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*The Sheffield Film Co-operative and the Women's Liberation Movement*

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**THE SHEFFIELD FILM CO-OPERATIVE  
AND THE  
WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss feminist independent film, its working practices and issues its films represented using the Sheffield Film Co-operative (1975-1991) as a case study. The study uses the seven demands of the national Women's Liberation Movement as a framework to analyse issues featured in selected films produced by the Sheffield Film Co-operative.

This study will show that there was a strong connection between the Sheffield Film Co-operative's representation of women's issues and the Women's Liberation's demands, indicating that this regional independent film company not only had value to Sheffield but also nationally. This study will discuss the emergence and the working practices of Sheffield Film Co-operative, its role within the broader context of Sheffield Independent Film and the Women's Liberation Movement and the various methods implemented by Sheffield Film Co-operative that attempted to raise public consciousness of women's issues.

This thesis will add to a growing body of literature regarding feminist independent film and video and the historical culture of independent film and video in Sheffield. This study will add to existing research and provide an impetus for further study in this emerging area of study.

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## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

This thesis' main focus is Sheffield feminist independent film, using the Sheffield Film Co-operative as a case study. The study focuses on the Sheffield Film Co-operative's perspective of women's oppression, how it presented the issues through film, which issues were featured and the effect and significance of its films. The primary sources used are largely the Sheffield Film Co-operative's films themselves, in addition to archival material from the Sheffield City Archive and the Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. The Sheffield Film Co-operative's non-fictional films are based on an interview format; the films show a collection of oral narratives from various individuals. This thesis uses contemporary oral narratives collected by the author, from individuals who were previously involved in Sheffield Independent Film and the Sheffield Film Co-operative and oral narratives from the British Library's collection *Sisterhood and After*, to fill in gaps in archival material and to reproduce the Sheffield Film Co-operative's use of interviews.

The author would like to thank the contributions of Chrissie Stansfield, Jenny Woodley, Colin Pons, David Rea and Alf Bower. The gift of your time and personal knowledge of the Sheffield Film Co-operative and Sheffield Independent Film has been invaluable. In addition, thanks to Dr Alison Twells and Professor Clare Midgley for their kindness and feedback. Finally, thanks to the continuous support from family and friends.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

**Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians**.....ACTT

**National Abortion Campaign**.....NAC

**Sheffield Independent Film** .....SIF

**Sheffield Film Co-operative**.....SFC

**Youth Training Scheme**.....YTS

**Women's Liberation Movement**.....WLM

**Women's National Co-ordinating Committee**.....WNCC

## INTRODUCTION

### Aims and Scope

This dissertation will begin in 1975, with the creation of the independent film group, the Sheffield Film Co-operative (SFC). SFC was responsible for the production and distribution of films which feature issues largely exclusive to women. Originally, SFC was established with the contributions of four women: Christine Bellamy, Jenny Woodley, Barbara Fowkes and Gill Booth. With very little prior experience in the film industry, they chose to produce films as they felt they offered the largest potential audience and therefore maximum exposure for their message. SFC aimed,

‘To produce films around the issues of concern to women

To develop our skills as film makers

To use these skills with other women in the community to enable them to have access to and control over their representation in the medium.’<sup>1</sup>

SFC aimed to portray ordinary working-class women’s lives in Sheffield and their films feature examples of how women and their families on a regional level were affected by prevalent women’s rights issues. Before establishing SFC, Christine Bellamy, Jenny Woodley, Gill Booth and Barbara Fowkes were involved in consciousness-raising of women’s issues on community radio (BBC Sheffield) and later television (Cable Vision). Unfortunately, due to restricted space

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<sup>1</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, CA990/91, c. 1984.

their story before 1975 is beyond the scope of this thesis. The timeline covered from SFC's first film *A Woman Like You* (1975) to its last, *Running Gay* (1991) is broad, and over this period much changed in terms of political leadership, international pressures and the position of women. This thesis does not attempt to give an overview of the changing position of women over the period. Rather it specifically concentrates on the feminist perspective towards aspects of women's oppression, women's position within society from the 1970s and onwards and exploring how SFC presented women's issues.

This dissertation explores the representation of women's issues in Sheffield through feminist independent film by analysing a selection of SFC films (1975 - 1991). SFC shares many characteristics with the national feminist movement and therefore this thesis will link with the wider agenda of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), using the WLM'S seven core demands as a framework for analysis of this regional material. To evaluate SFC's films in a chronological order did not seem appropriate as SFC implemented a similar working practice in the majority of its filming. SFC preferred in its non-fiction films to base much of its content on filmed interviews with people in their homes and use additional visual sequences to add to the understanding of the audience. The SFC films will therefore be discussed using the demands of the WLM as a structure; this approach does not consider the films as a body of practice that evolved over time but focuses on the issues presented in each film and its affiliated WLM demand.



As Tuttle writes, 'the women's liberation movement in Britain has one single, unifying creed'<sup>2</sup>, its seven demands. Chrissie Stansfield, a previous member of SFC, commented that the parallels between SFC's films and the WLM's demands were not intentional<sup>3</sup>, although the themes and issues highlighted in its films were intrinsically feminist and therefore represented the broader WLM as well as its intended specific topic. The feminist perspective prevalent within SFC's work is presented largely through interviews. The method of documentary film gave ordinary people a chance to put forward their views.

SFC endeavoured to represent the real image of women to bring women's issues to the forefront of public consciousness. SFC said that it aimed to challenge 'the usual representation of women in the media, with the depiction of their real activity in society.'<sup>4</sup> The WLM and independent film represented a perspective which was 'oppositional or alternative to the dominant values'<sup>5</sup> of the period. This thesis will use the work of SFC to illustrate prevalent women's issues and discuss SFC's consciousness-raising methods. This research will add to an increasing body of literature regarding the independent film and video industry.

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<sup>2</sup> Tuttle, L. (1987) *The Encyclopedia of Feminism*, London, Longman Group Limited. pg. 290-291.

<sup>3</sup> Stansfield, C. Member of SFC 1984-1991. Conversation with author, 26 July 2017. Personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> Luyster, C. ed. (1984) *The New Cooperatives: A Directory and Resource Guide*, London: Blackrose Press, pg. 68.

<sup>5</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 2.

## Literature Review

The WLM's aversion to a hierarchical organising structure and the impact of factors such as region and class produced a diverse women's movement with conflicting feminist thought in nearly every aspect. It is this conflict within the WLM while simultaneously opposing the oppressive patriarchal system which characterises the historiography of the women's movement. For example, Meehan, defines the ideological disparities between liberal, Marxist and radical feminists and discusses the distinctive topics which 'epitomize the three stands of feminist thought', namely, equal pay and opportunities, financial independence and abortion.<sup>6</sup> While Jenson explores the relationship between the state and women in post-war Britain, she argues that, 'Each element of the [women's] movement attacked the state and its social policies.' She comments that state welfare perpetuated women's dependence on men.<sup>7</sup> Bouchier<sup>8</sup>, Pugh<sup>9</sup> and Bruley<sup>10</sup> all provide superb chronologies of the women's movement within Britain during the second-wave of feminism, the main strands of feminist thought and the changing perspective towards women, politically and socially. Indeed, these texts are useful for national events and cross-referencing contextual facts although there is little mention of Sheffield and no discussion of feminist independent film.

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<sup>6</sup> Meehan, E. 'British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s' in Smith, H. (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (1990) Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd. pg. 189-204.

<sup>7</sup> Jenson, J. 'Both Friend and Foe: Women and State Welfare' in Bridenthal, R. and Koonz, C. and Stuard, S. (eds.) *Becoming Visible Women in European History* (1987) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, pg. 551-553.

<sup>8</sup> Bouchier, D. (1983) *The Feminist Challenge*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> Pugh, M. (2000) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, New York: St. Martin's Press. pg. 312-353.

<sup>10</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave. pg. 147-181.

Increasingly there has been a growing academic interest in historical independent film, its working practices, its funding, its output and legacy. Wilson's thesis outlines the function of Sheffield Independent Film and discusses the policies and funding opportunities which enabled independent film and video to flourish in Sheffield.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, there is a growing body of work focused on women's previous contributions to the film and video industry. Much of the content relative to women in the film industry is available from the Women's Film and Television Network for the UK and Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Most significantly to this research are articles written by Angela Martin which are based on interviews held with SFC members.<sup>13 14</sup>

The *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, highlights feminist's significant association with the film industry, as feminist film critics of popular cinema, as historians dedicated to rediscovering women's history and as filmmakers. Pioneering feminist filmmakers largely produced independent documentaries which attempted to represent a realistic and truthful image of women, an image of which, those filmmakers argued was not represented within popular culture. Producing alternative films was a form of consciousness-raising in order to object to the current situation and suggest possible changes for the future. Tuttle writes, 'Early

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<sup>11</sup> Wilson. A (2016) *SIF and the Emergence of Independent Film and Video in Sheffield*. Masters, Sheffield Hallam University. Thesis online.

<sup>12</sup> WFTHnetwork available via <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/>

<sup>13</sup> Martin, A. (2014) *Becoming Sheffield Film Co-op*, The Women's Film and Television History Network. Available online via <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/> accessed on 29/11/2017.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, A. (2014) *Sheffield Film Co-op: Beginning, Being and Ending*, The Women's Film and Television History Network. Available online via <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/11/sheffield-film-co-op-beginning-being-and-ending/> accessed on 29/11/2017.

documentaries, tackling women's issues, revealed women's oppression and at the same time demonstrated that women had the ability to fight against that oppression.<sup>15</sup>

Merz writes that the 'opening up of opportunities to women filmmakers in the 1970s' occurred simultaneously with 'the rise of women's movement and the independent film workshop movement in Britain.'<sup>16</sup> Many women were working within the male-dominated British film industry as directors, the most successful being Wendy Toye and Muriel Box, mainly directing short films and documentaries. Although women were present within the film industry they found themselves within the minority. Anderson comments that British filmmaking after the 1960s was characterised by a 'rush to conformism'. She goes on to explain that a symptom of this 'rush' was that for filmmakers 'it's really hard to be anyone.'<sup>17</sup> More optimistically, she highlights the later influence of Channel 4's policy and the 1982 Workshop Declaration which committed itself to funding British filmmakers giving 'some relief to the eternal economic problem.'<sup>18</sup> Even with the financial support of Channel 4, much of the available funding was concentrated within certain geographical areas.

Post-war independent film was characteristically London-centric and even films made in other parts of Britain were frequently finally edited in London because of the capital's superior

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<sup>15</sup> Tuttle, L. (1987) *The Encyclopedia of Feminism*, London: Longman Group Limited. pg. 112-113.

<sup>16</sup> Merz, C. 'The Tension of Genre' in Dixon, W. (ed.) *Re-Viewing British Cinema, 1900-1992* (1994) Albany: State University of New York Press, pg. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, L. and Stewart, S. 'The Tradition of Independence: An Interview with Lindsay Anderson' in Dixon, W. (ed.) *Re-Viewing British Cinema, 1900-1992* (1994) Albany: State University of New York Press, pg.165.

<sup>18</sup> Friedman, L. and Stewart, S. 'The Tradition of Independence: An Interview with Lindsay Anderson' in Dixon, W. (ed.) *Re-Viewing British Cinema, 1900-1992* (1994) Albany: State University of New York Press, pg.165.

facilities and resources.<sup>19</sup> Regional film simply did not receive the same amount of funding or attention. Despite this, Sheffield still proved itself to be an influential contributor to the independent film movement. From the 1970s a community of independent filmmakers existed in Sheffield, consisting of groups such as Sheffield Independent Film (SIF), the Sheffield Film Co-op, Steel Bank and students studying filmmaking or documentary at Sheffield Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam). This culture produced a broad and successful list of independent filmmakers and the *Encyclopaedia of the Documentary Film*, outlines SFC as a 'dominant distributor of feminist film and video' which 'laid the groundwork for feminist documentary filmmakers to reach new audiences and to share information about funding and production.'<sup>20</sup> Oral history interviews conducted by Margaret Dickinson with founding members of SFC, Jenny Woodley and Christine Bellamy provide a basic chronology of the group's history, how they obtained funding and how SFC functioned not only as an autonomous group but also as a film-making collective affiliated with SIF.<sup>21</sup> In a letter to the Equal Opportunities Commission, Ms Pat Coleman, Director of Libraries in Sheffield, remarked that SFC 'have been prime instruments in establishing Sheffield as a major centre for Independent film.'<sup>22</sup> Even considering the apparent success of SFC, there is relatively little mention of the group in respect to independent film or in the historiography relative to the WLM.

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<sup>19</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Draft report from Sheffield Independent Film, May 1985, pg. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz, D. 'Sheffield Film Co-operative' in Aitken, I. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Documentary Film* (2005) New York: Routledge. pg. 392.

<sup>21</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels*. London: BFI Publishing, pg. 289-303.

<sup>22</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-operative: Letter regarding the SFC's application to the Equal Opportunities Commission, CA990/91, 30 May 1984.

In the historiography of the post-war women's movement the focus is largely on how the majority of feminists believed they were being oppressed and an analysis of the system which perpetuated their inequality in comparison to men. There is a growing body of work discussing British independent film and video, which this thesis will contribute towards. This thesis analyses Sheffield feminist independent film based on oral narratives, which will acknowledge women's historical role in independent film and video in Sheffield. This research will answer questions such as: Did the SFC achieve its aims? In what sense was SFC a co-operative? In which ways did feminists believe women were being oppressed and how did the SFC represent each issue in its work? In which ways did SFC raise public consciousness of women's issues?

### Sources and Methodology

As this thesis is centred on SFC's productions, they will constitute the most valuable primary source. Fortunately, the majority of SFC's productions, now on VHS format, are available to view through the British Film Institute (BFI) based in London. *Women of Steel* (1984) can be viewed at the BFI South Bank site, London. *That's No Lady* (1977), *Jobs for the Girls* (1979), *A Question of Choice* (1982) and *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984) have been digitised and can be accessed privately online.<sup>23</sup> *A Woman Like You* (1975), originally produced on 16mm film, has been digitised and provided privately by Chrissie Stansfield. The SFC films audio content

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/>

(sourced from interviews with various women, young people and professionals) discussed in this research are primarily used as evidence to highlight specific women's issues. The visual aspect of SFC films could provide other ways in which it implemented the use of film to communicate with its audience and reach out to under-represented groups.

Sheffield City Archive holds correspondence and papers regarding the SFC (circa. 1983-1984) including promotional filmography booklets, letters to local government, details of plans to establish a film and video archive and applications for funding to the European Economic Community (EEC).<sup>24</sup> The Sheffield City Archive also holds information associated with the various Sheffield Women's groups (in which many members of SFC also participated); this consists of Sheffield Women's Newsletters, administrative letters between the Sheffield groups, and correspondence between other women's groups (most notably Nottingham).<sup>25</sup> Archives of SIF and Independent Film Archive are held by Sheffield Hallam University in the Sheffield Hallam Special Collection and contain rich information regarding SFC which highlights their strong association to the larger independent film culture within Sheffield and nationally.<sup>26</sup> These archives contain: interviews with SFC members, budgets, promotional filmography booklets and correspondence. Additionally published interviews conducted by Margaret Dickinson between herself, Christine Bellamy and Jenny Woodley inform this research towards the motives of the members of SFC and how it functioned.<sup>27</sup> Oral narratives, accessed online through the British Library's collection *Sisterhood and After*, provide

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<sup>24</sup> CA990/91, Sheffield City Archive.

<sup>25</sup> MD7966, Sheffield City Archive.

<sup>26</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection.

<sup>27</sup> Dickinson, M. (ed.) (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film Making in Britain, 1945-90*. London: British Film Institute. pg. 296 – 298.

retrospective accounts from individuals who participated in the early women's movement from various regions within Britain.<sup>28</sup> In addition, various books and articles by key feminist figures provide necessary contextual information which reflect various feminist perspectives on aspects of women's oppression.

Primary sources comprehensively inform much of this thesis; there is a distinct lack of documentation regarding how SFC films were received by their audience as this usually took the form of an informal discussion after the film. Therefore, there is difficulty in gauging public response to the films and whether the films altered the audience's attitudes towards women's issues after the screenings. Further research could be undertaken, researching how significantly SFC raised consciousness of women's issues by analysing, reviews of SFC's films, press reports, correspondence within its film network and film festival reviews.

Interviews with remaining members of SFC, SIF and Sheffield Women's group will add personal insight into this research and help address gaps in the archival material. The selected films analysed in this thesis have not only been interpreted by the SFC but also then been interpreted by myself. Bernard states that documentary films are 'unavoidably subjective' although their significance 'comes from the fact that they are grounded in fact, not fiction.'<sup>29</sup> This research is therefore largely based on analysis of oral narratives both in the films produced by SFC and in retrospective interviews. Ritchie advises that oral evidence should be

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/interviews>

<sup>29</sup> Bernard, S. (2016) *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction On Screen*, Fourth ed. pg. 5. Available online at Dawsonera accessed on 24/03/2017.



used 'as cautiously as any other form of evidence.'<sup>30</sup> Anderson writes that oral history must be navigated carefully by the interviewer through a method of analysing not only their questions but the interviewee's answers, their responses and their deliberate omissions. Women's oral history has the potential to 'explor[e] questions of self-concept and – consciousness, for documenting questions of value and meaning in individuals' reflections upon their past.'<sup>31</sup> Jack explains,

'Oral history interviews are unique in that the interaction of researcher and subject creates the possibility of going beyond the conventional stories of women's lives, their pain and their satisfactions, to reveal experience in a less culturally edited form.'<sup>32</sup>

*Women's Words* focuses on exclusively female oral history methods. The techniques also have value for the practice of interviewing men, in this thesis oral narratives will be collected from both men and women because the SFC was not exclusively female. Some personal accounts will also be provided using email communications. When oral narratives are substantiated with various other primary sources the interviewee may produce original, personal and qualitative information. The oral narratives collected within this thesis will connect the disciplines of documentary film and feminist history. Cross referencing SFC's films, archival material and oral narratives will underpin the arguments put forward in this research.

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<sup>30</sup> Ritchie, D. (2015) *Doing Oral History*, Third ed. Oxford Oral History Series. pg. 110. Available online at MyLibrary accessed on 24/03/2017.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, K. 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses' in Gluck, S. and Patai, D. *Women's Words The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991) London: Routledge, pg. 12-18.

<sup>32</sup> Jack, D. 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses' in Gluck, S. and Patai, D. *Women's Words The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991) London: Routledge, pg. 24.

## Chapter Outline

To position this research, Chapter one will evaluate the context in which the SFC existed. This chapter will briefly recreate the major events which led to the rise of the WLM in Britain. The WLM was a diverse network of regional groups whose perspectives of their oppression and attitudes towards change varied considerably. In addition, this chapter will discuss the WLM's national conferences, its seven demands and some of its major campaigns.

Chapter two aims to show the SFC being a part of two emergent forces. Discussion first considers Sheffield women's group's relationship to the national WLM and then more specifically the WLM in Sheffield. Simultaneous to the prevalence of the WLM, a national independent film industry emerged. In addition, the culture of independent film in Sheffield will be outlined. The SFC will be discussed, topics here will be, its brief history, its method of film-making, working with men. Also discussed will be SFC's consciousness-raising techniques of women's issues, audience discussions and re-discovery of women's history. Women's history films constitute a large section of work which has not yet been thoroughly discussed and unfortunately there is not enough space to consider them fully in this research.

Chapter three focuses on analysis of selected SFC films which represent the first four demands of the WLM. *For A Living Wage* (1986) raises the WLM's first demand for equal pay. *Jobs for the Girls* (1979) introduces the WLM's second demand for, equal education and job

opportunities. *A Woman Like You* (1976) represents the WLM's third demand for free contraception and abortion on demand. *A Question of Choice* (1982) introduces the WLM's fourth demand for free 24hour nurseries.

Chapter four will focus on analysis of specifically selected SFC films which represent the last three demands of the WLM. *Let Our Kids Grow Tall!* (1986) represents the WLM's fifth demand for women's legal and financial independence. *Running Gay* (1991) introduces the WLM's sixth demand for the right to self-defined sexuality. *That's No Lady* (1977) represents the final demand of the WLM, 'freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion.'<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion SFC was linked to its locality through its working practices, community involvement and part of a large culture within Sheffield of independent film. In a broader sense SFC contributed to film and video also through its nationwide distribution network. The study highlights some issues represented by SFC and their various techniques to raise public-consciousness of women's issues. This thesis hopes to add to the current literature regarding the historical role of women in visual practice and provide an impetus for further research on SIF as there continues to be a wealth of archival material in the Sheffield Hallam Special Collection which remains unanalysed.

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<sup>33</sup> Meehan, E. 'British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s' in Smith, H. (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (1990) Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd. pg. 195.

## THE RISE OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

This initial chapter aims to inform the wider scope of this thesis by outlining the rise and the influence of the WLM. This chapter will focus on aspects of women's lives which feminists believed to be oppressed to form a comprehensive picture of why the second-wave of feminism began in Britain. For feminists, the main aspects of women's oppression were encapsulated within the WLM's seven demands. These demands were articulated at national conferences and represent the minimum and most important requirements of the WLM. A brief overview of the WLM's key campaigns and influential new legislation will conclude the chapter.

### The rise of Women's Liberation

The second-wave of feminism was already an emerging movement in America, many women saw themselves as second class citizens because of the cultural expectation of women to dedicate their lives to domesticity. Increasingly, women desired emancipation from the household. Arguably, the pioneering book of the second-wave of feminism came from an American woman with three children, Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique* (1957)<sup>1</sup>, challenged the convention that all women should be happy within their role of domesticity. Many argued that Friedan was mistaken as most women were in relative material comfort compared to the generations before, although Friedan's argument was not regarding economic stability or comfort. Friedan's book questioned the fulfilment of women's lives, one

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<sup>1</sup> Friedan, B. (2010) *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin Classics.

currently full of raising children, cooking meals, cleaning and washing clothes. Many British women drew parallels with Friedan's work and felt relieved that other women were feeling the same discontentment.

Discontentment only grew as women became more conscious of their power and the injustices they felt were being done to them. In Britain, the first acknowledged women's action under the period of the second-wave of feminism was the strike at the Ford centre in north London, Dagenham 1968, when 183 car-seat machinists demanded to be recognised as skilled workers to gain a pay increase. The female workers were doing the same work as their male counterparts but being paid significantly less. Bruley, comments that, 'The media were fascinated by the women machinists who were threatening to bring down the giant car plant and gave the dispute a great deal of attention.'<sup>2</sup> This strike was a landmark for feminists, raised the consciousness of other women and contributed even further to the rise of the WLM. Writing in the ten-year anniversary of the Women's Liberation Movement, Ann Howard, a member of WLM, comments that 'We were lucky in 1969... Liberation became part of the language.'<sup>3</sup> Women's consciousness was also developing in political groups.

