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SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF RELATIONSHIPS

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Synopsis — Second-wave feminists challenged liberal democratic conceptions of the political. Part of this challenge involved politicising relationships. Relationships between women and men were the major target and connected to debates about in what ways sexuality was political. Focussing on examples from New Zealand feminist writings between 1970 and 1984, I argue that interrogating relationships led to an understanding of sexuality as both producing and produced by social relations of power. This insight was limited by a feminist view of power as 'power over', which prevented a constructive analysis of differences between women and could produce personalised conflict between feminists. But it is through the political exploration of relationships and sexuality that diversity could be recognised and that feminists could begin to consider how to represent themselves and their interests in more complex ways. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Two of the most common stereotypes of feminists are that they hate men and that they are all lesbians. These stereotypes are a reaction to the way feminists challenged naturalised explanations of relationships. Such challenges emerged as part of second-wave feminist criticism of liberal democratic conceptions of the political. Feminists asserted that male–female relations were political, not 'natural' and they politically interrogated sexuality (cf. Jackson & Scott, 1996a, p. 6–12). I examine feminist debates about relationships and how they related to feminist practices.

The New Zealand feminists I write about include a broad range of women who were struggling to represent women in new and better ways. Many identified as Women's Liberationists, a more radical label than 'feminist' (Curthoys, 1997), but one I avoid because it may exclude some of those important in the political struggles. The struggles constituting second-wave¹ feminism are usually seen as gaining force around 1968 (Whelehan, 1995, p. 4). In New Zealand 1970 is more commonly the date given (Dann, 1985, p. v; Poulter cited in Ranstead, 1977, p. 11). The slightly later date in New Zealand may have been due to its distance from the American and European political uprisings of 1968. However, ideas,

women, and literature were fairly quickly transported to the Pacific, and the extent of this overseas influence will become apparent.

Once underway in New Zealand, feminism rapidly became a vibrant and varied movement (see Cahill & Dann, 1991; Dann, 1985). I have always been sorry that I was too young to have been involved. My research has somewhat substituted for that absence, allowing me to get to know many of the women involved through what they wrote at the time. Feminists produced many magazines, newsletters, and submissions to government committees between 1970 and 1984, but New Zealand is a small country (the population was around 2 million in 1970) and I was able to read almost all of them. The small population also meant that many feminists knew each other, or got to know each other as the movement progressed.

Feminist political action was also varied because in New Zealand political power was diffuse (see Gelb, 1990, p. 146). This diffusion of power² emerged from factors such as the residue of regional government and the long-term interest of women in local(ised) politics (Aitken, 1980). New Zealand feminists of the 1970s and early 1980s therefore made use of a variety of models of political action found elsewhere, employing interest group feminism

(United States), Ideological/left-wing feminism (Britain) and State equality (Sweden) (Gelb, 1990). The emphasis (before 1984) was on interest group and ideological styles. I focus on 'Ideological' feminism, which emphasised the purity of ideas and was decentralised and locally based (Gelb, 1990, p. 138). State equality arguably became the dominant model of feminism after 1984 when a Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in New Zealand (see Holmes, 1998). Prior to this, the compactness and yet variety of the movement can make it difficult to discuss New Zealand feminism in terms of the groups referred to elsewhere. Yes there were 'black' feminists, socialist feminists, Marxist feminists, liberal feminists, and lesbian feminists, but in New Zealand they were notable for the extent to which they interacted.

Some of the major publications reflect the interaction between diverse types of feminists in New Zealand. The Auckland-based *Broad-sheet* magazine (which ran from 1972 to the 1990s) was aimed at a general feminist audience, published a fairly wide range of views, and was produced by diverse collectives, usually including lesbian feminists³ and feminists of colour. *Bitches, Witches, and Dykes* was a more radical, if more short lived, newspaper put out by a mixture of marxists and lesbians and with an affiliated 'Black Forum' section produced by Maori feminists. The Dunedin Collective for Woman was a broad umbrella organisation under which the eclectic magazine *Woman* was published. However, more specific groups existed, for example, specific lesbian organisation obviously took place early on, as the lesbian feminist magazine *Circle* began appearing in 1972. The Socialist Action League (1973) also quickly showed involvement with feminist ideas by producing a programme for women's liberation. A black women's movement, also emerged, but largely operated within an oral, rather than a written, tradition.

On four exciting occasions (1973, 1975, 1977, 1979), large numbers of feminists of all varieties gathered to discuss issues and share information in the United Women's Conventions. Each was attended by around 1,500 to 2,000 women, and in between were many smaller, but often equally diverse gatherings. Feminists also organised against attempts to restrict abortion, discussed racism, resisted

and complained about media stereotyping of women, campaigned for child care, and generally acted around issues familiar to feminists in other western liberal democracies.

