

If 'I am woman', what is man?

British masculinity and the Women's Liberation Movement,
1970-1990

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work and all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

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Artificial Intelligence

No generative AI tools were used as part of the research project or to assist with writing.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the theory and analysis by the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) about men - including their sons, husbands, fathers, friends and others - in the context of the project of liberation. The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) from the late 1960s has been widely recognised as naming men as oppressors in the systemic subordination of women. Beyond this, however, there has been little attention paid to the specific critique of men and masculinity that was made by this influential movement. Filling this gap, this thesis uncovers a consistent thread of thinking in the critique of men and masculinity that was sustained across campaigns and across the duration of the WLM. That thinking understood masculinity as a mechanism to assert power over others but, more explicitly, pointed to specific traits such as selfishness, hierarchical thinking, aggression and detachment as socially endorsed norms of masculinity. Rather than creating new forms of 'masculinity', feminists argued that, if systems of oppression were to be dismantled, gender categories such as masculinity would need to be abandoned in favour of a more egalitarian world in which women and men might coexist with a shared commitment to collective responsibility, regard for others, nonviolence and care.

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INTRODUCTION

We are going to have a son – yes, it’s got to be a boy ...¹

In January 1944, a few days shy of the bombing campaign of Southern England colloquially referred to as the ‘Baby Blitz’, a baby was born at St Mary’s Hospital, Paddington in London to parents Kathleen (Kay) and Richard. Expecting a boy – ‘Adrian’ – the parents, upon meeting their baby, quickly redirected and named the baby – a little girl – ‘Ann’.² The sex of a baby mattered and Ann would soon feel the weight of the meanings that imbued her definition as a female, both within her family and more broadly. That experience would both shape Ann’s experience of writing, as well as the content of, *Sex, Gender and Society* in which she famously drew attention to ‘gender’ as ‘the social classification into “masculine” and “feminine”’.³ Published in 1972, *Sex, Gender and Society* was an expression of optimism. If gender was a ‘matter of culture’,⁴ then its expression was not inevitable and therefore open to critique. In this, the feminist sociologist Ann Oakley was capturing a central tenet of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) that had, by this time, built substantial momentum. ‘A liberated woman’, said one of the women surveyed by *Spare Rib* ahead of the first issue in 1972, is ‘one who has worked her way through and out of the psychological, social, emotional and intellectual limitations stamped on her by false role definitions and indifferent education’.⁵ It was not, however, just women who could – or who should – challenge the strictures of gender. ‘The creation of a new woman’, declared Sheila Rowbotham, ‘of necessity demands the creation of a new man’.⁶ This thesis examines the ways in which the WLM considered gender, specifically about the thinking of women in the WLM about men and masculinity, including what ‘new man’ they thought would best support women’s liberation. In doing this, the thesis addresses a relative silence in the historiography about the voices of women on the question of men and masculinity.

¹ Richard Titmuss, extracted from a letter from Richard Titmuss to Maurice Newfield dated 11 June 1943, in Ann Oakley, *Man and Wife. Richard and Kay Titmuss: My Parents’ Early Years*, (London, 1997), p. 200.

² Ann Oakley, *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science*, (Bristol, 2014), p.2.

³ Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, (Melbourne, 1972), p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ [unattributed], ‘In our own write’, *Spare Rib* 1 (July 1972), p. 5.

⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Women’s liberation and the new politics’, in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, (London, 1972), pp. 3-30, at p.3.

1. A question of perspective

In 1991, not long after the emergence of the history of masculinity as a distinct sub-field of gender history, Michael Roper and John Tosh observed that the perspectives of women were largely absent from historical accounts of masculinity:

[R]ecent historical work on all-male institutions and on manliness leaves a great deal to be desired. The crucial problem is that women are almost entirely absent from these accounts, seemingly on the assumption that masculinity takes on a sharper focus when women are removed from the scene.⁷

Since that time, female voices have continued to have far less profile in a historiography that has generally privileged homosocial environments as a site of analysis. There is a rationale to this. Ever since Australian sociologist R.W. Connell coined the term in the 1980s, the historiography of masculinity has been heavily influenced by the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' which Connell used to describe the version of masculinity that is 'culturally exalted' over other masculinities. In this, Connell was seeking, particularly, to draw attention to 'gender relations among men'.⁸ While hegemonic masculinity, as framed by Connell, does not exclude a role for women in the formation, maintenance or disruption of masculinities, the concept moves the focus more firmly on men. In this gender ordering, while Connell is careful to say that women can, and do, challenge masculinities, it is also intimated that they have not yet managed to substantially disrupt hegemonic masculinities.⁹ For Michael Kimmel, it is a fear of the domination of other men that has more salience to men's views of themselves and masculinity. To this end, according to Kimmel, '[m]asculinity is largely a homosocial enactment'.¹⁰ In this sense, then, while '[w]omen are not incidental to masculinity, ... they are not always its central feature, either'.¹¹ This is reflected in the historiography.

⁷ Michael Roper and John Tosh, 'Introduction: Historians and the politics of masculinity' in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London and New York, 1991), pp. 1-24, at p. 3.

⁸ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Cambridge, 2005 [First published 1995]), p. 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, (Oxford, Third Edition 2012 [First published 1998]), p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

As observed by Karen Harvey in 2013, as part of an assessment of the historiography of masculinity:

Homosociality as a concept ... links many works on masculinity, from a study of seventeenth-century Cambridge students, to an analysis of men's responses to domesticity in mid-twentieth-century England. This stress on men alone reflects the idea that it is at such homosocial sites that masculinity is shaped or tested or becomes most pronounced.¹²

This sense of the importance of the homosocial environment to the definition of masculinities has resulted in a rich body of work about twentieth century masculinities. These range from the negotiation of masculinities in intimate settings, such as a multitude of studies of the relationship between fathers and sons¹³, to the formation, performance and disruption of masculinities in larger homosocial settings, such as the workplace or certain leisure spaces.¹⁴ More recently, John Tosh has drawn attention to two of these areas as significant sources of disruption to British masculinity in the twentieth century: '[T]he collapse of the twentieth-century model of male working-class employment, based on relative job security, pride in skill and homosocial solidarity; and the impact on masculinity of the effective disappearance of the expectation of the military service'.¹⁵

Others have expanded the lens beyond the homosocial environment to consider men in mixed settings. Richard Hall, for example, specifically examines the impact of increasing membership of women in the traditionally homosocial environment of working men's clubs.¹⁶ Yet, the views of women about men and masculinity remain somewhat opaque in many of these accounts demonstrating that, beyond the historian's intentional choice of the homosocial environment, it is still predominantly male voices that sit behind many histories,

¹² Karen Harvey, 'Gender II: Masculinity acquires a history', in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, (Los Angeles, 2013), pp. 1-21, at p. 11.

¹³ See, for example, Laura Ugolini, *Fathers and Sons in the English Middle Class, c. 1870-1920*, (New York and London, 2021); Richard Hall, 'Emotional histories: Materiality, temporality and subjectivity in oral history interviews with fathers and sons', *Oral History* 47:1 (Spring 2019), pp. 61-70; and Frank Mort, 'Social and symbolic fathers and sons in postwar Britain', *The Journal of British Studies* 38:3 (1999), pp. 353-384.

¹⁴ Recent examples include Peter Gurney, Matthew Grant and Joel Morley, *National Service Life Stories: Masculinity, Class and the Memory of Conscription in Britain*, (Oxford 2025); Ben Jones, 'Casual culture and football hooligan autobiographies: Popular memory, working-class men and racialized masculinities in deindustrialising Britain 1970s-1990s', *Contemporary British History* 38:1 (2024), pp. 95-117; Helen Smith, 'Reimagining working-class masculinities in the twentieth century', in Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones, and Ben Mechen (eds), *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, (Manchester, 2023), pp. 136-157.

¹⁵ John Tosh, 'Reflection: Masculinities and history for the present', in Houlbrook et al, *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 178-186, at p. 181.

¹⁶ Richard Hall, 'Being a man, being a member: Masculinity and community in Britain's working men's clubs, 1945-1960', *Cultural and Social History* 14:1 (2017), pp. 73-88.

particularly those in institutional settings, in which male voices are privileged. Use of terms such as ‘the military’, ‘the welfare state’ or ‘the labour movement’ are not historically gender-neutral.¹⁷ Equally, many historians have looked to the cultural production of masculinities using sources such as magazines but, again, cultural sites are not necessarily gender-neutral.¹⁸ This is not always just a question of numbers of women within those environments. Frank Mort observes that while increasing numbers of women were joining the ‘new profession’ of advertising throughout the second part of the twentieth century,¹⁹ their access to discourse-shaping roles – such as creative roles – was limited. In addition, certain perspectives, such as feminist perspectives, ‘could be kept at arm’s length by advertising professionals’ who felt that they ‘did not represent an influential group of consumers – at least not in Britain’.²⁰ The institutional privileging of male voices makes the project of seeking out female voices all the more important. Where women may not have had obviously loud voices in the discourse, this does not mean that they were irrelevant or had no influence in shaping men and masculinity. To not look for these voices, and their patterns of influence, is, at best, to fail to be curious about the nature and diversity of voices in discourses of masculinity and, at worst, to perpetuate an assumption that women had nothing to contribute to discourses of masculinity.²¹

¹⁷ As a more acute example of this, Mark Rothery draws attention to the specific influence of one man in the appointment of senior colonial appointments in the early twentieth century in his study of civil servant Ralph Furse [in ‘Manning the British Empire: Gender, identity and emotions in early twentieth century Britain’, *Family and Community History* 25:3 (2022), pp. 234-252].

¹⁸ See, for example, Bill Osgerby, ‘Mapping the male in magazines’, in Martin Conboy and John Steel (eds), *The Routledge Companion to British Media History*, (London and New York, 2015), pp. 297-308; and Jill Greenfield, Sean O’Connell and Chris Read, ‘Fashioning masculinity: Men Only, Consumption and the development of marketing in the 1930s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 10:4 (1999), pp. 457-476.

¹⁹ Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London and New York, 1996), p. 113. See note 67 for the gender composition of roles in advertising in 1989.

²⁰ See Mort, *Cultures of Consumption*, p. 114.

²¹ There are, of course, some exceptions that explicitly seek out the views of women in discourses of masculinity. For example, focusing on the period 1900 – 1939, Pat Ayers draws out the views of women in a study of masculinities of the Liverpool Docklands, including the ways in which these views were contained for various reasons such as ‘the desire to maintain the illusion of possessing a “good” husband, and/or the threat of domestic violence’ [Pat Ayers, ‘Gender, locality, and culture: Revisiting masculinities in the Liverpool docklands, 1900-1939’, in in Houlbrook et al., *Men and Masculinities in Modern Britain*, pp. 189-207, at p. 200]. With a focus on the later post-war era, Angela Davis and Laura King draw on oral accounts about the domestic role of English men finding ‘continuities in gendered ways of thinking about family life’ from both men and women [Angela Davis and Laura King, ‘Gendered perspectives on men’s changing familial roles in postwar England, c. 1950-1990’, *Gender and History* 30:1 (March 2018), pp. 70-92, p. 86].

To suggest that women do not have a significant impact on the performance of masculinities may also be erroneous. It is clear that men do react to what women say or what they think they say. While the impact of feminism, for example, on the thinking and/or behaviour of men is a rich space for further research (and beyond the scope of this thesis), it is clear that men were not only aware of the WLM but that the WLM was having an impact on thinking about masculinity. A significant historian in this regard is Lucy Delap who has drawn attention to the efforts of anti-sexist men to respond to the WLM.²² Of course, anti-sexist men formed just a small portion of the male population.²³ Looking beyond the anti-sexist man, on the basis of 70 interviews of men 'aged nineteen to fifty-nine' in the early 1980s, Helen Franks found that most of her interviewees suggested that they had 'not thought much' about the detail of feminism or where they had thought about it, there was a great deal of 'confusion'.²⁴ Feminism was, however, not irrelevant to men. Rather, Franks sensed a general unease amongst many men about feminism. It could be argued that the unease fuelled the sense of a 'backlash' that has often been attached to accounts of the WLM.²⁵ According to Susan Faludi, who extended her thesis on the rise of 'backlash' in America to the UK in 1992, 'backlash' was 'an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women' but, as Faludi notes, backlash is not just a reaction to what has changed but what might yet change.²⁶ As such, ideas of backlash by men to feminism are better understood and, perhaps, countered if there is visibility about what women have said as opposed to what men think that feminists have said. If we accept that there was a backlash or, at least, resistance to the WLM, what was behind the backlash or resistance? What is understood to be the narrative of the WLM about men and masculinity? Does this reflect the reality of what the WLM had to say about men and masculinity? This thesis starts to answer those questions by examining the reality of what the WLM had to say about men and masculinity.

²² Lucy Delap, 'Rethinking rapes: Men's sex lives and feminist critiques', *Contemporary British History* 36:2 (2022), pp. 253-276; and Lucy Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth-century Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 15:4, (2018), pp. 571-593.

²³ Psychologist and member of the anti-sexist men's movement, Mick Cooper suggests that there were 'probably never more than two thousand men actively involved in men's groups' ['Searching for the anti-sexist man', *Achilles Heel* 10 (1990), pp. 10-13, at p. 10].

²⁴ Helen Franks, *Goodbye Tarzan: Men After Feminism*, (London, 1984), pp. 1, 5 and 198.

²⁵ See, for example, Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (eds), *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing through the Backlash*, (New York, 1997); Sylvia Walby, "'Backlash' in historical context', in Mary Kennedy, Cathy Lubelska and Val Walsh (eds), *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, (London and Washington D.C., 1993), pp. 70-86; and Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, (London, Revised Edition 1992).

²⁶ Faludi, *Backlash*, pp. 13-14.

2. Men from the perspective of the Women's Liberation Movement

The Women's Liberation Movement began with a critique of men. They were always present, explicitly and implicitly.²⁷

One of the most explicit challenges to twentieth century British masculinity by women came from the WLM. As flagged above, the WLM represented a significant twentieth century discourse in which gender norms were analyzed and contested. This included examining men and masculinities. Despite the extent of this work, however, there is little in the historiography about the focus of WLM feminists on men and masculinity as theoretical subjects. To some, this may seem an erroneous, even outrageous, statement. Men were clearly at the heart of feminist theorizing, and this has been reiterated across narratives. Yet, in some important ways, the historiography is largely silent in this area. In one sense, men are ubiquitous in the historiography of the WLM. As we will see in chapter 1, the starting point of the WLM was to identify men as the oppressor so they are necessarily ever-present in the narrative of the WLM. That women are oppressed by men, whether individually and/or by patriarchy, is the defining basis of the feminism of the WLM. While this is a legitimate place to start when thinking about feminist theorizing about men, it is not the end point. A flat characterization of men as 'the oppressor' was not the extent of feminist theorizing which also considered the ways in which men, albeit as the oppressor, were men, together with the opportunities, or constraints, for change. However, the ways in which WLM thinking about men is frequently presented in the historiography and elsewhere would suggest that man as oppressor – often captured by reference to the concept of 'patriarchy' (in its various forms) - represented the extent of feminist theorizing.²⁸

For example, the WLM is frequently credited with kindling masculinity studies²⁹ but, beyond broad theorizing on the oppression of women, it is more rarely been acknowledged as a specific source of thinking on men and masculinity. This view of the WLM's contribution has a long tail. Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell and John Lee, writing their ground-breaking treatise on masculinity in 1985, observed a view of 'masculinity as more or less unrelieved villainy and all men as

²⁷ Jalna Hanmer, 'Men, power and the exploitation of women', in David Morgan and Jeff Hearn (eds), *Men, Masculinities & Social Theory*, (London, 1990), pp. 21-41, at p. 26.

²⁸ See chapter 1 for more on the various constructions of patriarchy within the WLM.

²⁹ Michael Roper, 'Recent books on masculinity: Introduction', *History Workshop* 29 (Spring 1990), pp. 184-186, at p. 184.

agents of the patriarchy in more or less the same degree' as a 'powerful current in feminism'.³⁰ Beyond this, the WLM was not given any further attention in the treatise with respect to theorizing about the 'male role'. Five years later, in the 'Introduction' to *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, editors Michael Roper and John Tosh state: 'Some feminist approaches have viewed masculinity and male dominance as simple mirror images of each other.' While not suggesting that this is their view of all feminists, it is the main legacy of feminist views of masculinity presented by the authors in this context. A similar sense of the contribution of the WLM to thinking about masculinity and men has since been maintained in the historiography of the WLM. More recently, in 2023, John Tosh reiterates the sense of a limited legacy with the suggestion that 'second-wave feminism ... employed "masculinity" as a convenient label under which to analyse men's stake in the oppression of women'.³¹ Less is said about the specific ways in which feminists thought about the ways in which men were being 'men' and the forms of masculinity they encountered.

This somewhat one-dimensional view of the relationship between the WLM and men can be seen throughout the historiography. The two main, related, stories about men that have imbued the historiography have been frictions over the construction, by revolutionary feminists, of men as 'the enemy' and the exclusion of men from the movement.³² More generally, however, men sit in the background of narratives focused primarily on the activism of women³³ and the impact of the WLM for its members (including the emotional cultures of the WLM)³⁴, while the focus of many

³⁰ Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell, and John Lee, 'Toward a new sociology of masculinity', *Theory and Society* 14 (1985), pp. 551-604, at p.552.

³¹ Tosh, 'Reflection: Masculinities and history for the present', at p. 184.

³² See, for example, Nicholas Owen, 'Men and the 1970s British Women's Liberation Movement', *The Historical Journal* 56:3 (2013), pp. 801-826; and Jeska Rees, 'A look back at anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review* 19:3 (2010), pp. 337-356.

³³ See, for example, Kate Mahoney, *Feminist Mental Health Activism in England, c. 1968-95*, (Manchester, 2023); Sue Bruley, 'Women's Liberation at the grass roots: A view from some English towns, c. 1968-1990', *Women's History Review* 25:5 (2016), pp. 723-740; Lucy Delap, 'Feminist bookshops, reading cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974-2000', *History Workshop Journal* 81 (Spring 2016), pp. 171-196; and Florence Binard, 'The British women's liberation movement in the 1970s: Redefining the personal and the political', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 22, (2017), pp. 1-17. Eve Setch challenges the pervasive narrative of a movement split by the positioning, by radical feminists, of men as 'the enemy' by demonstrating the ongoing activism of the London Women's Liberation Workshop [Eve Setch, 'The face of metropolitan feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969-1979', *Twentieth Century British History* 13:2 (2002), pp. 171-190].

³⁴ See, for example, Eleanor Careless and Jess Cotton, 'No woman is an island: The politics of loneliness, Spare Rib and the Women's Liberation Movement, 1969-1993', *New Formations* 109 (2023), pp. 10-28; Sue Bruley, 'Consciousness-raising in Clapham: Women's Liberation as 'lived experience' in South London in the 1970s', *Women's History Review* 22:5 (2013), pp. 717-738; and Bridget Lockyer, 'An irregular period? Participation in the Bradford Women's Liberation Movement', *Women's History Review* 22:4 (2013), pp. 643-657.

recent works has been to reinstate missing activists in the history of the WLM.³⁵ Zoe Strimpel provides an exception to this in tackling heterosexual relations in the WLM. Using the interviews recorded for the Sisterhood and After Oral History Project at the British Library, Strimpel ‘set out to explore the sparsely furnished space between the theory of loving men and its practice’.³⁶ Strimpel’s study was, however, very much focused on the emotional lives of the women as they sought to navigate the ground between theory and practice.

There are some possible explanations for the relative absence of men and masculinity from the historiography. In the first place, there is a recognition that much of the WLM was phrased and presented in terms of women. ‘Ultimately’, said Ann Oakley, ‘any feminism is about putting women first’.³⁷ Jalna Hanmer acknowledged that early in the WLM, ‘women were entreated to not spend their energies on men as this impeded the development of the Movement, of relationships between women, of the political cause for women’.³⁸ Second, the deliberate exclusion of men from the movement by feminists reinforced the notion that the WLM was a movement concerned with women only. ‘Understandably,’ says Lucy Delap, ‘the movement has been read as “by women, for women,” with a stress on the evolving development of women-only spaces and separatist strategies.’ The exclusion of men was not, notes Delap, unique to the WLM. ‘This stress on autonomy and self-authoring was a wider characteristic of the rise of identity politics, evident not only within feminism but also in movements for disability rights and gay liberation.’³⁹ Nicholas Owen similarly observes that the exclusion of men from the WLM was consistent with ‘a commitment to a self-reliant politics of identity’ common to many of the ‘new social movements’.⁴⁰ Owen, however, also points to a distance created between men and women by the exclusion of men from discussions. ‘[T]he men felt their exclusion sharply’.⁴¹ It was read as a rejection with ‘separatist implications’.⁴² Marcus Collins takes the interpretation further. Pointing to the ‘hundreds of formerly straight feminists [becoming] “political lesbians” as a means of cutting loose from men’, Collins suggests: ‘It seemed much easier to ditch men and start afresh,

³⁵ See, for example, George Stevenson, *The Women’s Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain*, (London, 2019); Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Basingstoke, 2016); and Sarah Browne, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Scotland*, (Manchester, 2014).

³⁶ Zoe Strimpel, ‘Heterosexual love in the British Women’s Liberation Movement: Reflections from the Sisterhood and After Archive’, *Women’s History Review* 25:6 (2016), pp. 903-924, at p. 903.

³⁷ Ann Oakley, *Subject Women*, (London, 1982), p. 335.

³⁸ Jalna Hanmer, ‘Men, power and the exploitation of women’, at p. 38.

³⁹ Lucy Delap, ‘Uneasy solidarity: The British men’s movement and feminism’, in Kristina Schulz (ed.), *The Women’s Liberation Movement: Impact and Outcomes*, (New York, 2017), pp. 214-236, at p. 214.

⁴⁰ Owen, ‘Men and the 1970s British Women’s Liberation Movement’.

⁴¹ Owen, ‘Men and the 1970s British Women’s Liberation Movement’, at p. 816.

⁴² Owen, ‘Men and the 1970s British Women’s Liberation Movement’, at p. 803.

so side-stepping the whole painful business of recasting existing relationships with men in a feminist mould.⁴³ Far from dismissed, the research for this thesis has uncovered the ways in which men and masculinity formed a central part of the conversation in the WLM, together with the ways in which feminists sought to better understand and reform their relationships with men.

There are, of course, exceptions where historians have created specific space for men in the historiography. Margaretta Jolly's recent history of the WLM based primarily on the *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project* at the British Library seeks to address many of the areas of concern to historians of the WLM outlined above, including a concern to capture diverse voices. In addition, and differently from many other accounts, Jolly includes a specific chapter on the topic of men but, titled 'Friend or Foe', this is again primarily positioned in the context of whether feminists felt able to work with men and whether men felt able to work with feminists.⁴⁴ While there is some treatment about men as a category of analysis the chapter, the book does not, and is not seeking to, analyze the specific thinking by feminists about the nature and attributes of masculinity in any depth. As mentioned above, Lucy Delap puts men at the centre of a number of studies of the responses of anti-sexist men to the challenge of the WLM.⁴⁵ While these seek, primarily, to draw out 'men's relationship to feminism', some aspects of the feminist critiques and theory that anti-sexist men were seeking to address also form an important part of some of these studies.

This thesis, by focusing specifically on the critiques and theory of feminists about men and masculinity, will provide a comprehensive picture about what women were, in fact, seeking from men. It will be seen that this differed in some important ways from what, perhaps, men thought was being asked of them. As observed above, it is in this more granular consideration of the theorizing and expectations of feminists where the context for men's response can be best assessed. Men – whether positively as anti-sexist men or as part of 'backlash' - were reacting to what they thought women were saying. However, did this correlate to what women were actually saying? This thesis provides valuable insights across several areas where, perhaps, the key messages from the WLM about men and masculinity have been assumed and significantly

⁴³ Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London, 2003), p. 186.

⁴⁴ The activities of anti-sexist men, intersectional issues, trauma related to violence against women. child abuse and the emergence of the men's movement are covered. Theorizing of men as subjects is summarized in relation to violence against women and the work of socialist feminist Lynne Segal is cited in response to the challenge posed by radical feminism [Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-Present*, (Oxford, 2019), pp. 159-203].

⁴⁵ Delap, 'Rethinking rapes'; Delap, 'Uneasy solidarity'; and Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain.

misunderstood. This is not, however, to understate the importance of power as a central concern of feminism.

3. Changing power over others into the power of connection

Man as ‘oppressor’ and masculinity as an expression of power was the starting point of theorizing for many in the WLM. However, it was not the end point of theorizing with the specific nature of men and masculinity given careful consideration. Even the group most attributed with dismissing men out-of-hand - the revolutionary feminists⁴⁶ - grappled concertedly with the issue of men. The Patriarchy Study Group (PSG) was established by a group of revolutionary feminists in 1978. ‘In the PSG we became convinced that men must be studied if we are to understand and end the oppression of women.’⁴⁷ The PSG explained this focus: ‘We do need to know more about what has happened to women in the past and more about our experiences now, but we must also study men, for it is they who are the problem.’⁴⁸ This thesis argues that the ways in which women in the WLM talked about men and masculinity (as well as about women and femininity) reveals that, while the WLM was a source of critique of the power of men over women, it also provided an alternative vision of the ways in which women and men might not only co-exist but flourish. This was not simply about demanding men relinquish power but, importantly, that they also redirect their gaze from themselves towards others to allow the development of what Lynne Segal termed ‘real responsibility and mutual co-operation and care’.⁴⁹

In this, the WLM sits comfortably in a recent historiography that challenges a narrative of the rise of the ‘individualistic society’ to observe, rather, a concern to balance both individualism and collective engagement, such as the ‘new individualism’ identified initially by Jeffrey Weeks⁵⁰ and adopted by Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite.⁵¹ While feminists sought liberation – autonomy – in the form of freedom of choice about the ways in which they lived their lives, they did not do so at the expense of connection and cooperation. Autonomy was not intrinsically exclusionary. For most women, most of the time, autonomy was consistent with a desire to connect, including assuming socially cooperative responsibilities and embracing roles

⁴⁶ Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women’s Liberation*, (London, 1982), p. 225.

⁴⁷ Lal Coveney, Margaret Jackson, Sheila Jeffreys, Leslie Kay and Pat Mahony, *The Sexuality Papers: Male Sexuality and the Social Control of Women*, (Abingdon, 2019 [First published 1984]), p. 13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), p. 317.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won*, (London, 2007), p. XIII.

⁵¹ Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘New Times revisited: Britain in the 1980s’, *Contemporary British History* 31:2 (2017), pp. 145-165, at p. 155. See also, Jon Lawrence, *Me Me Me?: The Search for Community in Post-War England*, (Oxford, 2019).

of care. The challenge was to navigate, through consciousness-raising and other processes of awareness-raising and education, the difference between internalised subordination and autonomous aspirations and urges. Acknowledging the challenge in considering the extent of subordination and imagining a world in which women were truly autonomous, this thesis also draws on descriptions of autonomy by feminist philosophers who identify a specific form of autonomy – ‘connected autonomy’ or ‘relational autonomy’ - that is ‘primarily concerned with the question of the social self or the social identity of autonomous persons and how their social embeddedness can be reconciled with the fact that social conditions can also be repressive and discriminatory’.⁵² Feminist philosophy drew out the distinction between ‘a conception of the self [isolated] from personal relationships and larger social forces’ and ‘conceptions of the self [that] make sense of experiences of interpersonal dependency and interdependency that are central to many women’s lives’.⁵³ In the demands of men that this thesis identifies – i.e., that power over women be replaced by a shared power of connection characterized by personal responsibility, genuine engagement and care – there was consistency across the WLM. Marilyn Friedman suggests that feminism moved from a more individualistic version of autonomy in the 1970s to a ‘relational concept of autonomy, one that treats social relationships and human community as central to the realization of autonomy’.⁵⁴ The research for this thesis challenges that characterization suggesting, rather, that there was a consistency across the period of the WLM about the fundamental nature of the changes women were seeking from men and that those changes can be linked to a core and enduring concern with connection.

⁵² Beate Roessler, *Autonomy: An Essay on the Life Well Lived*, Translated by James Wagner, (Cambridge UK and Medford USA, 2021), p. 157.

⁵³ Diana Tietjens Meyers, ‘Introduction’, in Diana Tietjens Meyers (ed.), *Feminists Rethink the Self*, (New York & London, 1997), pp. 1-11, at p. 2 and p. 3. See also, Lynn Abrams’ reference to ‘relational autonomy’, in Lynn Abrams, ‘The self and self-help: Women pursuing autonomy in post-war Britain’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019), pp. 201-221, at p. 206.

⁵⁴ Marilyn Friedman, ‘Autonomy and social relationships: Rethinking the feminist critique’, in Tietjens Meyers (ed.), *Feminists Rethink the Self*, pp. 40 – 61, at p. 40.

4. Methods and sources

There was the flowering of a sophisticated body of theory ...⁵⁵

An intellectual history

This is an intellectual history. Hilda Smith, a feminist historian who passed away recently (2023) had a keen eye to the oversight of women as serious thinkers. Smith suggests that ‘the omission of women’s thought’ is, amongst other things, based on ‘assumptions ... that women have not offered fundamental analyses of broad social, intellectual, and political phenomena that characterized an age or a society’.⁵⁶ Smith’s focus was primarily on early modern Britain but her observations were non-specific and can equally be applied to the twentieth century. Smith is not alone in identifying the quarantining of women’s thinking from the annals of intellectual history. Ben Griffin has observed more recently how feminist thinking has been distanced from intellectual history. Griffin, again with an eye to the early modern period, suggests that this is more about nomenclature than substance with ‘literature detailing women’s understandings of gender and inequality, frequently located within genealogies of “feminist” thought; there are also superb histories of suffragism, and a large field which identifies itself as a history of women’s writing – a label which carefully marks the field’s distance from intellectual history’.⁵⁷ While this thesis is, in one sense, a history of the WLM or, more specifically, a ‘history of women’s writing’, it is primarily a study of ideas, specifically the ideas that emerged from the WLM about men and masculinity.

The WLM was a fertile ground for ideas. Feminists thought carefully about the political and social context in which they found themselves, looked at the reasons for that context, and explored alternative ways of being and relating. However, as we will see, feminists did not generate ideas in a vacuum. While it is well known that feminists theorized from their lived experiences, as captured in the ubiquitous saying that ‘the personal is the political’, the extent to which feminists drew on an interdisciplinary intellectual context is less recognised. Feminist theory emerged from a maelstrom of ideas that were in circulation in the post-war era. Women brought these ideas with them from diverse backgrounds, including, but not limited to, the thinking and beliefs of their parents, from activist involvement, from popular culture and from the academy. In developing

⁵⁵ Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, ‘The British Women’s Movement’, *New Left Review* 1/148 (November-December 1984), pp. 74-103, at p. 77.

⁵⁶ Hilda Smith, ‘Women’s history as intellectual history: A perspective on the *Journal of Women’s History*’, *Journal of Women’s History* 20:1 (2008), pp. 26-32, at p. 27.

⁵⁷ Ben Griffin, ‘From histories of intellectual women to women’s intellectual history’, (Book Review), *Journal of Victorian Culture* 24:1 (2019), pp. 130-133, at p. 130.

their own theory, feminists considered these ideas, challenged them and built out from them to create a body of work that demonstrates both the opportunities and constraints of the contemporary intellectual environment of the twentieth century.

Despite the importance in understanding the context in which ideas were generated, it does not replace a central concern with the content of the thinking by the WLM. Foremost, this requires an engagement with the works by feminists – feminist theory - generated at the time. My sources are, in the main, written works – theory and analysis – by women of the WLM. In selecting works, however, I take a broad perspective. Jackie Stacey proffers a definition of ‘feminist theory’ as:

a body of knowledge which offers critical explanations of women’s subordination. By ‘critical’ I mean that the explanation does not seek to reinforce or legitimate, but rather attempts to undermine, expose or challenge, women’s subordination. It also tends to operate at some level of abstraction using analytical categories which move beyond the merely descriptive or anecdotal, and at some level of generalisation moving beyond the individual case. Typically, feminist theory offers some kind of analysis and explanation of how and why women have less power than men, and how this imbalance could be challenged and transformed.⁵⁸

Works by key theorists are, of course, the foundation of this thesis. However, the thesis is not confined to a presentation of key texts. Rather, when considering what constitutes ‘theory and analysis’, I have drawn widely. Lucy Delap proposes that ‘[f]eminism is better understood as a conversation ...’.⁵⁹ I look for traces of that conversation and so move beyond published books and academic articles to look for ideas and models proposed by women across the WLM. Of course, the line between ideas generated in the academy and those generated outside of the academy is, at times, imprecise and the relationship between the two can be porous. As Sophie Smith points out, ‘[o]n some occasions movement publications would provide the first venue for articles on women’s ideas that would later be republished by academic journals’.⁶⁰ Eve Setch argues that ‘[g]rassroots discussion and activity, manifested in sources such as newsletters, journals, conference papers and letters, were hotbeds of theory production’.⁶¹ To focus only on academic works would be to overlook a significant source base of theory and to privilege certain voices.

Further, the thesis also considers the women’s activism and campaigns to consider how theory was reflected in the scope and nature of activities undertaken by the WLM, including the WLM

⁵⁸ Jackie Stacey, ‘Untangling feminist theory’, in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds), *Introducing Women’s Studies: Feminist Theory and Practice*, (Basingstoke, 1993), pp. 49-73, at p. 50.

⁵⁹ Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History*, (London, 2020), p. 20.

⁶⁰ Sophie Smith, ‘Women and intellectual history in the twentieth century, part two: Activists, academics and the future’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 85:4 (October 2024), pp. 633-679, at p. 642.

⁶¹ Eve Setch, ‘Women’s Liberation Anti-Violence Organisation’, in Helen Graham, Ann Kaloski, Ali Neilson and Emma Robertson (eds), *The Feminist Seventies*, (York, 2003), pp. 59-71, at p. 60.

women as individuals. While theory, as suggested by Stacey, incorporated a ‘level of abstraction’, it was also grounded in personal experience. As Eve Setch recognises: ‘Women produced ideas through their own experiences and their theories were based in their political activities.’⁶² While there is broad familiarity with the term ‘the personal is political’, an expression denoting the connection of theory to the lived experience of women, as Setch argues, there has been less attention paid to the connection of theory to activism. Campaigns and activism, including the material generated as part of those campaigns, also reveal the theoretical basis for those activities.

Transnational influences

To understand the theory and thinking of the WLM requires an understanding of the transnational nature of the WLM – a ‘movement ... moulded by transnational connections’.⁶³ Tess Little draws attention to the myriad of cross currents that formed these transnational connections, including the movement of people, pamphlets, correspondence, periodicals, and books. Little observes, however, that, while not exclusively⁶⁴, the main flow of ideas was from America to Britain and France. Those ideas were, however, ‘adapted rather than adopted wholesale and were taken up in different ways by different groups’.⁶⁵ To ignore transnational influences would be to provide a misleading account of the ideas in circulation. As such, while primarily focused on British theorists, the transnational nature of the WLM is recognised in this thesis, drawing on major works from overseas which had a particular influence on British thinking. Aligned to Little’s observation about the flow of information, the majority of these are influential American theorists such as Sara Ruddick and Nancy Chodorow. The French feminist, Christine Delphy forms a notable exception to the predominantly American influences. Delphy met British sociologist Diana Leonard at a conference in 1972 and the two women formed a close friendship as well as a fruitful collaboration that would last for decades.⁶⁶ We will also see other transnational influences, including the international context for the formation of the British Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group in the 1970s which can be sourced to discussions between women of War Resisters International (WRI) in 1975.

⁶² Setch, ‘Women’s Liberation Anti-Violence Organisation’, at p. 59.

⁶³ Tess Little, *Transnational Women’s Liberation: Feminist Activism in the US, UK, and France, 1967-79*, (Oxford, 2026), p. 1.

⁶⁴ A notable exception is the establishment in Britain of refuges for battered wives.

⁶⁵ Little, *Transnational Women’s Liberation*, p. 240.

⁶⁶ Stevi Jackson, *Christine Delphy*, (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 1996).

Contemporaneous written sources

My primary reliance on written works differs from many of the recent social histories of the WLM that have been predominantly drawn from oral interviews. This is not to say that I haven't referred to those valuable oral histories to supplement my research but that my main focus has been on the contemporaneous writing of WLM women. This focus on contemporaneous writing seeks to locate the language and thinking that was being circulated at the time. As Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher note, '[i]t is a common accusation that oral history provides one with modern attitudes rather than access to attitudes from the past.'⁶⁷ In their investigation of post-war sexuality and intimacy, Szreter and Fisher actively engage with the insight provided to respondents by the passage of time. Interviewees were encouraged to '[use] the interview process to reflect constructively and informatively on such changes'.⁶⁸ Investigating the accounts of women about the way in which their views of men and masculinity have subsequently changed would be an interesting and worthwhile study. It is, however, outside the scope of the thesis. Rather, I am interested in the attitudes and language of the women as expressed throughout the period.

Drawing again on Delap's reference to a 'conversation', the WLM emerged from concerns and 'discontents' expressed in a conversation between 'ordinary' women from across Britain and the voices – the ideas and theories – of these women would have been heard by other women as well as men. It is also clear from the sources that the women of the WLM drew on the voices of women who did not necessarily identify with the WLM to examine and analyse the experiences of those women. Examining the contemporaneous written materials gives a flavour of that conversation as it happened. This approach not only aligns with Rebecca Goldsmith's identification of 'the vernacular turn' in which attention has been paid to the 'popular testimony and language' of the time to understand the ways in which people created meaning and understanding but also, in the words of Quentin Skinner, supports an understanding of the ideas as they were 'intended to be taken'.⁶⁹ It would be easy to read the perceptions of feminists about their relationships with men in the context of present day understandings of relationships. Reference to the contemporaneous written works and being conscious of the language and meaning intended goes some way to avoiding this risk. Seeking out contemporaneous definitions of key terms and concepts,

⁶⁷ Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Rebecca Goldsmith, 'Towards the vernacular, away from politics? Political history after the "new political history"', *The Political Quarterly* 94:2 (April/June 2023), pp. 272-278, at pp. 274-275; and Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', *History and Theory* 8:1 (1969), pp. 3-53, at p. 48.

observing repetition across texts for evidence of meaning and intent, and using a mixed base of sources has assisted me to consider and present the voices of the women as cleanly as possible.

Periodization

It is difficult to provide a robust start date for the WLM. Speaking for herself, Ann Oakley recalls that '[t]here was no moment of sudden revelation'.⁷⁰ Commonly, the conference at Ruskin College, Oxford is provided as a significant marker.⁷¹ A gathering of around 500-600 women, it saw the formulation of the first four demands that reflected key areas of concern to women: equal pay; equal education and opportunity; 24-hour nurseries; and free contraception and abortion on demand. This was in February 1970. However, activity by feminists – including theorising – had been stirring well before then, on similar themes. People still talk in terms of discrete 'waves' of feminist activity but activism did not suddenly appear in 1970 and there is increasing recognition of activism across the twentieth century.⁷² Nevertheless, as Sue Bruley and Laurel Forster point out, it is clear that there was something distinctive about the WLM: 'There is no denying, ... that there was a great burst of feminist energy – mass activism, theoretical texts and literature – between the 1960s and 1980s which distinguishes it from the periods both before and after.'⁷³ This 'burst of feminist energy', however, can be traced a bit earlier than 1970 with significant works by writers such as Juliet Mitchell appearing in the late 1960s.⁷⁴

At the other end, while some have suggested that by the early 1980s the movement was in decline, it is clear that the conversation, and associated activism, was still taking place throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.⁷⁵ Key feminist publications such as *Spare Rib* and *Trouble and Strife* continued to be published into the 1990s and many prominent campaigns were

⁷⁰ Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p. 196.

⁷¹ 'It was', said Sheila Rowbotham, 'really from the Oxford conference in February 1970 that a movement could be said to exist' [Sheila Rowbotham, 'The beginnings of women's liberation in Britain', in Wandor, *The Body Politic*, pp. 91-102, at p. 97].

⁷² See, for example, Caitriona Beaumont, 'The "silver thread": Hazel Hunkins-Hallinan (1890-1982), the Six Point Group, and new understandings of intergenerational female activism in England, 1960s to 1980', *Women's History Review* 34:4 (2025), pp. 603-619; Abrams, 'The self and self-help'; and Caitriona Beaumont, 'What do women want? Housewives' associations, activism and changing representations of women in the 1950s', *Women's History Review* 26:1 (2017), pp. 147-162.

⁷³ Sue Bruley and Laurel Forster, 'Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement', *Women's History Review* 25:5 (2016), pp. 697-700, at p. 698.

⁷⁴ Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The longest revolution', *New Left Review* 1:40 (November/December 1966), pp. 11-37, at pp.16-17.

⁷⁵ For histories that challenge the narrative of demise in the 1970s and point to ongoing activism, see, for example, Alice McKimm, "'We've been left out': Women's refuges in Northern Ireland, 1974-2008', *Modern British History* 35 (2024), pp. 475-492; James Robertson, Charlotte, 'The women's refuge as "homeplace": Black and Asian women's refuges in Britain as spaces of community and resistance (1980-2000)', *Women's History Review* 33:4 (2024), pp. 554-573; Setch, 'The face of metropolitan feminism'; and Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland*.

ongoing, including the protest at Greenham Common. Further, as women's studies programmes matured accompanied by a burgeoning range of texts, theorizing reflecting the feminism of the WLM continued to be collated and developed well into the 1990s. For the purposes of this thesis, I have drawn across the entire period including considering select materials published in the 1960s and 1990s.

The challenge of silences and missing voices

A key challenge with the research has been silence. While the foundation of the thesis is written, particularly published, works for the reasons outlined above, this approach has its own limitations. As much as this thesis demonstrates the centrality of men to WLM theorising, there were also significant silences around the topic of men. In the first place, as acknowledged earlier in this introduction, feminists sought to correct a history of writing in which men were the subject. This was generally done by foregrounding women as the subject. Further, despite a catch-cry that 'the personal is political', this did not, for many women, create an unfettered invitation to put the details of intimate relations at the heart of published political work. For some, '[m]uch of the revolutionary thrust of second-wave feminism lay in the rejection of women's traditional and exclusive preoccupations with personal life for an emphasis on the importance of the public work, and women's subordinate place within it, in shaping women's self-image and self-identity'.⁷⁶

As will be seen, a further reticence to tackle the subject of relationships with men lay in the assertive rejection by revolutionary feminists of the political validity of heterosexual relations. 'Men', asserted revolutionary feminists, 'are the enemy' and '[h]eterosexual women are collaborators with the enemy'.⁷⁷ For some, this triggered a silencing effect as women worried that any discussion of men or masculinity or relations between women and men that accommodated heterosexual arrangements represented a betrayal of feminism. At the same time, Jeska Rees suggests that 'socialist feminists ... have dominated the narration of the WLM' with a relative paucity of revolutionary feminist voices.⁷⁸ In part, the research for this thesis has been in reaching for the silences and gaps. To large extent this has been addressed by paying close attention to the presence, and absences, of men in the writing.

⁷⁶ Segal, *Slow Motion*, p. 279.

⁷⁷ Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 'Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality', in Onlywomen Press Ltd, *Love Your Enemy? The Debate between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*, (London, 1981), pp. 5-10, at p. 7.

⁷⁸ Rees, 'A look back at anger', at p. 338.

This thesis is weighted heavily to the experience of white British women, predominantly, although not exclusively, middle-class. While, as noted, above, the source base has been expansive to include a wide range of modes of theorizing, for many reasons the voices of Black⁷⁹ women, particularly on the topic of men and masculinity, were more muted. For many, the issue was one of priority. One woman, interviewed for *The Heart of the Race*, a book surveying the experience of Afro-Caribbean women in Britain, explained that ‘it’s a question of where we pitch our level’. Issues of racism and state violence against the Black community needed to be prioritised. ‘If you’re talking about racism’, she continued, ‘you’re talking about survival issues’. Against this, the dynamic between men and women were seen as “luxury” issues.⁸⁰ Further, as exemplified in Black women’s writing such as *The Heart of the Race*, many of the feminist campaigns could, and did, exacerbate race issues.⁸¹

5. Structure

Chapter one of the thesis examines the distinct lines of theory that made up feminist theorizing about men and masculinity including the context in which that thinking emerged. Influenced by both well-established and newly burgeoning academic fields such as sociology, together with thinking from outside the academy such as trade unionism and radical student politics, the critique of the supposed naturalness of ‘complementary’ gender relations increased exponentially. Frustrated with ubiquitous constraints, women entered a discourse that analysed the source of those constraints. As will be seen, despite significant political differences, there was broad agreement that a system of oppression operated to advantage men and subordinate women. However, in many respects, beyond identification as the oppressor, men and masculinity were obscured in the process of providing holistic explanatory frameworks. Chapters two to five will examine the ways in which the important theoretical foundation described in chapter one was extended into specific areas to contribute to a more granular critique of men and masculinity, together with a roadmap towards a ‘new man’.

⁷⁹ In this thesis, acknowledging the problems associated with the approach, I have, like Natalie Thomlinson, used the term ‘Black’ to refer to women of ‘Afro-Caribbean, African and Asian’ background. As observed by Thomlinson, while problematic, this terminology aligns with ‘the categories through which feminists in the era under consideration understood their ethnic identities’. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1968-1993*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain*, (London, 1985), p. 174.

⁸¹ See also Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, ‘Challenging imperial feminism’, *Feminist Review* 80 (2005), pp. 44-63, at p. 45.

Ann Oakley speculated that her mother ‘suffered from [what] might well have been, at least partly, “the problem with no name” identified by American feminist Betty Friedan in that 1960s tract *The feminine mystique [sic]*, a copy of which lingered so mysteriously on my father’s bookshelf’.⁸² Oakley would share her own early experience as a mother in which she, too, suffered from what she referred to as ‘the feminine predicament’.⁸³ Oakley’s feminist consciousness emerged in 1969: ‘All that “depression” I had felt was suddenly transformed into anger.’⁸⁴ In chapter two, we take a closer look at what was considered, for many, the tinder for the WLM – housework and childcare. Despite increasing rumblings of discontent from the late 1940s, it wasn’t until the 1960s that momentum gathered but, then, there was a flood of theorising around the nature and impact of the roles of the mother and housewife. Oakley herself would write a number of books analysing the role of women as wives and mothers, including *Housewife* and *The Sociology of Housework*, both published in 1974. While there were differences of opinion within the WLM about the source of what was seen as exploitation, there was a degree of consensus that the roles were very much entangled in ideas about ‘the family’. Challenging this, many women explored collective models to explore solutions including subsidised childcare, local community arrangements, and collective living arrangements. Women also challenged men to share the work, not just as ‘helping’ but calling on them to share the responsibility. In this, women confronted ambivalence in men but also had to face their own ambivalences. It is clear that women were not seeking to simply swap roles in the home. Rather, women sifted through, often competing, impulses to explore what was meaningful to them at any point across their life span, which may include responsibilities in the home and toward their children. To be able to do this required being aware of the mechanisms of oppression and then having the capacity and support, including the support and engagement from men, to challenge that oppression. Beyond structural limitations affecting the distribution of domestic work, an ability to address entrenched patterns not only required men to engage with the dynamics of oppression affecting women but to have the insight and skills – emotional maturity - to work with women in a partnership based on a gender neutral ethos of collective responsibility.

In chapter three, the emotional lives of men and women are examined in a new way. In this chapter, rather than looking directly at emotion, we look at how women of the WLM perceived the emotional lives of men and how those emotional lives affected both intimacy between men and women, together with the emotional expressiveness of women. The ways in which women talked

⁸² [Lower case in original.] Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, pp.69-70.

⁸³ Ann Oakley, *Taking it like a Woman*, (London: 1992), p. 70.

⁸⁴ Oakley, *Taking it like a Woman*, p. 73.

about emotion suggests that emotional expression in relationships was, and remained, gendered throughout the second half of the twentieth century in ways that undermined the achievement of genuine intimacy. In describing her father, Oakley described 'a man, ..., who inflicted his displeasures and negativities on his loyal family in the secure expectation that they would indulge him'.⁸⁵ In this, suggested Oakley, Richard was no different to other men who shied away from sharing their emotions with other men in favour of 'exposing them to women, who are expected always to be angels of sympathy'.⁸⁶ In her studies of anti-sexist men, Lucy Delap reveals that many anti-sexist men felt guilt about their role as oppressors but also, more specifically, men felt guilty for the emotional labour that they expected from women. 'Feminists', argues Delap, 'demanded that men start to perform this emotional labour for themselves'.⁸⁷ However, as we will see, there was more to it than this. Rather than just disconnecting from men, women were actually seeking reciprocity, both looking for men to take more responsibility for their emotional lives *as well as* providing more space and support for women's emotional lives.

Chapter four engages with one of the most complex and enduring campaign areas of the WLM - violence against women. This chapter reveals, with starkness, the enormity of the task of reform. 'The main point about patriarchy', says Ann Oakley, 'is that it's *systemic*. It isn't restricted to individual behaviour'.⁸⁸ In fact, a major focus of the WLM was to draw attention to violence against women as a systemic issue, rather than a private issue. Associated with this was the priority of turning attention away from an entrenched gaze on female behaviour to call out the culpability of men, individually and collectively. In this, there was broad recognition, both by feminists and non-activists, that violence was used by men as an expression of socially-sanctioned power over women. However, feminist theorizing about the nature and expression of violence went much further than this. The chapter draws out the range of ways in which feminists set out the conditions for a non-violent society including deconstructing a masculinity which desensitised men and valorised aggression in favour of gender-neutral qualities including egalitarianism, regard for others and emotional literacy.

Chapter five extends the theme of systemic violence to a state level by examining thinking by feminists about the military and nuclear technology. The chapter demonstrates that, more than a noteworthy site of activism, the Greenham Common Peace Camp was an important source of feminist theorizing about masculinity and state violence. However, it was not the only source of

⁸⁵ Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, pp.31-32.

⁸⁶ Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p.31.

⁸⁷ Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain', at p. 575.

⁸⁸ Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p. 218.

feminist theorizing in this space. Rather, there were multiple locations for this work, indulging the ‘groundbreaking’ theory of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group from the 1970s. As elsewhere across the WLM, while there were significant differences in opinion, there was a widely-shared sense that there was a connection between war and the nuclear threat and patriarchal and masculinist ways of being. As in the previous chapter, women pointed to a dehumanizing process of socialization that supported violence. In this case, however, women saw the contribution of the military to that process of desensitization of men. If peace (and the wellbeing of the planet) were to be achieved, men, again, needed to take responsibility for their role in systems of oppression. Further, feminists called on men to have the courage to eschew norms of masculinity in favour of gender-neutral attributes of nonviolence, regard for others and nurturance.

In the conclusion, the ‘new man’ that emerged in the wake of the WLM will be considered and assessed against the WLM critique of men and masculinity. The WLM was a source of extensive and in-depth theory into the causes and nature of the subordination of women. At issue for feminists was the ability of women to realise ‘autonomy and respect’. In this they shared common ground with the ‘vernacular discourse of gender equality’ attributed to women outside of the movement by Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson.⁸⁹ Where feminists differed was in the ‘political critique’ that they applied to those concerns. That critique included a specific analysis of the nature of men and masculinity. Not only drawing from political theory and diverse academic fields, but feminist theory also reflected popular discourses circulating in Britain in the late twentieth century informed by movements such as humanistic psychology and human rights. The resulting critique of men was a reflection of this range of influences as feminists called for the dismantling of masculinity and its attendant power inequalities in favour of a utopian vision of an egalitarian world underpinned by shared values of collective responsibility, regard for others, nonviolence and care.

⁸⁹ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Florence, and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class’, *Past and Present* 254 (February 2022), pp. 277-313.

