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# Gender, Discourse and the Public Sphere

by

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A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

**February 2000**



## Abstract

This thesis aims to develop an analytical framework that will combine the insights of critical discourse analysis and a range of feminist perspectives on discourse as social practice. This framework is then employed in an investigation of women's participation in a number of 'communities of practice' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) previously monopolised by men. Comparisons are also made with women's involvement in organisations where they are in a majority and where a feminist ethos prevails. I argue that women often find themselves at odds with the masculinist discursive norms that masquerade as gender-neutral professional norms. This, in turn, has implications for the way in which women are perceived and judged by others, as well as for the roles they are assigned within the public sphere.

With reference to selective transcripts of in-depth structured interviews with women in each of the domains under investigation, I suggest that the complex negotiations in which they engage in order to manage contradictory expectations about how they *should* speak and behave cannot easily be accommodated within a dichotomous model of gendered linguistic styles. Nonetheless, this is precisely how their linguistic behaviour is often 'fixed' and evaluated by others, especially by the mass media. I make reference to a wide range of texts from a variety of media in order to illustrate the role the media, in particular, play in *mediating* the perception of women's involvement in the public sphere and in (re)producing normative gender ideologies.

The first case study focuses on women Labour MPs in the House of Commons. It includes a detailed analysis of the media coverage of Margaret Beckett's bid for the Labour leadership in 1994. It also considers whether the record increase in the number of women MPs in the wake of the 1997 general election has helped to make the Government's policy priorities more woman-friendly and/or has changed the culture of the House. The second case study on women's involvement in devolved politics briefly considers their contribution to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, before focusing in detail on the contribution made by the Northern Irish Women's Coalition to framing the Good Friday Agreement and to the structures of the new Northern Irish Assembly. The third case study compares the structure and rhetoric of the London-based Women's Environmental Network and those of male-dominated environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, and the relative media coverage these groups receive. The final case study compares women's involvement in the Church of England as outsiders, campaigning for women to be admitted to priesthood, and as recently ordained insiders, whose subordination within Church structures is sanctioned by canon law.

A central thesis of this study is that both the institutional constraints with which women have to negotiate and the stereotypical evaluations of their performance of public sphere roles have contributed to a process of discursive restructuring, whereby the gendered nature of the public/private dichotomy has been reproduced *within* the public sphere. However, women are not passively positioned in relation to the institutional and other discursive constraints that operate on them. I suggest that, they, in their turn, have helped to promote a counter tendency whereby the discursive boundaries between the traditional public and private spheres are becoming increasingly weakened and permeable. The study concludes by arguing for a more socially situated theory of language and gender to account for the constant tension that exists between the freedom of individuals to make choices within discourse and the normative practices that function to limit these choices.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Sara Mills, for her constructive criticism, support and encouragement at every stage throughout the course of the research for this thesis. I would also like to thank my informants who generously took time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed by me. I am grateful to friends, family and colleagues for maintaining their faith in my ability to complete this thesis. Special thanks are due to Stuart for his patience and moral support during the highs and lows of the last few years. Finally, I am grateful to the following for granting me permission to reproduce material for analysis: *Belfast Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Guardian* and *The Times*.

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### 1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to develop an analytical framework that will combine the insights of critical discourse analysis and a range of feminist perspectives on discourse as social practice. The intention is to employ this framework in an investigation of women's participation in a number of 'communities of practice' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) previously monopolised by men. Comparisons will also be made with women's involvement in organisations where they are in a majority and where a feminist ethos prevails. According to Cameron (1997: 34), the potential advantage of rooting analysis in specific linguistic communities is that, 'it leads away from global statements, and the stereotypical explanations that frequently accompany them, towards a more "local" kind of account that can accommodate intra- as well as intergroup differences'. Following Freed's (1996) insight that certain spaces, settings and domains may be gendered as either primarily masculine or feminine, I will argue that the minority and/or subordinate status of women within public sphere institutions, such as Parliament and the established Church, means that the discursive practices which circulate in these domains are those associated with white middle-class *male* speakers. Through habitual use, these masculinist<sup>1</sup> discursive norms have assumed the status of gender-neutral *professional* norms, as have male-oriented patterns of behaviour and association. I will suggest that, as a result, women's public rhetoric is more likely than men's to be fractured by competing, often contradictory, norms and expectations and that this fact, in turn, has implications for the way in which women are perceived and judged by others, as well as for the roles they are assigned within the public sphere.

With reference to selective transcripts of in-depth structured interviews with women in each of the domains under investigation, I will suggest that the complex negotiations in which they engage in order to manage these competing norms cannot easily be accommodated within a dichotomous model of gendered linguistic styles (see Appendices). Nonetheless, this is precisely how their linguistic behaviour is often 'fixed' and evaluated by others. In other words, there is a *metadiscursive gap* between how gender is practised by individual women in everyday talk and professional contexts, and the stereotypical standards by which their linguistic behaviour is judged. I will make reference to a wide range of texts from a variety of media in order to illustrate the role the media, in particular, play in *mediating* the perception of women's involvement in the public sphere and in (re)producing normative gender ideologies. A central thesis of this study is that both the institutional constraints with which women have to negotiate and the stereotypical evaluations of their performance of public sphere roles have contributed to a process of discursive restructuring. One effect of this has been that the gendered nature of the public/private dichotomy has been reproduced *within* the public sphere. The public sphere is in danger of becoming an asymmetrical two-tier system in which women's subordinate status is institutionalised. However, women are not passively positioned in relation to the institutional and other discursive constraints that operate on them. I will suggest that, they, in their turn, have helped to promote a counter tendency whereby the discursive boundaries between the traditional public and private spheres are becoming increasingly weakened and permeable.

Walter (1998) urges feminist activists to shift their attention away from what she perceives to be an unhealthy and unhelpful preoccupation with women's private sphere identities, to concentrate instead on securing greater equality for women within public

sphere roles. Although I will suggest that such a wholesale shift would mask the many parallels between the two spheres in terms of gender asymmetry, the fact that only one section in a recent reader comprising essays on language and gender (Coates ed. 1998) reflects work on women's involvement in the public domain seems to indicate that this *is* a relatively under-researched area. In particular, little specifically *linguistic* research has been carried out into women's engagement in the type of institutional discourses of the state that are the subject of a number of case studies in this thesis, namely those on women in party politics and the established Church. Likewise, although there is a general perception that women are particularly active in the micropolitics of new social movements (McRobbie 1994; Fairclough 1995), little detailed work has been undertaken into the distinctive discursive strategies, if any, they employ. These will be examined in the third case study based on a comparison between the London-based Women's Environmental Network (WEN) and a number of mainstream environmental groups, notably Friends of the Earth (FoE).

## **1.2 The Concept of 'Communities of Practice'**

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) adapted the concept of 'community of practice', from the work of the social learning theorists, Lave and Wenger (1991), who developed it in their study of traditional apprenticeships. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999: 186) offer the following definition of the concept, 'A CofP is an aggregate of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values - in short, practices'. This emphasis on 'practice' is important, since it means that interest is not confined to issues of language, but extends to the whole range of discursive competencies by which members of a given community of practice construct their individual and collective identities, including

their gendered identities. In her study of a community of practice comprising a group of Asian American adolescents, Eckert (1989) stresses the complex ways in which gender is *co-constructed* with other aspects of identity, including age, ethnicity and social status. She and McConnell-Ginet (1999: 186) acknowledge that these practices can arise out of common enterprises that are more or less informal, and/or more or less institutionalised. Although they do not elaborate on this point, it would seem to raise the crucial issue of the extent to which practices are normatively imposed by a few members of a community of practice, or consensually agreed by all its members.

This issue is addressed to some extent by the idea that some members of a given community of practice are deemed to be more 'core' than others. Coreness is based on the degree to which individuals align themselves with the shared interests, activities and viewpoint(s) of the community as a whole. The concept of coreness is likely to prove useful in explaining differences between women within a given community of practice, as well as differences between men. For instance, the degree to which women accommodate themselves to prevailing masculinist discursive practices may depend on their feminist orientation, from pro-feminist to anti-feminist, with a wide range of possible positions in between, including those based on different *kinds* of feminist affiliation. Since individuals co-construct their identities along a number of different axes simultaneously, on occasions, this may lead them to assume contradictory subject positions. I will argue that in male-dominated communities of practice, an element of dissonance is introduced into women's membership of these communities by virtue of their gender identity alone. Yet, attempts to define the concept of a community of practice, as opposed to other sociolinguistic concepts like 'speech community' and 'social network', tend to foreground *consensus* as an ideal. This is implicit in a comment made by Holmes and Meyerhoff, 'The basis of...variation lies in how

*successfully* an individual has acquired the shared repertoire, or assimilated the goal(s) of the joint enterprise, or established patterns of engagement with other members.' (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 176, my italics). However, in mixed-sex communities of practice, dominated by masculinist discursive practices, *conflict* is as likely to occur as consensus, especially since, as Cameron (1998: 447) notes, 'Women and men are now in competition for the same kind of power and status as opposed to taking up complementary roles'.

I will suggest that the social meanings attached to the discursive norms and practices adopted by individuals within a community of practice are not always those they intend to convey. Cameron's (1998 449) observation that, 'speaker intention is not the final guarantor of interactionally produced meaning', holds equally true for other semiotic modes, such as non-verbal behaviour, sartorial codes and so on. For this reason, it is necessary, as Bergvall (1999: 282) notes, 'to consider and clarify the force of the socially ascribed nature of gender: the assumptions and expectations of (often binary) ascribed social roles against which any performance of gender is constructed, accommodated to, or resisted'. This entails moving beyond the local accounts of discursive practices afforded by a focus on specific communities of practice to a consideration of the beliefs and ideologies about gender that circulate in the wider society. According to Bergvall (*ibid*: 284), the uni-directional power of media discourse, whereby the roles of producer and interpreter do not alternate, make it a particularly potent cultural site for the re-production of normative gendered identities and relations. This view is supported by the current study of media coverage of women's participation in a wide range of civil and public sphere roles. Nonetheless, I will suggest, that (some) media institutions also function as sites of discursive *struggle*

in the on-going debate about 'appropriate' gender roles and behaviour, rather than simply re-producing conservative gender ideologies.

### **1.3 Negotiating Masculinist Discursive Norms**

There is no doubt that in the west women are increasing their role as active citizens, participating in political debate and public opinion formation, most visibly in central and devolved institutions of the state formerly dominated by men, but also in grassroots movements, including women-specific groups. Yet, as Cameron (1997) notes, there is a need to account for differences *between* women, as well as between women and men, since not all women in civil and public sphere roles respond in the same way to the masculinist discursive norms they encounter. I intend to outline a number of possible strategies available to women who enter traditionally male-dominated communities of practice and to consider the potential risks and advantages of each, both from the point of view of the career interests of individual women, and from the point of view of the broader feminist goal of eradicating inequalities based on gender.

#### **1.3.1 The Accommodation Model**

One strategy, advocated by Lakoff (1975), is for women to embrace existing androcentric discursive practices that have become normative within the majority of communities of practice in the public sphere, on the grounds that these are perceived as powerful, whereas those associated with women's speech are perceived as weak and powerless. Although subsequent empirical work has called into question many of the claims made by Lakoff about so-called 'powerless' features of women's speech (O'Barr and Atkins 1980; Holmes 1984; Cameron *et al.* 1989), Lakoff's views have remained influential in both feminist theory and praxis. The strategy of accommodation she advocates is illustrated in practice in a recent study conducted by McElhinny (1995:

221), which revealed that female police officers defeminise their language and

behaviour, 'in order to reconcile others and themselves to their presence in the police department'. Yet, as Coates (1998) points out, even wholehearted and uncritical conformity to implicitly androcentric professional norms on the part of women can lead to negative evaluations of their speech:

But women who successfully adapt to characteristically male linguistic norms run the risk of being perceived as aggressive and confrontational, as unfeminine - in other words, there is a clash between what is expected of a woman and what is expected of a person with high status in the public sphere.

(Coates 1998: 295)

This claim is borne out by empirical evidence summarised by Crawford (1995: 65). It would appear, then, that the strategy of accommodation to androcentric norms can be counterproductive, leading to negative evaluations of women's performance of public sphere roles. A number of feminists have argued that the uncritical acceptance of this strategy is, in any case, fundamentally inimical to the feminist goal of promoting gender equality, since it helps to reify a situation in which masculinist norms are legitimated, while women's speech is constructed as a 'problem'.

### **1.3.2 The Critical 'Difference' Model**

A second strategy is for women to challenge the unproblematised status of masculinist norms, promoting in their stead the more co-operative discourse style which extensive empirical research reveals tends to be favoured by women in a wide range of cultural contexts (see, for instance, Holmes 1995). With regard to the performance of public sphere roles, this strategy is illustrated by Coates' (1995) account of studies on women's involvement in a number of occupational contexts. Again, there are risks associated with this approach, since evidence suggests that the mismatch between the discursive choices made and those that are deemed 'professional' means that women are often

judged to be weak and ineffectual (Holmes 1995; Tannen 1996). More fundamentally, some feminist linguists have criticised this approach as naïvely apolitical. Cameron (1992: 76), for instance says of masculine and feminine speech styles, 'However we value the two styles morally...it is evident that instrumentally they have political consequences'. By embracing feminine norms, she claims, women help to reify the traditional gendered nature of the public/private dichotomy, 'constructing women to function best in the private domain and men in the public one.' (*ibid*).

Evidence from my study would suggest, instead, that the value some 'difference' feminists attach to co-operative discourse strategies in the workplace may, in practice, have contributed to the creation of a gendered split *within* the public sphere, by reinforcing the prevailing view, including amongst women themselves, that they are naturally suited to relatively low status roles. These include roles such as those involving 'soft' portfolios (party politics), pastoral work (the Church) and fund-raising and administrative activities (the environmental movement). In her review of Holmes' book on linguistic politeness, MacMahon (1998: 279) is concerned that the advocacy of women-oriented norms in occupational roles may lead to a, 'Stepford Wives scenario in which women direct all their energies into being as blandly pleasant as possible'.

Interestingly, this echoes very closely the widespread perception of the majority of the Labour Party's female MPs, the so-called 'Blair's babes', who gained their seats in the 1997 General Election, a perception of blandness which has been fuelled by largely hostile media coverage.

Yet, this underestimates the ability of feminist-identified women to influence the norms and structures that prevail in the communities of practice in which they participate. For instance, I will argue that women have contributed to the increasing

'conversationalisation' of the public sphere, noted by Fairclough, amongst others (1992; 1994; 1995b), whereby interpersonally-oriented discursive practices are displacing purely transactional ones. Cameron herself acknowledges that feminine speech styles coincide with those increasingly favoured in certain workplace contexts:

What is happening, at least in theory, is a shift in the culture of Anglo-American corporate capitalism away from traditional (aggressive, competitive and individualistic) interactional norms and towards a new management style stressing flexibility, team-work and collaborative problem-solving, which is thought to be better suited to changing global economic conditions.