Pugh, states that ideas of women's liberation during the second-wave of feminism initially emerged in Britain in the 'International Marxist Group, the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation, the International Socialists and the Communist Party.'<sup>4</sup> History Workshop was a group of radical New-Left historians based at Ruskin College, Oxford. Shelia Rowbotham

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<sup>2</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave. pg. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Ten Years On, MD7966/2/2/1, October/November 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Pugh, M. (1988) *The Evolution of the British Electoral System 1832 – 1928*, London: Historical Association, pg. 317.

inquired whether any other women in the workshop would be interested in focusing on women's history and shortly after they made plans to organise a women's history conference. Bruley comments that, 'As the applications flooded in for the meeting in early 1970 it soon became clear that this would not be a history conference. Nearly six hundred women attended.'<sup>5</sup> Sue Crockford attended Ruskin conference with the radical film collective, Angry Arts, they produced the film *A Woman's Place*<sup>6</sup> from audio and video taken at the conference. Crockford goes onto say, 'What the conference did, why it was so important, was that it focused not only the public attention on the beginning of a women's movement but ours. We knew it was important, individually and in little groups, suddenly we were all together thinking having this enormous buzz of excitement.'<sup>7</sup> Although the actual conference did not remain focused on women's history, it has become history, signifying the beginning of a national WLM.

By the 1970s, feminism had completely re-emerged as a multifaceted movement; the second-wave of feminism encapsulated a broad array of issues which were rooted not only in politics but social, economic and domestic. Disparities between groups identifying as feminist were large. Women's individual lives in Britain varied markedly; for one example, it was essential for many working-class women to engage in paid-employment while there remained a cultural expectation of middle-class women to abstain from paid-employment and dedicate

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<sup>5</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pg. 149.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpts of the original film can be found in, British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, video recording, *In the Beginning We Demanded*. Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/in-the-beginning-we-demanded> accessed on 07/09/2017.

<sup>7</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, video recording, *In the Beginning We Demanded*. Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/in-the-beginning-we-demanded> accessed on 07/09/2017.

themselves to domesticity. The influence of class, politics, region, employment, perspective of men produced various feminist groups. Jill Tweedie reported on the National WLM demonstration held on International Women's Day, she reported that 'sex is all we really had in common.'<sup>8</sup>

There were three main strands of feminist thought. Liberal Feminists aimed to achieve sexual equality through legal and political reform. Socialist Feminists believed that women's oppression was reinforced through culture and the capitalist system. Radical Feminists argued that men were responsible for women's exploitation. Taking this into consideration, Rowbotham states feminism 'came to be an all inclusive term.'<sup>9</sup> For all of feminism's idiosyncrasies, Lorber comments, the main unifying point was 'the basic goal of achieving equality between women and men.'<sup>10</sup> (All further references to feminism will therefore refer not to what divided the movement but the overall aim of gender equality).

Indeed, for many women the second-wave of feminism signified a great sense of 'awakening', as women began to confidently question the current patriarchal system which they believed was oppressing them.<sup>11</sup> Women's groups were established nationwide, with the aim of reaching out to women to discuss their issues using personal experience and exploring

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<sup>8</sup> Tweedie, J. (2013) *From the Archive, 8 March 1971: Women March for Liberation in London*. Available online via <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/mar/08/1971-womens-liberation-march-archive> accessed on 02/02/2017.

<sup>9</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1992) *Women in Movement*, London: Routledge. pg. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Lorber, J. (2012) *Gender Inequality, Feminist Theories and Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press. pg. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Tweedie, J. (2013) *From the Archive, 8 March 1971: Women March for Liberation in London*. Available online via <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/mar/08/1971-womens-liberation-march-archive> accessed on 02/02/2017.

aspects of women's oppression. The WLM was a vast network of local groups, all intrinsically connected to their region producing a varied range of feminist groups. The WLM established a forum for women, facilitated various events and raised public consciousness of women's issues. The WLM was removed from any hierarchies or bureaucracy; instead delegates from each women's group attended national conferences to discuss national problems and articulate demands.

### The seven demands

The WLM used national conferences to feature its most prominent issues and significantly, discuss the semantics of their demands. Rowbotham explains, many participants within the women's movement felt that articulating demands could limit the movement because 'we needed to transform everything.'<sup>12</sup> Inevitably, the demands offered structure and a unifying goal for those participating in the movement and those outside of the movement. Conferences gave WLM participants the opportunity to network, debate, organise and agree on demands.

The first national conference was held in February 1970 Ruskin College, Oxford. The first four demands were discussed here and passed one year later at the Skegness national conference. The first, and arguably the most crucial, was the demand for equal pay, popularised by the movement's campaign 'equal pay for equal work.' Bouchier comments that it, 'won almost

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<sup>12</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, *Sheila Rowbotham discusses the origin of the WLM demands*, C1420/10, 22 November - December 2010. Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/sheila-rowbotham-the-origin-of-the-wlm-demands> accessed on 20/04/2017.



universal public and political assent'<sup>13</sup>; Although it remained a difficult issue to solve completely due to disparities in the typical type of work men and women were employed in. The second demand asked for 'equal opportunity and equal education'. The theory was to break down gender segregations within the job industry and the education system, which would inevitably facilitate the success of their first demand for equal pay. Reform within the education system would ensure that each child would receive a comprehensive education not based on sex. Thirdly, 'free contraception and abortion on demand'. Abortion was the crucial area of this debate, sparking backlash from many pro-life individuals. Affiliated with the WLM, the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) organised demonstrations and campaigned for 'A Woman's Right to Choose' arguing that women should have the right to be in complete control of their bodies. Fourthly, 'free community controlled childcare'. The demand was for free 24-hour nurseries, but the key concern was to address the problem of manoeuvring childcare with paid employment. The WLM believed, to continue women's engagement with the paid job industry it was crucial to ensure that mothers were not continually responsible for childcare; otherwise this would restrict the time that they could invest in their careers.

Two additional demands were added at the national conference in Edinburgh, held in July 1974. Fifth was 'legal and financial independence for all women.' The Campaign for Financial and Legal Independence and Rights of Women analysed systemic areas of discrimination and added to pressure on the government for more egalitarian reform. Bouchier writes, 'Their common aim [was] to have every adult treated as an independent individual for legal and

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<sup>13</sup> Bouchier, D. (1983) *The Feminist Challenge*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 184.

social security purposes.’<sup>14</sup> The WLM’s sixth demand wanted ‘an end to all discrimination against lesbians’. Lesbian participants constituted a large demographic in the WLM, and went onto establish the Gay Liberation Movement. In the media and public consciousness, little was understood about lesbian and gay people. Generally, the majority believed that acceptable sexuality should follow ‘normative’ heterosexual lines. This demand therefore called for possible legislative reform but also a reform in national consciousness, altering the majority’s perception of ‘normal’ sexual relations.

Finally, at the national conference in Birmingham, April 1978, the WLM’s seventh and last demand was added, ‘freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status and an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men’s aggression towards women.’ This motivated ‘Reclaim the Night’ marches, national conferences held by Women Against Violence Against Women and raised consciousness of rape and domestic abuse. This demand encapsulated not only a wish for reform but for an overhaul of culture and attitudes which reinforced gender inequality. Peter Hildrew’s wife was involved in the woman’s movement in Sheffield, he wrote an article for Sheffield’s Morning Telegraph shedding light on wives and husbands’ attitudes towards the WLM,

‘Man’s freedom is woman’s captivity and vice-versa. To maximise the opportunities for both involves real and difficult compromises which can hardly be under-estimated,

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<sup>14</sup> Bouchier, D. (1983) *The Feminist Challenge*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 189.

because for all the trendy froth surrounding it, the movement is striking at a deep level in our social fabric.<sup>15</sup>

The WLM's main focus was on achieving its seven demands, therefore they were intrinsic to the British women's rights movement. WLM's overall objective was to obtain women's rights through various methods, particularly, governmental reform and consciousness-raising. Writing on the fortieth anniversary of the WLM's first conference in 2010, Phillips, a member of the WLM, writes that 'like many there I have been shaped by the manifesto, the books, the expectations and demands that emerged out of that first meeting in 1970.'<sup>16</sup>

### Key campaigns and legislation

The WLM proliferated around Britain and attempted to spread its message as widely and loudly as possible. Although the mainstream media popularly disapproved to the actions of feminists increasingly more egalitarian reforms were being published by the government.

One area that gave women some freedom was the introduction of the pill in 1961. The advent of the contraceptive pill allowed women to control their fertility therefore eliminating their 'natural' responsibility for producing children.<sup>17</sup> This legislation was associated with the advent of the permissive society, and for many women in the WLM it was one aspect of their

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<sup>15</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Morning Telegraph, MD7966/2/1, 9 June 1971.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, D. (2010) The Women's Liberation Movement at Forty, *History Workshop Journal*. Issue. 70, No. 1. pg. 293.

<sup>17</sup> The demand for reproductive rights is discussed further in chapter two in *A Woman Like You*.

increased 'liberation'. Despite the provision of contraception culturally women were still expected to be happily married and have children and conform to a certain stereotype.

The WLM objected to the Miss World beauty pageant because it believed that it reinforced the normative view of women. One of the first WLM campaigns in Britain was in protest to the Miss World beauty pageant in 1970. For feminists, the demonstration was objecting to the expectation of women to conform to certain aesthetic features, ambitions and personal traits. Advertising driven by consumerism and the media continually followed normative gender restrictions; the image of the perfect woman constantly attributed domesticity and beauty to women. As a result, many women felt marginalised within a society which argued that women had never had it so good. Jo Robinson attended the protest in 1970 at the Royal Albert Hall, London; she explains that the contestants were 'beauties under control' as they began coming onto the stage 'holding their numbers up, told where to walk, how to walk, hold themselves up, where to sit, where to stand, how to look, hold their heads up.'<sup>18</sup> The publicity of the protest alienated much of the country but strengthened feelings within the WLM. Although some WLM campaigns were not very well received by the public the consciousness of women's issues grew and resulted in more legislation being introduced which protected women's rights.

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<sup>18</sup> British Library, *Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project*, Jo Robinson discusses Miss World contest, C1420/43, 11 November 2011 - 4 December 2012. Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/jo-robinson-miss-world-contest> accessed on 29/03/2017.

In 1970 legislation was introduced giving more judicial power to women going through divorce proceedings. During divorce proceedings, the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act (1970)<sup>19</sup> enabled courts to distribute family assets between the husband and wife based on their individual contribution to the marriage. Montgomery notes 'In dividing family assets, judges tended to award the wives one third and husbands two thirds on the grounds that they would have greater expenses since they would probably be supporting two homes.'<sup>20</sup> Cultural stereotypes were deeply intertwined in organisations, legislation and individuals producing an intrinsically unequal system. Legislation introduced later attempted to redress the inequality.

The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts were introduced in 1975; this legislation was an attempt to level the gender gap in waged work. These acts were introduced in response to the WLM's demands for equal pay and equal job and educational opportunities. Under the Equal Pay Act many women were entitled to increased pay although on average remained underpaid compared to men mainly because of women's concentration in job roles associated with low skill levels and women's restricted availability because of commitments to children. The Sex Discrimination Act aimed to break down the sexual division of labour, producing wider opportunities for all within the job market; in reality, the act lacked any proactive endorsement from employers, unions, women and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Any improvement was a move in the right direction, although many feminists argued that the

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<sup>19</sup> Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act (1970) Chapter 45. Available online via <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/45/enacted> accessed on 10/11/2016.

<sup>20</sup> Montgomery, F. (2006) *Women's Rights, Struggles in Feminism in Britain c. 1770 - 1970*, Glasgow: Manchester University Press, pg. 12.

legislative advancements for women were not as comprehensive as expected. Snell writes, feminists 'inevitably [found] that laws, once passed, [were] unsatisfactory and that the inequalities they were intended to remove still remain[ed].'<sup>21</sup> As Bouchier notes on the position of women with reference to the legislative system,

'[Women] had learned from bitter experience that legal or political equality did not necessarily bring equality of condition. The bonds which some women had believed shattered in 1928 had less to do with the franchise than with the deeper structures of family life, male-dominated culture and the entrenched economic interests of men.'<sup>22</sup>

While the acts on their own did not produce an egalitarian legislative system, they did offer an impetus for improvement. Much sexual discrimination was caused because of cultural expectations and traditional stereotypes of men and women. Through consciousness-raising of women's issues the WLM sought to eradicate this cultural form of oppression. In the late 1970s, Reclaim the Night marches also attempted to object to cultural expectations of women. These protest marches were in reaction to the police's recommendation that at night, women should always be accompanied or stay indoors.<sup>23</sup> Key campaigns by the WLM aimed to alter women's current position by pressing for both legislative and cultural change. In addition, the actions of the WLM and regional groups attracted more individuals to the

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<sup>21</sup> Snell, M. 'Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination' in Feminist Review (ed.) *Waged Work A Reader* (1986) Essex: Virago Press Ltd, pg. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Bouchier, D. (1983) *The Feminist Challenge*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 9.

<sup>23</sup> The demand regarding violence towards women is discussed further in chapter two in *That's No Lady*.

movement by raising their consciousness of the issues and providing a proactive way that individuals could object to the current treatment of women.

### Conclusion

Diffused from America and strengthened by the growing consciousness of equality issues among women workers in Britain, the WLM offered women the opportunity to unite and discuss issues which were personal to them and through this method many women found that they had mutual problems. The WLM began by recognising women's issues and moved onto mobilising against them through protests, demonstrations, petitions, conferences and its seven demands. The WLM's seven demands were constructed through its national conferences and aimed to encapsulate their minimum requirements for increased gender equality. New legislations were introduced although feminists recognised that more reforms needed to be introduced and that some aspects of women's oppression could not be solved with laws.

## THE SHEFFIELD FILM CO-OPERATIVE IN ITS NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

To properly understand the nature of the SFC, chapter two will discuss the WLM and independent film culture within Sheffield. In addition, it will outline the two Sheffield groups as part of national movements. This context will inform a more comprehensive discussion of the SFC: how it functioned, its method, the purpose of its films and how this affected its output. A large body of material within this chapter is footnoted specifically; reference to broader detail has been informed by the Sheffield Hallam Special Archive and oral narratives sourced from individuals with personal experience of the SFC.

### Sheffield Women's Groups' relationship to the national WLM

The Women's National Co-ordinating Committee (WNCC) was established in 1970. WNCC was an organisational body which attempted to co-ordinate women's groups nationwide. The WNCC was open to all women's groups and organisations, offering them two representatives each who could attend the conferences, all decisions were made by mutual agreement although were not binding to any group; the WNCC was established to 'facilitate towards unity and broadening of women's liberation struggle.'<sup>1</sup>

Initially, a strong disassociation between Sheffield WLM and other regional women's groups in the WNCC is apparent from the archival material in the form of correspondence from other groups and WNCC minutes. It is clear from Caroline Freeman's letter, on behalf of Durham

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<sup>1</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Terms of Reference for Women's National Co-ordinating Committee, MD7966, 27 June 1970.



Women's Liberation Group, to Sheffield Women's group that Sheffield WLM was considering dropping out of the WNCC. This was because of the behaviour of the Maoists, Socialist Women's group at the previous conference in Birmingham and the apparent 'crisis in the movement' because of poor organisation. Durham Women's Liberation Group goes onto say,

'To withdraw from the main arena of discussion would be a decisive, and in our view a mistaken, action, which would tip the scales towards the very policies you disagree with. Organisation must concern us all, for the success of our local actions is very much bound up with the state of the movement nationally.'<sup>2</sup>

Correspondence from Nottingham Women's Liberation Group to Sheffield Women's group states that they believed the Birmingham WNCC c. 1970/1 was making the movement 'restrictive and exclusive' because of its 'specific political bias.'<sup>3</sup> Leamington Spa Women's Liberation Group suggested the need for a national WLM information service which aimed to provide information 'about campaigns, leaflets produced... A briefly monthly report', although the idea was not passed with a majority vote at the Leeds WNCC.<sup>4</sup> An umbrella group with no executive power, no national information service, made up of autonomous groups and organisations was arguably always going to be limited in its capacity for change.

The Skegness Conference in 1971 'by an overwhelming majority voted to abolish the W.N.C.C. and to concentrate on regional groupings of women's liberation groups with national

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<sup>2</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, MD7966/1/3, 15 July 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, MD7966/3/1, c.1970.

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Leamington Spa Women's Liberation Group, MD7966/3/1, 27 April 1971.

meetings only twice a year.<sup>5</sup> As a replacement for the WNCC regional centres were established, Leeds volunteered 'for the Yorkshire Regional W.L. Centre... The Yorkshire groups, as listed by Leamington are Doncaster, Bradford, Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, York.'<sup>6</sup> Organisation of the WLM through small divisions attempted to ensure the movement continued to broaden in terms of its following but not fragment because of ideological or political differences between participants. In 1972 the Northern Regions were 'attempt[ing] to formulate a general policy' regarding the six demands, 'to present to the National Conference.'<sup>7</sup> By the next Northern Regions conference in York, they agreed that their,

'Statement of Aims should begin with the words:

No womens liberation without socialist revolution.

No socialist revolution without womens liberation.

We aim to change the social relations of reproduction

as well as to change the social relations of production.'<sup>8</sup>

Increased association with local WLM groups and organisations ensured that Sheffield WLM, within the Northern Regions group, would attend the national conferences prepared and informed to put forward their perspective. Nevertheless, many still felt frustrated with the WLM's infrastructure. Gail Chester, from London WLM group, explains the conflict in the

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<sup>5</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Bristol Women's Liberation Group, MD7966/3/2, 14 December 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Leeds Women's Liberation, MD7966/3/1, c. November 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Leeds Women's Liberation, MD7966/3/1, May 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, An account of the Northern regions conference held at York on Saturday June 24th, MD7966/3/3, 24 June 1972.

WLM between 'a movement based on decentralised, non-hierarchical, autonomous organisation' while simultaneously, 'people were expressing widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of effective communication' at the national conference in Bristol, July 1973.<sup>9</sup> The Scottish Women's Newsletter consolidates this view; it says that the WLM was being stifled by 'its lack of organisation. The setting up of Workshops, Information Centres and newsletters is farcical playing about until these potential channels of communication have a definitive policy and programme to convey.'<sup>10</sup> Leeds Women's Organisation for Revolutionary Anarchists note that the WLM was mainly organised using, 'leader-less structureless groups... Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done.'<sup>11</sup>

Sheffield WLM's relationship to the national WLM was therefore not always favourable as it had organisational issues along with not always representing the Northern regions interests. Although at the same time, the national WLM established a comprehensive network of women's groups which covered a broad spectrum of women's issues, ideas and events.

### The Women's Liberation Movement in Sheffield

'When the Sheffield Group began in 1969 we had no models of previous women's groups. None of the original members had been in a group before. Indeed, apart from

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<sup>9</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Background notes for discussion in workshops on organisation, MD7966/3/3, April 1975, pg. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, Scottish Women's Newsletter, MD7966/3/1, May 1974.

<sup>11</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, The Tyranny of Structurelessness (ed.) MD7966/3/4, c.1972.

a couple in London and one in Nottingham, there were no other groups in this country.

We had to work out a practice of our own.'<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the second-wave of feminism, women's groups' initial task was articulating between themselves, sharing personal experiences and discussing the aspects in which they believed they were oppressed. The first Sheffield Women's Liberation Group newsletter, produced in 1971, consisted of a singular double-sided page. The content includes the story of Paulette McCulloch who 'started a protest at the City Library for its refusal to allow pushchairs into the main room.'<sup>13</sup> Their 'practical registration of protest' consisted of 'enter[ing] the lending library with three pushchairs Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup>.'<sup>14</sup> Along with local protests the group were simultaneously attempting to reach out to the wider community,

'We distributed 2,000 leaflets to Sheffield women to let them know we exist and to say how to reach us. We didn't get a single response from the leaflet itself, but several responses from the one leaflet we left with the Civic Information Centre.'<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Sheffield Women's Groups attempt to reach out to other local women, some contacted members of parliament to register their support for legislative reforms. For example, Miss. Hildrew, signed by eleven other women in her Sheffield group, wrote to various MPs in support of Mrs. Joyce Butler's 'Anti-discrimination Bill'. They received replies

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<sup>12</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, Ten Years On, MD7966/2/2/1, October/November 1979, pg. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/1, May 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, MD7966/1/3, March 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/1, May 1971.

from, John Osbourne, John Spence, Fred Mulley and George Darling.<sup>16</sup> These small beginnings of the WLM in Sheffield highlight the commitment of the first women's groups in Sheffield and the difficulty they faced in trying to raise public consciousness of women's issues. Indeed, another function of women's groups was to form a nationwide network, sharing experiences, ideas and debates. Arguably, the most significant way in which groups interacted with each other was through conferences.

Sheffield WLM held its first conference, Women and Health, 4 - 6<sup>th</sup> October 1974. Women attended from various groups including, Women from West London, Rochdale Women, Action for Women's Advice Research and Education and Cambridge Pregnancy Advisory Group.<sup>17</sup> Direct contact with various other women's groups and increasing participants within the Sheffield WLM ensured that the movement continued to become more coherent.

An example of Sheffield WLM's increasing diversity is the eighteen-page booklet, 'Alternatives in Sheffield', produced around 1977. It provided an all-inclusive directory of Sheffield's alternative groups, a brief outline of their activity and how to contact them. The content was organised into: alternative structures (The SFC is listed in this), help and information, personal liberation groups, pressure groups and skills exchange.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the content of the Sheffield Women's newsletters diversified, representing numerous groups, events and issues,

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<sup>16</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, MD7966/1/3, March 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, First Women and Health Conference, MD7966/2/3, October 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, Alternatives in Sheffield, MD7966/2/5, c. 1977.

whilst other content continued to consolidate ideas popularised by the national WLM. According to the Sheffield Raven Road women's group they,

'generate[d] a wide variety of activities - consciousness-raising groups; Women's Aid; NAC<sup>19</sup>; a women and socialism group; women's theatre group. There is also a childbirth group, women working in manual trades, a woman's printing group, woman's film co-operative... and more.'<sup>20</sup>

By 1979 Sheffield's women's groups boasted a myriad of events and groups such as: Women's Dance Group, Women and video course, Women and Education, Photography Group, Women and Art Group and even a Massage Group; The Monday Night Women's Group became so large that they 'agreed to split up into smaller groups.'<sup>21</sup> Each group decided the topic of discussion and a monthly meeting for all women was held on the last Monday of every month. Jenny Woodley comments that by the 1970s the WLM in Sheffield was 'thriving'.<sup>22</sup>

### The emergence of independent film and video-making at a national level

Before 1970 three independent film and video workshops existed in the United Kingdom: London Film-makers Co-op, Cinema Action and Amber Films.<sup>23</sup> The term workshop was

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<sup>19</sup> NAC is an acronym for National Abortion Campaign.

<sup>20</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/13, Springtime issue 1978, pg. 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Woodley, J. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Email to the author, 18/07/2017. Personal communication.

<sup>23</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 52- 81.

adopted in the 1970s to represent a 'unit which, in principle, produces, distributes and exhibits film or video, is managed collectively, operates egalitarian working practices, and nurtures long-term relationships with subjects and audiences.'<sup>24</sup> From 1974 the Independent Film Association was the main voice for workers within independent film; employment in the industry was typically casual and no official wage levels were in place. Independent cultural industries aimed to provide an alternative perception, diffuse ideas into the public domain and experiment with new methods of filming. Mainstream media typically aimed for commercial success, therefore it was restricted by the rules of convention; additionally, the content of mainstream media was primarily dedicated to entertaining its audience. Colin Pons, a founding member of SIF, comments that the media was largely inaccessible to many people; the elite dictating media content did not want to relinquish their control.<sup>25</sup> Increasingly, many individuals were feeling disassociated with provided mainstream media. A document from 1984 discussing the significant effect media could have on social change states,

'It is not surprising, considering these structural constraints that the media is inaccessible both in terms of its content and by the availability of the technology of the rest of society. A large amount of media output represents a constructed view of reality which excludes the concerns and experience of the majority of people in our

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<sup>24</sup> Dickinson, M. 'Workshop Movement' in McFarlane, B. and Slide, A. (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of British Film: Fourth Edition* (2013) Manchester: Manchester University Press, pg. 844.