1. THEORIZING MEN

WLM theory was both revolutionary *and* a product of its time in terms of the ways in which feminists thought about the circumstances in which they found themselves, challenged the constraints they felt, and examined the relevance of men to those circumstances. The context from, and in, which the WLM evolved had a significant bearing on the theory produced by the WLM, including the analysis of men and masculinity. This chapter examines the context from which the WLM emerged and the framing of the feminism that defined the WLM including the foundation questions posed by feminists as a challenge to the subordination of women. Men necessarily assumed a central position in that theoretical work and this chapter examines the ways in which feminists drew on their diverse backgrounds to analyse the conditions of their subordination. Recent historiographical work has emphasized the diversity of activists to challenge a notion that the WLM only served the interests of a young, educated, middle-class, metropolitan, white cohort.¹ This chapter examines diversity differently to reveal the richness of the intellectual underpinnings of feminist theory. Beyond a familiar understanding of a British feminism informed primarily by sociology, socialism and trade unionism, feminists drew liberally from wide-ranging disciplines, politics and sensibilities to understand and explain their subordination. It will be seen that, while the pathways were diverse, feminists soon formed a shared sense that men were central to the political project. Yet, as much as men were ubiquitous as ‘oppressors’ in feminist theorizing, they were equally obscured by the level of abstraction applied in overarching frameworks such as patriarchy and revolutionary feminism.

1.1 Growing frustration with the ‘complementary difference’

Ann Oakley fell within a cohort which Eve Worth has categorised as ‘the Welfare State Generation’, those born ‘between the late 1930s and early 1950s’, a time which saw the end of World War II and the establishment of institutions and policies that saw new educational and

¹ See, for example, Caitriona Beaumont, ‘The “silver thread”: Hazel Hunkins-Hallinan (1890-1982), the Six Point Group, and new understandings of intergenerational female activism in England, 1960s to 1980’, *Women’s History Review* 34:4 (2025), pp. 603-619; George Stevenson, *The Women’s Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain*, (London, 2019); Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women’s Liberation Movement, 1968 – Present*, (Oxford, 2019); Sue Bruley, “‘It didn’t just come out of nowhere did it?’: The origins of the women’s liberation movement in 1960s Britain’, *Oral History* (Spring 2017), pp. 67-78, at p. 75; and Sarah Browne, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Scotland*, (Manchester, 2014).

employment opportunities, as well as a 'social safety net'.² It was also a time when many women felt the constraints placed on them very keenly. Some of these were explicit such as the inability of many women, prior to 1975, to take out a loan with many institutions without the signature of a husband or other male and the failure, prior to 1991, to recognise rape in marriage. However, many of them reflected more subtle social constraints that many failed to acknowledge or simply didn't see. For example, Ann's father, Richard Titmuss, was one of the 'experts' credited with having an important role in the evolution of, and thinking about, the 'social safety net' that was at the core of 'the welfare state'.³ Titmuss had a central concern with equality and 'regarded the Welfare State as the main engine of greater equality in both a quantitative and qualitative sense'.⁴ 'The major positive achievement which has resulted from the creation of direct, universalist social services in kind', said Titmuss, 'has been the erosion of formal discriminatory barriers. One publicly approved standard of service, irrespective of income, class or race, replaced the double standard which invariably meant second class services for second class citizens.'⁵ However, as many have since observed, 'the welfare state' - even those aspects that were designed to be more 'universalist' such as the National Health Service (NHS) - did not necessarily deliver equality, including entrenching many of the structures that continued to constrain women.⁶ As Ann Oakley reflected:

The problem was – I now see but didn't then – that the politics of post-war reconstruction in which our family was embedded drew the social classes but not the genders together. The democratic ideal of one nation took as its binding ideal The Family as the nub of The

² Eve Worth, *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945*, (London, 2022), p. 1.

³ Not only in its establishment and implementation, 'the welfare state', says Jordanna Bailkin, 'required a constant flow of information in order to monitor the success of its redistributive projects, and it relied on an army of experts to provide this knowledge'. Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2012), p. 8. For Titmuss' 'contribution' to 'the welfare state', see, for example John Stewart, *Richard Titmuss: A Commitment to Welfare*, (Bristol, 2020); and David Reisman, *Richard Titmuss: Welfare and Society*, (Basingstoke, 2001 [First published 1977]).

⁴ Seymour Miller, 'Introduction', in Brian Abel-Smith and Kay Titmuss (eds), *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss*, (London, 1987), pp. 1-17, at p. 5.

⁵ Richard Titmuss, 'The role of redistribution in social policy' [Lecture first delivered in 1964], in Brian Abel-Smith and Kay Titmuss (eds), *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss*, (London, 1987), pp. 207-219, at p. 215.

⁶ For a discussion about the impact of 'the welfare state' on inequality see, for example, Nicholas Crafts, 'The welfare state and inequality: Were the UK reforms of the 1940s a success?', *Oxford Open Economics* 3 (2024), pp. i1191 – i1200). For feminist critiques of 'the welfare state', see, for example, Eizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London, 1977). For evaluations that, while acknowledging the constraints of 'the welfare state', also point to the opportunities for women that opened up through 'welfare state' initiatives, see, for example Worth, *The Welfare State Generation* and Sheila Blackburn, 'How useful are feminist theories of the welfare state?', *Women's History Review* 4:3 (1995), pp. 369-394.

Community. Equality for women meant complementary difference, not self-governing autonomy.⁷

The ‘complementary difference’ observed by Oakley was the perceived complement of a male breadwinner and female housewife and mother. This was both a middle-class⁸ and working class⁹ norm and the site in which these roles were played out was the family. ‘Caring for the family, through gendered role execution, was a key matrimonial characteristic’¹⁰ and marriage was booming.¹¹ The separate spheres narrative was not, however, a stable construct for either middle-class or working-class families. While Kay and Richard may have epitomized the roles by a ‘tireless enactment of gendered domestic ideology’ with Kay effectively withdrawing from public life when Ann was born, many women were not staying in their sphere.¹² The post-war era saw increasing numbers of married women seeking employment as marriage bars were lifted.¹³ This was motivated not just by financial need but, increasingly, by a desire for greater affluence, social connections or a change in scenery. This trend, however, had an impact on marriages. ‘Working wives’, observes McCarthy, ‘could imperil marital harmony because of the challenge they posed to men’s “traditional” identity as providers and to the legitimacy and modernity of the full-time housewife-worker in the home’.¹⁴ This did not, however, mean that women and men were now in a marriage of equals. While Titmuss was to suggest that ‘the idea of companionship in marriage is being substituted for the more sharply defined roles and codes of behaviour set by the Victorian patriarchal system’, the post-war family still retained ‘sharply defined roles and codes of behaviour’.¹⁵ As McCarthy says, ‘housework and childcare continued to be regarded – as it had been in earlier periods – the “natural” domain of the wife, regardless of whether or not she had an outside job’.¹⁶

⁷ Ann Oakley, *Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science*, (Bristol, 2014), p. 196.

⁸ Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1945*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 21.

⁹ Stephen Brooke, ‘Gender and working class identity in Britain during the 1950s’, *Journal of Social History* (Summer 2001), pp. 773-795.

¹⁰ Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 180.

¹¹ Pat Thane, ‘Introduction: Exploring Post-war Britain’, *Cultural and Social History* 9:2 (2012), pp. 271-275, at p. 272.

¹² Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p. 8.

¹³ Helen McCarthy, ‘Women, marriage and paid work in post-war Britain’, *Women’s History Review* 26:1 (2017), pp. 46-61; and Caitriona Beaumont, ‘The women’s movement, politics and citizenship, 1918-1950s’, in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2001), pp. 261-277, at p. 273.

¹⁴ McCarthy, ‘Women, marriage and paid work in post-war Britain’, at p. 48.

¹⁵ Richard Titmuss, ‘The position of women: Some vital statistics’ [based on a lecture first delivered in 1952], in Brian Abel-Smith and Kay Titmuss (eds), *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss*, (London, 1987), pp. 87-101, at p. 95.

¹⁶ McCarthy, ‘Women, marriage and paid work in post-war Britain’, at p. 58.

Further, women's experience of the workforce was different to that of men. Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall observe the diverse strands of women's activism around '[e]qual pay and opportunities' that continued from the early twentieth century and gathered momentum in the 1960s.¹⁷ Not only did women '[find] that the world of work was ... deeply imbued with sexist practices and culture'¹⁸ but, with responsibility for children, women's connection to a career often felt more tenuous. Even where marriage bars had been lifted¹⁹, 'social norms encouraged women to leave work upon marriage or, increasingly as the period progressed, upon having children'.²⁰ After the war, nurseries were closed as it was expected that women would return to the home. The expectation of women to be at home for children was further bolstered by pronouncements of the importance of maternal care for children by experts such as John Bowlby.²¹ On the other hand, with gradually increasing access to contraceptives from the 1960s, women would increasingly be empowered to make reproductive choices including delaying having children.²²

The post-war period also saw a dramatic increase in education. The passage of the Education Act 1944 extended formal schooling for children and, by the end of the 1950s, there had been a significant increase in university education.²³ Even here, however, the experience for females was different than for males. While increasing numbers of women were enrolling in university, as a proportion of the student cohort, their presence, discouraged by various mechanisms of 'direct and indirect discrimination', remained muted.²⁴ From 27% in the 1930s, the proportion of women in universities in 1963 remained low at 28%, only starting to rise more significantly from the

¹⁷ Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 179.

¹⁸ Bruley, "It didn't just come out of nowhere did it", at p. 72.

¹⁹ While marriage bars had been increasingly repealed from the 1940s, they were not outlawed until the commencement of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

²⁰ Angela Davis and Laura King, 'Gendered perspectives on men's changing familial roles in postwar England, c. 1950-1990', *Gender & History* 30:1 (March 2018), pp. 70-92, at p. 74.

²¹ Like economist William Beveridge and Titmuss, head of social administration at the London School of Economics, John Bowlby, a psychologist, was one of the experts who had influence in shaping post-war policy. See, for example, John Stewart, 'Child guidance and deinstitutionalisation in post-war Britain', in Despo Kritsotaki, Vicky Long and Matthew Smith, *Deinstitutionalisation and After: Post-War Psychiatry in the Western World*, (Cham, 2016), pp. 175-193. Jordanna Bailkin observes that '[b]y the 1960s, Bowlbyism had become a powerful conceptual framework for assessing child care and parent-child relations for all Britons'. Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, p. 180. See also Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement*, (Oxford, 2013).

²² Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English women, Sex and Contraception 1800-1975*, (Oxford, 2004).

²³ A. H. Halsey, 'Further and higher education', in A.H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds), *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends*, (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 221-253, at p. 225.

²⁴ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, (London and New York, 2006), p. 85.

1970s.²⁵ For many women, an expanding number of teacher training colleges offered, for a short time until the 1970s, an alternative form of higher education, often in the form of ‘a broad curriculum, often of the liberal arts kind’ for women.²⁶ Further education for women did not necessarily translate into careers or employment for women,²⁷ but it did change the ways in which many women thought about society, particularly the social circumstances in which they found themselves. This was particularly true of the social sciences (including ‘sociology, anthropology and psychology’) which flourished from the 1960s.²⁸ Many student political activities, however, failed to provide women with an ability to express their frustrations as many of the constraints they experienced otherwise followed them into those organisations. ‘Women who participated in these movements’, says Sue Bruley, ‘learned valuable political and organising skills, but found themselves treated with contempt by their male comrades’.²⁹ For many women, higher education – particularly in the social sciences – acted both as a significant gateway and a prompt to feminist political activism.³⁰ Whether through higher education and student politics, trade unionism or, as described by Oakley, ‘a naïve indignation, a sense of disbelief and distress that there could be so much of a gulf between my experience of the world and the theory of the good society within which and to which, I was brought up’,³¹ the varied pathways to feminism created a vibrant and diverse base for the development of new ideas. As ideas and texts circulated, they were developed in both distinct and synergistic directions towards a body of work that held difference and concurrence in uneasy tension.

1.2 Describing the problem – the system

Since the concept of patriarchy was developed as a means of both identifying and challenging men’s power over women, theories of patriarchy are, implicitly or explicitly, theories which explain the creation and maintenance of men’s social, ideological, sexual, political, and economic dominance.³²

²⁵ Dyhouse, *Students*, pp. 82 and 206.

²⁶ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 87.

²⁷ Carol Dyhouse, ‘Education’, in Ina Zweiniger-Bargierlowska, *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2001), pp. 119 -133, at p. 123. See also, Laura Carter, ‘The hairdresser blues: British women and the secondary modern school, 1946-72’, *Twentieth Century British History* 34:4 (2023), pp. 726-753.

²⁸ Peter Mandler, ‘The rise of the social sciences in British education, 1960-2016’, in Plamena Panayotova (ed.), *The History of Sociology in Britain: New Research and Revaluation*, (Basingstoke, 2019), pp. 281-300, at p. 282. See also A. H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*, (Oxford, 2004).

²⁹ Bruley, “It didn’t just come out of nowhere did it”, at p. 67.

³⁰ Celia Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self*, (Manchester, 2015), p. 102. See also, Browne, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Scotland*, p. 26.

³¹ Oakley, *Father and Daughter*, p. 201.

³² Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, (London and New York, 1989), p. 33.

Browse the historiography of the WLM and the term ‘patriarchy’ will consistently appear, most commonly without explanation. One of the most ubiquitous terms associated with the WLM, what did it mean?³³ The casual use in histories of the WLM would suggest that there is broad agreement about its meaning but there was, in fact, little agreement about what was meant by the term³⁴. ‘The concept of patriarchy’, said Caroline Ramazanoglu, ‘became one of the most central, but also one of the most confused terms in feminist use’.³⁵ It was, however, an important concept because it was widely employed to describe the problem of women’s subordination. As Ramazanoglu pointed out, theories of patriarchy sought to ‘explain’ both ‘the creation and maintenance of men’s ... dominance’. For many, it was (and still is) simply understood as a blanket term to express ‘the generalized power of men over women’³⁶ or ‘a traditional and systematic male dominance of women’³⁷. For socialist feminists, it was a way of identifying the operation of a form of subordination distinct from capitalism. As recalled by Sheila Rowbotham:

When contemporary feminists began to examine the world from a new perspective, bringing their own experience to bear on their understanding of history and modern society, they found it was necessary to distinguish women’s subordination as a sex from class oppression. Inequality between men and women was not just a creation of capitalism: it was a feature of all societies for which we had reliable evidence. It was a separate phenomenon, which needed to be observed in connection with, rather than simply as a response to, changes that occurred in the organisation and control of production. So the term “patriarchy” was pressed into service – as an analytical tool which might help to describe this vital distinction.³⁸

Beyond this general application, however, specific ideas of patriarchy, varied widely. Ideas about patriarchy went to the heart of whether individual men or all men were the problem and whether the problem was that men (individually or collectively) were bad or, to varying extents, unconscious participants in a system that was bigger than them. Sheila Rowbotham would worry that the term ‘patriarchy’, with its roots in ‘the power of the father’, suggested something essential – natural – related to the function of reproduction that undermined thinking about revolution.³⁹ Further, and related, Rowbotham worried that the term invoked a sense of being ‘fixed’. “Patriarchy” suggests a fatalistic submission which allows no space for the complexities of

³³ The literal meaning of the word ‘patriarchy’ is ‘the rule of the father’ exercised over both women and younger men. For a history of the term, leading up to its adoption by the WLM, see, for example, Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History*, (London, 2020), pp. 68-83.

³⁴ Jackie Stacey, ‘Untangling feminist theory’, in Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (eds), *Introducing Women’s Studies: Feminist Theory and Practice*, (Basingstoke, 1993), pp. 49-73, at pp. 52-59.

³⁵ Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, p. 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Lovenduski and Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics*, p. 9.

³⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, ‘The trouble with “patriarchy”’ [First published in *New Statesman*, 1979], in Feminist Anthology Collective (ed.), *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement 1975-80*, (London, 1981), pp. 72-78, at p. 72.

³⁹ Rowbotham, ‘The trouble with “patriarchy”’, at p. 73.

women's defiance.'⁴⁰ For others, conceptualising subordination as a system, rather than disempowering, was a powerful focus for revolution. In a rejoinder to Rowbotham's essay, Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor argued that '[t]he concept of patriarchy points to a strategy which will eliminate not men, but masculinity, and transform the whole web of psychosocial relations in which masculinity and femininity are formed'.⁴¹ The problem, however, lay in locating the source of the power imbalance.

It was generally agreed that the source of the subordination of women (and other men) was no longer best represented as the 'power of the father' but the question remained: 'What was the nature and source of men's dominance?'. For feminist academic Carole Pateman the power of men over women preceded the establishment of the patriarch. 'A man's power as a father comes after he has exercised the patriarchal right of a man (a husband) over a woman (wife)'.⁴² According to Pateman, who had a background in political science, while the idea of patriarchy as located in the family and kinship relationships had been replaced 'in modern civil society' by a patriarchy built into social contracts, women remained 'subordinated to men as *men*, or to men as a fraternity'.⁴³ Social contracts, rather than being constructed on the equality of all individuals, were in fact patriarchal. Like Pateman, sociologist Sylvia Walby observed that 'private' descriptions of patriarchy, such as locating patriarchy primarily in the family and generations, had been largely replaced by a 'public patriarchy'. 'Women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth', suggested Walby, 'but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited'. Walby developed a sophisticated framework of interacting 'structures' to describe patriarchy. For Walby, patriarchy was 'a system of social relations' that was comprised of 'six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. These structures, argued Walby, had 'causal effects upon each other, both reinforcing and blocking'⁴⁴

For some, rather than clarity, this sense of complexity undermined the usefulness of the concept. For many years, feminist analysts have been pointing out that patriarchy cannot be viewed as one entity, permeating people's existence in a single way. It's a complicated and ever-changing

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, 'In defence of "patriarchy"', in Feminist Anthology Collective (ed.), *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, (London, 1981 [First published in *New Statesman* in February 1980]), pp. 79-81, at p. 81.

⁴² Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.* (Emphasis in original)

⁴⁴ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, 1990), p. 20.

phenomenon, operating differently in different contexts.⁴⁵ More than this, however, what many of these theories had in common was a sense of abstraction from men. By conceptualising the problem of subordination in an overarching framework, there was a tendency to talk about systems and effects, rather than men.

1.3 Describing the problem – ideology

For some, the ways in which women and men thought and behaved was more tangibly captured by reference to *ideology*, ‘the ideas, beliefs and values about men and women which are embedded within biology and psychology, and the ways that these are passed on’.⁴⁶ As Mathew Thomson demonstrates, the WLM ‘was open to the influence of the psychological theories and practices that were surfacing at just the same time’.⁴⁷ Psychology was seen both as a contribution to the oppression of women while, at the same time, offering frameworks, concepts and language that were variously adopted by feminists. On the one hand, as Thomson observes, ‘established theories and practices of psychology and psychiatry provided the women’s movement with a powerful enemy to identify themselves against’.⁴⁸ Not only were psychologists such as John Bowlby read as reinforcing, if not defining, the subjugation of women, but therapeutic practices – as practised in ‘male-dominated mental health institutions’⁴⁹ – were seen as interventions designed to ensure the compliance of women with a dominant moral order.⁵⁰ Sarah Crook describes the feminist ‘reclamation’ of discontent – otherwise portrayed by psychological experts as a symptom of personal mental illness – as a prompt for political action.⁵¹ In this, feminists directly engaged with psychological concepts and frameworks, particularly to tackle the issue of ideology. Consciousness-raising, for example, drew on psychoanalytical concepts to draw out, otherwise unconscious, awareness of the ways in which women had been socialized for their gendered roles. ‘The focus on revealing the psychologically repressed and the emotionally intimate’, says Crook, ‘was critical to the feminist political project’.⁵² Consciousness-raising ‘recognised that [t]he social relations of a patriarchal society had become internalised in the

⁴⁵ Hague, Gill. *History and Memories of the Domestic Violence Movement: We’ve Come Further than You Think*, (Bristol, 2021), p. 22.

⁴⁶ Sue Sharpe, *Just Like a Girl!: How Girls Learn to be Women*, (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 61.

⁴⁷ Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 279.

⁴⁸ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 281.

⁴⁹ Sarah Crook, ‘The women’s liberation movement, activism and therapy at the grassroots, 1968-1985’, *Women’s History Review* 27:7 (November 2018), pp. 1152-1168, at p. 1154.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, (Basingstoke, 2005 [First published 1972]).

⁵¹ Crook, ‘The women’s liberation movement, activism and therapy at the grassroots, 1968-1985’, at p. 1154.

⁵² *Ibid.*

structures of mind. One had to use the best available tools – and this meant psychoanalysis – to understand and change this.⁵³ For Juliet Mitchell, '[u]nderstanding the laws of the unconscious ... amounts to a start in understanding how ideology functions, how we acquire and live the ideas and laws within which we must exist'.⁵⁴

Feminists also drew from theories of 'socialization' and 'sex role conditioning'. These terms and others were adopted variously from sociological and psychological traditions and applied to critique a process whereby gender roles were not only learnt but internalized from infancy by women and men alike.⁵⁵ 'The process by which the human infant is moulded to fit the society into which she or he is born has been called "socialisation"', explained Lee Comer.⁵⁶ More specifically, psychologist Helen Weinreich suggested that socialization was 'the transmission of behaviour, roles, attitudes and beliefs to the next generation'.⁵⁷ All of these aspects were transmitted, continued Weinreich, primarily by 'parents, teachers, peer-groups and the media'.⁵⁸ Some took on the challenge of breaking the pattern of transmission. In this, British feminists were influenced by thinking from Europe.⁵⁹ In a personal account of raising her daughter from the time of her birth in 1981 to the age of three years old, German lawyer, judge and feminist Marianne Grabrucker demonstrated an optimism and commitment to anti-sexist child raising that was shared by many of her contemporaries including many feminists in Britain. The book, translated by Wendy Philipson and published by The Women's Press in 1988, opens with the statement: 'A child is born, a new woman has arrived. And her future is going to be different.'⁶⁰ Grabrucker felt that she and generations of women before her had been the focus of a socialization that constrained the possibilities and potential of women in the interests of the patriarchy.⁶¹ For Grabrucker, and many others, this could – and should – change. 'My daughter's socialization was going to be different' asserted Grabrucker. 'If everything were caused by education then everything could equally well be avoided through education – such was the conclusion I came to.'⁶² It was quickly realized that change would not be easy.

⁵³ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 283.

⁵⁴ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 403.

⁵⁵ In this respect, sociologists such as Talcott Parson and William Goode were influential.

⁵⁶ Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, (Leeds, 1974), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Helen Weinreich, 'Sex-role socialisation', in Jane Chetwynd and Oonagh Hartnett (eds), *The Sex Role System: Psychological and Sociological Perspectives*, (London, 1978), pp. 18-27, at p. 18.

⁵⁸ Weinreich, 'Sex-role socialisation', at p. 20.

⁵⁹ Tess Little, *Transnational Women's Liberation*.

⁶⁰ Marianne Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl: Gender Stereotyping in the First Three Years of Life: A Diary*, [translated by Wendy Philipson], (London, 1988), p. 7.

⁶¹ Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, pp. 7-8.

⁶² Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, p. 8.

Amongst the challenges, parents observed the difficulties in overcoming their own conditioning. Ann Oakley would suggest that '[g]ender roles and gender identities are not acquired mechanically by the child from the parent, but because the child identifies with the parent in a variety of ways'.⁶³ This raised additional challenges for anti-sexist parenting. Despite the commitment to anti-sexist parenting, women would watch themselves fall into patterns aligned to gender norms. 'I function like a machine', reflected Marianne Grabrucker, 'reacting as expected to the traditional categories'.⁶⁴ The diary does not record the triumph of change but, rather, spotlights the pervasive nature of gender norms. Brutally honest at times, Grabrucker picked up moment after moment where, despite her best efforts, she inadvertently reinforced 'feminine' traits such as avoidance of technical and mechanical matters, passivity and people-pleasing. Behaving differently not only required consciousness, but also taking on tasks and behaviours that are less familiar. This took time and energy and, as noted by Grabrucker, '[w]hen we're under pressure we revert to our traditional roles'.⁶⁵ The ubiquitous nature of gender also made change difficult. Feminists became aware, outside of immediate familial relations, of the impact of schools, broader social circles and culture on the formation of their children's gender.⁶⁶

However, a more fundamental problem was that ideas about ideology/sex roles/socialization, either as an explanatory or as a gateway to change, did not, by themselves, provide insight into the nature of that change. As will be seen in the chapters ahead, reforming ideology was not simply about swapping roles. Either new versions of masculinity and femininity were needed or, as many feminists believed, gender, rather than rewritten, should be dismantled. Some, however, critiqued what was seen as a failure to sufficiently address gender. Writing in 1990, Sylvia Walby suggested that while there had 'been major changes, ... a dichotomy is still part of popular cultural practice'.⁶⁷ The dichotomy Walby referred to was the distinction between masculinity and femininity. In part, she argued, the persistence of that dichotomy reflected the nature of socialization theory which she critiqued as having 'little to say on why gender should be dichotomous and why masculinities and femininities have specific contents'.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, (South Melbourne, 1972), p. 179.

⁶⁴ Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, p. 42.

⁶⁵ Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, p. 94.

⁶⁶ Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, p. 93.

1.4 Describing the problem – a problem of ‘sex’

Feminists were very aware that the dichotomy was linked to the fact that gender was mapped onto biological sex. Some have suggested that, prior to Judith Butler’s intervention⁶⁹, feminists failed to sufficiently question the two-sex binary and, in fact, reinforced understandings of sex as binary.⁷⁰ It is undeniable that the sex-gender binary has been a point of challenge for the WLM and fierce debate continues to this day about the understanding of feminists about sex and gender, particularly in the context of trans feminism.⁷¹ However, the suggestion that feminists did not challenge sex as a binary structure is to misrepresent the relationship of the WLM to the issue of ‘sex’. While there were strong challenges to both the interpretation assigned to sex and even the immutability of sex difference itself, the fact that gender had historically been mapped onto sex was both the defining element of feminism and its greatest challenge. Rather than an either/or positioning of ‘sex’ as binary, feminists grappled with multiple layers of meaning in their thinking about ‘sex’.

There were two fundamental ways in which feminists did retain the binary structure of ‘sex’ in their theorizing. In the first place, to say that biological sex had no fixed identity would be to deny the subordinated experience of women who found themselves organised into a subordinate class in a patriarchal world on the basis of their biological structure. It was to this effect that the term ‘sex class’ was applied in the first instance by American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone in 1970 and then, as discussed further below, by revolutionary feminists who were concerned to capture the meaning imposed on biology, specifically reproductive capacity, (regardless of any associated gender construction) by men.⁷² In the same way, men – identified primarily by biological form – were understood to have been organised into a superior position. To deny sex would be to deny this arrangement. In this sense then, the WLM was predicated on a two-sex binary. It was inherent to the construction of feminism as understood in the WLM. This was not

⁶⁹ Butler argued that, rather than fixed, ‘the body’, like gender, was also ‘a construction’. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York & London, 2007 [First published 1990]), p. 12.

⁷⁰ Sally Hines, ‘Sex wars and (trans) gender panics: Identity and body politics in contemporary UK feminism’, *The Sociological Review Monographs* 68:4 (2020), pp. 699-717, pp. 702-703.

⁷¹ See, for example, Sam Caslin, ‘Historicizing gender and the “gender critical” movement in the UK.’ *Contemporary Sociology* 54.3 (2025), pp. 193–196; Sam Caslin, ‘Trans feminism and the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain, c. 1970-1980’, *Gender and History* 37:2 (2025), pp. 748-763; Hines, ‘Sex wars and (trans) gender panics; and D-M Withers, ‘Laboratories of gender: Women’s liberation and the transfeminist present’, *Radical Philosophy* 2.04 (Spring 2019), pp. 3-8.

⁷² Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, (London, 1971); and London Revolutionary Feminists, ‘Revolutionary feminism: Statement from the 1st year’, WLM Conference, Birmingham, in papers of Sally Alexander – 7SAA/1, Women’s Library, LSE, Women’s Liberation Movement Conferences, 1970-78, Folder 8.

particular to revolutionary feminists. It was a common understanding that women, identified by sex (as in biological attributes), were the oppressed and men, identified by sex, were the oppressor. 'Central to the formulation of sexed and gendered difference was a binary model wherein male and female were polarised'.⁷³ The second way in which feminists related to the concept of biological sex was through the lived experience of that biology. While meanings ascribed to biology were strongly challenged, the lived experience of biology – outside of the ascription of meaning to biology in a patriarchal world – needed to be acknowledged and drawn into the theoretical framework. Childbirth, for example, was both a lived experience and a culturally scripted lived experience. Part of the work of the WLM was to understand the distinction between these.

Yet, it is erroneous to suggest that feminists did not tackle the perceived immutability of biological difference. In a sense, feminists attempted to simultaneously hold multiple, conflicting, ways of thinking. While acknowledging the importance of biology to the relative positioning of women and men, together with the significance of biology to the lived experience of many feminists, feminists also challenged sex as a stable and/or binary construct as part of considering a world in which women would be liberated from subordination. This included Ann Oakley, who, while differentiating sex and gender, equally queried the significance of sex. 'Seeing sex differentiation as a natural fact of life, as many people do,' argued Ann Oakley, 'diverts our attention from the strangely inconsequential fact that our society, having achieved most of the equipment and knowledge necessary to dispense with sex differentiation everywhere except in the bedroom and the maternity hospital, nevertheless maintains it as a near-universal feature of the social structure.'⁷⁴ Kate Millet would have agreed. 'Whatever the "real" differences between the sexes may be, we are not likely to know them until the sexes are treated differently, that is alike. And this is very far from being the case at present.'⁷⁵ Millet used the example of strength. While acknowledging that many men had a 'heavier musculature', the degree to which this was a significant difference was not clear. '[B]reeding, diet and exercise', said Millet, was also a factor. Lynne Segal echoed this analysis noting that ongoing efforts to distinguish 'nature' from 'nurture' were futile as the two were tightly interwoven.⁷⁶

Even for those attributes where the difference between men and women appeared obvious, feminists queried the extent to which they were, in fact, meaningful. Most famously, Shulamith

⁷³ Hines, 'Sex wars and (trans) gender panics', at p. 701.

⁷⁴ Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, p. 209.

⁷⁵ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (London, 1972, First published 1971), p. 29.

⁷⁶ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), pp 61-64.

Firestone suggested that even the differentiation ‘in the bedroom and the maternity hospital’ could, and should, be overcome through technology. The ‘first demand for any alternative system’, Firestone argued, should be ‘[t]he freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women.’⁷⁷ Some wondered, however, whether technological interventions making reproductive difference obsolete might, in fact, worsen the position of women. In direct response to Firestone, Hilary Rose and Jalna Hanmer drew attention to the control of science by men and the risks of technology being employed to further undermine women’s control of their reproductive capacity. ‘Rather than forcing reproduction upon her as did the Catholic Church, today’s religion – science – seems to be moving in the opposite direction, limiting her right to reproduce, if not asking her to commit “voluntary” femicide.’⁷⁸ These fears captured the theoretical challenge faced by feminists who, while questioning the so-called fixed nature and binary construction of biological sex, were also concerned not to obscure not only the lived experience of biology but, importantly, the fact that biology had been, and could further still be, employed by men as a means of oppression.

1.5 Describing the problem – ‘the enemy’

Initially applying a socialist politics to feminism, Sheila Jeffreys said that frequent reference to ‘production’ soon had her thinking about ‘reproduction’.⁷⁹ For Jeffreys, and others would become identified as revolutionary feminists, oppression was ‘based on ownership of women’s bodies and reproduction’.⁸⁰ Rather than ‘patriarchy’, the terms ‘male supremacy’ was, according to historian Jeska Rees, preferred by revolutionary feminists who considered it better emphasized ‘the benefits that men – all men – accrued as a result of their membership of the superior class’. To revolutionary feminists, what was at stake was a ‘sex war’.⁸¹ In this, revolutionary feminists

⁷⁷ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 206.

⁷⁸ Hilary Rose and Jalna Hanmer, ‘Women’s liberation, reproduction, and the technological fix’, in Sheila Allen and Diana Leonard Barker (eds), *Sexual Divisions and Society: Process and Change*, (London, 2018 [First published 1976]), pp. 199-223, at p. 219.

⁷⁹ Sheila Jeffreys, *Trigger Warning: My Lesbian Feminist Life*, (North Geelong, 2020), p. 53.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Jeska Rees, ‘A look back at anger: The women’s movement in 1978’, *Women’s History Review* 19:3 (2010), pp. 337-356, at p. 343. While ‘the terms “Revolutionary” and “radical” are often used interchangeably in current writings on feminism’, Eve Setch explains that the terms refer to different ideological streams, each with further internal divergences. Eve Setch, ‘The face of metropolitan feminism: The London Women’s Liberation Workshop, 1969-1979’, *Twentieth Century British History* 13:2 (2002), pp. 171-190, at pp. 187-188. Jeska Rees posits some of these differences in ‘A look back at anger’, p. 344.

turned the spotlight onto the culpability of men – *all* men individually and as a group – as active and willing participants in the oppression of women.

In a 1979 Leeds Revolutionary Feminists conference paper (subsequently printed in *WIRES* with the title ‘Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality’), men were positioned as ‘the enemy’ and heterosexual sex – particularly penetration – was categorised as violence, as a form of ‘punishment and control of women’.⁸²

What part does sexuality play in the oppression of women? Only in the system of oppression that is male supremacy does the oppressor actually invade and colonise the interior of the body of the oppressed. Attached to all forms of sexual behaviour are meanings of dominance and submission, power and powerlessness, conquest and humiliation. ... Why all this fuss in our culture about sex? Because it is specifically through sexuality that the fundamental oppression, that of men over women, is maintained.⁸³

The revolutionary feminists pointed to ‘power’, ‘aggression’, ‘penis orientation’, ‘the separation of sex from loving emotion’, ‘objectification’, ‘fetishism’, and ‘uncontrollability’ as established elements of “normal” male sexuality’.⁸⁴ This ‘male sexuality’, they argued, was applied by men across ‘virtually every sphere of life’.⁸⁵ Despite the focus on men, however, the call to action was not put to men but, rather, for women to steer clear of sexual relations with men. ‘Heterosexual women’, they asserted, ‘are collaborators with the enemy’.⁸⁶ From this position, women were urged to become ‘political lesbians’. This did not necessarily mean having sexual relations with women, but, rather, eschewing any intimacy with men, regardless of whether it involved penetration or not. Any sexual engagement with a man, in their view, ‘[reinforced] his class power’. To head off the suggestion that women could have sex with men without penetration, the revolutionary feminists suggested: ‘If you don’t do penetration, why not take a woman lover? If you strip a man of his unique ability to humiliate, you are left with a creature who is merely worse at every sort of sensual activity than a woman is.’⁸⁷

While the suggestion that women should abstain from sexual relationships with men seemed, for many women, to be extreme and an invasion of their personal autonomy, there were women who

⁸² Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, ‘Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality’, *WIRES Newsletter* 81 (n.d.), n.p. The paper was later published in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*, (London 1981), pp. 5-10.

⁸³ Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, ‘Political lesbianism’, at p. 5.

⁸⁴ Lal Coveney, Margaret Jackson, Sheila Jeffreys, Leslie Kay and Pat Mahony, ‘Introduction’, in Lal Coveney, Margaret Jackson, Sheila Jeffreys, Leslie Kay and Pat Mahony, (eds), *The Sexuality Papers: Male Sexuality and the Social Control of Women*, (Abingdon and New York, 2019 [First published 1984]), pp. 9-21, at pp. 14-15.

⁸⁵ Coveney et al., ‘Introduction’, at p. 17.

⁸⁶ Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, ‘Political lesbianism’, at p. 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

took separatism further including ‘living in women-only houses and creating women-only culture’.⁸⁸ In the same year that ‘Political lesbianism: the case against heterosexuality’ was drafted, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group also produced a paper on ‘tactical separatism’. Looking back, Sheila Jeffreys says:

We defined it thus: ‘[N]ot living with men, not fucking them, not talking to them about Feminist politics, not treating them as individuals to give (priority) time and emotional support to, not feeling obliged to make their day brighter.’ We would, however, use men in situations where we needed information – ‘e.g. on genetic engineering’ or for ‘resources or skills’. Tactical separatism, we said ‘is the way we live our personal lives, as a means to an end’ that was ‘vital to our political struggle, not an optional extra’.⁸⁹

Despite the focus on men in this particular theoretical thread, the presentation of men and masculinity was one-dimensional and it did not speak to the possibility of something different. As observed in the introduction, to great extent, the narrative about the place of men in the WLM reflects the relationship of men as individuals to the movement. Against the separatist strand presented by the revolutionary feminists, the position of feminists from other theoretical positions was framed in terms of whether women thought they could live with men and/or work with men towards feminist goals. In 1981, drawing on analysis by Amanda Sebastyen, Ann Oakley summarised what she referred to as ‘tendencies in the women’s liberation movement’ that captured the position of men in relation to each of the ‘tendencies’.⁹⁰ The location of men in relation to each of the ‘positions’ was consistent with the way in which the WLM thinking about men is most often represented – in relation to the ability of men to support the achievement of women’s liberation at a meta level, along a continuum from being partners in the quest for liberation to being identified as ‘enemies’ of women. Again, this said little, outside of the positioning of revolutionary feminists of men as ‘the enemy’, about the ways in which women considered the nature and role of men and masculinity.

Conclusion

Feminists brought diverse personal, intellectual and activist backgrounds to the problem of the subordination of women by men. What was common across these backgrounds was an increasing recognition of, and frustration with, persistent constraints that undermined new opportunities that were opening to women in the labour market, education and politically.

⁸⁸ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970-1990*, (London, 2018), p. 55.

⁸⁹ Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution*, p. 62.

⁹⁰ Ann Oakley, *Subject Women*, (London, 1982), pp. 336-337. This was not to suggest that women neatly fell into one of the ‘tendencies’. At any given moment and across time, activists might hold an element of multiple perspectives.

Despite political differences, there was soon broad agreement that there was a system of oppression that subordinated women. Women drew widely from academic disciplines and diverse political positions to develop broad frameworks to explain the subordination of women. These included an exploration of the source, nature and scope of patriarchy. For some women, theories of patriarchy did not provide a tangible focus for change. Targeting ideology through sex role and socialization theories reflected an optimism that had been associated with the early identification of gender as a constructed category. What had been made, could be re-made.

However, as Sylvia Walby observed, change had been undermined by retaining a dichotomy of masculinity and femininity that was based on understandings of sex as a binary concept. This was a complex and challenging area for feminists. While the majority of feminists were consistent in their challenge to a binary notion of gender, feminists also acknowledged that sex was used to categorise and subordinate women from birth. Further, sex was the basis on which women sought to challenge injustices connected with physiological functions, such as reproduction. For revolutionary feminists, men were hostile oppressors who sought to control women's bodies and reproductive systems. In this, women were in a 'sex war' with men. The solution was to withdraw from men, particularly sexually, in favour of 'political lesbianism'. This position drew a quick reaction from feminists. Some agreed and pursued separatist lives. Others disagreed and, to some extent, focus shifted to a debate about whether feminists should live with or work politically with men. Yet again, like the other holistic frameworks, presenting men as 'the enemy' said little beyond positioning men as oppressors. Yet so much more was said about men and masculinity by feminists from all corners of the WLM. Chapters two to five will examine the ways in which feminists built on the theoretical foundations described in this chapter to contribute to a more granular critique of men and masculinity, together with a roadmap towards a 'new man'.

2. FROM HELPER TO PARTNER?

In the 1950s, the British writer J. G. Ballard trained as a pilot ‘with the idea of becoming a crew member in a nuclear bomber’.¹ In an interview on the BBC, in 2003, he said that he had always been, and continued to be, fascinated with flight:

It may be a generational thing but I’ve always admired those lone fliers of the 1920s and 1930s, you know, who took off in tiny aircraft, made of not much more than string and glue with ... lawnmower engines, ... managed, somehow, to fly the Atlantic Ocean or enormous distances across Africa. ..., I mean flight is obviously transcendence. It’s also an escape. Runways have always had a special magic for me. ... I like living near Heathrow.²

Another in a number of career options tried out by Ballard, the pilot’s training was not completed but Ballard remained fascinated with flying and themes of flight were reflected in many of his novels. Not only was flight symbolic of adventure for Ballard but, according to his biographer, John Baxter, also represented ‘freedom from responsibility’ for the writer.³ Ballard’s identification of his admiration of the pilot adventurers as a generational trait would ring true for historian Martin Francis who pointed to an oppositional pull – at least in the imaginations of men – from the domesticity that had been identified, in the years after World War II, as integral to rebuilding the nation.⁴ This pull was both satisfied and fed in ‘fantasised adventure narratives’, drawn from the domains of cinema, fiction and war memoir.⁵ It could be said that, for Ballard, the ‘fantasised adventure narratives’ were explored through his own writing.

In the real world, having married Helen Mary Matthews (Mary) in 1955, Ballard was soon father to three children - Christopher (born in 1956), Caroline Fay (Fay) (born in 1957), and Beatrice (born in 1959). Consistent with widespread practice at the time, Ballard had been forbidden by medical staff in the NHS hospital from attending his son’s birth. He reportedly ‘insisted’ on the two girls being born at home where ‘he not only observed the delivery but helped the midwife and his sister-in-law deliver the baby by kneeling beside the bed, pressing back Mary’s large and bursting

¹ John Baxter, *The Inner Man: The Life of J.G. Ballard*, (London, 2011), p. 25.

² Simon Chu (Director), J G Ballard: A Profile [presented by Tom Sutcliffe], BBC, (2003), available at <<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJvFNy1HmPM&t=1595s>>> (at 16:08 minutes), accessed 27 May 2025.

³ Baxter, *The Inner Man*, p. 61.

⁴ Martin Francis, ‘A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War’, *Gender & History* 19:1 (2007), pp.163–185.

⁵ Francis, ‘A Flight from Commitment?’, at p. 164. See also Martin Francis, ‘The domestication of the male? Recent research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British masculinity’, *The Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002), pp. 637-652.

haemorrhoids'.⁶ While the exact level of involvement may have been more unusual in this case, Laura King observes that attitudes to men's presence at births were starting to change from the 1950s, with the 'change in men's involvement [taking] place on a small scale at home', although this was still the minority.⁷ In 1960, the family moved into their own home in Shepperton – into the house with its much valued proximity to Heathrow. At the time of purchase, the house was located in a street that was 'even by local standards, a backwater, with open land opposite'.⁸

Acquiring a home was the focus of cross-class aspirations from the 1930s and particularly in the post-war period.⁹ In the context of the post-war era the home represented a safe retreat. Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield explain that, following World War II, the 'physical reconstruction of living conditions was seen as providing the backdrop for the consolidation of stable family life, based upon the type of relationship between marriage partners which itself was suited to the post-war world'.¹⁰ The term 'companionate marriage' was popularly used to describe that relationship. This was not, as Finch and Summerfield point out, a new concept, having been 'employed as early as the 1920s' but 'it is in the post-war period', they suggest, 'that it appears more widely'.¹¹ Initially attributed to the middle-classes, by the 1950s it was being suggested that working class marriages were increasingly reflecting companionate attributes.¹² Martin Francis explains that 'companionate marriage' implied that 'teamwork and partnership were to replace unquestioned patriarchal authority as the basis of domestic life'.¹³ However, in a survey of the use of the term 'companionate' from 1750, Kate Fisher draws attention to 'the imprecision in the concept of companionship and the hollowness of the egalitarianism it promised'.¹⁴ Also reflecting this, Finch and Summerfield make clear, referring to the application of the term to the immediate

⁶ Baxter, *The Inner Man*, pp.91-92. While Ballard's involvement was more unusual, it was consistent with the increasing number of men attending births, particularly at home births. See Laura King, 'Hiding in the pub to cutting the cord? Men's presence at childbirth in Britain c. 1940s – 2000s', *Social History of Medicine* 30:2 (2017), pp. 389-407.

⁷ King, 'Hiding in the pub to cutting the cord?', at p. 405.

⁸ Baxter, *The Inner Man*, p. 101.

⁹ Claire Langhamer, 'The meanings of home in postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), pp. 341-362.

¹⁰ Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage, 1945-59', in David Clark (ed.), *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne, 1944-88*, (London, 1991), pp. 6-27, at p. 6.

¹¹ Finch and Summerfield, 'Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage', at p. 7.

¹² See, for example, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, (London, 1957), pp. 3-15.

¹³ Francis, 'The domestication of the male?', at p. 644.

¹⁴ Kate Fisher, 'Marriage and companionate ideals since 1750', in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds), *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, (London, 2013), pp. 328-347, at p 332.

post-war period, that a “companionate marriage”, based on equality between the partners’ did not reflect, nor was, in reality, expected to reflect, the experience of many women.¹⁵

The role of women and men in the home was an early focus of acute attention in the WLM. ‘Our window on the world is looked through with our hands in the sink and we’ve begun to hate that sink and all it implies – so begins our consciousness’ said Jan Williams, Hazel Twort and Ann Bachelli.¹⁶ As women joined consciousness-raising groups and analysed the circumstances of their daily life under the rubric of ‘the personal is political’, the home as a site of subordination of women became one of the first areas to draw significant critique from feminists. The existing scholarship on the topic predominantly focuses on the ways feminists conceived of housework and childcare.¹⁷ Sarah Stoller, for instance, has shown how housework and childcare formed a rich basis for the formation of ‘spaces for sisterhood’ as women overcame their alienation in the home by connecting with other women.¹⁸ This chapter takes a different approach, showing how feminists considered their relationship with men as they rethought housework and childcare. It will show that, rather than a rhetoric of equality of roles, there was, in fact, no standard formula to enact women’s liberation in relation to the home and children. Rather, it became clear that what was needed, in addition to structural arrangements to support the ability of men to participate more fully in the home, was a willingness by men to engage positively with women to negotiate roles within a partnership underpinned by a gender-neutral ethos of collective responsibility.

In many ways, J.G. Ballard might appear to be an exception to the archetype breadwinning father reliant on the domestic skills of a wife who would take care of the home and children. In 1964, while on a family holiday in Spain, Ballard’s wife died unexpectedly from viral pneumonia. While relatives initially looked after the three children, Ballard soon assumed responsibility for raising them on a full-time basis. As observed by Ballard, himself, ‘it was extremely rare in the 1960s to

¹⁵ Finch and Summerfield, ‘Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage’, at p. 17.

¹⁶ Jan Williams, Hazel Twort and Ann Bachelli, ‘Women and the family’, in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, (London, 1972), pp. 31-44, at p. 31.

¹⁷ Emily Callaci, *Wages for Housework: The Story of a Movement, An Idea, An Unfulfilled Promise*, (London, 2025); and Sarah Stoller, ‘Forging a politics of care: Theorizing household work in the British Women’s Liberation Movement’, *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018), pp. 95-119. There has also been recent work with a significant emphasis on the work and contribution of the WLM to change in key areas such as childcare policy in Britain and the visibility and understandings of the experiences of mothers. See Sarah Stoller, *Inventing the Working Parent: Work, Gender, and Feminism in Neoliberal Britain*, (Cambridge MA, 2023); and Sarah Crook, *Unhappy Mothers: Women, Motherhood, and Social Change in Postwar Britain*, (Manchester, 2025).

¹⁸ Stoller, ‘Forging a politics of care’.

find single fathers caring for their children'.¹⁹ In explaining his decision, Ballard said, '... I felt that I owed it to Mary to look after her children, and I probably needed them more than they needed me'.²⁰ In some ways, this sense of responsibility aligns with the much-approved identity of the 'family man' of the twentieth century although it appeared to exceed the 'involved father' that Laura King identifies as an acceptable 'construction of masculinity' to emerge from the inter-war era.²¹ However, as will be seen in this chapter, the power of gendered norms – particularly around housework and childcare – was extraordinarily strong, both in the public imagination but also in the lived experiences of individuals. Rather than necessarily epitomize change, Ballard made full-time care of his children fit around an otherwise undisturbed middle-class masculine identity.

2.1 Feminism, housework and motherhood

While the domestic lives of women were subject to vast amounts of feminist theory, both during the WLM and afterwards, it is also one of the most difficult and complex areas of feminist theorising. The first task of feminists was to confront the overwhelming rhetoric around housewifery and motherhood (together with the trope of the breadwinning man) with which they had grown up and which continued to swirl around them across the second half of the twentieth century. As observed by historians Angela Davis and Helen McCarthy, the often conflicting messages that were directed to women personally about their adequacy, or otherwise, as wives and mothers made the detachment needed to consider the political context of their situation extremely challenging. Davis observes that 'throughout the second half of the century being a mother was a role fraught with contradictions and ambiguities'.²² Women struggled to sift through, and understand, the countless 'contradictions and ambiguities' of their domestic roles, including the ways in which these 'contradictions and ambiguities' changed both over chronological time and across lifespans. Further, as called out by McCarthy, the extent to which women adapted to the reality of their circumstances, often making 'psychic adjustments' daily to 'accommodate the needs of others' obscures the theoretical landscape as exemplified in individual stories. This should not, however, be read as undermining women's awareness and challenge to the subordinated status in which they found themselves. The pressures on women in their roles as wives (partners) and mothers were immense in practical and legal terms, but also

¹⁹ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, (London, 2014 [First published 2008]), p. 201. See also Emily Priscott, *Singleness in Britain, 1960-1990: Identity, Gender and Social Change*, (Wilmington and Malaga, 2020), pp. 126-127.

²⁰ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, p. 201.

²¹ Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 194.

²² Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c. 1945-2000*, (Manchester and New York, 2013), p. 207.

in social, cultural and psychological terms. Despite this, we see a steady emergence over the life of the WLM of strong theorising about the position of women as wives and mothers that clearly identified housework and childcare as (often gruelling) *work*; that recognised that women had been made responsible for this work; and that the work was unrecognised and unpaid. Against this background, the ability of men to routinely disregard, and/or personally evade, this responsibility was challenged.

The American journalist, Betty Friedan is popularly identified as a chronological point from which women across the anglophone western world started to question their roles as housewives as a 'natural' source of self-fulfilment. As elsewhere across the anglophone world, in the early 1960s, women in Britain were also reading, and relating to, Betty Friedan's book - *The Feminine Mystique* – in which she argued that American women, because of their home-bound existences, were suffering.²³ This suffering of women – 'the problem that has no name' – sourced from a feeling of discontent with their lives as housewives and manifested in a myriad of ailments including the bleeding blisters of "housewife's blight", tiredness, depression, neuroses, sexual problems and suicide.²⁴ Friedan's thesis was that women's suffering reflected a 'problem of identity' which, arising from their 'sexual role', constrained the ability of women to 'grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings'.²⁵ According to Friedan, many women no longer had the capacity or motivation to pursue any creative endeavours with genuine commitment and discipline. Rather, women would dabble in occupations that did not inspire them such as helping with volunteer work, taking on short courses and temporarily picking up hobbies. While increasing numbers of women were working, Friedan observed that this work was not in professional fields but, rather, pursued without real commitment, frequently to supplement household income. For Friedan, the problem was primarily a psychological one arising from 'the mystique of feminine fulfilment, and the immaturity it breeds'.²⁶ Women were simply not trying to engage wholeheartedly with other interests. Rather than calling for systemic change, Friedan argued that the answer lay in the hands of women themselves.²⁷ Friedan called on women to create a personal 'life plan' that outlined how they would pursue an authentic commitment to a profession. In this, Friedan did not ask anything from men to support women. While she thought that men would benefit from the greater fulfilment of women, responsibility for change, including

²³ The book was first published in America in 1963 with a British edition published in the same year.

²⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London, 2010 [First published 1963]).

²⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 58.

²⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 207.