(Cameron 1995: 199)

In its most politicised or critical guise, the 'difference' approach stresses that it is not women who should change their discursive style, but rather it is men who should adopt the norms associated with women's speech on the grounds that these are both morally *and* instrumentally preferable (Holmes 1995: 209 ff.). This view was echoed recently by the editor of *Management Today*, 'If men want to be successful at work they must behave more like women.' (*Guardian* 27 September 1999). In this context, the advocacy of linguistic strategies preferred by many women no longer seems like wishful thinking. Cameron's view that '*gender is a problem, not a solution*' (1995: 42), seems to assume that the promotion of traditional feminine speech styles in the public domain does *not* trouble normative ideologies about gender, but it does, if it can be shown to call into question an equation of such norms exclusively with the private domain or with subordinate roles within the public domain. Cameron's major concern appears to be that an undue focus on issues of language can be a distraction from 'tackling the root cause of women's subordinate status.' (1995: 205). Yet, if the sort of 'verbal hygiene'<sup>2</sup> practices promoted by feminist linguists, such as Holmes (1995), in particular, can be shown to effect *structural* changes that lead to greater equality in the workplace, then this objection is no longer valid. Indeed, Holmes' approach would

seem to answer Toolan's (1997: 89) call for a *more critical* discourse analysis, one that seeks to change, correct and minimise 'inequity, hegemony and control'.

This study will, however, call into question any *simple* equation between the co-operative discursive style favoured by many women, and increasingly promoted in a number of public sphere domains, and more inclusive and egalitarian practices in the workplace. It will be argued that the meanings this style carries depend on the purpose for which it is used and the co(n)text in which it occurs. For instance, whatever the intention of the text producer, it may be perceived and evaluated by addressees as patronising, insincere or even, I will suggest, as directive, rather than inclusive. Swann and Graddol (1995: 144) make the point that this type of style can serve to disguise the operation of power, since it, 'can be used to give the appearance of democratic participation whilst being well designed for the manufacture of consensus and consent'. I will argue that the connection between linguistic practice and the gendered identities and relations it helps to constitute needs, therefore, to be evaluated in a highly context-sensitive way.

A more fundamental objection put forward by Cameron (1995) to the 'difference' model is that the polarised nature of gendered discourse styles it identifies is as much a product of the empirical research carried out by sociolinguists as something 'discovered' by it. Elsewhere (1990), she expresses her scepticism about the equation of quantitative methods of data collection and the 'truth' about linguistic behaviour. In this instance, the implication is that researchers end up interpreting their data in ways that will confirm their *a priori* assumption about gender duality. However, study after study, using a wide range of sophisticated and context-sensitive modes of data analysis, as well as less reliable ones, have revealed remarkably similar patterns of linguistic

behaviour amongst women in a range of cultural and institutional settings (P. Brown 1980; Tannen 1989; Holmes 1995; Wodak & Benke 1996). This does not mean that such behaviour should be interpreted as part of an unchanging female essence. Indeed, far from relying on essentialist notions about gender, many 'difference' feminists assume that men can and *should* shift their gendered linguistic behaviour in the direction of feminine norms (see Holmes 1995: 209 ff.). That the linguistic variables that correlate with women's speech are, in many instances, *preferred* norms is evident from women's groups and organisations where they have become normative and where they *do* tend to coincide with egalitarian structures (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

More problematic are the views of those political theorists whose ideas *do* rely on essentialist ideas about women's speech. For instance, in the concluding chapter of her book, *Public Man, Private Woman*, Elshtain (1993) answers her initial question about the sort of public language feminists should begin to speak, by calling for 'values and language which flow from "mothering"' (*ibid*: 336). It remains unclear whether she is referring here to the institution of mothering or the latent potential in the majority of women to mother. Either way, the criticism Butler (1990: 89) makes of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, that it reduces the multiplicity of female identity to a univocal signifier of the maternal body, applies equally to Elshtain's position. Central to Elshtain's conception of an 'ethical polity' is a public sphere infused with private sphere values. Yet, by emphasising 'womanly' values of care, community, selflessness and so on, and by linking these to natural sex difference, Elshtain helps to re-produce the discourse that defines them as such. This discourse is itself a political construction which serves to sustain a gender hierarchy in which women are likely to be perceived as naturally suited to subordinate roles within the public sphere. As Cameron (1995: 43) points out, the goal of feminist theory is not to reify existing gender relations, but to

'open up the possibility of challenge and change'. This, I would suggest, is what the more politicised version of 'difference' feminism does.

### **1.3.3 The Performative Model**

The uncritical acceptance of pre-existing masculinist norms, or the active promotion of alternative norms associated with women's speech, are not the only strategies available to women who enter public sphere domains. A third solution, identified in more recent ethnographic work, is the conscious shifting between masculine and feminine norms (see, for instance, Hall and Bucholtz eds. 1995; Bergvall *et al.* eds. 1996). This presupposes a performative<sup>3</sup> view of gender as something that can be deployed strategically. My data indicates that this type of style shifting is routinely practised by women in traditionally male-dominated institutions. Thus a number of my respondents said they invest in ideals of femininity for strategic purposes in certain circumstances, while in others they align themselves with masculinist professional norms with equally strategic, but different, ends in view. I will suggest that this type of gendered style shifting is not without risks, since the hybrid nature of the resulting discursive style can lead to accusations of inconsistency and insincerity, accusations that are prevalent in media coverage of high profile women. In addition, I will call into question the belief that such *strategic* shifts in linguistic behaviour are invariably radical.

It has become a truism amongst poststructuralist feminists that performative shifts further the goal of promoting greater gender equality, since they deconstruct polarised beliefs about gender, or, in this instance, about masculine and feminine speech styles (Butler 1990; 1993). Yet, as Cameron notes, 'Playing with the codes only keeps the codes in play' and paradoxically may even reify them in their 'most exaggerated and dichotomous forms.' (1997: 32). The former British prime minister, Margaret

Thatcher, is a case in point. She switched between a confrontational masculinist style and a self-consciously exaggerated and stylised version of feminine speech and behaviour (Fairclough 1989: 182 ff.; W. Webster 1990). I will suggest that, in many instances, such shifts in style are, in any case, less a matter of political calculation and more a pragmatic means of managing the competing, often contradictory, expectations that operate on women in public sphere roles. I will also argue that the poststructuralist assumption that identity can be performed strategically is too rational and intentionalist and ignores the personal and emotional investment individuals have in aspects of identity, including those constituted by the linguistic choices they make. As Tannen (1995: 131) points out, speech styles are not, 'hats you can put on when you enter an office and take off when you leave'.

#### **1.3.4 The Concept of 'Appropriacy'**

A performative theory of language and gender relies implicitly on an appeal to the concept of 'appropriacy'. Thus in her research on the style shifting of female engineering students, Bergvall concludes, 'The trick is to know when to behave appropriately.' (1996: 180). However, judgements about the appropriacy or otherwise of an individual's behaviour are usually outside her/his control. Indeed, Bergvall's own findings illustrate this point. She makes clear that even where assertive female students employ strategies, such as self-deprecating laughter, to mitigate the perception of their power, they were often negatively assessed by peers. Despite their attempts to engage in a complex set of negotiations with conflicting role expectations, they remain caught in an evaluative double bind, 'When the women are assertive, they are resisted by their peers; when they are facilitative, their work may be taken for granted and not acknowledged.' (Bergvall 1996: 192). When Bergvall says of her respondents, 'Most often, however, they operate outside the limiting norms that would define them on the

basis of predetermined, binary, oppositional categories' (*ibid*), I would argue that this is as much an instance of wishful thinking, as an interpretation extrapolated from her data, since no such discursive space in fact exists.

Like Cameron (1995), I am suspicious of appeals to 'appropriacy', which is often viewed by linguists as a panacea for all those ill-informed and damaging appeals to 'correctness' made by 'shamans' (Bolinger 1980). Cameron (1995: 234) deftly exposes the equally subjective bases for most judgements about what is appropriate. As noted above, the question remains, who decides and on what basis? The answer is that such decisions remain the privilege of the powerful, and, I would suggest, of the increasingly powerful mass media. The criteria employed are often stereotypical, drawing upon folklinguistic ideas about the connection between gender and linguistic behaviour. It could be argued that there is no reason why the concept of appropriacy could not be extended to include the 'affective' dimension of speech, in other words, its ability to forge and sustain interpersonal relationships or to promote collaborative, rather than confrontational, interaction. Yet, appeals to 'appropriacy' tend *not* to be ideologically creative, but rather lead to judgements that are politically conservative, hence Cameron's point that they serve to 'reify the norms we currently have' (1995: *ibid*).

Feminist praxis demands other criteria: not simply whether speech is appropriate to its context of utterance, but whether it presents a challenge to existing unequal relations of power; not whether it accords with the advice from a training manual on 'how to get the most from your staff', but whether it is sincere and consistent with one's actions. Tannen (1995) argues that women managers tend to praise staff more than male peers, but unless this praise is consistent with their general managerial style, in other words, unless it is perceived as *more* than purely strategic, then it is likely to induce cynicism

rather than motivation. Montgomery (1999) refers to this as the 'performative paradox', 'If a person's behaviour is perceived by others *as* a performance, it will be judged to be insincere, for sincerity presupposes, as its general condition, the absence of performance.' (Scannell, cited in Montgomery 1999: 9). The contingent and subjective nature of criteria such as 'sincere' and 'consistent' mean, of course, that there will be no universal agreement about them. For instance, there may well be some who will have judged Thatcher as sincere when she celebrated the superior virtues of domesticity for women *when addressing them*, but there are others who will have been all too aware of the gap between her rhetoric, on the one hand, and her policies and lived experience, on the other. Since all judgements about discursive style are therefore both subjective and contested, including judgements about appropriacy, it is necessary to make a persuasive case for those which seem to be in keeping with feminist goals. Thatcher's style fails on these grounds for many feminists, however competent and stylistically flexible she may have appeared.

Montgomery (1999: 12) argues that, 'The emphasis on validity claims adds a hitherto neglected dimension to the systematic study of language and communication'. I would suggest that the importance of validity claims has been seriously underestimated by those who advocate a performative approach to language and gender. If one accepts that identity is constituted intersubjectively through language, then the response to one's use of language by others is crucial. Nor do judgements about the validity of an individual's speech rely exclusively on linguistic evidence. Equally important factors are accompanying prosodic, paralinguistic, and kinesic traces and cues. Montgomery (1999) illustrates the central role played by these factors in his analysis of the different evaluations of the verbal tributes offered by Tony Blair, the Queen and Earl Spencer respectively in the aftermath of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. He concludes

his analysis by claiming that sincerity has shifted from being a private sphere virtue to a virtue expected of public figures. He explains this shift by linking it to, 'the changing ways in which broadcasting configures modalities of communication.' (*ibid*: 29). I would argue, however, that its importance has increased in *all* public sphere domains in direct proportion to the emphasis placed on image consultancy and what Fairclough (1992: 9) refers to as the 'technologization' of language in these domains. Those in public sphere roles ignore its importance at their peril.

#### **1.4 Theorising Gender**

Cameron (1996) argues that work in sociolinguistics needs to theorise the social, and, in particular, gender, in a more sophisticated way, since it, 'has turned out to be an extraordinarily intricate and multilayered phenomenon - unstable, contested, intimately bound up with other social divisions.' (1996: 33-4). She believes feminists have a responsibility *not* to operate with reductive and misleading definitions of gender, since their, 'research findings have been taken up in popular media, and applied institutionally for practical purposes.' (*ibid*: 34). This is certainly borne out by my research into media coverage of women in public life which reveals that media producers frequently operate with reductive gender stereotypes.

##### **1.4.1 Gender, One Variable Amongst Many**

Cameron claims that the complex mapping of the intersection between gender and other variables is, 'probably the greatest theoretical change in feminist linguistics over the past twenty years.' (1997a: 33). Given the focus of this study, the main emphasis will be on the way gender intersects with institutional 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977) and status, as well as with the gender politics espoused by individual women. However, I will suggest that other identity criteria intersect with gender in a way that often doubly

disadvantages women. Thus the minority of women priests who are black and/or lesbian seem to attract particularly discriminatory responses from parishioners. This double 'otherness' appears to be too much of a threat to the *status quo*, especially in a climate of backlash against so-called political correctness, a climate that I would argue has helped to re-legitimise overt sexism, racism and heterosexism. More generally, allusions to class and age often function, especially in the media, to undermine women's credibility in public sphere roles in a way that is less true in the case of male colleagues.

While it is important to acknowledge that the isolation of gender as a variable in relation to linguistic behaviour has led to a distorted view of its importance and mode of operation, it is more difficult to avoid 'bolting on' other variables in a tokenistic way. This is something black women in particular seem suspicious of, hence, the w(e)ary reaction of high profile black women, most notably the veteran Labour MP, Diane Abbot, who declined to be interviewed by me for this study. To some extent the influence of other axes of identity is less marked in the case of women's participation in the institutions investigated in this study, since implicit identity criteria of whiteness and middle-classness, and to a lesser extent, heterosexuality and middle-agedness, continue to operate as *de facto* entry credentials to what remain essentially conservative institutional spaces. For instance, there are only two black women MPs and few black women priests, despite the relatively high proportion of black people in the Church of England. One might assume that the relatively radical credentials of the environmental movement would make it more open to participation by black people, yet, significantly, those who set up the Black Environmental Network (BEN) say they felt compelled to adopt a separatist policy in order to have their voices heard in a white-dominated movement (in the *Guardian* 17 March 1999).

#### 1.4.2 Pluralising Masculinities

Just as intra-group differences between women need to be acknowledged, so too do those between men. Thus Hearn (1992: 4) makes the point that, 'not only do men dominate women, but also different types of men dominate other men - able-bodied over men with disabilities, heterosexual over gay, and so on'. This is illustrated in the Church's ruling on gay priests, whereby they are denied the right to practise their sexuality openly. The introduction to a collection of essays on language and masculinity, edited by Johnson and Meinhof (1997), suggests that inequalities between men could be reflected in the use of 'masculinities' in the plural. A number of essays in the collection stress the variability of linguistic behaviour amongst men (Kiesling 1997; Pujolar 1997), while others call into question the assumption that men eschew interactive strategies based on co-operation (Hewitt 1997; Cameron 1997). Hewitt, for instance, points out that the competitive displays in which men often engage require all participants to submit to the operation of consensual rules. A number of the studies on which the essays are based underline the importance of language as a resource for establishing and maintaining homosocial bonds between men. However, I will argue that these co-operative strategies amongst men function to exclude women, and gay men, and therefore constitute an important mechanism for ensuring the continuing marginalisation of both women and homosexual men within public sphere institutions. Threadgold (1997: 33-4) alludes to the even more pervasive power of a *presupposed* homosocial audience. I will also explore this phenomenon, especially in relation to the way in which mediatized public discourse covertly genders its ideal addressee as male. Johnson (1997: 12) argues that the disproportionate focus on women's speech means that men's speech has retained its status as the 'default mode' for both sexes. As a corrective to this, in my case study on the London based Women's Environmental Network (WEN) in Chapter 5, I intend to analyse the linguistic practices of both men

and women within the same frame of reference, by comparing WEN with male-

dominated environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace.

However, the virtual exclusion of feminine norms from many public sphere institutions, until relatively recently, makes it difficult to accept Johnson's view that feminine and masculine norms are mutually dependent constructions in a dialectical relationship (*ibid.*: 22). Instead, I will suggest that the relationship between them is often conflictual and that in many instances the perceived efficacy of women-oriented norms has called into question the taken-for-granted status of masculinist norms.

However, I agree with Johnson's view that the neglect of close attention to men's linguistic behaviour has served to obscure the considerable common ground that exists between the speech of women and men, something that is not surprising, given that they are drawing on the same linguistic resources. Evidence from my data indicates that the commonalities are, if anything, increasing. Not only are the discursive strategies associated with women's speech increasingly employed by both women and men in the public sphere, but women in public life are also encroaching on traditionally male-oriented linguistic domains, such as swearing (see also de Klerk 1997). In addition, the willingness of women to talk openly about issues that have traditionally been treated as taboo amongst men, such as menstruation, breast cancer, pregnancy and so on, poses a challenge to the idea that women's language is more likely than men's to be marked by euphemism.