<sup>25</sup> Pons, C. Member of Sheffield Independent Film. Conversation with author, 01/08/2017. Personal communication.

society, a majority made up of class, age, sex, sexual, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and political minorities.<sup>126</sup>

In contrast to mainstream media, independent film's success was not measured economically but from the significance of their work, which was based on the film-makers use of innovative practice, their subject topic, perspective and the successful dissemination of their message. The major benefit of independent film and video groups was they were not wholly committed to cultural, political or social obligations, although as a result of this, many commonly struggled to obtain continuous financial support. At a round-table discussion conducted by Kraft Wetzel (a Berlin based film critic) during the Berlin Film Festival in May 1982, Jenny Woodley explained that before any official film and video policy, 'the vast majority of independent filmmakers, if they were making films at all, were being given small amounts of money, that covered stock and processing costs, and no money for wages.'<sup>127</sup> Predictably, the limited availability of funding for cultural industries restricted the number of independent film and video makers.

Archival documents are concentrated within the 1980s as this begins the period in which more opportunities for funding became available for cultural industries. Gradually, through the early 1980s, more financial support was made available to independent film and video makers as they provided a much-needed alternative to mainstream visual broadcasting. In one document, the Regional Production Fund state that, 'In twenty years... there has been a

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<sup>26</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield City Council Central Libraries Future Visions, The Development of Film and Video in Sheffield, Genuine access and social change in the media, 1984, pg. 8.

<sup>27</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, *Views the Magazine of the Independent Filmmakers Association*, Arguments for independence, Autumn 1983, pg. 2.



tremendous proliferation in film/video workshops of all sizes and kinds across these islands.<sup>128</sup> Institutions such as the British Film Institute's Regional Production Fund and increasing investment from many city councils allowed the regional independent film and video industry to diversify and grow. For many funding bodies the independent sector offered an opportunity to disseminate a message to the public on a national scale. The value of independent film and video was increasingly being acknowledged as an important part of cultural well-being and as a medium to showcase the social diversity of Britain.

'Good communicators are at the heart of the struggle to build a more equal and a more just society. We think it important that forms of story-telling and of social documentation remind us that it is not so impossibly beyond our grasp to meet all basic human needs, both material and spiritual.'<sup>29</sup>

Arguably the most significant contribution to cultural industries and the progression of national media policy in Britain was the creation of Channel 4 in 1982. Channel 4 was the potential solution to widespread dissatisfaction with mainstream broadcasting, 'The new channel had a statutory obligation to foster 'experiment and innovation.'<sup>30</sup> As Channel 4 was dedicated to representing minority views, it offered an opportunity to equalise the previously London-centric independent film and video industry. Channel 4 agreed to provide continuous funding for selected workshops offering the independent film and video industry the financial

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<sup>28</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 4.

<sup>29</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 1.

<sup>30</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 4.

stability it once lacked. Catalysed by Channel 4's financial backing, the main institutions associated with British filmmaking, Channel 4, the Independent Filmmakers Association, the British Film Institute, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) and the Regional Arts Association, produced the Workshop Declaration (1982). Woodley, speaking on behalf of the ACTT, commented that during the late 70s the ACTT began to recognise the non-commercial, grant-aided sector because of the Regional Art Association's 'code of practice', along with the support from Channel 4 the Workshop Declaration (1982) was produced.<sup>31</sup> The declaration attempted to end casualization within the industry by supporting affiliated workshops with regular funding provided by, Channel 4, the council and other funding bodies. Workshops were obligated to follow specific criteria in the way they functioned, their productions and the wider impact on their community. Goode writes that many believed that independent film and video under the declaration could provide the population with,

'qualitatively more than the existing profit-orientated entertainment industries...The nonprofit-making, and non-commercial workshops were run cooperatively and committed to an integrated and collective practice of production, exhibition, distribution, and development of audiences, research, education, and community work more generally.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Summary Notes of the Seventh Meeting of Sheffield Metropolitan District Council's Media Policy Group, 24 July 1985, pg. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Goode, I. 'Black Audio Film Collective' in Aitken, I. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (2006) New York: Routledge, pg. 123.

Franchised workshops under the declaration 'originat[ed] their own film/video projects' but still remained 'in close consultation with groups in various communities.'<sup>33</sup> Paul Marris, a founding member of the Independent Film-makers Association and Film and Video Officer for the Department of Recreation and Arts in the Greater London Council discusses a workshop's 'primary purpose is of artistic, educational and/or social benefit.'<sup>34</sup> Marris goes onto discuss 'production plus' where, as well as making their own productions, workshops would engage in 'activities such as promotion and distribution, organising showings, archiving, producing film-cultural publications, conducting educational events', as well as providing, 'access to production equipment or facilities, or production skills-training for non-commercial film or video-makers', giving many members of the public the opportunity to be involved with the cultural industry.<sup>35</sup> Workshops therefore were innately attached to their region, largely focused on documenting, presenting and engaging with the community in their immediate locality. Workshop productions were used to highlight regional and personal issues while also providing employment for an increasing amount of people. By 1986 there were 150 workshops established in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Most were concentrated in London (45 workshops), secondly Birmingham (10 workshops) and thirdly Sheffield (6 workshops). In 1986, the workshops in Sheffield were, Banner Films, SIF, Sheffield Media Unit, Sheffield Asian Film and Video, Steel Bank Film Co-op, SFC.<sup>36</sup> In the 1987 Birmingham Film and Television Forum, MP Mark Fisher, Shadow Minister for Arts and Media, commented that half

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<sup>33</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 3.

<sup>34</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 1.

<sup>35</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 1 – 2.

<sup>36</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 52- 81.

a million individuals were employed in Britain's expanding cultural industries. He added that the consumption of culture in the public and private field gave people, 'enjoyable social contact and means of expression.'<sup>37</sup>

Individuals wanted more out of their cultural industries. Alternative media had the potential to really make an impact on its audience's perception and attitudes. The acknowledgement of independent film and video as an important communicative tool led to increasing investment in the industry, which in turn allowed the industry to diversify and experiment further with their methods and content. David Rea, a founding member of SIF, states 'the independent film "movement" was most valuable in providing a valid alternative to mainstream television. It had a different voice - mainly left wing, but not always so. So, it encouraged debate.'<sup>38</sup> Workshops not only exposed their audience to new perspectives, methods of filming and issues, they also encouraged participation in the film-making process. Their investment in the local community frequently produced films which documented local stories and lives on an extremely personal level, leaving behind in the archives now, films which provide realistic snapshots into the past.

Inevitably the provision of financial support for independent film and video resulted in increasingly eclectic broadcasting, more stable jobs in the cultural industries and the development of alternative media. 'Workshops now play a strategic role in the ever-widening spread of a pluralist non-commercial audio-visual culture, producing or enabling a

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<sup>37</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, *Cities and City Cultures: Local Authorities and the Cultural Industries*, Birmingham Film and Television Festival Forum, 1987, pg. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Rea, D. Member of Sheffield Independent Film. Email to the author, 08/08/2017. Personal communication.

proliferation of images that is healthy for a modern democracy.<sup>139</sup> Independent film allowed the dissemination of ideas and perspectives to the masses which, traditionally, was only possible by the elite few.

### The emergence of film and video making in Sheffield

In Sheffield, before any national official film and video policy, many individuals and groups contributed to the establishment of a culture of independent film and video making. Synonymous with the national film and video industry, this culture was restricted because funding was difficult to obtain, and equipment was costly. Many Sheffield film-makers had to move in order to continue working in the industry on casual contracts, usually these were in London.

As alternative forms of media became appreciated and available, funding for the arts in Sheffield increased, academic institutions such as Sheffield Hallam University<sup>40</sup> reflected the growing interest in cultural industries. Barry Callaghan established a film-making course at Sheffield Hallam, on which Paul Haywood taught documentary. There was much collaboration between Callaghan, Haywood, Pons and former film students of the Sheffield Hallam film-making course and the SFC. As a result, they formed SIF as a supportive network for Sheffield's independent film and video makers. To become official, SIF needed legal status although lacking any waged members, Callaghan, Haywood, Pons and Alf Bower (a former student of

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<sup>39</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, The Regional Production Fund, December 1986, pg. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Previously Sheffield Polytechnic.

Sheffield Hallam) became guarantors.<sup>41</sup> Established in 1977 SIF was an umbrella group of practising filmmakers 'with the intention of collectively owning equipment and thereby being able to produce films more cheaply.'<sup>42</sup> SIF provided a crucial link for Sheffield film-makers to obtain knowledge, equipment, distribute and exhibit their work. SIF, 'provided a focus for the independent film and video movement in South Yorkshire and offer[ed] a basic film and video facility, screenings, workshops for skill sharing and a forum for discussion and co-operation between independent film and video workers.'<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, SIF was established with a desire to make the film and video industry more accessible to the people of Sheffield, through the provision of film and video technology and knowledge. This would ensure that developing ideas and methods which would usually not be aired by the mainstream media could still be produced independently. In 1978, SIF's three year plan consisted of: the provision of '28 short courses on all aspects of film and video making', developing a distribution and exhibition network for their work, move their facility into a larger space, employing three more staff and obtaining more funding not only from 'existing funders - Channel 4, Yorkshire Arts, Sheffield City Council, and the BFI, but [it was] also considering alternative sources such as the EEC Social Fund.'<sup>44</sup> SIF was motivated towards providing film training to people that were interested because it would allow individuals to produce and distribute their own media. The national conference on film and video training states,

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<sup>41</sup> Colin Pons mortgaged his house to establish Sheffield Independent Film.

<sup>42</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Draft report from Sheffield Independent Film, May 1985, pg. 3.

<sup>43</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 3.

<sup>44</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield Independent Film - The next three years, 1978.

'We believe that the general media paternalism of being spoken for and about must be ended, so that people can speak for themselves and use the media as one element in their struggle for emancipation and equality. So, we call for media access and training for working class people whose labour is exploited here and throughout the world; for access for women, who are continually discriminated against and whose childcare responsibilities have marginalised them from the world of paid work and from the centres of political power; for access for black people whose experience of everyday racism in Britain echoes memories and histories of colonial brutality; for access for those whose sexuality refuses the norms of heterosexual romance; and those who poverty excludes from participation in the choices offered by consumer society - the elderly, the young, the unemployed.'<sup>45</sup>

Financial restrictions kept many individuals out of the film and video industry, traditionally ensuring that only the powerful few had control over media output. To rent their production facilities, SIF implemented a differential scale in which 'well-funded groups working for television pa[id] a much higher rate than groups or individuals who may have no income but the dole. Since the higher rate subsidize[d] the lower rate, the principle of re-distribution of wealth is managed, at least on a small scale.'<sup>46</sup> This integrated practice established a comprehensive infrastructure of support, which was reflected in SIF's rising membership. 'Of

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<sup>45</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, National Conference on film and video training, Papers and recommendations, November 1985, pg. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 5.

the 22 members in 1977, 16' in 1985 earned their living in the industry.<sup>47</sup> In 1983 SIF comprised of 41 members, compared to 120 members in 1985.<sup>48</sup> The rising engagement with SIF, reflected 'Sheffield's recognized position as one of the most active centres for film and video production outside London, and SIFL's<sup>49</sup> history of encouraging a wide range of practices and products.'<sup>50</sup> SFC wrote,

'This important change makes our financial position less precarious and gives much-needed stability to develop our work and our training function. It is also a welcome commitment to fostering the growth of community-based autonomous groups of socialist film-makers outside London.'<sup>51</sup>

The growth in funding for cultural industries only sought to catalyse further experimentation and engagement from individuals and groups involved in the independent film and video industry. Arguably the most significant financial support came from Channel 4, the availability of funding 'allowed South Yorkshire film-makers to explore themes often ignored or trivialized by traditional film and television.'<sup>52</sup> The growth of the WLM regionally and nationally happened almost simultaneously with the advent of independent film. Both groups objected to certain aspects of culture and both similarly wanted to communicate their message to the

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<sup>47</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Draft report from Sheffield Independent Film, May 1985, pg. 8.

<sup>48</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Draft report from Sheffield Independent Film, May 1985, pg. 1.

<sup>49</sup> SIF is sometimes referenced as SIFL (Sheffield Independent Film Limited).

<sup>50</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Letter from Sheffield Film Co-op to John Bennington, CA990/91, 21 June 1983.

<sup>52</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the '80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 5.



public. SIF discussed the various accumulative factors which shaped the context for the advent of independent film,

'The emergence of the independent film sector can be linked to a number of social, political and economic developments. The shift towards acceptability of state subsidy of the arts, the establishment of the Regional Arts Associations, the influence of the 'New Left' and of movements such as the Women's Liberation Movement and the peace movement in the political arena, have all played a part in the development of independent film and video making.'<sup>53</sup>

#### Sheffield Film Co-operative

A group of women involved in Sheffield Women's group had contact with Dave Sheasby, a progressive broadcaster and playwright, who was employed at BBC Radio Sheffield. With Sheasby's support and encouragement, the women produced a series of radio programmes titled, *Not Just a Pretty Face* which explored specific demands of the WLM. After their success on the radio, the group recognised the significant positive impact the media could have and therefore continued onto community television. As Jenny Woodley comments, their motivation in the early 1970s was, 'Let's stop talking about things but actually DO something.'<sup>54</sup> With the technical support of Barry Callaghan and the workers at Cablevision the group produced two programmes. *Women and Children* (1973) featured the difficulties

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<sup>53</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Some notes on a media policy for the 80s, 4 March 1985, pg. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Woodley, Jenny. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Email to the author, 18/07/2017. Personal communication.

involved in travelling around Sheffield with small children and prams, particularly in-light of the new underpasses introduced by city planners and *My Child* (1974) was about the need for child-minders to be registered to ensure their reliability. The group's next film concept regarded the poor provision of abortions on the NHS after the 1967 Abortion Act; this was deemed too controversial for community television. As Woodley comments, 'John Brand, the station manager began to get cold feet and mutter about his Home Office license.'<sup>55</sup>

With no prior knowledge of the film industry, Christine Bellamy, Jenny Woodley, Gill Booth and Barbara Fowkes, involved in the previous projects (and with technical support from Barry Callaghan) established the SFC as a means of producing and spreading their perspective of women's issues. Through their working practice of skill-sharing, working with men and enrolling on associated courses they used the medium as a technique to raise public consciousness of women's issues in Sheffield. Each SFC member 'had one or two small children under school age'<sup>56</sup>, had worked part-time and was discontent with their situation. They wanted to contribute their feminist perspective to the film industry; an industry which they believed was dominated by men.

When the group decided to leave Cablevision to make their film *A Woman Like You*, they had to research other funding options. Independent film-makers did not measure their success financially, although the provision of funding was integral to produce films, particularly in such an expensive industry. From their initiation in 1975 the SFC obtained financial backing from

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<sup>55</sup> Woodley, Jenny. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Email to the author, 18/07/2017. Personal communication.

<sup>56</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London: British Film Institute, pg. 296 – 298.

various associated institutions. In 1975 the group decided on the name SFC while applying for funding support from Yorkshire Arts Association, the recommendation of Barry Callaghan. Yorkshire Arts Association provided the group with free film stock while the British Pregnancy Advisory Service contributed £300 and the group received a £25 personal cheque from Lady Gardner (Muriel Box).<sup>57</sup> *That's No Lady* (1977) was commissioned by the National Women's Aid Federation. Based on an interview with initial SFC member Christine Bellamy, Angela Martin (also a previous SFC member) writes, 'Screenings of the first two films then led to *Jobs for Girls*' (1979), 'which was funded largely by the Equal Opportunities Commission, with additional funding from Manpower Services and the YAA<sup>58</sup>.<sup>59</sup> In 1980 wages were available for members of the SFC as they registered as a worker's co-operative and joined the Association of Cinematography Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT). Later, the SFC was provided regular funding along with other franchised workshops because of the Workshop Declaration 1982 and Channel 4. 'Integrative practice' as mentioned earlier was a condition of continued funding, the SFC was involved in various community activities and focussed mainly on discussions with their audience. By 1981/2 SFC's total turnover was £15,000 and £100,000 in 1983, ensuring that four full-time and one part-time permanent worker could be sustained.<sup>60</sup> Financial backing gave SFC the consistency and the reliability to develop their style and for its members to progress their skills. In the SIF archive, a document regarding film-making in the 1970s discusses the definition of independent,

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<sup>57</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London: British Film Institute, pg. 292.

<sup>58</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association.

<sup>59</sup> Martin, A. (2014) *Sheffield Film Co-op: Beginning, Being and Ending*, The Women's Film and Television History Network. Available online via <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/11/sheffield-film-co-op-beginning-being-and-ending/> accessed on 29/11/2017.

<sup>60</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Sheffield Film Co-op's application to the EOC for funding, CA990/91, 1984, pg. 6.

“Independent' is a term used extensively to lend an assumed dignity to a host of activities which by their very nature can only be dependent... The word independent implies both an absence of any higher authority and a certain neutrality within an appointed field; that is, one 'independent' of any external obligations.’<sup>61</sup>

SFC used this 'independence' to produce films that it wanted to make, films that portrayed significant issues for women at the time. Some SFC films take the form of dramatized documentaries in which actors highlight specific issues through the storyline of the film. To keep costs as low as possible, much of the screenplay in the dramatized documentaries was played by family and friends. For example, *That's No Lady* (1977), highlights the issue of domestic abuse, the sexist stand-up comedian is Woodley's husband, while Bellamy's children play the children of the main couple. Other work by the SFC is wholly non-fiction, based on interviews from various individuals affected by the same issues. In these films, the interviewee is usually shown both visually and audibly, in some cases the audio is played over video sequences which supplement the audience's understanding of what the interviewee is speaking about. From their strong accents and colloquialisms, it is fair to assume that most interviewees were from Sheffield.

The ethnographical nature of their work produces a personal, unique and thought-provoking insight into the lives of the individuals featured in their films. SFC's primary function was to educate its audience and raise public consciousness regarding women's rights. The SFC used

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<sup>61</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Independent Film-Making in the '70s, An introductory discussion paper from the Organising Committee, 1976, pg. 2.

the content of its films, through dramatized story-lines or interviewees, to articulate and represent prominent women's issues. SFC aspired to feature real-life people and real-life problems to present a realistic image. Understanding was a key goal of the SFC's work; ultimately through understanding the protagonists' situation, the audience would be more likely to show empathy towards them.

In addition, the visual aspect of film and video offered SFC the opportunity to communicate its message to under-represented groups through its nationwide network of trade unions, adult education groups and universities. The aesthetics of SFC's films add to the audience's understanding of the film's topic and establish a strong sense of Sheffield. Interviews in SFC's non-dramatized films were visually and audibly recorded either in the interviewee's home, community centre or workplace. Other visual segments reinforce a sense of place by featuring Sheffield landscapes, for example: *A Question of Choice* (1982) is set largely in Walkley Nursey and Infants School and Walkley Junior School, *Women of Steel* (1984) showcases archived footage inside Sheffield's steel mills and *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* (1986) shows the Park Hill estate and the demolition of the Sheffield Flower Estate.

SFC attempted to challenge the audience's perception of certain issues by using oral narratives and visual sequences to establish a feeling of empathy towards the individuals featured in its films. The SFC highlights that it is society's norms and stereotypes which provide the restrictions of gender roles and produce such distinct inequality. At the time of the SFC, women's responsibilities were largely restricted to the role of a wife and mother;

Millum states that this image was commonly reinforced by mainstream media.<sup>62</sup> Each of the SFC's films represents issues which (although not intentional at the time) are relatable to the wider context of the WLM.

In an interview in *Rogue Reels*, Woodley comments, 'To begin with we were heavily influenced by the politics of the early Women's Movement.' She goes on to say that SFC was a collective, in which 'everybody ha[d] equal rights,' and they practiced informal collective working and skill-sharing, this meant that everyone was 'jack of all trades.'<sup>63</sup> For example in *Rogue Reels*, Bellamy explains that while they were making *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984) there were about ten people working on the project and they 'gave several people their first break as a cameraperson' and while the film was being edited, 'each newcomer had some input.'<sup>64</sup> As the Independent Filmmakers Association discusses, this practice of sharing skills became synonymous with the independent sector at the time,

'filmmakers saw themselves not as single specialist technicians, but as filmmakers working across a whole range of activities, being involved in scripting, in collectively working on a film, perhaps working on more than one technical aspect, being involved in the exhibition and distribution of the product at the end of it.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Millum, T. (1975) *Images of Women: Advertising in Women's Magazines*. London: Chatto and Windus.

<sup>63</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London: British Film Institute, pg. 296 – 298.

<sup>64</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London: British Film Institute, pg. 295.

<sup>65</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, *Views the Magazine of the Independent Filmmakers Association*, Arguments for independence, Autumn 1983, pg. 4.

Through their working method of sharing skills, commitment to its community and co-operating with men to produce their films, the SFC's Socialist ethos is clear. Stansfield, an SFC member, explains in a retrospective oral interview that Sheffield was known 'as 'The Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' with a politically receptive climate, good networks, community activism'<sup>66</sup>, all of which encouraged SFC's production. Jenny Owen wrote 'Women and Socialism' in 1976, articulating a need for socialist-feminists to communicate on a regional scale as the previous national socialist-feminist conference was 'sectarian and confusing'.<sup>67</sup> In the 1976 WLM conference in Newcastle, many women expressed their feelings of isolation within male-dominated left-wing groups.<sup>68</sup> In contrast to those not already involved in politics, other women were brought into the political sphere through their involvement in the women's movement. Woodley explains that the SFC had a political agenda which it used its films convey; to obtain funding from various organisations the SFC continually 'bounced back and forwards: is this political activity, is this community activity or is it film-making?'<sup>69</sup>

'As socialist feminist film makers working in film production, distribution and exhibition we place a high priority on engaging with the current concerns of ordinary women in the local community and on sensitively representing their experience in film. Our work is intended to combine a challenge to the usual representation of

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<sup>66</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Sheffield Feminist Archive project, Oral history interviews, Chrissie Stansfield, 30 September 2015/ 10 October 2015, X771/2/3.

<sup>67</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/9, July 1976.

<sup>68</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>69</sup> Dickinson, M. (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London: British Film Institute, pg. 296 – 298.

women in the media with the depiction of their real activity in society in a useful and accessible form.<sup>70</sup>

SFC and other minority groups in the independent film sector recognised that the film industry was male-dominated, although through the deconstruction of gender roles and policies of increased accessibility of equipment and knowledge they began to diffuse the sex-segregation of cultural industries. SFC worked with various men throughout its life; Jenny Woodley named Barry Callaghan and Russ Murray who shot the classroom sequence in *Jobs for the Girls*. In addition, members of SIF would act in their fictional films and help technically when asked.<sup>71</sup> Chrissie Stansfield, another member of SFC, comments that the SFC's 'working practices were as important as the content of the films themselves as a means to promote women's liberation', the group endeavoured to promote women in the film industry by encouraging women trainees, employing freelance women, having an all-women film crew which not only reassured women being interviewed but also set a good example and inspired other women to get involved.<sup>72</sup> SFC contributed to film by attempting to diffuse the industries sexually segregated roles. In addition, it contributed to film by providing a representation of women's image which aimed to reflect ordinary women more realistically in comparison to conventional television and film.