²⁷ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, The Cold War, and Modern Feminism*, (Amherst, 1998), p. 206.

the development and execution of the 'life plan' and self-fulfilment, rested with the individual woman. 'Perhaps men may live longer in America when women carry more of the burden of the battle with the world, instead of being a burden themselves.'²⁸

Writing a few years earlier in 1956, sociologists Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein had, like Friedan, recommended 'individual adjustments' by women to address what they saw as 'psychological conflicts'. Differently to Friedan and recognising the increasing numbers of women in the workforce, Myrdal and Klein identified '[t]he characteristic feminine dilemma of to-day' arising from 'women's two roles' – in the labour market and in the home respectively. With a somewhat optimistic outlook, the sociologists explained:

The struggle for the right to work is no longer directed against external obstacles; no longer is there the same hostile public opinion to overcome with which our grandmothers had to contend, nor is there a lack of opportunities for women. To-day [*sic*] the conflict has become "internalized" and continues as a psychological problem which may assume many different variations and shades; and just because there is no longer an absolute "either-or" to be decided on at the beginning of adult life, the pull in two directions goes on practically throughout a woman's life.²⁹

Amongst the 'individual adjustments' recommended for women was the suggestion that women '[learn] that taking a job is not only a matter of temporarily earning a living but, literally, of *gagner sa vie*, as the French say'.³⁰ They also suggested that women consider careers that might be more flexible to managing the two roles. While acknowledging that the suggestion may appear 'disappointing ... to many an idealist who had hoped for complete and unconditional equality between the sexes', Myrdal and Klein argued that '[w]omen could circumvent a crucial handicap on their road to emancipation if they chose occupations which they will be able to continue after marriage or resume after an interval of a few years'.³¹ The sociologists did, however, also call for a range of systemic – labour market and social – adjustments to better support women to balance their roles. For British sociologist Hannah Gavron, the solution to isolation and loneliness was to focus on connection. Gavron suggested that efforts should be made to 'reintegrate the mother and young child into the central activities of society' which 'would ... give mothers the opportunity to relate to each other, to the local community and to society at large'.³² Like Myrdal and Klein, Gavron looked to structural issues that would support women to balance their dual roles.

²⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 309.

²⁹ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, (London, 1968 [First published 1956]), p. 136.

³⁰ Literally winning, gaining or earning her life. Myrdal and Klein, *Women's Two Roles*, p. 154.

³¹ Myrdal and Klein, *Women's Two Roles*, p. 155.

³² Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers*, (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley, 1983 [First published 1966]), pp. 147-148.

‘Pressure’, Gavron said of schoolgirls, ‘should not be put on girls to opt for one “side” or the “other”’.³³

For many feminists, however, these theories did not address the central issue. Writing in 1974, British feminist Lee Comer critiqued both Friedan and Gavron for failing to link what she identified as work (housework) with a woman’s material condition, namely her economic dependency on man.³⁴ This economic dependence, Comer said, was the basis of women’s oppression:

She, too, works all week, but it doesn’t merit the label work because it isn’t paid. And, without a moment’s hesitation, he can sweep away the nonsense of shared money, merely by stating the truth. He earns it and he gives it to her. Faced with the facts, she can only nag or whimper. Such are the politics of economic dependence.³⁵

This relationship of dependence, said Comer, was contained within a ‘small nuclear family ... tailor made to suit the needs of a capitalist economy’.³⁶ The connection between the subordination of women and the exigencies of capitalism became a dominant theoretical thread of the WLM. In what came to be known as the ‘Domestic Labour Debates’, the work of women in the home was analysed through the lens of capitalism. ‘Domestic Labour’ was an expression that sought to underscore housework as work – as labour – that exploited women in the interests of capitalism. Margaret Benston, for example, asserted that ‘women as a group do indeed have a definite relation to the means of production and that this is different from that of men.’³⁷ It was, according to Benston, this special relationship of women to the means of production that defined ‘the group “women”’.³⁸ In this way, women were identified as a distinct class although ‘they may hold dual class membership, of the houseworking class and of the working class proper if they also go out to work’.³⁹ Because the work was ‘outside the money economy’, it was, according to

³³ Gavron, *The Captive Wife*, p.144.

³⁴ For context, in 1971, the majority of women were not working - 42.6 percent of women (42.0 percent of married women) over 14/15 were in paid employment. Of married women aged 25-34, the proportion in paid employment dropped to 38.4 percent as women left the workforce to look after children. Further, a third of those women who were working in 1971 were in part-time jobs. (Duncan Gallie, ‘The labour force’, in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 281-323, at p. 292 and p.296). In terms of income distribution, in 1970, the ‘median earnings of adult women working full-time’ was just 54 percent of the median earnings of men (A. B. Atkinson, ‘Distribution of income and wealth’, in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 348-381, at p.354).

³⁵ Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, (Leeds, 1974), pp. p. 126.

³⁶ Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, p. 236.

³⁷ Margaret Benston, ‘The political economy of women’s liberation’ (1969), in Ellen Malos (ed.), *The Politics of Housework*, (Cheltenham, 1995 [First published 1980]), pp. 100-109, at p. 100.

³⁸ Benston, ‘The political economy of women’s liberation’, at p. 101.

³⁹ Eva Kaluzynska provides a summary overview of many of the threads of the domestic labour debate in ‘Wiping the floor with theory – a survey of writings on housework’, *Feminist Review* 6 (1980), pp. 27-54, at p. 41. As Kaluzynska observes, however, not all socialist feminists were comfortable calling out women as a separate class to men [at p. 41].

Benston, viewed as 'valueless'.⁴⁰ While many agreed that the nature of housework was hidden, opinions differed whether housework provided a tangible productive value.⁴¹ Some, like Jean Gardiner, Susan Himmelweit and Maureen Mackintosh called out housework as a constituent part of labour value. 'Thus the capitalist would receive surplus value in two ways. First, from his male worker, because the value created by the male worker was less than his subsistence ... and secondly, from the worker's wife, through her providing part of her husband's subsistence by her surplus labour.' As '[l]abour power then appears to be sold at less than its value', explained Gardiner et al. 'the surplus labour of the housewife is also transferred to capitalist profits'.⁴² While many recognised that men benefited from the structure⁴³, for many socialist feminists, 'bitterness and anger' was not 'directed primarily against men, but against a social structure which makes women relate to the world solely in terms of their relationships to men and children'.⁴⁴ Selma James expressed it in terms of 'capitalism [using] men against us'.⁴⁵

From the start of the WLM, regardless of the theoretical framework applied, many feminists looked outside the family structure to alleviate the burden on women, including the way in which childcare tethered women to the home. Writing from a socialist perspective in a WLM conference paper in September 1971, the Women's Liberation Front said:

If women are to be equal the rearing of children must be a social responsibility. Fully equipped nurseries and child care facilities with trained staff must be readily and freely available for all mothers, as one basic condition for their freedom to enter social production and to acquire education, to extend their job opportunities. The bearing and rearing of children is a service to society and we demand that society fulfill their responsibility in this regard.⁴⁶

2.2 Outsourced Childcare

It is well known that during World War II, thousands of British women entered the paid workforce, both to backfill vacancies left by men recruited into the armed forces and to fill positions needed to directly supply the war effort such as the production of munitions. Less remembered is the establishment of publicly funded nursery facilities across Britain to support this shift into the

⁴⁰ Benston, 'The political economy of women's liberation', at p. 102.

⁴¹ Kaluzynska, 'Wiping the floor with theory', at p. 42.

⁴² Jean Gardiner, Susan Himmelweit and Maureen Mackintosh, 'Women's domestic labour', in Malos, *The Politics of Housework*, pp. 171-186, at 179.

⁴³ See, for example, Gardiner et al., 'Women's domestic labour', at pp. 180-181.

⁴⁴ Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, 'Introduction', in Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham (eds), *Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk About Their Lives*, (London, 1977), pp.1-9, at p. 3.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Lowry, *The Guilt Cage: Housewives and a Decade of Liberation*, (London, 1980), p. 67.

⁴⁶ Women's Liberation Front, 'The roots of women's oppression and the road to liberation' (September 1971), Paper presented to the Women's National Coordinating Committee Conference – October 15-17, 1971, in papers of Sally Alexander – 7SAA/1, Women's Library, LSE, Women's Liberation Movement Conferences, 1970-78, Folder 2, pp.1-6, at p.4.

labour market. In 1941, the Ministry of Health, jointly with the Board of Education, issued a Circular announcing the extension of the war-time nurseries scheme, originally established for evacuated children, to accommodate the children (under five years of age) of women who had been conscripted into work to support the war effort. By 1944, 'there were 1,450 fulltime nurseries (for children aged 0-5), 109 part-time nurseries (2-5-year-olds) and 784 nursery classes in schools (2-5-year-olds). It was estimated that the wartime nurseries together held 59,000 children, of whom 18,000 were under two.'⁴⁷

It was, of course, women who staffed the nurseries. The pressure to staff the nurseries meant that, where initial standards requiring qualified staff had been issued, by October 1941, 'reliance on women's "inborn love of little children"' became sufficient qualification, supplemented with a couple of weeks' instruction.⁴⁸ Despite these efforts, places remained limited, inaccessible or an undesirable option for some women, and many women relied on 'minders', again predominantly female, such as other mothers, friends and neighbours.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the war had prompted a significant commitment by the UK government to the provision of childcare support to women who were needed for work outside of the home and, at the end of the war, there were many who sought to retain the support, even if just for a few years. In April 1945, Alison Settle reported, in *The Observer*, that welfare associations were asking for nurseries to be kept open for a couple of years to allow for transition to a post-war environment. The argument was posed that it was the caring mother who was concerned to ensure ongoing good quality care for children in a time of post-war upheaval.⁵⁰ The arguments seemed, however, to fall on deaf ears with the Minister of Health citing the cost of maintaining the nurseries and noting that women were now free to return to their primary child-care roles. Funding was gradually withdrawn from the nurseries, with fifty percent of the funding withdrawn from 1 April 1946.⁵¹

Theorizing childcare was a central concern in the emerging WLM but the degree to which the very early and specific attention that the topic received has not always been recognized by scholars. Anna Danziger Halperin, for example, suggests that, while 'child care was on the minds of

⁴⁷ Denise Riley, 'War in the nursery', *Feminist Review* 2 (1979), pp. 82-108, at 83.

⁴⁸ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*, (Oxon, Edition published 2013, [First published 1984]), p. 74.

⁴⁹ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ Alison Settle, 'State of emergency in family life: Need for nurseries after war', *The Observer*, (15 April 1945), p. 7. When the issue was debated in the Parliament, in March 1945, a key focus was on the inadequacy of housing to properly accommodate children with the view that this needed to be resolved before closing the nurseries. 'War-time nurseries', HC Deb 09 March 1945, vol. 408, cc. 2425-50. For an analysis of the arguments surrounding both the retention and removal of nurseries, see Riley, 'War in the nursery'.

⁵¹ 'War-time nurseries', HC Deb 29 October 1945, vol. 415, cc. 184-5W.

feminists' in the 1970s, 'it was not a top priority'.⁵² Danziger Halperin bases this on the absence before 1980 of a coordinated national campaign.⁵³ Countering suggestions that motherhood in general was not the focus of serious theorizing, Sarah Crook observes the very central role that mothers, many of whom were 'propelled into feminist activism at least in part by their experiences as mothers', played in forming the WLM.⁵⁴ Childcare would, of course, be a critical concern for this cohort. In an article in *Spare Rib* in 1977, single Lambeth mother, Many Blatchford, gave a harrowing account of the difficulties she faced in the attempt to secure daycare for her infant son. As Blatchford reflected on the months of difficulties after her son lost his daycare place as she tried to find a daycare place, she asked:

Why couldn't I? It seemed so simple and straightforward. I needed a place in a nursery for my son. Wasn't that sufficient reason? Why couldn't I get it?⁵⁵

'Anyone who thinks that women should be free and independent can see the need for nurseries', she reflected. Blatchford was not alone. One of the first anthologies of WLM writing – *The Body Politic* – published in 1972 included a number of pieces addressing childcare.⁵⁶ The call for nursery spaces, specifically for free 24-hour nurseries to be made available, formed one of the four initial WLM demands adopted at the 1970 Ruskin Conference in Oxford as a lack of childcare was immediately recognised as a significant constraint on the lives of women with children. The WLM approached the issue with a range of campaigns, 'predominantly local in the 1970s' until the establishment of the National Childcare Campaign (NCC) in 1980.⁵⁷ 'The NCC's uncompromisingly stated objective was "To build a mass national child care campaign around the demand for comprehensive, flexible, free, democratically controlled childcare facilities funded by the state".'⁵⁸ However, women had different perspectives on what constituted suitable

⁵² Anna Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the education system": Margaret Thatcher's plan for nursery expansion in 1970s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 29:2 (2018), pp. 284-308, at p. 203.

⁵³ Danziger Halperin, "'Cinderella of the education system"', at pp. 203-204; See also Jane Lewis, 'The failure to expand childcare provision and to develop a comprehensive childcare policy in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History* 24:2 (2013), pp. 249-274, at p. 266; and Vicky Randall, 'Feminism and child daycare', *Journal of Social Policy* 24:4, (1996), pp. 485-505.

⁵⁴ Crook, *Unhappy Mothers*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ Many Blatchford, 'In search of a nursery', *Spare Rib* 57 (April 1977), pp. 12-14, at p. 14.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Michaela Nava, 'The family: A critique of certain features', (pp. 36-44); Rochelle Wortis, 'Child-rearing and women's liberation', (pp. 124-130); Jane Cullen, 'Nurseries', (pp. 131-132); Tufnell Park group of the London Women's Liberation Workshop, 'More than minding', (pp. 133-137), in Wandor, *The Body Politic*.

⁵⁷ Randall, 'Feminism and child daycare', at p. 485. In the papers of the Belsize Lane group (Papers of Amanda Sebestyen – 7SEB/A/13, Women's Library, LSE), a draft report (that would form an article in *Spare Rib* ['Nine years together: A history of a women's liberation group', *Spare Rib* 69 (April 1978), pp. 41 – 46] on establishment of a local nursery - named the Children's Community Centre – noted: 'a general campaign is harder to get your teeth into than something specific'. This sentence was removed from the final published version.

⁵⁸ Randall, 'Feminism and child daycare', at p. 488.

childminding facilities. For example, not all women agreed that State-run nurseries provided a satisfactory answer. Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, writing about the WLM in 1993, identified two ways in which socialist feminists tended to think about the issue:

One strand, which stemmed both from a more traditional, labour movement view of nurseries as a practical necessity for working-class women and, in some cases, from the urgent needs of young mothers themselves, looked to the state to expand day care provision. The other, with its roots in the libertarian Left, had a more “prefigurative” – some might say Utopian – vision of collectively run, community-based nurseries, involving fathers as well as mothers and consciously instilling progressive values.⁵⁹

Pre-dating the WLM, support for community-run arrangements had, more generally been building since the early 1960s sparked by a letter to *The Guardian* from Belle Tutaev of Cavendish Mews South.⁶⁰ In her letter, Tutaev encouraged ‘mothers and teachers’ to contact the Nursery School Campaign to both contribute to a petition seeking ‘more nursery schools and play facilities for children under 5’ and ‘to start their own schools wherever they can find suitable premises, employing trained teachers, especially those who are married with their own small children and who want only part-time jobs’. By 1976, there were over 14,000 playgroups in England, with nearly 360,000 places.⁶¹

Feminists similarly reflected the do-it-yourself impetus of the playgroup movement putting effort into setting up different forms of childcare arrangements.⁶² One of the crucial points of difference in the way in which feminists spoke about arrangements for community-run childcare was the vision of services staffed by both men and women. Reflecting a sensibility of mutual responsibility for childcare, Jane Cullen stated: ‘Nurseries must be small, local units, so that there is one within reach of every family: they must be run by trained staff (men and women) but controlled by the community.’⁶³ Cullen was not alone. Descriptions of nurseries commonly included reference to staffing by both men and women. Beyond including reference to ‘men’ in the indicated staffing of nurseries, Rochelle Wortis explained the importance of ensuring

⁵⁹ Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain*, (Oxford, 1993), pp. 287-288.

⁶⁰ (Mrs) B. Tutaev, ‘Do-it-yourself nurseries’, *The Guardian* (25 August 1961), p. 6. While Tutaev’s letter raised the profile of the playgroups, ‘a few playgroups were already in existence before then’. Eva Lloyd, Edward Melhuish, Peter Moss and Charlie Owen, ‘A review of research on playgroups’, *Early Child Development and Care* 43:1 (1989), pp. 77-99, at p. 78.

⁶¹ Lloyd et al., ‘A review of research on playgroups’, at p. 78.

⁶² The playgroup movement also spawned feminists. Jessma Carter, writing to *The Guardian* in 1984, commented: ‘The playgroup movement certainly led on to an examination of the role of women. We all passed round well-thumbed copies of the *Second Sex* and asked the WEA to organise evening classes for us on women writers. We were obsessed, in the Sixties, with our place in “society” and this was reflected in the *Guardian Women’s Page*’. Jessma Carter, ‘21 years after the playgroup movement I’m afraid to read the *Guardian*’, *The Guardian* (24 April 1984), p. 8.

⁶³ Jane Cullen, ‘Nurseries’, in Wandor, *The Body Politic*, pp.131-132, at p. 132.

nurseries staffed by men as well as by women to disrupt the assumption that women had primary ‘responsibility for the socialisation of children’.⁶⁴ According to Sarah Stoller, this was conveyed by reference to ‘the gender-neutral category of working parents’ and connected to the feminist ‘[imagining of] communities governed by equality and collective life – communities that would no longer be shaped by distinctions of class, race, or sex’.⁶⁵

Parents experimented with different ways of meeting the need for childcare. In 1976, Wisty Hoyland and Alison Fell wrote an article for *Spare Rib* looking at the various ways in which childcare was being arranged, together with the challenges.⁶⁶ Mike, from North London, described a neighbourhood ‘baby sitting bank’ covering about 30 households in which points would be given for baby sitting hours. At the end of each month, each participant would report their points. As Mike described, the system operated on a foundation of ‘good will and guilt’.⁶⁷ According to the article, the points system involved the participation of two parents: ‘The basic premise on which systems of points (or beans or counters or whatever) rest is that there are two parents, one of whom will be free to fulfil their obligation to baby sit for others, and one who can stay in with her own kids meanwhile.’⁶⁸ Despite the vision of childcare being provided by both men and women, the inherent involvement of men suggested by this arrangement was more unusual.

For a group of West London women, forming a neighbourhood creche was a way to ‘help each other bring up their young children’.⁶⁹ The creche, run by two women at a time, would look after the children three days a week. In contrast to the ‘bank’ arrangement, the West London creche was viewed ‘primarily as a women’s project’. In part this was pragmatic with the group including some lesbians and heterosexual women with fluctuating relationships. This was not, however, the only reason. ‘As one of the women put it, the man she lives with doesn’t *mind* the creche and knows his boy likes it there, but it isn’t of key importance to him, like it is to all the women.’⁷⁰ Catherine Hall suggested that some of the co-operative arrangements had the effect of excluding men. ‘One of the ironies about our relation to childcare’, she said of the co-operative arrangement that she was part of, ‘was that at the very same time that we were madly criticising men for not taking their responsibilities seriously, we were absolutely claiming the sphere of children and

⁶⁴ Rochelle Wortis, ‘Child-rearing and women’s liberation’, in Wandor, *The Body Politic*, pp. 124-130, at p 129.

⁶⁵ Stoller, *Inventing the Working Parent*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Wisty Hoyland and Alison Fell, ‘B**by**t*g: A very private problem’, *Spare Rib* 51 (October 1976), pp. 6-9, at p. 6.

⁶⁷ Hoyland and Fell, ‘B**by**t*g’, at p. 6.

⁶⁸ Hoyland and Fell, ‘B**by**t*g’, at p. 7.

⁶⁹ [Unattributed], ‘Sharing childcare’, *Spare Rib* 90 (January 1980), pp. 31-34, at p. 32.

⁷⁰ [Unattributed], ‘Sharing childcare’, at p. 32. (Emphasis in original)

home as ours and redefining it.' Hall continued: 'We were very controlling about wanting our power in that area, and actually excluding men.'⁷¹ For some women, the exclusion of men from childcare arrangements aligned with separatist politics although there were exceptions. Sheila Jeffreys recalled '[s]ome feminists left their children with their fathers when they decided to become lesbians, particularly if they were boy children'.⁷²

Even where, such as in the case of the radical and revolutionary feminists, there was a high level of antagonism toward men, it was still expected that men would provide childcare. Writing to *WIRES* in 1978, Maria explained the rationale for 'asking men to run the creche for a Radical Feminist Conference'. On the one hand, she explained: Yes we do write men off as "public enemy number one" they oppress all women as a class and as individuals.' However, she argued, '[t]hey must accept kids as their responsibility too. How lucky they are that they don't need to ask us to look after their kids while they have their meetings, conferences and nights out...'⁷³ In fact, the main form of active support seen by feminists from anti-sexist men was through providing childcare in creches at feminist events. Writing to the anti-sexist men's publication *Achilles Heel* in 1979, Amanda Sebestyan observed, of '[g]roups ... meeting since about 1972 under the name of Men against Sexism', that 'perhaps they haven't come across with all the action I've been hoping for but [amongst other things] they've been a big help with creches'.⁷⁴

It was frequently observed that men took a different approach to childcare than women. Examining alternative forms of childcare in 1978, co-founder of *Spare Rib*, Marsha Rowe commented on a 'detachment' that, in her view, differentiated childminding by men from that by women. While Rowe's article predominantly looked at collective arrangements, she drew on an example of a father she knew to exemplify this 'detachment':

Two years have gone by and his time in childcare is equal with the woman's but its quality has remained different. With him the child expects to be picked up and played with, and to do things. When the child is sad, sick or feeling quiet, the child goes to the woman. He has watched himself unwittingly encourage this split.⁷⁵

Rowe recognised the connection between the observed 'detachment' and normative emotional roles that are the subject of the next chapter. Rowe reported that another interviewee, Tim, who

⁷¹ Catherine Hall, interviewed by Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation*, (London, 1990), p. 177.

⁷² Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970-1990*, (London and New York, 2018), p. 70.

⁷³ Letter to *WIRES* 88 (25 October 1978), p. 2.

⁷⁴ Letter to *Achilles Heel* 3 (1979), p. 6.

⁷⁵ Marsha Rowe, 'Changing childcare', *Spare Rib* 67 (February 1978), pp. 16-18, at p. 16.

was part of a collective and provided childcare to two children, 'kept at a certain distance from the inter-relations of people and children in the house':

He felt he needed to construct his own relation to childcare which did not threaten to dissolve his identity as a man, to exist in a world of visible, manoeuvrable objects, so that when something went out of gear he could lift up the bonnet and set to with the spanner.⁷⁶

In the eyes of some women, this more practical approach meant that men provided a 'more exciting time' for children.⁷⁷ Other women felt that the ability to provide more adventures and games for children was a reflection of a lesser contribution to housework. Another of Rowe's interviewees, Caroline, suggested: 'It fell on women to do a lot of the incidental work with the kids. When it was the men's turn it wasn't going to the laundrette or clearing out their rooms so the kids preferred being looked after by the men.'⁷⁸ In the context of Ballard's housekeeping, Ballard's daughter, Bea Ballard recalled: 'He did not care about bourgeois concerns such as keeping the house tidy ... I remember finding the grander homes of some of my school chums eerily silent and stultifying in their neatness compared with our wonderful home, where old plastic flippers discarded from a beach holiday were used as doorstops.'⁷⁹ The contribution of men to housework, however, received more than a passing comment by many feminists. While acknowledging the importance of socialised childcare services, Ellen Malos pointed out that 'the sharing of necessary housework with men (and children) is important too, since not all housework can be taken outside of the home'.⁸⁰ Women were persistent in their efforts to engage men in housework and childcare. One of the most famous of these, including amongst British feminists, was an essay – 'The Politics of Housework' – written by American radical feminist, Pat Mainardi in 1968.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Rowe, 'Changing childcare', at p. 17.

⁷⁹ Bea Ballard, 'My dad, the perfect mum', *The Sunday Times* (26 April 2009), pp. 1-3 of 'News Review', at p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ellen Malos, 'Introduction', in Malos, *The Politics of Housework*, (pp. 1-33, at p.28.

⁸¹ Pat Mainardi, 'The politics of housework', in Malos (ed.), *The Politics of Housework*, pp. 83-87. The essay was originally published by *Redstockings* in 1970. Widely circulated amongst British feminists, the essay came to be included in Ellen Malos' collection with the same title in 1980.

2.3 Expanding ‘help’?

We both had careers, both had to work a couple of days a week to earn enough to live on. So why shouldn't we share the housework? So I suggested it to my mate and he agreed – most men are too hip to turn you down flat. You're right, he said. It's only fair.⁸²

Mainardi's essay took a wry look at the challenge of making change but as Mainardi was to draw out, this surface level agreement did not necessarily translate into action. Very quickly, said Mainardi, men would 'recognise the essential fact of housework, ... [w]hich is that it stinks'.⁸³ Earlier, in 1967⁸⁴, British woman, Suzanne Gail, had reported that husband, Joe, would happily play with their son but would refuse to do core housework such as washing nappies.⁸⁵ Many women echoed Mainardi and Gail in identifying a lack of unqualified support from men in the home but there was also a recognition of structural impediments to men providing more help with domestic tasks. In a study of 'gendered perspectives on change and continuity to men's roles from the late 1940s to the 1980s in relation to ... family planning and conception; pregnancy and birth; and infant care', Angela Davis and Laura King observe that women primarily pointed to 'structural reasons, such as lack of affordable childcare or hostile labour market practices, as explaining why their generation of women had been primarily responsible for homemaking and childrearing and conversely why their husbands had been less involved'.⁸⁶ Like Davis and King's interviewees, many feminists also recognised the structural impact of 'hostile labour market practices' on the ability of men to take on a greater proportion of domestic tasks. 'The most obvious impediments to men and women sharing labour in the home, including all the work associated with parenting, are economic – the demands of men's paid work.'⁸⁷ This was not a problem for Ballard whose work as a writer was undertaken in the house. His daughter, Fay, would recall:

⁸² Mainardi, 'The politics of housework', at p. 83.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Suzanne Gail's much cited essay – 'The housewife' – was first published in *New Left Review* 43 (1 May 1967), pp. 45-54. The essay was published under the name 'S.G.'. In 1968, the essay – the only one by a woman – was published as part of a volume of accounts of 'men and women' who have 'set down the intimate feeling and meaning to them of their work'. [Suzanne Gail, 'The housewife', in Ronald Fraser (ed.), *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 140-155. The quote is from Ronald Fraser, 'Introduction', in Fraser, *Work*, pp.7-10, at p. 7.] An extract of the essay – titled 'from The Housewife' - was later included in the collection edited by Ellen Malos (*The Politics of Housework*, pp. 88-94).

⁸⁵ Like other women, Gail felt that Joe 'plays with Carl better than I'. This was, Gail felt, 'because the responsibility is not in terms of his own personal success'. [Suzanne Gail, 'The housewife', in Ronald Fraser (ed.), *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 140-155, at p. 151].

⁸⁶ Angela Davis and Laura King, 'Gendered perspectives on men's changing familial roles in postwar England, c. 1950-1990', *Gender & History* 30:1 (March 2018), pp. 70-92, p.71 and p. 87.

⁸⁷ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), p. 37.

He would get up quite early in the morning, have breakfast, always do the Times crossword, and then settle down to write at his typewriter for the morning. And as a way of pausing and thinking of what he was writing, he would come out of his study, take hold of the carpet sweeper, which was just outside his study door, and start sweeping the hallway for ... I don't know ... a few minutes. Then go back to his study and do a bit more typing. Then he'd come out again, half an hour later, and do a bit more. The use of the carpet sweeper was really a device for him to stop and reflect on what he'd been writing.⁸⁸

Talking to journalist Suzanne Lowry, twenty-five year old Abigail Hunt said that while her husband, David, had done 'his share' when they were both students, she felt reluctant to ask for help when he returned from work. 'Now that he is a houseman, though, he works a hundred plus hours a week and when he does come in, I *couldn't* ask him to cook the supper or something.'⁸⁹ Thirty-four year old Jane Lewis similarly reported that she was reluctant to ask her husband for help: 'He has a lot of stresses and strains at work and he is the major breadwinner. I don't think that it is reasonable for me to ask him.'⁹⁰ As early as 1971, feminists were arguing in *Shrew* that systemic changes were needed to allow men to engage more with 'family life'. 'Men won't take time off if it is going to affect their careers.' The absence of men negatively impacted children according to the authors who also pointed to 'how men are deprived because they are so tied to their jobs and can't be involved in their growing family'.⁹¹

In 1990, the recently formed Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published its first policy paper – *The Family Way: A New Approach to Policy Making*.⁹² The paper was authored by three prominent feminists of the time – Anna Coote, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt.⁹³ Anna Coote, who is well known for co-authoring *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* with Beatrix Campbell in 1982, was Deputy Director of the IPPR. The IPPR had been 'launched in 1988, with the aim of generating and researching alternative, progressive policy ideas, after a long period in which the UK's political discourse had been powerfully shaped by a cohort of right-of-centre and "free market" policy institutions'.⁹⁴ All three authors were prominent in the National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL) and Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt, in particular, had significant ties to the Labour party. The paper included a clear statement that the responsibility of men – as 'breadwinners' – to provide financial support to families was detrimental for three

⁸⁸ Quoted in Baxter, *The Inner Man*, p. 148.

⁸⁹ Abigail Hunt quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 134. (Emphasis in original)

⁹⁰ Jane Lewis quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 154.

⁹¹ [unattributed], 'Do you have two jobs?', *Shrew* 3:7 (August 1971), pp. 7-9, at p. 9.

⁹² Anna Coote, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt, *The Family Way: A New Approach to Policy-Making*, (London, 1990).

⁹³ In addition, prominent feminists Juliet Mitchell, Janet Finch and Liz Kelly were amongst those acknowledged for advice in planning the report.

⁹⁴ IPPR, 'Our history', at <<<https://www.ippr.org/who-we-are/our-history>>>, accessed 10 October 2024.

reasons. First, that many men could not provide sufficient financial support to avoid ‘material deprivation’ to children. Second, that the assumption that material support was the responsibility of men meant that women were ‘disadvantaged in the labour market’ making it difficult for women to independently care for themselves and their children. Finally, the report stated that ‘the traditional emphasis on men as breadwinner has deterred many of them from forming close and lasting bonds with their children’.⁹⁵

The authors recommended that ‘a new family policy ... should encourage ... new kinds of responsibility in men’. Two ‘new kinds of responsibility’ were proposed. First ‘responsibility as fathers’ arising from close involvement with children, particularly in early years ‘to form strong, loving bonds’.⁹⁶ Interestingly, and with an awareness that divorce rates were rising during this period⁹⁷, one of the primary benefits that the authors saw from this would be to ensure that the bonds remained strong after the breakdown of a marriage. The second kind of responsibility called out by the authors was ‘responsibility as partners’. They called for a public policy that would ‘create the conditions for men to be responsible in ways which do not perpetrate female dependency’. Women could become more autonomous if men did ‘more of the unpaid work’. The authors observed a difference ‘between what people say ought to happen and what really does’ and called for change: ‘They must learn to respect – and treat – women as individuals of equal worth.’ The authors called for a change to the identification of men with material responsibility. ‘The long-term aim should be to create the conditions for men and women to be equally capable of supporting themselves and contributing at least half to the support of their children.’⁹⁸

However, it was not clear that alleviation of ‘breadwinning’ responsibility would substantially change the dynamics around housework and childcare in the home. One of the problems with theories – functional or economic – that pointed to the relationship between occupation of public (paid work) sphere versus occupation of private (domestic work) sphere was that the gender roles remained largely entrenched when the circumstances of men and women reversed. As observed by Laura King in relation to the earlier part of the twentieth century, while unemployment ‘could constitute the special circumstances in which it became permissible to undertake domestic labour’, it was not necessarily the case, or even predominantly the case, that men would do so.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Coote et al., *The Family Way*, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Coote et al., *The Family Way*, p. 37.

⁹⁷ The Guardian, Datablog, ‘Divorce rates data, 1858 to now: how has it changed?’ <<<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2010/jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons#data>>>, accessed 10 October 2024.

⁹⁸ Coote et al., *The Family Way*, p. 37.

⁹⁹ King, *Family Men*, p. 81.

Similarly, later in the century, when men were unemployed, they did not necessarily start doing domestic work.

My husband is out of work and has been unemployed for that long now that I don't think he even feels like having to work. He has become bone idle. Yet I am expected to do a part-time job, see to the children when I get home, cook a meal for five of us in the evening, do all the washing up and housework.¹⁰⁰

As with this letter writer, when women were in paid employment, they did not necessarily relinquish responsibility for ensuring that childcare arrangements were in place (often carried out by other women) and domestic work completed. Jan VanEvery observed that 'even when women are in the paid labour force, they still do the majority of the housework and child-care or are responsible for ensuring that it gets done'.¹⁰¹ With a concern to draw attention to the patriarchal structure in the home, Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard pointed out that figures to suggest that 'husbands of employed wives do a larger *proportion* of the housework than those married to non-employed wives' are misleading as, rather than suggesting an increase in effort from men, the figures reflect 'the smaller amount of time women devote to housework when they also have paid work'.¹⁰² Feminists recognised that there were other factors affecting the division of labour in the home.

2.4 Ambivalent men

Often put forward as the subject of jokes, men's lack of efficacy was often identified as a barrier to their providing help with household tasks. Even though Abigail Hunt's husband, David, had proven himself competent when they shared the housework as students and when he took on the housework and cooking when Hunt was pregnant, Hunt attributed a sense of uncertainty to David when it came to some tasks: 'I suppose I feel that he's not very sure of himself.'¹⁰³ However, for others, there was suspicion that the uncertainty about household tasks was perhaps more about a lack of motivation to undertake those tasks than authentic uncertainty. Feminists were well aware of the patterns of resistance they would, and did, encounter when suggesting that men should take on household tasks. Ann Oakley observed that men were likely to 'agree with the sentiment in theory but say in practice, "I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very

¹⁰⁰ A Cooper, 'Home Truths', Letter to *Spare Rib* 49 (August 1976), pp. 4-5, at p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Jan VanEvery, *Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to be a 'Wife'*, (Abingdon and New York, 1995), p.30.

¹⁰² Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies*, (Cambridge and Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 76.

¹⁰³ Abigail Hunt quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 134.

well. We should each do things we're best at.”¹⁰⁴ Sue Sharpe, on the basis of accounts by women from across England and Scotland, found a similar resistance reported by interviewees. ‘Maintaining ignorance and ineptitude in domestic tasks and childcare’, she said, ‘is a kind of passive resistance’.¹⁰⁵

Oakley was quick to observe that the ‘[a]pparent rationality’ suggested by the arguments of men, in fact, ‘conceals a concern to perpetuate the identification of women with domesticity: “I don’t like the dull, stupid, boring jobs so you should do them.”’¹⁰⁶ For Oakley, these conversations – arguments – between men and women carried an intensity that underscored their political nature. ‘The measure of the woman–housewife’s oppression is’, she argued, ‘the strength of the man–non-housewife’s resistance to “real” (not merely theoretical) change’.¹⁰⁷ Looking through the lens of childcare, American sociologist Margaret Polatnick, said bluntly that ‘men (as a group) don’t rear children because they don’t want to rear children’¹⁰⁸ and they are able to maintain this arrangement because ‘men as a gender enjoy a superior power position in relation to women as a gender’.¹⁰⁹ For some men, however, resistance also reflected a fear of judgement by others. Sue Sharpe observed that ‘some men still go to enormous lengths to conceal their activities within the privacy of the home’.¹¹⁰ Sharpe extracts an account by an interviewee, Lesley, who described:

I said to him, ‘I’m going to wash some pots so could you get the vac out and run it round the floor for me?’ So I was in the kitchen, and I dashed in and he was on his knees, pushing the vacuum cleaner round himself, and I said, ‘What *are* you doing?’ He said, ‘I’m doing it so nobody sees me through the window.’ ... He was actually on his knees, turning round in circles! I couldn’t believe it and we had an argument about it and I called him a chauvinist and all that.¹¹¹

In this, there was often a distinction between the types of tasks that men were willing to undertake. Laura King, for instance, tracks changing attitudes to the vision of men pushing prams in the 1940s and 1950s attached to ‘the promotion and acceptance of a family-orientated masculinity in some

¹⁰⁴ Ann Oakley, *Housewife*, (Harmondsworth, 1976 [First published 1974]), p. 240.

¹⁰⁵ Sue Sharpe, *Double Identity: The Lives of Working Mothers*, (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ Oakley, *Housewife*, p. 240.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Polatnick, ‘Why men don’t rear children: A power analysis’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 18 (1973-74), pp. 45-86, at p. 60. (Emphasis in original)

¹⁰⁹ Polatnick, ‘Why men don’t rear children’, at p. 46.

¹¹⁰ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 181.

¹¹¹ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 182. (Emphasis in original)

circles'.¹¹² Nevertheless, as found by King, this was not universal and there were equally examples of men who avoided being seen in public pushing prams or carrying out other tasks.¹¹³

2.5 Towards collective responsibility for housework and childcare

It was widely recognised that, despite the efforts of some men to 'help' with housework and childcare, responsibility for those areas still ultimately rested with women. Marilyn, interviewed by Sue Sharpe for her study of women who work, somewhat exasperatedly reported of her husband:

He does help but you've got to ask, this is what gets me. It's this constant 'Will you help me, will you do this, will you help me do the rooms tomorrow, I will need help tomorrow.' And he goes, 'Oh God, do I have to?' Sharing is doing it without being asked.¹¹⁴

Jenefer Coates called on women to relinquish the work – 'withdraw, Lysistrata style, their domestic favours' – and to take on a methodical, intentional approach to educating men and boys in the home. 'If the home is what Corbusier called it, a machine for living then the running of that machine must be demystified and reduced to the mechanical necessity that it basically is.'¹¹⁵ Coates' tips included weekly shopping, weekly cleaning and '[adopting] recipes that require little cooking'. However, Coates admitted that, despite the practice suggested, the task was likely to be daunting and still required a leading role by women. Where a woman had been 'taught domestic work by the "intuitive" method: i.e. subtle and unacknowledged brainwashing', teaching men, said Coates, would require an effort, together with a willingness to be patient with the 'novice domestic workers'.¹¹⁶

Thinking about shifting from men who 'help' to a sharing of responsibility, many women looked to something more substantive than negotiating individual arrangements. While calling for increased 'real participation' by men, Anthea Holme recognised that 'whatever the adjustments and concessions inside the families the lesson to be learnt from the present situation is that individual attempts to change the situation are liable to be frustrated and entail risks for the

¹¹² Laura King, "'Now you see a great many men pushing their pram proudly": Family-oriented masculinity represented and experienced in mid-twentieth-century Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 10:4 (2013), pp. 599-617, at p. 611.

¹¹³ King, "'Now you see a great many men pushing their pram proudly'", at p. 607-609.

¹¹⁴ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 196. Sharpe identified the behaviour – of men waiting to be asked to help – as another form of 'passive resistance' noting that [s]ometimes women give up the struggle of continuously asking, it seems much simpler in the end to go ahead and do it themselves'. [p. 181].

¹¹⁵ Jenefer Coates, 'Shared housework', *Spare Rib* 25 (July 1974), pp. 28-29, at p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Coates, 'Shared housework', at p. 28.

children'.¹¹⁷ It was recognised by many feminists that most women did not have the power to negotiate shared responsibility. 'The framework itself must be modified', argued Holme.¹¹⁸ In 1972, a campaign was launched that sought to provide greater power to women. WFH was a controversial campaign¹¹⁹ that, at its core, sought to recognise the material contribution of housework within a capitalist framework.¹²⁰ WFH campaigners argued that, by placing a value on housework through the payment of wages, women would be recognised as workers. 'If it were admitted that the family is maintained at the expense of women, capitalism would have to devise some other way of getting the work done.'¹²¹ In a recent account of the WFH campaign, Emily Callaci observed 'ambiguity' around the purpose and intent of the campaign.¹²² For some like Selma James, co-founder of the campaign, there was a pragmatic intent of directing money to, otherwise unpaid, women – 'We wanted to go home with money'.¹²³ Money, according to James, would allow women greater flexibility to connect. Without it, women were effectively 'isolated from each other, ... ghettoized by the income of the man'.¹²⁴ Others, however, promoted the campaign as a means of raising awareness of housework as an, otherwise unrecognised, job – 'a provocation that aimed to change consciousness and catalyze social transformation'.¹²⁵ Further, as described by Joan Hall, putting money into the hands of women would give them power:

Not just the power to buy a washing machine or pay a baby-sitter. It's the power to walk out of a job or a marriage you don't like, the power to tell Social Security snoopers to piss off, the power to insist that your mate stop doing overtime, or change jobs, so he can do his share of the housework. The power of women to work less and to control the conditions of their work.¹²⁶

¹¹⁷ Holme, 'Woman in her two roles', at p. 76. See also, Joan Hall, 'Money is power', Letter to *Spare Rib* 50 (September 1976), p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Holme, 'Woman in her two roles', at p. 64.

¹¹⁹ Historian Emily Callaci suggests that, rather than a 'campaign', WFH 'is perhaps best understood as a political perspective'. [Callaci, *Wages for Housework*, p. xiii]

¹²⁰ Selma James is attributed with its launch in Britain. To journalist Suzanne Lowry, in 1980, James suggested that the campaign was originally one of the demands included in a last-minute paper for the 1972 WLM Conference. According to James, it was from this mention in the paper (later published as a stand-alone pamphlet) – 'Women the Unions and Work' – that the WFH campaign emerged. From this, says Lowry, 'James got together, by accident she says, with three other women, all from different countries' to form 'The International Feminist Collective, with aim [sic] of propagating the idea of wages for housework in their own countries'. Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p.68.

¹²¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, (London and Brooklyn, 2015 [First published 1973]), p. 67.

¹²² Callaci, *Wages for Housework*, p. xvi.

¹²³ Selma James quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 69. This aligns with the disdain held by James for theory unrelated to the needs of everyday life evident in an interview with historian Emily Callaci: 'An intellectual, she corrected me, studies ideas for the sake of ideas. Selma James does not identify as an intellectual. She makes things happen.' Callaci, *Wages for Housework*, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 71.

¹²⁵ Callaci, *Wages for Housework*, p. xvi.

¹²⁶ Joan Hall, 'Money is power', Letter to *Spare Rib* 50 (September 1976), p. 4.

Many women, however, were uncomfortable with the campaign for several reasons. Suzanne Lowry, who was women's editor at *The Guardian* from 1975 to 1978, explained that '[m]ost feminists' did not support the campaign on the basis that 'it would merely tie women, even more than the supplementary benefits (welfare) system does at the moment, to their own apron strings'.¹²⁷ In a letter to *Spare Rib* in 1976, Gerrie Ellis expressed concern that the campaign would serve to reinforce the association of women with housework:

The capitalist system is completely interdependent with the existing molecular family structure. It relies on the fact that the majority of women maintain a supportive role in the home while their spouses can direct their efforts to the force of production. A demand for wages implies that this division is acceptable, and that financial reward is sufficient compensation.¹²⁸

Ann Oakley criticised the move to pay women for housework as 'a move to affirm, rather than reject, the identification of women with housewifery'.¹²⁹ Oakley argued that, rather than forming a wage and a stimulus for union organisation, a payment to housewives would be perceived as a State 'grant' – 'a benevolent handout'. It would lock women into a role with inferior status, conditions and rewards.¹³⁰ Oakley distinguished between payments to women for housework and State subsidization of childcare.¹³¹ One of the key distinctions was that, theoretically, the provision of childcare was gender-neutral – it supported the parents of the household rather than being interwoven with the identity of the woman in the household.

Oakley's concerns were echoed at a workshop on housework at the Seventh National Women's Liberation Conference in Newcastle in 1976 where a proposal for 'a seventh demand and campaign around the sharing of domestic labour and care of dependents' was considered. While the proposal, which was considered 'too muddled to be proposed at the moment', failed to garner support, women agreed 'that it was certainly a priority to organise publicly about housework in a way which brought out what the women's liberation movement wants to do about this drudgery – to minimise it by fighting for more socialised facilities and to raise consciousness about sharing it (rather than to demand wages for it)'.¹³²

¹²⁷ Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 65.

¹²⁸ Gerrie Ellis, 'Aim higher than wages', Letter to *Spare Rib* 52 (November 1976), p. 5. While this was not the only concern about the campaign, it was a widespread one. Other concerns included the source of funding for the initiative [See, for example, Paula Smith, 'Puzzled', Letter to *Spare Rib* 52 (November 1976), p. 5.

¹²⁹ Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, (New York, 1974), p. 196. See also Oakley, *Housewife*, p. 226-227.

¹³⁰ Oakley, *Housewife*, p. 227.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Jill Nicholls, 'Going back to the beginning', *Spare Rib* 47 (June 1976), p. 27.

2.6 Experiments in collective responsibility

Many women – even if working towards structural change – were also continuing to work at living feminist principles in their personal domestic arrangements. Anna Fuller was one of these women and found that the biggest factor in determining the level of sharing was children. ‘It is very easy to share when you don’t have children’. If something slipped, the stakes were low. However, Fuller pointed out, ‘when there is a child involved, if he is not delivered somewhere or fed then it does matter. That’s when the crunch of sharing really comes’.¹³³ Further, said Fuller, any sense of a schedule needed to remain flexible moment by moment and required constant negotiation:

The balance with your husband has to be constantly renegotiated. It’s not a balance you just set out at the beginning, because the age of the child – all sorts of things – alter it. Periodically timetables change, demands change. You can’t insist on exact sharing at any one time. Maybe someone has a deadline to meet, and that is one priority. If your relationship is strong and you are communicating enough, you just have to have faith and say, OK, this is a bad week for Peter. Next week will be my turn. ... Sometimes one has to think in terms of *years*.¹³⁴

For some, the negotiations were being carried out in larger groups as many women (and men) explored alternative ways of living that aimed to dismantle the nuclear family. ‘The housewife role must be abolished’, declared Ann Oakley. Further, she continued, ‘[t]he family’, which Oakley saw as a training ground for female subordination, ‘must be abolished’.¹³⁵ Oakley proposed ‘substitution of more open and variable relationships: not man-provider, woman – housewife and dependent children, but people living together in a chosen and freely perpetuated intimacy, in a space that allows each to breathe and find her or his own separate destiny’.¹³⁶

In 1977, Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, reflecting on the daily challenges of motherhood, predicted: ‘That there should be a search for more communal forms of living in which fathers, mothers and adult friends can share in the upbringing of children is surely a demand which as women we are increasingly going to make.’¹³⁷ Many agreed as women (and men), dissatisfied with the constraints of the ‘nuclear family’, explored alternative ways of living including communal living. While, for some, this was a necessity born of material need, for others, communal living was a way of putting into practice the theory that ‘new mode[s] of living,

¹³³ Anna Fuller quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 189.

¹³⁴ Anna Fuller quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 193. (Emphasis in original)

¹³⁵ Oakley, *Housewife*, p. 222.

¹³⁶ Oakley, *Housewife*, p. 236.

¹³⁷ McCrindle and Rowbotham, ‘Introduction’, at p. 4. Even Betty Friedan, who had launched the conversation for many with an urging for women to turn their focus away from the home to external pursuits, was, by 1981, re-examining the home ‘calling for new combinations of private space and shared communal spaces and services’. [Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage*, (Cambridge, MA, 1998 [First published 1981]), p. 276.]

embodied in the commune, could help improve society'.¹³⁸ For some this was a starting point for revolution. 'The majority of the hundreds of women I encountered politically in the 1970s', recalled Lynne Segal, 'who were mostly in their twenties and early thirties, lived in some form of shared housing'.¹³⁹ Segal, who lived in communal arrangements in Highbury, continued:

With or without men, collective living was viewed by many feminists as not just a more economical arrangement than settling down either alone or within the traditional family unit, but one which could encourage more open, supportive and creatively shared forms of companionship, domesticity, childcare, political work and community engagement.¹⁴⁰

For members of the Peckham Rye Group, communal living opened up the possibility to 'spread the load, to share work and thus to allow us time which is really free'.¹⁴¹ It was not proposed, however, that communal living alone was sufficient. Rather, an overt (and delivered) commitment to sharing the load was required. Segal notes that '[t]he one thing that was sacred in the 1970s, while our three children were still young, was compliance with the domestic rota, on which names circulated daily: one for the evening meal; one for getting up, making breakfast, taking the children to school and collecting them afterwards; one for putting the children to bed, reading to them, child-minding for the evening; one for allocating different household jobs; one for the weekly shop, using money from the few pounds we all put into the kitty'.¹⁴² It can be seen from this, the level of organisation applied 'to embody the libertarian catchphrase "live your politics"'.¹⁴³

However, more was needed than a detailed rota. Examining the efficacy of mixed gender communal living arrangements in Britain and Denmark, John Davis and Anette Warring found an 'overall picture ... of broad support for gender equality, infringed recurrently and in predictable ways'.¹⁴⁴ Across the communes featured in the study, many of the commune residents believed that gender inequality was more entrenched in nuclear families but, despite a stated commitment to feminism and gender equality, tasks were often assigned on a gendered basis. As in the case of the ambivalent men described above, this was often justified by referring to the need to capitalise on capability. This resulted in men, for example, taking on building and repair work with women cooking and cleaning. While, again, childcare was included in the rhetoric of

¹³⁸ John Davis and Anette Warring, 'Living utopia: Communal living in Denmark and Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 8:4 (2011), pp. 513-530, at p. 514.

¹³⁹ Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*, (London and New York, 2017 [First published 2007]), p. 75.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Williams et al., 'Women and the family', at p. 35.

¹⁴² Segal, *Making Trouble*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁴³ Segal, *Making Trouble*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁴ Davis and Warring, 'Living utopia', at p. 522.

shared effort, Davis and Warring suggest that this was not realized in practice. ‘Child-rearing’, they said, ‘encapsulated the tension between aspiration and reality’.¹⁴⁵ Shared childcare was, perhaps, better realized in women-only shared living arrangements. In a sentiment aligned with that recalled by Lynne Segal, academic Christine Wall, studying women-only squats in London in the 1970s, says that, for some women, squatting with other women ‘was a means to gain control over the material basis of their lives and allow collective living and sharing of resources’.¹⁴⁶ Wall draws out that many women, some motivated by the need to make semi-derelict spaces habitable, developed skills to undertake building and trade work such as plumbing. In these women-only spaces, ‘shared childcare was the norm’.¹⁴⁷

2.7 Ambivalent women

Not all women appeared to expect, or want, men to shoulder responsibility for housework and childcare. ‘Women themselves’ reported Sue Sharpe, ‘resist men sharing in or taking over certain areas of control at home’.¹⁴⁸ In observing this, Sharpe suggested that, in principle, women thought men should shoulder more responsibility, but, when it came to their own arrangements, some expressed ambivalence for a variety of reasons. For example, many women chose to remain at home and care for children, particularly in early years. Janice, from Glasgow, was one of these women:

My lifestyle can’t be changed at present, except in fantasy, for I feel my children need me to be with them until the youngest is at least three. When they eventually start school, perhaps I can go back to university and complete the course I interrupted in order to have my babies. That is what I would most like to do.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, Jane Lewis was strongly of the view that ‘[a] mum should be there when [children] come home from school – she doesn’t have to do anything wonderful – just be there to talk to and show things to’.¹⁵⁰ While wanting a career, Jane Lewis had determined that she would not return to work until ‘the twins are about fifteen or sixteen’ although she acknowledged that she had ‘lost a lot of self-confidence being at home all the time’ so building a career would take time.¹⁵¹ Feminists recognised that while for some women this was a preference, for many others there was a

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Christine Wall, ‘Sisterhood and squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, housing and urban change in Hackney’, *History Workshop Journal* 83 (2017), pp. 79-97, at p. 84.

¹⁴⁷ Wall, ‘Sisterhood and squatting in the 1970s’, at p. 84.

¹⁴⁸ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁹ Janice, ‘A day in the life of ... Janice and Ruth’, *Spare Rib* 65 (December 1977), p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 159.