### **1.4.3 Sex and Gender: Collapsible Categories?**

The title of a book edited by Bergvall, Bing and Freed (1996), *Rethinking Language and Gender Research: Theory and Practice*, indicates their view that the essays in the collection represent a new departure in the field, and more specifically in the conception of gender which they feel ought to inform the theory and practice of

linguistic research. Following Butler (1990), they make the radical, and in my view untenable, claim that sex, like gender, is a constructed category. This leads them to confuse and conflate the two terms, sex/gender, thereby effectively erasing a distinction that many feminists have found to be theoretically useful. This is evident in the following where they employ the terms designating sexual identity, female-male, where feminine-masculine would normally be employed:

Individuals who fail to fit the strict female-male dichotomy are either ignored or subject to boundary policing... Thus, assertive women may be nudged back into their approved roles by being labelled *aggressive bitches*, and nurturing men may be reminded of their deviance by being labelled *wimp, sissy, fay* or *pussy-whipped*.

(Bing and Bergvall: 1996: 6-7)

I would argue that this offers an account of the policing of *gendered*, rather than sexual, identities. In any case, my work on sacerdotal ministry in the Church of England suggests that gender-crossing behaviour is differentially evaluated for men and women, whereas Bing and Bergvall seem to imply that they are equally penalised for such behaviour. The instances they cite where *sexual* identities seem to be at stake are not, it seems to me, sufficiently widespread to merit collapsing the traditional feminist formulation whereby sex is seen as a biological category and gender as a socially constructed one. The fact that such instances trouble the sex/gender dichotomy does not mean that this dichotomy is no longer theoretically useful; it simply means that they are exceptions to a *general* and *generalisable* rule. I remain unconvinced by their claim that, 'the idea that female and male bodies are fundamentally different is relatively new.' (*ibid*: 7) since the historical evidence they cite is selective and patchy.

Equally unconvincing is the attempt made by Butler (1990: xx) to generalise about how people 'do gender' from the marginal practice of male/female drag artists. As

Cameron (1997: 32) points out, in many cases, 'the femininities they enact are exaggerated stereotypes, fakes'. Far from furthering a feminist agenda, such caricatured performances of femininity are often perceived as insulting by women. How can one explain the insult, unless there is something in traditional modes of femininity that many women seem anxious to defend? It suggests that women *invest* in some aspects of femininity which they view as positive markers of self-identity, *as well as* those which would be deemed by some feminists as reactionary. This perhaps offers a timely reminder that not all aspects of the ideology of femininity, including those traditionally associated with linguistic behaviour, are incompatible with feminist goals. To argue that they *are* ignores the fact that as active, though socially constrained, agents, women themselves have helped to shape the conception of gender, including gendered linguistic behaviour, that circulates at any given time in a given society.

The main argument put forward by Bing and Bergvall (1996) is for an approach that does not involve the bringing of preconceived ideas to bear on the study of language, sex and gender; yet it is clear from their introductory chapter that they are already committed to a way of thinking about both which emphasises diversity, rather than dichotomy, as though diversity were in itself a good thing. This may well be true, but a political case needs to be made for such a view. This is symptomatic of the poststructuralist tendency to privilege discursive plurality, yet as Cameron points out in the same volume, the value of different linguistic styles is contingent upon the context of use (1996: 43), and, I would add, the mechanisms by which they are evaluated. Yet, I am persuaded by the arguments of feminist linguists, such as Coates (1995) and Holmes (1995), that some speech norms favoured by women have the *potential* to be ethically and instrumentally preferable to the masculinist speech norms

that currently assume the guise of professional norms in the public domain. The promotion of this view, far from leading to the co-optation of feminist research on language and gender, can in fact constitute a radical challenge to the *status quo*.

Equally paradoxical is Bergvall's (1996) commitment to deconstructing gender as a category, while at the same time urging women to recognise it as a ready-made identity marker by which they can assert their common experiences. She insists that, in the case of her respondents, a failure of empathy with other women, 'fuels the conflicts they experience' (*ibid*: 193). She develops this point further, 'The anti-feminist stance of many of the women, reinforced by the conservative campus climate, leads them to be naively apolitical, depriving them of any common ground upon which to work together to contest limiting gender stereotypes.' (*ibid*: 193). Yet, this is precisely what her theoretical commitment to the deconstructing of *both* sex and gender polarities inevitably leads to.

#### **1.4.4 Gender, A Flexible and Fixed Category**

The approach to gender that informs this study is one that views it as both a flexible *and* a fixed category. On the one hand, it will be argued that gender does not simply reflect a pre-existing identity, but helps constitute, maintain and transform that identity in everyday situations via talk. On the other, the metadiscursive control exercised by others, and especially by the mass media, constrains this process of on-going identity formation. This is because the *metadiscursive gap* alluded to earlier (1.1) means that, however fluid the enactment of gendered identities by individual women may be, the schemata<sup>5</sup> by which their behaviour and speech are evaluated often remain fixed and persistent. For this reason it is important that feminists should not simply dismiss

folklinguistic assumptions:

Although folklinguistics is often dismissed by linguists as unscientific and inaccurate (both of which it is), it is certainly not without interest for a feminist linguistic theory. Feminists must pay attention to beliefs about male and female speech, because prejudice is often more powerful than fact.  
(Cameron 1992: 54)

I would argue that this is especially true when it comes to understanding the different ways in which the speech of men and women in public sphere roles is evaluated.

Folklinguistic ideas are also important for understanding women's self-perceptions of their own linguistic practices and the ideological and symbolic work that such practices perform. This study will attempt to map out the complex ways in which interpretative constraints and self-perceptions interact.

The theory of gender outlined above is shared by Crawford (1995), but she sees the political potential of 'doing gender' as radically circumscribed. She creates the impression that conversational humour, largely restricted to private sphere interaction, is one of the few discursive spaces that permit women to exercise the linguistic licence to 'do gender' in ways that transgress conventional gender expectations. In this way, she effectively denies agency to women as speakers, even while admitting this agency in theory. Butler (1990) betrays the opposite tendency of over-emphasising the constitutive nature of discourse, while ignoring material constraints. I agree with Threadgold's view that her work betrays a confusion between the metaphorical and the real:

Her metaphor/narrative of performing gender is seductive and productive in her writing, but the gendered body which performs does so in fictions, again in a place apart from the material and institutional constraints on real bodies... it may well be that it is only those with a certain level of cultural and economic capital and the right colour skin whose lives as discursive practices are really

As Fairclough points out, subjects are socially pre-constituted; there is no simple 'free play of ideas in people's heads' (1992: 66). Unlike Butler (1990), Dorothy Smith (1990) recognises the institutional constraints that operate on women's identities. She argues that there is a constant tension between women's freedom to make choices within discourse and the regulatory practices which function to limit these choices and determine how they are perceived. For instance, in her discussion of the textually mediated discourse of femininity, she points out that, while women are subjected to disciplinary regimes embedded in texts, 'Behind appearance and its interpretation is secreted a subject who is fully an agent' (*ibid*: 193). Following Smith, I will argue that, 'women actively work out their subject positions and roles in the process of negotiating discursive constraints.' (D. Smith 1990: 86). More specifically, I will suggest that by exploiting this dialectic between structure and agency, women have been able to effect both discursive and structural change in a number of communities of practice within the public sphere.

I do not, however, share Threadgold's (1997) emphasis on an *embodied* feminist practice. Her preoccupation with the corporeality of traces in texts appears to be motivated by a desire to write back into poststructuralist theory the gendered nature of the subject. It is also linked to her critique of theorists, 'who see ideology as the result of a failure of *intellectual* labour.' (*ibid*: 98). Although at one point she refers to 'embodied consciousness' (*ibid*: 50), there is little reference thereafter to consciousness. Granted, she attempts to bridge the gap between bodily habit and belief by appealing to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus'. However, the overwhelming impression emerges of female subjects as reducible to their bodies, which in turn implies only a

limited and crudely materialist view of human agency. With Elshtain (1981: 277), I believe that 'a rich view of the human subject' is a prerequisite for an adequate feminist social theory. More specifically, I believe that a theoretical approach that seeks to promote and facilitate intellectual labour is a sound basis for a feminist politics, since such a view is perfectly compatible with safeguarding our bodily selves.

### **1.5 Theorising Masculinist Hegemony**

The term 'patriarchy' is problematic since it implies a monolithic and totalising system of oppression in which all men dominate all women. This obscures the differences between women, noted above (1.4.2), as well as differences between men. The term's original meaning, 'the rule of the fathers', carries connotations of paternalism that do not capture the subtle and varied ways in which women continue to experience discrimination in a range of public domains. This is not to deny that residual aspects of this paternalism can still be found. For instance, it manifests itself in systems of patronage and mentorship, whereby powerful older men help to foster the careers of younger male colleagues, incidentally sidelining the career chances of women. Likewise, Threadgold (1997) identifies a persistent public discourse of 'care and protection' that seeks to contain and control both women and members of ethnic minorities. However, I will suggest that two of the main ways in which gender inequality is perpetuated is through the operation of impersonal masculinist discursive practices that have become normative, as well as through concrete fraternal networks that transcend the boundaries of institutional discourses.

I will argue that the operation of masculinist hegemony is diffuse; it is embedded in impersonal discursive practices and institutional structures that are historically associated with men. Foucault's (1984) concept of 'orders of discourse'<sup>6</sup> allows for an

understanding of discourses as masculinist in their expression. He claims that certain institutional discourses maintain their dominance because they are organised around practices of exclusion, often involving speech rituals, 'Religious, judicial, therapeutic, and in large measure also political discourses can scarcely be dissociated from the deployment of a ritual which determines both the particular properties and the stipulated roles of the speaking subjects.' (*ibid*: 121). And again, in his definition of what he terms 'societies of discourse', he highlights their ability to position those outside as excluded 'others', '...[they] function to preserve or produce discourses, but in order to make them circulate in a closed space, distributing them only according to strict rules, and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution.' (*ibid*). It is this insight that will be developed further in my own analysis of women's exclusion from, marginalisation within, and challenges to, a range of masculinist institutional discourses which position them as 'outsiders within'.

Although the social theorist Sylvia Walby (1990) retains the term 'patriarchy', her work is useful in that she avoids the economistic tendency which dominates discussions of the operation of masculinist hegemony. Instead, she suggests that there are many dimensions of power (economic, political and cultural) which form a complex matrix of power relations, often with institutional bases. Walby's major insight, and one that is central to this study, is that, whereas private patriarchy operated on the basis of exclusionary tactics, denying women access to participation in the public sphere, public forms of masculinist power are segregationist and subordinating. As was mentioned earlier, this study will suggest that the asymmetrical power relationship which underpinned the traditional public/private dichotomy has been re-produced *within* public sphere institutions. In particular, it will be argued that women continue to be seen and judged by male colleagues and by the media in terms more appropriate to the

private domain. Hearn observes, 'of special interest is the occurrence of sexual harassment, which is often at high levels when women enter what are traditionally men's domains and occupations.' (1992: 175). This practice, together with more covert means of segregating and marginalising women, have the effect of undermining their claims to authority in public sphere roles.

A number of feminist theorists (see Sedgwick 1985; Pateman 1989) have suggested that the nature of masculinist power itself has changed in that it has become less top-down, and more horizontal in its operation. For instance, Sedgwick (1985) argues that the interdependence and solidarity between men, what she terms 'homosocial bonding', is one of the mechanisms by which masculinist norms become reproduced in the public sphere:

...in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power; a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence.

(Sedgwick 1985: 25, italics in the original)

The form this takes is, she claims, culturally contingent. It can range from hierarchical forms of homosociality, made manifest in bonds based on competitive mastery and subordination, to more egalitarian forms that rely on an ideology of brotherhood which transcends differences of social class. The latter seem to be particularly relevant to the operation of institutional discourses in the west in the 1990s and have been labelled collectively and variously as 'the old boys' network', 'the boys' club' and 'cronyism' in everyday parlance, and as 'virarchy' (Waters 1989) and 'fratriarchy' (Remy 1990) by social theorists. Even Coward (1999), who has expressed scepticism about the systematic nature of current forms of gender discrimination against women in the west, acknowledges that such networks continue to be detrimental in their effect,

'Networking and men's narcissistic interest in each other often cut women out of positions of power. Sexual attitudes are often denigratory. Male hostility to women is still a significant fact.' (Coward 1999: 212). I will suggest that women's entry into previously male dominated environments has, in some instances, led to a defensive strengthening of fraternal networks and that a 'thickening' effect occurs because these networks often cut across the boundaries of different communities of practice.

In order to counter the masculinism they confront in many public institutional spaces, women have, in many cases, developed their own counter-networks. The potential power of such networking has been emphasised by many feminists who have achieved positions of prominence in public sphere institutions. Thus in an article in

*Everywoman*, Mary Robinson, then President of Ireland, highlighted:

...the kinds of structures that are evolved by women, for example, the capacity to link an informal grouping together in very supporting and helping ways. I think that this way of networking, and networking in a way that links grassroots organisations into systems, is very important.

(cited in *Everywoman*, September 1995: 11)

Yet the relatively recent history of this type of networking among women means that its ability to transform public sphere institutional structures is often contained by the far more potent power of male homosocial bonds which are deeply embedded in public sphere discourses. As Macdonald (1993) points out, popular media representations of the concept of sisterhood have meant that it is often equated with sentimentalism, a charge which Elshtain argues was justifiably levelled against suffragist public rhetoric (1993: 359). Macdonald (1993) suggests that the inevitable reduction of sisterhood to a matter of *emotional* bonding, undermines its radical potential. This was strikingly evident in media reports of the period that followed the signing of the Northern Ireland peace settlement (4 April 1998). The comment, reproduced in a wide

range of broadcast media, was that, 'Everyone felt very emotional, *especially the women of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.*' (my italics). This comment was underscored by images of the women crying uncontrollably and hugging one another. The question arises as to why male homosocial bonding has not been subject to the same kind of reductive treatment in the media? The common-sense view of male homosocial bonds is that they are rational and strategic. This may be symptomatic of the common phenomenon whereby the discursive strategies employed by women invariably become downgraded.

It is important to acknowledge that gender inequality is not only reproduced by the activities of men. Male-identified women, like Margaret Thatcher, pride themselves on being seen as offering no special favours to women, which almost inevitably means that they end up discriminating against them, as Thatcher did. She did little to promote the careers of other women, thereby safeguarding her reputation as an *exceptional* woman, one even worthy of the title 'honorary man'. A very different problem is the fact that women, whether consciously or not, often have an investment in their own subordinate status. For instance, members of the organisation, Women Against the Ordination of Women, seem to have derived reassurance from the paternalistic authority wielded by male priests. On the basis of in-depth interviews with women, Coward (1992) suggests that some respond to the competitive and often hostile environment of the workplace by returning to the familiarity of the domestic realm. A legitimate feminist goal is surely to make this environment less alienating and I will argue that one way in which women have sought to do this is by promoting more woman-friendly discursive norms, *as well as* by seeking to change institutional structures.