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<sup>70</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c. 1984.

<sup>71</sup> Woodley, Jenny. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Email to the author, 18/07/2017. Personal communication.

<sup>72</sup> Stansfield, Chrissie. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Conversation with author, 04/08/2017. Personal communication.



The representation of women in mainstream film and television conformed to cultural expectations. Hollywood glamour was one of the most popular genres at the time, representing pure escapism for its English audience and all the related goodies of capitalism. In commercial film women were portrayed in a very specific way. Mulvey comments that in Hollywood films young female characters frequently,

'exuded energy and initiative that reflected the aspirations of its young female audience. However, in the last resort, scripts had to balance these images with extreme care. Emblematic freedom and independence stayed ultimately within bounds, traditions of sexual morality were maintained, and endings could bring the heroine back to the tradition and stability of conventional marriage.'<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, British popular cinema was much more down-to-earth, although it continued to conform to gender norms and restrict its characters to the accepted roles of men and women. For the WLM and SFC, mainstream cinema and television's image of women was not one of gender equality or reality. The advent of independent film gave film-makers the opportunity to produce alternative images. To achieve change within the nation's institutions and governmental policies, SFC and WLM firstly attempted to get its audience to think critically about gender roles and discuss whether they were still relevant; as discussed in this SFC promotional booklet,

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<sup>73</sup> Mulvey, L. 'Unmasking the Gaze: Feminist Film Theory, History, and Film Studies' in. Callahan, V. *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* (2010) Detroit: Wayne State University Press. pg. 24.

'Sheffield Film Co-op hopes to continue producing films that are enjoyable and that stimulate discussion in a way which furthers the understanding of women's experience, their representation in film and the possibilities of social change.'<sup>74</sup>

Through its work, SFC attempted to raise public-consciousness of women's issues. The SFC's success in independent film gave them a platform to promote their message even further. In an interview with Pam Marshall, Chrissie Stansfield, a SFC member, comments that the legacy of the SFC was one which tried to 'empower women by involving them in the production of films and by valuing their voice.'<sup>75</sup> In addition to its films, the SFC encouraged discussions from the audience after screenings to motivate people to think critically about aspects of women's situations and how it could be improved. Bruley states, discussion groups were 'fundamental' to the WLM as they allowed 'small groups of women [to discuss] their lives and [connect] their own personal feelings of oppression to a wider context.'<sup>76</sup> Jalna Hanmer, a member of the WLM, explains that in consciousness-raising groups all participants were, 'required to talk. Because that's the way you discover[ed] your oppression... it's only by talking about it that there began to be some understanding.'<sup>77</sup> Similarly to the WLM, SFC used personal stories to convey its message; as a result, the SFC's films invoked sympathy for the individuals represented in them.

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<sup>74</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Promotional booklet about the Sheffield Film Co-operative, c. 1984, pg. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Sheffield Feminist Archive project, Oral history interviews, Chrissie Stansfield, 30 September 2015/ 10 October 2015, X771/2/3.

<sup>76</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900, Social History in Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pg. 150.

<sup>77</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, *Jalna Hanmer discusses consciousness raising groups*, C1420/04, 15-16 November 2010, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/jalna-hanmer-consciousness-raising-groups> accessed on 01/04/2017.

In contrast to a typical WLM discussion group, SFC involved and invited members of the public to participate. SFC films were viewed in an array of venues such as colleges, union branches, film festivals and schools; therefore, its audience was typically diverse. At request, members of the SFC would even be present at the screening of their work to facilitate and stimulate discussion afterwards. In a SFC filmography booklet it states that, 'This relationship with our audience plays a vital role in the continuing development of our film practice.'<sup>78</sup> Bernadette Moloney, a member of the SFC, addressed a paper explaining that distributing their work was, 'to maintain contact with the audience,' as a result, 'Publicity and promotion [was] a major advantage.'<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, none of these initial informal discussions were properly noted. There is a distinct lack in the archival material regarding the audience's response to SFC's films.

Discussions after screenings of SFC films not only inspired the audience to think critically about women's position within society. It also encouraged individuals to be more involved in the women's movement. *Changing Our Lives – 5 Arches Community Centre* (1984)<sup>80</sup> produced by the SFC, 'grew out of a screening of *A Question of Choice* at a community centre in Shirecliffe which [was] organised by a group of women with small children.'<sup>81</sup> The Shirecliffe community and SFC aimed the film at, 'women in similar situations,' as they wanted the film

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<sup>78</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c. 1984.

<sup>79</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Summary of the media policy group, 23 May 1985, pg. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Changing Our Lives- 5 Arches Community Centre*, dir. Christine Bellamy, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1984) BFI Archive, London. VB104977.

<sup>81</sup> *Changing Our Lives- 5 Arches Community Centre*, dir. Christine Bellamy, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1984) BFI Archive, London. VB104977.

to be, 'about their work in setting up the centre and the change that it has brought about in their hitherto depressed and isolated lives.'<sup>82</sup> Through this film, SFC wanted to raise their audience's awareness of community projects and motivate more community action.

Another consciousness-raising method implemented by the SFC was their films regarding the re-discovery of women's history. In the Sheffield Women's Paper (1979) Woodley comments that women should be learning from history, 'and also making sure that women coming now and in the future to the Movement can also learn from it.'<sup>83</sup> In 2015, SFC's, *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984) was screened in Glasgow to commemorate the centenary of the 1915 rent strikes, this discussion was filmed and is available on YouTube.<sup>84</sup> The discussion held afterwards was initiated by Jenny Woodley and various members of the audience contributed to the discourse. Several speakers stress the significance of films such as *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984) as they re-discover historical events which would have ordinarily faded from public memory. Through various projects the SFC endeavoured to either capture the present lives of ordinary individuals or recreate the experiences of women in the past. An article in Sheffield Women's Newspaper (1971) discusses the value and application of women's history to the contemporary WLM. It reads,

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<sup>82</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-operative, Update of application to Sheffield City Council, CA990/91, February 1984.

<sup>83</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Ten Years On, MD7966/2/2/1, October/November 1979.

<sup>84</sup> Red Skirts on Clydeside – After Screening Discussion, 4/06/2015, Available online via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g75VEdCvdjA> accessed on 11/12/2017.

‘We know little or nothing about the feminine masses, about the ordinary women of the past; what defined their lives; what seemed natural to them and how they resisted what was intolerable, and whether they succeeded.’<sup>85</sup>

For the women’s movement, a shared history was arguably the only topic that the fragmented and diverse groups united over. The SFC’s films that focus on historical events highlight the significance of women’s past roles. Furthermore, the films document these women’s stories which typically would have been lost or confined to personal oral narratives. *Women of Steel* (1984)<sup>86</sup> was produced in collaboration with the local women’s history group and includes ‘interviews with women who worked in local industry at that time.’<sup>87</sup> The film recognises the role that Sheffield’s female munitions workers played during World War Two and their significant contribution to the war effort. *Red Skirts on Clydeside* (1984)<sup>88</sup> largely consists of interviews with descendants of the women who participated in the 1915 Glasgow rent strike. *Diamonds in Brown Paper* (1989)<sup>89</sup> traces ‘the lives of two women who started work running errands for the buffers - silver cutlery polishers - in Sheffield... Sixty years on Mary and Flo, the “real life girls” of 1928, look back over the bad old days.’<sup>90</sup> Women’s historical films such as the ones produced by the SFC gave its audience a chance to consider the past and connect

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<sup>85</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women’s Liberation Movement, Women’s Newspaper, No. 3, MD7966/4/12a, 5 June 1971, pg. 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Women of Steel*, dir. Jenny Woodley, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1984) BFI Archive South Bank, London. VB105407.

<sup>87</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-operative, Update of application to Sheffield City Council, CA990/91, February 1984.

<sup>88</sup> *Red Skirts on Clydeside*, dir. Jenny Woodley and Christine Bellamy, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1984) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>89</sup> *Diamonds in Brown Paper*, dir. Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1989) BFI Archive, London. VB337316.

<sup>90</sup> *The Sunday Times*, Digital Archive 1822-2006. Guide to the Week on Television. 12 February 1989. Issue 8583. Available online via <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/sunday-times-digital-archive.aspx> accessed on 04/03/2017.

personally with individuals from it. Kathie Sarachild was a member of Redstockings, a New York radical feminist group and a significant contributor to the consciousness-raising movement. Regarding the importance of women's history, she wrote,

'As in unity – in the organised movement – there is power; so in continuity – or history – there is power. If unity is hard to achieve, continuity may be even harder. To win, women uniting is not enough. Women must unite and persist! But without a history, persistence is impossible.'<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

Independent filmmakers, such as the SFC, were inextricably linked to their region and their community through its working practice and selection of interviewees while simultaneously reflecting many broader national themes in the content of its films. The SFC not only represented the interests of ordinary people, it made film-making more accessible and gave people the opportunity to engage in film-making where typically control of such media would have been only in the hands of the mainstream media. In 1970s Sheffield, the WLM and a culture of independent film blossomed simultaneously. Both phenomena have many similar characteristics, namely promoting an alternative perspective within the public. SFC popularised its feminist socialist perspective through the medium of independent film to increase public understanding of women's position in society and the home. Through its films, discussions and re-discovering women's history, SFC highlighted women's issues to its

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<sup>91</sup> Sarachild, K. 'The Power of History' in Sarachild, K. (ed.) *Feminist Revolution*, 7-29. New Paltz, NY: Redstockings, 1975.

audience and recognised women's roles in historical events; as a result, society's current gender inequality was highlighted while simultaneously reaffirming the WLM's demands.

## THE FIRST FOUR DEMANDS OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

### REPRESENTED BY THE SHEFFIELD FILM CO-OPERATIVE

Chapter three discusses the main themes and issues presented in selected SFC films and analyses the film's broader context, using the first four demands of the WLM as a framework. This chapter aims to analyse aspects of women's oppression, represented via selected SFC films and highlight parallels between issues represented by SFC and the national WLM. The following films and corresponding demands are discussed in this chapter: *For A Living Wage* (1986) represents the demand for equal pay, *Jobs for the Girls* (1979) represents the demand for equal education and job opportunities, *A Woman Like You* (1975) represents the demand for women's reproductive rights and *A Question of Choice* (1982) represents the demand for 24-hour nurseries.

#### For A Living Wage 1986

*For A Living Wage* (1986) concerns the poorly paid areas of work, why were they so acutely affected and methods which, if implemented by the government, trade unions and individuals, may ease the problem. In 1984 the film explains, more than 40% of the adult workforce in Britain, which equated to 8.6 million people, were earning less than £115 a week.<sup>1</sup> The numerical value of 'low pay' was considered to be a basic weekly wage of less than: £109 (Trades Union Congress), £115 (Low Pay Unit), £116 (European Economic

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<sup>1</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.



Community).<sup>2</sup> For many individuals, employment with low pay was the lesser evil in comparison to redundancy, although many in poorly paid jobs argued that their wage was not enough to afford the necessities of life. A discontent female Sheffield worker in *For A Living Wage* exclaims, 'It's not a living wage at all, it's rubbish.'<sup>3</sup> *For A Living Wage* highlights jobs available within Sheffield Council as another area for concern regarding low pay. The film shows, lollipop ladies earned £2.13 an hour, school clerks were only employed for either 38 or 41 weeks per annum, a child-care assistant's yearly salary was £5,500 since the last rise.<sup>4</sup> Particularly affected job areas discussed are: manual, public sector, health service, local authorities, service industry, part-time and home-based work. Low pay was shown to be prevalent across many different industries and was a difficult situation to resolve, as a 'living wage' was dependent on workers' rates of pay and the cost of rent and goods.

In addition, other factors contributed to the issue of low pay. Age was another area for concern highlighted in *For A Living Wage*. 'The Government wants pay cuts for the under-21s ... teenagers to get less than £1 an hour – little more than YTS<sup>5</sup> rates for a full-time job!'<sup>6</sup> Many employers profited from the national trend of low wages and young people's fear of unemployment. SFC show that low pay restricted workers spending power, which continued to strengthen a trend of cut backs in homes, businesses and the government. A female interviewee in *For A Living Wage* comments,

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<sup>2</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>3</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>4</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>5</sup> Run by the government, the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) provided school leavers with comprehensive on-the-job training, participants were subsidised with £15 a week.

<sup>6</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

'The irony of it is of course by doing that, by reducing the pay of working people what you do then is reduce the spending power and that of course means that people aren't buying the consumer goods and therefore there isn't the demand for them and therefore the manufacturing industry goes further into decline.'<sup>7</sup>

*For A Living Wage* shows Sheffield's working class as being caught between low wages, unemployment and detrimental government economic policies. Wages councils set legal minimum rate of pay for 2 million workers in shops, clothing and catering. The government aimed to remove these restrictions as they argued that wages were being kept 'unrealistically high.'<sup>8</sup> With the threat of abolishing wage councils, workers' wages would inevitably fall even lower and people would struggle, even more, to make ends meet. Rowbotham explains that the capitalist system, 'is not based on the organization of production for people but simply on the need to secure maximum profit.'<sup>9</sup> By lowering wage levels the government hoped to benefit businesses and therefore stimulate Britain's economy. The problem of an adequate national wage level was intrinsic to individual's lives and continued to add strain as inflation increased the price of goods.

In the forefront of national life was the prevalence of strikes from workers protesting for higher wages. Margaret Thatcher's premiership is renowned for the continuous struggle

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<sup>7</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>8</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>9</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Great Britain: Pelican Books. pg. 123.

between workers, trade unions and the government. Thatcher and her government resisted the majority of strikes and demonstrations from workers wanting higher wages, knowing full well that if they bent for one union they would have to fall for them all. In *For A Living Wage* a male worker in an industrial laundrette explains, 'The old method of let's go on strike business, the let's withdraw our labour, it doesn't seem to work anymore. We've seen with the miners and all it does is tend to get the public against you.' He suggests that instead they must somehow, 'convince the government that we should be on higher pay.'<sup>10</sup> *For A Living Wage* comments that workers called for, 'drastic changes and a drastic reversal in the economic policy in this country.'<sup>11</sup> While workers wrestled for their livelihoods and demanded more organised union action, the government attempted to promote principles of the free market to achieve long term economic stability. One interviewee in *For A Living Wage* comments that, 'The fundamental policy of this government is a monetarist policy.'<sup>12</sup> This economic policy attempted to promote principles of the free market to reduce inflation and ultimately, achieve long term economic stability.

In an interview in 1988, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher explained that the government would not interfere with pay levels and that 'each company should know what it is doing as far as wages are concerned and what it will do to prices.' She went on to say, wage levels in the business industry were completely the responsibility of management: 'You know your business. You get on with it!'<sup>13</sup> The Conservative government aimed to increase individual

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<sup>10</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>11</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>12</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>13</sup> Thatcher Archive: COI transcript, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online, TV Interview for ITN News at Ten, Sir Alistair Burnet and Margaret Thatcher, 18 Feb 1988.

autonomy, although many felt that the government's method was not conducive to fair wages. *For A Living Wage* goes on to argue that poorly paying job areas were also associated with a higher risk of becoming redundant.

Unemployment statistics from 1984 show the unemployment rate had large racial disparities. Shown in the film, the demographic of workers with the highest number of unemployed in 1984 were West Indian men at 28.5%, while Asian women were at 20.8%.<sup>14</sup> A racial bias can also be found in the median weekly wages of men in 1982, white men received on average £129 per week, Asian men £111 and West Indian men £109 (there is no clear division between women's weekly income and their race).<sup>15</sup> *For A Living Wage* continues by saying that racism and sexism caused many individuals to be confined to a narrow range of poorly paid jobs. Many Asian women workers were being taken advantage of by employers. As shown in the film, the Asian Resource Centre in Sheffield attempted to support workers and inform them of their rights while at work. (Figure 0.1 is a film still of the Sheffield Asian Resource Centre, taken from *For A Living Wage*). In the film a representative of the Asian Resource Centre speaks to one of their clients,

'What she said was that she was working 40 hours a week, only for £17. All of the workers over there were Asian women who couldn't speak English and also they were

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<sup>14</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>15</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

very afraid ... because if they talk about it then perhaps the manager will sack them and they won't get any work anywhere.'<sup>16</sup>



Figure 0.1

The Asian Resource Centre encouraged all workers to join their affiliated union and participate in meetings to discuss and proactively begin to solve their issues. Many local authorities (such as Sheffield City Council) introduced equal opportunities policies to minimise discrimination in employment, although doubt remained, particularly in the Asian community, whether the council could, 'make the policy work.'<sup>17</sup> Another group of workers who found themselves in the minority were homeworkers.

Homeworkers typically had no contact with other employees or employers; these were particularly isolated conditions commonly resulting in their worker's rights being impinged upon. The Homeworke<sup>r</sup>'s Fact Pack, as featured in *For A Living Wage*, included information

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<sup>16</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>17</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

on welfare rights and informed individuals working from home what they were entitled to under current legislation. In Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976, Dianne wrote 'If women want to stop exploitation at work – they should stop working... As the women's movement builds strength, there will be provisions for all women who stop working, those in factories and those unpaid workers in the home. That will be the revolution.'<sup>18</sup> The problem was that minority workers found themselves in fragmented workforces, unrepresented by mainstream unions and unable to apply necessary pressure on employers for change.

Sheffield City Council, working in partnership with the workplace's respective trade unions, introduced a 'low pay supplement' which directly affected 8,000 of the council's 'lowest paid employees, mainly in the retail industry. It added between £1.17 and £5.42 per week for the basic rate of workers.'<sup>19</sup> *For A Living Wage* comments, in Greenwich, 70% of the workers that received the minimum earning guarantee were women.<sup>20</sup> Indeed for many women, sex discrimination continued to affect their daily lives despite the Sex Discrimination Act (1975); although, Bruley comments that the legislation ensured gender equality in 'housing, employment, education and training and the provision of goods and services.'<sup>21</sup>

*For A Living Wage* shows low pay for Sheffield City Council workers was primarily a result of the Job Evaluation Scheme. This theoretical framework implemented by Sheffield City Council graded all job roles with a precise set of criteria; its evaluation would then conclude the

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<sup>18</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/6, March 1976.

<sup>19</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>20</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>21</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. pg. 158.

associated salary for each job. The Job Evaluation Scheme was implemented to gauge workers' rate of pay in comparison to other professions. Many argued that the scheme, 'overemphasise[d] the importance of education and professional qualifications ... And also it [did]n't recognise many of the factors associated with the areas of women's work dealing with the public and all the pressures that creates.'<sup>22</sup> An interviewee in *For A Living Wage* goes onto say that, 'Caring aspects of certain jobs, or dealing with large amounts of routine work, working to deadline all those kind of factors ... Women [were] often low paid because their skills involved in their jobs [were]n't recognised and valued.'<sup>23</sup> The 1977 Sheffield Women's Newsletter states that in the industrial sector women constituted, '40% of the workforce, and one third of all women work in industry.'<sup>24</sup> Women's proliferation in job roles within the industrial sector and industry meant that the majority of women were engaged in monotonous work which did not require any previous qualifications. Within this context, women had little chance at successfully bringing in a substantial wage. As the film highlights, most women in Sheffield held jobs that were intrinsically poorly paid and publicly perceived as fundamentally 'un-important'. Even the association with women workers seemed to be a prerequisite of low pay; in a Sheffield Women's Newsletter one writer comments that employers preferred to employ women because they were the cheapest labour available. She goes on to say that men were hostile to their female colleagues because, 'once women [were] let into an area of work, the work be[came] down graded and the pay goes down.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>23</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>24</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/11, 1 Feb 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

Therefore, despite the Job Evaluation Scheme, Sex Discrimination Act and the minimum earning guarantee the differentials of take home pay continued to be affected by gender. A study in Greenwich pinpoints contributing factors such as women's lack of bonus payments and restricted access to over-time compared to men. A woman in *For A Living Wage* comments,

'The council may be vulnerable to claims from women who are denied... bonus claiming their equal pay for equal value because they can show that their jobs which may be graded the same as a man's are more demanding and require more skill than a man who is getting a substantial bonus payment.'<sup>26</sup>

The legislation established to protect women's rights and ensure equal pay were shown to have pitfalls. The issue of equal pay was therefore deeply set in British industries and feminists would argue reflected society's attitude towards the subordinate position of women in society. Rowbotham comments that society had constructed a culture which believed it was normal to position women in a subordinate position to men, particularly in terms of employment. Rowbotham states,

'They still act as if women should somehow be grateful for the chance to be exploited. This is particularly ironic in view of the actual nature of the jobs which are categorized as 'women's work'. The only factor these jobs really have in common is low pay, which

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<sup>26</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.



means the profit capitalism takes from women is direct and crude. The cheap labour of women is an alternative to investing in machinery.'<sup>27</sup>

The WLM's demand for equal pay aimed to eliminate sex discrimination in the workplace and promote the ethos of 'equal pay for equal work.'<sup>28</sup> Feminists argued that equal pay was crucial to establishing a society which was based on individual merit in contrast to one segregated by gender. Moreover, as divorce rates and single parents continued to grow in number, the male 'breadwinner' was becoming less typical; families which deviated from the conventional nuclear unit were no longer anomalies. Marxist feminists explain that 'capitalism incorporated patriarchy because it assumed women were supported financially by male relatives. This was then used to justify lower wages for women.'<sup>29</sup> Feminists would argue that equal pay was a fundamental demand of the WLM and has the potential to improve many women's lives, particularly the growing number of single parent mothers and those that do not or cannot be reliant on a husband's wage. Demands which hoped to ease the issue of poorly paying jobs were: £400 a week (and equivalent hourly rate for part-timers), a minimum of four weeks holiday, full sick pay, 'decent' pensions, 'proper shift pay' and unsocial hours allowance. Rowbotham explains,

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<sup>27</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Great Britain: Pelican Books. pg. 83-84.

<sup>28</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>29</sup> Meehan, E. (1990) British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s. In. Smith, H. L. ed. *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited: Southampton. pg. 191.

‘Equal pay within capitalism represents a rationalization of the work force which is comparable to the ending of slavery and serfdom. Although it is bitterly resisted by employers and will be achieved only as a result of pressure ... With equal pay too women will be clearly amongst the lower-paid work force rather than a specific category of labour.’<sup>30</sup>

Even with the support of equal pay, Rowbotham says that women would still find themselves within the lowest paying areas of work. A national minimum wage would offer poorly paid workers a guaranteed income, unaltered by discrimination. In *For A Living Wage*, £115 a week was argued to be 'really starting to get to the stage where you're actually talking about paying people a decent wage and I think that is something people would regard as worth fighting for.'<sup>31</sup> Equal pay was arguably one of the most contentious of the WLM's demands as it threatened the traditional family unit. Jenson states, 'Male unionists feared that if women received equal pay employers would seize the opportunity to lower the wages of men and to challenge the legitimacy of the family wage.'<sup>32</sup> Many feminists would argue that society had to alter its treatment and cultural expectations of women in order to contend with other changes such as, variations in family structure, increasingly influential sexual discrimination legislation. The Equal Pay Act and the National Minimum Wage inevitably improved the financial independence of women.

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<sup>30</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Great Britain: Pelican Books. pg. 99 – 100.

<sup>31</sup> *For A Living Wage*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19028A.

<sup>32</sup> Jenson, J. 'Both Friend and Foe: Women and State Welfare' in Bridenthal, R. and Koonz, C. and Sturard, S. (eds.) *Becoming Visible Women in European History* (1987) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, pg. 542-543.

Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976 comments that the, 'deterioration of women's status in society is one further aspect of a comprehensive attack on welfare rights and the working class in general.'<sup>33</sup> The position of women and the issue of low pay were fundamentally linked to government policy and the poor national economic conditions.

### Jobs for the Girls (1979)

'Riddle: A father was taking his son to school one day when they were involved in a bad car accident. The father was killed instantly, and the son was rushed to hospital. When the boy was wheeled into the operating theatre, the surgeon exclaimed: "My god, it's my son!"'<sup>34</sup>

The previous excerpt was taken out of the Sheffield *Morning Telegraph* 1971 and attempts to highlight the extent of individual's gender stereotypes. For many individuals sex roles had not been a conscious decision, the restrictions implied on gender had been learnt, inherited through tradition and culturally reinforced. *Jobs for the Girls*, features Pat, who is about to leave school and is considering which route of employment to take. SFC wanted this dramatized film to catalyse a discussion regarding, 'the pressures acting on girls to conform to traditional feminine roles and the difficulties faced by an individual who has other ideas.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/9, July 1976.

<sup>34</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Morning Telegraph, MD7966/2/1, 9 June 1971.

<sup>35</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c.1984.

Pat's school teacher promotes the hairdressing apprenticeship for the girls and motor mechanic for the 'lads'; the teacher represents traditional expectations towards careers, one which differentiates job roles using gender.

Popularly held cultural expectations and stereotypes were firmly in the public's consciousness, the education system and job market reinforcing the sexual division of labour. In 1968, selected girls from a London grammar school, aged fourteen to fifteen, were asked to write an essay, their responses were analysed by the feminist academic Figes, to explore how women perceived their role in society and their future life. The pupils were asked to imagine it was their eightieth birthday and give a retrospective account of their lives. Figes comments that the girl's essays most noticeably consisted of, 'sad realism and lack of ambition.'<sup>36</sup> Largely the essays followed the conventional attitude 'that marriage is the most important factor in a woman's life, and that any other interests she may have must be curtailed by the demands that these duties make on her.'<sup>37</sup> Exceptionally, one pupil stated that she was going to be a film star, but even the most ambitious girl in terms of career, inevitably returned to the sacrament of marriage by explaining that she would postpone being an actress in order to be a committed wife to her dream husband 'Sean'. Figes argues that traditional attitudes towards women and ultimately women's position in society was, 'perpetuated through the very structure of family life.' She goes on to say that a crucial factor inhibiting significant change in the public's perception towards women, was 'the institution of marriage itself.'<sup>38</sup> Feminists argued that individual attitudes and stereotypes of gender

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<sup>36</sup> Figes, E. (1970) *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Plymouth: Faber and Faber Limited. pg. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Figes, E. (1970) *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Plymouth: Faber and Faber Limited. pg. 171.

<sup>38</sup> Figes, E. (1970) *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Plymouth: Faber and Faber Limited. pg. 175.

were deeply ingrained within culture and reinforced continually by our institutions. Rowbotham writes that the 'function of women in our society [was] to reproduce.'<sup>39</sup> Sheffield WLM archive contains a non-sexist teaching resource, it highlights the stark sexual discrimination in various parts of normal everyday life, 'For example, with banks there are separate leaflets for the boys and the girls and it is quite literally, to quote the blurb – "Careers for boys in banking" but "Jobs for girls."<sup>40</sup> Feminists would argue that women were expected to fulfil their natural role as a mother and therefore their involvement with any other role, such as the job industry, would be inevitably limited. This being said, women were at liberty to have a job, and many increasingly did.

In 1950, 20% of married women were working outside the home and by 1980 the number had risen to over 50%.<sup>41</sup> Women's engagement with the job market was growing although many women could only obtain employment in certain industries which were often, poorly paid. Levoy writes, 'Ever increasingly levels of female employment, including mothers with dependent children, has been a distinctive feature of post-war British society, paralleled by an overall improvement in living standards yet a rise in inequality.'<sup>42</sup> Montgomery writes, 'Since 1951 the number of married women working in the public economy has risen from 26 per cent in 1951 to 71 per cent in 1991 though much of this reflects the growing trends towards part-time work.'<sup>43</sup> In Sheffield Women's Paper 1979, Ann Howard comments that

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<sup>39</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Great Britain: Pelican Books. pg. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Non-sexist teaching resources, MD7966/4/3, 1974.

<sup>41</sup> Bouchier, D. (1983) *The Feminist Challenge*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. pg. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Levoy, B. (2011) Motherhood, Work and Life, *Optometric Management*, Vol. 46. No. 6. pg. 80.

<sup>43</sup> Montgomery, F. (2006) *Women's Rights, Struggles in Feminism in Britain c. 1770 - 1970*, Glasgow: Manchester University Press, pg. 121 – 122.

women's overall unemployment was growing which only placed, 'extra financial burdens on the family.'<sup>44</sup> The rise of consumerism and real wages resulted in more jobs to meet public demand; growing job sectors were typically in shops and offices which were largely filled by female employees. Chodorow states that women's work was usually an extension of their, 'wife-mother roles' and tended to reinforce women's commitment to the family, this shows that, 'All women, then, [were] affected by an ideological norm that define[d] them as member of conventional nuclear families.'<sup>45</sup> The stories of Pat's mother and sister in *Jobs for the Girls* showcase the popular trend that most women worked within white collar industries.

In *Jobs for the Girls*, Pat's mother and sister represent the conventional female career pathway, 'straight from school into an office.'<sup>46</sup> In the film they both express the difficulty of finding a job after the break of bringing up children. Pat's mother says, 'This'll be the ninth job at least I've gone after and got nowhere. When you're over 40 they don't want to know.'<sup>47</sup> Re-entering the job market was particularly difficult as women were still expected to run the home and take primary care of the children.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, after maternity leave mothers generally had limited availability while the child was growing up. This commitment to the family made women less favourable to hiring organisations and therefore women were less likely to be offered serious roles. Women's working lives were therefore punctuated with

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<sup>44</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Ten Years On, MD7966/2/2/1, October/November 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Chodorow, N. 'Mothing, Male Dominance, and Capitalism' in Einsenstein, Z. (ed.) *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1979) London: Monthly Review Press, pg. 91.

<sup>46</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>47</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>48</sup> This issue will be explored later in the analysis of, *A Question of Choice* 1982.

each child, which made them less desirable for employers who would need to pay maternity leave and find suitable cover. Many women had the desire to engage in other job areas although frequently had to compromise for a role which was flexible to their commitments.

In contrast to convention Pat, the main character in *Jobs for the Girls*, decides that after her school education, she would like to pursue the career of motor mechanic. Reactions from her parents epitomise conventional attitudes towards women's suitable employment options. 'Oh, Pat do be sensible'<sup>49</sup> her mother remarks, while her father is much more explicit, 'It's a damn stupid idea, no job for a girl that.'<sup>50</sup> Other attitudes to women working as a mechanic are voiced in the film, 'What's a good-looking girl like you want to do a dirty job like that for?' and, 'I don't have women in my workshop me lads couldn't concentrate.' And, 'A job like that? A woman couldn't do it.'<sup>51</sup> Masculine jobs were typically in the blue collar, heavy industries; commonly dirty and manual work such as, motor mechanic. Women who ignored this cultural gender segregation and pursued their own interests, such as Pat, were often criticised as being unwomanly.

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<sup>49</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>50</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>51</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.



Figure 0.2

Difficulties in breaking gender norms of employment were not only cultural but also practical; because Pat had received no formal education relative to being a mechanic, or any other practical subject with the exception of helping with her boyfriend's motorbike. (Figure 0.2 is a film still of Pat, her boyfriend and his motorbike, taken from *Jobs for the Girls*). The education received by a school child was orientated wholly by their sex, compulsory subjects for boys were: woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing. While girl's compulsory subjects were: needlework and home economics or domestic science. Bruley says, for the rest of their school careers, 'sex-role stereotyping applied: maths and hard sciences being 'boys' subjects' and arts, humanities and biology being 'girls'.<sup>52</sup> A paper discussing women's diffusion in further education in 1974 features the most popular courses that were attended primarily by female students. The most popular courses for women were, catering and institutional management (12,744), home economics (8,636), education (2,817), whole sale and retail trades (2,147).<sup>53</sup> Notably what women chose to study in further education only strengthened

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<sup>52</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*. Hampshire: Palgrave. pg. 170.

<sup>53</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Women and Education, No. 2, MD7966/4/15, Summer 1977.



cultural expectations of gender. Culturally there seemed to be an expectation in which women were inevitably going to fulfil similar aims, to have a husband and be a mother, everything else was superfluous. Rich writes that for many women in employment sexual discrimination was to be anticipated,

‘Economically disadvantaged, women – whether waitresses or professors – endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly heterosexual manner because they discover this is their true qualification for employment, whatever the job description.’<sup>54</sup>

Rich argues that at this time society constructed a culture in which the derogatory treatment of women was considered to be the norm. Other examples highlight this popular attitude towards women’s place in society; a segment in the May 1976 Sheffield Women’s Newsletter criticised popular children’s literature for its, ‘racist content, class prejudice, as well the preponderance of adventurous males and kitchenbound females.’<sup>55</sup> Additionally, in *Jobs for the Girls*, the man advising Pat about the apprenticeship warns that the actual garage is not equipped for female staff: ‘First of all you’ll be the only girl in an all-male environment, secondly the facilities that are available... again are for the all-male staff.’<sup>56</sup> Sheffield Women’s

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<sup>54</sup> Rich, A. Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, in Jackson, S and Scott, S. ed. (1994) *Feminism and Sexuality*, Columbia University Press, pg. 133.

<sup>55</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women’s Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>56</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*, dir. by Jenny Woodley (Sheffield Film Co-operative, 1979) BFI InView. Available online via BFI Screenonline.

Newsletter discusses a workshop in which the author attended, regarding women in masculine jobs. They discussed the,

'Suspicion, if not hostility, towards women applying for courses, shown in one man's question: "Are you doing this for a gimmick?" There is usually a trick question, after trying to put you off with such statements as: "Of course, you'll have to behave like a man", or "Could you carry a colour T.V. up 4 flights of stairs?", they come up with some gem like: "Where would you change your Tampax on a building site?", or "You'll have to share the men's toilet you know."<sup>57</sup>

Public attitudes were reinforced because many individuals adhered to the cultural restrictions in certain roles. Exclusively female and male staff in certain industries continued the sexual segregation of work which reproduced a culture where gender dictated many people's career paths. MacKinnon explains the connection between, 'compulsory sexuality and economics', which segregated women into poorly-paid service jobs, for example, 'Secretaries, domestics, nurses, typists, telephone operators, child-care workers, waitresses'.<sup>58</sup> Ally writes about the National Women's Conference held in Newcastle, 1976, in the workshop on 'Women in Traditional Male Jobs', one woman explained that she applied, through the Government re-training scheme, to be a 'brickie'. On the advice of her interviewer she agreed to all of the conditions associated with the job, including buying a car, to ensure she would not be turned

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<sup>57</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>58</sup> MacKinnon, Catherine. A. and Emerson, T. I. (1979) *Sexual harassment of working women: A case of sex discrimination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

down on that basis. After all, she discovered that a 'bloke down the road' had been accepted after refusing all of the conditions.<sup>59</sup> In the workshop they went on to discuss the difficulty for women in male dominated areas of work to secure the experience and training in their desired role and then to be accepted to work in the job. Frequently a job would not hire you without experience although you could not gain initial experience without prior knowledge of the industry and free time.

Socialist Feminists argued that the sexual division of labour confined women to low-skilled and low-paying industries, therefore reinforcing women's oppression. The opportunity for equal education and job opportunities would offer women a chance to advance in the job market, providing that public attitudes towards women in the workplace do not continue to restrict them. Legislation had attempted to promote a more egalitarian attitude towards education and employment, although many problems remained. An article in Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976 reads,

'We discussed the inadequacies of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and also how we must use it. The structure of the form is far removed from our feelings on discrimination. It asks: "On what date were you discriminated against?" Answer: "For the last 2,000 years."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>60</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

The WLM's demand for equal education and job opportunities ultimately aimed to produce a job industry less defined by sex, by diffusing the concentration of genders in each job area. Without strict gender roles constraining people into certain industries, employers would be able to assess applicants for employment based on their individual merit instead of their gender, age or race. Feminists argued that the division of labour emphasised the reliance on husbands as the 'breadwinner', earning the main family income asserted men at the head of the family; with reform, women would be able to engage more with the public sphere and experience the financial independence that comes with earning a good wage. *Jobs for the Girls*, attempts to raise questions regarding gender roles and encourage its audience to consider whether the perception of male and female job industries was still applicable to the 1970s. *Sexist Equations* explains the cultural expectation of gender and how men and women were restricted to certain masculine or feminine traits, 'A man who believes he has to be strong and protective is just as unliberated as a woman who believes she shouldn't be.'<sup>61</sup> Feminists attempted to alter individual's attitudes towards women in order to produce cultural change. Women workers had to return to education and enter industries previously dominated by men. In reality, gender equality in the job industry was as diverse as ever, with women working as oceanographers, architects, plumber and heavy goods vehicle mechanic etc. SFC applied to the Equal Opportunities Commission to produce more films. In its application they stated that, 'Education has done and will always play a prominent part in any strategy aimed at working towards the elimination of discrimination.'<sup>62</sup> *Jobs for the Girls*,

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<sup>61</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, Correspondence, *Sexist Equations*, MD7966/3/4, c.1970, pg. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, The Sheffield Film Co-op's Application to the EOC, CA990/91, c.1984.

concludes with Pat resorting to a job in the parts department after she is unsuccessful at applying for the motor mechanic apprenticeship.

### A Woman Like You (1975)

*A Woman Like You* (1975) was SFC's first independent production in the format of a dramatized documentary. Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1975 explains that the, 'film is about an ordinary woman with two children who finds that she is pregnant. She tries to get an abortion by going through the NHS procedure in a rational way and the film is about what happens to her.'<sup>63</sup> Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976 adds that included in the film are two interviews, 'one with Jill Tattersall who works at the 408 clinic, and one with Professor Cooke a consultant gynaecologist at the Jessop Hospital for Women. To demystify the whole subject an out-patient abortion clinic is shown.'<sup>64</sup> *A Woman Like You* was, 'screened extensively in schools, colleges and to women's groups. It has also been used by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service for training counsellors.'<sup>65</sup> The film was shown twice at Sheffield Hallam University on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April 1976<sup>66</sup> and to sixth formers at Rowlinson school, which inspired the students to request another similar experience 'and also maybe to have a discussion on women's liberation.'<sup>67</sup> The SFC's filmography booklet states that the, 'film is useful for discussions around the question of whose choice abortion should be and also raises other issues such as the way women are often treated by members of the medical profession and

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<sup>63</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/3, July 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/6, March 1976.

<sup>65</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, c. 1984.

<sup>66</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/7, April 1976.

<sup>67</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/9, July 1976.

the social pressures on women to have children.<sup>68</sup> The SFC initially proposed to make *A Woman Like You* for Sheffield Cable Vision although the topic of abortion was considered too controversial for community television in the current climate of proposed changes to abortion legislation in the form of James White's Abortion (Amendment) bill.

In contrast to other aspects of women's oppression, women's accessibility to contraception and abortion was exclusively political, its realisation resting wholly on legislative reform. The 1967 Abortion Act gave women the right to terminate their pregnancy, up to 24 weeks, dependent on two consenting doctors agreeing that the pregnancy would put either the mother or the unborn child's physical or mental health at risk.<sup>69</sup> In *A Woman Like You*, the character Mrs. Anderson represents the mother of two who is trying to get an abortion. (Figure 0.3 is a film still of Mrs. Anderson with her two children, taken from *A Woman Like You*). She explains to her GP that the pregnancy was not planned, they already care for two children, she was planning on taking up some part-time work and her husband agrees that they should terminate the pregnancy. After the examination, the GP concludes that the family was well-off enough to support another child and there was no medical reason to constitute an abortion therefore he could not perform one. Mrs. Anderson exclaims, 'Who the hell does he think he is? ... It's my life.'<sup>70</sup> The film shows that although abortions were available on the NHS they were only offered under certain circumstances, GPs were reluctant to consent and

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<sup>68</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, c. 1984.

<sup>69</sup> Abortion Act 1967, Chapter 87 Available online via [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/pdfs/ukpga\\_19670087\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/pdfs/ukpga_19670087_en.pdf) accessed on 02/01/2017.

<sup>70</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

did not have the resources to offer a termination unless the pregnancy was medically abnormal in some way or could detrimentally affect the mother or the unborn child.



Figure 0.3

In Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1975, Rose Star, a member of Sheffield women's group, asks why, 'the function of women's bodies, childbirth, our sexuality should be decided and legislated over by anyone other than ourselves.'<sup>71</sup> Pregnancy not only restricted women into certain roles it also reaffirmed traditional expectations. Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1978 produced by the Broomhill Group begins by focusing on the British Medical Association's booklet, 'given to every pregnant woman on her first antenatal visit to the hospital.'<sup>72</sup> The booklet assumes that if women continued to work they would still be responsible for the housework, all women who were pregnant were happily married and every expectant mother

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<sup>71</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/5, October 1975.

<sup>72</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/12, January/February 1978, pg. 1.

was happy about their pregnancy. The article most notably highlights the suggestions to help ease backache,

'carry two shopping bags, one in each hand, rather than one heavy one; do tasks like ironing, washing up, peeling vegetables sitting down. Cleaning the bath is apparently dangerous, because the possibility of slipping, so perhaps husbands might like to help out there (very tentative suggestion.) When we suggested that maybe such tasks could be shared, especially as the assumption was being made that most of the women present were working, the physiotherapist conducting the session said in an embarrassed way that she'd only dared suggest bath cleaning for the men because she thought that would be the only task they'd fancy.'<sup>73</sup>

For many women, particularly those with other children or unmarried women, the addition of a baby was not favourable because they did not feel like they were able to bring the child up comfortably. Many feminists objected to the cultural attitude which assumed all healthy pregnancies were wanted. Bernard signifies the want shared by many feminists to be liberated from these natural and cultural expectations,

'What many [feminists] object to is the insistence that *all* women must become mothers, that motherhood is *every* women's destiny, that *only* through bearing children can women find fulfilment.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/12, January/February 1978, pg. 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard, J. (1975) *Women, Wives, Mothers*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, pg. 195.



Historically, women dedicated their lives to childcare and pregnancy, the advent of contraception gave women the opportunity to control their fertility and therefore plan their futures more effectively. The proliferation of contraception 'immeasurably increas[ed] the possibilities of sexual relationship without fear of pregnancy, contraceptives contribute[d] to a loosening of moral coercion to the 'permissive' society.'<sup>75</sup> Most notably, the pill gave women control over their own bodies something which Bruley explains, 'contributed to the growing feminist consciousness in the late sixties and helped to create a feeling among women that they must seek control over other aspects of their lives.'<sup>76</sup> While controlling their fertility women could therefore begin to unpick who they were without the ordinary expectation of being a mother. The move towards women's reproductive rights had therefore already begun before the second-wave of feminism had properly taken shape in Britain. As Pugh explains,

'The abortion law is an example of a reform which effectively pre-dated women's liberation; consequently the chief task for feminists subsequently was to *defend* the status quo rather than extend it.'<sup>77</sup>

Many feminists believed that it was their prerogative to be in control of their own bodies, motivating the WLM's third demand for free contraception and abortion on demand. Nationally, it was difficult for pregnant women to gain their GPs approval for an abortion and in addition then they were then required to find a consultant to perform the procedure. A

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<sup>75</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's consciousness, man's world*, London: Verso Books. pg. 113.

<sup>76</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pg. 138-139.

<sup>77</sup> Pugh, M. (2000) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 328.

*Woman Like You* includes an interview with Jill Tattersall, who worked at the 407 clinic. She says that even after the patient has received a letter from her GP to then go to the consultant it could be, 'luck of the draw because some consultants [were] more sympathetic towards requests for termination of pregnancy than others and those of course who [were] more sympathetic inevitably have a longer waiting list.'<sup>78</sup> In addition, Pugh states it was also, 'more difficult to get an abortion in the north than in the south of England.'<sup>79</sup> Walby writes that accumulative, 'discretionary elements led to wide regional variation in the availability of free abortion on the NHS.'<sup>80</sup> The Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter states that although the Abortion Act was a, 'tremendous gain for women' many abortions were not granted because the female patients did not fit the criteria. It goes on to say a typical married woman who became pregnant was inevitably pushed 'into economic, physical and psychological dependence on her husband.' While for an unmarried woman, the strains of a pregnancy were 'almost impossible'.<sup>81</sup> For these reasons, increasingly in the 1960s more abortions were being performed.

Throughout the 1960s the number of abortions performed by the NHS continued to increase from 2,300 (1961) to 9,700 (1967). Each year 10,000 abortions also took place in private clinics and annual 'estimates of illegal, 'backstreet', abortions ranged from 15,000 to 100,000.'<sup>82</sup> A medical professional in *A Woman Like You* states that commonly the NHS did not have the

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<sup>78</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

<sup>79</sup> Pugh, M. (2000) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 328.

<sup>80</sup> Walby, S. (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Oxford: Blackwell, pg. 169.

<sup>81</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter, *The Guardian*, MD7566/3/1, 26 October 1971.

<sup>82</sup> Lewis, J. (1992) *Women in Britain Since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, pg. 57- 58.

resources to offer women abortions therefore their only recommendation to patients would be to find a private facility.<sup>83</sup> An interview with Professor Cooke, a consultant who worked at Jessop Hospital, is included in *A Woman Like You*. He comments that their, 'maximum pressure in gynaecology' at the time was their out patients.<sup>84</sup> Lewis states, the number of terminations conducted by the NHS, 'rose sharply after 1967, peaking at 169,362 in 1973', then the number of abortions per 1,000 women - aged 15-44 - kept increasing, 'from 11.39 in 1973 to 12.32 in 1982'.<sup>85</sup>

For a short time after the Abortion Act the number of abortions conducted on the NHS simultaneously rose with the number of illegal backstreet abortions. The Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter 1971 includes an excerpt from *The Guardian*, stating that backstreet abortions were continuing despite the Abortion Act. The Birmingham Pregnancy Advisory Service found in their report, which included 2,814 patients nationwide, that many women had been refused abortions from their GPs; they were so desperate that they had tried to self-medicate themselves. Out of the 2,814 women that had self-medicated,

'946 were married, 17 were common law wives, 15 were co-habiting, 183 were separated, 28 were widowed and 75 were divorced...more than 900 had been made pregnant by their husbands.'<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

<sup>84</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis, J. (1992) *Women in Britain Since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, pg. 57- 58.

<sup>86</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter, *The Guardian*, MD7566/3/1, 26 October 1971.

The research suggests that, so many women resorted to self-medicating because they were not accepted through the NHS and could not afford a termination in a private abortion clinic. Professor Cooke suggests that following Professor Beard's model in St Mary's hospital London could help them, 'cope with these requests to a much greater extent and more effectively.'<sup>87</sup> Increasing the NHS's capacity and efficiency regarding terminations would inevitably cease illegal backstreet abortions and self-medicating.