As elsewhere in the democratic west New Zealand feminists politicised relationships, but the impact was perhaps amplified by the smallness of their feminist community. Although they emphasised the political nature of relationships with men, relations with other women became increasingly scrutinised. I explore the effects of this politicisation of relationships on New Zealand feminist debates and practices by interpreting changes in how they represented themselves through their feminist writings.

My conclusions about the politicisation of relationships are broadly applicable to second-wave feminism in western liberal democracies. These conclusions are comparable with Stevi Jackson's (1993, pp. 39–42) brief description of second-wave feminist criticisms of love as they emerged from a wider consideration of sexuality; and with Jackson and Scott's (1996a) discussion of feminist debates about sexuality, which introduces many classic pieces (Jackson & Scott, 1996b). Other more general accounts of second-wave theory (e.g., Beasley, 1999; Evans, 1995) and of feminist political action (e.g., Rowe, 1982; Tanner, 1970) also indicate that the New Zealand examples are fairly representative.

New Zealand feminist debates on relationships were recorded in reports of gatherings, in submissions to parliamentary select committees (particularly the Select Committee on Women's Rights 1975 (Papers on the Select Committee on Women's Rights, 1975), and in feminist magazines and newsletters. It is these writings that have been my major sources and they are analysed as texts (see Holmes, 1998).

REPRESENTATION AND THE FEMINIST POLITICISATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

I have interpreted feminist texts as representations because what feminists wrote gives only a partial idea of how feminists lived, thought, and acted. These texts do not transparently tell the 'Truth' about feminism or feminists' lives. Those who wrote them were representatives striving to give a better picture, not just of themselves, but of women as a group and their

needs. In order to interpret feminist texts, I developed an understanding of representation as a process of communicating and contesting both meanings and needs/interests. This focus on all feminist writings as both cultural representations *of* women and political representations *for* women means that I make little distinction between primary and secondary sources. Feminists challenged stereotypical meanings (representations) associated with women and also challenged political processes by which the interests of individuals or groups are represented (Pollock, 1992, p. 166). It has been argued that this dual aim has caused difficulties for feminism because it not only seeks to dispute, but relies upon notions of 'woman' (Alcoff, 1988; Riley, 1988). Feminists struggled to contradict sexist portrayals of women, picking apart facile generalisations. At the same time there was a sense of some coherent identity as women as necessary for feminist political action (Mouffe, 1992, p. 371).

In politicising relationships feminists highlighted the dubious nature of objectified and sexualised representations of women. Feminists protested against male-dominated portrayals of women as sex objects, but expressing disgust at stereotypes alone would not bring change. Strategies for change also involved a self-conscious production of knowledge alongside political activity (Kuhn, 1985, p. 2). I concentrate on how efforts to better represent women and their interests produced new perspectives on relationships with men and between women. These perspectives in turn impacted on how feminists represented themselves and their lives.

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF FEMALE-MALE RELATIONS

Feminists challenged liberal democratic definitions of politics and claimed that full citizenship and equality for women, were bound up with the supposedly personal lives of women. These personal lives were structured in large part around relationships, sexual and otherwise. Therefore, challenging the idea that male/female relations were 'natural' was crucial to representing women and their interests (Mouffe, 1992, p. 372; Pateman, 1989, p. 131).

In order to establish that female/male relations were political feminists attempted to focus on power relationships, but were often in-

terpreted as critical of men as individuals (cf. Spender, 1994, pp. 1–6). Many feminists were unapologetic in criticising men and accepted the unpopularity this brought. Others thought it politically necessary to try and emphasise the faults of a patriarchal system rather than individual men. The latter strategy sought to avoid suggesting individual change as the solution to women's oppression. Similarly, sex-role stereotypes could be blamed for relations of subordination. This explanation was related to ideas about liberation voiced by a variety of new social movements in the 1960s and '70s (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Melucci, 1989; Seidman, 1994). These ideas could imply that everyone needed to be liberated from repressive roles. For instance, one New Zealand feminist suggested that women no longer wanted to play a role 'assigned by men', but that 'wider horizons for women will enrich male-female relationships' (Rotherham, 1973, p. 19). Raewyn Stone (1974, p. 7) took a similar view, arguing that the myth of men as 'impeccable breadwinners, bedmates, slaves to the naturaaly (sic) grasping, demanding and exploitative female' was designed to 'extract labour from and sell motor mowers, insurance and after-shave to the deluded male'. Women who were liberated, she suggested, would not expect men to conform to these stereotypes. This would liberate them and make fuller, more honest relationships possible.