## 1.6 The Discursive Restructuring of Institutional and Societal Orders of

### Discourse

The political philosopher, Carole Pateman (1989), argues that masculinism has been intrinsic to the bourgeois public sphere since its inception. Hearn (1992), for instance, provides a detailed historical account of the ways in which the objectifying discourses associated with public bureaucracies have evolved in conjunction with hegemonic forms of masculinity. I will suggest that one effect of women's entry into traditionally male-dominated domains has been to make *explicit* the implicitly masculinist nature of the beliefs, norms, values and practices that masquerade as gender-neutral professional norms within these communities of practice. Most men are less likely to find themselves at odds with these norms, since they accord more readily with their socially ascribed roles. By contrast, some women have felt so alienated from them that they have elected to develop alternative communities of practice, based on women-oriented discursive practices. A central thesis of this study is that a process of discursive restructuring is currently taking place within the institutional order of public sphere discourse, whereby the gendered nature of the public/private dichotomy is being reproduced *within* the public sphere, with women occupying a disproportionate number of subordinate roles.

The somewhat crude, but influential, critical mass theory, espoused by Dahlerup (1988), assumes that it is only when women constitute a substantial skewed minority of about 30% that they are likely to be in a position to contest the dominant discursive practices that prevail in traditionally male-dominated institutions. However, my research suggests that even relatively small numbers of women *can* make a difference within a community of practice, if they manage to develop strategies which ensure that their 'interactional power' (Mills, forthcoming) exceeds their institutional power and

status (see especially Chapter 4). On the other hand, the mere presence of substantial numbers of women, in itself, offers no guarantee that the masculinism that pervades many institutions and organisations in the civil and public spheres will be called into question, unless some, or all, of these women unite to promote the goal of gender equality. Even where this occurs, I will suggest that the efforts of feminist-identified women can be undermined by a range of factors, including the operation of fraternal networks both within, and, more significantly, *between*, communities of practice. Such networks are not necessarily co-operative; they are often productively competitive and may only incidentally marginalise and/or exclude women. Yet, if it is true, as Hearn suggests, that the public identities of men and the homosocial relations between them are now more likely to be forged *covertly* through interaction in *private* spaces: 'clubs, chats in saunas, behind closed doors... "fixes" in pubs and snugs, in locker rooms' (*ibid*: 20), then this makes them even more difficult to contest.

The institutionalisation of gender inequalities has been exacerbated by the operation of certain 'colonising' discourses at the societal level of discourse. Habermas (1962, 1989) defines 'colonising' discourses as types of discourse that have particular salience in late capitalist society and which expand their functions across institutions. His thesis is that communicative discourse types, those oriented to interpersonal goals, are being colonised by strategic goals. Although Habermas does not say so explicitly, these are goals at odds with, or even hostile to, the discursive norms often favoured by women. One such discourse, alluded to above, is the discourse of professionalism which purports to be gender-neutral, but which in reality emerges from a long tradition of male monopoly of the norms associated with professional life, and which is expanding at the expense of more vocational discourse types (see especially Chapter 6). Perhaps *the* most salient colonising discourses in post-industrial society, however, are those

associated with commodification. As Fairclough (1994: 253) points out, these have the effect of weakening the boundaries, 'between on the one hand the discursive practices of the market in the more traditional sense, and on the other hand the discursive practices of politics, public services like health and education, government and other forms of public information, and even the arts.' (Fairclough 1994: 253). I will suggest that commodified discourses have had contradictory effects on women's access to, and participation in, the public sphere. As Walby (1990: 181) notes, market forces helped to bring women into the public sphere, yet I will suggest that the resulting preoccupation with the *image* of public figures has had a particularly detrimental effect on women in public sphere roles. On the other hand, social movements like the Women's Environmental Network have been able to translate the lip-service paid to the 'power of the consumer' into genuine power for many women who would otherwise be denied a political voice on important issues concerning the links between the environment and health, such as the current controversy surrounding the production of genetically modified foods (see Chapter 5).

It is my contention that the increasingly mediatized nature of public sphere discourse has also had contradictory effects on women who perform public sphere roles (see also Talbot 1997). This is not surprising, since a number of feminist analysts have pointed out that a masculinist culture prevails in the majority of mass media institutions (van Zoonen 1994; Macdonald 1995). The narrow elite of accessed voices remain predominantly male and male journalists remain in a majority, especially when it comes to reporting so-called 'hard news' stories. The assumption of an ideal reader who is gendered as male means that media producers continue to construct women as 'other' and/or trade on the concept of 'women-as-group' (Fowler 1991: 103). In some cases, women's public sphere activities are not deemed newsworthy and are not

reported at all. Where women *are* included as represented subjects, gender stereotypes abound, including those which dichotomise the sexes in crudely antagonistic terms, something that chimes well with the news values of 'negativity' and 'conflict between people', referred to by Bell (1991: 156). However, Fairclough's (1989: 51) view that, 'the media operate as a means for the expression and reproduction of the power of the dominant class and bloc' does not offer an adequate account of the complex workings of media texts. His own more recent work on media discourse challenges the tendency to view news-making practices as homogeneous and stable (Fairclough: 1995a). I will suggest that contradictions manifest themselves in the hybrid nature of media texts which both function to expose overt sexism, yet often reproduce it in covert forms.

The picture outlined above is further complicated by the fact that other 'colonising' discourses appear to have led to a process of deconstruction whereby the discursive boundaries *between* the spheres have become weakened and permeable. Fairclough, for instance, describes what he terms the 'conversationalisation' of public sphere discourse:

a more general translation of public language...into private language: a linguistic shift which is itself part of the rearticulating of the relationship between the public domain of the political (economic, religious) events and social agents, and the private domain, the domain of the 'lifeworld', of common experience.

(Fairclough 1992: 110)

He does not specify who the agents of this change are. I will suggest that the presence and activities of women in public sphere roles has, at the very least, contributed towards this discursive shift. Other feminist analysts have made this link explicit, hence van Zoonen's (1998) designation of this process in the media as the 'feminisation' of the media. However, as with other discursive strategies associated with women this

process has recently been denigrated as a process of 'dumbing down' by influential male gatekeepers (Humphreys 1999). I will argue that if the mass media has been 'feminised' to some extent, this has been achieved in a way that reproduces a reactionary discourse of femininity which disguises what Dorothy Smith (1990: 159) terms, 'The cracks, seams, varieties, contradictions in the multiple sites and modes of being a woman'. I will therefore suggest, with Macdonald (1995), that the conversationalisation of public discourse has, at the very least, been contradictory in its effect for women who participate in the public sphere. Finally, I intend to explore the various ways in which feminist-identified women have actively contested the boundaries between the public, civil, and private spheres, often by taking advantage of independent changes occurring at the institutional and societal levels of discourse.

### **1.7 Structure of the Study**

Chapter 2 sets out in detail the framework for approaching feminist critical discourse analysis to be applied to the data in the case studies that follow. The methods of data collection and analysis employed in the four case studies is also discussed briefly, in the light of feminist debates about the relative merits of the various methodological procedures available to researchers. The first case study, in Chapter 3, focuses on women who enter British parliamentary politics. The 'glass ceiling effect' is difficult to account for in a political party like the Parliamentary Labour Party which theoretically seems committed to equal opportunities for men and women. It becomes more explicable when it is recognised that the institutional orders of masculinist political discourse and the equally masculinist discourse of the print media operate through *fraternal networks* to segregate and subordinate women once they have entered the arena of party politics. However, this needs to be set alongside the changes that have resulted from women's increasing presence in the Commons, notably in the wake of the

1997 General Election. Particular reference is made in this chapter to a feminist re-reading/re-writing of Foucault's (1984 [1970]) work, and to the work of feminist political theorists, including Pateman (1989) and Walby (1990).

Chapter 4 considers the gendered implications of the recent trend towards secessionism in UK politics. The considerable impact women have made thus far on the policy priorities and structures of the Scottish Parliament would seem to lend support to the argument that devolution as a political process should be welcomed by feminists.

However, a consideration of the treatment by both colleagues and the media of one female minister in the Welsh Assembly makes it clear that the mere presence of a high proportion of women in a community of practice is no guarantee of a woman-friendly ethos. By contrast, despite its status as one of the smallest and newest political parties in the Province, and despite having to confront entrenched sexism, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition has managed to accrue to itself considerable interactional power, which it has used to ensure that the new Northern Irish Assembly is responsive to the interests and needs of women. The remainder of the chapter explores in detail the contribution made by the Coalition to the Talks process leading to the formation of the Assembly, as well as the way in which this contribution has been framed in the media. The chapter includes a critical evaluation of the usefulness of the concept of gendered news frames (Norris ed. 1997) in accounting for the complex and contradictory ways in which the media represent women's involvement in public sphere roles.

Chapter 5 shifts the emphasis away from women's involvement in state institutions to a consideration of their activities in grassroots organisations. A number of feminist political theorists have suggested that new social movements (NSMs) constitute sites of political participation that are particularly open to women. This is supported by my

study of the activities of the London based Women's Environmental Network (WEN) which has sought to exploit women's role as primary consumers in order to expand their role as active citizens. However, a comparative study of the preferred discursive practices of WEN and other non-gender specific environmental groups, notably Friends of the Earth, helps to foreground the masculinist ethos that pervades these groups. The constructive role the media are said to have played in helping to reinvigorate the civil sphere (McRobbie 1994) needs to be qualified in the light of the often trivialising coverage of WEN's campaigns. Particular reference is made in this chapter to a feminist re-reading/re-writing of Habermas' (1989 [1962]) work on the bourgeois public sphere.

The focus of Chapter 6 of the study is on women's participation in the Church of England in the period before and since their ordination as priests. Such a study affords opportunities for comparing women's role as campaigning 'outsiders' and their relatively recent and, for some, grudgingly-granted role as 'insiders', in what is obviously a liminal period in the Church's history as an institution. The pre-ordination campaign created an ideal opportunity for proponents to construct a coherent set of oppositional discursive practices designed to challenge masculinist definitions of the priestly role. However, the ability of women priests to promote these alternative norms in the post-ordination period has been hampered by their continuing institutional subordination within the Church's structures, a situation that is sanctioned by canon law. This chapter will make particular reference to Butler's (1990) performative theory of gender to account for the range of, sometimes contradictory, subject positions women priests have occupied in their attempts to satisfy socially ascribed, and, in particular, media-generated, expectations that they will perform their role as priests in a distinctive way. It will conclude by suggesting that women's entry into priesthood *has*, nonetheless, made a difference to both Church structures and modes of ministry.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, Chapter 7, I will suggest that my case studies point to the need for a more socially situated theory of language and gender to account for the complex interplay between the choices women make within discourse and the broader social-structural constraints within which they have to operate. A focus on local communities of practice within the public sphere helps to illuminate the wide range of ways in which women have chosen to negotiate with the masculinist discursive norms they continue to confront, whether they are involved in institutions of the state or grassroots organisations. However, a comprehensive account of the construction of gendered identities and gendered relations in contemporary society also requires an investigation into the expectations and stereotypes that circulate in the society as a whole and that exert a powerful influence on the subject positions available to women who enter the public domain. This study suggests that one means of accessing these global ideologies of gender is by undertaking a critical analysis, such as I propose in this thesis, of the contradictory ways in which women's public identities are represented in the media.

### **End Notes**

1. The term 'masculinist' is used here, and throughout the study, to refer to discursive practices that have evolved historically in conjunction with hegemonic forms of masculinity and have often become deeply entrenched in institutions within the public sphere. Unlike the term 'patriarchal', it does not assume that these practices are either coherent, or intentionally designed to deny women equality of access or

status, though this is often their effect. Women can, of course, choose to adopt, rather than contest, such practices.

2. The term 'verbal hygiene' was introduced by Cameron, in her book of that name (1995b), to cover a wide range of practices which entail some form of linguistic engineering. She is at pains to point out that such practices are not, in themselves, reprehensible; instead, their efficacy, or otherwise, should be assessed in terms of the uses to which they are put. Her central argument is that all language use is value-laden and that individuals and groups need to, 'focus critically on the particular standards and values being invoked and to propose alternatives' (*ibid*: 115). As a case in point, Cameron argues *against* accepting a narrowly instrumental view of language as the basis for teaching English in schools (*ibid*). However, she admits that she remains personally unconvinced by the arguments of some feminist linguists who claim that the discursive style preferred by women is interactionally superior to men's and should, for this reason, be promoted in workplace contexts (*ibid*: 208).
3. The performative theory of gender was developed by Judith Butler in her influential book, *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler denies that gender is a foundational identity category, and instead stresses that it is constituted by a series of performative acts. As such, she argues that it is open to intervention and resignification. For instance, she celebrates drag performances for denaturalising the constructed nature of all gendered identities and advocates the promotion of parodic practices, 'that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.' (*ibid*: X).
4. Fairclough (1995a: 176) refers to the 'order of mediatized political discourse' as a means of capturing the role the media play in structuring political discourse. In particular, he suggests that one of the functions of the institutions of the mass

media is to literally *mediate* between the official discourse of politics and the lifeworld discourse of viewers/listeners/readers. The media do not transparently report events, but select and frame official voices in various way, often translating them into a more accessible lifeworld idiom. I suggest that this *mediating* function is not confined to party politics, but extends to all civil and public sphere discourse types.

5. Mills (1995: 187 ff.) defines 'schemata' as frameworks, which are often stereotypically gendered, and which represent an intermediate stage between language and ideology, 'These structures are well-trodden pathways, which because of their familiarity, take on an air of commonsense knowledge. It is only by describing these seemingly commonsense structures that we begin to expose their constructed nature and at the same time their perniciousness.' (*ibid*: 197).
6. Fairclough (1992a: 68 ff.) adapts the concept of 'orders of discourse' from Foucault's essay of that name (1982) to refer to configurations of discourse practices. These can occur at different, often interdependent, levels: the immediate situational level, the institutional level and the societal level.

### 2.1 Introduction:

In this chapter, I intend to set out in detail the approach that will form the basis of the analysis in the chapters that follow. The analytical framework adopted in this study has its roots in work in critical linguistics carried out by the University of East Anglia group comprising Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Robert Hodge, Tony Trew and others (see Fowler *et al.* eds. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979). The value of this approach for the subsequent development of feminist textual practice lies in the emphasis it places on exposing the ways in which dominant ideologies become encoded in texts.

However, one of the weaknesses of early work in the field was the assumption that the relationship between linguistic forms and functions is a transparent one and that meanings can therefore simply be 'read off' from surface features of text. The emphasis was on the text as *product*, with insufficient attention being paid to *processes* of text production and interpretation. For instance, the problem of the role of the analyst was not addressed, and little or no attempt was made to account for variable or resistant readings. More recent work has sought to remedy these weaknesses by linking the micro-level of text analysis to a sophisticated post-structuralist theory of discourse which views discourse as a site of ideological struggle (Fairclough 1992; Threadgold 1997). Like Fairclough, I intend to unite, 'a broadly Foucauldian conception of discourses as differently positioned ways of signifying domains of practice and knowledge, and the common view in linguistics of discourse as process wherein texts are products.' (Fairclough 1995b: 55).