The National Abortion Campaign (NAC) was established in 1975 and organised public demonstrations under the slogan, 'A Woman's Right To Choose'. Pugh says, 'NAC had to fight off hostile bills in 1976, 1977, 1978, 1980 and 1982 introduced in order to undermine the 1967 Act.'<sup>88</sup> NAC's first demonstration was on, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1975. 20,000 people were estimated to have attended in order 'to voice their opposition to James White's Abortion (Amendment) bill' while around, '300 people turned up to counter-demonstrate against NACs demonstration.'<sup>89</sup> NAC handed in a petition of around 180,000 signatures and there were representatives from student unions and medical and legal professions in addition to, '19 Trade Council banners, 48 Trade Union groups represented and Switzerland, Belgium, Australia'.<sup>90</sup> Bruley comments that NAC was the only women's organisation which encouraged the participation of men in the local groups and in the demonstrations.<sup>91</sup> It was important for NAC to proliferate nationwide in order to raise public consciousness of

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<sup>87</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

<sup>88</sup> Pugh, M. (2000) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, pg. 328.

<sup>89</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/3, July 1975.

<sup>90</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/4, August 1975.

<sup>91</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pg. 152-153.

reproductive rights and highlight areas in which the NHS could improve their service to women. Meehan writes that NAC,

'operated at both local and national levels; it picketed health authorities where abortions were difficult to obtain, held conferences, gained 350 affiliates from other organizations and drew the support of the TUC, which included the reform in its Charter for Women at Work.'<sup>92</sup>

At a local level in Sheffield, the Women's Newsletter August 1975 appealed to all of their readers to continue writing to their MPs, particularly residents in Attercliffe as their representative Patrick Duffy had voted in support for James White's Bill, and trade unions in order to support the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign.<sup>93</sup> Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976 includes an article from Sheffield NAC, they had been campaigning 'for an out-patient abortion unit to be set up at the Northern General Hospital. Recently John Maynard MP tabled a question in the House of Commons to find the reasons why. In addition, Professor Cooke had expressed an interest in establishing such a unit but saw the advantage through 'evaluating medical efficiency on a cost and turnover basis.'<sup>94</sup> *A Woman Like You* continues by outlining a typical termination at an out-patient clinic. The film uses still pictures and audio to outline the procedure, describe what happens to the patient throughout the visit and the medical equipment used.

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<sup>92</sup> Meehan, E. 'British feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s' in Harold, L. Smith (ed.) *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, (1990) The Camelot Press Ltd: Southampton, pg. 200- 203.

<sup>93</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/4, August 1975.

<sup>94</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/9, July 1976.

'In an out-patient clinic a prospective patient would arrive early in the morning and be greeted by a social worker or some ancillary worker who could properly be a counsellor. She then would meet the nursing staff and be told what the procedure would be later on when it would be her turn to move into the theatre which ideally is just next door she would be put on the table and her legs would be put up into the stirrups, the counsellor would remain with her... during the whole of the procedure the counsellor stands at the head end of the table and chats to the patient explaining precisely what's going on and reassuring her the whole time.'<sup>95</sup>

The Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter 1971 goes onto say that, 'the combination of a hostile medical profession and the un-willingness of Britain to spend money on social services makes it useless to the majority of women.'<sup>96</sup> An effective out-patient clinic would offer women the opportunity to get an abortion in a safe and reassuring atmosphere. *A Woman Like You* shows the struggle of one Sheffield woman in obtaining an abortion; this film represented a broader issue shared by pregnant women in Sheffield and nationwide. The final scene of *A Woman Like You* shows Mrs. Anderson walking down the street with her two children, unless she found the money to go to a private clinic we can only assume that she was unsuccessful in getting an abortion.

### A Question of Choice (1982)

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<sup>95</sup> *A Woman Like You*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1975) Private DVD provided by Christine Bellamy.

<sup>96</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Abortion and Contraception Newsletter, *The Guardian*, MD7566/3/1, 26 October 1971.

As time progressed increasingly more women joined the paid workforce, simultaneously they were still wholly responsible for traditional female roles of the house and caring for children. *Question of Choice* features four low-paid women: Margaret Stevenson and Hazel Parsons who were cleaners, Isobel Wardle, a school meals cook and Brenda Leesley, a lollipop lady. (Figure 0.4 is a film still of Margaret, Hazel, Isobel, Brenda and Ken, taken from *A Question of Choice*). *A Question of Choice* illustrates the limited job opportunities available for mothers whose primary commitment was childcare and housework. The film was shot mainly in Walkley Nursery and Infants School and Walkley Junior School. SFC's filmography booklet says, 'This film was shot without lights or simultaneous sound recording to make the filming as simple and unobtrusive as possible, and the voice track is based separately on recorded interviews. It shows work by women that are rarely seen and points of view that are rarely heard.'<sup>97</sup> The film highlights issues associated with: low pay, the expected roles of each parent in the family and the provision of childcare.



Figure 0.4

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<sup>97</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c.1984.

Chrissie Stansfield comments that when women were approached and asked whether they would like to feature in *A Question of Choice*, a common response was a mix of confusion and shock. Many women at the time did not think that they had anything to say or did not think they were worth interviewing. A working practice of the SFC was one which attempted to use an all-female crew, where possible, to reassure interviewees and create a reassuring atmosphere. Stansfield comments that the four female workers preferred to be interviewed off camera, although visual moving footage and picture stills are shown of them engaging in work and housework.<sup>98</sup> All four jobs were poorly-paid and typically considered low-skilled, woman's work.

The women featured in *A Question of Choice* all express their gratitude for their employment although for many it was not their ideal career choice. One of the ladies in *A Question of Choice* remarks that she feels, 'ashamed to say I'm a cleaner. I feel useless... I'm not doing the work I want to do.'<sup>99</sup> Whereas another lady in the film explains that she heard that Ken Hunter, the caretaker, was hiring for a cleaners position, she continues by saying that she, 'was really desperate for a job ... so I ran round in my carpet slippers and knocked on his door... almost begging for a job.'<sup>100</sup> Brenda Leesley comments in *A Question of Choice* saying, 'I was very fortunate really to get in because you can't now there's a great long waiting list because it's so convenient on school meals for women with children, purely the holidays.'<sup>101</sup> One of

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<sup>98</sup> Stansfield, C. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Conversation with author, 04/08/2017. Personal communication.

<sup>99</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>100</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>101</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.



the ladies in *A Question of Choice* explains that when she was bringing up her children it was expected of the mother to remove herself from paid employment she said that going back to work was, 'the best thing for me mentally and physically' as it gave her, 'a break from home life.'<sup>102</sup> For many women work offered a welcome break, although typically their activities at work and home were extremely similar. Ken the caretaker explains in *A Question of Choice* that women had a certain affinity for cleaning,

'I prefer to work with women cleaning wise because let's face it a woman has always cleaned... A woman is more adaptable to doing that particular job than what a man would be, I think personally anyway and it's a lot easier, believe it or not, to instruct a woman to do a job a certain way than what it would be say a male cleaner.'<sup>103</sup>

In their cleaning jobs, Margaret and Hazel earned £25 per week which was the most that they had ever earned. Despite this, cleaners were considered poorly paid and below the threshold of national insurance payments, 'because our friend Mrs Thatcher has upped the contribution, you've got to earn £27 now before you pay national insurance.' She goes onto say, 'so if we're off sick we don't get anything. There's only one way round it.' She continues while laughing, 'You don't be sick! You go to work!'<sup>104</sup> For the majority of working class women it was essential for them to, 'find a job just to keep your house and get your children, bare

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<sup>102</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>103</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>104</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

essentials at times.<sup>105</sup> Rowbotham comments on women's increased engagement with the job market,

'Woman-power has thus become increasingly an integral and essential part of community production. By making use of both husband's and wife's labour capitalism has been able to allow the family unit a higher income... Women have been left with a double load.'<sup>106</sup>

Additional to their employment out of the house there was a tremendous amount of responsibility put on women to run the home. Millet writes, 'Women who are employed have two jobs since the burden of domestic service and child care is unrelieved either by day care or other social agencies, or by the co-operation of husbands.'<sup>107</sup> The roles of, cleaner, cook and lollipop lady, in *A Question of Choice*, were particularly suited to these women in 1982 because the hours fitted around their husband's work and their children's school day. Leesley the cook in *A Question of Choice* comments that she cannot complain about her job or her wage because she is, 'always at home before the family arrive home now that's an asset to me that I can have their meal on the table and it doesn't alter family routine.'<sup>108</sup> Zoe Fairbairns, a participant in the WLM, knew from an early age that her childhood home was a

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<sup>105</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>106</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Great Britain: Pelican Books.pg. 83.

<sup>107</sup> Millet, K. (1971) *Sexual Politics*, Essex: The Anchor Press Ltd, pg. 41.

<sup>108</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

'place of total enslavement for my mother.'<sup>109</sup> One of the four workers in *A Question of Choice* explains that mother's, must

'have a very organised life. I've a manager meeting and a parent's meeting next Thursday on the same day, plus I've got a play centre straight after. I've got to organise what shift my husband's on, if he's on't wrong shift I've got to organise someone to come and look after the kids. Tea's got to be all prepared for when they come home from school at half past three. The only free day I have a week is on a Tuesday, I usually change my curtains and wash my windows sweep my outside and that sort of thing, you know. That's my free day.'<sup>110</sup>

*A Question of Choice* highlights women's cultural attachment to the home, by extension introduces the Wages for Housework Campaign. The Wages for Housework campaign grew from feminists' objection to women's lifetime servitude to the family. The Wages for Housework debate attracted much controversy. Individuals who wanted housework to be paid believed that it would be a way for women to be paid for the work that was already expected of them and in addition would introduce more women into the capitalist system, giving their current unpaid work some financial worth. On-the-other-hand the argument against paying wages for housework, and the perspective which in retrospect proved most

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<sup>109</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, sound recording, *Zoe Fairbairns discusses a mother's life and work at home vs father's*, C1420/24, 23 - 24 June 2011, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/zoe-fairbairns-mothers-life-and-work-at-home-vs-fathers> accessed on 13/10/2016.

<sup>110</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

popular, was that it would only fuel a system based on sexual inequality. Ellen Malos, a member of the WLM, explains her reasons for resisting the Wages for Housework campaign, she comments that the important distinction was that the campaign gave accountability of housework squarely to women like it was a, 'natural emanation from being female' therefore strengthening the sexual division of labour. Malos concludes by saying paying women for unpaid work was, 'just not practical or particularly useful way of... looking at the issue.'<sup>111</sup> The integral issue therefore was not about women being paid, it was about attempting to reach some sort of equilibrium of power within the family.

In a Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976 an article reads that the responsibility of housework and childcare was incredibly undervalued, particularly when women were engaged in employment outside of the house women were committed to two jobs and 'in practice very few men [were] actually sharing the housework.'<sup>112</sup> Lorber writes of the accumulative factors which hindered mothers' career paths.

'When workplaces do not accommodate family needs, and fathers do not share child care, mothers pay a price in lowered wages, reduced lifetime earnings, and minimal pensions because of part-time and interrupted work. When they want to return to full-time work or get off the 'mommy track,' they are discriminated against in hiring

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<sup>111</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, sound recording, *Ellen Malos discusses wages for housework*, C1420/06, 24 - 26 October, Available online via: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/ellen-malos-wages-for-housework> accessed on 13/10/2016.

<sup>112</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/6, March 1976.

promotions. Thus, mothers bear most of the economic and occupational costs of parenting, even though everyone in society benefits from good child care.<sup>113</sup>

Mainly because of their commitment to their children, working mothers largely found themselves restricted to low paying industries. Without childcare, women could not work and without work women could not afford childcare or any other necessities for the household. Bruley writes that, 'Britain has the lowest proportion of publicly funded childcare in Europe... Women are having to meet this cost directly through their own earnings.'<sup>114</sup> The WLM promoted the demand for free 24-hour nurseries. Catherine Hall attended the first women's meeting at Ruskin, she comments that for her, 'childcare was always at the top of the list... Of course, it's a ridiculous demand, twenty-four-hour childcare, but we certainly did believe in the importance of proper provision of childcare.'<sup>115</sup> With increased childcare, feminists hoped that mothers' would have the opportunity to broaden their job prospects which would infer more women having the opportunity to engage in higher skilled and therefore higher paying jobs breaking down the sexual division of labour. Socialist feminists argued that free 24-hour nurseries could potentially alter the conventional family unit, producing a shift in the popular conception of parental roles within the family where both parents were equal. One female worker in *A Question of Choice* comments,

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<sup>113</sup> Lorber, J. (2012) *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press. pg. 37.

<sup>114</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Hampshire: Palgrave. pg. 166.

<sup>115</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, sound recording, *Catherine Hall discusses collective childcare*, C1420/54, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/catherine-hall-collective-childcare> accessed on 13/10/2016.

'Lionel always says to me I haven't got to make him my life or the children for that matter I must do something outside of the marriage as well, so I can see now I go to work to have a bit of luxury. Earlier I've had to go out to work for necessities.'<sup>116</sup>

The provision of free 24-hour nurseries nationwide would have involved a large investment from the government which the WLM would not have been likely to obtain, particularly under Margaret Thatcher's premiership. As a woman in *A Question of Choice* explains,

'We vote our MP or whatever in parliament thinking he's going to do this that and the other for us but it never happens like that ... it just doesn't work at all... so you've just got to put yourself out there to get these groups going.'<sup>117</sup>

A method, which many community orientated individuals implemented, was the establishment of local communal childcare groups. Many mothers proactively established and arranged their own nurseries and crèches in which children could be left in the care of trusted individuals; this gave mothers the opportunity to complete tasks without the continual responsibility of caring for children. In the SFC's films many childcare facilities are referenced, all of which have been established and run by the featured women.<sup>118</sup> For example, in *A Question of Choice*, the women have invested their time into running

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<sup>116</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>117</sup> *A Question of Choice*, dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative (1982) Available online via BFI Screenonline.

<sup>118</sup> For other community organised childcare groups highlighted in SFC films see: Kelvin Nursery Collective in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* (1986) and Five Arches creche in *Changing Our Lives - 5 Arches Community Centre* (1984).

community activities and after-school clubs which relieve some pressure off other working mums. These groups gave families an opportunity to leave their children in the capable hands of their community and led to the development of strong community ties.

### Conclusion

The first four demands of the WLM were introduced as the bare minimum requirements that feminists desired in Britain. The ethnographical nature of the SFC's work and its method of interviews with ordinary people produce an incredibly personal and intimate reflection of individual's lives at the time. The films and their analysis highlight broad themes which connect to various other aspects of women's issues. Each film attempted to raise the audience's consciousness of specific issues and provoke the audience into thinking critically about the current situation.

## THE LAST THREE DEMANDS OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

### REPRESENTED BY THE SHEFFIELD FILM CO-OPERATIVE

Chapter four discusses the main themes and issues presented in three selected SFC films and analyses them in a broader context of a relatable WLM demand. This chapter aims to analyse aspects of women's oppression represented by the SFC and show parallels between issues featured in Sheffield and nationwide. The following films and corresponding demands are discussed in this chapter: *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* (1986) represents the demand for legal and financial independence, *Running Gay* (1991) highlights the demand for the end to discrimination to lesbians and the right for women to define their own sexuality, finally *That's No Lady* (1977) represents the demand which wants the end to all violence and sexual coercion against women.

#### Let Our Children Grow Tall! 1986

'When Suzie had a baby, she called her little Flo,  
she put her in a tower block to see if she would grow.  
She fed her bread and water there wasn't any meat,  
she tried to play in the garden and she fell into the street.  
And she said grow tall, grow tall  
I'll be lucky if I grow at all.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.



The song quoted above is the audio introduction, sang by children to, *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* (1986). This film produced by the SFC addresses issues regarding mothers relying on child supplementary benefit in Sheffield and the impact of Margaret Thatcher's policies on mothers and their children. In the amendments to its application to the British Film Institute, SFC outlined its focus as being the development of *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*. SFC had made initial contacts 'with people in Sheffield at Advice Centres, Community Centres, schools etc all of whom [were] very keen on the idea. We know feel that the project is a vital one particularly in the current economic and political climate.'<sup>2</sup> The film states that in 1986, one third of British children lived in poverty, half of these lived in working families; in 1986 the annual cost of child benefit to the British economy was £4.4 billion, while the total loss from tax evasion was £4 billion.<sup>3</sup> The continued decline of the steel industry began a real worry regarding the fate of the Sheffield job industry and by extension, the welfare of Sheffield's inhabitants, particularly its children. Sheffield steelworkers turned out on strike in 1980 after they were offered a 2% wage increase when inflation was at 20%. Sheffield's Women's Paper 1980 discusses that the strike was also, 'about the policies of a government which stops funds to a nationalised industry, sits back to watch 53,000 redundancies; a strike about the future of nationalised industries, about unemployment, about who controls what, and in whose interest.'<sup>4</sup> Many individuals, particularly in traditional staple industry centres such as Sheffield, felt that Margaret Thatcher's leadership was only making their situation worse. In a public statement in 1983, Mrs Thatcher remarked, 'The fact remains that people who are

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<sup>2</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Amendments to application to B.F.I R.P.F 85-86, 20 February 1985, pg. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/2/2/2, March 1980.

living in need are fully and properly provided for.’<sup>5</sup> This statement is repeated in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, exclaimed using a very unflattering impersonation, suggesting that those people living in need in fact did not feel, ‘fully and properly provided for.’ *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* included various excerpts from Margaret Thatcher's speeches, 'to provide a rhetorical and often sanctimonious counterpoint to the stark realities of people's lives.'<sup>6</sup> (Figure 0.5 is a film still of a cartoon of Margaret Thatcher, taken from *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*).

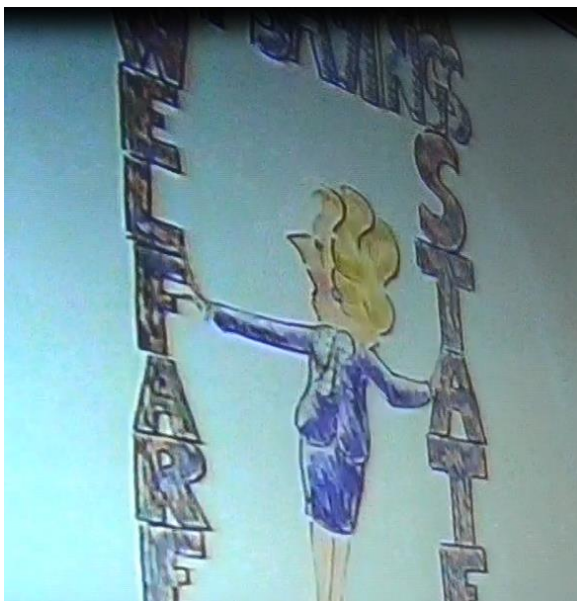


Figure 0.5

*Let Our Children Grow Tall!* consists of various interviews with Sheffield residents commenting on the Thatcher government's policies and how they affected their personal lives. SIF archival material says that *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* aimed to show 'the gross inequalities and

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<sup>5</sup> Thatcher Archive: House of Commons PQs, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online, public statement. 22 December 1983. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.

<sup>6</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield Film Co-op amendments to budget proposals for 1985/86, 20 February 1985, pg. 4.

disadvantages now experienced by the many people on low incomes, or unemployed.' And in addition, expose 'how the recent considerable increase in poverty has affected the everyday lives of Sheffield children and their parents.'<sup>7</sup> The mothers featured in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* voice their concerns regarding their issues associated with living in tower blocks while bringing up children, problems such as: restricted space, difficulty keeping the flat warm, close proximity to neighbours (in terms of noise) and latches on the windows which allow them to open all the way. One mother says you, 'Might as well just keep them in and keep them under your feet.'<sup>8</sup> Another mother explains, 'I mean, our Paul's alright... I won't say he's underdeveloped, but I wouldn't say he's real, you know brain-box of Britain. He never will be as long as we're stuck in there.'<sup>9</sup>

Newly developed tower blocks provided council flats for thousands of residents. An initiative promoted by Margaret Thatcher encouraged tenants to buy their flats. Thatcher said, 'Mother's with small children living in tower blocks now have three options: to carry on renting, to put down an option to purchase the flat within a reasonable time or to purchase the flat. That seems to me to enlarge the freedom and possibilities available to such people.'<sup>10</sup>

*Let Our Children Grow Tall!* shows a mother's response who was living in a tower block, she

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<sup>7</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield Film Co-op amendments to budget proposals for 1985/86, 20 February 1985, pg. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>9</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>10</sup> Thatcher Archive: House of Commons PQs, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online, public statement. 24 May 1979. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.

replied, 'Oh no, I'm trying to get shut of it. I don't want to buy it!'<sup>11</sup> Many tenants of council dwellings endured illnesses because of unsuitable conditions.

Health issues were commonplace in council tower blocks; a mother who lives in a tower block explains in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, that chest and throat infections were ordinary and at one point her little boy was admitted to Northern General Hospital because of respiratory problems. She goes onto say she has 'Been to the social workers and ... they've put through for me to be removed as soon as possible but I'm still waiting for the inspector.'<sup>12</sup> In the background an SFC camera crew member asks, 'How long have you been waiting?' She replies, 'Two years nearly.'<sup>13</sup> Health problems were also commonplace in council houses because of overcrowding and their dilapidated condition. *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* features an interview with a member of the Flower Estate Community Association, they formed an action committee consisting of six council house residents. They had been attending council meetings over a five-year period to get their homes demolished within two years (the council had previously planned to take them down in five years). One tenant explains that her house had, 'got damp on the walls and... fungus in the kitchen, overcrowded as well.'<sup>14</sup> Another resident says, 'I don't think anyone should have to live in those conditions at all.'<sup>15</sup> Because the buildings had deteriorated so badly, Sheffield City Council was forced to demolish the

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<sup>11</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>12</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>13</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>14</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>15</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

houses as soon as possible. Indeed, living conditions were not the only issue many council residents had to endure.

Parents found it difficult to provide nutritious meals because of financial restrictions; many could not afford fruit because it was such an expensive item. In *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* it states that in 1975, 12% of students in Sheffield received free school meals, by 1984 this had increased to 40%.<sup>16</sup> For many children their free school meal would be the only nutritious meal in their day. One mother interviewed in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* comments,

'The 14-year-old is always saying, 'Mummy I've been weighed today, and I've been told I've got to eat more of this and got to eat more of that'... I haven't got the money to provide these things so he's going to stay small and underweight.'<sup>17</sup>

As well as budget restrictions dictating the families shop many parents struggled to clothe their children. *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* shows from 1979-80, 4,300 children were receiving a clothing grant, by 1984-85 this had more than tripled to 17,000.<sup>18</sup> Applicants of the clothing grant sometimes had to wait over 10 months to receive their children's clothes. A mother in the film says, 'I find that I can't afford to buy the proper shoes, so my children will probably

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<sup>16</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>17</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>18</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

end up small and crippled... I'm laughing but it's not funny. It really isn't.<sup>19</sup> Another mother explains, 'If it weren't for my mother my kids wouldn't have half the stuff they've got... She bought him a pair of shoes and they cost her £8... there's no way we could afford them, we'd have had to save for months.'<sup>20</sup> Parents found it difficult enough to provide the essential clothes for their children alongside pressure from the ever-growing consumer market and advertising. When children left secondary school, there was even less support for parents, children no longer qualified for weekly child benefit, free school meals or clothing grants.