Most feminists recognised the difficulties of both personal and working relationships with those they were identifying as their oppressors. Feminists stressed the need to set their own agendas and that this was more easily done independently of men (Church, 1971, p. 7; Goodger, 1972, p. 1; *Woman* 1972, p. 1). But some feminists wanted to 'step beyond the anti-male rhetoric' and the belief that the more distant from men the stronger a feminist is (Casswell, 1975, pp. 28–29). One feminist group blatantly stated that feminists were not all hostile to men and cited the fact that all members of their group were married. They felt that men could never be 'emotionally committed' to feminism; but there was no reason why 'women only' and mixed groups could not support each other (Woman Collective, 1972, p. 1).

Other feminists argued that if men oppressed women, feminists should personally and politically detach themselves from men. In New Zealand as elsewhere, an initially low tol-

erance of male involvement in feminist politics appeared to decline (cf. Beasley, 1999, pp. 32–35; Tanner, 1970, pp. 313–315; Whelehan, 1995, p. 177). At the beginning, some feminist groups or events included men (Broadsheet collective, 1982c, p. 12; Brownlie, 1970; see also Whelehan, 1995, p. 177), but feminists became frustrated by their tendency to monopolise meetings or groups (cf. Phillips, 1991, p. 98). In these cases feminists removed either themselves or the men from mixed groups. For instance, disagreements apparently led to the formation of Auckland Women's Liberation—for women only (Poulter cited in Ranstead, 1977, p. 11). However, men remained involved with this group when it produced the first few issues of *Broadsheet*. This and other examples (e.g., Dann, 1979, p. 8) indicate that there was not necessarily a linear progression towards excluding men. In particular, more conservative or reformist women continued to believe in including men (see *Women '74*, 1975). Nevertheless, most feminists disengaged from working with men, sometimes even when they shared other political goals. This was the case with the women who re-formed an anti-racist group called Nga Tamatoa. They found they were still doing the work and the three male members taking the glory. They held sessions on women's issues and expelled two men who persisted in attacking the group. One woman had left, but returned when the men went and apparently subsequently blossomed (Dann, 1976, p. 7).

It was easier for women to be taken seriously as political actors if they were not in direct juxtaposition to men. If civil/public society is constituted 'in opposition to the private sphere of natural subjection and womanly capacities' (Pateman, 1988, p. 113), then women will be 'naturally subversive of men's political order' (Pateman, 1988, p. 96). By acting politically women have subverted the political order, but to go beyond mere negation has been difficult, because women and their interests are not easily represented within the present political system (Melucci, 1989). Awareness of this is partly what stimulates women to act together as feminists and to spark debates about whether they should do so in isolation from men. Feminists strove to affirm their independence and partly did so by rejecting constant comparison with men and insisting that 'women have far more in common with women than with men' (Browne et al., 1978, p. 80).

To fully explore their supposed commonalities as women, feminists attempted to create spaces (including bodies) which were free from the male-dominated gaze (cf. Mulvey, 1989; Tseëlon, 1995) and from male access (see Beasley, 1999, p. 54; Echols, 1989; Evans, 1995, p. 79). In such struggles over territory men were represented as the enemy, but usually strategically. For example, there was criticism of a few men who 'trespassed' into the 1979 United Women's Convention (UWC). Yet men's services had not been totally dispensed with and the male custodians were praised for their helpfulness and discretion (*United Women's Convention Committee*, 1979, p. 118).

There was also resistance to male symbolic access to women, clearly seen in debates over media reporting of feminist events (see Baynes, 1994, pp. 12–13; Browne et al., 1978, pp. 64–71; Coney, 1973, pp. 3, 7; Meikle, 1976, p. 153; *United Women's Convention Committee*, 1979, pp. 94, 97–99). Male (and sometimes female) reporters usually trivialised, sexualised and distorted feminists and their gatherings. To refuse media access was part of the battle to control the representation of themselves and their political action. The immediate concern was to be in a position to move forward rather than constantly having to refute male-dominated misrepresentations.

Struggles to represent themselves occurred not only with men but between feminists. Lesbian feminists, for example, had to fight for space and time to express themselves and their politics. A lesbian spokeswoman made a speech to the 1977 convention only after lesbian feminists had demanded time from the convenors—which was given up by the guest speaker (Browne et al., 1978, p. 81). According to Michele Dominy (1986), these lesbians argued that 'to reclaim femaleness one must reject middle class behaviour'. This meant adopting anger, confrontation, and violence as female (p. 35). So lesbian separatists were not behaving like men, but rather 'rejecting markers of femaleness defined by men' (p. 37) and attempting to reorganise the world 'around different conceptions of femaleness and maleness' (p. 29). This illustrates that feminism was a struggle to find representative space (Evans, 1995, p. 79), and to consider how to act together within it.