Threadgold points out that one cannot simply take for granted the legitimacy of employing a linguistic metalanguage as part of a feminist critique, since

poststructuralist theory has called into question all such metalanguages. She acknowledges that it is simply one code among many, but like Cameron (1995), she argues that the authority it carries makes it a useful resource for appropriation by feminist theorists. Since this is a view that I too share, I will utilise linguistic metalanguage, where appropriate, in my own approach to feminist discourse analysis. This is partly to remedy the fact that the so-called 'linguistic turn' (Fairclough 1989: 3) in recent social theory has, in reality, largely ignored close attention to texts. The challenge is to connect the insights of linguistic, and I will suggest social semiotic, theory with an analysis of wider discursive and social changes relevant to the analysis of gender. No approach to the critical study of texts is entirely bottom-up, however, since the analyst brings an understanding of these wider changes to bear on her/his linguistic analysis. This understanding is also likely to influence the types of texts scrutinised. In my case, I am interested in looking for textual traces of shifts in gendered identities and relations that occur in periods of rapid discursive and institutional change. One needs, of course, to be alert to the dangers of tautology, but my intention in this study is not simply to use texts to *describe* these changes, but to help *explain* them in a more nuanced way than would be possible in the absence of close attention to linguistic analysis.

## **2.2 Discourse and Power**

As Mills (1997: 78) observes, it is somewhat paradoxical to seek to appropriate a Foucauldian model of discourse analysis given that Foucault's own work is almost entirely gender-blind. Nonetheless, a major theoretical insight of Foucault's work is that discourse is constitutive of the social, including social identities, and more specifically for the purpose of this study, of gendered identities. Yet, a criticism of Foucault by McNay (1992), and echoed by a number of other feminists, is that,

although in theory he conceives of power as a diffuse and productive phenomenon, his concrete studies of power relations tend to rely on a concept of power as a monolithic and uni-directional force. Where resistance does occur, as in the 'reverse discourse' of homosexuality, and, by extension, of feminism, it is believed to be incapable of fundamentally transforming structures; instead, it is contained by power. By contrast, Fairclough's work is motivated by the political aim of exposing the workings of ideology in texts with the explicit goal of contributing to transformations in existing relations of power. This overt political agenda makes his work adaptable to the feminist goal of challenging the social, political and economic inequalities that continue to exist between men and women.

However, Fairclough's approach marginalises the importance of gender inequalities.

While accepting that power relations are not reducible to class relations, he nonetheless privileges class above other determinants of power relations:

...it is not acceptable to regard gender, race and so forth as simply parallel to class. I shall regard class relations as having a more fundamental status than others, and as setting the broad parameters within which others are constrained to develop, parameters which are broad enough to allow many options which are narrowed down by determinants autonomous to the particular relation at issue.

(Fairclough 1989: 34)

He goes on to claim that 'class struggle is the most fundamental form of struggle.'

(*ibid*). This economistic tendency to treat gender as a derivative of capitalism is common amongst Marxist and post-Marxist social theorists. As Walby (1990: 13) notes, it downplays the significance of other aspects of women's subordination, despite the fact that feminists have shown that class relations are experienced differently by men and women (Skeggs 1997), and by men and women of different races, ethnic groups and so on (McClintock 1995; Threadgold 1997). It also serves to disguise the

operation of *cross-class* fraternal alliances which have supported the exclusion of women from a number of public and civil sphere domains and activities. Walby (1980) also points out that it fails to take account of the independent historical dynamics of class and gender, offering no explanation for the division of labour which existed in pre-capitalist societies and which continues to exist in non-capitalist societies today. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it fails to acknowledge that class is itself a highly contested site. Although the primary focus in this study will be on the reproduction, maintenance and transformation of gendered identities and relations, the intersection between gender and issues of class, race, age and so on, will also be investigated.

### **2.3 Intertextuality and Discursive Change**

Unlike early work in critical linguistics, feminist work in the field of discourse analysis has stressed the creative dialectic that exists between structure and agency (D. Smith, 1990; Mills, 1995; Threadgold 1997). As Mills states:

ideologies of gender are not solely oppressive, and they are not simply imposed on women by men. Women and men construct their own sense of self within the limits of these discursive frame-works, and build their pleasures and emotional development, often in conscious resistance to, as well as in compliance with, these constraints.

(Mills 1995: 2)

This accords with the view of discursive change outlined in the introductory chapter of this study. Threadgold (1997) uses the term 'poiesis' to capture the dynamic nature of discourse as a process, in contrast to the more traditional term 'poetics', which presupposes a static view of texts as products. Fairclough's emphasis on the concept of intertextuality (a term adapted from Kristeva, 1986[1966]) likewise leads to a dynamic view of discourse, since it, 'points to the productivity of texts, to how texts can

transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourse) to generate new ones.' (1992b: 103). Intertextual analysis can provide traces of the type of hybridisation that occurs when new and old gendered paradigms co-exist in tension with one another. I will suggest that women's public identities are discursively produced by this clash of competing norms and expectations. However, with Threadgold (1997), I will argue that a dynamic view of discourse does not preclude the existence of an underlying stability in public discourse which serves to (re)produce gender inequality.

#### **2.4 The Role of the Analyst**

As the name suggests, the goal of the critical discourse analyst is the overtly political one of encouraging interpreters of texts to develop a critical awareness of the way linguistic choices often have ideological effects, and in particular the contribution they make to the unequal distribution of power relations in society. Fairclough (1989: 1) makes this political goal explicit in his book *Language and Power* with his claim that, 'consciousness is the first step towards emancipation'. In an article criticising Fairclough's approach, Widdowson argues that overt political commitment, whatever its complexion, is incompatible with objective text analysis, since it leads the analyst to select, 'those features of the text which support [her/his] preferred interpretation' (1995: 169). In a follow-up article (1996), he claims to provide a concrete instance of just such a selective analysis by offering a very different reading of the interpersonal meanings encoded in a book about antenatal care analysed by Fairclough (1992: 170-1).

This is a criticism that feminists are, of course, accustomed to answering, not least by pointing out that *no* theoretical or methodological approach is politically neutral and that *all* readings of texts are invariably selective. The difference is that critical

linguists, including those working from a feminist perspective, openly acknowledge their political aims, and are committed to promoting alternative and resistant subject positions to the dominant ones encoded in texts. By contrast, in his reading of the text about antenatal care, Widdowson obligingly takes up a compliant subject position. He offers an analysis that he claims, 'is more co-operative than conflictual, which invokes no hegemonic struggle, and which is rather more favourable to the medical profession.' (1996: 68). One of the claims of critical discourse analysis is that such readings contribute to the maintenance of existing relations of social inequality, in this instance between medical experts and female patients, whereas resistant readings can cumulatively contribute to their transformation.

In a somewhat different criticism of critical discourse analysis, Cameron expresses her scepticism about the expert status that the critical discourse analyst appears to lay claim to (1995b: 233). From a feminist perspective, in particular, this assumption would seem to introduce an unwelcome hierarchical element into the analysis of discourse. To some extent this is offset by the type of self-reflexive approach advocated by Fairclough, and also adopted in this study. Yet, what of Cameron's claim (*ibid*) that ordinary readers are well aware of the connections between language, power and ideology? While this offers an antidote to the tendency to view readers as passive, it nonetheless ignores the fact that a good deal of interpretative work in everyday situations is based on 'slack' (Wicomb 1994), as opposed to close, reading. A feminist approach to critical discourse analysis aims to offer readers the analytical tools to recognise the 'subtler and hence more insidious discriminatory and exclusionary discourses that abound' (Toolan 1997: 94). This does not mean neglecting instances of overt sexism<sup>1</sup> altogether, since although these may be easy to identify (Mills 1988: 247), this does not mean that they are always easy to contest. Indeed, I would suggest

that the backlash against political correctness has opened up a discursive space for the re-emergence of overt sexism. Such sexism has even been justified on the dubious grounds that, 'if men oppress each other, why should women complain?' (Johnson 1997: 20).

## **2.5 Gender and Reader Positioning**

In common with other approaches to critical discourse analysis, I begin with the theoretical premise that all natural linguistic and semiotic communication rests upon the possibility of choice or selection from a set of alternatives, albeit within certain constraints. Mills (1995: 31) outlines a feminist model of text that specifies the various production and reception regimes that operate on texts to constrain the choices both text producers and interpreters can make. As well as the constraints imposed by the linguistic system itself, these include norms and expectations about rhetorical conventions, the affiliations of the text producer and the assumptions s/he makes about the implied audience. The term 'choice' is somewhat misleading, then, since 'choices' are constrained by factors in the linguistic and extralinguistic co(n)text in which they are made. Actual listeners/readers may, of course, have quite different expectations and affiliations, and may resist the dominant meanings promoted by a given text. For instance, one of the claims made by feminists is that, 'the reader in a wide range of texts is positioned as predominantly male.' (Mills 1995: 67). One aim of a feminist approach to critical discourse analysis is to encourage listeners/readers to read back into texts elements presupposed at the production stage and to recognise formal and semiotic features that promote preferred, often male-gendered, readings.

It is assumed, therefore, that the choices text producers make are not random, but are motivated, often by a desire to position listeners/readers as compliant subjects. Such

choices impose constraints on the process of interpretation by acting as traces and cues which promote certain readings, while seeking to suppress others. In this way, they can serve to reinforce or challenge dominant conceptual frames, including those involved in the reproduction of normative gendered identities and gendered relations.

Listeners/readers construct hypotheses about the preferred meaning of texts on the basis of the traces and cues they perceive to be present 'in' the texts, as well as on the basis of their own assumptions about the communicative event. Interpreters often have to do a good deal of inferential work to make connections that are not always made explicit in a text. As Gee points out, 'the choices and guesses we make may be *more or less conscious* and *more or less conventionalised* (routinised, a matter of habit).' (1990: 86, italics in the original).

To have ideological effects textual traces and cues do not need to be conscious; they may be the relatively unconscious products of common-sense assumptions, often based on stereotypical ideas. Fairclough (1989: 84) points out that only those common-sense assumptions which help to sustain unequal relations of power are ideological. Mills (1998: 237), for instance, notes that feminist ideas have become part of the common-sense knowledge presupposed in texts, especially those aimed at young women readers. Yet, I would agree with Coward (1999) that the version of feminism that tends to circulate as common-sense in popular and media texts is often a reductive and/or a distorted one and should not remain immune from a feminist critique. However, whereas Coward argues that what she terms 'womanism' disadvantages men, especially working class men, I will argue that popularised versions of feminism are just as likely to disadvantage women. This is because the selective appropriation of feminist theories that stress women's supposed difference from men often helps to rationalise their continuing marginalisation and subordination in civil and public sphere roles.

As noted above, preferred readings of texts, popular or otherwise, may, of course, come into conflict with assumptions that readers/listeners bring to the interpretative process. Gill and Whedbee (1997: 164) point out that these assumptions include generic expectations, 'Generic classification is one of the means by which a critic or audience member establishes the standards for evaluating a rhetorical text'. They illustrate this with reference to variable interpretations of Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, arguing that these can be explained by the fact that different analysts respond differently to the intertexts and generic conventions drawn upon (*ibid*: 175 ff.). As feminists, Gill and Whedbee (1997) go on to read against the text's uncritical acceptance of the generic convention, sanctioned by a long intertextual history, that political speeches address a citizenry gendered as male. I will suggest that this type of textual and intertextual negotiation is just as likely to have implications for the identities, relations and beliefs of listeners/readers as more compliant readings. In making this claim, I am challenging the assumption made by Christie (1998: 221) that it is only if preferred readings can be shown to have been accepted that they can be said to have ideological significance. It may be equally significant ideologically that listeners/readers choose to resist, challenge or reject preferred readings. Indeed, one of the central aims of a feminist critical discourse analysis is to promote such resistant and oppositional readings in order to call into question normative gender ideologies.

## **2.6 Defining the Interpretative Context**

A current controversy in the field of discourse analysis is the extent to which the interpretative context is modelled in the mind of listeners/readers and the extent to which it is shaped by extraneous social factors. I would argue that, rather than being theoretically incompatible, the differences between these two positions is largely a matter of emphasis. For instance, despite the primarily sociological orientation of

Fairclough's work, the concept of 'members' resources' (MR) employed in his early work acknowledged the *psycho*-social nature of the individual's common-sense knowledge, beliefs and so on (Fairclough 1989: 24). Likewise, his concept of interpretative cues is compatible with Sperber and Wilson's (1986) concept of ostensive acts in explaining how much of the context a given listener/reader decides is relevant to the process of interpretation. By contrast, van Dijk, who adopts a primarily cognitivist orientation in his approach to discourse analysis, is nonetheless careful to avoid reducing the social to the personal, 'the mind is social - socially acquired, shared, used and changed.' (van Dijk 1998: 235).

More recently, in an effort to distance himself from the cognitivist turn in discourse analysis, Fairclough (1995a) has sought to emphasise instead that text producers and interpreters draw upon *socially* available genres. Yet, such a view needs to confront the apparent lack of consensus, both cultural and scholarly, about the formal characteristics of given genres and the boundaries between them. As numerous commentators have pointed out, genre is both an intuitive and a surprisingly fuzzy concept. Fairclough tries to answer this objection by insisting that the problem disappears, if we see the debates about genre definitions as due to a failure to distinguish between different levels of abstraction, from the most abstract to the most concrete (1995a: 13ff.). Quite rightly, in my view, he rejects a rigidly schematic, and ultimately prescriptive, approach to genre, based on obligatory staged structures (cf. Labov and Waletzky 1967). He posits instead the existence of a broad consensus about *ideal* generic conventions at any given time in any given culture, but acknowledges that actual text types rarely instantiate these in a predictable way. What is significant is that this approach to genre is compatible with the prototype theory of genre advocated by cognitivist discourse analysts (cf. Lakoff 1987; Forceville 1996).

relationship between written/verbal text and any accompanying visual material. The more multi-modal approach to discourse, advocated by Toolan (1996) and Kress *et al.* (1996; 1997), and also developed in this study, means that cues from a range of semiotic modes, including the visual, are already incorporated into an understanding of texture. However, I would dispute Kress *et al.*'s view that words and images are generally read as a *single* text. The example they use to illustrate their contention is a two-page spread from a Brazilian journal featuring a profile of a conservative politician on the left hand page and an advertisement for a car on the right hand page (1997: 276 ff.). Although the juxtaposition of the two texts by (sub-)editors, something no doubt vetted by the advertisers of the car, was probably deliberate, it seems far-fetched to suggest, as Kress *et al.* (1996) do, that most readers will perceive them as a single textual unit. I would argue that one of the reasons why the same text gives rise to variable interpretations is precisely because individuals vary in what they perceive as relevant co-texts and intertexts.

## **2.8 The Micro-Level of Text Analysis: An Integrational Approach**

From the point of view of a feminist critical discourse analysis, any attempt to devise an overarching and globally applicable metalanguage based on a closed set of linguistic items is likely to prove misguided. This is because *any* linguistic item or structure has the potential to become ideologically charged, depending on the way it is coloured by the surrounding cotext and/or by the context of production and consumption in which it occurs. In his provocative defence of the regulation of what he terms 'hate speech', Fish (1994: 106) makes this point, 'every idea is an incitement to somebody, and since ideas come packaged in sentences, in words, every sentence is potentially, in some situation that might occur tomorrow, a fighting word and therefore a candidate for regulation', and, I would add, for critical analysis. What is needed, therefore, is a framework that

is flexible enough to attend to the *local* specificities of the text/context interface. Yet if a feminist approach to critical discourse analysis is to be replicable, it is nonetheless important to set out a framework, albeit a broad and contingent one, for analysing discourse critically at the textual level. In particular, the aim is to devise a framework that will help to foreground the tension between the identities women in public life fashion for themselves and those ascribed to them by others, especially by the media.

