first in Melbourne, then in Timaru and Wanganui. Despite the trepidation with which she embarked upon this final stage in her career, she found herself welcomed, respected and, she noted with some wonderment, even *liked* by the younger male doctors with whom she worked. The unpleasant hospital experiences of her early career were finally exorcised. McLaglan ended her working life as second in command of Wellington's geriatric hospital at Silverstream.[17] She retired at the age of seventy-three and died at Selwyn Village in Auckland in 1969, four years after the publication of *Stethoscope and Saddlebags*.[18]

Margaret Tennant

'General Observations' from Eleanor Baker McLaglan's Response to Questionnaire on Sex Education, 1927

(H1,35/16, National Archives, Wellington)

1 When discussing sex-education of the young, middle-aged married adults, who have had full sexual satisfaction and whose emotions are becoming linked with reason, and possibly waning, must be careful to remember how in early youth any mention of the matter caused shame and uneasiness and also often an undesirable stirring up of emotion.

2 Direct as much as possible of the child's and adolescent's interest and activities into other channels. Activities which occupy physically as well as mentally, are better than those which call for intellectual activity only. Boys' lives are naturally more objective than girls: girls' lives should be made as objective as possible and introspection discouraged. There are so many things in the "pot pourri" of life — science, art, crafts, machinery, games, politics, wit, herbism, humour, good-fellowship, business, beauty, kind-heardedness — and so many hundred more lovely, interesting, inspiring; or merely entertaining or frivolous — and the flavour of them all, so very good, if we but train the palate to appreciate them. Surely we are all getting a little tired of this deification of the sex libido to the exclusion of everything else.

3 It must be remembered that there are thousands of children in the lower classes only too well acquainted with the crude facts of sex-relations, even some of its most hideous manifestations. The attitude towards sex-matters in their home and class is coarse, vulgar and without insight; jokes about it are frequent and vulgar, if not bad. (wicked) Such children require instruction not in sex facts but in its ideals, breadth of outlook, the sacredness of it all. The upper classes (whose training has enabled them to express themselves) must remember that the standard of chastity required by them in their single women, is only nominally required by the lower inarticulate classes where circumstances render such standards impossible of attainment.

4 Suitable people for the imparting of sex-knowledge to children will always be rare. Children and young people will continue to get much of their information from each other, because everyone at any age finds it on the whole easier to discuss intense psychological matters

with their contemporaries. Except in occasional moments of emotional loss of self-control, few grown-ups will be consulted by children. The most we can do is to put those children we can reach on to the right track, the fine point of view. Even a few such children are a valuable leaven in a school

5 The psychology of noble minds is quite different from the psychology of mean and ignoble ones. Although outlook can be influenced by training and environment, yet this remains a fundamental difference. Thus, while the higher type of minds will appreciate the higher outlook, a good psychologist must also study the lower-type mind and find out what is the most useful instinct to appeal to in that. This applies especially to adolescents. Very often it will be found to be nothing higher than self-interest. If you can show that reasonable sex-control "pays" — in added enjoyment and in a greater sum-total of personal enjoyment of sex relations, it is the most you can do. Regrettable, but no good blinking the fact.

6 I have said that in instruction and appeal the religious channel should not be exploited, because of agnostic beliefs and danger of emotionalism. But where a not very well-educated young girl has got into trouble and is sinking into the mire, some religieuse will be often be the only saviour — in such a case all desire is fully, indeed abnormally stimulated — and one flame must be driven out with another, the fire of desire with the fire of religion. Besides religion, with its promise of complete cleansing from sin, enables a girl, (after penitence etc.) to regain her own self-respect, an essential matter. Various religious sister-hoods, the Salvation Army etc. can here do much good. A calm "gentlemanly" religion is no use in such case, it must be as emotional as possible. Similarly for young men, the Church may have something to offer, though young men are not handicapped by the despair of the young woman, the social stigma and loss of self-respect. But again success depends on the personality of the religieuse. A simulated conviction is no good, it is always detected. The number of wise, sane people, burning with belief in a God who personally loves each one of us, "especially sinners", is limited and therefore cannot be called upon as a routine.
(As you have headed your questionnaire — "A consideration of the Problem of Sex Education without limiting the age, I feel justified in considering in adolescents, mothers, adult women etc.)