After leaving school, individuals found it difficult to obtain full time employment because of their lack of practical work experience; many attended the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). YTS offered to train young people in a job role, giving them practical knowledge and a small wage. In a speech, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson said that the YTS was, 'a giant step towards our objective of ensuring that no youngster under the age of 18 need be unemployed.'<sup>21</sup> In contrast, one young unemployed man in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains,

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<sup>19</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>20</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>21</sup> Thatcher Archive: HC 56/286-304, 1986 Budget. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online, Thatcher record. 18 March 1986. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.

'99% of the people that go on a YTS scheme are just there to be abused by the factory owners... point blank you don't learn anything, you do sorry I'll take that back ... you do learn one thing when you go on a YTS and that's not to go back on it again.'<sup>22</sup>

YTS was renowned for being poorly paid and participants being treated like a 'dog's body.' As well as YTS, unemployment was another issue, particularly in Sheffield as the steel industry was dwindling. *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* shows that unemployment was 35% in the Park Hill estate. A community worker says, 'We've seen teenagers gone through junior club, senior club now coming unemployed drop in. What we going to do, carry on until they go to old age pensioners club?'<sup>23</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* highlights the desire for Sheffield's unemployed to find work, although being employed was not typically advantageous either,

'There's no incentive to go to work... factory owners are benefitting from keeping wages down. The firm I worked for I worked for four years and we never had a pay rise, in four years. And the answer to that was if you don't like the heat you can get out of the kitchen because there's thousands ready to take your job and they were right, we couldn't do owt about it.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>23</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>24</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

Because of low pay, being employed did not directly lead to being better off. Many employees became frustrated as they argued that the Conservative government inherently favoured the employers. A worker in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* comments that traditionally, 'If you were unemployed you were skint. And now you can be working and still be broke.'<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of poorly paid workers protested for higher wages which they argued, would result in less people claiming supplementary benefit. *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* quotes one of Thatcher's speeches,

'We seek a society where people make their own choices and take responsibility for their decisions. Where rewards are related directly to one's efforts. A get up and go instead of a sit back and wait for it Britain.'<sup>26</sup>

This speech resonated with individuals with disposable income although it alienated the working class. For the working-class life was hard, it seems that however much effort they invested into work they would receive little 'rewards'. The majority of job opportunities in Sheffield were reliant on demand of the business therefore many workers would fluctuate between being employed and not. One unemployed man comments in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* that, 'Life's made of circles and you've just got to find a break through it... You've got to find a way through and I don't think it's through Margaret Thatcher... I don't think she really

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<sup>25</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>26</sup> Thatcher Archive: THCR 5/1/4/65 speaking notes & press release, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Online, speech. 8 February 1984. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.



wants to help.<sup>27</sup> Thatcher was accused of ignoring the needs of the working-class people in industrial towns, the government backed strategy of low pay aimed to increase business profit margins and therefore kick-start the British economy back to a competitive international trader. As inflation rose without wage levels, poorly paid worker's real wage decreased; commonly many workers in Sheffield were financially worse off than those claiming benefits. The economic policy of the Thatcher government established a counterintuitive system where unemployment was more financially viable than employment. A woman in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains,

'I wouldn't work because I couldn't earn enough to keep the whole family... The fact that my husband's just worked for one year on the community programme's scheme and we were actually £8 a week worse off than if we'd been on supplementary benefit.'<sup>28</sup>

This systemic issue meant that the vast majority of those on benefits could not afford to work. An interviewed woman in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains that people on the 'dole' earned more than her husband who was working. She goes on to say that, 'it makes me angry. They can claim for free school dinners, lots of other things that we can't claim for, so they're in a way better off than us.'<sup>29</sup> Although those surviving without government aid were

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<sup>27</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>28</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>29</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

frequently worse off, many individuals reliant on the government's supplementary benefit system also encountered problems. In the SIF archive, it says that through the film they wanted to show that, 'Government cuts and savings over the last five years have taken money away from poor people e.g. a loss of £11.20. per week to an unemployed (married) claimant with the abolition of earnings related supplement in 1982.'<sup>30</sup> A mother featured in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* says that living on supplementary benefit meant you must become an 'economist', she goes on to say; 'About another £100 a week that would just provide the necessities I'd say. I'm not even asking for luxuries.'<sup>31</sup> For many individuals the process of being on benefits and claiming for additional grants was a humiliating experience. A mother in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* says that the government, 'make you feel right small, as if you're begging.'<sup>32</sup> Another mother details the calculated inspection process of claiming for additional support,

'I had some curtains that were almost dropping to bits... he looked and said oh well you've got curtains, so you can't have anymore... They look at your bed and check what you've got on it, which to me is the most embarrassing situation I've ever been in.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield Film Co-op amendments to budget proposals for 1985/86, 20 February 1985, pg. 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>32</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>33</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

The claiming process consisted of various forms full of personal questions and ultimately whatever aid you were granted was the personal decision of whoever dealt with your case. Indeed, as discussed in interviews in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* many applicants for benefits had to repeatedly fill in tactless forms and continue to chase up the council to receive the financial help they needed. For those that had secured supplementary benefit, their monetary allowance altered along with inflation, in November 1986 the rate increased by 15 pence. One exasperated mother in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* says that she will get an extra, '45 [pence] because I've got three kids. I'll be able to buy one sock.'<sup>34</sup>All of the interviewees in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* were living on benefits, the overwhelming theme was one of alienation and powerlessness towards Thatcher's policies. An interviewee remarks,

'I'll be honest, I voted for her because I thought she'd make how we're living better but she'd never ever get my vote again, never. I live in a place where I can't afford to vote for Margaret Thatcher.'<sup>35</sup>

In Sheffield 1984, Labour held 61 seats on the Council compared to 17 for the Conservatives and 9 for the Liberals; in 1984, Oliver Letwin a member of Thatcher's policy unit reported back to the PM about the risk of rate-capping revolts in Sheffield. Letwin commented that 'local government in Sheffield has been turned into a political juggernaut with a momentum of its

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<sup>34</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>35</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

own.<sup>36</sup> Much of Sheffield in the 1980s consisted of working class people; therefore, many found the Conservative policies of the free market and privatisation of no benefit to them. The interviewees in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* all represent a despondent and unenthusiastic electorate. In a speech in 1984, Margaret Thatcher vowed, 'to protect the poor and those most in need.' Kinnock mentions this statement in the House of Commons in 1985, saying, 'is it not about time that the Prime Minister honestly admitted to the country that more money is spent on benefits for the poor because her policies have made many more people poor?'<sup>37</sup> For working class people, there were few options available to escape the reality of living off benefits or low pay. The majority of those living on benefits did not enjoy relying on the government for support. One woman in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains, 'If you get decent jobs with decent pay everything else will follow... it all boils down to people going to work.'<sup>38</sup>

*Let Our Children Grow Tall!* presents a counterintuitive system where people want to work but the financial advantage of relying on benefits from the government was too great; the international decline of industry in Sheffield meant that the available jobs were frequently poorly paid and not dependable for a regular wage. A mother in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains that, 'Nobody's asking for anything out of the ordinary, just like to get on and not

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<sup>36</sup> Thatcher Archive: THCR 2/6/3/76. Records of conversation, Margaret Thatcher Online. 20 December 1984. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.

<sup>37</sup> Thatcher Archive: HC 89/153-58. House of Commons PQs, Margaret Thatcher Online. 17 December 1985. Available online via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/search.asp> accessed on 20/06/2017.

<sup>38</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

have to go to social security and ask for this and go through all the rigmarole.<sup>139</sup> One of the WLM demands is for women's financial and legal independence; feminists would argue that this specific aspect of oppression was deeply entwined within government policies, work and the structure of the family. For mothers, their reliance on benefits restricted their lives as well as their children's. Another mother in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* explains, 'You're not a person ... you're mother to the baby, you're wife to the husband and you're cleaner for the house.'<sup>140</sup> The perspectives shown in *Let Our Children Grow Tall!* represented not only women's issues but extended to young people, the unemployed, poorly paid workers, individuals reliant on benefits and children. Leonard Quart, a Professor of Cinema Studies, comments that in Thatcher's premiership the gap between rich and poor became as wide as ever; 20 percent of the population were living under the poverty line; one million people were homeless, and Britain had the highest prison population per capita in Europe. Quart goes on to say that, 'Clearly, one of Thatcher's prime legacies was to produce a more impoverished life for a sizeable portion of the population...In fact, it sometimes seemed that in their savage critiques of Thatcherism, the English films of the eighties produced one of the few effective political weapons against the Thatcher tide.'<sup>141</sup>

*Let Our Children Grow Tall!* certainly offered a damning perspective of Thatcher's policies from the Sheffield population. Notably, the SFC was most concerned about how their interviewees would be presented in the final edit. In one of its archival documents it reads,

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<sup>39</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>40</sup> *Let Our Children Grow Tall!*, dir. Christine Bellamy and Gill Booth, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1986) BFI Archive, London. VB19030A.

<sup>41</sup> Quart, L. 'The Politics of Irony: The Frears-Kureishi Films' in Dixon, W. (ed.) *Re-Reviewing British Cinema, 1900-1992*, (1994) New York: State University of New York Press, pg. 241-242.

'We will be most concerned not to portray any of these people as victims and we are sure that the ones we have met so far will certainly not come over as such.'<sup>42</sup> The majority of the individuals featured in the film were heavily financially dependent on the government. The WLM's fifth demand called for the financial and legal independence of women, particularly for married women. Mary McIntosh, founded the Women's Liberation Independence Campaign which promoted the WLM's fifth demand. She said, 'The main thing was that it was against the means testing of the couple, as a couple, still are means tested as a couple, in fact... now gay couples are included in that.'<sup>43</sup> The fifth demand broadly encapsulated the need for various reforms, legislation and cultural alterations. Lewis writes,

'Above all, post-war legislation assumed the harmonious workings of the family as a unit, so that any measure to improve male welfare was assumed to be shared by women and children. Any claim by women to greater financial independence and sexual autonomy ran contrary to the strong post-war desire to rebuild the family.'<sup>44</sup>

*Let Our Children Grow Tall!* presents a clear image of Sheffield, its council tower blocks, inside interviewees homes and exasperated Sheffield residents. Portrayed in this film is the difficult position many Sheffielders encountered, being stuck between the government, low pay and unemployment. The film shows that many working people in Sheffield wanted financial and

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<sup>42</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, Sheffield Film Co-op amendments to budget proposals for 1985/86, 20 February 1985, pg. 4.

<sup>43</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, *Mary McIntosh discusses financial and legal independence*, C1420/11, 25 August 2011, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-mcintosh-financial-and-legal-independence> accessed on 29/03/2017.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, J. (1992) *Women in Britain Since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, pg. 94.

legal independence, they wanted a normal paying job and to not rely on the government for supplementary benefit. Additionally, for women it was a difficult position because for many they would receive more money when on benefits and so many continued to be stuck in the home. The issue of legal and financial independence was a particularly difficult topic which summarised a plethora of issues not only for women.

### Running Gay 1991

*Running Gay* (1991) is the final production made by the SFC and was part of a series exploring issues relative to individual's sexuality. *Running Gay* focuses on the participation of gay and lesbian athletes in sport. In the film, Betty Baxter, a former Olympic athlete and Canadian national coach explains, 'If you come out as a gay man or lesbian in the sports system, your career is finished. You will never be hired in a coaching position you will never be selected for another team.'<sup>45</sup> Many athletes felt it was necessary to hide their sexuality from the media, sporting organisations, coaches and team mates, for them to continue competing at a professional level. Indeed, for some gay and lesbian athletes and coaches, the fear of their real sexual preferences being made public forced them to 'intentionally undermine their successes.'<sup>46</sup> Rich comments that, 'because of heterosexual prejudice' lesbians in the workplace must not only deny their sexuality to their colleagues but also conform to society's expectation of all women. 'Her job depends on her pretending to be not merely heterosexual,

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<sup>45</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>46</sup> Rotella, R. and Murray, M. (1991) Homophobia, the World of Sport and Sport Psychology Consulting. *The Sport Psychologist*, Issue. 5. No. 4, pg. 357.

but a heterosexual woman.<sup>47</sup> *Running Gay* includes an interview with coach of the Hackney Women's Football Club, Joan Evans who explains, that homophobia is most prevalent in sport in comparison to other working environments as, 'people can avoid you [in work] if that's what they feel they want to do.'<sup>48</sup> She goes on to explain that, 'Homophobia is probably worse within sport because you come into ... close contact with people ... Some people might not like the idea of being so close to a lesbian, I don't mind!'<sup>49</sup> (Figure 0.6 is a film still of Joan Evans scoring a goal, taken from *Running Gay*).



Figure 0.6

Because of these pressures many gay and lesbian athletes felt it was necessary to establish their own sports teams, associations and events to avoid discrimination. *Running Gay* focuses on a singular international sporting event, participated wholly by gay and lesbian athletes.

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<sup>47</sup> Rich, A. Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, in Jackson, S and Scott, S. ed. (1994) *Feminism and Sexuality*, Columbia University Press, pg. 133.

<sup>48</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>49</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.



The Gay Games III, held in Vancouver consisted of, '7,300 athletes from 27 countries [who] participated in 29 sports. 43% were women. More than 10,000 people watched the opening ceremony.'<sup>50</sup> Kevin Sheldrake, Co-ordinator of the UK Lesbian and Gay Sports Association, was one out of twelve individuals from Britain who participated in the games. In *Running Gay*, he says,

'I want to be me, I don't to have to hide my boyfriend from the track or other people. I want him to come and be able to support me ... I want to be as free as heterosexuals are, doing what I want to do.'<sup>51</sup>

Crucially gay and lesbian individuals found themselves in a society in which the voice of the majority did not accept them. Consequently, this culturally justified the discrimination and marginalisation of gay and lesbians. One half of the homophobia hypothesis is that gay and lesbian athletes may choose to be silent about their sexuality to remain in the majority. 'Athletes fear that their difference will interrupt the homosocial camaraderie, that they will be treated differently.'<sup>52</sup> Dusty Rhoades, Co-ordinator of the Women's Sport Foundation, comments in *Running Gay* on the lack of elite lesbian athletes because, the tabloids were 'totally obsessed' with athletes' sexuality which was, 'nothing at all to do with their sport.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>51</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, E., Magrath, R. and Bullingham, R. (2016) *Out in Sport the Experiences of Openly Gay and Lesbian Athletes in Competitive Sport*. London: Routledge. pg. 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

For example, Justin Fashanu was an English football player who in 1990 was outed (by his manager) for being gay in *The Sun* newspaper. In the ensuing media storm, he was 'harassed and bullied by his family, teammates and fans.'<sup>54</sup> Elite athletes found that increased tabloid coverage regarding their sexuality affected their chances for sponsorship. In *Running Gay*, Sheldrake states that businesses typically avoided gay athletes as sponsors because their image would not be, 'conducive to their product.'<sup>55</sup> Gay and lesbian individuals were frequently portrayed by the popular media through negative stories only distancing even more endorsements from sponsors. Elite athletes could therefore not confidently share their sexuality without having a damaging effect on their sporting career.

Predictably many sports organisations showed prejudice against gay and lesbian athletes. The Women's Sport Foundation aimed to include more women in sport although did not directly target lesbians or try to resolve the issue of homophobia in sport. Betty Baxter was fired after three years from the position of coach for Canada's national team. In *Running Gay* she states that the reason was because of rumours circulating regarding the sexuality of her team although the association said that she was let go, 'for no cause.'<sup>56</sup> Sheldrake explains in *Running Gay* that during the 1980s and 1990s, the English Football Association were concerned about gay participation in football matches because, 'if someone cut their knee and there was blood everywhere, then you know if they were gay, my god there was going to

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<sup>54</sup> Anderson, E., Magrath, R. and Bullingham, R. (2016) *Out in Sport the Experiences of Openly Gay and Lesbian Athletes in Competitive Sport*. London: Routledge. pg. 90.

<sup>55</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>56</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

be AIDS everywhere and everybody was going to catch it.<sup>157</sup> *Running Gay* features another example of sexual discrimination from 'Team Berlin Vorspiel', who were a German football team exclusively for gay men; they had applied several times to participate in the official German football league, a player in the team explains that the German Federal Association stated that the, 'Team Berlin Vorspiel' were not permitted into the association because they were using their team as a, 'vehicle to pass [their] gay message in order to seduce people.'<sup>158</sup> Other discrimination within sporting organisations was much more 'covert'; one article written by Helen Lenskyj mentions a case in which, 'male athletic directors investigated the sexual orientation of female applicants for a female coaching position, and rejected those who were lesbian.'<sup>159</sup> Organisations remained loyal to public attitudes in order to reflect the majority of their potential customers. Many individuals had been conditioned by a culture that considered gay and lesbian individuals to be 'wrong' in some way. Mary McIntosh, a member of the Gay Liberation Movement and WLM, details a discussion regarding their demands in the early Gay Liberation Movement. She says, 'Particularly I remember the demand for holding hands in public... Some people said it was vitally important and we needed that right in order to show that there was nothing wrong with being gay.'<sup>160</sup> Prejudice against gay and lesbian individuals remained common and largely accepted, possibly because of legislation which led to misunderstanding.

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<sup>57</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>58</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>59</sup> Lenskyj, H. (1990) Power and Play: Gender and Sexuality Issues in Sport and Physical Activity. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Issue. 25, No. 3, pg.241.

<sup>60</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, video, *From GLF to WLM*, Mary McIntosh, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/from-glf-to-wlm> accessed on 29/03/2017.

In legislation, sexual rights issues had been highly contested. For example, Clause 28 of the December 1988 Local Government Act surmised the, 'prohibition on promoting homosexuality'<sup>61</sup> in education authorities. Predictably this sparked outrage with the gay and lesbian community, many gay rights activists felt it necessary to raise public consciousness of homophobia. In *Running Gay*, Dusty Rhoades explains that,

'Primarily people's attitudes have got to change, in order to make lesbians feel that they can be out and be lesbians in whatever activity they take part in. And that's just asking for the world basically but that's the starting point, nothing else.'<sup>62</sup>

Much of the attraction of the Gay Games was that participating athletes were under no pretence to disguise their sexuality. An individual's performance was assessed wholly on their personal achievement. The fifteenth point on *The Sport Psychologist's*, 'Wish list for the future' was that, 'everybody would view athletes as individuals and then as athletes, no more and no less.'<sup>63</sup> The Gay Games aimed to provide a positive image of gay and lesbian athletes, an image which had the potential to change attitudes and reaffirm solidarity against homophobia. It was not only an event which reaffirmed gay pride for its participants; it promoted an image of a united and proud event to the press. In *Running Gay*, Jeremy Clarke,

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<sup>61</sup> Local Government Act 1988, Clause 28. Available via:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/contents> accessed on 02/01/2017.

<sup>62</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>63</sup> Rotella, R. and Murraray, M. (1991) Homophobia, the World of Sport and Sport Psychology Consulting. *The Sport Psychologist*. Issue. 5, No. 4, pg. 364.

coach for the English Badminton Association, comments, 'It's such a good feeling that you're in the majority for once, I really appreciate that.'<sup>64</sup> The core emphasis of the Gay Games was on participation rather than competition.

While participation was encouraged many individuals could not attend because of the financial cost involved in attending, such as, registration fees, uniforms, air fare and accommodation. Betty Baxter explains in *Running Gay* that, 'It still really is an event for the wealthy.'<sup>65</sup> *Running Gay* showed that some participants in the games managed to cover the cost of their attendance through charitable giving, for example the Boston Peppermints fundraised in their home town of New York and one athlete from Germany explains that although she was a student she began driving a taxi in order to afford the event. Financial restrictions resulted in many individuals not being able to attend the Gay Games; therefore, the majority of those that could attend originated from Western countries. As one participant of the Gay Games states, 'it's a very white event.'<sup>66</sup> Although participation of the event was inclusive, the Gay Games aimed to represent the interests of all gay and lesbian athletes. An athlete in *Running Gay* states,

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<sup>64</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>65</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>66</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

'It's this essential philosophy that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in these games regardless of race anything you know. All barriers have to fall.'<sup>67</sup>

It was institutions such as the Gay Games, the Gay Liberation Movement and the WLM that were the driving forces that gave gay and lesbian individuals a platform to object to discriminative behaviour and begin make homosexuality acceptable in popular culture. In the Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1976, Parsley writes regarding race, gender and sexual preference: 'we ought to look at our lives and see what they could have been without oppression discrimination and the barriers society erects.'<sup>68</sup> The WLM wanted to bring an end to discrimination against lesbians and the right to a self-defined sexuality, although popular attitudes were deeply set in institutions and generations of individuals.

*Running Gay* is an interesting production by SFC because of its specific focus on gay and lesbian athletes, more broadly the sixth demand of the WLM was to end all discrimination against lesbians and allow women the right to define their own sexuality. Rich discusses the idea that, 'Heterosexuality ha[d] been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women.'<sup>69</sup> Even for individuals who were gay, they found themselves in a difficult culture which did not recognise, or did not entirely accept gay and lesbian people. For example, Mary McIntosh remarks that she was about twenty-four when she realised, 'that it was not a bad thing to be

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<sup>67</sup> *Running Gay*. dir. Maya Chowdhry, Sheffield Film Co-operative (1991) BFI Archive, London. VB19034A.

<sup>68</sup> Sheffield City Archive. Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>69</sup> Rich, A. Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence, in Jackson, S and Scott, S. ed. (1994) *Feminism and Sexuality*, Columbia University Press, pg. 138.

a lesbian. Before that, if I was a lesbian it was as some form of suffering and it meant to me definitely that you couldn't be a mother. It probably meant unhappiness and that you couldn't ever have a rewarding relationship.<sup>70</sup> The marginalisation of gay and lesbian individuals was an extension to the marginalisation of women, both groups desired more representation and acceptance from society.

In conclusion, the Gay Games represents the truly asexual nature of sport in which all are welcome to attend, and athletes could participate fully. The Games created, 'an inclusive queer space devoid of boundaries that separated gays from lesbians, homosexuals from heterosexuals, muscular from flabby bodies, the fit from the slow.'<sup>71</sup> SFC once again presented a topic in such a way as to stimulate the audience to think critically about their attitudes regarding sexuality. It was this positive image of gay and lesbians which was necessary to change the perception of the public.

### That's No Lady 1977

'Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence. An end to the laws, assumptions and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.'<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, video, *From GLF to WLM*, Mary McIntosh, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/from-glf-to-wlm> accessed on 29/03/2017.

<sup>71</sup> Waitt, G. (2003) Gay Games: Performing 'community' out from the closet of the locker room. *Social & Cultural Geography*, Issue. 4, No. 2, pg. 175.

<sup>72</sup> Tuttle, L. (1987) *The Encyclopedia of Feminism*, London, Longman Group Limited. pg. 290-291.

*That's No Lady* (1977) raises issues concerning battered wives and the limitations of the government to provide sufficient aid. *That's No Lady*, 'raises for discussion the general question about socially accepted attitudes towards women in our society...It is not the story of one woman and her problems but instead a series of scenes illustrating the kinds of experiences and relationships that can develop in the life of any woman who gets battered.'<sup>73</sup> *That's No Lady* highlights additional implications associated with domestic violence, such as the effect on children, the common situation where wives were financially dependent on their abusive husbands and battered wives feeling of isolation. As a result, the film demonstrates that leaving an abusive relationship was particularly difficult. Lesley Abdela, a member of the WLM, endured domestic abuse in her marriage, she explains that at that time,

'you sort of felt embarrassed or ashamed...I mean you did not know what to do in those days, you're supposed to be respectable, married, you know, a together person who has a job, etc.'<sup>74</sup>

Traditionally, issues within marriages were considered private business, as a husband in *That's No Lady* says, 'you can't interfere between man and wife.'<sup>75</sup> *That's No Lady* attempted to end the tradition of privacy surrounding battered wives and encourage a public

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<sup>73</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c. 1984.