The corollary of the radically co(n)text-dependent view of language advocated in this study is that the boundaries between linguistic levels, and indeed between linguistic and extralinguistic phenomena, become extremely permeable. This renders problematic a traditional metalanguage which emphasises the linear ordering of autonomous linguistic elements. According to Toolan (1996: 132), 'language in all its diversity and contextual embeddedness cannot reasonably be characterised as a closed system of endlessly iterable fixed signs'. As Lee (1992: 26) points out, the structuralist orientation in language studies derives from Saussure's segmental metaphor where linguistic elements are treated as discrete homogeneous categories. Such an approach assumes that meaning resides in individual lexical and grammatical components, whereas an integrational approach stresses that meaning is negotiated in context (Harris 1996; Toolan 1996). Toolan's (1996: 3) central thesis, for instance, is that interpretation is not analytical and decompositional, but rather integrational and compositional. Potentially, Halliday's (1994 [1985]) systemic functional grammar offers a more multi-dimensional model of the relationship between language and co(n)text. For instance he notes, 'there are rarely any sharp lines in language, since it is an evolved system and not a designed one.' (1994: xxv). Despite this, his chief concern in *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (*ibid*), seems to be the mapping of functional categories on to traditional linguistic structures.

Feminist approaches to critical text analysis also tend to accept conventional structural categories as a point of departure. For instance, Mills (1995) organises her book, *Feminist Stylistics*, in terms of a tripartite analytical framework comprising word and phrase/sentence levels respectively, together with a third more functionally oriented level of discourse. This approach leads to a number of anomalies. To take just one example, generic pronouns are discussed at the level of the word, yet, like existential 'there', personal pronouns are effectively *empty* categories whose meaning depends on the recoverability of antecedents in the surrounding co(n)text. Thus in order to illustrate their pseudo-generic nature, it is necessary to make reference to their co(n)text of use. Even full lexical items mean very differently in different contexts. In her discussion of the connotations of the word 'girl', Mills herself acknowledges, 'the importance of context, and...the need not to assume that sexism resides within individual language items.' (*ibid*: 98). Yet, I would argue that any approach which relies on formalist categories as a point of departure tends to obscure, rather than illuminate, such differences in use. A more serious objection, however, might be the inappropriate nature of a unit such as the 'sentence' for analysing texture in general, and spoken texture in particular. As a result, the very different mechanisms by which spoken interaction is structured have to be added on, usually under the 'catch all' category of discourse, as do prosodic and paralinguistic features.

There is, then, in such frameworks a constant tension between treating language as an object of description and a stated commitment to developing a more dynamic model that accounts for the way language functions in specific contexts of use. Fairclough's (1989) early, and still influential, framework for approaching the micro-level of textual analysis has some of the same potential drawbacks as the approaches discussed above since it maintains a traditional tripartite linear and hierarchical structure based on an

ascending order of linguistic elements: vocabulary, grammar and text. His discussion of pronoun choices under the rubric of grammar seems intuitively more satisfying than Mills' treatment of them at word level, but this nevertheless obscures the fact that pronouns operate both within and *between* sentences and therefore contribute to the *texture* of texts. In this way, they trouble the boundary that Fairclough draws between the grammatical and textual levels. I will argue that it is more productive to view texts in terms of lexicogrammatical networks of relations, whose meanings are determined in specific contexts of use, rather than as comprising discrete and autonomous levels.

As Kress *et al.* (1997) note, a shift in perspective is required whereby texts are seen as multi-modal, involving a complex matrix of linguistic and extralinguistic choices. This shift in perspective, which contests the linguistic/semiotic boundary, leads to a view of language as a multilayered meshing of texts, contexts and histories. On this reading, attention to the linear ordering of linguistic elements remains a necessary, but not a sufficient, basis for the current analytical framework. It is necessary in particular for foregrounding creative patterns of lexical collocation, as well as the mechanisms by which information flow can be manipulated with ideological effects. Cameron (1990) provides a vivid example of the way the latter functioned in press reports of a rape incident to foreground the suffering and pain of the survivor's husband by making him the grammatical subject of the main clause, while relegating the experience of the survivor herself to a dependent clause at the end of a long complex sentence:

A man who suffered head injuries when attacked by two men who broke into his home in Beckenham, Kent, early yesterday, was pinned down on the bed by intruders who took it in turns to rape his wife.

*(Daily Telegraph, cited in Cameron 1990: 17)*

Yet an exclusive focus on the linear sequencing of linguistic elements may serve to obscure the fact that the degree to which elements become ideologically implicated has more to do with the wider cotextual and contextual relationships that operate on and between them. For instance, Toolan (1996: 259) suggests that a preoccupation with syntactic sequencing may overlook other associative connections: semantic, intonational, kinesic and the inter-relations between them. In speech, for instance, information focus is generally controlled by prosodic features, while in both spoken and written texts the paradigmatic axis may be as important as the syntagmatic one. Thus each item chosen can be set against choices that were *not* made, leading to a focus on structured absences from texts. Likewise, gaps in syntax may be ideologically significant, because readers/ listeners are invited to infer connections left implicit. It would be difficult to account for the ideological effects of structured absences in Toolan's (1996) approach, since he does not allow for the existence of predictable structures. In my proposed framework, however, these structured absences from texts will be accounted for by reference to the operation of (inter)textual networks.

One advantage of Halliday's *systemic* model is that it has the potential to accommodate such absences, but their ideological importance tends to be obscured by the undue emphasis he places on the syntagmatic axis and by his instrumental understanding of the interpersonal metafunction. More generally, as Threadgold (1995) notes, he fails to link his functional model of grammar to a well-developed social theory. Particularly significant from the point of view of this study is the fact that he largely ignores issues of power, including issues of gender. A striking instance of this is when he discusses the fact that, 'Body parts are favoured sources of metonymy' (1994: 340), but chooses to ignore the fact that this practice is usually gendered (Montgomery 1986). This is illustrated by the overtly sexist nature of the example he subsequently cites, 'He's

always chasing skirts (girls).' (Halliday 1994: 340). Needless to say, this example occurs without any comment on its sexist connotations. He also makes universalist claims about the value associated with rising and falling tones in language (*ibid.*: 302), ignoring the well-attested gender, and indeed regional, differences in respect of patterns of intonation (Holmes 1995: 101 ff.).

A more substantive point of disagreement with Halliday's systemic functional model of grammar is with his somewhat puzzling decision to identify the 'textual' as one of three semantically and pragmatically oriented metafunctions. Like Fairclough (1989), I would argue that the textual, as defined by Halliday, is more properly viewed as a *linguistic* level, since it comprises the network of intratextual choices marked by *explicit* cohesive ties. Fairclough (1989) extends the textual to include other structuring devices such as significant features of layout and phonological patterning. In my proposed framework, I extend it even further to include any element in, or presupposed in, the co(n)text that contributes to texture. Such elements may be realised by *implicit* (inter)textual traces which account for the ways in which readers/listeners interpret a text as a coherent, as opposed to a cohesive, whole. This extended definition of the (inter)textual also includes the interplay between textual cues and other interpretative cues present in the co(n)text. The latter might comprise extralinguistic cues, signalled by accompanying visual material, such as photographs, cartoons and so on, and, in the case of spoken interaction, by paralinguistic features such as facial expressions and body language. Such cues are often used by addressees to establish the validity, or otherwise, of given speech acts. However, I will argue that the way in which validity criteria are applied is contingent on the gender of the text producer. For instance, I will suggest that the criterion of 'sincerity' is likely to be applied more stringently to evaluations of women's performance of public sphere roles,

than to men's (see 3.2). This multifunctional view of the textual, or rather the (inter)textual, is in keeping with the recent work of Kress *et al.* (1997: 257) who view language, 'as one representational element in a text which is always multi-modal, and [which] has to be read in conjunction with all the other semiotic modes of that text'. It renders redundant the separate 'connective' metafunction which Fairclough (1989) proposes in his analytical framework to replace the textual metafunction in Halliday's systemic model.

Rather than assuming, however, as many text linguists do, that texts are produced and perceived as both cohesive and coherent, in keeping with Fairclough's more recent work (1995a), I will suggest that close critical analysis often reveals them to be riven with tensions and contradictions. Indeed, the primary focus of this study will be on this discursive *heterogeneity* and more specifically on the way public sphere discourses are fractured by competing, and often contradictory, ideologies of gender. According to Cameron:

This reflects the fact that there is currently a degree of conflict, especially in modern middle-class communities, about the respective roles, rights and obligations of women and men. Such conflict does not only (or always) position women and men on opposite sides. It can be just as marked, or more marked, between women of different generations or classes. Because of the conflict of *interest* it represents, however, it is likely to be felt as most salient when it arises in male-female interaction.

(Cameron 1998: 445)

Although texts are inherently ambivalent, the combination of linguistic and other (inter)textual traces and interpretative cues nonetheless function to promote dominant readings, including readings that reify normative gendered identities and relations. This may not, of course, be their effect on individual readers who may choose to misread the cues and/or may choose to read 'against' them. Given the asymmetrical

power relations that continue to exist between men and women, Cameron (*ibid*: 447) suggests that 'strategic' misreadings are likely. In other words, male interlocutors, in particular, are likely to exploit the polypragmatic nature of linguistic items for their own particular ideological ends.

To offset some of the problems with the approaches discussed thus far, the analytical model adopted in this study will take functional categories as *a point of departure* for analysis. The basic premise is that language serves two fundamental functions, the interpersonal and the ideational, and, in the sections that follow, an attempt is made to set out an inventory of (inter)textual forms and sociosemantic categories by which these metafunctions are realised. The aim is to explore patterns of habituated use that function to reproduce normative gendered identities and relations. Although the meaning attached to these forms and categories in *specific* contexts is contingent on the interpretative assumptions that interlocutors bring to the speech situation, I intend to suggest that the *range* of meanings attached to given (inter)textual traces and cues *is* predictable. I will also explore some of the factors that are likely to give rise to variable interpretations.

A major advantage of Fairclough's approach for the current study of gendered identities is that by integrating work in critical text linguistics with a Foucauldian view of discourse, he foregrounds the centrality of the interpersonal metafunction. In other words, he stresses the ideological work that texts do in constituting social identities, as well as social relations. As Mills points out, this aspect of language has generally been neglected, 'Linguistics has largely ignored questions of the role of language in the constitution of subjectivity and selfhood' (Mills 1997: 150). Where it has been addressed, it has often been treated in a superficial way. Thus Threadgold notes that

Halliday's initial formulation of the interpersonal as 'an exchange of meanings or goods and services' (cited in Threadgold 1997: 96) is an extremely reductive one. She goes on to explain that this is largely due to the fact that he conceived of texts as products, rather than as embedded in discursive processes of production and reception, or in her terminology, in terms of 'poetics', rather than 'poiesis'.

Fairclough's solution to Halliday's less than satisfactory conception of the interpersonal is to propose two separate metafunctions, the 'relational' and the 'expressive', which refer respectively to the social relations and social identities enacted via texts in discourse. Following Voloshinov's (1986 [1929]) work on intersubjectivity, I will suggest that these are best viewed as two facets of the one interpersonal metafunction, since identities are always formed and transformed through a never-ending process of sociolinguistic interaction with others, and/or with texts. As Pearce (1994) points out, Voloshinov's approach stresses the role of power and conflict in determining the nature of the utterance. This compares favourably with Habermas' (1984; 1987) theory of communicative action which relies on a utopian concept of an ideal speech situation in which participants have symmetrical rights. Empirical research has shown that this is far from true of cross-sex interaction, where men employ strategies, such as interruption and non-response, as prerogatives of power (Zimmerman and West 1975; Fishman 1983; Holmes 1995). Likewise, my own research points to the considerable *power* the media have in constructing and maintaining normative gendered identities and relations, identities and relations which are often at odds with those that women and men construct for themselves.

The second metafunction in my framework, the ideational, is closer to Halliday's initial conception, since it subsumes the expressive and evaluative aspects of language, as

well as knowledge and beliefs. This seems more satisfactory than Fairclough's decision to assign them to two separate metafunctions, since I would argue that the distinction between them is difficult to sustain. This point is also stressed in the recent work of Poynton:

The attachment of feeling to representation is of particular importance to the circulation of ideologies, because it involves a virtual physical attachment of people to beliefs and values, thereby ensuring a fierce commitment to those beliefs and values and resistance to attempts 'to take them away' by means of argument.

(Poynton 1990: 251-2, cited in Threadgold 1997: 98)

Threadgold (1997: 13) identifies what she regards as a preoccupation amongst male linguists with the ideational stripped of its evaluative and emotive dimensions as symptomatic of a more general masculinist and technicist orientation in work produced in the field of systemic linguistics. In addition, a number of feminist linguists have argued that this has led analysts to overlook the interpersonal functions of a range of linguistic and pragmatic features, such as hedges, intensifiers and pragmatic particles (Coates: 1989; Holmes: 1995). This study will suggest that a foregrounding of the ideational at the expense of the interpersonal also characterises the traditional discursive strategies associated with professionalism in a wide range of institutional domains, as well as the persuasive rhetoric produced by male-dominated environmental groups (see Chapter 5).

Although both metafunctions should be regarded as operating *simultaneously* in discourse, I would agree with Threadgold that the interpersonal should be regarded as the 'driving function' of language (Threadgold 1997: 13). This is a view also shared by Toolan (1996: 2), who regards what he terms 'orientedness to others' as the pre-eminent function of language. The increasing conversationalisation of public sphere discourse

types, noted by Fairclough (1992: 204), means this is now just as true of public sphere interaction as it is of interaction in the private sphere and is, in fact, contributing to the deconstruction of the boundaries between the private and public spheres noted earlier. For instance, phatic interaction, with little or no ideational content, plays a central function in cementing relations between intimates, workmates and strangers in everyday situations, whereas texts with little or no interpersonal orientation are restricted to a number of technical or highly specialist domains. This is because the majority of linguistic choices related primarily to the ideational also have implications for the way the identities of participants, and the relationships between them, are enacted via texts. Thus the ideas, beliefs and attitudes that producers encode in texts obviously say a good deal about their own social identities and their attitudes towards addressees. Since text producers are likely to frame these in a sympathetic way, framing devices act as interpretative cues, encouraging listeners/readers to take up compliant or resistant subject positions and this in turn helps to shape *their* identities. The decision to assign linguistic and pragmatic phenomena to separate metafunctional categories is therefore purely for the purpose of analysis, yet it can be justified on the grounds that in any given utterance a particular function or sub-function is likely to be primary (see also Holmes 1995).