It was recognised that to make political action effective alliances between different groups

of women were necessary. These alliances were possible if it was acknowledged that unity did not, 'naturally' pre-exist on the basis of specific identities but was created strategically in acting politically (cf. Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). For feminist alliances to be workable other 'naturalised' relations of power had to be questioned. Race relations were a priority in New Zealand, particularly relations between Maori and Pakeha (white New Zealanders). The Treaty of Waitangi signed between Maori and Pakeha in 1840, established a partnership between the indigenous people and the white (mostly British) colonisers. New Zealand has focussed on biculturalism because it has been argued that this partnership between Maori and Pakeha must be properly attended to before Aotearoa/New Zealand can embark on multiculturalism (see Orange, 1987).

For second-wave feminists the most sophisticated and influential critique of Maori-Pakeha relations was Donna Awatere's, *Maori Sovereignty* (1984), originally published as a series of articles in *Broadsheet* (Awatere 1982a, 1982b, 1983). Some feminists took up this analysis, although a black women's movement had already emerged from anti-racist groups that had developed in New Zealand during the mid-70s. This movement involved Maori, Pacific Island, and Indian women. Some pakeha (white) women were also involved in anti-racist groups, notably those in a group called 'Women for Aotearoa', which specifically met to discuss Awatere's ideas (Simpkin, 1994). The focus on racism intensified around the anti-Springbok rugby tour movement in 1981, in which many feminists were involved. This was 'fraught with personal and political conflict', arising from the lack of acknowledgement of racism in New Zealand and the women's movement and the domination of the anti-tour movement by men (Simpkin, 1994).

Race relations debates were prominent in New Zealand, but analysis of class relations did also occur—most obviously through socialist feminism (see e.g., Socialist Action League, 1973). Jill Hannah, for instance, contested the idea that feminists were middle class, instead reinforcing that the movement was middle class dominated and ignored working class women and their experiences (Hannah, 1982, p. 21).

Generally attempts to consider the complexity of power relations were hampered by

feminist conceptualisations of power as something men have and women do not (cf. Curthoys, 1997; Yeatman, 1994). As Yeatman (1994) argues, feminism is fundamentally concerned with how power should be understood and as a movement its vision for change depends on the adequacy of its conceptions of power. Principally, feminism has understood women as subject to patriarchal 'power over' them. Women are seen as excluded from 'power to' because only male heads of households can enjoy power as a capacity within the terms of the social/sexual contract. As Shields and Milne (1975, p. 15) argued: 'If men understand how to use power, women understand what it is to be without it'. This view tended to emphasise a unity of oppression between women. Thinking of power as a thing men exercised over women was useful in creating a basis for feminist solidarity, but discouraged the exploration of power differences between women and focused on women's identity as other to men.

The emphasis on men's power over women led to considerable soul searching for those feminists who had intimate relationships with men. As Sue Kedgley (1971) noted: 'women live on far more intimate terms with their oppressors than any other group in history' (p. 4). This produced ambivalent attitudes to men in many women. But recognising that personal intimacy may make it difficult for many feminists to represent men as oppressors does not really help analyse the ambivalence and the range of interpretations of female-male relations (Spender, 1994, p. 35-36).

There were efforts to interpret women more as they related to each other and to see women's identities as multiple. But these efforts tended to use a rather stagnant hierarchy of oppressions based on oppositions such as white/black, heterosexual/lesbian, intellectual/community-based (Jones & Guy, 1992) which reflected self/other distinctions. It is important to recognise that 'other' feminists (black, lesbian, working class, and so on) were part of the feminist struggle from the beginning (Curtain & Devere, 1993). This is something often disregarded by accounts of the second wave that describe it as a path from sisterhood to fragmentation (e.g., Mitchell & Oakley, 1997). Such ideas maintain dominant strands of feminism (usually white and middle class) as central and 'other' feminisms as added later,

rather than being parallel and equally important, if less dominant.

Emphasis on power as 'power over' meant that dominant feminist groups were chastised for operating in 'male' ways, seen as contrary to ideals of feminist sisterhood. Interrogation of power as a capacity to produce relationships, rather than only be produced by them, offered a better basis for considering differences between women. This alternative perspective on power was implied within the lesbian feminist analysis of heterosexism.