¹⁵¹ Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 160.

nervousness about the impact of not being present in a child's life, particularly in the early years. In large part, this reflected prevailing thinking about the role of a mother. In a history of British emotional life, historian Teri Chettiar draws attention to the prevalence of belief that a mother's presence in a child's life was critical, not only to the wellbeing and mental health of the child but also for the 'national wellbeing'. One of the most well-known proponents was British psychiatrist John Bowlby.¹⁵² Bowlby's views on the importance of maternal presence had wide impact having been disseminated in a World Health Organisation publication in 1951.¹⁵³ Ballard reports that, after his wife died, in 1964:

Many people (who should have known better) openly told me that a mother's loss was irreplaceable and the children would be affected for ever, as maintained by the child psychiatrist John Bowlby.¹⁵⁴

In the report, Bowlby made clear that the focus of attention was on the mother. 'The reason for this', he said, was that 'the child's relation to his mother ... is without doubt in ordinary circumstances by far his most important relationship during these years'. The father, according to Bowlby, was of lesser interest playing 'second fiddle' to the mother.¹⁵⁵ 'Maternal deprivation' was to be avoided at all costs and was avoided only by 'continuity' of presence. Historian Sarah Stoller observes that '[b]y the 1960s social scientists had begun to articulate scepticism about John Bowlby's famous claim that children deprived of maternal attention would suffer lasting damage'.¹⁵⁶ Writing for The Six Point Group¹⁵⁷ in 1968, social worker Anthea Holme called into question the idea that young children would suffer psychological damage from being separated from their mother. In this, Holme clarified that Bowlby had 'in fact, [found] that reasonable doses of such separation need do no harm and could be beneficial'. Further, Holme noted, Bowlby had '[argued] that the mother's role should be shared with the father'.¹⁵⁸ However, as evidenced by Ballard's reference, the heavy sense of responsibility on women still circulated in lay understandings. Again, while feminists challenged Bowlby's sentiments, there was still an

¹⁵² Teri Chettiar, *The Intimate State: How Emotional Life Became Political in Welfare State Britain*, (Oxford, 2022).

¹⁵³ John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health: A Report prepared on behalf of the World Health Organization as a Contribution to the United Nations Program for the Welfare of Homeless Children*, (Geneva, Second Edition 1952), p. 13. The report is still available on the World Health Organisation website [<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/40724>], accessed 2 April 2025.

¹⁵⁴ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, pp.201-202.

¹⁵⁵ Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ Stoller, 'Forging a politics of care', at p. 97.

¹⁵⁷ As explained by Hazel Hunkins-Hallinan, The Six Point Group was 'a non-political organization working to establish equality between men and women in status, in opportunities, in rewards, in rights, and in responsibilities'. Hazel Hunkins-Hallinan, 'Foreword: Editor's note', in Hunkins-Hallinan, *In Her Own Right*, p.7.

¹⁵⁸ Holme, 'Woman in her two roles', at p. 64.

unease for many about the implications of reducing maternal presence in the life of young children.

The presence of children could also affect the way women saw household tasks. For Suzanne Gail, housework was correlated with childcare which was, in her view, *her* main responsibility as a mother. Gail toyed with skipping household tasks but, essentially, her fear was that a slippage in housework would undermine the health of her baby. Gail recalled ‘we had a flat which accumulated fluffy dust balls ankle-deep till a parental invasion was expected’.¹⁵⁹ However, after her son, Carl, was born:

I was shaken out of my cavalier attitude to housework. The baby immediately caught enteritis, and I was shattered by guilt when the doctor attributed this to the dirty flat.¹⁶⁰

In his autobiography – *Miracles of Life* – Ballard suggested that ‘women journalists’ were always more interested in the level of ‘dust that their gimlet eyes detect’ than in the fact that Ballard was ‘bringing up apparently happy children’.¹⁶¹ However, Ballard did confess that he was ‘a very slatternly mother, notably unkeen on housework, unaware that homes need to be cleaned now and then, and too often to be found with a cigarette in one hand and a drink in the other’.¹⁶² There is a degree to which Ballard’s ‘humility’ about housework might be considered in the context of managing his masculine identity. Ballard’s biographer, John Baxter, suggested that Ballard’s ‘untidiness had an element of contrivance’.¹⁶³ In similar fashion, potentially performing an intense pragmatism around his domestic duties, Ballard came to be known for his claim that ‘[y]ou can do all the housework in five minutes if you don’t make a fetish of it’.¹⁶⁴ What ‘all the housework’ comprised, however, might, for some, have been a matter of contention. Much was made by journalists about the state of the house which was said to contain ‘a layer of dust as thick as volcanic ash’.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, said Bea Ballard in a retrospective on her father published in 2009: ‘We not only thrived; we had the most idyllic childhood I can imagine.’¹⁶⁶

Sue Sharpe observed that some women were concerned about maintaining standards of care and cleanliness in the absence of their personal control. Sharpe cited interviewee, Fiona, who said ‘... you always find that he doesn’t do it the same way as you do it. It’s done and it’s tidy and

¹⁵⁹ Gail, ‘The housewife’, in Fraser, *Work*, at p. 141.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, pp.227-228.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Baxter, *The Inner Man*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁴ Ballard, ‘My dad, the perfect mum’, at p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ An unidentified journalist quoted by Baxter, *The Inner Man*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁶ Ballard, ‘My dad, the perfect mum’, at p. 1.

it's clean but it's not the way you would do it.'¹⁶⁷ Like Fiona, a number of women felt that men either did not complete all the work required or completed tasks to a lesser standard. In her prescription to adjust responsibility for housework in the home, Jenefer Coates recognised that [o]ne of the results of re-organisation and one to which many women may have difficulty reconciling themselves will be the almost inevitable fall in domestic standards'.¹⁶⁸ However, it was not just men questioning the time taken to complete housework. Like Ballard, many women were also questioning the degree to which housework should take up a day. Caroline Thompson said that she was not burdened with housework. 'In no way do domestic tasks interfere with my interests or with my lifestyle as a whole.' While acknowledging that some housework needed to be done, Thompson echoed Ballard's observation about the time taken to complete housework, calling for a 'healthier, less hysterical attitude to domestic tasks'.¹⁶⁹ In seeking to dismantle the idea that 'housewifery is ... a calling', Suzanne Lowry, argued:

The more it is mechanized and technologically revolutionized and consumerized the more a thought that a robot could do it, *should* do it, gathers weight. And the more Betty Friedan's statement, that a housewife is there simply to buy more things for the house, seems true.¹⁷⁰

Housework was, in Lowry's view, 'largely invented' and did not need the personal attention that some women suggested was needed. Michelene Wandor, however, recognised that disquiet about standards may also be a symptom of a sense that the home was the 'world' that some women felt that they controlled. 'Because a woman's opportunities for communication are so much more limited', Wandor said, 'she needs to dominate in the small area she has control over, and may well become bossy, hen-pecking, encourage her husband's helplessness'. Sue Sharpe agreed. '[M]any women', said Sharpe, 'seek to protect at least part of their domestic role as it provides a clearly marked area of responsibility carrying certain elements of power, however, limited, and a definite sense of control'.¹⁷¹ Mary Laughton, an 'academic by training and instinct', confessed:

I rule the house. I decide where everything goes and how everything should look. If you ask me where anything is in the house, I can tell you down to the last inch in each cupboard. This is my role. Every so often I say, goddamit why doesn't he do this, that or the other. On the other hand, I would be very loath to give up my control. I am *jealous* of my control of the system. Just as, if I went into his office and moved all his pencils out of one drawer and his paper out of another, he would hit the roof.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁸ Coates, 'Shared housework', at p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Caroline Thompson, 'Sweeping changes', Letter to *Spare Rib* 69 (April 1978), p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, p. 80. (Emphasis in original)

¹⁷¹ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 183.

¹⁷² Mary Laughton quoted in Lowry, *The Guilt Cage*, pp.166-167. (Emphasis in original)

For Laughton, there was a sense that, if her husband, James, was left to his own devices in the home, there would be a quick descent into ‘chaos’. The control she defended was control of the environment. Wandor suggested that, for some women, the sense of control was more deep-seated: ‘If in fact he did offer to share the housework completely, she would lose what little control she had, and be made redundant, and at some level she is aware of this.’¹⁷³ For some women, this ambivalence was heightened around childcare with some women finding the thought of more intervention from men threatening. Interviewee Chris told Sharpe: ‘My children were part of me, part of my womanhood, mine, not his, and although I didn’t mind him doing a certain amount, I didn’t want them to go to him and not me for comfort.’¹⁷⁴ As discussed earlier, Catherine Hall reflected on the expression of control in the feminist co-operative childcare arrangements that she was involved with:

One of the things I’ve realised, working on the nineteenth century and so on, is the connection between what’s often called separate spheres feminism, and what we were doing, building a power base in your own arena, your separate sphere. At the same time as loudly demanding equality, we were also insisting on difference. So that contradictory element was always there. Well, we were going to rule the world you know. It wasn’t just our nests we were ruling!¹⁷⁵

Historian Sarah Stoller reports similar sentiments saying that ‘to describe caring for dependents as work would undermine the autonomy and influence women possessed through their alleged expertise as carers’.¹⁷⁶ ‘However troubled the realm of home and family’, further explained Stoller, ‘it remained an area in which many women felt they could exert a degree of influence and creativity’.¹⁷⁷ For some, this was ‘[b]ound up with ... the emergence of “pro-woman” or “cultural” feminism, originating in the United States but increasingly popularized [in Britain], which emphasized women’s special childbearing capacity and maternal, caring qualities.’¹⁷⁸ Vicky Randall, reflecting on WLM theorising and campaigning on childcare, suggested ‘motherhood can be a source of powerlessness but also of power’.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Michele Wandor, ‘Family everafter’, *Spare Rib* 5 (November 1972), pp. 10-13, at p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ Sharpe, *Double Identity*, p. 185.

¹⁷⁵ Catherine Hall, interviewed by Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 177.

¹⁷⁶ Stoller, ‘Forging a politics of care’, at p. 104.

¹⁷⁷ Stoller, ‘Forging a politics of care’, at p. 106.

¹⁷⁸ Lovenduski and Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics*, p. 272.

¹⁷⁹ Randall, ‘Feminism and child daycare’, at p. 500. Joanna Bourke has observed parallel concerns of working-class women in the early twentieth century. ‘It is not surprising’, Bourke says, ‘to hear that housewives often resisted male intervention in the domestic sphere on the grounds that it disrupted their routine, resulted in the lowering of standards, and encroached on their power-base’. Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity*, (London and New York, 1994), p. 57.

While it may have looked that feminists were resiling from the idea of a gender-neutral collective responsibility for home and children, for the most part, much of the resistance was a reflection of the context in which that collective responsibility would be exercised. For Lee Comer, the problem was the attitude that men would bring to the role. Comer accused men of '[bringing] to their activity their whole apparatus of male prerogative' into the housework and childcare. In this, she said, men 'invaded the woman's only sphere of influence'.¹⁸⁰ Jo Sutton and Scarlet Friedman, reflecting on the rise of the father's rights discourse, put it another way:

When feminists demanded that men become involved in childcare, it was a demand for men to be responsible – to take on their share of responsibilities for others. What has resulted is a minimal change in caring and a significant move by men to increase their *rights* and hence control.¹⁸¹

Feminists were not looking for a collective responsibility simply exercised as an extension of men's power but rather, a gender-neutral collective responsibility shared by men and women alike within the context of a broader project of social reform based on a foundation of egalitarianism, regard for others and care rather than oppression. This was an ambitious project that would require revolution across multiple spheres.

In acknowledging many of the resistances and fears around housework and childcare, most feminists came to recognise the complex array of social pressures, combined with early socialization, that created a web of conflicting feelings around housework and the role of the housewife. Suzanne Gail reflected that 'home and family is the one realm in which it is really difficult to shake free of one's upbringing and create new values'.¹⁸² While clear-eyed about her role and its frustrations, Gail also did not, in the essay, question the basic division of labour in her house. At no point in the essay did she ask, 'why is it that I am at home and Joe at paid work?' Rather, Gail suggested that to swap roles would be inconceivable:

Can you imagine what would happen to a man who was suddenly uprooted from a job in which he placed the meaning of his life, and delegated to a mindless task, in performing which he was also cut off fairly completely from the people who shared his interests? I think most of the men I know would disintegrate completely.¹⁸³

This was, according to Ann Oakley, something to be expected. Oakley found that a complex and pervasive process of socialization in childhood meant that women and men had entered

¹⁸⁰ Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, p. 230.

¹⁸¹ Jo Sutton and Scarlet Friedman, 'Fatherhood: Bringing it all back home', in Scarlett Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *On the Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences*, (London, 1982), pp. 117-127, at p. 125.

¹⁸² Gail, 'The housewife', in Fraser, *Work*, at 140.

¹⁸³ Gail, 'The housewife', in Fraser, *Work*, at p. 151.

adulthood with gendered identities that seemed natural.¹⁸⁴ In this, Oakley distinguished a woman's *feelings* towards *housework* from her *attitudes* towards the role of *housewife*. While women may dislike housework and resent having to do it, at the same time she will 'feel herself to be a housewife, and agree with the idea that housewifery is an appropriate role for women'.¹⁸⁵ For Suzanne Gail the conflict was the other way around. Gail said that she was raised to associate cleanliness with 'moral and social virtue' but that this understanding sat uneasily with an occupation, as housewife, that was seen as being beneath 'an intelligent being'.¹⁸⁶ For many women, their sense of identity was intertwined with caring for the family, meaning that many women were, even when working fulltime, 'unable or unwilling to shed their primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning and caring for their families'.¹⁸⁷ This was not class dependant. A majority of both working-class and middle-class women identified with the housewife role. Oakley, with reference to other research, observed that this identification existed even where both husband and wife had professional careers. In fact, it often affected a woman's choice of career leading to a 'concentration of female professionals in "domestic" professions' such as teaching or nursing.¹⁸⁸ For many, this identification connected to an identification as carer and connected to the emotional life of women.

Ballard was to observe of the 1960s: 'Emotion and emotional sympathy, drained out of everything, and the fake had its own special authenticity'.¹⁸⁹ Yet, a rich emotional life continued to be lived in homes across Britain with women as the primary caretakers of that life. Emotion played a number of roles in the politics of housework. First, at the heart of housework was the idea that women fulfilled the role of housewife and mother out of love. 'They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.'¹⁹⁰ The myth that spoke of woman's natural desire – born of love – to fulfil the role of housewife and mother was a complicated one to untangle. A large part of the challenge to the ability of feminists to look dispassionately at their roles as wives and mothers was the connection of those roles to the emotional lives of those women, together with the men and children who the women cared for. Women were generally reluctant to suggest that emotional connections with family members were solely the result of political oppression. To question their roles as wives and

¹⁸⁴ Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*.

¹⁸⁵ Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁸⁶ Gail, 'The housewife', in Fraser, *Work*, at p.140.

¹⁸⁷ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Housewifery', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2001), pp. 149-164, at p. 162.

¹⁸⁸ Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, p. 119. See also Stoller, 'Forging a politics of care.

¹⁸⁹ Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, p. 208.

¹⁹⁰ Slogan of the WFH campaign. See, for example, Silvia Federici, 'Wages against housework' [pamphlet first published 1975], in Alix Kates Shulman and Honor Moore (eds), *Women's Liberation! Feminist Writings that Inspired a Revolution and Still Can*, (New York, 2021), pp. 343-352, at p. 343.

mothers was attended by the risk that women would be perceived as not caring for their husbands/partners and/or children. Further, perception aside, women did not necessarily want to *not* care for their families. Jill Tweedie captured the conflict that sat behind thinking politically about housework and childcare:

I do not want to think about the anger I actually feel about 'women's work'. I do not trust myself not to direct it at my husband and children in lieu of taking action. My only way of accepting that work is either to ignore it, shut off my brain and try to do it like a robot, or pretend to myself that I do it for love and therefore am good.¹⁹¹

Reflecting the enduring nature of the problem, historian Emily Callaci more recently said of her own life: 'To refuse the work of caring for my child would be to harm the most vulnerable of beings, and the person I loved most in the world.'¹⁹² This reflection resonates with the, often overlooked, mix of emotions that many women had in relation to their role as mother. Nevertheless, feminists did recognise that, in significant ways, the emotional structures in the home were significantly affected by, if not derived from, the political frameworks that operated to subordinate them. As observed by Sarah Stoller, a key challenge was to dismantle the mythology and replace it with something more authentic, particularly when children were involved. When it came to children, Stoller said, feminists 'struggled more deeply with whether to think of caring as a form of work or to imagine it as something more'.¹⁹³ Overall, most feminists wanted the labour content of housework and childcare recognised and to share that work more equitably with men but, entangled with intimacy and emotion, the degree to which they felt they could step away from those roles was less clear for many. 'For although romantic imagery may often disguise exploitation, people experience feelings of love as powerfully "real" in ways which have very real consequences for their lives'.¹⁹⁴

Conclusion

Women's liberation is ... importantly about coming together. One does not want to release women as isolated units from the care of children. One wants to bring women and men together to care for children and for each other in new ways.¹⁹⁵

The historiography presents a picture in which, despite the efforts of feminists to reshape responsibilities in the home, women ultimately continued to be held responsible for housework

¹⁹¹ Jill Tweedie, 'Slave wages' [First published 3 May 1976], in Kira Cochrane (ed.), *Women of the Revolution: Forty Years of Feminism*, (London, 2012), pp. 43-49, at 48.

¹⁹² Callaci, *Wages for Housework*, p. xii.

¹⁹³ Stoller, 'Forging a politics of care', at p. 103.

¹⁹⁴ Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden, 'Love and intimacy: The gender division of emotion and "emotion work"', *Sociology* 27:2 (May 1993), pp. 221-241, at p. 237.

¹⁹⁵ Tufnell Park group of the London Women's Liberation Workshop, 'More than minding', at p. 137.

and childcare into the 1980s, including ‘managing conflicts between the demands of work and home’.¹⁹⁶ This was not lost on feminists. Lynne Segal, writing in 1983, observed that women were ‘still shouldering vastly unequal burdens of domestic work’.¹⁹⁷ Feminists recognised, and campaigned against, the significant structural elements that operated to keep them confined in domestic roles. However, there was another dynamic operating that spoke to the way in which responsibility for domestic roles was perceived. Davis and King suggest that, while ‘[t]here was a sense of changing roles’ in the home, the degree of change was undercut by an ongoing understanding, held by both men and women, ‘that women were responsible for matters relating to family life’.¹⁹⁸ Differently, amongst feminists, there was strong consensus that women should not be solely responsible for the domestic realm. This was not simply a call on men to take over domestic roles. ‘In the end the demand for complete reversal is the demand to extend oppression – understandable, but leading to a dead end. Our perspective must be different.’¹⁹⁹ Equally, many feminists did not believe that all housework and childcare should be divided neatly into two equal parts at all times. What was at the heart of the issue for many feminists was the way in which the division of labour was determined.

Observing a level of detachment from domestic work that men, regardless of level of help, routinely demonstrated, there was a clear thread of theorizing that men should demonstrate a level of engagement in the concerns of the home reflective of a sense of collective responsibility for the home and children. Shared by men and women alike, this shared responsibility was not gender specific. Rather than a remaking of masculinity, feminists were calling for a dismantling of gendered roles in the home. ‘Most important as well as specific to this new utopian vision was the insistence on the abolition of gender differentiation, particularly in housework and child-care. Men were to engage in the domestic sphere on *equal terms* with women.’²⁰⁰ As argued above, the concerns of feminists were less about the actual division of domestic and caring work and more about the assumption that women were responsible for that work. The call was for removal of gender as the determinant of that division. The equality that was envisaged was at the point of negotiating arrangements ‘to allow a greater choice for both men and women’.²⁰¹ Lynne Segal

¹⁹⁶ Stoller, *Inventing the Working Parent*, p. 207. See also Davis and King, ‘Gendered perspectives on men’s changing familial roles in postwar England’, pp. 70-92.

¹⁹⁷ Lynne Segal, “‘The most important thing of all’ – Rethinking the family: An overview’, in Lynne Segal (ed.), *What is to be Done about The Family?*, (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 9-24, at p. 21.

¹⁹⁸ Davis and King, ‘Gendered perspectives on men’s changing familial roles in postwar England’, at p. 86.

¹⁹⁹ Williams et al., ‘Women and the family’, at p. 35.

²⁰⁰ Mica Nava, ‘From utopian to scientific feminism? Early feminist critiques of the family’, in Segal (ed.), *What is to be Done about The Family?*, pp. 65-105, at p. 68. (Emphasis added)

²⁰¹ Lynne Segal, ‘No turning back – Thatcherism, the family and the future’, in Segal (ed.), *What is to be Done about The Family?*, pp. 215-231, at p. 229.

hoped that 'those same family values of love, care and commitment which, if seen as the individual responsibility of women, are oppressive, could extend beyond the confines of gender and home to become an essential part of a society which would liberate us all'.²⁰²

²⁰² Segal, "The most important thing of all" – Rethinking the family', at p. 23.

3 FROM EMOTIONAL ‘PARASITE’ TO EMOTIONAL SUPPORT?

My father was a man as unacquainted with love as a Scots pine tree and what’s so wrong with that? It makes a change, these days, when love slops out all over the place from any old bucket: preachers, politicians, gurus, pop stars, ad-men, every kind of shyster on the make flogging everything from fish fingers to eternal life.¹

In this passage, British feminist journalist Jill Tweedie, surveying the body of her dead father in 1990, captured something of the history of emotion in the twentieth century. Tweedie’s father, Patrick Tweedie, like many middle-class men of his era, personified the ‘stiff upper lip’² that was a legacy of the nineteenth century and underpinned British masculinity in the early twentieth century. ‘A handsome man, a handsome corpse’, she mused, and also ‘contained, commanding and no more user-friendly in death than in life’.³ This chapter explores masculine emotional cultures in the late twentieth century as reflected through the thinking of feminists in the WLM. Overlooked in the historiography of the WLM, feminist theorizing about the emotional cultures of men presents a new perspective on the ‘emotional revolution’ that is said to have taken place from the 1940s and 1950s.⁴ This chapter looks at the way in which feminists presented a picture of emotional relationships between women and men that were shaped by gendered emotional roles. This gendered structure fundamentally impeded genuine emotional connection including the ability of women to feel emotionally supported within their relationships with men. Feminists found that men were not only unable to effectively reciprocate emotional care but that they were not entering heterosexual relationships with the expectation that they should provide emotional support and empathy. Feminists called on men to not only develop greater emotional maturity in managing their own emotions but to be less emotionally self-absorbed and more empathic to the emotional lives of women.

¹ Jill Tweedie, *Eating Children (with unfinished memoir: Frightening People [Fragments])*, (London, 1994), p. 1.

² Noting, however, that the term itself did not, in the nineteenth century, represent the emotional restraint that it grew to reflect in the twentieth century. See Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 202.

³ Jill Tweedie, *Eating Children*, p. 1.

⁴ Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 28.

In what Martin Francis terms a ‘culture of “restraint”’, Patrick Tweedie would have met with public approval.⁵ While this self-restraint was expected of ‘all genders and classes’, it was most particularly applied to men and built into approved versions of masculinity.⁶ ‘By contrast’, says Martin Francis, a lack of self-restraint was considered to apply to ‘various countertypes – women, homosexuals, Jews, people of color, the working classes’ who, Francis explains, ‘were construed as being restless and formless, lacking control, order, or direction’.⁷ According to Francis, things would change after World War II when ‘the combined effect of changes in psychological attitudes to the self and growing affluence reshaped British emotional culture, and self-discipline increasingly appeared to give way to self-expression’.⁸ Reviewing the historiography, Michael Roper observes:

[T]he 1950s are seen as a crucial period of transformation toward a more ‘modern’ self, characterized by a lifting of emotional restraints among men, and by an enhanced capacity – stimulated through discourses of psychology – for self-reflection on emotional conduct.⁹

For Roper, the beginnings of change can be located in the aftermath of World War I when shell shock challenged the achievability of stoic martial masculinities against a background of growing engagement with popular psychology and psychoanalytic concepts. While the British Psychological Society was established in 1901 and clinical psychology training and practice emerged in Britain after World War II, the greater impact of psychology for Britain was ‘as a powerful source of ideas for envisaging not just the good person but also the good society’.¹⁰ A culture of consumerism in an affluent society has also been linked to greater self-expression. ‘The new sensibility’, says Francis, ‘foregrounded self-indulgence and self-fulfilment rather than

⁵ Martin Francis, ‘Tears, tantrums, and bared teeth: The emotional economy of three Conservative prime ministers, 1951-1963’, *The Journal of British Studies* 41:3 (2002), pp. 354-387. While Francis was focused on the emotional lives of political men, he argued that the ‘culture of “restraint”’ did not apply only to the political realm. ‘Uncontrolled emotion transgressed’, says Francis, ‘a conception of British (or more accurately, white Anglo-Saxon) national identity that was rooted in self-restraint’ [at p. 358].

⁶ Karsten Lichau, ‘“The streaming eyes of all the many men”’: Revisiting male weeping in British commemoration of the First World War’, *Social Science History* 48 (2024), pp. 667-685, at p. 672. See also John Tosh, ‘Domesticity and manliness in the Victorian middle class: The family of Edward White Benson’, in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, (London & New York, 1991), pp. 44 – 73, at p. 65; and John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (New Haven & London, 1999), p. 189.

⁷ Francis, ‘Tears, tantrums, and bared teeth’, at p. 359.

⁸ Francis, ‘Tears, tantrums, and bared teeth’, at p. 358.

⁹ Michael Roper, ‘Between manliness and masculinity: The “War Generation” and the psychology of fear in Britain, 1914-1950’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (April 2005), pp. 343-362, at p. 360.

¹⁰ Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2006), at pp. 289-290.

self-discipline'.¹¹ Teri Chettiar puts these forces in the context of a national project that concerned itself with building an 'emotionally healthy citizenship'.¹² Chettiar calls the period from 1945 to 1979 a 'psychopolitical era' in which the emotional states of British citizens were scrutinized by experts from a wide range of fields for their contribution, or otherwise, to a 'good society'.¹³ More specifically, the focus was on relationships, particularly intimate relationships. 'In the years after 1945', says Claire Langhamer, 'a more widely spread belief that love could lay the foundations for a better social order was indicative of a social optimism which went hand in hand with the fear and anxiety of the atomic age'.¹⁴ Intimate relationships were of political interest. 'The emotional intimacies of private life were explicitly drawn into public policy discussion.'¹⁵ Chettiar agrees, observing that '[l]ong before second-wave feminists adopted the rallying cry "the personal is political", the nature of intimate relationships in the private sphere was of political interest'.¹⁶ A healthy emotional life was believed to underpin a healthy society. It was a focus that was to question the 'stiff upper lip' as a source of national strength. In this, the ideal of the 'companionate' marriage, discussed in the last chapter, was, once again, invoked. 'A large part of the literature on marriage in the middle of the century', observes Jane Lewis, 'consisted of attempts to "modernise" the male breadwinner model, so as to make it less patriarchal and more "companionate", in keeping with the social changes that were taking place'.¹⁷ This was, according to Lewis, a direct reaction to 'increasing individual rights and freedoms' that threatened to undermine 'traditional marriage'.¹⁸

While the earlier post-WWII years were focused on the emotional wellbeing of the family, Teri Chettiar observes that '[b]y the end of the 1960s, the pursuit of emotional security had broadened to include individual emotional fulfilment and self-realization as endpoints of healthy psychological development in adults. Emotional health had thus become the basis for individual and social wellbeing for many early believers and new stakeholders alike.'¹⁹ Similarly, Claire Langhamer also draws attention to a shift from an emphasis on 'self-control' to an emphasis on

¹¹ Martin Francis, 'The Labour Party: Modernisation and the politics of restraint', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, (London and New York, 1999), pp. 152-170, at p.168.

¹² Teri Chettiar, *The Intimate State: How Emotional Life Became Political in Welfare State Britain*, (Oxford, 2022), p. 5.

¹³ Chettiar, *The Intimate State*.

¹⁴ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Chettiar, *The Intimate State*, p. 2. See also Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations*, (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, 2001), pp. 49-50.

¹⁷ Lewis, *The End of Marriage?*, p. 45.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The End of Marriage*, p. 51.

¹⁹ Chettiar, *The Intimate State*, p. 7.

‘self-fulfilment’.²⁰ ‘By the century’s end’, says Langhamer, ‘self-fulfilment appeared to have triumphed over self-restraint’.²¹ However, Langhamer suggests that well before this, in the post-war era, heterosexual relationships were already seen as an important source of self-fulfilment:

Expectations, as well as understandings of love shifted in this period. Whereas in the first half of the century ‘to love’ might mean to ‘take care’ of a partner, in the second half of the century it increasingly meant understanding them and cultivating their self-development. Crucially, it also meant expecting them to do the same for you.²²

However, examining what feminists, from the 1970s onwards, were saying about their relationships with men suggests a far more complicated picture of heterosexual relationships, one that was shaped by important gender differences in the expression and management of emotions. These gender differences call into question a historiography that describes a movement towards emotional expressiveness in mid-century Britain and, instead, draw attention to a gap between the rhetoric behind the political project that sought to reframe marriage as ‘companionate’ and the extent to which the ‘companionate’ model as an expression of emotional intimacy was, in practice, to be expected in relationships between men and women. Rather, it is suggested that women in the WLM were part of a much later ‘emotional revolution’ in which they questioned the gendered emotional structure of heterosexual relationships that were seen to inhibit genuine emotional expressiveness and intimacy.

In terms of historical surveys of the British WLM, not much has been written about the ways in which feminists sought to live in emotional relationships with men. Zoe Strimpel’s survey of the Sisterhood and After archive²³ for the experiences of WLM activists of their heterosexual relationships is a rare exception.²⁴ In large part, this mirrors the ways in which, contemporaneously, the issue of emotional relationships with men was, often stridently, called out by some feminists as a lost cause. Most point to the silencing effect of critiques such as the American publication – The ‘CLIT Statement’ - in 1974²⁵ and the British paper – ‘Political

²⁰ Langhamer, *The English in Love*.

²¹ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 3-4.

²² Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p.38.

²³ <https://archive.sussex.ac.uk/research/clhlwr/research/sisterhoodafter>

²⁴ Zoe Strimpel, ‘Heterosexual love in the British women’s liberation movement: Reflections from the Sisterhood an After archive’, *Women’s History Review* 25:6 (2016), pp. 903-924. Others who touch on the subject include Lucy Delap, ‘Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain’, *Cultural and Social History* 15:4 (2018), pp. 571-593; and Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women’s Liberation Movement, 1968-Present*, (Oxford, 2019).

²⁵ The ‘statement’ referred to a series of statements issued by American radical feminists of the Collective Lesbian International Terrors (CLIT) group and published in *Off Our Backs* (see 4:6 (May 1974); 4:8 (July 1974); and 6:7 (Oct 1976). Extracts from the statements were reproduced in the newsletter of the London Women’s Liberation Group (from newsletter 58 in 1974).

lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality' – in 1979.²⁶ Both publications advocated separatism suggesting that women who entered intimate relations – whether sexually or emotionally - with men were collaborating with 'the enemy'. Further, the focus of analysis of heterosexual relations was on the *sexual* nature of intimacy. The British paper, authored by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, principally focused on the sexual nature of relationships with men – particularly the act of penetration - and was largely silent on the issue of emotional engagement, other than to suggest that the predominant emotional dynamic between men and women resided in 'emotions that accompany the exercise of power and the experience of powerlessness'.²⁷ This focus on sex, rather than other aspects of relationships between men and women was widespread. Feminist sociologists Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden observed that 'many feminists turned away from explorations of romantic love, seen as merely an aspect of male hegemony, towards explorations of sexuality and separatism'.²⁸

While the paper by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists is one of the most notorious critiques of heterosexual relationships, Lynne Segal pointed to an analysis that had emerged early in the WLM that positioned '[r]omantic aspirations' as 'dangerous delusions, promoted only to trap women into marriage or other types of emotional dependency on men, a dependency which could never be satisfactory for any real feminist because of the inevitable inbuilt inequality of overestimating or idealising one's sexual partner'.²⁹ Others pointed directly at reproduction as the starting point: 'The name of the trap: monogamy; its rationale: to ensure the safe propagation of the species; its real motivation: to ascertain paternity, thereby perpetrating and perpetuating at once a dominant male line, and the cycle of female suppression.'³⁰ Many women questioned their ability to reconcile feminism with maintaining relationships with men. Liz Wilkie, for example, pondered:

The idealist says that in a perfect world you should relate freely to all individuals, while the realist says that NOW we can't do that and relating to men is upholding the sexist status quo. ... How do I justify *my* relationships with men in feminist terms? I feel that *my* reality does. I certainly don't lie awake at nights riddled with self doubts. Maybe I should.³¹

²⁶ Published in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love Your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*, (London, 1981), pp. 5-10.

²⁷ Onlywomen Press, *Love Your Enemy?*, at p. 7.

²⁸ Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden, 'Love and intimacy: The gender division of emotion and "emotion work"', A neglected aspect of sociological discussion of heterosexual relationships', *Sociology* 27:2 (May 1993), pp. 221-241, at p. 223.

²⁹ Lynne Segal, 'Sex and violence', *Spare Rib* 175 (February 1987), pp. 40-42, at p. 41. See also Belinda Yates, 'Love and romance', *Spare Rib* 79 (February 1979), p. 26, at p. 26.

³⁰ Rowan Edwards in Ruth Wallsgrove, 'Love and romance', *Spare Rib* 85 (August 1979), pp. 26-28, at p. 26.

³¹ Liz Wilkie, letter to WIRES 92, reproduced in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love Your Enemy?*, at p. 30. (Emphasis in original)

The strength of criticism by some radical and revolutionary feminists had the effect of reducing the space that many women in the British WLM felt they had to discuss their relationships with men generally – sexually or emotionally.³² ‘The women’s movement’, declared Athina Tsoulis, ‘has failed heterosexual feminists because it hasn’t adequately explored alternatives for women. It has become a “no no” to talk about heterosexual relationships.’³³ Tsoulis reasoned that any attempt to raise relationship issues would be met with a response along the lines of ‘why do you bother and what do you expect, and all men are terrible’. As Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell pointed out, identifying heterosexual women as ‘collaborators’ or ‘agents’ of male power was met by a defensiveness that ‘proposed no way out’ resulting in a form of theoretical stagnation.³⁴ Outside criticism of the institution of marriage, relationships with men seemed to inhabit a space that resisted political analysis. Zoe Strimpel suggests that ‘heterosexual love disrupted the “personal is political binary by creating a third, less articulable emotional space: the private’.³⁵

Looking back, historian Marcus Collins suggests that the British WLM saw emotional intimacy between men and women as ‘by turns mythical and counterproductive’ and, rather, pursued personal autonomy and separation from men as a necessary panacea to an, otherwise, lost quest for emotional connection.³⁶ This chapter suggests that, rather than the pursuit of autonomy and separatism as the only viable alternate for relationships with men, women in the WLM did, in fact, examine the nature of their emotional relationships with men with the same rigour as they approached the analysis of their material conditions. It is also suggested that, for a significant proportion of women, the issue of emotional intimacy remained in focus throughout the entire timeframe that is the focus of this thesis from the inception of the WLM in the late 1960s and into the 1990s. Discussion of emotional relationships with men – outside of specific campaign areas such as violence – became increasingly muted over time, but it was not silenced and there is a wealth of material that points to the efforts of women to understand their relationship dynamics in both personal and political terms and seek opportunities to challenge those dynamics.

³² Although, as Eve Setch has observed, the silencing effect of critiques such as the ‘CLIT Statement’ has commonly been overstated. Eve Setch, ‘The face of metropolitan feminism: The London Women’s Liberation Workshop, 1969-79’, *Twentieth Century British History* 13:2 (2002), pp. 171-190.

³³ Athina Tsoulis, ‘Heterosexuality – A feminist option?’, *Spare Rib* 119 (June 1987), from p. 22, at p. 22.

³⁴ Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women’s Liberation*, (London, 1982), pp. 222-227.

³⁵ Strimpel, ‘Heterosexual love in the British women’s liberation movement’, p. 905.

³⁶ Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London, 2003), pp. 182-183.

3.1 Expanding male emotional range

Love is being psychically wide-open to another. It is a situation of total emotional vulnerability. Therefore it must be not only the incorporation of the other, but an exchange of selves.³⁷

Popularly described as an sexologist, feminist Shere Hite had qualifications in history and, later, international relations. She divided her time between America, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Italy and Germany.³⁸ While working with the National Organisation of Women in the US, Hite published *The Hite Report* (1976) that would mark her as a sexologist and gain her global notoriety, not least for the vigorous criticisms of her methodology which was to extrapolate quantitative and qualitative conclusions from essay style questionnaires.³⁹ In 1987⁴⁰, as part of *The Hite Report*, Hite published a volume titled *Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress*.⁴¹ The volume, which received a positive review in *Spare Rib*⁴², drew on responses from 4,500 American women who completed and returned questionnaires that covered not only sex in relationships but also the feelings of women about their emotional lives with men. The very first finding presented in the volume – which ran over 900 pages – was that ‘98 percent of the women in this study say they would like more verbal closeness with the men they love; they want the men in their lives to talk more about their own personal thoughts, feelings, plans, and questions, and to ask them about theirs’.⁴³ According to Hite, many women reported that men tended to withhold talking about their feelings. She reported that ‘71 percent of women say the men in their lives are afraid of emotion’. Hite pointed to an underlying prevalent belief acknowledged by women she interviewed that ‘real men are supposed to be only “rational,” “logical,” “scientific,” and “objective”’.⁴⁴

Women in the British WLM also frequently referenced a distinction between men and women in relation to emotions suggesting that women were more ‘sensitive to emotion’ or ‘more emotionally aware’ than men.⁴⁵ Drawing out the inverse, Stevi Jackson echoed this understanding: ‘To be overly emotional for a Western male, particularly within Anglo-Saxon culture, is to bring his masculinity into question.’ This was widely recognised to be a consequence

³⁷ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, (London, 1971), p. 144.

³⁸ Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Shere Hite: Voice of a Daughter in Exile*, (New York, 2013), p. 252.

³⁹ See, for example, Lynne Segal who notes ‘Hite’s survey is methodological mayhem’, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), p.277.

⁴⁰ Published in Britain in 1988

⁴¹ Shere Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress*, (New York, 1987) [published London, 1988].

⁴² *Spare Rib* 189 (April 1988), p. 31.

⁴³ Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Susan Hemmings, ‘Out of the background’, *Spare Rib* 87 (October 1979), pp. 6-8, at p. 8; and Mary McCann, ‘A singularity: Being a woman nuclear physicist’, *Spare Rib* 93 (April 1980), pp. 6-8, at p. 8.

of social expectations. For some, it was a necessity of economic conditions, including the exigencies of capitalism. As pointed out by Sheila Rowbotham: 'Emotion is waste. Time is money. A man must be hard – little boys don't cry. ... A man should not be made to feel, but to calculate.'⁴⁶ This understanding of the contrasting positions of men and women was so ubiquitous that references were often made in passing to the distinction between the 'rational' male and the 'emotional' female and taken as given.

Listing the concerns of the WLM, Lee Comer included 'the separation of men from emotionality and women from rationality'.⁴⁷ This concern included the way in which emotional dynamics affected relationships between men and women. Feminist sociologist Stevi Jackson's focus was on the emotional content of 'love'. 'Men's distancing themselves from emotion, their fear of loss of control', she said, 'has been noted by a number of writers and is experienced by women as a problematic aspect of heterosexual relationships'.⁴⁸ Echoing this observation, researchers Duncombe and Marsden identified, based on interviews of 'sixty mature married or cohabiting couples', 'an asymmetry of emotional response'. 'Most of our women respondents', they said, 'felt their male partners were lacking in what might be called "emotional participation" in their relationships'.⁴⁹ Rather than 'emotional participation', men were seen to 'psychically desert' women to focus on material aspects such as work and career. 'As some wives bitterly observed, "he wanted the picture" (wife, house and two children) rather than the emotional intimacy for which they had hoped'.⁵⁰ Mary Ingham suggested that men, with a discomfort with emotional expression, might feel 'safer with controlled, superficial, positive, restricted emotional exchange' of the workplace than in the 'emotional hothouse at home'.⁵¹ In this, most women were not suggesting that men were actually unemotional. Rather, they suggested that men were reluctant and/or did not have the skills to effectively express emotion. 'Western masculinity', explained Stevi Jackson, 'is not constituted as wholly unemotional; rather, boys and men are not encouraged to develop competence in locating themselves within discourse of the emotions'.⁵² British columnist Irma Kurtz agreed that men often struggled to articulate emotion - 'the greater their emotion, the quieter they become'.⁵³

⁴⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, (London & New York, 2015 [First published 1973]), p. 49.

⁴⁷ Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, (Leeds, 1974), p. 274.

⁴⁸ Stevi Jackson, 'Even sociologists fall in love: An exploration in the sociology of emotions', *Sociology* 27:2 (May 1993), pp. 201-220, at p. 214.

⁴⁹ Duncombe and Marsden, 'Love and intimacy', at p. 225.

⁵⁰ Duncombe and Marsden, 'Love and intimacy', at p. 226.

⁵¹ Mary Ingham, *Men: The Male Myth Exposed*, (London, 1994), p.32.

⁵² Jackson, 'Even sociologists fall in love', at p. 214.

⁵³ Irma Kurtz, *Malespeak*, (London, 1986), p. 8.

From her study, Hite provided examples of women who described trying to draw emotional expression from men. One respondent reported: 'He's often silent for hours when we are alone, which gets on my nerves. I would like him to talk more about feelings – reactions – problems – but he's just not interested.'⁵⁴ For some women, there was a reticence to push men to talk about their feelings because of fear. Sally Cline and Dale Spender, who interviewed some 300 women about their emotional interactions with men, said that, while this might be 'fear of withdrawal of approval and affection' or 'fear of withdrawal of financial support', for some women, the fear was more fundamental. 'I tried to push him to reveal his feelings', revealed one woman, 'and he struck out in violence instead and slapped me.'⁵⁵ Others talked of being met with withdrawal and irritation. Sociologist Vic Seidler, a key figure in British antisexist politics including as editor of *Achilles Heel*, offered that 'anger is a much more acceptable emotion, so that when we are beginning to feel vulnerable we react with anger as a way of pushing others away and unconsciously concealing our vulnerability. Anger becomes a form of self-protection as a whole range of emotions are transmuted into anger, and we fail to learn how to differentiate our different emotions and feelings.'⁵⁶ A call for greater emotional expression was taken up by many antisexist men. In 1973, American antisexist proponent, Warren Farrell observed:

To the extent a men's group helps us counter our emotional constipation, and to the extent it encourages a nondefensive openness, it establishes the basis for a communicative relationship between the sexes. It also establishes the framework in which women can express feelings and emotions without feeling uniquely "just like a woman." When men are also expressing feelings, such expression by definition becomes a human characteristic.⁵⁷

British antisexist men worked to reform their emotional expression as a key form of feminist support. 'Thousands of British men sought to transform masculinities and selfhood, in part through deliberate attempts to rework masculine emotional expressiveness.'⁵⁸ Writing in 1990, Lynne Segal reported the 'joyous feelings' of men who 'learned to be more open to, and expressive about, their emotions'.⁵⁹ But to what degree was unfettered emotional expression by men seen as a positive trait by feminists?

Thomas Dixon argues that women formed the vanguard of efforts to encourage men 'to get in touch with their feelings'. In this, Dixon draws attention to the efforts of 'agony aunt' Marjorie

⁵⁴ Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Vic Seidler, 'Men, sex and relationships', in Vic Seidler (ed.), *Men, Sex and Relationships: Writings from Achilles Heel*, (London and New York), pp. 1-26, at p. 15.

⁵⁷ Warren Farrell, 'Men: Guidelines for consciousness-raising', *MS 1:8* (February 1973), from p. 12, at p. 111.

⁵⁸ Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain', at p. 572.

⁵⁹ Segal, *Slow Motion*, p. 282.

Proops along with others such as Bel Mooney, writer for the *Mirror*, in, what Dixon describes as a ‘campaign for male emotional liberation’, expressing support for tears from men.⁶⁰ Not everyone was, however, on board. Many feminists felt ambivalent about the idea of a newfound ‘male emotional liberation’. Jill Tweedie, for example, revealed a mix of scepticism and support for the men writing about their feelings in *Achilles Heel*. On the one hand, Tweedie – mindful of her son who was ‘entering adolescence’ – celebrated the expressive efforts of the authors in *Achilles Heel*, hoping that their efforts signalled a substantive change and were evidence that men ‘can find the hearts they discarded in their teens’. On the other hand, she revealed immediate and involuntary reactions such as “‘Who needs men muscling in on the women’s movement, set to take over, I dare say, and asking for sympathy to boot?’” and “‘Are men who publicly investigate themselves and their emotions real men, anyways?’”⁶¹

In fact, Jill Tweedie had a lot to say about men and their emotions. Like others, Tweedie critiqued the positioning of women as naturally more emotional, suggesting, rather, that it was a device to position women as inferior:

[M]en, the dominant sex, call themselves the reasoning sex, cool, rational, mathematical, logical, and label women intuitive creatures, slaves to the emotions, easily swayed, irrational, innumerate, illogical. Women, they say, do not reason, women feel. Men proceed by outer realities, women by inner upheavals and that is why women are designated the loving sex.⁶²

Tweedie objected strongly to this. Not only did she find the suggestion that women are unable to reason objectionable but questioned the claim of male clear-headedness. She suggested, rather, that ‘the amount of logic, rationality, objectivity or even common sense’ on the part of men ‘could be stood on the end of a pin’. ‘Men’, Tweedie claimed, ‘do not need to develop their emotional facilities, they are already hideously overdeveloped’.⁶³ Indeed, the issue for many women was not the emotional range of men but the way in which they managed their emotions.

3.2 Challenging responsibility for ‘emotion work’

Men have not forgotten there is a female “emotional” half: They live it on the sly.⁶⁴

Ambivalence about efforts by men to demonstrate greater emotional range was expressed in the view that, rather than a lack of feeling, men lacked the ability (or will) to manage their own feelings

⁶⁰ Dixon, *Weeping Britannia*, p. 267.

⁶¹ Jill Tweedie, ‘How can we turn our sons into men instead of machines?’, *The Guardian* (15 May 1979), p. 11.

⁶² Jill Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, (London, 1979), p. 147.

⁶³ Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, p. 150.

⁶⁴ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*.

and, rather, relied on women for emotional support. Feminists started to talk about this reliance using the term ‘emotion work’. The term had originated with American academic Arlie Hochschild who famously drew attention to the concept of ‘emotional labour’ or ‘emotion work’ to capture the effort required in a role to ‘induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’.⁶⁵ The term was, however, quickly adopted and extended to include other activities perceived as emotional management.⁶⁶ In her influential book *The Reproduction of Mothering* first published in 1978, American sociologist Nancy Chodorow identified the operation of ‘moral mother’ ideology alongside capitalism and its attendant industrialisation. ‘Moral mother’ ideology located responsibility for women ‘to act as both nurturant moral models to their children and as nurturant supporters and moral guides for husbands on their return from the immoral, competitive world of work’.⁶⁷ In describing this role, Chodorow acknowledged Hochschild’s authorship of the term as applying to emotional self-management but extended it to include the efforts of women to ‘work for and upon other people’s emotions’.⁶⁸ Beyond Chodorow’s analysis, the different applications can be seen in the three main ways that others spoke about the expectations on women to manage emotions – their own and others.

First, aligned with Hochschild’s original application, women recognised an expectation on them to control – even suppress - their own feelings and emotions to maintain psychological space for others. A ‘sponge for other people’s emotions’, the housewife was, said Lee Comer, expected to put aside her own emotions. Her own ‘emotional needs’, argued Comer, were believed to be ‘completely satisfied by responding to other people’s’.⁶⁹ The research undertaken by British feminists Sally Cline and Dale Spender into the emotional interactions between women and men

⁶⁵ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2012 [First published 1983]), p. 7. With reference to Hochschild’s nomenclature, Jan Plamper draws a distinction between ‘emotional labour’ as ‘management of feeling in the workplace’ and ‘emotion work’ as the ‘same kind of emotional management in a private context’. [Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, (Oxford, 2012), p. 303.] In this chapter, I reflect the language used in contemporaneous writing.

⁶⁶ In an interview in 2018, Arlie Hochschild acknowledged the extent to which the term was applied beyond its original intended meaning. This was about its vernacular use across populations and not just by feminists. In that interview, Hochschild expressed some unease about the ‘blurriness of the thinking’ associated with the broad use. Julie Beck, ‘The concept creep of “emotional labor”’, *The Atlantic* (27 November 2018), << <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/arlie-hochschild-housework-isnt-emotional-labor/576637/>>>, accessed 13 May 2025.

⁶⁷ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999 [First published 1978]), p. 5.

⁶⁸ Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 238, note 9. Chodorow was referring to an earlier, less well-known, articulation of the term by Arlie Hochschild in 1975, namely Arlie Hochschild, ‘The sociology of feeling and emotion: Selected possibilities’, in Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (eds), *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*, (New York, 1975) pp. 280-307.

⁶⁹ Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, p. 111.

was inspired by a dinner they had shared one night, during which they noticed that a disproportionate number of women in the restaurant were smiling at men without a smile in return.⁷⁰ They noticed how women smiled at men they didn't know, including men who encroached, without invitation, on their boundaries. When they started investigating this, they noticed that the behaviour by women, which included the suppression of feelings, was ubiquitous both in the public sphere and the private sphere. In a more pointed treatment of the topic, Cline and Spender, citing Hochschild, drew attention to 'smiles and orgasms' as 'gestures' that were intended to 'please men'.⁷¹ Smiles, they argued, were expected of women by men at great emotional expense. 'This means their emotions, like their bodies, are not truly their own. Women cannot afford valid or honest expressions of feeling.'⁷² This, argued Cline and Spender, contrasted with men who were not expected to smile and for whom smiling was a spontaneous, more authentic, act. 'For men, smiling is a spontaneous act, a mark of enjoyment, appreciation or self-satisfaction. Men do not smile because they feel they should.'⁷³ Jill Tweedie described herself as a 'doll' in her first marriage – a self that was separate to her real self. The doll 'smiled just enough to give a man the wildest expectations and frowned just enough to make him feel safe'. 'When my husband said he loved me', she said, 'I knew he meant he loved the doll I had created and I accepted his love smugly enough, on her behalf'.⁷⁴

Beyond a smile, Cline and Spender drew out other examples of daily life where women set aside their own emotional needs for their partner. For example, Florence, interviewed by Cline and Spender, observed of her daughter's marriage:

I'd watch her rushing in from work having collected the children, negotiated with the child minder, done the shopping. She'd be sorting clothes with one hand and getting the supper with the other while she tried to talk to the children about their day. And then in would come her husband and everything had to be for him. His day. His problems. And say wasn't there a bit of order about the place? He'd take himself off with a drink – "to relax" – and she'd have to fuss around him.⁷⁵

As exemplified by Florence's daughter, the containment of female emotions was seen as necessary to provide space for the emotional state of males. This was a pre-condition to the second aspect of emotion work by women in the home – providing empathic attention for the feelings of men. Widely cited feminist researchers Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard included

⁷⁰ Sally Cline and Dale Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, (Glasgow, 1988 [First published 1988]), p. 13.

⁷¹ Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 110.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 111.

⁷⁴ Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 145.

‘emotional work’ in their definition of ‘work’ and firmly located this ‘emotional work’ in their assessment of a woman’s unpaid work in the home.⁷⁶ A large part of this work was to act as confidant: ‘A good wife enables her husband to talk intimately and confidentially. She is the person to whom he can unburden himself, who will share his anxieties and siphon off his discontents.’⁷⁷

‘Men rarely disclose, or confide in their male friends’, said Mary Ingham based on a series of interviews with men.⁷⁸ While observing that ‘many men said they often kept things to themselves’, Ingham reported that often ‘[t]hey would turn to their wife if they wanted to confide’.⁷⁹ Like Ingham, Lillian Rubin acknowledged the apparent contradiction between the observation that men tended to keep their emotions to themselves and, equally, rely on women as confidants. ‘It’s another of those paradoxes’, she said. ‘For, to the degree that it’s possible for him to be emotionally open with anyone, it is with a woman – a tribute to the power of the childhood experience with mother. Yet it’s that same early experience and his need to repress it that raises his ambivalence and generates his resistance.’⁸⁰ Angela Phillips also called out the relationship between a young boy and his mother as a refuge for emotion. Boys would learn early that ‘[a]n intimate detail to one boy is a sign of weakness to another’.⁸¹ Phillips suggested, rather, that boys would look to women for emotional support. ‘In secondary school, feelings have to be tucked well out of sight, reserved only for examination at home with Mother (for those who still get along well enough with their mothers), or, in time, with a trusted female friend, rarely another boy.’⁸²

Finally, beyond empathic listening, women also saw themselves as responsible for actively managing the feelings of the family, including men and children in the household. The personal accounts of women reveal a task of cheering up and encouraging men, an aspect particularly called out by Cline and Spender as managing the ego of men. ‘Unable to share their emotions with other men’, observes Lucy Delap, ‘men turned to women for emotional sustenance and ego-massaging’.⁸³ Delphy and Leonard explained that the caring of men undertaken by women extended beyond ‘feeling a general affection towards one’s husband’ to take the form of ‘active “relationship work”’: observing and moderating his emotions, arranging entertainment and

⁷⁶ Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies*, (Cambridge and Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 21.