### **2.8.1 The Interpersonal Metafunction**

There are a number of different kinds of identity and relation enacted via texts, including those of/between any represented individual(s), the text producer, and the assumed reader (see Figure 2.1: 62). However, the primary focus of this study is on the tension between how individuals in the public eye choose to construct their own identities, a process that is, in any case, always subject to material and discursive constraints, and the representation of these identities by others, notably by the media. I

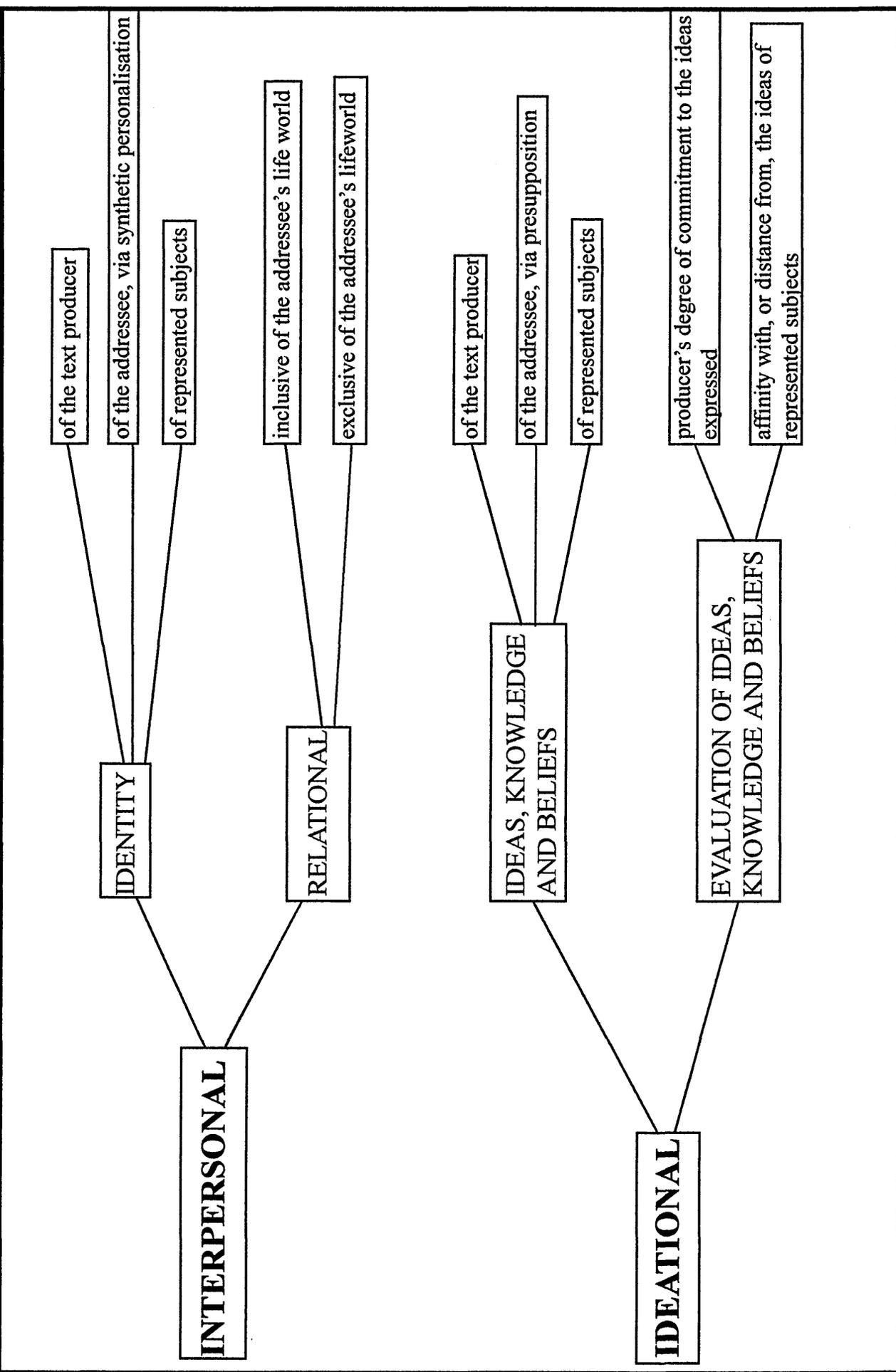


Figure 2.1: Linguistic metafunctions, showing subfunctions

will suggest that the performative choices women in public sphere roles make are constrained not only by institutional and societal norms, but by the investment they themselves have made in aspects of discursively produced femininity. I will argue, therefore, that individual women negotiate with gendered linguistic norms in ways that are complex and contradictory. This is in stark contrast to the media's tendency to construct gendered identities for them which ignore these complexities and which serve to locate them within a preconceived binary frame. However, I will illustrate ways in which these same media texts bear traces of women's resistance to the public identities being constructed for them.

Interestingly, it would seem that one effect of women's entry into public sphere roles has been to heighten men's sense of their own gendered identities. Coward (1999: 98-9) goes so far as to suggest that, 'probably the key aspect of feminism's success is this displacement of men from [a] position of neutral authority, the ungendered space, against which women as gendered subjects were always measured'. I will argue, however, that women's presence in traditionally male preserves has led to a new defensive version of traditional male networking, a phenomenon known as 'boundary heightening' (Powell 1993: 114) and, in some cases, to an exaggerated performance of macho masculinity (see also Faludi 1992: 308). I will also suggest that, outside the academy and a limited number of sites of popular culture, such as men's magazines, women are still much more likely to be constructed *primarily* as gendered subjects than their male counterparts and that this has the effect of underlining an apparent lack of fit with their exercise of public and professional roles. Likewise, there is a persistent tendency amongst institutional discourses of the public sphere to gender their listeners/readers as male, thus discursively excluding women from their address. The gendering of readers is one element in a process of what Fairclough (1989: 62) terms

'synthetic personalisation', whereby text producers simulate a relationship of intimacy with addressees. It is my contention that the producers of media texts are more likely to employ a mode of address that is inclusive of the lifeworld of *male* readers.

As noted above, the interpersonal metafunction can be divided into the identity and relational subfunctions, although once again it must be stressed that they are closely interrelated. The identity subfunction is largely concerned with the way subject positions are created in discourse, while the relational subfunction focuses on degrees of affinity and/or social distance between participants. The question that I intend to answer in detail in this section is how the interpersonal metafunction is realised (inter)textually in ways that are relevant to the production, reproduction and transformation of gendered identities and gendered relations. Subsequent chapters will investigate the different implications these realisations have in the specific 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977) which prevails in each of the communities of practice under investigation. It is important to stress that the areas identified in the sections that follow are intended to be representative, rather than exhaustive.

### **The Identity Subfunction**

***Naming Practices:*** The constraints of the linguistic system of naming in English mean that women have to confront and negotiate issues around self-naming practices that men do not have to consider. This means that they not only have to represent their femininity to themselves (see Black and Coward 1990 [1981]), but they also have to represent their gender politics to others. Whether they like it or not, their gender and gender politics become salient categories in the perception of their public identities. Thus whereas both men and women in the public sphere might have to decide whether to use or dispense with a title such as 'Dr', only women have to decide *between* the

titles 'Miss', 'Ms' and 'Mrs'. The choice of 'Miss' or 'Mrs' has come to be perceived as signalling disidentification with feminism and an identification with more traditional discourses of femininity. 'Ms', on the other hand, is usually assumed to signify a statement about one's gender politics in that it is equated with a feminist stance. In reality, the situation is likely to be more complicated than this, since some of the women interviewed for this study choose to eschew the title 'Ms', and the label 'feminist', for strategic reasons, even though they regard themselves as pursuing feminist goals. This is because they feel themselves to be operating within institutions hostile to feminism. Given the widespread media backlash against political correctness (Faludi 1992), women who let it be known that their preferred title is 'Ms' may attract hostile coverage for this reason alone, especially in the tabloid press. At the very least, the assumption of an 'I *am* a feminist, but...' stance lays women open to the charge of inconsistency, whatever their underlying motive may be for assuming such a stance. This is also true of feminist-identified women who nonetheless choose to take their husband's surname on marriage. Potentially this can be remedied by the revival of a 'maiden' name, as in the case of high profile women, such as Hilary Rodham Clinton and Cherie Booth Blair, but such a strategy may well be viewed as revisionist, and therefore suspect. This highlights the potential metadiscursive gap that can exist between the strategic intentions of speakers and the perception and evaluation of the linguistic and other discursive choices they make by others, and, in the case of public figures, by the powerful institutional force of the media.

Diminutive forms of first names, even where self-selected, appear to carry different connotations for women and men. Thus the Labour Cabinet Minister, Mo Mowlam, had to think long and hard about whether to adopt her full name, Marjorie, when she entered politics, because she felt that a self-chosen diminutive might be interpreted as

signifying a lack of authority in a female politician ( cited in the *Guardian* 6 July 1999:

7). By contrast, the current Prime Minister's choice of 'Tony' over 'Anthony' is sanctioned by a long and honourable tradition amongst (male) MPs in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). Indeed, this decision is more likely to have increased his status and credibility as a politician with leadership pretensions, carrying as it does connotations of solidarity with ordinary Labour voters. It would seem, then, that whereas for men in public life the differential power/solidarity meanings associated with full/diminutive names are generally compatible, for women they are often in tension, partly because of their greater insecurity in male-dominated institutions. The dilemma this poses is evident in an article in the *Daily Mail* bearing the headline, 'The name is Margaret, not Maggie' (1 July 1994). The alleged resistance of the then Deputy Leader of the PLP, Margaret Beckett, to accept the use of the diminutive form of her name is taken as 'evidence' of her relative formality and distance when compared to the ex-Prime Minister, a view reinforced by the visual cues in juxtaposed photographs of a smiling Thatcher and an unsmiling Beckett (Figure 3.1: 114).

***Lexical and Collocational Patterns:*** Naming practices obviously go beyond preferred titles and first names. Women in the public eye also have to decide whether they are comfortable with the gender marking of non-gender specific names for occupational roles, as in 'woman politician' and 'woman priest'. The fact that 'male politician' and 'male priest', unless used in a specifically contrastive co(n)text, are still largely regarded as tautologies suggests how far these roles are still seen as the preserve of men. The ex-Conservative MP Edwina Currie made her views on this issue very clear, 'I think that Margaret Thatcher and I would both say that we're not women MPs. We're MPs. I don't represent women; I represent 76,000 people' (cited in the *Sunday Express* 3 March 1985). This statement provides a trace of the way some women in public life feel the

need to resist the widespread media practice of employing naming practices that prioritise their gender over their professional status. In other words, however women in public life may wish to name themselves, it is as stereotypically gendered subjects that their identities are reproduced in the media. Fowler views this as symptomatic of a widespread practice whereby the concept of 'women-as-group' is traded in discourse (1991: 103). Despite traces of women's resistance to this practice, its ubiquity in media texts serves cumulatively to naturalise and reproduce normative gendered identities.

Fairclough (195b: 102) notes that, 'Collocations are often a good place to look for contradictions in texts'. Dysphemistic collocations, such as 'lipstick feminists' and 'career feminists', provide traces of a perceived tension between feminist-identified women and the public sphere roles they occupy. Such collocations presuppose that the collective political goals of feminism are fundamentally incompatible with the image consciousness and competitive individualism that are, it is implied, needed to attain high profile institutional roles. Such presuppositions afford feminists little discursive space in which to construct coherent subject positions for themselves. If they attempt to reconcile high status institutional roles and the subject position of 'feminist', they are liable to the charge, often levelled by other feminists, as well as by colleagues and the media, of a lack of integrity. A counter strategy amongst feminists has been to call into question normative assumptions about 'the best *man* for the job'. This is true in all the domains investigated in this study, but is particularly striking in the case of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition which has sought to contest the near-exclusive equation of 'politician' and 'hard *man*' in the Province's political life. For instance, in its campaign literature, the Coalition renders these 'hard men' discursively, if not materially, redundant by dismissing them as 'dinosaurs'.

Media representations of women in the public eye often include trivialising collocations. An infamous example is the caption 'Blair's babes' which accompanied an inset photograph of the PLP's record 101 female MPs in the 1997 General Election (*Daily Mail*, 8 May 1997). The use of the genitive implies that they 'belong' to Blair, and the connotations of 'babe' simultaneously infantilise and sexualise their identities. This is reinforced by the cues in the accompanying photograph which ostensibly celebrates their approximation to a 'critical mass' (Dahlerup 1988), yet by locating Blair at their centre, it transforms their story into a visual narrative of masculine control (Figure 2.2: 69). This collocation has been recycled since in numerous media texts, although sometimes it is used in a more tongue-in-cheek way.<sup>2</sup> As Fairclough (1995b) notes, a range of alternative subject positions is open to media producers. If the reader assumes that the role of entertainer, rather than that of serious analyst, is to the fore in this instance, s/he may interpret the collocation 'Blair's babes' in the spirit of postmodern irony. Irony, can, of course, disguise an ideological stance. I will argue that the collocation 'Blair's babes' imposed a homogeneous synthetic identity on Labour's new women MPs, an identity that has made it difficult for them to be taken seriously as politicians of conviction.

This tendency to sexualise women's identities is also evident amongst hostile male colleagues who exploit the polysemy of words and phrases to introduce sexual innuendo into supposedly asexual organisations and institutional spaces. A vivid instance of the undermining effect of such verbal harassment is provided by Joan Ruddock, MP, who recalled an early experience of speaking in the Commons, 'I was speaking once in an army debate eh talking about strip searching and one of the Tory men said I'd like to strip search *you*' (Appendix II: 120-21). Verbal sexual harassment is, of course, a contested site of meaning and some women may not feel offended by

## BLAIR'S BABES The picture that proves women have arrived at Westminster



Exclusive: Surrogate mother talks of love for her three sons

# OUR TRIPLE GIFT OF JOY

By NICK HOPKINS and SAM HARRIS

**A 41-YEAR-OLD grandmother has given birth to surrogate triplets in only the second case of its kind in Britain.**

Anne Keep had the three boys for Anthony and Julie Cohn, after meeting them through an organisation that helps childless couples. Last night all three spoke of their joy. Mrs Cohn, who was born without a womb, said: 'We still cannot quite believe it. They are everything we have ever wanted.'

Mrs Keep said: 'I wanted Anthony and Julie to feel the same overwhelming pride I did when I held my own first son 23 years ago. The happiness on their faces when they saw the babies for the first time made all the trauma worthwhile.'

'When I had to say goodbye to the boys, I remembered that image and knew I had done the right thing. There was no real sadness.'

The tiny boys were born in March, more than a month prematurely, and the largest weighed only 3lb 10oz. They have still not grown enough to leave hospital and go home with the Cohns to their flat in North-West London.

The birth defied huge odds. To avoid just such a risky multiple pregnancy, doctors had implanted only two eggs — taken from Mrs Cohn and fertilised with her husband's sperm — in Mrs Keep's womb. But one split into identical twins.

Mrs Keep told of the shock when she went for her first scan. She said: 'The doctor called out, "Yes, there's one, no two." Then there was a pause, and he



The best things in life are three: Julie and Anthony Cohn and Anne Keep (right) with the triplets *Picture: BRIAN BOULD*

INSIDE: Weather 2, Richard Littlejohn 11, Keith Waterhouse 12, Diary 37, TV and Radio 54-56, Letters 58, Coffee Break 63-65, City 66-69, Sport 70-80

Figure 2.2: Photograph of 'Blair's Babes' as it appeared in the *Daily Mail* (8 May 1997)

such behaviour. Those who make their displeasure clear, by contrast, often find themselves being labelled as 'humourless feminists' for, 'not properly handling "normal" sexual attention.' (Powell 1993: 126). Tannen argues that, 'being female is in itself "faultable" - a term used by Erving Goffman to capture the sense in which someone can be embarrassed or made to feel in the wrong because they have a particular characteristic.' (Tannen 1996: 260). She contrasts this with what she claims is men's very different relationship to their sexual identities, 'many men regard their sexual prowess as a form of power, not vulnerability' (*ibid*: 261). According to Hearn (1992), the impulse to humiliate women through sexual innuendo stems from a fear of women's sexuality which in turn interferes with men's homosocial work groups. In some institutional contexts, women's sexuality is not only regarded as anomalous, but as 'tainting', as will be evident in Chapter 6 on women in the Church.

***Theme and Rheme:*** Evidence from this study suggests that both familial roles and appearance continue to be thematised for women, often in text and/or utterance initial dossier epithets, while their academic and professional qualifications tend to be backgrounded. It is not uncommon for their identities to be reduced to sartorial metonyms, as in the article accompanying the *Daily Mail* photograph of Blair's babes:

The women frothed out of Church House, Westminster, in a multi-Coloured tide. It was like the Chelsea Flower Show meets the Girl Guides, as the fuschia suits loved by the likes of Margaret Beckett (No. 83), and Barbara Follett's glittering emerald green (No. 74), mingled with more sombre browns and beiges.