THE POLITICS OF SEX AND SEXUALITY

The politicisation of sex and sexuality was part of feminist claims that 'the personal is political' (see Jackson & Scott, 1996a). That slogan could be interpreted in different ways (Pate-man, 1989, p. 131; Phillips, 1991, pp. 96–101). It could mean bringing things previously considered personal into political debate. As one feminist put it, politics was brought 'out of parliament and into the double-bed and the kitchen' (*Woman Collective*, 1977, p. 5). On the other hand, the slogan could mean 'that in your personal life you must live your political principles' (Dann, 1976, p. 7). Both interpretations were evident in feminist thinking about heterosexism.

The lesbian feminist development of the concept of heterosexism was an important part of the politicisation of relationships (see Evans, 1995, p. 16; Jackson & Scott, 1996a, pp. 12–17). Nancy Pederson defined heterosexism as the failure to see sexuality as political, in that 'heterosexuality is promoted as 'natural' and homosexuality sanctioned. Thus women derive all their status from men, which results in the economic and emotional commitment of women to men. . . .' (Pederson, 1979, p. 21).

Relationships not only with men, but with anyone defined as an oppressor came under criticism. Awatere, for instance, criticised Maori men for preferring relationships with pakeha (white) women, seeing these not as personal relationships, but political units (cited in Dann, 1976, p. 7). Similarly, at the first national black women's hui (meeting) it was suggested that black-white personal relationships were 'destructive to the black people's movement and to black women especially' (Awatere, 1980, pp. 11–12). Therefore, sexuality de-

bates were about more than whether or not feminists slept with men. Yet arguments over heterosexuality were most prominent and related to the place of lesbians within the feminist movement.

Like elsewhere, lesbians felt they were forced to justify their place in the movement (cf. Cartledge & Hemmings, 1982), while heterosexual feminists automatically belonged (Cole, 1976, pp. 12–13). This was explained as related to the general institutionalisation within society of heterosexuality as the norm. Adrienne Rich (1997) is most famous for this argument, but I recall no specific mention of Rich in New Zealand lesbian feminist writings. However, similar points were made in earlier works such as Germaine Greer's (1970) *The Female Eunuch*, which many New Zealand feminists did read (see Cahill & Dann, 1991). Lesbians also came to these conclusions from examining their own experiences, including their experiences within the feminist movement. New Zealand lesbian feminists wanted their own voice, not just to assume that lesbians elsewhere spoke for them (Dominy, 1986, pp. 31–32). At first lesbians offered to 'educate' women about lesbianism and seemed to be trying to 'reassure' rather than challenge, asserting similarities between lesbians and non-lesbians. *Circle* reports on the early conventions and gatherings confirm this, as do comments about the black dykes workshop at the first national black women's hui (meeting) (Awatere, 1980, p. 12). At the 1979 UWC, lesbian visibility was still important and a lesbian nation banner and purple armbands were adopted (see Mulrennan, 1979, p. 6). However, now they represented themselves not as feminist political actors who happened to have a different sexual preference, but asserted that lesbian sexuality was a threat to men and to male power (Dominy, 1986, p. 28) and was therefore political. They wanted to subvert norms of politeness (Dominy, 1986, p. 27) and believed in 'the power of change and growth through personal confrontation' (Eagle & Argent, 1978, p. 11). Lesbians wanted to have heterosexual feminists take account of their politics.

Heterosexual feminists were not always sympathetic towards their lesbian sisters. Val Cole argued that 'lesbian' had been used as an insult at the beginning of the second wave, as a way of silencing feminists. This led to lesbians

being 'oppressed' by the movement' (Cole, 1976, pp. 12–13). Certainly many heterosexual feminists seemed uncomfortable with some lesbian ideas. As Vera McShane (1979, p. 8) said about UWC 1979 (see also Coney, 1979): '... [t]he separatism and behaviour of the Lesbian Separatists disturbed many and was the cause of tension' (p. 7). But why, and what was it that disturbed? An answer requires an understanding of lesbian politics.

Classified as 'deviant', lesbians seem to have taken on the idea that their sexuality was an indication of their person as a whole, it was the truth about themselves. The American writer Dolores Klaich (1974)⁴ made such an argument at the time and her work may have influenced New Zealand lesbians either directly, or through their contact with overseas lesbians. For example, prominent American lesbian feminist Charlotte Bunch spoke at the 1979 UWC (*United Women's Convention Committee, 1979*). Lesbians were also aware from what was happening around them that heterosexual feminists did (and do) not tend to identify themselves in terms of their sexuality (see Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993). Although Anne Else did suggest later that some women were being called 'closet heterosexuals' because they were too scared to admit to lesbian sisters that they enjoyed sex with men (Else, 1979, p. 2). Nevertheless, lesbian feminists were more likely to recognise sexuality as being about more than sex and increasingly represented lesbianism as a politics rather than as a preference. Thus lesbians 'developed a political stance out of personal experiences' (Cole, 1976, p. 13; cf. Cartledge & Hemmings, 1982, Rainone et al. cited in Tanner, 1970, p. 349–361).