⁷⁷ Delphy and Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation*, p. 232.

⁷⁸ Mary Ingham, *Men*, p. 218.

⁷⁹ Mary Ingham, *Men*, p. 219.

⁸⁰ Lillian Rubin, *Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together* (New York, 1983), pp. 82-83.

⁸¹ Angela Phillips, *The Trouble with Boys*, (New York, 1994), p. 233.

⁸² Phillips, *The Trouble with Boys*, p. 232-233.

⁸³ Delap, ‘Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain’, at p. 575.

relaxation, and supplying his personal needs'.⁸⁴ Of course, while the focus in this chapter is on the private relations between women and men, it was widely acknowledged that women assumed this work was carried over into the public realm, including the workplace whether in specific 'caring' positions or in mixed workplaces.⁸⁵

So why did women do this 'emotion work'? Many theorized that economic dependence created the conditions for emotional dependence. For Lee Comer, a woman was captured by 'her husband's breadwinning role and her own subservience to it'.⁸⁶ In this, the woman was responsible for maintaining the mental wellbeing of the man as labour in the capitalist system. Ensuring the male's 'emotional and psychological well being' was a core part of her role.⁸⁷ In her treatise, Comer gave economics a central role in keeping women in this role noting the financial dependence of women on men. For Hochschild, economic dependence and emotional dependence were inversely linked. Women, she suggested, 'make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack'.⁸⁸ The nature of this 'emotion work', which Hochschild suggested was a form of *deference*, tended to be 'emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others'.⁸⁹ Hochschild pointed to a veil over this practice making it 'an unseen effort'. 'As with doing housework well, the trick is to erase any evidence of effort, to offer only the clean house and the welcoming smile.'⁹⁰ Like Hochschild, Cline and Spender pointed to a link between emotional support and economic dependence although they were concerned to note that economic dependence was not the only motivation. Some of the women interviewed by Cline and Spender flagged that they performed emotional labour 'for a quiet life', others to 'increase their own importance in a relationship' and others again, as we saw earlier, were motivated by fear.⁹¹ Nevertheless, they argued, economic dependence was a leading factor. 'Despite their varied responses', reported the researchers, 'each woman agreed that there were connections between economics and their psychological care of men'.⁹² Duncombe and Marsden, who conducted research on gender dynamics in relationships, also stressed the importance of the connection between economic and emotional power but contended that it was 'only one element in a complex material and *emotional*

⁸⁴ Delphy and Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation*, p. 232.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*; and Delphy and Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation*.

⁸⁶ Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, p. 241.

⁸⁷ Comer, *Wedlocked Women*, p. 237.

⁸⁸ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 163.

⁸⁹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 165.

⁹⁰ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 167.

⁹¹ Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 129.

⁹² Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 135.

exchange where “power” resides in the asymmetry of men’s and women’s “needs”.⁹³ ‘The ability to fulfil another person’s emotional needs’ could, in itself, be a source of power.

Also, complicating the link between economic dependence and emotional support were findings drawn out by Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard who found that the level of emotion work by wives often increased when husbands were unemployed:

Wives were concerned to help maintain their husband’s happiness and self-respect, knowing his ego was already deflated and that he was “worried sick” that “he wasn’t playing his part in things”, namely, keeping the family. They felt it “wasn’t fair” to further threaten his sense of worth by getting him to do women’s (that is, low status) work; and they had also to put in extra caring work to boost his morale. Wives might keep on outside employment to improve domestic relations: to prevent them and their husbands being “on top of each other all day”. But this meant they not only had to do two jobs, but also sort out their husband’s irritation or unhappiness when he saw her getting up and going out to work.⁹⁴

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach also explored the reasons for this emotion work drawing on observations from sessions and workshops at The Women’s Therapy Centre in London they had founded in 1976. In 1983, the pair coauthored a book - *What do Women Want?* - that, while primarily concerned with the emotional lives of the women who attended the Centre, also provided insights into the emotional lives of men through the accounts of the women.⁹⁵ Of particular interest to the authors was the question of dependence and independence. The authors recognised the connection between economic dependence and the constraints that this placed on the liberation, including emotional freedoms, of women. ‘Women sought to be economically independent so that their emotional relationships could take on a different shape.’⁹⁶ However, observed Eichenbaum and Orbach, even without economic dependence defining the relationship, women were still struggling with satisfying emotional intimacy in their relationships. One of the challenges they observed was that, while women had changed, men had not changed. ‘Men were making behavioural adjustments to women’s demands but changes in couple relationships clearly required more than men doing the dishes and helping out with the kids.’⁹⁷ Eichenbaum and Orbach suggested that the answer lay in recognising the nature and role of emotional dependence in intimate relationships. There was, they argued, a distinction between *behavioural* dependence and *emotional* dependence. Eichenbaum and Orbach said that ‘women are raised to be depended upon; to place their emotional needs second to those of

⁹³ Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden, “Workaholics” and “whinging women”: Theorising intimacy and emotion work – the last frontier of gender inequality?, *The Sociological Review* 43:1 (1995), pp. 150-169, at p. 158 (Emphasis in original). See also Jackson, ‘Even sociologists fall in love’, at p. 217.

⁹⁴ Delphy and Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation*, p. 174.

⁹⁵ Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, *What do Women Want?* (Glasgow, 1990 [First published 1983]).

⁹⁶ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, pp. 11-12.

others'.⁹⁸ Complementing this, men were raised to depend on women for emotional support although this dependency was kept in the shadows in the interests of maintaining the 'myth' of the 'independent, strong, able and competent' male.⁹⁹ 'Women and men', they continued, 'collude in this process of keeping from view men's dependency needs'.¹⁰⁰ This dependency, however, was evident to many women. 'Every woman knows that men rely on them and that the idea that men are independent and women dependent is essentially a false one.'¹⁰¹

It was clear to some that the nature of their emotional interactions with men were deeply ingrained. One woman writing in *Shrew* examined her own habitual ways of interacting with her husband noting that while housework was now more readily shared, it was the ways in which she was 'acting out the role of a wife' in their relationship that was 'more difficult' to overcome. 'In many situations', she said, 'I react automatically, such as by smoothing over difficulties, by being sympathetic and helpful when my husband is irritated or has lost something, by giving way in discussions and by seeking advice or reassurance unnecessarily'.¹⁰² In a theory that resonated with Eichenbaum and Orbach's model of collusion, Duncombe and Marsden suggested that, more than habit, women's ongoing emotional support of men reflected a form of perennial 'false consciousness'. Drawing on Hochschild's model of differentiated levels of emotion work¹⁰³, Duncombe and Marsden suggested that 'deep acting' operated to support women (and some men) to persuade themselves that 'as a couple "we're ever so happy, really", even against powerful evidence to the contrary'.¹⁰⁴

Despite these analytical, and personal, challenges, feminists called on men to start '[performing] this emotional labour for themselves'.¹⁰⁵ The demand was echoed across years and publications. Writing in *Shrew* in 1978, Anne-Marie Fearon, while acknowledging that socialization of boys 'does great violence to the psyche of the little boy', was quick to say: 'I don't mean by this that any woman should spend an ounce of energy on being sorry for the poor dears; men must now seek comfort from each other, not from women.'¹⁰⁶ Paula Jennings, writing in *WIRES* in 1981, echoed the sentiment: '[W]e must stop nurturing men. They must learn to nurture each other and if they

⁹⁸ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, p. 17. (Emphasis in original)

⁹⁹ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ Eichenbaum and Orbach, *What do Women Want?*, p. 21.

¹⁰² [unattributed], 'Something about being honest', *Shrew* (September 1970), p. 16.

¹⁰³ Arlie Hochschild, 'Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure', *American Journal of Sociology* 85:3 (November 1979), pp. 551-575, p.568.

¹⁰⁴ Duncombe and Marsden, "'Workaholics" and "whinging women", at p. 162.

¹⁰⁵ Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain', at p. 575.

¹⁰⁶ Anne-Marie Fearon, 'Come in Tarzan, your time is up', *Shrew* (Summer '78), pp.17-19, at p. 17.

can't then I don't believe they will survive.'¹⁰⁷ 'I believe', said Jayne Egerton in *Trouble and Strife* in 1984, 'that it is vital for women to withdraw our unconditional support and love for men and to compel them to support each other'. In this, Egerton pointed to the works of 'Phyllis Chesler and Adrienne Rich who have pleaded with women to force men to grow up by refusing to soothe all their pains, calm all their fears and care for them at the expense of our integrity and energy'.¹⁰⁸

One of the ways in which men responded to the demand to undertake this emotional labour was to support each other in men's groups which were both informed by and supplemented by a range of therapeutic models including co-counselling.¹⁰⁹ In a pamphlet outlining the background to the East London Men's Centre, the management of emotions was identified as a central concern:

Like most men's groups we've spent a lot of time in close and quite in-turned examination of ourselves, our emotions, our relationships with some and with each other. Experience has been amazing. Learning that the ways we have been brought up as men to be cool and rational, cut-off from our own feelings and the feelings of others, isolated in secret pain and insecurity by the demands of a competitive [*sic*] and individualistic society; learning that we don't have to be like this and actually helping each other to change has been beautiful.¹¹⁰

Jan Bradshaw reported that she had been 'hopeful' when her male partner joined a men's group because she hoped to be 'relieved of the choice of either shouldering all his emotional needs myself, or having him go off and lay it on some other woman'.¹¹¹ For some men, it seems this was effective. Paul Morrison credited his men's group in East London for 'deep change' in himself, 'learning to depend on other men for emotional support, instead of laying it all on the women I knew'.¹¹² Some women were less optimistic about the ability of men to support each other. Jayne Egerton, for example, observed that:

Some of us had hoped that one benefit of "anti-sexist" men's groups would be that they'd take the burden of supporting men off women's shoulders. I recall one anti-sexist man whining to me that his group couldn't fulfil this function as he couldn't stand men. (Join the club I thought!)¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Paula Jennings, letter published in *WIRES* 88, reproduced in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love Your Enemy?*, at p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Jayne Egerton, 'For "thrill-seeking females" only', *Trouble and Strife* 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 21-23, at p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain'.

¹¹⁰ [unattributed], *East London Men's Centre*, Pamphlet in Sheila Rowbotham papers, LSE Women's Library, 7SHR_E_01_04.

¹¹¹ Jan Bradshaw, 'Now what are they up to? Men in the "men's movement"! ', in Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *On the Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences*, (London, 1982), pp. 174-189, at p.176.

¹¹² Paul Morrison, Geoff Holland and Tony Trott, "'Personally speaking ...': 3 men share the experience of their men's groups', *Achilles Heel* 2 (1979), pp. 12 – 16, at p. 16.

¹¹³ Jayne Egerton, 'For "thrill-seeking females" only', at p. 22.

Historian Nicholas Owen observes that, ‘for reasons neither they nor others could fully explain’, men struggled to achieve a high level of ‘emotional honesty and mutual empowerment’ in men’s groups.¹¹⁴ There was an evident discomfort on the part of men to share with other men but also a discomfort witnessing other men expressing their emotions. In 1973, Ellen Leopold, discussing male consciousness-raising groups that had been formed in New York, suggested a ‘terror of that old demon homosexuality’ limited the ability of men to connect emotionally with other men.¹¹⁵

Women remained ambivalent. As with Jill Tweedie, other feminists also had mixed feelings about the encouragement of emotional expressiveness in men’s groups. At the heart of this disquiet was a sense that the men’s groups were fostering an even greater focus, by men, on themselves exacerbating the degree to which the needs and interests of women were subordinated. Some viewed the groups as self-indulgent losing sight of the political project of challenging the subordination of women.¹¹⁶ In a letter to *Achilles Heel* in 1979, Amanda Sebestyan acknowledged that men’s groups, in part, operated to ‘relieve women of the terrible burden of male emotional needs’ but worried about a ‘new tendency’ that, rather than seeking to ‘support the women’s movement and change themselves’ was operating to ‘change the women’s movement and support men in being “themselves”’.¹¹⁷ But it was not just the invisibility of the political project that was in question. At a more personal level, there was a sense that men were focusing on their self-development at the expense of women. Jan Bradshaw who had been looking to be relieved of some emotion work, also recognised that men emotionally connecting with other men in men’s groups didn’t ultimately solve the issue of how men related to women. In fact, the feelings of women may become even more invisible to men.¹¹⁸ This was not the intent of a feminist critique that, for many, rather than building greater distance, sought to build more connection.

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Owen, ‘Men and the 1970s British Women’s Liberation Movement’, *The Historical Journal* 56:3 (September 2013), pp. 801-826, at p. 818. See also Lucy Delap, ‘Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain’, at pp. 576.

¹¹⁵ Ellen Leopold, ‘Across the great divide’ *Spare Rib* 10 (April 1983), from p. 8, at p. 10.

¹¹⁶ Owen, ‘Men and the 1970s British Women’s Liberation Movement’, at pp. 818-820.

¹¹⁷ Amanda Sebestyan, ‘Dear *Achilles Heel*’, *Achilles Heel* 3 (1979), p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Jan Bradshaw, ‘Now what are they up to?’, at pp.176-177.

3.3 Seeking emotional reciprocity

(Male) culture was (and is) parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity.¹¹⁹

Rather than more emotional *expression by men*, women were primarily seeking more emotional *support from men* of women. Cline and Spender said that women were, in the main, not looking to disengage from the emotions of men but, rather, were seeking reciprocity. In this, Cline and Spender made clear that the caring behaviours of women were not, in themselves, the problem. 'There is nothing wrong with considering others, putting them at their ease, managing their emotions to make them feel good, expanding their confidence, extending their abilities, improving their performance or nurturing their spirit.' Rather, they argued, '[w]hat is wrong is that women do it for men and men do not do it for women'.¹²⁰ Christine Robertson agreed framing it in terms of 'affection' to suggest that men needed to be reminded that 'affection must be given as well as taken, or they will not be accepted as a partner'.¹²¹ Hite's study echoed the concern with reciprocity. When asked 'What does your partner do that makes you maddest?', 77 percent of respondents said 'He doesn't listen'.¹²² After outlining the different ways in which women identified a lack of reciprocity including being interrupted, 'negating or looking for a way to "one-up"' the accounts of women and being told 'not to feel what they are feeling', Hite observed that '[m]ost women think of this as an individual man's problem, rather than a larger social one (in which the society encourages men not to take women seriously)'.¹²³

In a study widely cited by British feminists, sociologists Penny Mansfield and Jean Collard reported, from interviews of 65 newly-wed couples in the later part of the 1980s, that the majority of women interviewed thought that emotional support was important.

They wanted to share their feelings and to be "understood"; to feel appreciated and cared about by their spouses. Generally, however, wives felt that they were the ones who reassured and were understanding and tender towards their husbands (and indeed their spouses recognised this), but they wanted reciprocity.¹²⁴

In this, Mansfield and Collard distinguished the perceptions of women and men reporting that '[m]ost (though not all) men seek a *life in common* with their wives, a home life, a physical and psychological base; somewhere and someone to set out from and return to'. For women, on the

¹¹⁹ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 143.

¹²⁰ Cline and Spender, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size*, p. 203.

¹²¹ Christine Robertson, 'Letters: Love and deficiency', *Spare Rib* 81 (April 1979), p. 4.

¹²² Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, p. 11.

¹²³ Hite, *The Hite Report – Women and Love*, pp. 12, 13 and 18.

¹²⁴ Penny Mansfield and Jean Collard, *The Beginning of the Rest of Your Life? A Portrait of Newly-Wed Marriage*, (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 178.

other hand, Mansfield and Collard suggested that ‘a *common life* with an empathic partner’ was sought. In this, Mansfield and Collard stated that women were looking for both material and emotional security. The extent to which this study of newly-weds (rather than specifically feminists) could be applied to feminist activists who were highly critical for the material basis of their subordination could be questioned, yet this exact extract was reproduced in an anthology of Women’s Studies readings edited by British feminist, Stevi Jackson to draw attention to the fact that ‘[w]omen enter marriage expecting emotional fulfilment and companionship, but here too they often find themselves in an unequal relationship’.¹²⁵ Women’s discontent with the lopsided nature of their emotional relationships was observed and reiterated across both feminist and non-feminist reflections from the late 1960s and into the 1990s.¹²⁶

From a questionnaire distributed to readers of *Spare Rib* about sexual relationships with men, Angela Hamblin observed that women were looking for ‘[g]ood communication and emotional responsiveness’ from their sexual relationships.¹²⁷ Separately, based on her work at the Women’s Therapy Centre in London, Tricia Bickerton examined the thoughts and feelings of women who were alone – not necessarily celibate but ‘without a primary, intimate relationship in which there is a long-term commitment’.¹²⁸ Bickerton found that, for some women, being alone was the outcome of a discrepancy between the intimacy sought from a relationship and the intimacy that relationships could provide:

Women are making demands, not just for sexual pleasure, but for emotional support and understanding within a relationship. Unfortunately, men are not necessarily able to meet these demands and many women despair of finding an equally caring partner. This is not surprising given that men generally grow up to expect nurturance as a right, but are rarely taught how to give it.¹²⁹

The reference to ‘understanding’ in many of these accounts is important. Duncombe and Marsden argued the importance to women of ‘understanding’ noting that some women in their research ‘found that their partners could not respond because they appeared simply not to understand’.¹³⁰ This aligned with the need expressed by women in the Duncombe and Marsden study, for ‘empathy with how they were *feeling*’.¹³¹

¹²⁵ See Penny Mansfield and Jean Collard, ‘6.4 Solving problems and airing feelings’, in Stevi Jackson (ed.), *Women’s Studies: Essential Readings*, (New York, 1993), pp. 191-194; and Sue Faulkner and Stevi Jackson, ‘Introduction’, *Women’s Studies*, pp. 181-184, at p. 182.

¹²⁶ Stevi Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question*, (London, 1999), p. 113 and p. 117.

¹²⁷ Angela Hamblin, ‘Is a feminist heterosexuality possible?’, in Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan (eds), *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions*, (London, 1983), pp. 105-123, at p.118.

¹²⁸ Tricia Bickerton, ‘Women alone’, in Cartledge and Ryan, *Sex and Love*, pp. 157-166, at p.157.

¹²⁹ Tricia Bickerton, ‘Women alone’, at pp. 158-159.

¹³⁰ Duncombe and Marsden, ‘Love and intimacy’, at p. 227.

¹³¹ Duncombe and Marsden, ‘Love and intimacy’, at p. 228. (Emphasis in original)

Women are beginning ... to resent their continuing support of men. Without perhaps fully appreciating male lack of skill, both verbally and empathetically, women are expecting men to give the same emotional input into relationships that they do.¹³²

Women were looking for understanding but there were very mixed views about the potential for men to deliver this understanding. Susie Orbach was optimistic. While recognising the challenges of anti-sexist parenting within a broader culture of sexist influences, Orbach said that she and her partner had prioritised ‘creating emotionally literate children so that our daughter will not have to reiterate a situation in which girls and women provide for the emotional needs of others without receiving that attention themselves, and so that our son can be both articulate about what he is feeling and be responsive to the emotional expression of others’.¹³³ Others were less optimistic. For some women, it was to be expected that men would never provide the emotional support they sought. Some put it in quite bald terms. Most widely known for her assassination attempt on Andy Warhol in 1968, American radical feminist, Valerie Solanas self-published the *SCUM Manifesto* in 1967. The *Manifesto*, which concluded that men should be eradicated, stated: ‘Being completely self-centred and unable to relate to anything outside himself, the male’s “conversation,” when not about himself, is an impersonal droning on, removed from anything of human value.’¹³⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, a founding member of the Revolutionary Feminists who authored ‘Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality’, gave a more dispassionate assessment in her autobiography: ‘Men and women do not necessarily have anything in common, and relate, indeed, to different communities of people with entirely different concerns and passions which correlate to their different positions in a hierarchy of power.’¹³⁵ For Jeffreys, while noting that her ‘relationships with men had been pleasant and [she] was fond of them’ explained that her ‘emotions had not been seriously engaged’.¹³⁶

3.4 The understanding of women

For Jeffreys, and many others, emotional intimacy would only be possible with women. Large numbers of women found emotional connection – whether or not within sexual relationships – with other women within the WLM. Audrey Battersby recalled that the ‘sense of sisterhood was

¹³² Ingham, *Men*, p.223.

¹³³ Susie Orbach, ‘Heterosexuality and parenting’, in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Heterosexuality: Feminism and Psychology Reader*, (London, 1993), pp. 48-49, at p. 48.

¹³⁴ Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, (London, 2004 [First published 1967]), p. 21.

¹³⁵ Sheila Jefferys, *Trigger Warning: My Lesbian Feminist Life*, (North Geelong, Victoria & Mission Beach, Queensland, 2020), p. 74.

¹³⁶ Jefferys, *Trigger Warning*, p. 73.

so supportive and so powerful for me that it actually replaced everything I felt I didn't have at the time.'¹³⁷ The WLM was as much a network of social and emotional support as it was a political project. The two things were intertwined. Seeing loneliness as 'a catalyst' for the WLM, Eleanor Careless and Jess Cotton maintain that the WLM addressed loneliness both 'as a political condition and ... cut through that isolation by forming social networks with other women in a local and national context'.¹³⁸ Those social networks also gave women the courage to challenge their situation thereby reinforcing the political power of the WLM.¹³⁹ The strength of connection, however, was in the *understanding* that women found in each other. Women, such as Janet Ree, felt emotionally engaged in the WLM: 'Talking to other women about fears and doubts and finding that they'd got the same ones, was absolutely fantastic. ... The best kind of relationship I've ever had. The feeling was like you have when you're in love.'¹⁴⁰

Influential American feminist, Adrienne Rich was interested in the assumption that intimate relations between women were framed as an exception rather than acknowledging the 'profound emotional impulses and complementarities drawing women toward women', against which the choice of a relationship with a man might form an exception.¹⁴¹ 'Compulsory heterosexuality' was, according to Rich, an institution imposed on women that cut women off from forming primary emotional relationships with women with significant consequence.

The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community; the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*.¹⁴²

While not attributing lesbian proclivities to 'mothering-by-women', Rich suggested that 'it would seem logical' that childhood experiences of 'emotional caring and physical nurture' by women would mean that both men and women would look, in the first instance, to women for 'love and tenderness'. In a study of 82 women and 89 men who all identified as bisexual, Charlotte Wolff found that '[m]ost of the women were homoemotional, while most of the men were bi-emotional.

¹³⁷ Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation*, (London, 1990), p. 115.

¹³⁸ Eleanor Careless and Jess Cotton, 'No woman is an island: The politics of loneliness, Spare Rib and the Women's Liberation Movement, 1969-1993', *New Formations* 109 (September 2023), pp. 10-28, at p. 11.

¹³⁹ Emma Wallhead, 'A political sexual revolution: Sexual autonomy in the British Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s and 1980s', *Twentieth Century British History* 34:2 (2023), pp. 354-376, at pp. 374-375. See also Sarah Stoller, 'Forging a politics of care: Theorizing household work in the British Women's Liberation Movement', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018), pp. 95-119, at p. 111.

¹⁴⁰ Michelene Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 99.

¹⁴¹ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence', *Signs* 5:4 (Summer 1980), pp. 631-660, at p. 637.

¹⁴² Rich, 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence', at p. 657. (Emphasis in original)

... [W]omen's emotional attachments to, and emotional preoccupation with, other women was a striking feature of the investigation...'.¹⁴³ Writing about feminist bisexuality, Deborah Gregory similarly observed a strength of emotional connection between women: 'There is both pleasure and relief in the feeling, "I know you. I sense what you want, I sense what you feel, because you are like me, I feel those things, too."' ¹⁴⁴ Gregory reflected that many feminists who identified as bisexual did not 'sleep with any men at all nor do they contemplate doing so, but they recognise within themselves – and do not reject – the emotional openness to the possibility that they could feel sufficient rapport with some man to want a sexual relationship with him'. 'I assume', said Gregory, 'there is a big difference between "unlikely" and "impossible"'.¹⁴⁵ However, emotional reciprocation from women was also not necessarily guaranteed.

Many women found that other women were not necessarily reliable sources of emotional support. "We" discovered that competition, envy, jealousy, oppression, violence and abuse exist between women.'¹⁴⁶ Careless and Cotton observe that, for some women, the WLM could feel 'cliquey'.¹⁴⁷ Janet Ree who had recalled her emotional engagement with women in the WLM also recalled moments of disconnection such as a lack of empathy or interest when she turned up at a women's meeting shortly after giving birth to her daughter. Despite this, Ree maintained that her relationships with women in the WLM were 'far more important than [her] relationship with a man ... at that time. Far more intense and loving, subtle, engaging, profound.'¹⁴⁸ For Black women, 'sisterhood' was more tenuous. Mo Ross recalled that, following an initial excitement, she soon noticed a lack of connection in predominantly white feminist groups. Ross recalled 'hearing myself at different meetings trying to say "I have a different story to tell, there's some bits that are similar, but I've got a different song to sing", and white women not wanting to hear that, and instead wanting to talk about whether there should be smoking or no smoking at meetings'.¹⁴⁹ Pelusa from Chile similarly found a lack of understanding from the predominantly white WLM. Having been dissuaded from putting imperialism, an issue that had shaped the lives of 'many of us Black and Third World women', on the agenda for a socialist feminist conference in 1980, Pelusa suggested, with reference to the term 'sisterhood', that 'the least that I could expect from

¹⁴³ Charlotte Wolff, *Bisexuality: A Study*, (London, 1979 [First published 1977]), p. 92.

¹⁴⁴ Deborah Gregory, 'From where I stand: A case for feminist bisexuality', in Cartledge and Ryan, *Sex and Love*, pp. 141-156, at p.145.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory, 'From where I stand', at p.144.

¹⁴⁶ Helen Palmer, 'In sisterhood', *Trouble and Strife* 14 (Autumn 1988), pp. 26-30, at p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Careless and Cotton, 'No woman is an island', at p. 18.

¹⁴⁸ Wandor, *Once a Feminist*, p. 103.

¹⁴⁹ Jackie Kay and Pratibha Parmar, 'Pushing the Boundaries: Mo Ross talks with Jackie Kay and Pratibha Parmar', in Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis and Pratibha Parmar (ed.), *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*, (London, 1988), pp. 169-187, at p. 178.

my sisters here was a willingness to discuss it and its affects on all our lives'.¹⁵⁰ Pelusa suggested that, despite the talk of sisterhood, 'it doesn't show in our actions'.¹⁵¹

For many feminists, walking away from men was neither possible or desirable. Margaret Elphinstone declared: 'my father, my brother, my husband, my lover ... infiltrate to my heart, and there is nothing wrong with my heart'.¹⁵² Yet, said Elphinstone, all of those relationships were imbued with sexism.¹⁵³ While Elphinstone thought that change was possible - that men and women 'have the potential to truly understand and trust each other' – she was also of the view that 'we can't realise it, not now, not yet'¹⁵⁴. Further, it was not possible, in Elphinstone's view, for individual women to make the change through their particular relationships with men. Rather, a 'revolution' was necessary. 'Until society changes,' said Elphinstone, 'I don't think it's possible for any individual relationships between a man and a woman to defeat sexism. Therefore, my effort should go into changing society, should it not?'¹⁵⁵ Many recognised that social change needed more than the elimination of oppression based on gender. Noting that her emotional relationships with women could be as challenging as with men, Nira Yuval-Davis pointed out that 'differences among women are as important and significant as the differences between women and men; that national, racial, class, place in the life cycle, and other social divisions are interrelated and enmeshed with gender differences'.¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

While historians have examined the emotional lives of feminists at length, little attention has been paid in the historiography to emotion as an important focus for feminist theorizing about men in the WLM. There are good reasons for this. In the first place, emotional relationships between men and women were intensely personal, making it difficult to extract them for public and political examination. Further, early feminist analysis of love and intimacy had been 'unambiguously critical' positioning relationships with men as the primary site of subordination.¹⁵⁷ Intimate relationships with men were seen to '[divert] women's energies from

¹⁵⁰ Pelusa, 'Turning the world upside down', in Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis and Pratibha Parmar (ed.), *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*, (London, 1988), pp. 307-314, at pp. 311 and 312.

¹⁵¹ Pelusa, 'Turning the world upside down', at p. 312.

¹⁵² Margaret Elphinstone, 'Living with a man', *Spare Rib* 140 (March 1984), pp.52-54, at p. 52.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Elphinstone, 'Living with a man', at p. 54.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'The (dis)comfort of being "hetero"', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Heterosexuality: Feminism and Psychology Reader*, (London, 1993), pp. 52-53, at p. 53.

¹⁵⁷ Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question*, p. 113.

more worthwhile pursuits'.¹⁵⁸ This quarantining intensified following the revolutionary feminist identification of heterosexual women as 'collaborators' with 'the enemy' and the emergence of the 'sex wars' in the 1980s. Despite these challenges, however, women continued to critically scrutinize their relationships with men and articulate frustration with gendered patterns of emotional exchange with works appearing throughout the two decades and into the 1990s.

This chapter has revealed the extent to which gender shaped the nature of emotional exchange between men and women. This insight challenges a history of emotional intimacy in Britain that understates the extent to which gendered norms continued to constrain the achievement of genuine emotional connection between men and women throughout the late twentieth century. Both Marcus Collins and Claire Langhamer respectively acknowledge that many relationships failed to live up to the promise of greater emotional intimacy. Collins suggests that relationships no longer structured around patriarchal norms foundered 'from the sheer absences of clear rules and roles'.¹⁵⁹ Rather than 'absences of clear rules and roles', however, gendered emotional roles impeded the achievement of emotional intimacy. This chapter has demonstrated that, for many couples, greater emotional intimacy was not structurally possible. For Langhamer, 'romantic love, particularly when tied to sexual satisfaction and emotional growth, ... made demands upon individuals which went well beyond the successful performance of established gender roles'.¹⁶⁰ However, the picture presented by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s suggests that, rather than transcending gender roles, gender, in fact, strongly shaped the nature, and expectations, of *emotional* exchange between men and women. It cannot be assumed that both men and women were actively committed to an emotional intimacy based on a reciprocal notion of empathy and support. Rather, emotional relationships remained very structured around gendered emotional roles in which male emotional selfhood had primacy.

While Michael Roper suggests greater emotional range by men may have been increasingly countenanced from the end of World War I, this did not displace ongoing significant constraints on *public* male emotional expression.¹⁶¹ As late as 1992, Vic Seidler spoke of a 'public world of work where often there is little space for our emotional lives'.¹⁶² While some would suggest that, as a result of these constraints, the emotional range of men was limited, there were many who

¹⁵⁸ Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 128.

¹⁶⁰ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, masculinity and citizenship in England 1950-1970', *Past & Present* 187 (May 2005), pp. 157-185; and Francis, 'The Labour Party: Modernisation and the politics of restraint'.

¹⁶² Vic Seidler, 'Men, sex and relationships', at p. 2.

felt that the capacity of men to be emotional was not at issue. Rather, it was the fact that men saved this emotional expression for the home and, most specifically, for women to manage. While it was from the work of Arlie Hochschild in America that 'emotional labour' received its name, British feminists such as Lee Comer had already identified the 'work' of caring for the emotional wellbeing of men from early in the 1970s. Feminists were quick to query the gendered basis for this responsibility and the anti-sexist men Lucy Delap interviewed, responded to the critique of emotional labour through modes such as joining men's groups in which they could explore their emotions with other men. Delap's study is, however, silent on the issue of reciprocity either from the perspective of feminists or the anti-sexist men. In fact, the expression of guilt and shame that Delap identifies as predominant amongst anti-sexist men appears, rather than driving men to offer reciprocal emotional engagement and emotional support to women, to have encouraged men to withdraw from their partners into introspection.¹⁶³ Somewhere along the line, the core message from women was lost. Rather than disconnecting from men, women, including many feminists, were seeking reciprocity in a bid for authentic emotional connection that operated beyond the bounds of gendered emotional roles. To achieve this, men would need to take more responsibility for their emotional lives and make space for, and genuinely engage with, the emotional lives of women. This message was consistently echoed in the assessments of feminists and non-feminists alike. Where women wavered was on the ability, or otherwise, of men to provide this emotional engagement.

One person who felt that she had successfully overcome the inequality that affected the achievement of intimacy was Jill Tweedie. Tweedie married three times, the third time to the British journalist Alan Brien, who she remained married to for twenty years until her death from motor neurone disease in 1993. It was to this relationship that she pointed as an example of real love. It was a love between two adults who had capacity and will to manage their emotions. For Tweedie, rather than more *emotion*, more *reason* was needed. For Tweedie, both men *and* women needed emotional management skills – self-respect, self-awareness and an ability 'to filter the emotions through our reasoning capacities'.¹⁶⁴ This required 'introspection' said Tweedie but it also required 'enough introspection for empathy', that is, the application of insights from that introspection to the world of the other person. Tweedie acknowledged, however, that equality was a pre-condition for such a relationship. In her relationship with Brien, which she firmly distinguished from her prior relationships, Tweedie and her husband represented, and respected each other as, equal autonomous individuals with both strengths and faults. '[I]t is our

¹⁶³ Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain'.

¹⁶⁴ Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, p. 209.

separateness', said Tweedie, 'and two people's separateness within love, that is our gift to each other and you cannot be separate if you are unequal'.¹⁶⁵ This was, according to Tweedie, very rare between women and men.

¹⁶⁵ Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, p. 195.

4. FROM PERVASIVE THREAT TO ‘RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR VIOLENCE’?

Pete wasn't a lad for showing his feelings in any shape or form.¹

Just as Ann Oakley's father – Richard Titmuss – had hoped for a boy in 1944, so had John Sutcliffe. This, suggested John, was a common wish: 'They pretend to be delighted when it's a girl, but they'd have been much more delighted if it had been a boy, the first one. It's the sort of thing that fellers do.'² He got his wish and, on 2 June 1946, shortly after John's demobilization from the Merchant Navy, Kathleen Sutcliffe gave birth to a boy who they named Peter. Growing up in Bradford, eventually joined by two brothers and three sisters, Peter was, in many respects, an unremarkable boy with a 'passivity that was to characterise his whole school career, so that at the end of it very few teachers, head-teachers or priests attached to his schools would be able to associate the name with a face'.³ Even his family sometimes didn't notice him when he was in the same room.⁴ Peter Sutcliffe would, however, soon become a household name. The seemingly quiet child who grew into a man who never showed emotion came to be known as 'the Yorkshire Ripper' who was convicted of murdering 13 women together with the attempted murder of seven other women. Most sources cite Peter Sutcliffe's violence as taking place between 1975 and 1980 but there are also many accounts of violence against women prior to this, from as early as 1969.⁵ It was from the late 1970s, however, that Sutcliffe would gain national notoriety for his violence.

As Sutcliffe's violence took hold, so, too, did feminist anger about violence against women. In this chapter, feminist theorizing about violence against women is examined closely. The historiography is rich in accounts of the campaigning and activities of the WLM around the issue of violence. Violence against women was an urgent issue and was a rich site for thinking about the nature of the relationship between women and men throughout the entire period of the WLM (and beyond). This chapter examines the dynamics of that thinking. By analysing WLM thinking about violence in detail, it charts a different path from a historiography largely focused on the

¹ Laurie Ashton, quoted in Gordon Burn, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son: The Story of Peter Sutcliffe*, (London, 1984), p. 43.

² John Sutcliffe, quoted in Burn, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*, p. 13.

³ Burn, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*, p. 22.

⁴ Burn, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*, p. 39.

⁵ See, for example, Louise Wattis, *Revisiting the Yorkshire Ripper Murders: Histories of Gender, Violence and Victimhood*, (Cham, 2018); Chris Clark and Tim Tate, *Yorkshire Ripper: The Secret Murders*, (London, 2015); and Burn, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son*.

broad framing by feminists of violence as an instrument of oppression. Historians of the WLM have acknowledged differences in opinion about the place of violence in the construction of masculinity, but usually in passing, devoting a page or two at most to the topic: the historiography provides little detail about the variety of ways in which violence against women was theorized and, again, less has been said about feminist expectations of the nature of change.⁶ This chapter explores the ways in which feminists explored the possibility of a society rooted in non-violence. While there was broad agreement that violence was a tool of male domination, recognition of this would not, in itself, be sufficient to transform society. Feminists also considered how men were individually and collectively situated in that framework. It was recognised that the possibility of a nonviolent society would require multiple lines of change on the part of men (and women), individually and collectively. Underpinning this change was a reimagining of British masculinity.

4.1 The ‘peaceable’ British man

For many people, Peter Sutcliffe was seen as an outlier in an, otherwise, ‘peaceable’ nation. Actual levels of violence were, however, less important than perception as Britain adopted non-violence as a specific cultural identity.⁷ Jon Lawrence points to the period following the First World War in which ‘it became common place to argue that the use of violence – both at home and in the empire – was somehow “un-British”’.⁸ Lawrence does not contend that all British people were now universally nonviolent pacifists. Rather, Britain at large saw itself as somewhat above violence. ‘This demanded’, suggests Lucy Noakes, ‘personal, as much as political, control and helped to shape the emotional economy of self-restraint and self-management that came to dominate in the interwar years’.⁹ Sonya Rose suggests that, flowing from this, a more ‘tempered’ masculinity’ was carried into World War II and contrasted with what was perceived as a more

⁶ See, for example Lucy Delap, ‘Rethinking rapes: Men’s sex lives and feminist critiques’, *Contemporary British History* 36:2 (2022), pp. 253-276, at p. 258; Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women’s Liberation Movement, 1968 – Present*, (Oxford, 2019), p. 176; Sarah Browne, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Scotland*, (Manchester, 2014), p. 141; Eve Setch, ‘Women’s Liberation anti-violence organisation’, in Helen Graham, Ann Kaloski, Ali Neilson and Emma Robertson (eds), *The Feminist Seventies* (York, 2003), pp. 59-71, at pp. 64-65; and Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain*, (Oxford, 1993), p. 320.

⁷ Clive Emsley identifies this rhetoric from the eighteenth century. Clive Emsley, *Hard Men: The English and Violence since 1750*, (London and New York, 2005).

⁸ Jon Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom: War, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-first world war Britain’, *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003), pp. 557-589, at p. 559.

⁹ Lucy Noakes, *Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain*, (Manchester, 2020), p. 51. For an insight into changing attitudes to militarism in the inter-war period, see also Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, (London, 1996), pp. 181-192.

aggressive, less humane, masculinity of the German military.¹⁰ The rhetoric of considered self-control was reinvigorated following World War II and, as observed by Rose, while phrased in general terms, the rhetoric was particularly pertinent to constructions of masculinity. “Good citizenship” and masculinity were virtually the mirror images of one another.¹¹ Violence by men was, however, excused in some cases.

There are, however, always ways in which societies, particularly ‘the dominant or powerful groups in that society’, will legitimate the use of violence.¹² One of the ways this was evident in post-war Britain was in the context of race and empire. Caroline Elkins identifies the persistence of an understanding of ‘imperial contingencies, which invariably included subjects’ purported savagery that needed to be tamed and reformed using violence’.¹³ While this sort of reasoning struggled against what Elkins refers to as ‘systemized violence’ carried out in Malaya and Kenya and elsewhere in the 1950s, Elkins suggests that Britain ‘always managed to reconcile the logic of necessary violence with its civilizing mission’.¹⁴ ‘Playing up the barbarism of one’s enemies to relax strictures on the use of force’, observes Erik Linstrum, ‘was a time honored tactic’.¹⁵ Similar justifications were seen on British soil. Jordanna Bailkin observes the categorisation of troublesome immigrants who had supposedly provoked violence from working-class white men, such as in the case of the 1958 riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham. ‘These connections between black misbehavior and white rioting served to “naturalize” racial antipathy and to place culpability for both the violence and the failures of assimilation upon the black targets.’¹⁶

Women were also, more frequently than not, blamed for the violence levelled against them. Even in the case of Peter Sutcliffe, the focus of attention turned to the behaviour of women. West Yorkshire Police, otherwise ineffective in stopping Peter Sutcliffe, suggested that victims of Sutcliffe had been careless. In 1977, police reported that a 42-year-old woman – who ‘may have ignored safety warnings and accepted a lift’ with the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ – had been left for dead in Bradford.¹⁷ Further to such accusations of carelessness, was the insinuation that some of the

¹⁰ Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Oxford, 2003), pp. 153-154.

¹¹ Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 152. See also Abigail Wills, ‘Delinquency, masculinity and citizenship in England 1950-1970’, *Past & Present* 187 (May 2005), pp. 157-185.

¹² Sandra Ball-Rokeach, ‘The legitimization of violence’, in James Short and Marvin Wolfgang (eds), *Collective Violence* (New York, 2009), pp. 100-111, at p. 102.

¹³ Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*, ((London, 2023), p. 358.

¹⁴ Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Erik Linstrum, *Age of Emergency; Living with Violence at the End of the British Empire*, (New York, 2023), p. 94.

¹⁶ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2012), p. 206.

¹⁷ ‘Ripper hunt stepped up’, *Daily Telegraph* (12 July 1977), p. 3. This victim was Mrs Maureen Young, a resident of Leeds. See also, ‘Ripper girls defy murder police’, *Daily Mail*, (Monday, 3 April 1978), p. 14.

women – assumed to be prostitutes – had been more deserving of the violence. In 1979, the *Daily Mirror* reported that ‘the Yorkshire Ripper’ felt remorse for the killing of 16-year-old shop assistant Jayne MacDonald quoting from a letter allegedly sent to the Police by ‘the Ripper’. ‘I didn’t know that she was decent’, quoted the paper.¹⁸ Feminist and journalist Joan Smith called out the double-standard quoting Jim Hobson, a senior detective on the case:

He has made it clear that he hates prostitutes. Many people do. We, as a police force, will continue to arrest prostitutes. But the Ripper is now killing innocent girls. That indicates your mental state and that you are in urgent need of medical attention. You have made your point. Give yourself up before another innocent woman dies.¹⁹

The application of judgement about the character, appearance and/or behaviour of a woman when considering cases of violence against women was common, particularly in cases where sexual violence was involved.

Just as in the case of the suggested responsibility of women to avoid attack by violent men such as Peter Sutcliffe, there were those who located a culpability in the women who incurred violence from their husbands, who were known as ‘battered wives’. ‘The idea that nagging provokes or causes the violence is not merely a justification provided by the man for his behaviour’, asserted British feminist sociologists R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, ‘it is very much a part of our cultural beliefs and is also used by researchers and representatives of social agencies to explain wife beating or to justify their own actions or inactions’.²⁰ In 1985 Jan Pahl observed that the vernacular phrase alone – ‘battered wives’ – suggested that it was women who are the problem, rather than the ‘violent husbands’. ‘The effect of this renaming of the problem is to shift attention from the instigators of the violence to its victims, and the shift tends to make it easy to blame the victim for the problem and to encourage a search for solutions among the victims rather than among the violent partners.’²¹ The issue of battered wives had come to prominence from the early 1970s following the establishment of a refuge, by Erin Pizzey (with three other women), in a four bedroom semi-detached house in Chiswick, which became known as Chiswick women’s Aid.²²

¹⁸ Attributed to ‘Mirror reporter’, ‘The Ripper Regrets’, *Daily Mirror*, (Monday November 19, 1979), p. 5.

¹⁹ Jim Hobson, extracted in Joan Smith, *Misogynies*, (London, 2013 [First published 1989]), p. 175.

²⁰ R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*, (New York, 1979), p. 133.

²¹ Jan Pahl, ‘Introduction’, in Jan Pahl (ed.), *Private Violence and Public Policy: The Needs of Battered Women and The Response of the Public Services*, (London and New York, 1985), pp. 1-19, at p. 5. Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Sandra Walklate (*What is to be Done about Violence against Women: Gendered Violence(s) in the Twenty-First Century*, (Abingdon, 2024), pp. 27-28) also draw attention to the limitations inherent to the term ‘battered wives’ (instead of ‘battered women’) limiting the issue to marriage.

²² Originally set up as a women’s community centre, it quickly became apparent to the founders that there was an urgent need for refuge from violence.

Inspired by the Chiswick refuge, women formed groups across the country to establish similar facilities.²³

While Erin Pizzey's association with the WLM had always been tumultuous,²⁴ it was over her views on the causes of violence where a fissure between Pizzey and the WLM came to a head.²⁵ One of the most controversial perspectives that Pizzey put forward was the role that women, in her view, played in the violence against them. In one of the early reports on the Chiswick refuge, Jill Tweedie had been unequivocal about the source of violence. Violence was, according to Tweedie, 'a male problem'.²⁶ Pizzey rejected the attribution of sole responsibility to men. In *Prone to Violence*, which Pizzey authored with husband Jeff Shapiro in 1982, Pizzey put forward a theory of women who are addicted to violence.²⁷ A distinction was drawn in the book between an 'innocent victim of another person's violence' and 'a violence-prone person [who] is the victim of their own addiction to violence'.²⁸ Explaining the 'violence-prone' woman, Pizzey and Shapiro asserted: 'Having been reared on violence, she will only feel *alive* and satisfied in a situation of great danger, so she often deliberately provokes a man to the point where he will hit her. Then in her pain she returns to her quiet and peaceful inner-womb of the opioid state.'²⁹ Not only were the propositions put forward in the book not credible but the book, according to sociologist and feminist Liz Kelly, was 'dangerous' in absolving the responsibility of men and '[giving] an excuse for further denial of the needs of battered women – they like it so why bother to help'.³⁰ Kelly was not alone in finding the suggestion, that women were responsible for the violence they experienced, offensive. Over the course of the 1970s, feminist anger intensified in the face of what seemed to be continued legitimisation of violence against women.

²³ Gill Hague reports that '[m]ore than 40 refuges came into being just in 1974 alone, across the whole UK, with new ones being set up all the time' [Gill Hague, *History and Memories of the Domestic Violence Movement: We've Come Further than You Think*, (Bristol, 2021), p. 72]. It should also be acknowledged that battered women were also being taken in by other groups and women's centres on an ad-hoc basis across the country [See Hague, *History and Memories of the Domestic Violence Movement*, p. 66].

²⁴ Erin Pizzey, *This Way to the Revolution: A Memoir*, (London and Chicago, 2011).

²⁵ In addition to a fundamental disagreement over the causes of violence, the split also reflected Pizzey's 'antipathy to collective and co-operative ways of working' which distinguished all areas of the WLM (Hague, *History and Memories of the Domestic Violence Movement*, p. 71).

²⁶ Jill Tweedie, 'Beaten up women and their children', *Spare Rib* 12 (June 1973), from p. 4, at p. 12.

²⁷ Erin Pizzey and Jeff Shapiro, *Prone to Violence*, (London, 1982).

²⁸ Pizzey and Shapiro, *Prone to Violence*, footnote at p. 18. (Emphasis in original)

²⁹ Pizzey and Shapiro, *Prone to Violence*, p. 170. (Emphasis in original)

³⁰ Liz Kelly, 'Who needs enemies with friends like Erin Pizzey?', *Spare Rib* 127 (February 1983), p. 39.

4.2 Reframing violence against women

In 1977, shortly after the discovery of Jayne MacDonald in Chapeltown, feminists in Leeds galvanized to express anger about violence against women. Jayne was the fifth murder victim of Sutcliffe and the fourth in Leeds. Some of the women in Leeds started to transform the fear they felt for their safety at night into anger. Why, questioned the Leeds feminists, were women responsible for violence against women? Why was the onus on women to manage violence by men? Why were women expected to limit their freedoms? These questions prompted the first of the Reclaim the Night demonstrations in Britain modelled on marches that had taken place elsewhere.³¹ A call went out in the WLM publication WIRES: 'Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group wants to hold a women only midnight demonstration on the theme of "every woman has the right to walk alone at night without fear" and "fight rape". We want to hold ours in the Chapeltown area of Leeds where a Jack the Ripper type character has murdered several women... and to get as many women as possible on the march.'³² The march – inspired by similar protests in Scotland and Germany - was held on 12 November 1977 and mirrored across the UK with women taking to the streets in Manchester, London, Lancaster, Brighton, Bristol, York and Newcastle.³³ For many, the march was an expression of anger. Marion Bowman, reporting from the walk in Manchester, said: 'We want to say we've had enough of male violence and male justification for it.' Rather than focusing on the actions of women, said the Manchester group, police and the community should be focusing on the culpability of men. 'It's men's violence that's got to stop.'³⁴

The following year, at the 1978 WLM Conference in Birmingham attended by over 3,000 women, a seventh demand was added to the list of WLM demands: 'Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status; and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women.'³⁵ The goal was to eliminate violence, including the threat of violence, from the lives of women. However, this was a complicated project. There wasn't agreement about the connection of men to violence. Were all men violent or just some? What was the reach of the causal factors, of which two or more might be in operation. As women within the WLM shared

³¹ Gill Hague points to marches 'in Philadelphia in 1975 and in Brussels in 1976'. Hague, *History and Memories of the Domestic Violence Movement*, p. 88.

³² WIRES 39 (11 October 1977), p.9

³³ For a history of the Reclaim the Night marches, see Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement*, (Basingstoke, 2015).

³⁴ Marion Bowman, 'We will walk without fear November 12th: Manchester', *Spare Rib* 66 (January 1978), pp. 22-23, at p. 22.

³⁵ Anna Coote, 'Seven pillars of liberation', *The Guardian* (14 April 1978), p. 9.

stories of their personal experiences within consciousness-raising groups across the country they realised the extent to which they shared experiences of violence and, from this, in line with the sentiment captured in the saying ‘the personal is political’, women ‘began to collectivize their experiences of male [violence against women], no longer conceptualizing these as individual problems or failures, but as symptoms of an unequal patriarchal society’.³⁶ Interestingly, in a study of sexual violence, Liz Kelly found that women outside the WLM shared a similar vernacular understanding of violence against women as rooted in ‘oppressive social relations’. Reflecting on interviews of 60 women³⁷ on the topic of sexual violence, Kelly observed: ‘Whilst the majority of the women I interviewed did not define themselves as feminists, their causal explanations draw on an experiential understanding of men’s dominance and women’s subordination.’³⁸

Similar understandings had already been emerging from feminists involved with the growing network of women’s refuges. As feminists working with ‘battered women’ across the UK distanced themselves from Erin Pizzey and the Chiswick refuge, they started to ‘develop more complex understandings of, and responses to, what became known as domestic violence’.³⁹ In 1975, the National Women’s Aid Federation, which formed in 1974 as an umbrella organisation for refuges across the country⁴⁰, made a submission to the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage in 1975. The submission outlined the ‘aims and objectives of the National Women’s Aid Federation’, including: ‘To educate and inform the public, the media, the police, the courts, the Social Services and other authorities with respect to the battering of women, mindful of the fact that this is a result of the general position of women in society.’⁴¹ In an article in *Spare Rib* in 1978, the Federation elaborated on their position to note that, while capitalism underpinned the structure of the family, ‘simply getting rid of capitalism wouldn’t in itself radically change the position of

³⁶ Finn Mackay, ‘Feminist activism in movement: UK activism against VAW’, in Nadia Ahgtaie and Geetanjali Gangoli (eds), *Understanding Gender Based Violence: National and International Contexts*, (London, 2014), pp. 81-94, at p.83.

³⁷ Interviewees included 45 women who reported experiencing sexual violence and 15 reporting that they had not experienced sexual violence.

³⁸ Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 229.

³⁹ Zora Simic, ‘From battered wives to domestic violence: The transnational circulation of Chiswick Women’s Aid and Erin Pizzey’s *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours will Hear* (1974)’, *Australian Historical Studies* 51:2 (2020), pp. 107-126, at p. 111.

⁴⁰ In 1976 Scotland established an independent federation. In 1978, separate organisations were established for England, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively.