7 To my mind, early information on sex-matters will most easily be given to boys as well as girls by their mothers. Herein lies the great importance of making available good instruction for mothers, e.g. (as suggested further back) from women doctors at welfare centres.

8 Take care lest much discussion cheapen this subject and reduce its depth. Things should not be shouted which are meant to be murmured in intimacy and affection. Beware lest owing to the extensive vocabulary now available for sex matters, those debating are not simply hitting words about like cricket balls.

9 Send your questionnaire to competent women, so as to get the female angle of vision — quite as important as the male. The one I received, for instance, was simply addressed "The School Medical Officer", and began "Dear Sir", so that I am in doubts if it were not intended for my male colleague Dr Phillipps, at present on leave. Yet surely my opinion is worth getting because of my sex as much as because of my training and official position.

10 Sex hygiene is a vague term, loosely and glibly used, which I have never seen properly defined. Whenever I have been asked to "instruct in sex hygiene", I have always found I was intended to threaten medical punishments instead of out-of-date hell-fire to those who did not live according to the letter of the law as preached by the Christian Church, not at all the same thing as theoretical sex-hygiene; respectability obviously expedient, confounded with morality. And how can anyone of us state what is and what is not right for another person and therefore hygienic. Even physical needs differ. Then there are the rights of others to be considered (however hungry one is, one must not steal). Each race, each nation, each class has its own social or caste creed. The essential point is to have a definite standard and try and live up to it. Broadly speaking, of course, one is right to condemn and encourage disgust for all abnormalities, and anything of a predatory nature (age and sophistication taking advantage of youth and innocence. That is a matter of "herd calf protection")

11 When instructing in sex matters, it seems to me an impertinence for the middle-aged of our generation to dictate to the adolescent the complete management of their sexual life, or to endeavour to impose on the young of this generation a standard of morality evolved under rural conditions, and when marriage was possible at a more reasonable age. The primitive ancient urge is the same, but the economic and social conditions have altered. The next generation must make its own compromise and evolve its own standard. The most we can endeavour to do is:

(a) To prevent them when immature from forming bad habits, alone, or with the opposite sex.

(b) Show them by example as well as precept that self-control is desirable and beautiful — therefore to be tried for. But for

Heaven's sake do not let us adopt a superior moral attitude.

(c) Let them understand that though there may be "danger in repression" (as stated so frequently in modern psychology), suspect the term as too often improperly used to justify self-indulgence and selfishness.

(d) Make it clear that physical relations like most other things in life, without affection, self-respect, self-sacrifice and thought of others are always a nasty makeshift, incapable of giving real worthy satisfaction.

(e) Have some ideals ourselves and do our best to live according to them quietly, unostenatiosly [sic], modestly, and without talk, Avoid flippant and vulgar jokes before the young, and so give them a reverential attitude to the whole thing. Then we must leave them uncriticised to work out the details for themselves, as best they can.

(Spelling and punctuation as in the original)

Notes

1 McLaglan, 1965, Chapters 8-12.
2 *Lyttelton Times*, 25 September 1922.
3 See Tennant, 1991 (forthcoming).
4 McLaglan, 1965, p. 139.
5 McGeorge, 1977, pp. 133-5.
6 Hogg, 1912, p. 140.
7 Report of Committee of the Board of Health on Venereal Diseases in New Zealand, *Appendices to the Journals, House of Representatives*, H-31A, 1922.
8 See Dr Ada Paterson to Director-General of Education, 15 Jan. 1924, H1 35/16 (Medical Inspection of Schools—Sex Hygiene 1924-38), National Archives, Wellington.
9 See Response to Questionnaire, below.
10 Edith Howes, *The Cradle Ship*, London, 1916.
11 McGeorge, 1985, pp. 545. 547.
12 Field, 1927.
13 Dr Elizabeth Gunn, 'Special Report on Stratford District High School', 11 Nov. 1921, H1 35/3, National Archives, Wellington.
14 Marriages Index, St Catherine's House Index to Births, Deaths and Marriages, Auckland Public Library; Wise's Street Directories, 1924-29.
15 I would like to thank Beryl Hughes for information received.
16 Field, 1927, pp. 152-3.
18 McLaglan, 1965, pp. 181-7.
18 *New Zealand Medical Journal*, October 1969, p. 272.

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