The lesbian arguments about heterosexism implied that power relations were productive. Their experiences of being oppressed had produced them as lesbian feminists. However, there was a fine line between this view and seeing lesbianism as automatically opposing patriarchal power. Some lesbian feminists specifically argued that their political stance put them outside patriarchy. There were lesbians preferring to exist on irregular or low incomes rather than working at jobs which might 'prop up institutions which oppress women etc.' This potentially left lesbian feminists with more available energy for political action and more time to put into personal relationships—sup-

posedly necessary because they rejected heterosexual models for relationships (*Juno, 1978, p. 5*). In this case, criticisms that lesbian feminists were pursuing personal solutions were conceded to, and justified by the need 'to survive emotionally as doubly oppressed women, not because it was a conscious attempt to pursue political principles' (*Juno, 1976, p. 5*). Sometimes such strategies resulted in closed groups that experienced considerable conflict, demanded strict conformity, and had 'well defined codes of behaviour and a pecking order dependent on group values'. Groups could become 'trapped' at a personal level (*Juno, 1976, p. 6*).

An emphasis on the personal meant that there were those who saw lesbian or radical feminists as saying that all women must adopt lesbian relationships 'or be regarded as suspect feminists' if they remained heterosexual. This argument represented lesbians as 'embryonic feminists because they have already decided to live outside the structure of male privilege' (Pederson, 1979, p. 22). To avoid contact or relationships with men was to deny them power (Circle collective, 1980, p. 52). This still saw women as only capable of assenting to or dissenting from power (which was male). Daphne Terpestra (1976, p. 5) challenged such views in a letter to *Broadsheet*. She asked: what about those who chose to channel their sexuality into other creative or practical channels, and how would the movement progress if those who were not "'high frequency" feminists' were alienated? She saw unity as crucial, and was concerned by what she saw as a lack of it in the movement because 'a very vocal group tries to assert superiority by, what appears to be, sexual preference' (p. 5). This ignored or failed to understand lesbian attempts to define sexuality as politics rather than preference.

Radicalism did not mean dictating how women expressed their sexuality, as Karen Butterworth (1976, p. 3–4) argued in a reply to Terpestra. Butterworth said she was in a heterosexual relationship, '(but also enjoying auto-erotic and homosexual feelings not consummated in the same degree)'. Butterworth noted that her choice involved 'a degree of daily, loving political vigilance in the home with husband and son' and that a relatively liberated male partner was necessary. Given the lack of liberated men she felt lesbianism remained 'the only practical course' for many

radical feminists. She thought, however, that lesbians went 'too far' if they suggested their way was right for all. Butterworth saw it as possible to have any sexual orientation and be a radical feminist, as long as it was not a 'dominant-submissive perversion', which she acknowledged most marriages involved (cf. Jackson, 1993). Val Cole (1976, pp. 12–13) also thought that Terpestra had wrongly equated radicalism with lesbian separatism. (Broadstreet 1976b, pp. 12–13, also see Beasley, 1999, pp. 53–58).

Separatism was much misunderstood. Most lesbian feminists interpreted practices of sexuality as central to male supremacy. This interpretation was evident in Firestone (1972) and Greer's (1970) widely read polemics. Such an interpretation led some lesbian feminists to argue that women should withdraw their sexual attention from men and focus it on women (Poulter cited in Ranstead, 1977, p. 11). This could suggest that heterosexuality and liberation were opposed (see e.g., Eagle & Argent, 1978, p. 8; cf. Jackson & Scott, 1996a, pp. 12–17). Lesbian separatists making a statement in a magazine article, saw 'all men and (institutionalised) heterosexuality as the block to their growth as free, strong women [who] take their separateness into their personal everyday activities' (Ray & Lloyd, 1979, p. 19). Nancy Pederson also doubted that heterosexual women could really be liberated in choosing men as sexual partners (Pederson, 1979, p. 32). In the same vein, Phillida Bunkle (1980) explained that:

The rest of the women's movement has seen sexual preferences as a personal issue, but lesbians have extended the idea of the personal as political to a unique analysis of sexuality that is central to their view of politics. Lesbian separatists see sexual dependence as the tie that binds the sexist system together. The central dynamic of male supremacy is sex itself because the main motive for the suppression of women is to obtain her sexual services.