⁴¹ Appendix 6: Letter from National Women’s Aid Federation. ‘Battered Women’, in *Report from the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage, Session 1974-75, Volume 2, Report, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, H.C. 553-II, (London, 1975), p. 491. Despite the capture of a political understanding of violence against women in the objectives, Jan Pahl observed a tension amongst refuge workers between those in the movement who she referred to as the ‘radicals’ driven by the politics of WLM and the ‘reformers’ who were more ‘interested in the “refuge” side of the enterprise’ [Jan Pahl, ‘Refuges for battered women: Social provision or social movement?’, *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* 8:1-2 (January 1979), pp. 25-35, at p. 31.

women'. Rather, the organisation pointed to patriarchy – 'wherein all women are oppressed by all men' – as the cause of women's oppression.⁴²

The connection of 'violence against wives' to patriarchy was reiterated by Dobash and Dobash in 1979. Having conducted their research working closely with both the Scottish Women's Aid Federation and the National Women's Aid Federation, they concluded that 'the correct interpretation of violence between husbands and wives conceptualizes such violence as the extension of the domination and control of husbands over their wives'.⁴³ Violence was, argued, Dobash and Dobash, a mechanism of control woven into the 'hierarchical ideology which has institutionalized the subservience of one half of the population and deified and enshrined that relationship to such an extent that it is almost beyond question or scrutiny'.⁴⁴ In their wide-ranging scrutiny of the elements that locked in the control of women by men, Dobash and Dobash stressed the importance of considering the 'structural aspect of the patriarchy' which included the institutions that - imbued with patriarchal ideology - ensured that the control of women by men was maintained.⁴⁵ Similarly Sylvia Walby observed that the role of the State in establishing an environment conducive to violence against women should be challenged. Walby proposed that male violence – 'systematically condoned and legitimated by the state's refusal to intervene against it except in exceptional instances' – was reliant on State sanction.⁴⁶ Perceived as one of the most insidious of these was the infamous protection of rape in marriage. The exclusion of this particular form of violence from criminal law was, in part, a legacy from Sir Matthew Hale (a former Chief Justice of England) who, in 1736, declared:

... the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract.⁴⁷

⁴² National Women's Aid Federation, "'He's got to show her who's boss: The National Women's Aid Federation challenges a man's right to batter', *Spare Rib* 69 (1978), pp. 15-18, at p. 16. The linking of violence in the home to the patriarchal oppression of women has been retained by the organisation: 'At women's Aid we recognise that while domestic abuse can be experienced by a range of people, it is gendered and is most frequently perpetrated against women by male perpetrators. We recognise that domestic abuse happens within the context of patriarchy and we use our platform to challenge this.' Women's Aid, 'Our values', at << <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/about-us/what-we-believe/>>>, accessed 24 February 2025.

⁴³ Dobash and Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 15.

⁴⁴ R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, 'Love, honour and obey: Institutional ideologies and the struggle for battered women', *Contemporary Crisis* 1 (1977), pp. 403-415, at p. 403.

⁴⁵ Dobash and Dobash, 'Love, honour and obey'.

⁴⁶ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1990), p. 21.

⁴⁷ Sir Matthew Hale, *Historia Placitorum Coronae: The History of the Pleas of the Crown*, Volume 1, (London, 1736), p. 629.

In 1982, with this legal principle still in operation, the Rape in Marriage Campaign (RIMC) was established seeking ‘to abolish the exclusion of married women from any legal protection against husbands who rape’.⁴⁸ The RIMC formed after a Criminal Law Revision Committee (CLRC) working paper on sexual offences was released in 1980 with what was perceived to be a qualified recommendation to remove the exclusion on marital rapes. *Spare Rib* reported the recommendation in scathing tones:

The CLRC does grudgingly recommend that rape in marriage be made an offence – but they are concerned that “If wives were to be treated in the same way as other women, that might lead to prosecutions which some would think were not desirable in the interests of the family or the public.” For this reason the committee decided that no prosecution should go ahead without the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions, who will decide whether it is in the “public interest”. It is fairly obvious that the “public” is assumed to be male.⁴⁹

In the final report handed down by the CLRC in 1983, there was no recommendation to make marital rape an offence at all. A small shift was recommended in making marital rape an offence only where the husband and wife were no longer cohabiting. Although effectively abolished by the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland in 1983, the ‘rule’ composed by Matthew Hale would remain in place in England and Wales until 1994.

It was not just eighteenth-century pronouncements that were legitimizing violence against women, and it was not only confined to violence in marriage. Women drew attention to evidence of attitudes that condoned violence against women outside of the home. In 1977, Guardsman Thomas Holdsworth was given a three year sentence for the attempted rape of Carol Maggs during which he injured her kidney and left her with serious internal injuries.⁵⁰ Two months later, the Court of Appeal altered the sentence to a six months suspended sentence in the belief that the sentence would allow Holdsworth to continue to ‘serve [his] country’ in the military.⁵¹ The value, held by the Court, of Holdsworth’s military role over the damage caused to seventeen-year-old Carol Maggs did not go unnoticed. Neither did Justice Wien’s view that ‘Miss Maggs would probably have been less severely injured had she submitted to rape’.⁵² It was in their response to this case that the activist group Women Against Rape (WAR) came to public attention organising a protest of the decision that included disrupting the court room of Lord Justice Roskill, one of

⁴⁸ [unattributed], ‘Rape in marriage: Make it a crime!’, *Spare Rib* 126 (January 1983), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁹ [unattributed], ‘Rape in marriage’, at p.30.

⁵⁰ Nikki Knewstub, ‘Guards to sack soldier in sex case’, *The Guardian* (23 June 1977), p. 2.

⁵¹ Despite the efforts of the Court of Appeal to allow Holdsworth to remain in the military, he was discharged under the Queen’s Regulations which required discharge in any case where a soldier received a prison sentence, including a suspended sentence. Nikki Knewstub, ‘Guards to sack soldier in sex case’.

⁵² Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present*, (London, 2007), p. 370.

the three appeal judges who had decided to release Holdsworth and defacing a Royal Artillery memorial in Horse Guards with the words: 'Women against rape unite'.⁵³

WAR was explicit in its condemnation of institutional failure to protect women. 'It is rape by all the authorities, as well as by individual men, that women are refusing to accept.'⁵⁴ The group called for a wide range of changes including, but not limited to, changes to the treatment of rape victims by police and medical staff, fair and unbiased trials and investigations, ready compensation of victims, a prohibition on references to a woman's sexual history, and a prohibition on judges warning juries that women lie.⁵⁵ But there was also a sense that action against the State and its institutions was just fiddling around the edges. Jill Radford captured the sentiment: 'An analysis which locates men's violence as the fundamental form of social control of women in patriarchal society demonstrates that, in the absence of any fundamental change in the power relations between men and women, the problem addressed will not be resolved by minor reforms in policing or law reform'.⁵⁶ And it was in the analysis of rape and sexual violence where theorising the role of men and masculinity rapidly advanced.

When Sutcliffe was at large in the north of England, the press drew a picture of a rampaging 'sex beast', a man set apart from the civilised world. But in fact he turned out to be an ordinary married man, with sexual attitudes not so very different from those held by thousands of men all around him.⁵⁷

The trial, conviction and sentencing of Peter Sutcliffe was not, for many feminists, a point of closure. Rather, '[t]he trial refused to recognise the way in which Sutcliffe's acts were an expression – albeit an extreme one – of the construction of an aggressive masculine sexuality and of women'.⁵⁸ This was out-of-step with feminist theorising that placed masculine sexuality at the heart of the subordination of women. One of the earlier proponents in this space was American feminist (and Oxford graduate), Kate Millett who, in 1970, published the very influential *Sexual Politics* drawing attention to the power relationships between men and women.⁵⁹ While Millett's

⁵³ [Unattributed], 'Free soldier may still be discharged', *Coventry Evening Telegraph* (21 June 1977), p. 17; [unattributed], 'Women storm judge's court over sex case', *Daily Mirror* (29 June 1977), p. 5.

⁵⁴ Ruth Hall, 'Introduction, Women Against Rape', [First published 1976], in Feminist Anthology Collective (ed.), *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80*, (London, 1981), pp. 216-217, at p. 217.

⁵⁵ Women Against Rape, 'Statement of Aims', [First published 1976], in Feminist Anthology Collective, *No Turning Back*, pp. 218-220.

⁵⁶ Jill Radford, 'Policing male violence – Policing women', in Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard (eds), *Women, Violence and Social Control*, (Basingstoke, 1987), pp. 30-45, at p.44.

⁵⁷ Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, 'Speakout: "We must move beyond attitudes that link cruelty and death with eroticism"', *Cosmopolitan* (November 1987), from p. 61, at p. 61.

⁵⁸ Hollway, Wendy, "'I just wanted to kill a woman" Why? The Ripper and male sexuality', *Feminist Review* 9 (October 1981), pp. 33-40, at p. 33.

⁵⁹ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, (Great Britain, 1971).

book, reflecting her academic background in English literature, substantially focused on literary analysis, it was also one of the first high-profile feminist statements of a theory of violence in the late twentieth century. In Millett's theoretical framework, violence – or 'force' – was critical to the establishment and maintenance of patriarchy. While actual force may not need to be used to maintain patriarchy – '[s]o perfect is its system of socialization' – the threat of force was, according to Millett, the undercurrent of patriarchy.⁶⁰ American radical feminist Susan Brownmiller, who was widely read in the British WLM, offered a similar analysis in 1975, identifying rape as 'nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear'.⁶¹ In *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Brownmiller positioned rape at the heart of patriarchy. 'It seems eminently sensible', she posited, 'to hypothesize that man's violent capture and rape of the female led first to the establishment of a rudimentary mate-protectorate and then sometime later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy'.⁶² In this, she placed responsibility for the violent subordination of women at the feet of all men. While acknowledging the role of law in perpetuating patriarchal control of women, the solution to sexual violence against women did not lie in law reform. 'I am of the opinion', she said, 'that the most perfect rape laws in the land, strictly enforced by the best concerned citizens, will not be enough to stop rape'.⁶³ The subordination of women, including the sexual exploitation of women, was a far more fundamental 'problem beyond any possible solution of criminal justice'.⁶⁴

Originally from America, Jalna Hanmer was a committed activist in the British WLM and an academic, blending both.⁶⁵ Hanmer, 'one of the founders of the National Women's Aid

⁶⁰ Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 43. Interestingly, Kate Millett's connection of force/violence to patriarchy is the subject of some debate. There are some who suggest that force – or violence – was not central to Millett's theory of patriarchy (see, for example, Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), pp. 233-234). However, Anne Edwards acknowledges that Millett drew a clear link between violence and patriarchal control (Anne Edwards, 'Male violence in feminist theory: An analysis of the changing conceptions of sex/gender violence and male dominance', in Hanmer and Maynard, *Women, Violence and Social Control*, pp. 13-29, at pp. 17-18). Liz Kelly also acknowledges the contribution of Kate Millett: 'A crucially important, although often neglected, aspect of her analysis is that control in patriarchal societies, as in all political systems, ultimately rests on force.' (Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, p. 21).

⁶¹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, (New York, 1975), p. 15. (Emphasis in original)

⁶² Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, p. 17.

⁶³ Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, p. 400.

⁶⁴ Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, p. 401.

⁶⁵ Sandra McNeil recounted that Hanmer, who established a Women's Studies program at the University of Bradford required 'every student who enrolled ... to volunteer to work on a feminist project, such as helping at a women's aid or a rape crisis centre'. McNeil observes: 'This was typical of Jalna's approach to feminism, that it must involve theory and practice.' [Sandra McNeil, 'Remembering Jalna Hanmer (1931-2023)', *Women's History Review* 33:2 (2024), pp. 169-172, at p. 169.]

Federation'⁶⁶, similarly saw 'force and its threat' at the heart of the subordination of women. 'Force and its threat is the primary variable that underwrites male supremacy in all present-day societies and throughout its history.'⁶⁷ Hanmer suggested that the forms of violence that constituted 'force and its threat' extended beyond the rape and violence against wives 'to include all modes of behaviour that coerce compliance'.⁶⁸ In 1984, Hanmer, with Sheila Saunders, published the results of a study of women in an 'inner city area in Leeds'. The research, which concentrated on a goal of '[interviewing] every woman on seven adjacent streets' was carried out in 1981, not long after Peter Sutcliffe had been arrested.⁶⁹ This timing was important and acknowledged by Hanmer and Saunders who felt that the proximity – in time and space – of 'the Yorkshire Ripper' would have drawn attention of potential interviewees to the issue of violence against women and make them more willing to discuss violence in their own lives. Surprisingly successful in terms of response rate, the team walked away with 129 completed questionnaires from 171 houses. From the responses, Hanmer and Saunders identified a system in which women were kept subordinated by the fear of violence. Rather than putting forward a definition of violence, however, Hanmer and Saunders allowed women to offer experiences that they viewed as violence. 'We wanted women to define violence for themselves.'⁷⁰ These definitions varied considerably but Hanmer and Saunders put forward a common thread that they felt linked the experiences described. 'The common strand running through these events is the inability of the woman to control the initiation of the behaviour and the subsequent interaction.'⁷¹ Hanmer and Saunders were not alone in broadening the range of actions (actual or threatened) that constituted 'violence against women'. By the latter half of the 1970s, feminist theorising around violence had shifted from thinking about the various forms of violence separately – e.g. wife-battering, rape, sexual harassment, flashing – to theorising about violence by men against women inclusive of all its forms. Reflecting on feminist approaches to violence across the 1970s and 1980s, Anne Edwards acknowledged a movement 'from separate accounts of specific types of

⁶⁶ Sandra McNeil, 'Remembering Jalna Hanmer (1931-2023)', *Women's History Review* 33:2 (2024), pp. 169-172, at p. 169.

⁶⁷ Jalna Hanmer, 'Male violence and the social control of women', [First published 1978], in Feminist Anthology Collective, *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975-80*, (London, 1981), pp. 190-195, at 190.

⁶⁸ Hanmer, 'Male violence and the social control of women', at p. 190.

⁶⁹ Jalna Hanmer and Sheila Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear: A Community Study of Violence to Women*, (London, 1984), p. 14.

⁷⁰ Hanmer and Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear*, p. 30.

⁷¹ Hanmer and Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear*, p. 33.

violence 'to an appreciation of male violence overall as being at some level a unitary phenomenon'.⁷²

However, for many, the focus remained specifically on 'sexual violence' reflecting a view that most, if not all, violence against women by men was sexual violence. Liz Kelly, who researched women's experiences of sexual violence, concluded from her interviews that 'the range of men's behaviour that women defined as abusive was neither reflected in legal codes nor in the analytic categories used in previous research'.⁷³ Rather, Kelly, like Hanmer and Saunders, identified a common connecting theme that, in her view, ran across a 'continuum' of behaviours. 'The basic common character underlying the many different forms of violence is the *abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to control women*.'⁷⁴ Kelly was anxious to clarify that the use of the term 'continuum' was not intended to rank the violence in terms of seriousness but, rather, merely to show that there were a range of overlapping behaviours – including (but not limited to) the threat of violence, flashing, sexual harassment, pressurized sex, rape and obscene phone calls - that constituted sexual violence. Kelly was also less concerned about closing in on the sexual nature of the violence saying, 'it is not possible to distinguish between forms of sexual violence on the basis of the violence being sexual or physical. In each form, in each individual assault, both aspects will be present although one may be more dominant than the other'.⁷⁵ Kelly counted domestic violence amongst the types of sexual violence. For some, heterosexual sex was firmly situated on that continuum as an act of violence.

When the seventh demand – 'freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion' – was added at the 1978 National Women's Liberation Conference, a sentence that had been included in the original proposal was now excluded. That sentence, intended to be a precursor to the demand, said: 'Male violence against women is an expression of male supremacy and political control of women.'⁷⁶ For some, such as Frankie Rickford, the sentence was 'profoundly reactionary, and implies a really divisive politics totally alien to the women who identify with women's liberation'.⁷⁷ The issue was the connection of the statement with revolutionary feminists' theorising of violence which tightly intertwined violence and sex in a way that made *all* men – individually and as a group – culpable in the building and maintaining of patriarchy. The application of culpability for violence to *all* men and ultimately to *all* sex with men,

⁷² Anne Edwards, 'Male violence in feminist theory', at p. 15.

⁷³ Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, p. 74.

⁷⁴ Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, p. 76. (Emphasis in original)

⁷⁵ Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*.

⁷⁶ Frankie Rickford, [untitled letter], *WIRES* 49 (4th May 1978), pp. 22-23, at p. 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

even with consent, represented a distinct theoretical strand. An early proponent of this position was US radical feminist Susan Griffin, who wrote, in 1971 that ‘the basic elements of rape are involved in all heterosexual relationships’.⁷⁸ Revolutionary feminists in Britain aligned with radical feminists in seeing men as the focus. ‘If we ignore men then the process by which we remain oppressed appears mysterious; it could even seem to be our fault.’⁷⁹ As observed in chapter 1, Leeds Revolutionary Feminists famously positioned men as ‘the enemy’ and heterosexual sex as a form of violence to control women.⁸⁰ The solution, for some, was to separate as much as possible from men. ‘It is not always possible for us to be totally separatist’, said radical feminist Marlene Packwood, ‘but we need to strive towards total separatism because it is our strongest tactic against them’.⁸¹

More than tactical, violence was, according to revolutionary feminist, Sheila Jeffreys, pervasive in private space and creating women-only spaces was necessary to allow women to escape the violence of males, but also to create spaces ‘where women can dance perform and be joyful without the eyes of men who leer, comment, harass and rape’.⁸² Many women, while supportive of creating women-only spaces, were uneasy about attributing violence to *all* men. For some Black women, there was a discomfort in creating ruptures with men with whom they shared a daily experience of racism. In this context, it was important to head off suggestions that they were ‘anti-men’:

‘We recognise that as Black people, we have a collective responsibility for each other. ... [T]he reality is that it’s not a Black man’s struggle or a Black woman’s struggle, but a Black people’s struggle.’⁸³

Women with male children struggled with the implications of radical theory for their sons. A letter writer in *Spare Rib* in September 1980 revealed strong feelings associated with the birth of a boy. ‘I felt that my body had betrayed me by producing a male ... I ignored him as much as I could for

⁷⁸ Susan Griffin, ‘Rape: The all-American crime’, *Ramparts* 10:3 (September 1971), reprinted by KNOW, inc. Pittsburgh, pp. 1-8, at p.3

⁷⁹ Lal Coveney, Margaret Jackson, Sheila Jeffreys, Leslie Kay and Pat Mahony, ‘Introduction’, in Lal Coveney, Margaret Jackson, Sheila Jeffreys, Leslie Kay and Pat Mahony, (eds), *The Sexuality Papers: Male Sexuality and the Social Control of Women*, (Abingdon and New York, 2019 [First published 1984]), pp. 9-21, at p.13.

⁸⁰ Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, ‘Political lesbianism: The case against heterosexuality’, *WIRES Newsletter* 81 (n.d.), n.p. The paper was later published in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*, (London 1981), pp. 5-10.

⁸¹ Marlene Packwood, ‘Political lesbianism – Mark II’, in Onlywomen Press (ed.), *Love your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*, (London 1981), pp. 26-29, at p. 27.

⁸² Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970-1990*, (London, 2018), p. 59.

⁸³ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe (eds), *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain*, (London, 1985), p. 173.

months, during which time I was depressed, angry, confused, hostile, guilty.’⁸⁴ It took, she said, about two years to become reconciled to her son and now, she reported, seven years later she could say that she loved her son. ‘I believe’, she said, ‘that learning to accept and love my son opened my eyes to the fact that maybe they’re not all the enemy’.

4.3 Violence at the heart of men?

While there was a wide acceptance of the connection of violence to the exercise of patriarchal power, many feminists were also reluctant to leave the analysis at that point. Lynne Segal expressed concern about generalising the exercise of violence exclusively to all men. Citing examples of female violence, Segal observed that the wielding of power through violence was not exclusive to men. ‘Fear of violent attack from men’, agreed Segal, ‘is the number one fear of women in both the United States and Britain today’. ‘But’, she cautioned, ‘if we want to get to the heart of this fear, and the escalating rates of violence in modern society, we shall have to include, but also progress beyond, an analysis simply in terms of gender’.⁸⁵ For many feminists, this raised challenging questions. Some instances of violence by women, such as cases of self-defence, sat easily within feminist theorizing. Less easily theorized, however, were instances where women were violent outside of the framework of self-defence.

In 1992, American feminist researcher Claire Renzetti published the results of a study of lesbian partner abuse. ‘It appears’, Renzetti declared, ‘that violence in lesbian relationships occurs at about the same frequency as violence in heterosexual relationships’.⁸⁶ While finding a strong correlation between dependence and violence, Renzetti was more uncertain about the relationship of power and violence in lesbian relationships. ‘With respect to some dimensions of power (e.g., decision making, the division of household labor)’, Renzetti reported, ‘batterers could be considered the more powerful partners’. In other respects such as material circumstances, however, Renzetti found that ‘victims tended to be more powerful’ but, perhaps, had ‘ceded power to batterers in an attempt to appease them’. Renzetti concluded: ‘This evidence lends support to the hypothesis that batterers are individuals who feel powerless and use violence as a means to achieve power and dominance in their intimate relationships.’⁸⁷ Renzetti’s research did not sit easily with some who, in addition to issues of methodology, saw the research as contributing to ‘a backlash against feminism’ by fuelling arguments to undermine the feminist

⁸⁴ M, ‘Thinking about boy children: I felt betrayed’, *Spare Rib* 98 (September 1980), p. 31.

⁸⁵ Segal, *Slow Motion*, p. 269.

⁸⁶ Claire Renzetti, *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*, (Newbury Park, 1992), p. 115.

⁸⁷ Renzetti, *Violent Betrayal*, p. 117.

analyses of male violence against women.⁸⁸ At the same time, feminists, such as Liz Kelly, argued that, despite the difficulty, it was important for feminists to tackle violence by women.⁸⁹ To not do so, suggested Kelly, had multiple risks. It would not only leave the issue to the interpretation of ‘the professionals and the media’ but would also ‘continue to file women and children who have suffered at the hands of women’.⁹⁰ Importantly, Kelly said:

Including women’s use of violence is only a threat to a version of feminism which views men and women, masculinity and femininity as fixed, unchanging, biologically based, which defines violence as an inherent potentiality in men. A feminism which begins from understanding gender as a social construct, which recognizes the variability with which gendered selves and individual biography combine, can locate women’s use of violence within its existing framework.⁹¹

For Kelly, writing with Sara Scott in 1989, the essential point was that ‘all human beings can choose to use violence’.⁹² Yet Kelly also considered the degree to which choice was exercised in situations where individuals felt powerless – situations which ‘create choices which are no choices’.⁹³ The woman in an abusive situation who felt unable to leave might respond with violence. Beyond this, however, Kelly and others theorised the use of violence as a response to a *threat* of powerlessness. Echoing Renzetti, Kelly observed that a ‘recurrent theme in accounts of abuse in lesbian relationships is the fear the abusive woman has of losing her partner; her controlling behaviour is directed towards ensuring she stays’. This expression of violence, said Kelly, was distinguished from the exercise of violence on the basis of ‘a heterosexual man’s sense of “rightful ownership”’. Rather, it was, argued Kelly, ‘connected to profound dread of isolation in a hostile world’.⁹⁴

While feminists did not resile from the framing of violence against women as an expression of socially-sanctioned power over women, the threat of powerlessness was also seen to exacerbate male violence. Lynne Segal argued, for instance, that while there was undeniably an essential link between masculinity and power, particularly an ‘unambiguous social power’, there were a range of theories, particularly psychoanalytic theories, that correlated aggression with a fear of

⁸⁸ See, for example, Sara Scott, ‘Lies, lesbians and statistics’, *Trouble and Strife* 28 (Spring 1994), pp. 36-40.

⁸⁹ Liz Kelly, ‘Unspeakable acts’, *Trouble and Strife* 21 (Summer 1991), pp. 13–20.

⁹⁰ Liz Kelly, ‘When does the speaking profit us?: Reflections on the challenges of developing feminist perspectives on abuse and violence by women’ in Marianne Hester, Liz Kelly and Jill Radford (eds), *Women Violence and Male Power: Feminist Activism, Research and Practice*, (Buckingham, 1996), pp. 34–49, at p. 35.

⁹¹ Kelly, ‘When does the speaking profit us?’, at pp. 36–37.

⁹² Ellen Bell, Liz Kelly and Sara Scott, ‘With our own hands: Violence between and by women’, *Trouble and Strife* 16 (Summer 1989), from p. 26, at p. 28.

⁹³ Kelly, ‘When does the speaking profit us?’, at p. 37.

⁹⁴ Kelly, ‘When does the speaking profit us?’, at p. 39.

powerlessness in men. 'The greater the threat, for some men, the more compulsive, the more coercive, the more violent the assertion of masculinity.'⁹⁵ Beyond psychoanalytical explanations, however, a link between material circumstances and the exacerbation of violence was drawn. Based on a study of 42 women in a refuge – the Women's Centre – between 1976 and 1980, researcher Jan Pahl acknowledged that, while violent husbands were a gendered issue, economic conditions were also relevant. Not only did economic conditions affect the ability of women to leave violent situations but survey results had also suggested an 'association between the violence and the unemployment of the husband'.⁹⁶ Abused women would also draw a connection between abuse and stress. In a memoir of her experience at the Chiswick women's refuge, Jenny Smith, who had been abused for years by her husband Lenny, tied Lenny's violence to unemployment and mental health issues.⁹⁷ Joan, who met Jenny at the refuge, after escaping from a husband who had 'broken my nose, knocked out my front teeth and cut me so badly I have needed stitches', attributed the violence to her husband's sensitivity to questions about his readiness to work: 'Most of our troubles began because he was work-shy – he would get a job as a labourer for a month or two then go on the dole. And if I dared to mention it I would be hit for my troubles.'⁹⁸ For Jenny, police harassment of her husband as a West Indian immigrant, compounded the issue.

Sylvia Walby noted that, while less common in feminist theorising around violence, there were examples of class-based analysis that suggested 'that men at the bottom of the class hierarchy are violent towards women as a result of the frustration generated by their circumstances'.⁹⁹ Elizabeth Wilson, writing from a socialist-feminist stance, pointed to class-based differences relevant to violence, suggesting an emphasis of aggression in working class boys.¹⁰⁰ 'The working-class youth's aggression – "bovver" – becomes a front to conceal his inner desperation and to protect him against a hostile world that condemns him, essentially, to failure'. On the other hand, proposed Wilson, middle-class masculinity – 'oriented around achievement, leadership and competence' – was 'less overtly aggressive' but, she continued, 'more authoritarian'.¹⁰¹ Segal,

⁹⁵ Lynne Segal, 'Changing men: Masculinities in context', *Theory and Society* 22:5 (October 1993), pp. 625-641, at p. 628.

⁹⁶ Jan Pahl, 'Marital violence and marital problems', in Jan Pahl (ed.), *Private Violence and Public Policy: The Needs of Battered Women and The Response of the Public Services*, (London and New York, 1985), pp. 29-43, at p. 42.

⁹⁷ Jenny Smith, *The Refuge: My Journey to the Safe House for Battered Women*, (London, 2014),

⁹⁸ Paula James and Sally Moore, 'Battered wives', *Daily Mirror* (Tuesday, 29 June 1973), p. 11.

⁹⁹ Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, *What is to be Done about Violence Against Women? Crisis in the Eighties*, (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 231.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, *What is to be Done about Violence Against Women?*, p 231.

similarly pointed to research that suggested a link between class and the nature and expression of aggression. Segal expressed concern that feminists were '[losing] sight of the significance of class oppression for the sake of identifying a universal male beastliness'.¹⁰² Segal suggested, for example, that: 'It is the sharp and frustrating conflict between the lives of lower working-class men and the image of masculinity as power, which informs the adoption and, for some, the enactment, of a more aggressive masculinity.'¹⁰³

4.4 The objectification of women

In addition to the exercise of power, feminists also paid attention to the way in which perpetrators of violence saw their victims. In her critique of Renzetti's study of lesbian relationships, Sara Scott suggested that, rather than focusing on 'nebulous emotional concepts such as dependency', a better starting point would be to examine the ways in which women were objectified.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, in relation to male violence against women, the objectification of women was a significant focus for feminists with specific attention paid to the cultural production of women as sex objects, particularly through pornography.

It may not be the case, as anti-porn feminists claim, that there is a direct relationship between pornography and violence against women, such as that men look at a pornographic depiction of rape and then go out and do it. But in a more diffuse way, women know that the existence, and display, of such images is bound to shape men's view of women. How could it not?¹⁰⁵

With anger towards police, the courts, the media and men, 500 women from across the country attended the Sexual Violence Against Women conference in Leeds in November 1980. A new campaign was launched bringing together the activities of several existing groups, including Feminists Against Sexual Terrorism and Women Against Rape, under a united banner – Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW).¹⁰⁶ The point was also to bring together women's critique against all forms of sexual violence against women including sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault, obscene telephone calls, prostitution and 'gynaecological and obstetric

¹⁰² Segal, *Slow Motion*, p. 265.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ In this, Scott was quoting American feminist D.A. Clarke, 'Consuming passions: Some thoughts on history, sex and free enterprise', in Irene Reti (ed.), *Unleashing Feminism: Critiquing Sadomasochism in the Gay Nineties*, (Santa Cruz, 1993), pp. 106-153, at p. 144, extracted in Scott, 'Lies, lesbians and statistics', at p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Melissa Benn, 'Campaigning against pornography', in James Curran, Jake Ecclestone, Giles Oakley and Alan Richardson (eds), *Bending Reality: The State of the Media*, (London, 1986), pp. 169-174, at p. 170.

¹⁰⁶ Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*, (London, 1982), p.204. A campaign with the same name had been established in the US.

practice which violates women's bodies'.¹⁰⁷ Also listed was pornography 'which incites men to hate and be violent to women'. It was agreed that two days of action would take place on 11 and 12 December 1980 where women across the country would independently plan and execute direct action to protest violence against women under the banner of WAVAW.¹⁰⁸ Much of the action targeted perceived depictions of violence against women including the occupation by 30 women of the offices of the *Sun* newspaper 'in protest at its use of rape stories for titillation', gluing the locks in doors of porn shops in Manchester, throwing paint-filled eggs at cinema screens in London, leafleting outside a cinema in Bradford, and spray painting in subways in Coventry. On 12 December, 12,300 women protested 'sex-and-violence films' in Leicester Square. This would be the beginning of a long campaign. Escalating the protest, in October 1982 women identified only as Angry Women claimed responsibility for two arson attacks on sex shops in Chapeltown in Leeds. In their statement in *Spare Rib* they stated:

Pornography is made by men for men's pleasure. It shows women as sex objects to be used, humiliated and degraded. The laws, the police and the courts do nothing to stop this revolting industry. As women we do not want and will not have our bodies used in this way. We believe that porn encourages sexual violence to women including rape, incest and child abuse.' They promised to maintain the campaign 'until men stop this wholesale degradation of women.'¹⁰⁹

Well before this, in 1978, the London Revolutionary Feminist (anti-porn) Group had written a conference paper which explained the link between pornography and violence against women. 'Pornography could never on its own be responsible for the way men treat women', they clarified. But it had, in their opinion, 'real terrifying effects' by '[validating] men in not seeing, whilst it facilitates and justifies rape, violence, verbal and physical abuse'.¹¹⁰ In referring to 'not seeing', feminists were calling attention to the dehumanizing effect of pornography in which women were turned into objects by men. Making it clear that they were 'not against sex', 'not concerned about sex shops "lowering the tone of the neighbourhood" or "corrupting the young"', 'not against sex education literature for children and adults', Angry Women said that their protest was about the dehumanization of women. 'Pornography in films, magazines and sex shops', they explained 'incites men to treat women as instruments solely for their use'.¹¹¹ More explicitly, Ruth Grinrod

¹⁰⁷ Press release on the Women's Liberation Conference on Sexual Violence extracted in Rosie Snowden, Al Garthwaite and Sandra McNeill, 'Fear into anger into action', *Off our Backs* 11:7 (July 1981), pp. 8-9, at p.8.

¹⁰⁸ 'Male violence, women's response and men's reaction', *Spare Rib* 103 (February 1981), pp. 24-27.

¹⁰⁹ 'If they won't close them, we will!', *Spare Rib* 123 (October 1982), p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Maria Coulias, Siva German, Shiela Jeffreys, Sandra McNeill and Jan Winterlake, 'Pornography', in papers of Sally Alexander – 7SAA/1, Women's Library, LSE, Women's Liberation Movement Conferences, 1970-78, Folder 8.

¹¹¹ Angry Women, Leeds, 'Press release from the sex-shop arsonists', in Hannah Kanter, Sarah Lefanu, Shaila Shah and Carole Spedding (eds), *Sweeping Statements: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1981-83*, (London, 1984), p.49, at p. 49.

and Maria Katyachild wrote that, in pornography, women's bodies were 'dehumanised, objectified and reduced to a "slab" available for any act of humiliation and violence men wish to subject it to'.¹¹²

For others, pornography was one part of a broader landscape of masculinity that dehumanized and degraded women. Perhaps the most famous theorist on the objectification of women was American feminist Andrea Dworkin. While theorizing the objectification of women through pornography, Dworkin was unequivocal that objectification was a central means of subordinating women.¹¹³ 'Woman is not born; she is made. In the making, her humanity is destroyed.'¹¹⁴ Inversely expressing the idea, British feminist Jill Radford connected the dehumanization of women with the construction of masculinity: 'All celebrations of masculinity constitute a denial of humanity and a degradation of women.'¹¹⁵ More specifically, with reference to violent (sexual) murders, such as those carried out by Peter Sutcliffe, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer attributed a broader environment of 'meanings and concepts' with the shaping of boys to 'seeing women as objects of hatred and conflating aggression with masculine sexuality'.¹¹⁶ Further, argued Cameron and Frazer, patriarchy defined men as 'subjects' against which women were contrasted as 'objects'.¹¹⁷ Turning men into objects was however, according to Cameron and Frazer, a zero-sum game. Rather, the subject-object binary needed to be dissolved.

4.5 Changing men?

I believe that all human beings, even male ones, are born (or at any rate conceived) sensitive, loving, intelligent, open and real. We all know that they don't stay that way for very long and that males in particular tend to grow up arrogant, insensitive, alienated and, above all, violent.¹¹⁸

In saying this, Anne-Marie Fearon suggested that calling out what she termed 'their physical and intellectual Tarzan act' ... 'may hasten the day when they start to see through it too'.¹¹⁹ Addressing male perpetrators of violence was not, however, easy. Jenny Smith provided an account of

¹¹² Ruth Grinrod and Maria Katyachild, 'Pornography – theory and practice' [Conference paper originally presented at the WAVAW Conference in London in November 1981], in Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill (eds), *Women Against Violence Against Women*, (London, 1985), pp. 261-265, at p. 262.

¹¹³ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, (London, 1981), p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Dworkin, *Pornography*, p. 128.

¹¹⁵ Jill Radford, 'Marriage licence or licence to kill? Womanslaughter in the criminal law', in Kanter et al., *Sweeping Statements*, pp. 141- 151, at p. 150.

¹¹⁶ Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder*, (New York, 1987), p. 111.

¹¹⁷ Cameron and Frazer, *The Lust to Kill*, p. 171.

¹¹⁸ Anne-Marie Fearon, 'Come in Tarzan, your time is up', *Shrew* (Summer '78), pp.17-19, at p. 17.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

addressing a support group for violent men in Primrose Hill.¹²⁰ ‘From the minute I walked into the room’, she said, ‘I shuddered at the waves of anger and hostility present’.¹²¹ While acknowledging that there were some men there who ‘wanted to change’, there were others who took little responsibility. When asked why he was violent to his partner, one man responded to Jenny: ‘She asks for it.’¹²² This was the one and only time, Jenny attempted such an approach. Looking back on it in 2014, she mused: ‘It may seem strange, a battered woman going to talk to a room full of abusive men. I daresay it wouldn’t happen now, but back in 1975 there were no set rules in place. It was all one big experiment and I was willing to try anything that might work.’¹²³ Not only was the process challenging but there was a sense that, again, it was tackling the issue at too granular a level. Gill Hague and Ellen Malos observed: ‘To try to challenge by a few small programmes this great mass of tradition, history, economics, culture, and social organization, which backs up and bolsters aggressive or violent male behaviour, can seem a hopeless task.’¹²⁴

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties associated with attempting to engage with men’s support groups and other therapeutic efforts, Hague and Malos recognised that it was better for activists to be involved. ‘Men’s programmes ... seem to be here to stay, and domestic violence activists are better off exerting some influence over them than being excluded and possibly regretting it later.’¹²⁵ One of the main areas of useful influence was, according to Hague and Malos, to encourage those leading therapeutic efforts to acknowledge violence as a problem rather than to merely focus on violence as a symptom of other problems. Programmes needed to include both ‘anger management’ and ‘an analysis of power between men and women’.¹²⁶ ‘A fundamental principle’ of ‘pro-feminist programmes’, explained Dobash and Dobash, was ‘to make men responsible for their violence’.¹²⁷ In considering the dynamics of power between men and women, there was also a recognition that violence extended beyond obvious forms of physical violence. Women’s Aid groups critiqued some programmes as ‘[overlooking] the importance of sexual, emotional and financial violence’.¹²⁸

There were, however, not many programmes targeting men. In 1996, Dobash and Dobash reported that there were just two formal ‘criminal justice based re-education programmes for

¹²⁰ Smith, *The Refuge*, p. 239.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Smith, *The Refuge*, p. 240.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Gill Hague and Ellen Malos, *Domestic Violence: Action for Change*, (Cheltenham, 1993), p. 193.

¹²⁵ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 194.

¹²⁶ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 198.

¹²⁷ R. Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, *Women, Violence & Social Change*, (London and New York, 1992), p. 244.

¹²⁸ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 206.

violent men in the UK', one of which had been established in England in 1989 and the other in Scotland in 1990.¹²⁹ Other initiatives included voluntary programmes such as the Everyman Centre, 'run by committed men' to '[provide] help for men who want to stop being violent.'¹³⁰ In a volume - *Families, Children and Crime* - put together by feminist Anna Coote for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Paul Wolf-Light explained that there were 'three basic principles that underlie all the work of the Everyman Centre: Responsibility, Empathy and Vulnerability'.¹³¹ Wolf-Light indicated that the work of the Centre was based on an understanding 'that violence against women occurs within a social, institutional and political framework that subordinates women, trivialises their abuse and addicts men to the maintenance of power and control over them'.¹³² However, outside of this acknowledgement, the description of the work pointed to a programme primarily based on anger management and 'a counselling approach that develops the men's feeling capacity and emotional awareness'. The extent to which, for example, a focus on 'empathy' addressed the political concern of feminists of the dehumanization of women is not clear from the description that focused, rather, on the more introspective qualities of men understanding their own emotions. For some, the programme was a positive step. Angela Phillips endorsed the programme with a case study in *The Independent*. While the man ('Steve') in the case study reported a focus on addressing childhood violence and gaining his 'self-confidence and self-respect', Phillips took hope from the fact that Steve had not hit his partner, now wife, in two years.¹³³ Others were less optimistic. While not specifically naming the Everyman Centre programme, Hague and Malos observed that therapeutic methods that were not substantially based on a feminist perspective were unlikely to address the core issue. For example, they said, a project monitoring the outcomes of an American programme that had a 'cognitive behavioural and psycho-educational' model – similar to the Everyman Centre programme – had found that 'reformed violent men ... merely switched, after the programme, from anger to other

¹²⁹ Rebecca Dobash and Russell Dobash, 'Men's violence and innovative programmes focused on change', Paper presented at the Conference International Perspective on Violence Against Women: Evaluating New Initiatives, Sydney, Australia, (29 August 1996), p. 3.

¹³⁰ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 206.

¹³¹ Paul Wolf-Light, 'The Everyman Centre', in Anna Coote, *Families, Children and Crime*, (London, 1994), pp. 106-113, at p. 107. At the time of writing the article, Wolf-Light was a member of the Achilles Heel collective. Lucy Delap has noted that Wolf-Light had 'become a leading figure' in what 'became known as "mythopoetic" men's politics' [Lucy Delap, 'Feminism, masculinities and emotional politics in late twentieth century Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 15:4 (2018), pp. 571-593, at pp. 581].

¹³² Wolf-Light, 'The Everyman Centre', at p. 106.

¹³³ Angela Phillips, 'I haven't hit her for two years: Violent men were often damaged as children. How can they reform?', *The Independent* (Friday 11 February 1994), online at <<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/i-haven-t-hit-her-for-two-years-violent-men-were-often-damaged-as-children-how-can-they-reform-angela-phillips-reports-1393367.html>>>, accessed 31 May 2026.

psychological means to control their wives'.¹³⁴ While feminists understood the importance of emotional management and empathy in the reduction of violence regardless of gender, they did not lose sight of the central role of violence as a means of control within a socially-sanctioned system of oppression. Importantly, the elements needed to inform each other. Psychological interventions needed to be framed within a political context. At the same time, understanding the political context without developing and putting into practice attributes such as empathy and regard for others would simply be theory rather than change. Nevertheless, there were still doubts about the ability of men to change. For some, the better point of focus for change was on the processes that turned boys into 'masculine' men.

4.6 Changing boys?

The trouble with boys is that they must become men and, if the only picture of men available is that of a brute, then in order to become male they must be brutish. If we care about the way our boys will grow up, we have to try to change that picture.¹³⁵

As observed in chapter one, the socialisation of children was of interest to feminists, including parents and teachers, who were interested in the possibilities of change by transforming the way children were raised and educated. There was, however, hesitation when it came to reframing the masculinity of young boys. 'One thing that made a strong impression on me', observed Marianne Grabrucker, 'was, on the one hand, girls' mothers' willingness to experiment and, on the other, the conservatism of boys' mothers'.¹³⁶ This aligned with observations by researcher, Ruth Hartley of a concern by parents that boys did not veer from 'social notions of what is manly'.¹³⁷ For researcher June Statham, this conservatism played out in finding participants for a study of anti-sexist parenting: 'It was much easier to find parents of girls who fitted the criterion of trying to challenge traditional notions of femininity than it was to find parents of boys who did not want them to be traditionally "masculine"'.¹³⁸ One of the reasons for the difference was that, for boys, the change wanted was less black-and-white than for girls. There was a sense of an absence of vision of what that balance could, or should, be. 'Do we,' asked Angela Hamblin, 'have any

¹³⁴ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 197.

¹³⁵ Angela Phillips, *The Trouble with Boys*, (New York, 1994), p. 270.

¹³⁶ Marianne Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl: Gender Stereotyping in the First Three Years of Life: A Diary*, [translated by Wendy Philipson], (London, 1988), p. 159.

¹³⁷ Ruth E. Hartley, 'Sex-role pressures and the socialization of the male child', *Psychological Reports* 5 (1959), pp. 457-468, at p. 158.

¹³⁸ June Statham, *Daughters and Sons: Experiences of Non-Sexist Childraising*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 90.

positive image, however tentative, of what we think a “non-oppressive” adult male might be like?’¹³⁹

One area of alignment between many feminist mothers was a concern to intervene in processes in which boys learnt to ‘devalue their mothers and other women and girls’.¹⁴⁰ Angela Hamblin, in the context of thinking about her son as an adult, hoped that men could ‘grow up to identify their own interests with [those of women], instead of defining them, as at present, in opposition to us’.¹⁴¹ A frequent reference in feminist sources was to men turning away from women. In relation to male children, Hamblin asked how women could ‘ensure that ... their faces are not turned from us’.¹⁴² Hague and Malos recognised the enormity of the task. ‘If bringing up boys to be non-violent and to be able to express their feelings is a monumental task, so too is the project of bringing up boys to respect women and to learn how to engage in equal mutually supportive adult relationships.’¹⁴³ However, beyond these fundamental qualities of respect and responsibility, there were many attributes associated with approved masculinities that parents wanted to retain in their sons. Parents wanted to retain ‘qualities like adventurousness and independence and self-confidence’ in their boys (as well as build them in their girls) but ‘prevent them going to excess’. This was a question of balance. ‘The parents’, reported Statham, ‘felt the need to draw the line somewhere to prevent assertiveness developing to a “masculine” extreme of aggression, power over oneself from becoming power over others, self-confidence from tipping over into arrogance’.¹⁴⁴ Grabrucker observed a discrepancy in the treatment of boys and girls when it came to aggression. Beyond her own automatic impulse to quell any aggression in her daughter, she observed that women were reluctant to curb similar aggression in boys. ‘It may even be that the boys’ mother herself goes to classes on methods of non-violent defence and is active in the peace movement, whilst at the same time she lets her son have his way when he releases his petty aggressions on other children in a sandpit.’¹⁴⁵ When querying this with other mothers, Grabrucker identified a concern about the ability of sons to hold their own in the future.

¹³⁹ Angela Hamblin, ‘What can one do with a son? Feminist politics and male children’, in Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *On the Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences*, (London, 1982), pp. 238-244, at p.239.

¹⁴⁰ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 211.

¹⁴¹ Angela Hamblin, ‘What can one do with a son?’, at p. 244.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 211.

¹⁴⁴ Statham, *Daughters and Sons*, p.94.

¹⁴⁵ Grabrucker, *There’s a Good Girl*, p. 41.

For one (white) parent of an adopted West Indian boy, race was relevant to determining the 'right' balance. For that parent interviewed by Statham, a certain level of aggressiveness was appropriate:

He may feel later on in adolescence that he wants to identify himself as a West Indian, and the West Indian view of themselves is changing very rapidly. The new generation is very much more aggressive, much tougher and on the defensive, and I think this has got to happen, that they have got to be aggressive towards the white community in order to get any modicum of, whatever you want to call it, economic or political rights. So that would be all right ... but I'd hope it was a toughness when it was needed and not a toughness all the time ...¹⁴⁶

This concern echoes the suggestion by Marcus Collins that second-generation West Indian men were navigating a more aggressive masculinity in the face of relentless prejudice. 'Their hard task was to fashion a masculinity at once respectable and black, so severing the association between British gentlemanliness and masculine respectability and thereby reconciling their racial and gender identities.'¹⁴⁷ A significant difficulty in navigating this line was the charge commonly made that West Indian men were 'regarded ... as vicious, indolent, violent, licentious, and antifamilial'.¹⁴⁸

More generally, there was a nervousness that the expression of 'feminine' attributes would attract contemporary ridicule or other judgement on boys. 'Boys', Statham observed, 'do not have to stray far beyond the bounds of "acceptable" male behaviour to cause concern for their psychological well-being'.¹⁴⁹ In this, Statham cited a psychiatrist who identified 'lacking typical aggressiveness' as a cause for concern. It was recognized that the core issue was that males who strayed too far from masculine norms would lose power in society. While feminism demanded men lose power in society, parents could be reticent to start the process with their own sons. 'When men as a whole are in a privileged position, girls (and women) are seen as gaining more power from expanding sex roles, whereas boys (and men) are seen as having to give up some of their power and privileges in order to achieve equality. Accepting that boys as a group should not have all the advantages may conflict with the desire not to hold back one's own child.'¹⁵⁰

Despite these reservations, many feminist parents persevered with parenting that was alert to sex-role stereotyping but, as observed in chapter one, there was also a recognition that, while important, the home environment could be overwhelmed by socialization at school, other State

¹⁴⁶ Statham, *Daughters and Sons*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Marcus Collins, 'Pride and prejudice: West Indian men in mid-twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 40 (July 2001), pp. 391-418, at pp.417-418.

¹⁴⁸ Collins, 'Pride and prejudice', at p. 391.

¹⁴⁹ Statham, *Daughters and Sons*, p. 87.

¹⁵⁰ Statham, *Daughters and Sons*, p. 91.

institutions, the social environment and cultural influences. Susie Orbach talked about the extent of anti-sexist parenting that she and her partner were applying to their daughter ('just three') and son (at the time 'seven-and-three-quarters'). Rather than attempting to limit the access of their children 'to the wider culture' or strictly curating their toys and activities, Orbach said that they were focusing on 'creating emotionally literate children so that our daughter will not have to reiterate a situation in which girls and women provide for the emotional needs of others without receiving that attention themselves, and so that our son can be both articulate about what he is feeling and be responsive to the emotional expression of others'.¹⁵¹ Orbach talked about the challenge of countering the impact of 'the overwhelming nature of the heterosexual world in which they are located' including the inevitability of her son internalising versions of masculinity that surrounded him.¹⁵² Observing her son's attempts to navigate the versions of masculinity that he was being exposed to, Orbach recounted her son's first days at school:

On first starting school he said, 'Well I'm extremely nervous but I suppose other children will be too.' A few days later he reported that they (the boys) might be nervous but they showed it by bashing one another up. The following week he said regretfully to his father, 'I'd like to be a gentle boy Dad, but I just don't think I can manage it.'¹⁵³

Despite widespread acceptance of the construction of 'gender', questions remained in the mind of many about the presence of core biological attributes of boys and girls. Grabrucker speculated: 'Perhaps it is in the belief that boys are simply like that, with the result that their teaching is less intensive?'¹⁵⁴ Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin were known for challenging biological determinism and arguing that 'the sexes are far more alike than they are different', yet they conceded some biochemical differences between men and women such as levels of aggression.¹⁵⁵ As such, accompanying the optimism that came with the understanding that gender was created rather than fixed, came uncertainty that there may be elements that are fixed to biological sex. Others were less concerned with biological determinism believing, rather, that men were unlikely to change simply because, at their core, they would not want to relinquish the advantage provided to them through the subordination of women. Revolutionary feminists refuted criticisms of biological determinism noting that their reservations about the possibility of changing men and masculinity were rooted, rather, in a belief that men were not motivated to

¹⁵¹ Susie Orbach, 'Heterosexuality and parenting', in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (eds), *Heterosexuality: Feminism and Psychology Reader*, (London, 1993), pp. 48-49, at p. 48.

¹⁵² Orbach, 'Heterosexuality and parenting', at p. 49.

¹⁵³ Orbach, 'Heterosexuality and parenting', at pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁴ Grabrucker, *There's a Good Girl*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁵ Eleanor E. Maccoby and Carol Jacklin, 'Sex differences in aggression: A rejoinder and reprise', *Child Development* 51:4 (December 1980), pp. 964-980, at p. 978.

change.¹⁵⁶ Even for those who retained an optimism for changing the hearts and minds of men, it was recognised that this would take time. More immediate measures were needed to neutralize violence against women.

4.7 Neutralising violence

The pervasive fear of violence and violence itself, has the effect of driving women to seek protection from men, the very people who commit violence against them.¹⁵⁷

For some feminist theorists, the construction of the masculine protector was a critical part of the framework of subordination as women were coerced into dependence on men as a protection against violence by other men. Susan Griffin pointed to the duality between man as protector and man as rapist observing that women are ‘taught fear’ to place them in a position where they are passive and dependent on men. ‘[C]hivalry is an age-old protection racket which depends for its existence on rape.’¹⁵⁸ By keeping women afraid of going out alone, women were dependent ‘on the protection of men both as escorts and in a more general sense’.¹⁵⁹ This dependence was also supported by economic dependence and social structures. Dependence on men in the home further created conditions of vulnerability which was, in effect, endorsed by public institutions that would ‘reinforce expectations and experiences that no one can or will help’.¹⁶⁰ The ways in which women responded to the threat of violence, however, started to shift away from reliance on men. There were three main mechanisms that feminists explored to break from dependence on men: drawing on support from other women; building material independence; and building the personal means to physically counter violence.

In their study of violence against women in Leeds from which they concluded that women remained subordinated by a fear of violence, Hanmer and Saunders noticed a shift across ‘the five years that the so-called “Ripper” roamed the North’ as ‘the consciousness of women began to be transformed’. ‘Women’, they observed, ‘began to call on women to depend on each other and not men’.¹⁶¹ Taking the man as protector out of the equation meant, in the eyes of Hanmer and Saunders, that the structure of subordination through violence was undermined. ‘The feminist response to violence from men’, they argued, ‘is that women should develop ways of

¹⁵⁶ Coveney et al., ‘Introduction’, at p.20.

¹⁵⁷ Hanmer, ‘Male violence and the social control of women’, at p. 191.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Griffin, ‘Rape’, at p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Hanmer and Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear*, p. 66.

¹⁶⁰ Hanmer and Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear*, p. 67.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

depending on each other for protection'.¹⁶² Not only about raising awareness, Reclaim the Night events were about women marching *together* and promoting the support of women by women. 'The best thing was the constant warmth and support we got from other women', reported one woman from the march in Lancaster.¹⁶³ Not everyone, however, felt supported.