<sup>74</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, *Lesley Abdela discusses domestic violence*, C1420/13, 23 July 2012, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/lesley-abdela-domestic-violence> accessed on 29/03/2017.

<sup>75</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.



conversation regarding domestic violence. Domestic violence produced not only unsafe situations for women and children but was inherently linked to its male-orientated society.

Jane Lewis states that,

'Wife abuse has continued to be treated primarily as a problem for women, rather than something intimately related to coercive sexuality and male domination. Violent relationships reveal the unequal nature of marriage *in extremis*, involving as they often do *both* sexual coercion and gross inequality in the distribution of income and resources.'<sup>76</sup>

The division of labour was based on inequality and inevitably caused strain within marital relationships. Feminists argued that many housewives were caught in a structure which did not value their role and perpetuated women's subordinate position. Rowbotham discusses the, 'division of labour which relegates caring to women and brands women as inferior'; Rowbotham goes on to explain that, 'It is not surprising that violence breaks out in the family, or that people are made victims of families... The family under capitalism carries an intolerable weight.'<sup>77</sup> Women's subordinate position was ever reaffirmed through their continued role as a housewife and mother. The 'Why be a Wife?' campaign encapsulated feminist's objection to marriage, particularly women's expected role within it. 1978 Sheffield Women's Newsletter states that, 'being a wife... is all part of the assumption of emotional

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<sup>76</sup> Lewis, J. (1992) *Women in Britain since 1945*, Oxford: Blackwell, pg. 107.

<sup>77</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin Books, pg. 77.

dependence and selfless service which lie behind women's relationships with men.<sup>178</sup> Rowbotham states that women's consciousness was defined by culture and institutions reinforcing the ideology that, 'the work of a housewife and mother is not just something you do, it's somebody you are.'<sup>179</sup> For many housewives and mothers being battered was an endured part of life and a feature of their subordinate role.

*That's No Lady* features domestic violence through its portrayal of Bill, an abusive husband and his battered wife. The film shows that there was little wives could do to immediately stop the violence in their home. 'How not to get battered' is an excerpt from Broken Rib, Edinburgh Women's Aid Magazine, reprinted in Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1979. It consists of various contradictory statements regarding wives' behaviour and their actions within the home. It seeks to highlight the idea that wives could engage in whatever good-willed behaviour and still result in being battered. One example from the excerpt is,

'Don't have supper on the table when he gets

in. He'll think you're getting at him for

being late.

Don't let supper be late. The least he des-

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<sup>78</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/12, January/February 1978, pg. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Penguin Books, pg. 76.

erves when he gets in from a hard day's work  
is to have his supper on the table.'<sup>80</sup>



Figure 0.7

Similarly, *That's No Lady* features a dispute in which Bill shouts at his wife, 'Fucking cow where's my fucking dinner. Come home from work and it's not on the bleeding table.'<sup>81</sup> *That's No Lady* aimed to introduce the issue of domestic violence to bring the problem into public consciousness. To keep the film appropriate for a wide audience much of the violence is implied for example; in one of the scenes in *That's No Lady* a loud argument between Bill and his wife is heard by their next-door neighbours. Next, we see the husband take his coat and quickly leave the house, after that a young girl, presumably his daughter, sneaks out of the front room and goes into the kitchen to find her mother on the floor, crying and bleeding from her lip. (Figure 0.7 is a film still a wife who has just been beaten, taken from *That's No*

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<sup>80</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

*Lady*). When the mother looks up at her daughter 'Stand by Your Man' performed by Tammy Wynette is playing in the background,

'Stand by your man, and show the world you love him

Keep giving all the love you can

Stand by your man.'<sup>82</sup>

The significance of the audio backdrop in this scene is highlighted using an article from the Sheffield Women's Newsletter. The article discusses art as 'the glorified oppressor of women' it goes onto say, 'When one looks at women writers and artists they mostly reinforce the male status quo in some way or another – and some even betray themselves enough to be used as a propaganda outlet – (Tammy Wynette).'<sup>83</sup> The lyrics juxtaposed with the contextual setting of the film highlights the expectation of wives to 'stand by their men'.

Women were not only culturally expected to 'stand by their men' but in many cases, were in no position to leave them. As featured in *That's No Lady* many women were abused because of their financial reliance on their husbands. *That's No Lady* highlights the resentment that some husbands felt towards having to financially support their families. In one scene in the film, three men (the abusive husband called Bill, a man playing darts called Pete and an older

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<sup>82</sup> Wynette, Tammy. (1969) Stand by Your Man, Epic, Available online via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwBif4BWew> accessed on 27/06/2017.

<sup>83</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/9, July 1976.

man) are in the pub, speaking about how their wives spend their earnings.<sup>84</sup> The older man exclaims, 'Every rise I've had in the last two years has been taken up with housekeeping. I keep telling the misses I don't know what she does with it.' Although he remarks later, 'Mind you they haven't got it easy the way prices keep going up.'<sup>85</sup> The character Pete says, 'It's a mugs game if you ask me. Once you're married you don't have a penny to call your own.'<sup>86</sup> Bill ends the conversation between the men saying,

'You're stupid to tell her when you get a rise, I never do. She gets her house-keeping every week; I never tell her how much I earn. It's the only thing they can think about, their one track bloody mind.'<sup>87</sup>

Wives financial dependence on their husbands was arguably the most critical characteristic of women's subordinate position, reinforcing their continual reliance. Men's position within the public sphere and relationship with capitalism ensured that they commanded more power within society and the family unit; while women were largely dedicated to their family and their role was head of the household. When husbands became abusive, women frequently had little choice but to remain with their partner. In one scene in *That's No Lady*, Bill and his wife are in their kitchen, he slaps her on the left-side of her face and exclaims, 'What I do with my money is my bloody business. I earn it and I'll bloody well spend it how I

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<sup>84</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, *That's No Lady* original script, c. 1977, pg. 6-7. Provided by Alf Bower.

<sup>85</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

<sup>86</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

<sup>87</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

feel.' He holds her face with his left hand and threatens the other in a fist, while shouting, 'Anymore of your mouth and I'll bloody give you some of this.'<sup>88</sup> Melanie Smarridge was involved with Sheffield women's aid, and in an article in 1979 she explains, 'how powerless women [were] if a marriage turn[ed] sour', particularly when they were alone, had 'young children and ha[dn't] worked for years.'<sup>89</sup> A wife's reliance on an abusive husband's income not only caused tension but also ensured that women encountered problems if they decided to leave the relationship.

Many wives found it incredibly difficult to find housing while leaving their abusive husband, because frequently tenancies were held in their husband's name, which meant that wives and children were forced into finding alternative accommodation, even though they were the victims.<sup>90</sup> For many women the only organisation which offered solace from domestic violence was refuge's set up by women's groups.

In Sheffield, there was small provision for battered wives established by women's groups. 30 women squatted in a cooperation house and on the premises opened the Sheffield Women's Refuge in October 1974, in ten months of it being open, 58 women and 86 children had used the facility.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, in September 1976 provisions were being made to establish Sheffield Women's Aid Refuge although at that time it did not yet have a 'regular source of

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<sup>88</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

<sup>89</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, The Demand for Independence, MD7966/4/2, November 1975, pg. 7.

<sup>91</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/3, July 1975.

income'; it applied to the Charity Commission in order to achieve charitable status and also applied for financial help 'from charity trusts and other bodies.'<sup>92</sup> The Sheffield Women's Aid Refuge opened in late November 1976, by January the Refuge had provided facilities for twelve women and twenty-two children, it remained full as did 'the other Sheffield refuge (A.B.W.'s) - and by all accounts, almost every other refuge in the North of England.'<sup>93</sup> In December 1977, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was introduced which categorised battered women as homeless and in priority need for rehousing, an article in Sheffield's Women's Newsletter, written by a woman staying in a refuge explains that in contrast to the new legislation, the Housing Department argued that women housed in the refuge were not homeless and were not put forward for rehousing. Four women were living in the refuge for nine months leaving, 'only one place left for the purpose of which it [was] run, i.e. an emergency refuge, and that place [was] always taken', the article goes on to say that over 18 months of the refuge being open, 'over 50 women have used it, not one rehoused by Local Authority.'<sup>94</sup> The refuges remained a female only area although men 'in the support group could be valuable, and especially playing with kids – as an example, to try to redress the balance in that not all men [were] aggressive and violent.'<sup>95</sup> By 1979 the 'Women's Aid refuge in Sheffield [was] one of over 150 refuges throughout Britain' which formed the National Women's Aid Federation, 'a developing national network of groups'.<sup>96</sup> The women's movement initiated aid for battered wives although their impact was inevitably limited by

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<sup>92</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/10, September 1976.

<sup>93</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/11, 1 February 1977.

<sup>94</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Springtime issue, MD7966/1/1/13, c.1978, pg. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/8, May 1976.

<sup>96</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979.

financial restrictions, many called on the government to provide more care for victims of abuse.

*That's No Lady* demonstrates the lack of established support for battered wives trying to leave abusive relationships by showing meetings with individuals representing various government departments, social services, marriage guidance, the housing association and the police.<sup>97</sup> In the film each department either cannot take her out of her abusive relationship until she begins divorce proceedings or suggest that she gives her husband another chance.

In *That's No Lady* social services and marriage guidance had limited power in regards to marital relationships and could only file for an injunction if divorce proceedings were underway. Similarly, the housing association was limited to what it could do. The representative advises that because the abused wife left her house of her 'own accord' she had therefore 'made herself voluntarily homeless' and that their 'department [was] under no obligation to rehouse' her; he continues by saying, 'you don't want to lose a nice home do you? Why don't you go back and talk it over with your husband?'<sup>98</sup> (The SFC's filmography booklet c.1984 explains that since the film had been made injunctions could be applied for before starting divorce proceedings and women's 'application for housing [was] likely to be treated with more discretion than is shown by the housing officer in the film.' Although at the

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<sup>97</sup> Although *That's No Lady* consists of fictional characters the information provided regarding what the government departments could and would do was correct at the time.

<sup>98</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.



time the information provided was accurate.)<sup>99</sup> Finally, in *That's No Lady* a meeting with a police officer is shown. He explains that the police service does not have the time to 'follow up every domestic tiff', he suggests for the wife to 'have a drink of tea and you'll probably find he's forgotten all about it.'<sup>100</sup> The police were frequently reluctant to interfere in the relationship between man and wife as it was considered a social problem not a legal one. A booklet entitled, 'The Demand for Independence' 1975 explains that, 'Although the police have the power they will not prosecute a man for assaulting his wife, even when they have clear evidence that an assault has taken place.'<sup>101</sup> The Sheffield Women's Newsletter states, when abuse was reported, 'The priority of the police [was] to establish the facts and not to help the woman overcome her distress.'<sup>102</sup> Where a woman was being 'persistently beaten by her husband, the common law right cease[d] to operate in the privacy of a 'marriage' or 'domestic situation''<sup>103</sup>, until divorce proceedings had been started.<sup>104</sup>

The culture of apathy towards battered women was reproduced not only through the previously mentioned institutions but also in the court of law. In an article in Sheffield Women's Newsletter, Ms Roebuck discusses that she, 'had to walk out on [her] husband' in

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<sup>99</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c. 1984.

<sup>100</sup> *That's No Lady*. dir. Sheffield Film Co-operative, (1977) Private online access via vimeo.

<sup>101</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, The Demand for Independence, MD7966/4/2, November 1975, pg. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, No. 5, MD7966/1/1/5, October 1975.

<sup>103</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement, The Demand for Independence, MD7966/4/2, November 1975, pg. 7.

<sup>104</sup> Since *That's No Lady* the law was amended, and it was then 'possible to apply for an injunction without first having to commence divorce or separation proceedings.' More information in, Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, Filmography booklet, CA990/91, c. 1984.

1977 because she had 'stood enough, for the last 21 years.' Roebuck received nothing from Social Security and was refused from the Housing Department because her final divorce papers had not been received from Court, she did receive 'half price of a pair shoes which was £4.85' from a Tribunal.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the 1980 Sheffield Women's Newsletter includes an article reporting about a man that pleaded guilty in a Sheffield Crown Court to inflicting grievous bodily harm to a woman. The article begins with the remarks of the Judge,

'I can understand him doing what he did, although of course it was wrong. I don't feel very much like punishing him (but) I think if he isn't straightened out he may do something more serious.' It seems there were mitigating circumstances. According to the Defence council 'He was one of the last people in the world who could withstand the sort of taunting that he had had.' What was said to him, to make him react so violently? He was told another man was a BETTER LOVER than him!!! ... The headline says it all – "Judge understands plight of taunted man who beat wife". What about the plight of the woman who has been beaten?'<sup>106</sup>

In this example, the Judge, the Defence council and the newspaper reporting the case all sought sympathy with the defendant. Increasingly from the mid-1970s many organisations began to oppose the male-centric system and started representing women's rights within the

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<sup>105</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, Springtime issue, MD7966/1/1/13, c.1978, pg. 6.

<sup>106</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/2/2/2, March 1980.

legal system, these organisations pushed for more protective legislation for women and children enduring violence in the home.

The National Women's Aid Federation was established in 1974 and provided care for women who had been subject to domestic abuse and rape. It provided the majority of funding for *That's No Lady*, they required the film's content to be as tactful as possible to highlight issues relative to domestic violence in such a way that would be palatable for their wide audience. Therefore, although synonymous with domestic violence, rape is not mentioned in the film. Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1979 reads, in 1978, 1100 rapes were reported to the police, it was estimated by the Man Alive Programme to be ten times above the official figure by 1979. 66% of women were raped by a man that they knew, 56% of rapes were committed in either the woman or the rapist's home.<sup>107</sup> Still in many cases in 1979, 'rape [was] not recognised within marriage.'<sup>108</sup> In an article in the 1980 Sheffield Women's Newsletter states that because most sexual assaults were committed in women's homes, 'no amount of self-imposed restrictions will free women from sexual abuse.' It continues by saying that, 'Women [were] trained from an early age to be passive and non-aggressive.'<sup>109</sup> Zoe Fairbairns, a member of the WLM, explains that up until 1991 legislation allowed husbands to rape their wives because they were considered their property.<sup>110</sup> Many feminists believed that the issue

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<sup>107</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 8.

<sup>108</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/2/2/2, March 1980.

<sup>110</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, *Zoe Fairbairns discusses YBA wife?*, C1420/24, 23 - 24 June 2011, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/zoe-fairbairns-yba-wife> accessed on 01/04/2017.

of violence and rape against women was more broadly to do with women's consciousness and a male dominated culture.

One characteristic of this male dominated culture was the representation of women in the media, advertisements and newspapers, they sought to either reinforce restrictive gender roles or objectify women to make financial gain. Liz Jones' article in Sheffield's Women's Newsletter explains, 'it's not surprising men carry on seeing women as an available and assaultable collection of tits and bums' because of the 'acres of passive female flesh which take the place of news in popular newspapers these days.'<sup>111</sup> Many feminists believed that the representation of women in popular culture only validated women's already subordinate position. Some organisations were established by women's groups to combat the sexual discrimination within popular culture.

Women Against Violence Against Women was established largely by revolutionary feminists in the late 1970s, they 'linked male domination with rape and other violence against women.'<sup>112</sup> Their 'Reclaim the night' marches were a reactionary measure against the police's advice to stay in at night to avoid attacks; demonstrators walked 'round back streets and side streets' chanting,

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<sup>111</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Bruley, S. (1999) *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pg. 153.

'YES MEANS YES  
AND NO MEANS NO  
HOWEVER WE DRESS  
AND WHEREVER WE GO!'<sup>113</sup>

Demonstrators were not only objecting to the individual attacks on women but also the broader treatment of women in society. One article in Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1975 discusses their 'male-orientated society' in which, 'facts about rape [were] seldom distinguished from the myths that flourish around them.'<sup>114</sup> The article goes on to list these myths, 'A man can't help himself', 'All women should be pure', women 'often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'', 'Women like to be treated with force and violence... it comes naturally to them' and 'Dishonour is a fate worse than death'.<sup>115</sup> These myths were also reproduced in the legal system and women's treatment within it.

For example, one article in Sheffield's Women's Newsletter 1975 discusses the position of raped women in court. In *DPP v. Morgan* the House of Lords ruled on an appeal, 'that a defendant in a rape case cannot be convicted if he believed that the woman consented.' Additionally, in rape cases the woman had to prove herself to have, 'good 'moral' character.

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<sup>113</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, No. 5, MD7966/1/1/5, October 1975.

<sup>115</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, No. 5, MD7966/1/1/5, October 1975.

'Previous abortions, pre-marital intercourse, being unmarried and on the Pill all count against her and are ruthlessly brought up by the defence to show that she was used to frequent or casual intercourse.'<sup>116</sup>

For the raped victim, the process of prosecuting their attacker was already extremely difficult, the article ends by asking, 'how many women will run the gauntlet of sneers and jokes to be told that she got what she asked for and enjoyed it!'<sup>117</sup> Another issue with the criminal justice system was the proliferation of women in employment in the area. A Sheffield Women's Newsletter 1979 states, 'Rape is only one way in which men use their power over women. All our most powerful institutions are controlled by men... We believe that when women share this power, and have control over their own lives, sex will no longer be used as a weapon against us.'<sup>118</sup>

The Equal Opportunities Commission stated in 2004 that 'women represent[ed] 18% of Members of Parliament, 23% of top civil service managers and 36% of public appointments.'<sup>119</sup> As a result of the minority numbers of women in senior positions the Fawcett Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice system explains that, 'policies are

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<sup>116</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/3, July 1975.

<sup>118</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Women's Liberation Movement: Newsletters, MD7966/1/1/14, February/March 1979, pg. 8.

<sup>119</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission, Press Release January 2004, Web archive. Available online via <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20070325120000/http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default8c5b-3.html> accessed on 25/08/2017.

literally man-made and the different context of women's lives is often overlooked when policies are formulated and implemented.<sup>120</sup> The Fawcett Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice system was established in order to examine the treatment of women as victims, as accused and convicted offences, and as workers within the criminal justice system. On the Commission were senior members within the justice system, police officer, probation officer, a judge, a barrister, the prison service, and in addition a journalist and a legal journalist. Vera Baird was the Commission's chair and a criminal barrister; Baird spoke to the WLM's Oral History project about her role and the conclusions of the Commission. Baird comments that the Commission found, 'very early on' that women who were victims of rape and domestic violence had been treated poorly by the justice system and outside agencies. The Commission then examined female defendants, those in custody or in crime. Baird explains that around two-thirds of women in prison had suffered either sexual abuse or violence in their life and half of women in prison had endured domestic violence. She concludes by saying that the women and the Criminal Justice system highlighted a trend in which,

'The victims and the defendants were the same women. They were sufferers from domestic violence. And we were punishing them twice, firstly as a society by not intervening sufficiently early to rescue them from the violence and the sexual abuse, and secondly when those attacks on them threw them into chaotic lifestyles and they

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<sup>120</sup> Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, A Report of the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, pg. 1. Available online via <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=da9130a4-6e24-4717-b770-3efee1d351aa> accessed on 25/08/2017.

started to take drugs or take drink or to steal to look after their kids 'cos they were in chaos, we put them in prison, so we failed women twice.'<sup>121</sup>

Domestic violence and rape continues to be a difficult issue to resolve as policies alone cannot stop it from happening and the repercussions for the victim are life-long. Barbara Jones volunteered at a Rape Crisis centre in London and remarks that, 'Rape wasn't about sex, rape wasn't about desire, rape was about power.'<sup>122</sup> Rape is a definitive method of exercising complete superiority over someone else, the prevalence of it and the lack of empathy towards rape around the time of this film only goes to further highlight the subordinate position of women.

## Conclusion

The last three demands of the WLM were introduced to continue advocating women's rights in various aspects of life. In this chapter, the issues presented in the three SFC films and associated WLM demands were interwoven into British culture, politics and the economy; solving the issues involved change not only in people's attitudes but also the equal treatment of women by institutions, legislation and employers. SFC used its films to communicate a message to encourage its audience to see women's issues from a different perspective and

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<sup>121</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, sound recording, *Vera Baird discusses women in the legal system*, C1420/51, 22 April – 20 June 2012, Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/vera-baird-women-in-the-legal-system> accessed on 01/04/2017.

<sup>122</sup> British Library, Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project, sound recording, *Barbara Jones discusses Rape Crisis centres and sexual fantasy*, C1420/53, 10 July 2012. Available online via <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/barbara-jones-rape-crisis-centres-and-sexual-fantasy> accessed on 07/09/2017.



raise awareness of problems, groups and events that the audience had not been exposed to before.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has used selected films of the SFC and analysed them in a local and national context. This thesis adds to a growing body of academic writing dedicated to feminist independent film and video through its analysis of SFC's productions. Feminist film and independent film in Sheffield are both areas of literature which have much potential for further academic attention; the SIF archive in Sheffield Hallam holds a vast amount of archival material which yet has not been analysed or discussed academically.

SFC achieved all its initial aims.<sup>1</sup> It made films around issues which concerned women, its members developed their film-making skills and they used their skills, with other women in the community, to control the image of women in film and present a more realistic representation of women's lives. SFC represented real-life Sheffield people and now retrospectively they offer an intimate snapshot into Sheffield's popular shared history. The SFC was a co-operative because of its working practice of sharing skills, its affiliation with socialism and working with men. In addition, its dedication to its integrative practice grew firm ties with the community, co-ordinating film viewings, discussions, interviews and even encouraging members of the public to get involved with filming. Feminists believed they were oppressed in a plethora of ways; the WLM's seven demands encapsulated many aspects of women's oppression and allowed feminists to focus on the minimum demands to effect change. The SFCs films were not produced to explicitly support specific demands; they feature

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<sup>1</sup> Sheffield City Archive, Correspondence and papers relating to the Sheffield Film Co-op, CA990/91, c. 1984.

various aspects of female oppression although the seven demands provide a solid framework for the analysis of the films. SFC represented issues through oral narratives; giving these broad issues a human face. Bernard remarks, 'By offering an unexpected point of view, filmmakers can sometimes force viewers to take a new look at a familiar subject.'<sup>2</sup> The SFC attempted to raise public consciousness of women's issues through screenings of its films through a vast, nationwide network. In addition, SFC implemented other techniques to try and raise consciousness of women's issues, for example after-screening discussions, re-discovery of women's history and their integrative practice; now as a historical source, oral histories preserved in SFC films continue to motivate discussions and commemorate historical events and the role of women.

The SFC dedicated itself to recording women's lives and collecting oral narratives and moving images from people in their locality. Chrissie Stansfield, a member of the SFC, commented that many of the working-class women that they met and wanted to interview did not realise that they had something of value to say.<sup>3</sup> SFC managed to convince these women that their voices were significant; otherwise a whole section of Sheffield's working class popular history would have been lost. SFC gave ordinary people the opportunity to speak, in their films, in discussions and through film-making; the significance of their films is that they made the political, personal.

Word count: 30,572

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard, S. (2016) *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction On Screen*, Fourth ed. pg. 26. Available online via Dawsonera accessed on 24/03/2017.

<sup>3</sup> Stansfield, Chrissie. Member of Sheffield Film Co-operative. Conversation with author, 04/08/2017. Personal communication.

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