This suggests that lesbianism was a 'personal political strategy' for being as independent as possible of the patriarchal system (Circle collective, 1980, p. 53).

Notions of experience were crucial in trying to establish a 'personal political strategy'. Consciousness raising groups were established to

discuss women's experiences (see Tanner, 1970, pp. 238, 253). Different experiences were thought to lead lesbians to a different politics from heterosexual feminists (*United Women's Convention Committee*, 1979, p. 69; Livestre, 1979, p. 7). Most lesbians saw sexuality as far more complex than the sexual act, involving psychological, emotional, and political factors as well as physical (*Wellington Women's Workshop Newsletter*, 1985, p. 1; see also Crawley, 1974, p. 7; Johnson, 1979, p. 7, 14; Browne et al., 1978, p. 81). Heterosexual feminists were therefore often criticised for continuing to refer to sexuality as merely a preference. The 1979 UWC organisers' statement of feminist position, for instance, was censured for recognition of lesbians only in terms of sexual preference, which negated lesbian politics (Johnson, 1979, p. 7; *United Women's Convention Committee*, 1979, p. 196). The "what you do in your own bedroom is your business" attitude made many lesbians feel like non-persons, (Alston, 1973, p. 6; Cole, 1976, pp. 12–13; cf. Cartledge & Hemmings, 1982, p. 333). Sharon Alston argued that lesbians needed to be 'internalized into the movement' and other women needed to know more about lesbianism and to recognise that gay women were not oppressed in exactly the same way as straight women (Alston, 1973, p. 6).

Differences between lesbian and heterosexual women were sometimes obscured because embodied experience became the privileged basis of feminist knowledge (Beasley, 1999, pp. 32–35). Some feminists suggested that women needed to be liberated from their reproductive bodies if equality was to be achieved. This approach resisted familial constructions of women and came from Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) work, and was also expressed in Shulamith Firestone's (1972) *The Dialectic of Sex*. This supports Grosz's (1994) idea that feminists have been wary of the body. However, other feminists saw the body as the key to liberation. They embraced the idea of women's bodies as expressing their essential difference from men and stressed they should be revalued as the basis of women's more peace loving, nurturing nature (see Gatens, 1992, p. 129). This did not mean focussing either on equality or difference. Feminist representations could involve both disassociating themselves from familial-based representations of women and simultaneously appropriating those representations to show feminists as powerful because

in touch with their bodies as 'natural'⁵ and having life giving potential.

The privileging of experience also fostered conceptions of women as individuals who knew themselves. Their own interpretation of their experiences was considered superior to others (see Scott, 1991).⁶ Although 'the feminist movement campaigned around issues that could easily be formulated in the language of ownership of the person, the predominant feminist argument was that women required civil freedom *as women*, not as pale reflections of men. This argument rested on an implicit rejection of the individual as a masculine owner' (Pateman, 1988, pp. 13–14). The ability to dispose of the property of your person as you wish, is one way of defining agency, but whether we 'own' our bodies is debatable. Besides which, no form of ownership ensures complete control over property. Control is always partial, limited by the organisation of social institutions and relations (Brown & Adams, 1979). Similarly, conceptions of women as possessors/controllers of their bodies are problematic. A view of bodies as things or possessions to be controlled was behind male claims of their rights over women's bodies.

Feminists did recognise that power produced/constructed types of bodies and sexualities (cf. Jackson & Scott, 1996a, pp. 6–12, 17–20). Assumptions that the 'true' sexuality for feminists was a lesbian one (repressed by patriarchy) implied such recognition. Yet, suggesting that simply 'choosing' to 'return' to this 'true' sexuality would empower women failed to acknowledge the complexity of the ways in which power is inscribed upon bodies and constructs sexuality. Seeing sexuality as central to identity formed an important part of the challenge to the apolitical categorisation of sexual relationships, but it could easily be subsumed into the discourse emerging from Western science which suggests that sex will tell us the truth about ourselves (Foucault, 1990, pp. 69–70).

The difficulties of feminists representing themselves as 'personal' and sexual political actors are summarised by Michelle Dominy (1986, p. 37). She argues that lesbian separatists were expanding the concept of sexuality: 'redefining it as an aspect of all interpersonal relationships' and urging women to 'use their sexuality as a model to structure their behaviour'. This was based on a belief that women have 'natural capacities' which are related to 'sexual powers'

and 'an ethos of natural purity'. This kind of argument has faults—mainly it assumes some universal womanly essence (Grosz, 1994). However, lesbian views of sexuality as a political choice did challenge conceptions of sexuality as 'natural', or a matter of personal preference.