Black women saw the marches in areas with predominantly Black populations, such as Chapeltown, as a racist indictment of Black men. In the May 1978 issue of *Spare Rib*, the Leeds Reclaim the Night Group responded angrily to criticisms that the Reclaim the Night marches were racist in taking place in 'Black areas'.¹⁶⁴ As drawn out by Natalie Thomlinson, 'white women marching through Black areas calling for an end to male violence raised the uncomfortable spectre of the myth of the Black rapist whose primary victims were white women'. This was not lost on the Reclaim the Night Group.¹⁶⁵ 'The Reclaim the Night marchers', argued the Group, 'were perfectly well aware of what we were doing in marching through a black area'. Chapeltown, they explained, had been chosen as the site for the march as the location of a number of Yorkshire Ripper murders. However, the problematic image cast by the marches was replicated in sites across the country.¹⁶⁶ Further, the call for greater police protection raised the prospect of exacerbating the harassment of Black men by police. 'White feminists' racism and insensitivity to Black community struggles in organising "Reclaim the Night" marches through Black areas, and in demanding an increased police presence at a time of overt police brutality towards Black communities, created further antagonism between Black and white women'.¹⁶⁷

Another expression of women supporting women was evidenced in the refuge movement which had a focus on supporting the autonomy and independence of women who attended those refuges. While the first aim of the National Women's Aid Federation was to 'provide temporary refuge', a close second was 'to encourage the women to determine their own futures and to help them achieve them whether this involves returning home or starting a new life elsewhere'.¹⁶⁸ With the support of women, battered women were empowered to make decisions about their lives.

¹⁶² Hanmer and Saunders, *Well-Founded Fear*, p. 69. In the same paragraph, the researchers also suggested a curfew on men at night. 'A curfew on all men after dark would make the streets safe for women.

¹⁶³ [unattributed other than 'from Lancaster WL newsletter'], 'We will walk without fear November 12th', *Spare Rib* 66 (January 1978), pp. 22-23, at p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ Leeds Reclaim the Night Group, 'Letters: Reclaiming the night', *Spare Rib* 70 (May 1978), p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 169.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Julia Chinyere Oparah, *'Other Kinds of Dreams': Black Women's Organisations and The Politics of Transformation*, (London & New York, 1998), p. 201.

¹⁶⁸ National Women's Aid Federation, "'He's got to show her who's boss: The National Women's Aid Federation challenges a man's right to batter', *Spare Rib* 69 (1978), pp. 15-18, at p. 15.

Refuges were run on non-hierarchical terms as women were 'encouraged to take part in its collective management'.¹⁶⁹ Again, however, not all women felt supported. Lucy Delap, for example, draws attention to the sometimes 'unpredictable or judgmental' responses of feminists to disclosures of child sexual abuse. Some feminists struggled to manage the respective needs of mothers and children, leaving the needs of victims unmet. 'Feminist practice', says Delap, 'was uneven, despite clear intentions to support survivors and victims'.¹⁷⁰

For some women, race affected the degree to which they felt supported. Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall reported that 'Black women coming to refuges were often met by racism'. In the five years to 1984, a handful of Asian women's refuges were established, two of which were in London.

The need for an autonomous Asian Women's refuge, run for and by Asian women arose out of the experiences which Asian women had when they used women's aid refuges, where often they had to put up with a lot of racism. The last thing a woman wants when she seeks shelter in a refuge is to have her cultural traditions and values attacked by women who feel they know and understand what is best for her.¹⁷¹

This included a lack of understanding by many white feminists about the impact of the intersection of race and gender and the need of many women to maintain links to the Black community including men. Brent Asian Women's Refuge and Resource Centre explained that 'for us the decision to leave a violent home might mean having to break from the community we are born and brought up in'.¹⁷² While all women who went to a refuge would 'lose contact with friends and neighbours'¹⁷³, there could, for women coming out of particular communities, be an additional layer of disconnection. Despite this, the Refuge and Resource Centre recognised the role of female networks in supporting women in this situation acknowledging that 'as more and more women leave, we have been able to build support networks, exchange ideas and experiences, and provide strength, support and courage to others to show that they are not alone.'¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Lovenduski and Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics*, p. 307.

¹⁷⁰ Lucy Delap, "Disgusting details which are best forgotten": Disclosures of child sexual abuse in twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 57:1 (January 2018), pp. 79-107, at p. 100.

¹⁷¹ [unattributed], 'Brent Asian Women's Refuge and Resource Centre', *Feminist Review* 17 (Autumn 1984), pp. 97-99, at p. 98.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ National Women's Aid Federation, *Battered Women, Refuges and Women's Aid: A Report*, A Report from the National Women's Aid Federation, (1978), p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ [unattributed], 'Brent Asian Women's Refuge and Resource Centre', at p. 98.

Even after building material independence and connecting with the support of other women, the threat of violence remained ever-present for women. 'It is the social context of womanness that continually reminds women of their universal vulnerability', said Elizabeth Stanko in an essay on the extent and nature of fear of violence.¹⁷⁵ Feminists considered the possibilities and problems of counter violence. Not all women, however, felt that counter violence was an option. In a study of battered women in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, Eileen Evason identified a reluctance by women to counter violence in the home with violence. The main reason cited was that women feared that attempting to fight back would result in 'an escalation of the violence by the husband which they could not hope to match'.¹⁷⁶ Related to this was a concern that women did not have the physical strength for effective counter-violence. Further, there was an understanding that using a weapon would be judged harshly as constituting a 'serious premediated offence'. Echoing Kate Millett's concerns about socialization, Evason also observed a psychological disadvantage: 'A culture which emphasises passivity, submissiveness and deference to males as desirable female traits renders women ill-prepared mentally for self-defence or countering aggression with aggression.'¹⁷⁷

Across the Atlantic Brownmiller had put forward a similar argument: 'We have been trained to cry, to wheedle, to please, to look for a male protector, but we have never been trained to fight and win.'¹⁷⁸ As such, it was psychological power, rather than physical strength that gave men the edge in sexual aggression. Men 'know how to fight, for they have been trained and encouraged to use their bodies aggressively and competitively since early childhood'. This was not the case for women for whom fighting and physical prowess were not seen as feminine. It was this realisation, not only intellectually understood but also physically experienced by Brownmiller through a three month training programme in ju-jitsu and karate, that led Brownmiller to suggest that a solution lay simply in women 'redressing the balance' by 'fighting back'. Fighting back did not require strength but, rather, an understanding of how to fight. 'It is possible', suggested Brownmiller, 'that there is some sort of metaphysical justice in the anatomical fact that the male sex organ, which has been misused from time immemorial as a weapon of terror against women, should have at its root an awkward place of painful vulnerability'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Elizabeth A. Stanko, 'Typical violence, normal precaution: Men, women and interpersonal violence in England, Wales, Scotland and the USA', in Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard (eds), *Women, Violence and Social Control*, (Basingstoke, 1987), pp. 122-134, at p. 132.

¹⁷⁶ Eileen Evason, *Hidden Violence: Battered Women in Northern Ireland*, (Belfast, 1982), p. 48.

¹⁷⁷ Evason, *Hidden Violence*, pp.48-49.

¹⁷⁸ Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, p. 401.

¹⁷⁹ Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, p. 404.

The notion of using martial arts for self-protection was not a new one. Accompanying an expanding interest in physical culture and closer Anglo-Japanese relationship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was an emerging interest in Japanese martial arts including ju-jutsu.¹⁸⁰ Not being reliant on physical strength, ju-jutsu particularly attracted the interest of women.¹⁸¹ Women learnt the techniques at dedicated schools, such as that established by Edith Garrud in Argyle Place in Regent Street, London, through classes provided at universities and at fashionable 'jūjutsu parties'.¹⁸² Ju-jutsu was also embraced by suffragettes as a means of resisting arrest.¹⁸³ For Edith Garrud, however, the potential of ju-jutsu extended beyond taking on policemen. Martial arts, argued Garrud, provided 'a necessary safeguard for the woman who has to defend herself through life'. Levelling the physical playing field was, for Garrud, the last impediment to women being able to claim full equality. 'Physical force seems the only thing in which women have not demonstrated their equality to men, and whilst we are waiting for the evolution which is slowly taking place and bringing about that equality, we might just as well take time by the forelock and use science, otherwise ju-jitsu.'¹⁸⁴ Nearly 60 years later, in 1968, radical US feminist collective Cell 16 was again raising the possibility of martial arts as a key element in the quest for women's liberation. In the first place, echoing the sentiment of Edith Garrud, it would level the physical playing field and this would not only allow women to stave off violent attacks but would discourage many behaviours that, while falling short of a physical attack, denigrated women. 'The incessant threat of women's physical volatility would stop men from preying on them.'¹⁸⁵ However, learning a martial art would also teach women to see their bodies differently. Building on Brownmiller's identification of the psychological element in being prepared to fight, women believed that learning karate would lead to stronger bodies and greater confidence that would flow across all areas of a woman's life.

¹⁸⁰ Diana Looser, 'Radical bodies and dangerous ladies: Martial arts and women's performance, 1900-1918', *Theatre Research International* 36:1 (2011), pp. 3-19; and Mike Callan, Conor Heffernan and Amanda Spenn, 'Women's jūjutsu and judo in the early twentieth-century: The cases of Phoebe Roberts, Edith Garrud, and Sarah Mayer', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35:6 (2018), pp. 530-553.

¹⁸¹ Jū-jutsu, also known as Jūjitsu and Jiu-jitsu, literally translates to the 'gentle skill' or 'gentle art'. It primarily relies on engaging the momentum of an opponent to overpower that opponent.

¹⁸² Callan et al, 'Women's jūjutsu and judo in the early twentieth-century'.

¹⁸³ 'Miss Sylvia Pankhurst', *The Suffragette* (Friday 29 August 1913), 802; 'Miss Sylvia Pankhurst's Advice', *Weekly Irish Times* (23 August 1913), p. 11. See also Wendy Rouse and Beth Slutsky, 'Empowering the physical and political self: Women and the practice of self-defense, 1890-1920', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13:4 (October 2014), pp. 470-499.

¹⁸⁴ Edith Garrud, 'The world we live in. Self-defence', *Votes for Women* (4 March 1910), p. 355.

¹⁸⁵ Jaime Schultz, 'More than fun and games: Cell 16, female liberation, and physical competence, or why sport matters', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36:17-18, pp. 1552-1573, at p. 1561.

Conclusion

The fear of superior physical strength alone keeps many women in their place.¹⁸⁶

It was not long after the emergence of the WLM that the issue of violence against women took on a particular visibility. Before the first refuge for battered wives opened its doors in 1971, women were connecting the use of violence to the oppression of women. Kate Millet had drawn attention to the use of force in the maintenance of patriarchy as early as 1970. As the refuges started to fill, activism expanded across other forms of violence such as rape, and women started discussing their personal experiences of violence, awareness grew over the extent and nature of violence against women. It also became clear that violence against women was socially sanctioned and supported by institutions including the parliament and the courts. While there was much acrimonious debate around the wording, the point remains that a show of cohesion was demonstrated around the passage of the seventh demand – ‘We demand freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status, and an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men’s aggression towards women’ – by the approximately 3,000 women in attendance at the Birmingham Conference in 1978. There was little disagreement that violence against women, including the threat of violence, was a core concern and, for many feminists, underpinned the subordination of women. This understanding was not confined to the WLM as research showed that women who ‘did not define themselves as feminists’ understood men’s violence to be an expression of systemic domination. The demand was, however, not the end point of feminist theorizing on violence against women.

As the decade closed and across the next two decades, despite loss of funding, activism and theorizing would intensify as feminists tackled complex and sensitive theoretical questions around what was now seen as a ‘continuum’ of violence inclusive of a wide range of actions that were intended to denigrate, intimidate and control women. One of the most well-known manifestations of this theorizing was that of revolutionary feminists who declared, in 1978, that *all* men were violent and that all heterosexual relationships represented ‘a form of violence to control women’. For some, the only solution was, to the extent possible, to live separate lives from men but for many women, particularly those with sons, separatism was not possible or desirable. As women considered their lives with men and boys, they considered possibilities for change. It was recognised that violence was a choice. ‘It is indeed the men who have to stop being violent’.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ (Unattributed), ‘Zap! Pow!’, *Shrew* 4:3 (1972), p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 192.

Whether men could, or would, change was less clear. For revolutionary feminists, it was straightforward. Men were unlikely to give up the advantage of their position of power.

There were questions, however, around whether all men felt assured of their power. Was violence exacerbated by a sense of powerlessness or a fear of powerlessness? For therapists, such as those at the Everyman Centre established in 1989, a fear of vulnerability and emotional immaturity were key targets of programmes for violent men. For many feminists, however, programmes heavily based on ‘cognitive-behavioural and psycho-educational’ techniques alone were not necessarily substantially grounded in a core understanding of, or commitment to dismantle, socially-sanctioned systems of oppression. In place of an internally focused therapeutic programme, violent men needed to see women through new eyes. Feminists examined the role of detachment that underpinned the ability of men to dehumanize and view women as objects. Feminist mothers shared this concern as they worried about the point at which their sons might ‘turn away’ from them. How they might intervene to prevent this, however, was less clear. A new masculinity was needed to replace more ‘brutish’ forms that desensitized men and dehumanized women. Rather than ‘[valuing] qualities of toughness and competition’, it required valorising masculinities of ‘collectivity, sharing and tenderness’.¹⁸⁸ The ability to shape this was, however, challenged both by internal conflicts around the nature of the men that anti-sexist parents wanted to raise and by the influence of the external social and cultural environment with which their children were interacting.

Regardless of the optimism of parents, it was clear that change would take time and feminists explored ways in which violence could be mitigated more immediately. This included building independence from men and considering counter violence measures such as martial arts. There was a sense that more options and ‘informal sources of help’ – outside of State institutions – needed to be made available.¹⁸⁹ The National Women’s Aid Federation proposed that, [i]f women are to be able to make real choice about their futures, efforts should be made to campaign for real alternatives such as joint tenancies with other women, communal living situations, etc.’¹⁹⁰ Anne-Marie Fearon wryly noted that calling out the ‘Tarzan act’ in the hope that men would change was not a single action prescription but, rather, needed to form part of a myriad of actions by women. ‘All this, of course not instead of but *as well as* learning Judo, supporting Women’s Aid and all the rest of it.’¹⁹¹ Feminists worked across multiple layers of action, some seeking to change

¹⁸⁸ Hague and Malos, *Domestic Violence*, p. 212.

¹⁸⁹ Evason, *Hidden Violence*, p. 73.

¹⁹⁰ National Women’s Aid Federation, *Battered Women*, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ Fearon, ‘Come in Tarzan, your time is up’, at p. 17.

men and patriarchy, most seeking to neutralize violence. Writing in *Cosmopolitan* in 1987, on the phenomenon of sexual violence including the violence of Peter Sutcliffe, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer conveyed an optimistic tone: 'As women break out of traditional stereotypes and start playing a greater part in shaping our society, attitudes to sexual relations are change and new models are being created for men, less violent and self-obsessed than the heroes of the past.'¹⁹²

¹⁹² Cameron and Frazer, 'Speakout', at p. 63.

5 FROM MILITANT TO ‘THE COURAGE OF WOMEN’?

If I could have one wish for my own sons, it is that they should have the courage of women. I mean by this something very concrete and precise: the courage I have seen in women who, in their private and public lives, both in the interior world of their dreaming, thinking and creating, and the outer world of patriarchy, are taking greater and greater risks, both psychic and physical, in the evolution of a new vision.

... I would like my sons not to shrink from this kind of pain, not to settle for the old male defenses, including that of fatalistic self-hatred. And I would wish them to do this not for me, or for other women, but for themselves, and for the sake of life on planet Earth.¹

These words, by American feminist Adrienne Rich, were reproduced in large lettering in *The Greenham Factor*, a publication published by the Greenham Print Prop to publicise the nature and significance of the Greenham Common Peace Camp. By this stage, the Greenham Common Peace Camp had been running for more than two years. At that time, few would have predicted that it would run for another 16 years eventually disbanding in September 2000. The purpose of the Peace Camp, centred on the military base in Berkshire, was to protest the original proposed storage of American Cruise missiles at the base and to draw attention to the threat of nuclear war. The Greenham Common Peace Camp would become the most well-known expression of feminist protest against the nuclear threat and, indeed, inspired similar efforts in Britain and internationally. It was not, however, the only location of feminist theorising on the topic of state violence, including the use of nuclear technology. As an extension of the work of feminists on the topic of violence against women, the connection of state violence – and nuclear technology - to masculinity would become a distinct and important area of theorising in the WLM from the mid-1970s.

More often positioned as part of late twentieth century movement for nuclear disarmament, feminist protests against state violence, including nuclear weapons, have been largely treated as peripheral to the WLM.² Even in its most well-known manifestation – the Greenham Common Peace Camp – it has tended to be differentiated. Prominent early histories did not mention Greenham Common or treated it as peripheral. David Bouchier, for example, suggested, with reference to Greenham Common, that ‘the women’s peace movement is not feminist in the

¹ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (New York, 1976), p. 215, extracted in Greenham Print Prop (ed.), *The Greenham Factor*, (London, Revised Edition c. 1984), [no page numbers].

² David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women’s Liberation in Britain and the United States*, (London, 1983), pp. 178 and 193 respectively.

narrow sense'.³ However, more recent histories, with few exceptions, have also not given prominent space to Greenham Common as a site of feminist theorizing.⁴ Where the Greenham Common protest has been given more prominence, it is primarily with reference to protest methods rather than identification of the site as a source of feminist theory.⁵ This chapter examines feminist theorizing of state violence and nuclear technology finding that, grounded in a challenge to systems of oppression, feminist anti-nuclear campaigning was distinguished from other anti-nuclear campaigning. Based on an identified need to dismantle a hierarchical and violent world order, there was a call on men to shun competitive, detached and aggressive norms of masculinity in favour of gender-neutral attributes including non-violence, regard for others and care.

Protests against nuclear weapons were not new. The use of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 had shocked the world and, according to Lawrence Wittner, 'a movement against the Bomb rapidly took shape in dozens of countries around the world', including Britain.⁶ Histories of the British anti-nuclear movement, however, observe that it was only in the 1950s that mobilization on a larger scale took place. By then, Britain had become the third nation globally to develop nuclear weapons.⁷ Nuclear weapons were seen as an attractive economic alternative to traditional forces, including the 'expensive and unpopular conscription programme', which would end in 1960.⁸ For Meredith Veldman, the impetus for larger-scale protest activity was five-fold including 'the emergence of neutralism as a force in the Third World, the Suez crisis, the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, and the revolution in nuclear technology', together with the support of Aneurin Bevan of the Labour Left with the Labour Party's pronuclear policy.⁹ According to Veldman, these events together created both the motivation and foundation for what would become the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's singular focus to

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See, for example, George Stevenson, *The Women's Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain*, (London, 2019); and Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Basingstoke, 2016).

⁵ See, for example, Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968 - Present*, (Oxford, 2019), pp. 223-227; and Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History*, (London, 2021), pp. 295, 296, and 316-323.

⁶ Lawrence Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*, (Stanford, 2009), p. 9. Wittner qualifies the speed at which people mobilised in protest by noting that, due to management of narratives about the bombing, it took a little time immediately after the attacks for people to grasp the enormity of the devastation (at pp. 10-11).

⁷ Martin Shaw, *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2024), p. 1.

⁸ Martin Navias, 'Terminating conscription? The British National Service Controversy 1955-56', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989), pp. 195-208, at p. 195.

⁹ Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest 1945-1980*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 119-120.

‘seize the moral leadership of the world by abdicating the throne of Nuclear Power’.¹⁰ While not the first protest campaign, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), founded in 1958, would, according to Jodi Burkett, become ‘the largest radical extra-parliamentary organization in Britain’.¹¹

At the same time, Burkett argues, the CND’s singular focus would ultimately contribute, over the course of the 1960s, to a growing perception of the organisation as ‘a staid, old-fashioned and marginal player in radical left-wing politics in Britain’.¹² In this, it had competition for members from other groups seen as more reflective of the aspirations of those looking for a more radical platform, both in terms of focus and the nature of the activism. For many, the CND was too passive in its approach. In contrast to this perceived passivity, the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear Weapons (DAC) was founded on a commitment to direct action. Campaigners Harold and Sheila Steele had attempted to stop British hydrogen bomb testing by sailing into the test site. The attempt was not successful but captured public attention.¹³ It was this attention, explains Burkett, that the DAC wanted to continue by ‘receiving media coverage and making a clear statement’.¹⁴ While supported by the CND and taken over by the CND from its second year, it was the DAC that initiated and organised the inaugural annual march between Trafalgar Square in London to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston, Berkshire.¹⁵ The route was about 50 miles and was scheduled to take four days over the Easter long weekend to complete, starting on Good Friday. In the first year, more than 10,000 people are reported to have attended the start of the walk, with 8,000 walking on the first day. The number increased towards

¹⁰ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, p.118.

¹¹ Jodi Burkett, ‘Re-defining British morality: “Britishness” and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958-68’, *Twentieth Century British History* 21:2 (2010), pp. 184-205, at p. 184. Amongst others, the CND was preceded by the National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests (NCANWT) that maintained a singular focus on the risks associated with nuclear testing. The organisation formed following news of the contamination of a Japanese fishing boat in Bikini Atoll and the crew’s radiation sickness following US testing of its hydrogen bomb.

¹² Burkett, ‘Re-defining British morality’, at p. 204.

¹³ For an account of the attempt, see Nic Maclellan, *Grappling with the Bomb: Britain’s Pacific H-Bomb Tests*, (Canberra, 2017).

¹⁴ Jodi Burkett, ‘Direct action and the campaign for nuclear disarmament, 1958-62’, in Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay, *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 21-37, at p. 24. Also emerging around the same time, founded in 1960, the Committee of 100 was ‘an anti-nuclear group ... committed to civil disobedience and direct action’. Burkett, ‘Re-defining British morality’, at p. 190.

¹⁵ The walk was from London to Aldermaston in its first year (1958) but reversed (Aldermaston to London) in the following year (1959) and thereafter. Burkett, ‘Direct action and the campaign for nuclear disarmament, 1958-62’, at p. 28.

100,000 by 1960.¹⁶ Established peace activist and feminist Pat Arrowsmith was engaged as a dedicated field organiser for the march.¹⁷ The last full-scale march took place in 1963.

There is a historiographical narrative of decline in activism from the late 1960s with a ‘resurgence’ in the 1980s reflecting a shift to a more aggressively articulated policy of deterrence that brought home, for many, the possibility and likelihood of nuclear attack.¹⁸ Running alongside these ‘heightened Cold War tensions’, Rachel Collett identifies ‘growing anxieties about the safety of nuclear power and its environmental risks’ following incidents such as the Three Mile Island reactor meltdown in 1979.¹⁹ The Greenham Common peace camp that ran from 1981 to 2000, involving tens of thousands of women variously as residents and visitors and attracting global attention, is commonly given a central role in this ‘resurgence’ of anti-nuclear activism. Mirroring the earlier walks by the DAC, the protest famously started with a walk from Cardiff to Greenham Common by a group of 36 women and four men – using the name ‘Women for Life on Earth’²⁰ Like Aldermaston, Greenham Common was also in Berkshire.²¹ Notwithstanding a history as a commons for the people, Greenham Common had, by this stage, been purchased by the Ministry of Defence and leased to the United States for use as an operational base for military defence purposes. More specifically to the attention of the protestors, the site was slated to house

¹⁶ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, p. 117.

¹⁷ Sophie Scott-Brown, *The Radical Fifties: Activist Politics in Cold War Britain*, (Oxford, 2025), p. 79.

¹⁸ The language of ‘resurgence’ from 1980 can be seen in Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, ‘Feminism and the critique of violence: negotiating feminist political agency’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19:2 (2014), pp. 143-163, at p. 149. See also Ellen Boucher, ‘Anticipating Armageddon: Nuclear risk and the neoliberal sensibility in Thatcher’s Britain’, *American Historical Review* (October 2019), pp. 1220-1245.

¹⁹ Rachel Collett, ‘Capenhurst Women’s Peace Camp (1982-3) and after: Local nuclear resistance, grassroots feminisms, and transnational solidarities’, *Modern British History* 36:3 (2025), pp. 1-23, at pp. 2-3.

²⁰ *Women for Life on Earth* was distinct from *Women and Life on Earth*, which had been started in the US by women who had gathered in 1980 following the nuclear reactor core meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979. Drawing connections between feminism, ecology and peace, the *Women and Life on Earth* issued a Unity Statement in 1980 that declared, in part: ‘We see connections between the exploitation and brutalization of the earth and her people and the physical, economic and psychological violence that women face every day.’ (Extracted in Joni Seager, ‘Rachel Carson died of breast cancer: The coming of age of feminist environmentalism’, *Signs* 28:3 (Spring 2003), pp. 945-972, at p. 947). It is not known to what extent knowledge of the *Women and Life on Earth*, or even the name of the David Attenborough documentary – *Life on Earth* – that first aired in the UK in 1979, influenced the name of the new group in Cardiff in 1981. In relation to the title, Ann Pettitt merely said: ‘[W]e had to give the thing a name, so we called it “Women for Life on Earth”, because we felt that nothing less than the future of the entire planet was at stake here, and this just about summed it up. In case this title might be mistake for some kind of anti-abortion, religious right-to-life outfit, we threw in for good measure the explanatory sub-title: “Women’s Action for Disarmament”.’ Ann Pettitt, *Walking to Greenham*, (South Glamorgan, 2006), pp. 42-43.

²¹ On 1 April 1983, CND organised a 14 mile human chain between Greenham Common and Aldermaston.

nuclear-armed Cruise missiles.²² Upon arrival at Greenham Common on 5 September 1981, a letter was delivered to the base Commander that said, in part:

We are a group of women from all over Britain who have walked one hundred and twenty miles from Cardiff to deliver this letter to you. Some of us have brought our babies with us this entire distance. We fear for the future of all our children, and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life.²³

In this, despite the involvement of four men in the march and the assistance of other males, the group was described in the media as women motivated by fear for the future of their children and it reflected the 'catastrophic' view of the outcome of nuclear war that Boucher identifies with the disarmament movement.²⁴ Individual activists echoed a narrative of devastation specifically as mothers. Simone Wilkinson, who helped organise the protest, was reported as saying that she 'would take one look at her children and burst into tears every time ... because she was worried about her children's future – a future she doesn't believe exists while the threat of nuclear war remains'.²⁵ The impetus to action by these women focused on the protection of their own children aligned with what Celia McDonagh, in the 1980's, identified as a narrative of 'individual responsibility', one that Ellen Boucher, more recently, associates with a neoliberal sensibility encouraged by the Thatcher government.²⁶ Of course, as Boucher notes, there were few that believed that nuclear war could be countered solely by individual responsibility and, in this case, the women were expressly seeking state intervention to ensure the safety of their families. In the letter to the Base Commander, the original protestors called on the state to bring 'the arms race to ... a halt now – before it is too late to create a peaceful, stable world for our future generations'.²⁷

²² The first missiles arrived at the Common in November 1983, more than two years after the protest commenced.

²³ Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins (eds), *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*, (London, 1984), p. 16.

²⁴ Boucher, 'Anticipating Armageddon', at p. 1234. Sasha Roseneil personally recalls that the government's 1980 'Protect and Survive' campaign drew attention to the nuclear threat and generated fears with the campaign proving to be 'a propaganda gift to the burgeoning peace program' [Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham*, (London and New York, 2000, p. 41]. Others, however, have disputed this reading of motivation for activism. Elaine Schwartz, in response to Roseneil, suggests that, rather than fear, people were motivated by 'moral outrage' [Elaine Schwartz, 'Review: Reviewed Work: *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham* by Sasha Roseneil', *Feminist Teacher* 11:2 (1997), pp. 174-176, at p. 175].

²⁵ [unattributed], 'Peace woman's story goes on TV', *Reading Evening Post* (Tuesday, December 23, 1982), p. 7.

²⁶ Celia McDonagh, 'The women's peace movement in Britain', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8:2 (1985), pp. 53-58; and Ellen Boucher, 'Anticipating Armageddon'.

²⁷ Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 17.

The protest did not, however, end there. It is well known that, in response to a lack of attention to the original protest, the women decided to stay at the site turning the protest into a decades long prominent site of feminist theorizing. While seen to emerge primarily from a more 'limited sense of individual responsibility', we will see that feminist protests against nuclear weapons, including the Greenham Common protest, would be, in fact, an important source of thinking about a 'collective sense of responsibility'.²⁸ Again, this was not limited to the collective methodologies of the protest, itself, but, rather, reflected a vision of 'collective responsibility' in its broadest sense. Feminist campaigning against nuclear weapons contained a vision for social reform and, as we will see, ultimately, men would be called on to be part of this reform and to share this responsibility.

5.1 Connecting peace and feminism

Sasha Roseneil suggests that feminist thinking about war, including nuclear technology, only gathered momentum from 1980.²⁹ However, feminists in the WLM were developing a distinctive feminist critique of state violence in the form of militarism, war and the threat of nuclear weapons well before 1980. This theorising was commonly framed in terms of thinking about 'nonviolence'. It was this lens that emerged from a group of women in War Resisters International (WRI). In 1975, at a gathering of WRI in Holland, a small group of women started planning a workshop specifically for women. The following year, '[f]or five memorable days, ninety women and ten children attended' a conference in Les Circauds in Bourgogne, France, examining the links between feminism and nonviolence.³⁰ Ellen Wilkinson, who attended the conference, reported that the conference 'focused initially on how feminism should effect nonviolent movements and organizations, and conversely, how nonviolence should effect feminist thinking'. Discussion groups were varied but included sessions that firmly connected men with war, including 'the militaristic, unfeeling, uncaring aspects of ... male-dominated societies'.³¹ After the conference, another gathering was arranged in Birmingham by British women who wanted to look further at the links between feminism and nonviolence. It was at this Birmingham gathering in 1977 that the

²⁸ McDonagh, 'The women's peace movement in Britain', at p. 55.

²⁹ Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham*, (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 21 and 28.

³⁰ Jill Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism & Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820*, (London, 1989), p.206.

³¹ Ellen Wilkinson, 'For women only: A new kind of meeting', *Fellowship* 42:12 (December 1976), pp. 14 and 24, at p. 14.

Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group was formed.³² In a special edition of *Shrew* published in 1978, the group explained that, '[h]aving found that there was nothing to read on the subject we decided that for several reasons we would have to do the thinking and writing for ourselves'.³³ In the first place, the Group was concerned to understand the 'links between feminism and non-violence'. While there was a strong feeling that the two were connected, that connection was not easy to articulate.³⁴

Separately, in 1980, another group – Women Oppose the Nuclear Threat (WONT) – emerged in Leeds on the heels of a conference – Women and the Military – earlier in the year. Initial action by the group was to organise a petition 'voicing opposition to nuclear weapons and the escalation of the arms race'.³⁵ The petition's text was disseminated throughout the country inspiring the formation of new groups and soon there were WONT groups in multiple locations including Cambridge and Nottingham. Many of the participants in WONT had been members of mixed peace groups but grew frustrated with the gender dynamics of the groups, including 'frustration with male ways of organising' and feeling that they, as women, needed to 'use a disproportionate amount of their energy facilitating the meeting, and taking care of group dynamics – i.e. their traditional servicing role'.³⁶ WONT did not, however, see themselves as a women's peace organisation merely by virtue of organisation as women. Rather, they identified themselves as feminist³⁷ and started developing a 'specifically feminist analysis of nuclear threat, and to show the links between women's oppression and nuclear technology'.³⁸ From the beginning, WONT was closely associated with the Greenham Women's peace camp which itself, over time, developed a largely feminist identity as women had time to think and reflect on what they were doing and, importantly, to exchange thoughts and feelings with others about protest, peace,

³² The Study Group has been variously described as the 'women and nonviolence study group' [see, for example, *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978)] and the 'feminism and nonviolence study group' [see, for example, *Piecing it Together: Feminism and Nonviolence*, (Devon and London, 1983)]. For consistency, the name Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group is used in this thesis.

³³ The group, describing itself as a 'long distance study group', was comprised of members from across England and 'met once every two months'. Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978), p. 3. Articles in the issue were wide-ranging including, but not limited to, 'Women and the military', 'Ireland's English problem', 'Feminists facing fascism' and 'Nuclear power: The future is fearful', along with articles looking at the conscription of women in Greece and anti-nuclear protesting in Malville, France.

³⁴ Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*, p.207.

³⁵ [unattributed], 'Short list: Campaigns', *Spare Rib* 98 (September 1980), p. 28.

³⁶ Nottingham WONT, 'Working as a group: Nottingham women oppose the nuclear threat', in Lynne Jones (Ed.), *Keeping the Peace: A Women's Peace Handbook*, (London, 1983), pp. 22-29, at p. 22.

³⁷ Jill Liddington suggests that, rather than 'strongly feminist', the group initially saw itself as sitting between feminist groups and peace groups [Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*, p.216].

³⁸ Nottingham WONT, 'Working as a group', at p. 23.

militarism, gender and sexuality.³⁹ For many, this would be life altering. For Jenny, being at the camp expanded her sense of self beyond her role as a mother. Roseneil observed that '[t]he women who underwent the most dramatic transformations in identity were those whose motivation to get involved with Greenham had been strongly maternalist, and who had begun by identifying as "ordinary women" and mothers'.⁴⁰ Beyond personal transformation, the camp itself would come to represent a particularly feminist perspective on war.

So, what, if anything, distinguished feminist thinking about war and nuclear technology? Acknowledging a 'broad definition of feminism', Jill Liddington describes three main 'strands' of thinking linking feminism and 'anti-militarism'. The first of these is 'maternalist feminism' in which women draw on their roles as mothers to object to the violence of war.⁴¹ The second, 'an equal-rights feminism' proposes that war reflects an absence of female voices in political decision-making positions. Finally, Liddington describes a 'radical feminist strand' that has a focus on 'male violence'. Liddington suggests that the latter 'radical feminist strand' with its attendant 'attack upon men individually and on patriarchy generally, and its failure to acknowledge women's own collusion with militarism, have deprived this strand of popular support, and has at times caused painful controversy'. This chapter looks at the expression of what Liddington terms the 'radical feminist strand'⁴² through the theorising of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, WONT and the Greenham Common Peace Camp to suggest that rather than a blanket 'attack upon men', there was an (almost⁴³) utopian vision underpinning much of the theorising that saw a world in which women and men would support each other and the wellbeing of the planet through collective responsibility, nonviolence and altruism.

This is not to say that there wasn't a determined critique of men and masculinity. There was, indeed, a significant focus on 'male violence' and the link between that violence and the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Much of this theorizing had roots in the WLM. The Feminism and

³⁹ The original walk was supported by donation from various peace groups including the Cambridge WONT group [Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 33.] A number of the women variously living at, and visiting, Greenham Common were also members of WONT.

⁴⁰ Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Others, such as Roseneil, sees maternalist theorizing as sitting outside of feminist analyses of war and nuclear weaponry albeit recognising the emergence of versions based on feminist thinking [Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 4].

⁴² Noting that, many of the opponents of the focus of feminists on nuclear disarmament identified themselves as 'radical feminists'. See Brenda Whisker, Jacky Bishop, Lilian Mohin and Trish Longdon (eds), *Breaching the Peace: A Collection of Radical Feminist Papers*, (London, 1983).

⁴³ The Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group were specific in eschewing 'utopia' which 'would be so boring'. Rather, while acknowledging that bad things would still happen, their vision of a reformed society was one in which there would be 'enough peace, freedom and love' [Feminism and Non-violence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 54].

Nonviolence Study Group argued that there was ‘a profound relationship between the fact that individual women are commonly attacked and beaten up and that a nuclear war threatens the entire world.’⁴⁴ This connection, characterized by the Study Group as a ‘continuum of violence’ that linked ‘the nuclear family to the nuclear state’,⁴⁵ was, in the words of British academic Cynthia Cockburn⁴⁶, ‘groundbreaking’, long preceding broader use of the term in this context about twenty years later.⁴⁷ The link, according to the Study Group, was power. The underlying assumption of ‘patriarchy, capitalism and the State’, said the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, is ‘that some people are better than others and are therefore more important and valuable’⁴⁸ including men having more ‘value’ than women.⁴⁹ This ethos, they argued, underpinned a military that both represented this ideology in its structure and supported the State to implement this ideology. The military existed to defend ‘the interests of a powerful privileged minority’.

It was precisely because of the theory that the military – and nuclear weapons – were a manifestation of patriarchy that the Greenham Common protests attracted criticism from other feminists. Rather than pouring effort into the issue of peace, argued Lynn Alderson, ‘we should be working solidly against the underlying structure of patriarchy’.⁵⁰ Focusing on nuclear disarmament was seen by some as a distraction to the main task of dismantling patriarchy. Many of these views were expressed in a pamphlet published in 1983 – *Breaching the Peace* – to capture the concerns of some radical feminists who felt that protests focused on peace and nuclear disarmament were not only a distraction, but also a symptom of a general dilution of the WLM.⁵¹ However, many felt that the military – as the ultimate expression of patriarchy – was an appropriate target. For Gay Jones, a member of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, the military was ‘*the* bastion of male power in a way not even the police, the law or the top echelons, are’.⁵² Frequently cited by British feminists, American feminist academic, Cynthia Enloe used

⁴⁴ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Cynthia Cockburn, who was involved in the Greenham Common protest, did not attend university but wrote prolifically on gender and peace activism receiving, amongst other forms of academic recognition, an honorary doctorate from the University of Lund, Sweden and an honorary chair at City University London and the University of Warwick respectively.

⁴⁷ Cynthia Cockburn, *Anti-Militarism: Political and Gender Dynamics of Peace Movements*, (Basingstoke, 2012), p. 72, n. 18.

⁴⁸ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Alderson, Lynn, ‘Greenham Common and all that ... A radical feminist view’, in Whisker et al., *Breaching the Peace*, pp. 11-15, at p. 13.

⁵¹ Whisker et al, *Breaching the Peace*.

⁵² Gay Jones, ‘Women and the military’, *Shrew* (Summer 1978), pp. 4-6, at p. 4.

similar terms referring to the military as 'society's bastion of male identity' pointing to a 'mutuality of interest between men and the military ... that few other institutions enjoy, even in a thoroughly patriarchal society'.⁵³

Holding this privileged position, the military, according to Enloe, was exceptional. With 'close identification of the military to the state', the military could 'exercise powers denied to other institutions'. Those powers, said Enloe, were used not only for defence 'from external foes', they were also applied to the 'maintenance of the social order' inclusive of 'those gender definitions which bolster ideological militarism'.⁵⁴ The Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group agreed warning that, despite rhetoric to suggest that the armed forces existed to protect the population, it also existed to control the population – 'to preserve the State from "the enemy within"'.⁵⁵ Jones believed that, even if other sites of patriarchy were dismantled, the military would ensure that patriarchy prevailed. 'When ideological and economic coercion fails, when the individual woman can no longer be terrorised on the street by the individual man, the army is there – with its full paraphernalia of nuclear and non nuclear power – behind even the police, with incalculable power to control, contain and destroy.'⁵⁶ 'Even where the military is not so prominent', said Penny Strange, 'it still wields power over the government, as a powerful lobby and electoral force'.⁵⁷

Many women at Greenham Common saw working for nuclear disarmament as a mechanism to challenge patriarchy at its heart. Nottingham WONT saw broad value in drawing attention to 'the links between nuclear weapons and male domination'. Through this awareness, 'people will appreciate the destructiveness of sex-role stereotypes and the oppression of women'.⁵⁸ Further, organising peace work on non-patriarchal terms would, according to the Nottingham WONT, allow people to 'experience their own power, and demand more autonomy: this would threaten the hierarchical, centralised structures that are an expression of and a support for male domination'.⁵⁹

⁵³ Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become you? The Militarization of Women's Lives*, (London, 1998 [First published 1983]), p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ Jones, 'Women and the military', at p. 4.

⁵⁷ Penny Strange, *It'll Make a Man of You: A Feminist view of the Arms Race*, (Nottingham, 1983), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Nottingham WONT, 'Working as a group', at p. 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

5.2 Protesting without men

One of the distinguishing features of much feminist activism on state violence and the nuclear threat in the 1970s and 1980s was that it was done autonomously from established peace groups and, in many cases, from men.⁶⁰ This was not without controversy. As seen from the exclusion of men from the Greenham Common Peace Camp, it was the subject of significant debate both within the movement and externally. While much is made of the exclusion of men from the Greenham Common Peace Camp, the identification of the camp as a women's protest had started evolving before that. Following the initial presentation of the walk from Cardiff as a protest specifically by women, it was women who continued to talk to the press from the camp. Signage was spontaneously put up denoting the camp as a 'Women's Peace Camp'.⁶¹ Alongside this, women at the camp started to think more purposely about the place of men at the camp but there was little consensus about the issue.⁶² Women at the camp in those early months expressed a range of worries including 'it's wrong to blame men for the nuclear mess we're in' and 'if working to stop Cruise means you can't co-operate with men then how will the next generation be produced to make it all worthwhile?'⁶³ Connie Mansueto, reporting on the camp in *Spare Rib* in November 1981, said that, while not wanting to encourage too many men to join the camp, '[t]he organisers actively wanted some men there, because they want to work out new, more equal ways of relating to men'.⁶⁴

At the same time, women saw benefits in making the camps women only, including, but not limited to, reducing the risk of escalation in violence with authorities connected to men's 'conditioning and because of feeling protective towards women in a dangerous situation'.⁶⁵ Some felt that, just by being present, men would provoke a more violent response in police. For Connie Mansueto, nuclear weapons were not only 'an expression of male violence' but she also simply wanted 'to fight nuclear weapons more than [she wanted] to spend time confronting sexism in individual anti-nuclear men'.⁶⁶ Early in 1982, a women-only meeting was held and the decision to

⁶⁰ Lynne Jones, 'Introduction', in Lynne Jones (ed.), *Keeping the Peace: A Women's Peace Handbook*, (London, 1983), pp. 1-6, at p. 1.

⁶¹ Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 19.

⁶² See Jayne, in Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 32.

⁶³ quoted account of the discussions by Sarah H. in Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ Connie Mansueto, 'and men too?', *Spare Rib* 112 (November 1981), pp. 9-10, at pp. 9-10.

⁶⁵ Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ Mansueto, 'and men too?', at p. 10.

exclude men from the site was made. The decision did not land well with the men at the camp. From one account, when the group statement was read out:

‘The men went completely mad. Their worst elements came out. There was one bloke staying here for a couple of days who had come specifically to give us a workshop on self-control. Well he just couldn’t take it – he bashed into this cauldron of boiling water, almost spilling it all over one of the women, and then he just stormed off.’⁶⁷

Despite the initial consternation, the men soon left and the camp officially became a women’s only protest. A press release was issued declaring the camp a women’s only camp from 1 February 1982: ‘We intend to maintain this camp peacefully and act at all times in a non violent manner and diffuse confrontation’, declared the women.⁶⁸ While not explicit in the statement, nevertheless the connection between peaceful occupation and gender was cemented with a receptive media. As will be discussed later, this connection would become a complex theoretical challenge for the feminist protestors.

In the meantime, however, there were more pressing practical issues. The departure of the men meant the loss of valuable support.⁶⁹ It also meant that women who wanted to attend the Peace Camp needed to make a conscious decision to leave male partners behind. ‘How many women could go to Greenham now without feeling that they were betraying their partners?’ asked Sarah H.⁷⁰ However, as seen in the previous chapter, there was power in demonstrating the independence of women. Running the protest by themselves without the protection of men formed a challenge to the model of female dependence on men. The women at the camp did not need, in fact repelled, the protective role of men. ‘There is’, said Carola Addington, ‘a tremendous fear of women doing anything on their own, surviving without men, particularly surviving in the great outdoors’.⁷¹ Not only a practical message, it was, for many women, this construction of men as protectors of women that fed rhetoric justifying war. Shrugging off the protective role of men was seen by some as important in the message of peace. Women recognised the similarity between the rhetoric of ‘protection’ within interpersonal relations, as discussed in the last chapter, and the ‘protection’ offered by the military.⁷² The rhetoric of ‘protection’ was, according to feminists, just one of the narratives used to shape violent masculinities in the military and the

⁶⁷ Sarah G. quoted in Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ Women’s peace camp, Greenham Common, ‘Press Release’, reproduced in full in Lynne Jones, ‘On common ground: The women’s peace camp at Greenham Common’, in Jones, *Keeping the Peace*, pp. 79-97, at p. 87.

⁶⁹ Sarah H. quoted in Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 33.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Carola Addington, quoted in Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 150.

⁷² See, for example, Jenny Jacobs, ‘Sorting the men from the boys’, *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978), pp. 20-21, at p. 20.

women at Greenham Common were not going 'to be a party anymore to men using us [as] an excuse to be protective'.⁷³

5.3 Socializing men to be violent

The connection between 'maleness' or masculinity and the military was not a new one. In 1914, American feminist intellectual, Charlotte Gilman, for example, located 'maleness in its absurdist extremes' in 'warfare'.⁷⁴ In Britain, Virginia Woolf's 1938 polemic, *Three Guineas* firmly placed war at the feet of men.⁷⁵ Feminists in the WLM, however, thought about this connection in new ways. In the first instance, extending thinking about processes of socialization, the military was seen as a specific site of socialization, cultivating and valorising violence in men.

Being in the army is a brutalising process whereby sensitivity, gentleness, initiative, individuality, concern for life are processed out, and men are trained to be tough, ruthless, obedient, competitive and willing to dominate, suppress and kill to maintain the power structure.⁷⁶

Others mirrored this analysis. Gay Jones described the military's version of masculinity as '[t]ough, aggressive, coolly efficient, self-sufficient'. Helen John, a longer-term protestor at Greenham Common, recognised that, against this version of masculinity, femininity was rejected. Militarism, reported John, had 'no regard for women'. She recalled: 'An American marine actually explained to me, that in the training of a soldier they take the woman out of the man until they turn him into a killer and then he becomes a man again.' Through this process, she suggested, 'he's gained his masculinity'.

Jones' characterisation of military masculinity as 'a glamourised image of inhumanity' was also reflected in the language of others as feminists critiqued a process they understood as intentionally desensitizing men. Rachel Lever, for example, saw military training as a dehumanizing process in which men were 'specially hardened and brutalised'.⁷⁷ This, said the Study Group, meant that 'men are more likely to see human beings as expendable' and underpinned the willingness and ability of men to be violent, even to kill. For some, there was a

⁷³ 'Jane (grandmother), from Carry Greenham Home' quoted in extracted in Greenham Print Prop (ed.), *The Greenham Factor*, (London, Revised Edition c. 1984), [no page numbers].

⁷⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World: or, Our Androcentric Culture*, (New York, Third Edition, 1914), p. 211.

⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (New York, 1938).

⁷⁶ Jenny Jacobs, 'Sorting the men from the boys', *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978), pp. 20-21, at p. 20.

⁷⁷ Rachel Lever, 'What sort of peace do we want?', *Spare Rib* 142 (May 1984), p. 21.

sense of some compassion for ‘soldiers [who] were themselves victims of the military system’.⁷⁸ While not losing sight of the benefit accruing to men from their roles as oppressors, the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group conceded that men ‘suffered’ from processes that ‘twisted’ their values and alienated them from ‘the magic of human life’.⁷⁹ In the face of harassment by soldiers, Katrina Allen reflected that the perpetrators were ‘basically ... young men who had been brutalized by a process deliberately intended to do that’.⁸⁰ Like the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, others saw men suffering from the socialization processes. Lever, for example, suggested that the process of brutalization led to ‘lasting mental wounds’ in many men.⁸¹ Accompanying this sentiment was a recognition that, for some men, entering the military had been necessary rather than sought out. On the heels of a significant recession, and following a decline in manufacturing from the 1970s, this was a time of increasing unemployment in Britain. Roseneil reports that many women recognised that the military represented one of a few viable employment opportunities for many men. ‘For working-class men with few qualifications during the period of high unemployment in the early 1980s, the army was one of few routes to a job.’⁸²

The military was also seen as a site where violence was condoned, even endorsed, as a way to solve problems. Penny Strange wrote that ‘[t]he soldier’s task is not thought of as a disagreeable necessity but as an heroic field of manly virtue.’⁸³ This endorsement of violence was recognised as exacerbating violence beyond military applications including exacerbating violence against women. Lynne Segal reported observations of ‘a greater use of violence’ by men in the military who had been trained ‘in the professional use of violence’.⁸⁴ Feminists looked to the experience of Northern Ireland and the writing of Eileen Evason.⁸⁵ It was Eileen Evason, born in Birmingham but moving to Northern Ireland in 1969, who first coined the term ‘armed patriarchy’ to refer to the specific nature of patriarchy in the militarised environment of Northern Ireland noting that

⁷⁸ Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, p. 241.

⁷⁹ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p.11.

⁸⁰ Katrina Allen, quoted in Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham*, (London & New York, 2000), p. 238.

⁸¹ Rachel Lever, ‘What sort of peace do we want?’, *Spare Rib* 142 (May 1984), p. 22.

⁸² Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, p. 241.

⁸³ Strange, *It’ll Make a Man of You*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, (London, 1987), p. 168.

⁸⁵ Evason’s work was referenced in Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p.55.

‘many more men have access to weapons here’.⁸⁶ In the lives of women in the region, this translated into an environment of increased violence – both in frequency and degree.⁸⁷

5.4 Feminist nonviolence

We can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods.⁸⁸

For some, a fundamental change in the dominance of masculine aggression could be brought about by modelling nonviolence and feminist protests commonly adhered to a principle of nonviolence. Not only was nonviolence at the heart of the theorising of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, it was also one of the few non-negotiables of the Greenham Common ethos. While women had very different views about the types of action that should be taken, ‘as long as they were within the non-violent code’, explained Becky Griffiths, ‘then what one person chose to do was fine, even if someone else wouldn’t have chosen to do it’.⁸⁹ Nonviolence was not, however, exclusively feminist and had a long history that pre-dated the feminist protests against nuclear weapons.

Roseneil suggests that the principle of nonviolence, as adopted by the women at Greenham Common, had ‘its roots in the commitment to non-violence of Gandhi, and later of the civil rights movement in the United States’. This is somewhat true but such accounts understate the multi-faceted nature of the idea of nonviolence which, as it has been adopted and practiced variously internationally and within Britain has taken on different characteristics. Research by historians such as Sean Scalmer and Sophie Scott-Brown has demonstrated how nonviolence was variously adapted, theorized and practiced by organisations, including activist groups, throughout the West.⁹⁰ While the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group had its roots in WRI, it

⁸⁶ Eileen Evason, *Hidden Violence: Battered Women in Northern Ireland* (1982), p.73. See also Monica McWilliams, ‘Struggling for peace and justice: Reflections on women’s activism in Northern Ireland’, *Journal of Women’s History* 7:1 (Winter 1995), pp. 13-39.

⁸⁷ Alice McKimm, ‘“We’ve Been Left Out”: Women’s refuges in Northern Ireland, 1974-2008’, *Modern British History* 35:4 (December 2024), pp. 475-492, at pp. 479-480. See also Monica McWilliams, ‘Violence against women and political conflict: The Northern Ireland experience’, *Critical Criminology* 8:1 (Spring 1997), pp. 78-91.

⁸⁸ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 219.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Kate, Kerrow, and Rebecca Mordan, *Out of Darkness: Greenham Voices 1981-2000*, (Cheltenham, 2021), p. 41.

⁹⁰ Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*, (Cambridge, 2011); Sophie Scott-Brown, ‘An artful science: Activism, non-violence, and radical democracy in cold war Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 59:4 (2024), pp. 639-659; and Sean Scalmer, ‘Nonviolence meets direct action: A transnational encounter of the interwar years’, *Modern Intellectual History* 23 (2026), pp. 146-168.

would be erroneous to assume that WRI thinking about nonviolence defined the starting point of thinking about nonviolence for feminists. While some have critiqued the Greenham Common protest as being largely made up of middle-class white women⁹¹, we know that, while it did not necessarily represent the composition of British society, participants were, in fact, drawn from diverse backgrounds.⁹² The composition of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group showed a similar diversity. In an anthology of writings on feminism and nonviolence, Selina Gallo-Cruz has provided biographies of some of the authors who contributed to the special edition of *Shrew*, as well as the authors of *Piecing it Together*. These biographies show that, beyond WRI, members were drawn from diverse activist backgrounds including Quakers, the CND, Committee of 100, DAC, anarchist groups, assorted feminist campaigns and groups, as well as a number of overseas organisations such as the Movement for a New Society in America.⁹³ As such, no single perspective on nonviolence can be attributed to feminist campaigning against state violence and nuclear weapons.

What was common across feminist thinking in this area was the need to apply a feminist lens to thinking about nonviolence. As explained by the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, ‘we did not want simply to inherit and pass on “male notions of nonviolence”’.⁹⁴ Reflecting this intention to develop something modified for feminist values, some important strands of thinking – together with differences – can be identified. In the first place, as a corollary to thinking about violence as an expression of patriarchal power, nonviolence was seen by many as a significant challenge to patriarchal ways of ordering society. Connected to challenges to hierarchical ways of decision-making, nonviolent protest was about ‘abolishing power as we know it and redefining it as something common to all, to be used by all and for all’.⁹⁵ In this way, nonviolence was intimately connected to the feminist project in removing power structures and oppression and allowing everyone to have a voice – a ‘shared power’. This was reflected in the ways in which women organised themselves at Greenham. Kate Kerrow and Rebecca Mordan observe:

No stone was left analytically unturned, as language, systems, laws and economics came under the women’s scrutiny. A lot, they felt, was wrong with the top-down, violent, hierarchical

⁹¹ See, for example, Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women’s Movement in England*, p. 165.

⁹² See, for example, Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 41-59.

⁹³ Selina Gallo-Cruz (ed), *Feminism, Violence and Nonviolence: An Anthology*, (Edinburgh, 2024), pp. 49-53, 131-132 and 134.

⁹⁴ The group, describing itself as a ‘long distance study group’, was comprised of members from across England and ‘met once every two months’. Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978), p. 3.

⁹⁵ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 27.

world that men had created and were running. They set about creating an alternative in the peace camp, establishing collective decision making and leaderless action.⁹⁶

A key source drawn on for alternative approaches - 'consensus decision-taking, no leaders, no hierarchy, shared responsibility' - was the WLM.⁹⁷ Ann Pettitt recalled the influence of feminists on the original walk from Cardiff who invited people to share their feelings in a judgement-free setting.⁹⁸

A second characteristic of feminist nonviolence was that 'conscious nonviolence' did not need to be heroic.⁹⁹ The protest actions did not need to be dramatic to have value, neither did those actions need to invoke great 'suffering' which, when that suffering was disproportionate to a beneficial outcome, was seen to feed into 'a form of machismo'.¹⁰⁰ However, nonviolence was equally not passive and should be distinguished from 'peace'. Peace denoted an absence of conflict. Nonviolence, rather, pointed to a way of being that, according to feminists, had ramifications beyond the absence of war. Lynne Jones observed that nonviolence was not just a 'tactic for action, but an approach to life, chosen because we are aiming for a non-violent society'.¹⁰¹

Nonviolence was promulgated by many feminists as a way of organising society – a behaviour common to everyone and not something specific to women. This was also evident in acknowledging male nonviolent forerunners which flagged the conviction that men were not inherently aggressive but, rather, had a capacity for non-violence. Sasha Roseneil points to what she terms a 'firm belief that men's violence, individual and collective, could be prevented, and that it was not biologically determined'.¹⁰² 'Men are just as capable of being non-violent as women' argued many women in the debates leading up to declaring the peace camp a women-only space.¹⁰³ Writing about nonviolence in 1984, Myrtle Solomon, went further. 'Nonviolence', she said, 'is natural to every one of us in our daily lives; very few women – or men – solve their personal problems by injuring or murdering the person with whom they are in disagreement'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Kerrow and Mordan, *Out of Darkness*, p. 64.

⁹⁷ Sue Finch, with Mary, Cynthia, Linda, Colleen, Barbara, Jan, from Hackney Greenham Groups, 'Socialist-feminists and Greenham', *Feminist Review* 23 (June 1986), pp. 93-100, at pp. 93-94.

⁹⁸ Kerrow and Mordan, *Out of Darkness*, p. 34.

⁹⁹ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 36.

¹⁰¹ Lynne Jones, 'Some notes on taking nonviolent direct action', in Lynne Jones (ed.), *Keeping the Peace: A Women's Peace Handbook*, (London, 1983), pp. 149-152, at p 149.

¹⁰² Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 64.

¹⁰³ Jones, 'On common ground', at p. 86.

¹⁰⁴ Myrtle Solomon, 'Alternative defence: Nonviolent struggle and peace building', in Dorothy Thompson (ed.), *Over our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*, (London, 1984), pp. 129-135, at p. 130.

However, not everyone agreed that nonviolence was necessarily a natural state for men or women. Many women were concerned, for example, to emphasize that women were not inherently nonviolent. Sophie Laws said, 'we must stop perpetuating certain patriarchal myths' such as 'the view that women are inherently nonviolent'. 'Women are not traditionally nonviolent', she explained but, rather, 'traditionally oppressed'. The violence of the oppressed, she continued, was expressed inwardly in 'self-destructive ways'.¹⁰⁵

Many described nonviolence as an attitude, a strategy, underlining all activities. Gwyn Kirk described nonviolence as 'truly oppositional'.¹⁰⁶ For Kirk, 'feminist nonviolence' could be characterised by the principles of 'assertiveness, enjoyment, openness, support and preparation, flexibility of tactics, and resistance'.¹⁰⁷ It was not an absence of violence but, rather, a strategy of engagement. Gwyn Kirk described nonviolence as 'taking responsibility for situations rather than thinking of ourselves as powerless victims without resources'.¹⁰⁸ Nonviolence was a way of speaking up and making oneself visible. It was the opposite of being a victim. 'Nonviolence', explained the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, 'offers a third approach to the kill-or-be killed pattern'.¹⁰⁹ Nonviolence was not necessarily 'nice'. 'Some of us are repelled by the media image of non-violent resistance associated with the peace movement: the peace activist in wellington boots who smiles at everyone including the policeman, believing that she has moral rightness on her side.'¹¹⁰ Disruption and challenge were not prohibited under nonviolence. Rather the Greenham women devised a wide range of creative ways to disrupt the operations of the base including die-ins, locking the gates with a bicycle lock¹¹¹, shaking and/or removing parts of the fence of the base, climbing into the base, dancing on the silos and blockading the entrance.

While women were often arrested, many of the activities seemed to disarm the military and police. Protestor Aggie observed: 'The authorities, when faced with organised non-violent women, do not know how to deal with us. They are trained to react to aggressive behaviour.'¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Sophie Laws quoted in *Shrew* (Summer 1978), p. 2. This was a special edition of *Shrew* published by the Women and Nonviolence Study Group.

¹⁰⁶ Kirk, 'Our Greenham Common: Feminism and Nonviolence', in Adriene Harris and Ynestra King (eds), *Rocking the Ship of State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics*, (London & New York, 2019 [First published 1989]), pp. 115-130, at p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ Kirk, 'Our Greenham Common: Feminism and Nonviolence', at p. 120.

¹⁰⁸ Kirk, 'Our Greenham Common: Not just a place but a movement', at p. 263.

¹⁰⁹ *Shrew* (Summer 1978), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Fran Bradshaw and Teresa Thornhill, Northern Ireland and 'Greenham Common: Connections and contradictions', *Spare Rib* 133 (August 1983), from p. 60, at p. 62.

¹¹¹ *Carry Greenham Home*, from 29:49 minutes. Unable to otherwise remove the lock, the gate was ultimately pushed off its hinges by Base personnel (at 32:32 minutes).

¹¹² Aggie, Greenham Peace Camp, quoted in Greenham Print Prop, *The w*, [no page numbers].

Similarly Ann Snitow observed how authorities, unable to employ 'a visibly brutal force', were helpless in the face of much of the nonviolent action. This, maintained Snitow, represented 'another kind of defeat, since the British armed services and police want to maintain their image of patriarchal protectors; they do not want to appear to be batterers of nonviolent women'. Snitow continued: 'Greenham women expose the contradictions of gender: by being women they dramatize powerlessness, but they also disarm the powerful.'¹¹³

However, the women also faced aggression, and the nonviolent activities required a certain courage. In a self-published pamphlet written in 1984, Jean Freer spoke to the nature of nonviolence as strength. 'Remaining non-violent in the face of provocation', argued Freer, 'requires immense personal discipline and is a source of tremendous inner strength'.¹¹⁴ Jane, a representative of the left-leaning National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO)¹¹⁵ who provided support to Greenham women on occasion, echoed this sentiment:

'The macho-ness of the policemen and their eventual heavy-handed approach at the blocking of the gates cannot be counteracted effectively either by outright aggression or by complete passivity. Non-violent action is *not* non-action. When women are actually getting caught under huge army trucks and being pulled or kicked onto pavements only to get up again and go back for more, it is real action which requires *real guts*.'¹¹⁶

Ann Snitow agreed: 'As women have seen again and again, if they push the soldiers too far, the men stop pulling their punches, reverse their above-beating-a-woman attitude, and beat away.'¹¹⁷

While all protestors at Greenham Common were expected to adhere to nonviolence, not all women held the same view about the purpose of non-violence at the camp. For some feminists, there were fundamental difficulties in the adoption of non-violence particularly if considered in the context of the broader continuum of violence. For these feminists, non-violence remained at best ineffective and potentially a dangerous stance to take. 'It is highly dangerous for women to rely on their moral superiority to protect themselves from men.'¹¹⁸ In saying this, radical feminist

¹¹³ Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty*, p. 187.

¹¹⁴ Jean Freer, *Ragin Womyn: In Reply to Breaching the Peace*, (London, 1984), p. 13

¹¹⁵ Established in 1905 NALGO, whose 'activities [originally] were largely those of social club and friendly society' for local government employees, grew to become a significant white-collar union [David Lockwood, 'The National and Local Government Officers' Association', in Richard Hyman and Robert Price (eds), *The New Working Class? White-Collar Workers and Their Organizations: A Reader*, (London & Basingstoke, 1983), pp. 188-196, at p. 188].

¹¹⁶ Jane, NALGO rep, Newbury court, quoted in Greenham Print Prop, *The Greenham Factor*, [no page numbers]. (Emphasis in original)

¹¹⁷ Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty*, p. 188.

¹¹⁸ Alderson, 'Greenham Common and all that ... A radical feminist view', at p. 14. The Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group distinguished self-defence from nonviolent action. 'As long as individual women at home or on the streets face violence without a very active support to stop that violence, we assert the right to defend ourselves from the victimisation, including physically if necessary.' Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 38.

and critic of the protest Lynn Alderson was not alone in concern about a blanket commitment to non-violence. More than the need for counter-violence, others saw violence as a necessary part of revolution. 'Some feel that accustoming oneself to the use of violence is a necessary part of women's liberation, and have difficulty reconciling this with the non-violent philosophies of many women's peace groups'.¹¹⁹ This ran counter to those who felt that a nonviolent society could not be achieved by violent means. Kathy Watson of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group argued that 'if we want a nonviolent society and I think a society without oppression, exploitation and authority is a nonviolent one, the process by which we make that society will have to be nonviolent too'.¹²⁰

Many feminists who otherwise denigrated violence as a patriarchal attribute attempted to balance support for women (and men) overseas who had joined military operations as resistance to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes.¹²¹ In a study of female participation in the Royal Navy and The Royal Air Force, Kathleen Sherit called out a distinction between the way *Spare Rib* reported on female military activities in Britain and overseas. 'Armed female freedom fighters acting against repressive regimes were lauded', she said. On the other hand, articles about women in the British armed forces 'disparaged their participation'.¹²² Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, writing an account of Greenham Common in 1984, were quick to distinguish between the decision to apply nonviolence at Greenham Common and supporting the need for others to apply violent resistance. Sensitive to this distinction, nonviolence was frequently presented as a pragmatic tactic of protest. 'As a tactic, it is definitely appropriate to our needs, here and now, in this phase of our protest.'¹²³ Others, such as Rebecca Johnson, remained steadfast that nonviolence was a necessary precondition to nuclear disarmament. 'We can't disinvent nuclear weapons, so we must evolve the moral and political attributes to render them useless.'¹²⁴ So, what were these moral and political attributes?

¹¹⁹ Lynne Jones, 'Introduction', in Jones, *Keeping the Peace*, pp. 1-6, at p. 3.

¹²⁰ Kathy Watson, 'Being nonviolent', *Shrew* (Summer '78), pp. 8-9, at p. 8.

¹²¹ Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 64.

¹²² Kathleen Sherit, 'The Integration of Women into the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, Post-World War II to the Mid 1990s', [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Kings College, London], (23 August 2013), p. 198. See also Kathleen Sherit, *Women on the Frontline: British Servicewomen's Path to Combat*, (Gloucestershire, 2020), pp. 123-124 on attitudes to female participation in the armed forces.

¹²³ Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 36.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Harford and Hopkins, *Greenham Common*, p. 40.

5.5 Gender neutral attributes for peace

Just think about it. Which side? Are you on the side of death or are you on the side of life?
That's the only decision you have to make.

Protestor addressing police officers¹²⁵

Sasha Roseneil observes the importance of the principle of personal responsibility at Greenham Common.¹²⁶ Roseneil frames this in terms of the expectation on each and every woman at the site. However, it is clear that the principle of personal responsibility was expected of men as part of an ethos of collective responsibility. Women at Greenham Common regularly directly addressed the service personnel and others working at the base, verbally heckling them or otherwise challenging them by asking questions about their thoughts on the military, patriarchy and nuclear weapons. Maggie Lowry reported, 'we aim to make the American personnel think'.¹²⁷ A frequent question put to the soldiers in song was 'which side are you on?' The song, written by Gillian Booth in 1982, came with the instruction: 'To be sung through barbed wire fences, at Police, and outside courts, and at every demonstration, and just about everywhere'.¹²⁸ The song asked listeners to consider, for example, whether they were on 'the side of atrocity', 'the side of perjury', or 'the side of misery' but extended beyond the issue of nuclear warfare to also ask listeners to consider questions such as whether they were on 'the side of racial strife', 'the side of the National Front', or 'the side that beats your wife'. There was a 'hope that soldiers might reflect upon their actions and change'.¹²⁹ 'This', Lowry explained, 'may sound condescending, but the fact is that the military training discourages independent thinking or any questioning of their individual responsibility'.

Beyond this, Lowry saw a need for a change in behaviour commenting, in response to heckling by passing servicemen, that 'people must learn to talk and not to hurl abuse, throw stones or discharge guns'.¹³⁰ Lowry was not alone. American feminist and camp visitor, Ann Snitow recalled sitting at Indigo gate '[talking] to the guards five feet from us on the other side of the fence about

¹²⁵ Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson (Directors), *Carry Greenham Home*, National Film and Television School (1983), at 26:34 minutes.

¹²⁶ Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 66.

¹²⁷ Maggie Lowry, 'A voice from the peace camps: Greenham Common and Upper Heyford', in Dorothy Thompson (ed.), *Over our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*, (London, 1983), pp. 73-77, at p. 75.

¹²⁸ 'Which side are you on?', Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp Songbook, accessed from the Website of The Danish Peace Academy curated by Holger Terp, at <<<http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/abase/sange/greenham/song19.htm>>>, accessed on 20 January 2026.

¹²⁹ Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, p. 245.

¹³⁰ Lowry, 'A voice from the peace camps', at p. 76.

war, peace, men, women, weather, money ...'.¹³¹ Sasha Roseneil reports that women would '[attempt] to reason and converse with [soldiers] in order to convey a sense of shared humanity and to try to undermine the process of "othering" in which the soldiers were engaged'.¹³² There were some successes with this approach. Lynne Segal acknowledges that 'many of the soldiers felt not only respect and even sympathy for the peace women, but were also led to question their own role as soldiers'.¹³³

Many women were asked by soldiers for information about how they might leave the army and the telephone number of "At Ease", a counselling organization for military personnel wanting to leave, was regularly passed through the fence.¹³⁴

In a more specific example, Roseneil quotes Carmel Cadden who related a story of a soldier who changed from abusing women at the site to reflecting, some years later, that he had 'changed his mind'. Cadden suggested talking to people 'hoping that they will change their mind' was not hopeless but could result in change. Even if they did not change, it might encourage them to think. In 2017, John Skare, who had worked as a security officer for the American military, described being confronted by the Greenham protestors:

there was one instance when I was walking the perimeter and a woman said to me through the fence, 'Why do you want to kill my children?' I told her I was just doing my job, but I always remember that.¹³⁵

In this, protestors were, like feminists across other campaigns of the WLM, looking for an altruism in men – a culture of caring. For some, this was exemplified by the concept of 'maternal thinking'. The most well-known proponent of maternal thinking was American philosopher Sara Ruddick who published a book with the same name – *Maternal Thinking* – in 1989. In the book, she proposed that there was something specific about 'a mother's thought – the intellectual capacities she develops, the judgements she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, the values she affirms'.¹³⁶ Likening these attributes to any professional discipline, Ruddick

¹³¹ Ann Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty: A Gender Diary*, (Durham, 2015), p. 171.

¹³² Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, p. 241.

¹³³ Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, p. 203.

¹³⁴ Roseneil, *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, p. 245.

¹³⁵ Suzanne Moore, Homa Khaleeli, Moya Sarnier, Leah Harper, Justin McCurry, 'How the Greenham Common protest changed lives: "We danced on top of the nuclear silos"', *The Guardian* (Tuesday, 21 March 2017), online edition, accessed from << <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/20/greenham-common-nuclear-silos-women-protest-peace-camp>>> accessed on 3 October 2025.

¹³⁶ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, (London, 1990 [First published 1989]), p. 24.

suggested that this way of thinking attuned the mother to three main interests – ‘preservation, growth and acceptability’.¹³⁷ It was this way of thinking that, for Ruddick was the source of pacifism. ‘The real basis of female pacifism’, explained Ruddick, ‘lies in the complicated social activity of preservative love’.¹³⁸ Rather than ‘virtuous characteristics’, however, Ruddick was keen to emphasise that mothers shared ‘an identification and a discourse about the strengths required by their ongoing commitments to protect, nurture, and train’.¹³⁹ This was, according to Ruddick, something that anyone – regardless of gender – could acquire, although socialization meant that, on the whole, it was more commonly the preserve of women. Sara Ruddick’s thinking, however, was not prevalent in British theorizing. While it was known, particularly in academic contexts, it did not get broad traction and, rather, received strong criticism from theorists such as Lynne Segal who found Ruddick’s arguments filled with inconsistencies as well as prone to downplaying the diversity of traits of women such as the ability of women to be aggressive and hate.¹⁴⁰

Over time, the Greenham Common Protest became associated, for many, with a form of ecofeminism. Jodi Burkett argues that increased domestic political attention on nuclear weapons, together with ‘growing understandings of their potential impact’ underpinned a shift from anthropocentric ways of seeing the relationship between humanity and nature to an ecocentric world view from the late 1960s.¹⁴¹ Over time, as women connected with the environment in which they lived¹⁴² and as ecofeminist thinking, primarily (although not exclusively) from America, imbued the protest, another strong line of thinking emerged that critiqued men as disconnected from the natural world. Much as women perceived that men had been dehumanized by the military, they theorized that dominant norms of masculinity had also disconnected men from nature.¹⁴³ In this thinking, British feminists were influenced by ecofeminist theorising and action coming out of the US, including the work of Mary Daly¹⁴⁴ and

¹³⁷ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 23.

¹³⁸ Sara Ruddick, ‘Preservative love and military destruction: Some reflections on mothering and peace’, in Joyce Trebilcot (ed.), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, (Savage, 1983), pp. 231-262, at p. 236.

¹³⁹ Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, (London, 1987), pp. 148-149 and 196-198.

¹⁴¹ Jodi Burkett, ‘The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and changing attitudes towards the Earth in the nuclear age’, *British Journal for the History of Science* 45:4 (December 2012), pp. 625-639, at p. 626.

¹⁴² Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, p. 67.

¹⁴³ Kerrow and Mordan, *Out of Darkness*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ Finn Mackay observes that ecofeminism was ‘visible in the politics of Greenham’ including ‘a Dalysque ... version of ecofeminism’. (Finn Mackay, “‘You can’t kill the spirit’ (but you can try): Gendered contestations and contradictions at Menwith Hill Women’s Peace Camp’, in Catherine Eschle and Alison Bartlett (eds), *Feminism and Protest Camps: Entanglements, Critiques and Re-Imaginings*, (Bristol, 2023), pp. 66-71, at p. 69.), Christina Welch also refers to the influence of Mary Daly on the camp. (Christina Welch, ‘The spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp’, *Feminist Theology* 18:2 (2010), pp. 230-248, at pp. 235-236.) Many of the symbols employed by Greenham Common including the web and

those associated with the American movement - Women and Life on Earth. In an anthology published by Women for Life on Earth¹⁴⁵ in 1983, US feminist and one of the founders of Women and Life on Earth, Ynestra King wrote:

We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way.¹⁴⁶

Jean Freer, resident at Greenham Common for two years from 1981, reflected similar sentiment: 'The gruesome threesome of patriarchy, male religions and technology have dishonoured the mother and countenanced the rape and pillage of the planet until she can barely support life.'¹⁴⁷ However, in a manner that was common to ecofeminist theorising, Ynestra King suggested a special connection of women with nature that was contrasted with male disconnection:

Why women? Because our present patriarchy enshrines together the hatred of women and the hatred of nature. In defying this patriarchy we are loyal to future generations and to life and this planet itself. We have a deep and particular understanding of this both through our natures and through our life experience as women.¹⁴⁸

Similarly emphasising the sense of a special connection of woman to nature, many of the symbols and images of Greenham Common played into a binary presentation of men as representative of the 'mechanistic and division' as compared to women who were, in turn, representative of 'the natural and unification'.¹⁴⁹ For ecofeminist Jean Freer, the use of symbols and rituals was important for shared meaning and a way of connecting people 'with the timeless universal forces which weave the magical web of life'.¹⁵⁰ A common trope applied in this perceived connection to nature was motherhood. In considering the emergence of ecofeminism in the 1980s, Lynne Segal also pointed to 'woman's capacity for motherhood which is presented as connecting her with what Adrienne Rich calls the "cosmic essence of womanhood", keeping

fire were influenced by their use in Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston, 1978).

¹⁴⁵ Distinguished from the US movement, Women for Life on Earth was not only the name of the original walk to Greenham Common but had an ongoing presence as an organisation to 'put women in touch with each other locally, nationally, and internationally, ... as a means of sharing news, ideas, and creative expression relating to the Earth and the issues that affect us' (as described in 'About Women for Life on Earth', in Léonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (eds), *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, (London, 1983), [no page number].

¹⁴⁶ Ynestra King, 'The eco-feminist imperative', in Léonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (eds), *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, (London, 1983), pp. 9-14, at p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ Jean Freer, 'Gaea: The earth as our spiritual heritage', in Léonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (eds), *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, (London, 1983), pp. 131-135, at p. 131.

¹⁴⁸ King, 'The eco-feminist imperative', at p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Welch, 'The spirituality of, and at, Greenham Common Peace Camp', at pp. 238-239.

¹⁵⁰ Freer, 'Gaea: The earth as our spiritual heritage', at p. 134.

women in touch with the essentially creative, nurturing and benign blueprint of nature'.¹⁵¹ This theorizing was, however, inherently unstable and came with risk. Lynne Segal pointed out that as equally as women could be 'closer to nature', men were also commonly presented as 'closer to nature: forceful, violent, animal-like and instinctive'.¹⁵²

For many, Greenham Common was a site of multiple feminisms - an experimental site - where women felt able to test the boundaries of gender norms that they experienced outside of Greenham Common. 'I came to see "woman" as a porous identity at Greenham' says Ann Snitow - 'romanticized, celebrated, but also taken apart, transformed by an extreme situation'.¹⁵³ For Finn Mackay, there was a sense of freedom from gender expectations - an 'absence of gendered pressures'. There was room to play with gender. 'Humour was essential', Mackay reflects on her time living on peace camps, 'but womanhood of any particular type at all was not'.¹⁵⁴ For many, however, the nuance of feminisms at Greenham Common, such as the gender-neutral possibilities for maternal thinking and the playful approach to ideas of gender, were too subtle and many feminists worried that, overall, Greenham Common conveyed an essentialist vision of men and women that undermined the possibility of change. In the words of Ann Snitow, making the Greenham Common protest women-only, 'essentialized violence as male'.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, in her analysis of the rhetoric employed at Greenham Common, Margaret Laware observed that '[m]any of the protest strategies relied upon, to some degree, an essentialist notion of "woman"'.¹⁵⁶ For some feminists, this was a fatal problem. Socialist feminist Lynne Segal, for one, suggested that '[a] kind of homegrown radical feminist sociobiology has in fact emerged around the issue of male violence and war'.¹⁵⁷ The suggestion that biology predisposed men to violence (and women to nurture) was, according to Segal, not only problematic but seemed prolific in the Greenham Common publications. Lynn Alderson suggested that the biological essentialism was 'dangerous' in that it entrenched ideas that were used to subordinate women. 'Surely', she said, 'we've learned our lessons about the way that the so-called natural has been used against us'.¹⁵⁸ Further, said Alderson, such an approach was contradictory. Referring to essential female traits distinguished from essential male traits undermined any proclamations that the protests were

¹⁵¹ Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, p. 7.

¹⁵² Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, p. 7.

¹⁵³ Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty*, p. 187.

¹⁵⁴ Mackay, "'You can't kill the spirit" (but you can try)', at p. 73.

¹⁵⁵ Snitow, *The Feminism of Uncertainty*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁶ Laware, Margaret, 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common', *NWSA Journal* 16:3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 18-41, at p. 24.

¹⁵⁷ Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁸ Alderson, 'Greenham Common and all that ... A radical feminist view', at p. 13.

geared to change men. 'How can you influence men if such matters originate in masculine biology?'¹⁵⁹ Micaela di Leonardo agreed: 'By defining men as innately violent it leaves no room for them to join feminist antimilitarism and places no demands on them to take responsibility for their own children and the children of the world.'¹⁶⁰

Equally, as we saw earlier, many feminists would deny the suggestion that their theories drew on, or promoted, essentialist views of men and women. 'I don't believe', said Lucy Whitman in *Spare Rib*, that "human nature" accounts for men's aggression any more than it accounts for women's pacifism and/or passivity'.¹⁶¹ Rather, women pointed to the arguments of socialization that, in their view, underpinned patriarchy. This could include socialization as a child, but also the life experiences of women and men.¹⁶² The Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group identified a distinction between suggestions of biological trait – 'the idea that women are *naturally* co-operative, peaceful, caring and nurturing' – and learnt 'qualities of caring and nurturing'.¹⁶³ It was this belief that gender could be altered that led feminists to call on men to adopt many of the qualities that were traditionally associated with women. More specifically, it was, according to the Study Group, the recognition of the value of the 'qualities of caring and nurturance' which were 'crucial to the development of the human community', together with the understanding of these qualities as learnt that provided a path to change. '[W]e should', they argued, 'be insisting that *men* learn precisely these qualities'.¹⁶⁴

In this way, it would not be for women to 'save' the world with those qualities as distinct from men, but for women and men equally to approach the issue of peace and non-violence with those qualities. Men, they argued, have a 'responsibility for transforming themselves, developing caring human qualities, for being responsible for childcare and housework and all other essential support work'. Interweaving both broader WLM objectives and the objective of peace, the Group continued: 'Children are not just the responsibility of their biological mother and we are *all* responsible for the future of the planet.'¹⁶⁵ Others called on men to adopt a broader agenda. In a review essay in 1985, Micaela di Leonardo asserted that 'it is imperative that we not allow the feminist agenda to be reduced to a concern for children. We should both assume and demand

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Micaela di Leonardo, 'Morals, mothers, and militarism: Antimilitarism and feminist theory', *Feminist Studies* 11:3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 599-617, at p. 612.

¹⁶¹ Lucy Whitman, 'Nuclear Weapons: Stay home and die', *Spare Rib* 99 (November 1980), pp. 50-51, at p. 50.

¹⁶² See, for example, Solomon, 'Alternative defence', at p. 134.

¹⁶³ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 46. (Emphasis in original)

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 49. (Emphasis in original)

that male antimilitarists be feminists and endorse feminist goals.’ This would include a ‘commitment to a just world order’.¹⁶⁶ For Welsh reader Heather Berridge writing to *Spare Rib* in 1982, both women and men needed to change: ‘In a sense it is only as women become assertive and powerful in their own way that men will be able to become gentle, feeling and nurturing.’¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

Connected with a focus on Greenham Common as the primary site of feminist anti-nuclear protest, the emergence of feminist anti-nuclear campaigning is commonly situated in the 1980s.¹⁶⁸ This chapter, however, has shown how feminist theorising on nonviolence, including a critique of nuclear technology, emerged much earlier in the mid-1970s with the ‘groundbreaking’ work of the Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group. Further, while, with some exceptions, a reading of the historiography might suggest that Greenham Common was set apart from the WLM, by looking at the theory underlying the protest action, this chapter has reinstated it to form an important part of the trajectory of feminist thinking in the 1970s and 1980s, including the development of a theoretical framework for an alternative masculinity.

Meredith Veldman locates a shared sensibility in protests against nuclear weapons and the Green movement that emerged in the second part of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁹ It has become generally accepted that the late twentieth century, rather than a period of untrammelled individualism, reflected a common ‘desire to reconcile personal independence with social connectedness’.¹⁷⁰ Veldman’s work, however, finds a current of feeling, termed ‘romanticism’, running through parts of British society that went beyond a concern for ‘social connectedness’ to engage in a ‘critique of industrial society’ and advocate for ‘the restoration of right relationships’ with the world, including ‘right relationships’ with self, others and the natural world.¹⁷¹ While reflecting some of the ‘romantic’ sensibility described by Veldman, the thinking by feminists on

¹⁶⁶ di Leonardo, ‘Morals, mothers, and militarism’, at p. 613.

¹⁶⁷ Heather W Berridge, ‘Why I march’, *Spare Rib* 121 (August 1982), p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy*, pp. 21 and 28.

¹⁶⁹ In this analysis, Veldman’s lens also includes the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien [Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*].

¹⁷⁰ Jon Lawrence, *Me Me Me?: The Search for Community in Post-War England*, (Oxford, 2019). See also, Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Telling stories about post-war Britain: Popular individualism and the “crisis” of the 1970s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 28:2 (2017), pp. 268-304.

¹⁷¹ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, p. 310.

the topic of war and nuclear weapons reveals an important distinction from the organisations (and writers) researched by Veldman.

State violence, particularly in the form of nuclear weapons, was a significant area of concern for feminists in the 1970s and 1980s who came to this area of thinking and campaigning from diverse backgrounds including, but not limited to, the WLM, the peace movement, anarchist groups and socialist organisations. What connected these feminists was a concern to understand violence, and nonviolence, through a feminist lens. This went beyond a critique of ‘mass society’ or ‘the cult of science and technology’ that bothered Veldman’s subjects.¹⁷² It spoke to a fundamental injustice that was seen to imbue the globe. The military, and nuclear technology, took centre stage in this critique, positioned by some as the epitome of patriarchy. Rather than technology itself being the problem, technology was seen as a tool for the exercise of power and nuclear technology a symptom of the exercise of patriarchal power. At the heart of the military and militaristic thinking, argued feminists, sat an ideology of hierarchy in which some people were seen as better than others.¹⁷³ Bring down the military, suggested some, and you would bring down patriarchy. More than a critique, however, feminists suggested an alternative in the form of social reform in which women and men could – would – practice nonviolence and altruism within a framework of egalitarian collective responsibility, not just for the liberation of women but for the wellbeing of the planet.

Mirroring the tactics of predecessors such as the DAC which ‘aimed to create a nonviolent society through direct appeals to individuals and through symbolic but concrete actions’, the protest at Greenham Common directly challenged men to take responsibility for the nuclear threat.¹⁷⁴ ‘Which side are you on?’ rang through the camp and the same question imbued feminist theorising. Like Veldman’s subjects, feminists were attuned to the ‘insistence that ordinary persons could and should shape the structures of their world’.¹⁷⁵ However, feminists were also attentive to the patriarchal structures and systems that impeded individual agency. Even for men, the exercise of individual responsibility would require courage, ‘a resource which is relevant and necessary to the lives of both women and men’.¹⁷⁶ Men would need this courage to take

¹⁷² Indeed, as Veldman acknowledges, the utopian vision of some of her ‘romantics’ sat uneasily with feminism [Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, pp. 89, 102, 255-256.]

¹⁷³ For Veldman’s subjects, hierarchy was not only desirable but necessary for an ordered society [Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, p. 309].

¹⁷⁴ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁵ Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain*, p. 309.

¹⁷⁶ Jenny Jacobs, ‘Sorting the men from the boys’, *Shrew (Neither Victim nor Assassin: Feminism and Non-violence)*, (Summer 1978), pp. 20-21, at p. 21.

responsibility for their role in systems of oppression and violence. They would need courage to relinquish the power that came from positioning themselves within these systems of oppression in order to assume a new form of 'shared power', 'to be used by all and for all'.¹⁷⁷ Further, men would need courage to overcome processes of socialization. In this, feminists drew particular attention to military training as a site of brutalization in which men were conditioned to dehumanize others.

Well before R.W. Connell's treatise on hegemonic masculinities, feminists recognised the policing of masculinities by men, including in the military. A spotlight was placed on the military as a prime site for this policing. Men who failed to meet standards were seen as 'not as "manly" as the others'.¹⁷⁸ It was also recognised that this failure did not necessarily mean a physical failure to meet military standards of masculinity but that questioning those standards would also likely attract judgement and consequences.¹⁷⁹ If men were to be part of a new future, one without patriarchy and the power imbalances attendant to patriarchy, men would need to exercise the courage to not only reject the advantage of power but also to adopt the attributes of nonviolence, regard for others and nurturance. As in the other areas of feminist theorising, it was at this point that the biggest question, and greatest conflicts, arose. Did men have the courage, will or capacity to be part of this future?

¹⁷⁷ Feminism and Nonviolence Study Group, *Piecing it Together*, p. 27.

¹⁷⁸ Jacobs, 'Sorting the men from the boys', at p. 20.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Men are falling over each other to bring us the good news: the sex war is over. Centuries of gender inequality have been all but wiped out in a single generation. We've changed. Women and men are much closer now.¹

The 'new man' who appeared in Britain in the wake of the WLM is something of an enigma. Some journalists suggested that the new man signalled the emergence of a new form of masculinity in the 1970s responding to a changing context, including, but not limited to, the demands of feminism.² Historians and cultural studies scholars writing at the time suggested he was a calculated manifestation of the marketing world invoked from the mid-1980s to sell products.³ Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between. Regardless of the extent of the reality of the 'new man', he is an interesting point of reference to consider against the critique of masculinities posed by feminists, particularly as references to the 'new man' frequently suggested that he was one version of man's answer to feminism. Rosalind Gill, for example, argues: 'It would be impossible to make sense of the figure of the "new man" without reference to feminism.'⁴ So who was this 'new man'? Most accounts positioned the 'new man' as representing a younger generation.⁵ Many referred to the 'new man' being more 'emotional' or 'sensitive'. Reporter John Cunningham spoke to a 'softness' that might 'endear him to many women'.⁶ The 'new man', opined Cunningham, had qualities that might 'enlarge the possibility of greater mutual understanding' with women. A common feature of the 'new man' was that he was either a 'feminist' or considered to have 'feminist views'. For Lucy Delap, the 'new man' was the anti-sexist man.⁷ The most robust way to assess the 'new man' against feminist appraisals of masculinity is to understand what feminists said about men and masculinity, including the specific ways in which they understood

¹ Alistair White, 'New man – the same old story?: Self-obsession', *The Guardian* (20 June 1990), p. 17.

² See, for example, Jo-Ann Goodwin, 'New man on the block', *The Guardian* (13 February 1993), p. A70; and Carol Dix, 'The newly liberated male', *Cosmopolitan* (January 1975), from p. 56.

³ See, for example, Sean Nixon, 'Resignifying masculinity: From "new man" to "new lad"', in David Morley and Kevin Robins (eds), *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality, and Identity*, (Oxford, 2001), pp. 373-385; Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*, (London and New York, 1996); and Frank Mort, 'Boy's own? Masculinity, style and popular culture', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (eds), *Male Order: Unwrapping masculinity*, (London, 1988), pp. 193-224.

⁴ Rosalind Gill, 'Power and the production of subjects: A genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad', *The Sociological Review* (2003), pp. 34-56, at p. 42.

⁵ See, for example, [Unattributed], 'New Man in view', *Yorkshire Post* (Wednesday October 5, 1988), p. 12; and Carol Dix, 'The newly liberated male', at p. 56.

⁶ John Cunningham, 'Macho may be the role image, but is a New Man emerging?', *The Guardian* (20 February 1985), p. 20.

⁷ Lucy Delap, 'Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 15:4 (August 2018), pp. 571-593, at p. 576.

that masculinity needed to change to support the liberation of women. This thesis has engaged with the question of feminist theory about men and masculinity to provide that insight.

Many have argued that, rather than being about men, feminism was primarily about women and the way women wanted to be in the world.⁸ This is true. In a post-war era in which it has been argued that social relationships were being refashioned, women started questioning their situation in circumstances in which greater freedoms and autonomy were promised and denied to them in equal measure. Lynn Abrams describes the period as one in which ‘two central but contradictory discourses which had been at the heart of postwar reconstruction came into conflict’, one that spoke of ‘greater freedoms and opportunities’ and one that reflected a “conservative” discourse of social duty’ in which women were ‘respectable, self-effacing, modest, and willing to care for and serve others.’⁹ Across the board, women navigated these contradictory forces to forge new ways of being a woman, including ‘[working] out ... the principles by which they would live their lives’.¹⁰ Emerging from this, argue Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, was a ‘vernacular discourse of gender equality’ which was as much constructed by working-class women as it was the middle-class women that had been the focus of Abrams’ study.¹¹ At the heart of this discourse was a concern with ‘autonomy and respect’. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson distinguish the ‘vernacular discourse of gender equality’ from the ‘typical concerns of post-1968 feminism’.¹² Yet ‘autonomy and respect’ were also at the core of the feminist project.

What distinguished the feminism of the WLM from this vernacular discourse was the ‘political critique’ applied to the concern with autonomy and respect.¹³ It was a political critique firmly directed at men and masculinity as feminists, analysing the nature and source of the subordinated status in which they continued to find themselves, quickly identified that men were at the heart of the problem. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson’s subjects ‘did not critique masculinity in the same way the women’s liberation movement did’ but, for women of the WLM, it was clear that masculinity needed to change in order to realize the conditions for the ‘autonomy

⁸ Ann Oakley, *Subject Women*, (London, 1982), p. 335.

⁹ Lynn Abrams, ‘Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the discourse on the “good woman” in 1950s and 1960s Britain’, in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (eds), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), pp. 60-83, at p. 66.

¹⁰ Abrams, *Mothers and Daughters*, at p. 80.

¹¹ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class’, *Past and Present* 254 (February 2022), pp. 277-313, at p. 283.

¹² Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, ‘Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class’, at p. 254.

¹³ Emma Wallhead, ‘A political sexual revolution: Sexual autonomy in the British Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s and 1980s’, *Twentieth Century British History* 34:2 (2023), pp. 354-376, at p. 355.

and respect' of women.¹⁴ This did not, for many feminists, mean being 'anti-men', 'putting men "down there"', or looking to 'privilege women over men' as Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson's subjects believed.¹⁵ Rather, the WLM drew on, and consistently applied, universal principles such as egalitarianism, collective responsibility, non-violence, regard for others, empathy and care to critique norms of masculinity that were seen to be grounded in hierarchy, competition, aggression, self-centredness and detachment.

Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson argue that vernacular 'discourses of gender equality' reflected 'a value system' that was distinct from feminist values and that 'drew on alternative sources in fashioning their understanding of gender equality' such as the psy-sciences and human rights discourses. However, I would argue that, in addition to drawing extensively across academic disciplines, feminists were also clearly influenced by these same discourses. While, as noted by Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, predominantly self-referenced values such as individuality and autonomy can be traced to these discourses, other-referenced values such as collective responsibility, mutual understanding and empathy were also associated with these discourses and provided a readily accessed means of interpreting the nature of relationships with others. As Rosalind Gill observes, '[t]he humanist psychology that was popularized in the UK and US throughout the 1970s ... promoted assertiveness in place of aggressiveness or passivity (which were popularly mapped onto men and women respectively), and it placed high value on good communication'.¹⁶ For example, while humanist psychologist Carl Rogers is most famous for promulgating a person-centred approach in therapy, he also advanced the same principles – including empathy and unconditional positive regard - for lay audiences and non-therapeutic relationships.¹⁷ Importantly, these attributes were gender-neutral and could be applied by men or women alike.

Further, the research for this thesis has shown that feminists were not alone in their observations about the nature of men and masculinity. Women who did not necessarily identify with the WLM showed similar understandings. For example, it was not just feminists who recognised the use of

¹⁴ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 'Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class', at p. 283.

¹⁵ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 'Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class', at p. 285.

¹⁶ Rosalind Gill, 'Power and the production of subjects: A genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad', *The Sociological Review* (2003), pp. 34-56, at p.43.

¹⁷ See, for example John Whiteley (Producer), *Carl Rogers On Empathy*, (New York, 1974), at << <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ap1.proxy.openathens.net/watch/carl-rogers-on-empathy-part-1/details>>> and << <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ap1.proxy.openathens.net/watch/carl-rogers-on-empathy-part-2/details>>>, accessed on 7 June 2026; and Carl Rogers, 'My philosophy of interpersonal relationships and how it grew.' *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 13:2 (April 1973), pp. 3–15.

violence by men as a means of systemic control. Similarly, the desire for emotional support was shared by many activists and non-activists alike. Rather than a fundamental difference in values then, the difference lay more in whether women saw those understandings as motivating a broader political project, including a sense of what that might mean for the ways in which they wanted to live their lives. It is not inconceivable that in the context of the exigencies of daily life, the political concerns of feminism may have seemed remote to the lives of working class women such as those interviewed by Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson. Yet, I would argue, that this did not mean that feminists and women who did not engage with the WLM were as siloed as might be supposed. The fact that both groups drew on and shaped meaning from circulating discourses such as the psy-sciences, and human rights discourses meant that there was a degree of common ground for assessing men and masculinity at that point of time in British history.

With women increasingly focusing on the topic from the 1960s, one of the earliest areas of concentrated theorizing for feminists in the WLM was housework and childcare. This reflected the frustration of women who struggled to realise new opportunities that were opening up to them in the face of significant domestic constraints. While the starting point of theorizing was broad agreement that women should not be solely responsible for housework and childcare, feminists did not necessarily have a pre-determined formula in mind for an appropriate division of housework and childcare. Some feminists wanted to retain larger roles in the home while others wanted the ability to pursue larger roles outside of the home. Importantly, too, these choices were likely to shift over a life time. As a result, rather than on the specific division of labour in the home, the focus was on the attitude brought to decisions about the division of labour in the home. In this, they were seeking a greater sense of engagement from men. Despite increasing levels of 'help' in the home and involvement with certain aspects of fatherhood, feminists recognised that many men remained fundamentally detached from the responsibility that they, themselves, felt for the domestic sphere. Rather than assuming that the domestic sphere was the responsibility of women, feminists argued that it was the collective responsibility of all those connected with that 'household' (noting that this term did not necessarily mean a nuclear family but could also refer to a communal or other alternative living arrangement). Underpinning this call for engagement on equal terms was a caution that this engagement should not be exercised as an extension of patriarchal control as was attributed by some feminists to the fathers' rights

movement. Rather, it should be underpinned by an attitude of gender-neutral egalitarianism, 'care and commitment'.¹⁸

As feminists considered their household roles, they quickly observed that 'emotional labour' made up a significant part of those roles. Writing in 1972, Sue Sharpe observed that the 'housewife ... is asked to become, without choice and unpaid, cook, laundress, housemaid, lover, psychiatrist and many other roles'.¹⁹ While historians as different as Claire Langhamer and Marcus Collins have recognised that, despite a framing of post-war heterosexual relationships as a site of emotional intimacy, the reality often proved disappointing. While various theories have been suggested for this failure, this thesis has found that a gendered framework of emotional exchange identified by feminists structurally precluded emotional intimacy. Rather than mutual support, feminists pointed to the responsibility assigned to women for the emotional wellbeing of men, often to the abandonment of their own emotional lives. As we have seen, while anti-sexist men looked to expand their emotional range and reliance on other men for their emotional wellbeing, women were, in fact, seeking greater emotional reciprocity from men. As Jill Tweedie suggested, in addition to emotional management skills, 'a true concern' and a 'true understanding', was sought from men and women alike.²⁰ These were not, however, purely feminist concerns. As this thesis has shown, a wide range of women from across the anglophone world shared this perspective. The difference was in the framing. Where many women had understood the failures in emotional intimacy to be particular to their individual relationships, feminists drew attention to the systemic nature of the failures.

For the editors of *Achilles Heel*, men's inability to manage their emotions was also interlinked with violence: 'Men rage because their vulnerability is touched and they have no language to express it. So perhaps one of the ways of confronting male violence will be by encouraging other kinds of emotional expression.'²¹ Feminists were not blind to the complexity of violence. Violence against women was both a complex and urgent issue as its extent became increasingly evident from the early days of the movement. Accompanying practical action, including the establishment of a growing network of refuges for battered wives from the early 1970s and rape crisis centres from the mid-1970s, was a consistent stream of theoretical treatments which

¹⁸ Lynne Segal, "The most important thing of all" – Rethinking the family: An overview', in Lynne Segal (ed.), *What is to be Done about The Family?*, (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 9-24, at p. 23.

¹⁹ Sue Sharpe, 'The role of the nuclear family in the oppression of women', in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, (London, 1972) pp. 138-145, at p. 140.

²⁰ Jill Tweedie, *In the Name of Love*, (London, 1980), p. 196.

²¹ [unattributed], 'Editorial', *Achilles Heel* 5 (1981), pp. 2-3, at p. 3.

continued to grow across the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s. Consistent across this theoretical work was an understanding of the systemic nature of violence - in its myriad of forms - as a socially-sanctioned and institutionally supported expression of man's dominance. This understanding was not exclusive to feminists. Liz Kelly found that women who 'did not define themselves as feminists' reflected a similar 'experiential understanding' of the nature of violence against women.²² Not only one of the most complex areas of theory, but the nature and causes of violence also represented one of the most vigorous areas of debate in the WLM as women grappled with questions about the capacity or will of men to change. Again, women invoked the need for men to cultivate attributes such as 'collectivity, sharing and tenderness'.²³ It was also recognised that psychological vulnerabilities in specific men – such as fear of powerlessness - could exacerbate violence. However, as seen in critiques of therapeutic programmes for violent men that focused primarily on therapeutic interventions such as building empathy, self-awareness and/or anger management skills, the main issue to be addressed was the way in which men perceived women. Lynne Segal cautioned that 'a softer, more emotional' man could still 'retain ... his hegemony over women'.²⁴ Replacing a focus on self, the nonviolent male would lose the trappings of masculinity, including the fiction of the man as protector of women, in favour of a genuinely egalitarian recognition of, and care for, the humanity of others.

As feminists considered the possibility of nonviolence in their daily lives, theory on the nature of nonviolence and its connection to feminism extended in the mid-1970s to state violence, including nuclear technology. Consistent with earlier critiques of masculinity, theorizing in this space called for the dismantling of masculinities that valorised competition, hierarchy, and aggression. Feminists extended theory that positioned violence against women as an expression of power over women, to position state violence as an expression of hierarchical thinking in which it was assumed – and actively asserted – that some people were better than others. In a global framework of injustice, nuclear weapons were a tool for the exercise of subordination. The liberation of women required the dismantling of masculinity in favour of an egalitarian perspective. Until then, not only the subordination of women but global injustice more generally, would not be effectively challenged. In thinking about global injustice, beyond the bounds of feminism, feminists demonstrated a consciousness of a burgeoning human rights discourse.²⁵

²² Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 229.

²³ Gill Hague and Ellen Malos, *Domestic Violence: Action for Change*, (Cheltenham, 1993), p. 212.

²⁴ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, (London, 1990), p. 291.

²⁵ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson, 'Vernacular discourses of gender equality in the post-war British working class', at p. 290.

This would come to raise difficult questions for feminists who had to assess themselves against the attributes that they were seeking in men.²⁶

It was in this structuring of injustice at the heart of theory that feminist protest against state violence can be distinguished from the ‘romanticism’ that Meredith Veldman has identified in other protest movements of the twentieth century such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Remove social injustice grounded in hierarchical thinking and you would remove much of the impetus for violence. Feminists recognised, however, that this would not be an easy task for men. Courage would be required for men to forego the advantages of masculinity, to incur the judgement of other men by eschewing norms of masculinity, and to exercise attributes compatible with a society based on egalitarian collective responsibility – gender-neutral attributes that included nonviolence, regard for others and care.

So, if we return to the question of the ‘new man’, can we better assess how satisfactorily he might meet the vision of the WLM? This thesis has shown the WLM delivered a significant critique of masculinity and we can assess the ‘new man’ against a number of the attributes that feminists needed to see for change. A ‘new man’ that would address the concerns raised in that critique would, in the first instance, eschew the socially-sanctioned power that was inherent to the construction of masculinity. The ‘new man’ who ‘combines his undoubted masculinity with feminist views’ would fall far short of meeting the expectations of feminist theorists. Without eschewing ‘his undoubted masculinity’, there would be no real commitment to ‘feminist views’.²⁷ Second, feminists also called on men to commit to collective responsibility for the domestic sphere including emotional cultures in the home. Rowena Chapman, writing in 1988, reviewed the phenomenon of the ‘new man’ suggesting: ‘The new man of humanist psychology was the perfect partner for ambitious women who needed a wife, not a husband’.²⁸ This, perhaps, might distort the ask of feminists. This thesis has demonstrated that what concerned feminists was the ability to have choice. What feminists need from men was a sense of collective responsibility to have the conversation from an egalitarian basis. This also required men to turn a focus on self to a focus on others. Regard for others, care and nurturance were repeated themes. Rowena Chapman points to the failure of such a ‘new man’ to be realised beyond rhetoric, including

²⁶ Natalie Thomlinson, for example, draws out the challenges that white women encountered in the face of criticism from Black women from the early 1980s. This forced feminists to ‘undertake serious self-examination’ [Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 192. More generally on this issue, see pp. 161-193.]

²⁷ [Unattributed], ‘New Man in view’, *Yorkshire Post* (Wednesday October 5, 1988), p. 12

²⁸ Rowena Chapman, ‘The great pretender: Variations on the new man theme’, in Chapman and Rutherford (eds), *Male Order*, pp. 225-248, at p. 231.

finding an 'ideal nesting ground' in women's publications such as *Cosmopolitan*.²⁹ In his place emerged a more self-absorbed version promulgated by advertisers and marketers who spent much of his time reflecting on his own very-smartly-dressed image. In the words of Rowena Chapman: 'The nurturant tadpole had become a narcissistic toad'.³⁰

While it is easy in some respects to dismiss the 'new man' whose credentials have always been questionable, the point is that understanding the views of feminists in the WLM about men and masculinity is essential to the project of considering change that might support the elimination of injustice to women (and, perhaps, more generally). In looking to realize 'autonomy and respect' for women, feminists considered men and masculinity in great depth. Despite significant differences and debate between feminists, there are consistent threads that come through each of the areas of feminist focus and across time from the theorizing about housework and childcare in the 1970s through to the sophisticated analysis of violence, including state violence, of the 1980s and 1990s. At the heart of this was a vision of an egalitarian world in which women and men might coexist with a shared commitment to collective responsibility, regard for others, nonviolence and care. Feminists recognised that this would be difficult requiring commitment and courage on the part of all people. The reward, however, would be a just and sustainable world in which the liberation of women would be finally realised.

²⁹ Chapman, 'The great pretender: Variations on the new man theme', at pp. 230-231.

³⁰ Chapman, 'The great pretender: Variations on the new man theme', at pp. 232.

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