HAPPY? ENDINGS? CONCLUSIONS ON THE IMPACT OF POLITICISING RELATIONSHIPS

Feminists politicised relationships in complex ways. They were critical of men, but most feminists denied that they were man-haters and early groups sometimes included men. There was also feminist reference, particularly near the beginning of the movement, to a discourse of liberation for all. But women's liberation was centrally for women and they rapidly discovered that progress was more easily made without male involvement. In some cases this translated into a belief that feminists should be independent from men in all ways. Certainly women could better represent themselves and their interests if not continually juxtaposed with men. It remained difficult for women to be taken seriously in political action because the model of a political actor was male.

Creating women-only spaces made it possible for women to more clearly define themselves, their needs and interests. Creation of such spaces attempted to resist patriarchal assumptions of male rights of physical and symbolic access to women. However, having excluded men, women struggled with each other for representative space. Criticisms of naturalised explanations of relationships were extended to relations between other groups, including different groups of women. Differences had to be acknowledged and alliances worked on, rather than it being assumed that women would act on the basis of shared experiences as women. Feminist notions of power as 'power over' limited this process. These views led, for instance, to the use of a hierarchy of oppression that made constructive discussion of differences difficult.

Heterosexism was a concept that involved a vision of power as more productive. It enabled, for instance, the recognition that a person's political stance might arise from their personal (including sexual) experiences. There was considerable feminist debate about whether, or to what extent, sexuality was central to

identity and what this implied about how to challenge male dominance. The institutionalised nature of heterosexuality made many lesbian feminists feel that their sexual experiences were an integral factor in their politics.

Positions in debates about heterosexism related to whether particular feminists saw women's bodies as the basis of their oppression or the basis for revolution. In order to achieve freedom for women *as women*, feminists had to carefully consider when to avoid liberal patriarchal ideas that bodies are possessed and under control. These ideas underlie liberal conceptions of the individual as masculine owner. In resisting these ideas it was difficult for feminists to represent themselves as personal, sexual, and political beings without relying on essentialist notions of women and women's bodies. Seeing lesbianism as a more liberated form of sexuality did acknowledge bodies and sexuality as operated on by power. But interpretations of power as productive were overshadowed by the focus on men's power over women. That focus made it difficult to account for more complex operations of power between women.

Feminist struggles to politicise 'personal' relationships could result in personal conflicts between women committed to liberation. This could be painful, but feminism was never really a happy united sisterhood, it was always an ongoing negotiation about how to better represent women and their needs and interests. Acknowledging that personal relationships were part of politics was an important factor in mounting a serious challenge to liberal democracy, which had excluded women's interests partly by pretending to cater for the common good of abstract citizens. Politicising relationships may have contributed to the loss of a feeling of sisterly solidarity, but for many marginalised groups of feminists, that solidarity had always been a mirage. To destroy that mirage had its costs, but also allowed feminists to begin to conceive of how to represent themselves and their needs in more complex ways. Feminists continue to try and engage in political struggle as particular but inter-related human beings.

ENDNOTES

1. Second-wave feminism is not meant to imply that there was no feminist activity between the 19th century and the 1960s.

2. The extent to which political power could be described as diffuse in 1970s' New Zealand is debatable. However, I would argue that political power was sufficiently decentralised to produce a variety in modes of resistance.
3. A split between heterosexual and lesbian members of the Broadsheet collective occurred in 1978 as a result of disagreements over the issue of whether to share rooms with the financially precarious (and primarily lesbian) Women's Art Collective (WAC) (Circle Collective, 1978, p. 74; see also Broadsheet collective, 1978). This and disputes over Christine Dann's recent editorials (which were critical of lesbian politics), led to four lesbian collective members resigning. Lesbian energy was withdrawn from the magazine, to be reinvested when *Broadsheet* acknowledged the political significance of lesbianism and its importance within women's liberation, and reflected this in what was published (Circle Collective, 1978, p. 76-80). After discussions a working relationship with lesbian feminists was finally re-established in 1980 (Broadsheet collective, 1980, p. 2).
4. Thank you to the anonymous referee who alerted me to this work.
5. This usually meant 'freed' from male imposed standards of beauty, so with bodily hair, and without make-up or other 'repressive' paraphernalia.
6. This was an idea not unique to feminists. Scott mainly discusses its pre-eminence in History as a discipline. Feminists, however, put particular emphasis on it because of their belief in the importance of women representing themselves rather than being represented by others (men).

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