(*Daily Mail* 8 May 1997: 40, my italics)

Lakoff (1995: 45) points out that the disproportionate focus on women's appearance is effectively a form of silencing, since it deflects attention away from what they are actually *saying*. Ward's (1984) observation that this is true whether the woman in question 'defies or exemplifies a popular stereotype.' (cited in Lee 1992: 111) is

supported by my research. Indeed, despite the wide range of images and sartorial codes adopted by women in public life, they tend to be portrayed either as 'femmes' or 'frumps', signalling to them that they are women in a male-dominated environment. In her recent book, Faludi (1999) argues that men are now just as likely to be evaluated in terms of their surface appearance, including in terms of their heterosexual attractiveness. While this may well be true of popular icons, like Sylvester Stallone, and perhaps for certain high profile political leaders, such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, there is less evidence that this holds true for the majority of men in male-dominated institutions and organisations. It could, of course, be argued that this places women at an advantage, since they are likely to stand out amongst the drab grey suits, giving them a disproportional amount of interactional power relative to their minority status. Hence, the headline in the *Financial Times* (4 May 1997) after the gains made by women in the 1997 General Election, 'Women start to beat back pinstripe hordes'. But those who actively invest in modes of femininity often find themselves at odds with the normative requirements of the *physique de role* that most men fulfil with a minimum of effort.

***(Inter)textual Traces and Cues:*** The perceived mismatch between women and the public sphere roles they occupy can often be deduced from the intertextual resonances of the terms used to describe them. A vivid example occurred in a recent profile of the Shadow Home Secretary, Ann Widdecombe, which appeared in the *Guardian* under the telling headline 'Out of this world'. In it she is described by journalist, Simon Hattenstone, in the following terms:

Her head is tiny, trapped inside the jet-black basin cut, her legs non-existent and she walks on a giant bosom. Her face is somehow not human. Not inhuman, just not human. She looks as if she could have been created by

(*Guardian* 21 June 1999)

This lends support to Puwar's (1997) argument that women, like black people, in Parliament and the Civil Service, are seen as 'space invaders'. The extreme misogyny evident in this particular description provoked an angry response in the Letters' page, including from the feminist campaigner and writer, Claire Raynor, indicating that readers often read against such sexist texts. Readers are, perhaps, less likely to feel confident about reading against the sexist connotations of visual media texts, since, as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:15) point out, in terms of visual literacy, the education system produces illiterates. One such sexist visual text is a political cartoon that appeared in *The Times* (7 June 1994), during the 1994 European election campaign. It depicts Margaret Beckett, then Acting Leader of the PLP, as the enemy within, in what is an explicit intertextual reference to Lacoste's infamous WWII propaganda poster (Figure 2.3: 73). In a piece of flattery, as insulting as that in the original poster, the implication is that Beckett may yet prove to be a serious political player, *in spite of* her incongruously feminine appearance, emphasised by her attire and posture, and by the fact that her male political opponents are clad in military uniforms. As will be evident in the chapters that follow, these examples are not untypical of the many metaphors and other intertextual references that are used to refer to women in public sphere roles in order to signal their anomalous position as 'outsiders within'.

The tendency amongst women themselves, most notably in the Church and the environmental movement, is to discuss the performance of their public and professional roles in terms that seem calculated to stress the *complementary* nature of



Figure 2.3: Cartoon by Peter Brookes, after G. Lacoste (*The Times* 7 June 1994)

their private and public identities. Thus some women frame their experience of the latter by employing familial and bodily tropes. In the light of the media tendency noted above, this discursive strategy may inadvertently help to contribute to the widespread perception that women are particularly suited to a narrow range of usually subordinate public sphere roles. Faludi (1992) argues that the media all-too-readily embrace women's appeals to their special nurturing and domestic management skills, 'marking women as "special" slips easily into placing limits on them. "Special" may sound like superior, but it is also a euphemism for "handicapped".' (*ibid*: 360). A more productive strategy, employed by Margaret Thatcher, with the help of the Public Relations firm Saatchi and Saatchi, was to exploit the productive *clash* of stereotypically gendered subject positions as housewife, nanny and dominatrix, with masculinist roles of technocrat and 'toughocrat' (W. Webster 1990). Whereas this undoubtedly furthered her personal political ambitions, it did little to further the feminist goal of promoting greater equality for *all* women in public sphere institutions.

Fairclough (1995b) argues that one of the functions of media discourse is to mediate between public sphere discourse types and the lifeworld discourse of readers. In the case of the genre of the media interview, this mediatizing role generally results in the production of hybrid texts which emphasise the public and private identities of the public figures interviewed (*ibid*: 189). I will suggest that the genre of the media interview is gendered in the sense that the balance of this coverage varies depending on the gendered identity of the interviewee. When women in public life are profiled in the media there is a relative *absence* of references to their public sphere roles and a disproportionate focus on their private sphere identities. In the profile of Widdecombe referred to above, central to the interviewer's construction of her as an alien is his

obsessive foregrounding of her childless state. In a mock-sympathetic tone, he invites the reader to, 'imagine how lonely life must be for her with no partner, no kids and just a mouthful of crooked teeth for company.' (*Guardian* 21 June 1999). Thereafter, he records her response to no fewer than three separate questions as to why she did not want to have children. By contrast, profiles of women in public life who *do* have children often bear traces of interrogative strategies which foreground the alleged 'problem' this poses for the fulfilment of their occupational roles.

### **The Relational Subfunction**

***Naming Practices:*** The media are under no obligation to accept the self-selected titles of women in the public eye, creating a rich resource for variable representation not available to them in the case of men. The titles and names they choose can signal a number of meanings, including ideological distance or affinity with the individuals represented. For instance, the *Guardian* and *Independent* are the only papers which use Mo Mowlam's preferred title, 'Ms'. She is referred to as 'Miss Mowlam' in the *Telegraph*, despite the fact that she is married, while *The Times* employs the more formal and respectful academic title, 'Dr'. Fowler (1991) makes some interesting observations about the asymmetrical patterns of naming for men and women in the print media, although he stresses the fact that they need to be analysed in a context-sensitive way. He illustrates this by reference to the different meanings associated with the diminutive form of first-name-only used in relation to the former prime minister, Margaret Thatcher:

[It] is the standard reference...in the right-wing popular press, and in that particular context it signifies a friendly intimacy; used in the *Daily Mirror*, however, which claims to represent the interests of the Left, it might connote casualness or disrespect.

(Fowler 1991: 99)

This rather clear-cut ideological division he draws here between different newspapers is no doubt somewhat crude, but cotextual cues can clearly function to promote preferred meanings for the naming practices used within specific newspaper articles. Fowler also notes that it is, 'more difficult to apply last names alone to women, with different significance' (*ibid*). The unequal personalisation of men and women in this respect may provide a trace of media producers' greater respect for women, but it also indicates a lack of easy familiarity when discussing female actors in public sphere roles. By contrast, the practice of using last-names-only for men can carry connotations of solidarity, through its association with this pattern of use in the British public school system.

This study supports the view that women in public life tend not to mark the difference between their transactional roles and their personal relationships. One way in which this manifests itself is in their tendency to minimise status distinctions between themselves and addressees by inviting first name use. However, a number of interviewees reported the pattern also noted by Mills (1995: 110) that people *presume* that they can address them in this way, whether or not they have sanctioned this pattern of naming. It would seem that assumptions about gender override issues of asymmetrical power relationships in this respect, a pattern also noted by Tannen (1996: 264) in relation to interaction between patients and women doctors. An alternative reading, however, might be that there is a general shift to less formal marking of status differences in public sphere discourse types (see Fairclough 1995b), a shift that women's increasing presence may have helped to reinforce.

***Lexical and Collocational Patterns:*** By choosing to employ informal lexis a text producer can establish a relationship with the implied addressee as a 'co-member of the

world of common experience, the lifeworld.' (Fairclough 1995b: 137). More specialist vocabulary can position the speaker as expert, and listeners/readers as receivers of information. The question that will be explored in this study is whether women in public life consciously employ more informal and accessible language than male peers. There would seem to be some empirical evidence to lend support to this view. For instance, a comparative study by F.L. Smith (1993) of sermons delivered by ten male and four female trainee preachers on the same biblical text revealed that the men were much more likely to assume an expert 'stance' in relation to their listeners by interpreting the text in question for them. This was also the strategy adopted by one of the women, despite the fact that the sermons were delivered to fellow students. Two of the other women, however, 'translated' the text into a more accessible and contemporary register, while the fourth employed a number of other linguistic devices in order to construct and maintain a 'low- profile' stance (cited in Tannen 1996: 173-5). The female Anglican priests interviewed for this study likewise claim to employ a consciously accessible rhetorical style when preaching in order to avoid the sort of remote language and authoritative tone that they feel characterises the preaching style of many male priests.

Obviously the question of intended audience is crucial here. For instance, there is some ambiguity in F. L. Smith's (1993) study, at least as reported by Tannen (1994), about whether the trainee preachers were invited to *simulate* an address to an intended congregation. If not, then the decision of one woman to speak, 'as if she were telling a story to a group of children.' (*ibid*: 174-5) could, with some justification, have been viewed as patronising by her fellow trainees. In other words, whatever the speaker's intentions, an accessible style might be perceived as more patronising by listeners/readers, than a specialist one that positions them as knowledgeable, even if

not wholly comprehending, subjects. There is, in any case, some evidence from my study that the relative insecurity women experience in male-dominated institutions and organisations leads some of them to employ even more professional jargon than male colleagues, especially when interacting with these colleagues in committees and public forums. The sense that women have to outdo men at their own game is evident in the views expressed by a number of female MPs interviewed by Puwar (1997: 4): '[women] have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good' and, 'we will have succeeded in getting equality for women when women can be as mediocre as the men'. Given that women in woman-oriented organisations are freed from these constraints, do they eschew such jargon? My comparative study in Chapter 5 of the very different campaigning styles adopted by female- and male-oriented environmental groups considers the question in some detail.

***Pronominal Choices:*** Mechanisms for establishing relations between text producers and readers/listeners include the rich resource of pronominal reference. Van Dijk (1998: 203), for instance, claims that, 'there are few words in the language that may be as socially and ideologically "loaded" as a simple *we*'. The interpersonal meanings of pronouns will be considered here, while their ideological functions will be considered in the section below which relates to the ideational metafunction. The structured absence of personal pronouns, often achieved by the sustained use of passive constructions and nominalisations, and/or the use of exclusive 'we', can lead to an impersonal and/or authoritative address. By contrast, as the name suggests, the use of *inclusive* 'we' presupposes common ground between text producers and assumed readers/listeners. Yet, I will demonstrate that in media texts, and numerous other texts associated with institutional discourses types, this so-called inclusive use of 'we' is often implicitly gendered as male. By assuming a commonality of beliefs and values

with their ideal male addressees, such texts contribute to positioning women as members of an 'out group'. This raises an important general point, a point that is often downplayed, especially by feminist linguists: language oriented to others can serve an *exclusive*, as well as an inclusive function (see Figure 2.1: 62).

In her discussion of the relationship between pronoun choice and speaker claims to authority, Tannen suggests that (1996: 137) , 'It is not uncommon for many men to say "I" in situations where many women would say "we".' She goes on to imply that this tendency to share credit with others by eschewing the use of the first person pronoun may affect women's prospects for promotion since their individual achievements may go unrecognised. However, this ignores the fact that inclusive 'we' does not unambiguously signal solidarity with listeners/readers in all co(n)texts of use, and in some cases can be used to lay claims to authority in relation to addressees . For instance, Fairclough (1995b: 181) notes an ambivalence in Thatcher's inclusive uses of 'we', 'On the one hand they claim solidarity by placing everyone in the same boat, but on the other they claim authority in...claiming the right to speak for the people as a whole'. Another instance of this potential ambivalence can be found in an example cited by Coates, in order to support her claim that women doctors mitigate their directives to patients by using 'we' rather than 'you', 'Maybe what we ought to do, is stay with the dose of di(avameez) you're on.' (1995: 26). Yet it could be argued that the patient might perceive this use of 'we' as directive, or even infantilising, rather than inclusive. This alerts us to the need to be sensitive to co(n)text immanent factors when judging the relational meanings conveyed by pronominal use.

***Relational Modality Choices:*** Holmes (1995) cites an impressive body of empirical evidence in support of her claim that women are more sensitive than men to the face

needs of addressees. One way in which this sensitivity manifests itself is through their use of a high density of affective modality markers, including hedging devices, often expressed by modal verbs and adverbs; facilitative tags, like 'aren't they?' and pragmatic particles, such as 'you know'. They are also more likely to employ deontic modality markers that mitigate, rather than strengthen, the illocutionary force of utterances. It is not surprising then that many of the women interviewed for this study claim to find themselves at odds with the confrontational norms that prevail in previously male-dominated institutions and organisations. In some instances, this has led them to be openly critical of these norms and to call for the implementation of alternatives.

Whatever their commitment, in principle, to a more collaborative style, however, this study would suggest that the institutional constraints that operate on women in public sphere roles often lead them to employ hybrid speech styles, marked by mixed, often contradictory, modality choices. By contrast, women who belong to groupings and organisations with a feminist ethos, such as the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the London based Women's Environmental Network, have developed structures in which egalitarian and collaborative rhetorical styles not only prevail, but have in their turn become normative (see Chapters 4 and 5).

There is, of course, a danger that, as well as meeting all the other requirements of their public sphere roles, women will carry the additional burden of being expected to civilise male institutional spaces. This expectation is implicit in the claim made by Holmes (1995: 194), in her book on linguistic politeness, 'despite their lack of social power, women have considerable social influence: their linguistic behaviour determines the overt and publicly recognised norms of polite verbal interaction in the community'. The likely consequence of this socially ascribed expectation is that those who fail to conform to norms of politeness are likely to be judged even more harshly

than male peers. Thus Cameron (1992: 209) notes that Thatcher's speech style attracted a disproportionate amount of hostile comment. More recently, Mo Mowlam's reputation for swearing was used to call into question her suitability for the job of Northern Ireland Secretary (*Guardian* 20 July 1999), whereas this pattern of linguistic behaviour is likely to go unremarked in a male politician. Again, this suggests that the speech of men and women in public life is often evaluated according to different criteria.

***Speech Acts and Relational Meaning:*** Halliday (1994: 68) suggests that the inherently dialogic nature of speech acts means that they should be thought of as speech 'interacts'. The relationship between participants in any given situation can be signalled by the sort of speech acts text producers feel themselves entitled to accomplish. Van Dijk (1998: 209) argues that it is in this way that the, 'social position, power and control of social members can be exercised, opposed, mitigated or emphasised'. A number of linguists have argued that once again gender is a key factor in determining the preferred speech acts and deontic modality markers used by text producers (Coates 1995; Holmes 1996; Tannen 1996). In particular, it is claimed that women are more likely to use mitigating devices to offset potentially face-threatening acts. For instance, in her comparative study of the speech acts favoured by male and female academics, Kuhn (1992) suggests that female academics tend to avoid issuing unmitigated directives to express what they require from students at the beginning of a course. Whereas male colleagues used bald directives such as, 'I require X', women tended to emphasise the institutional origin of regulations, employing the nominalisation, 'the requirements are Y' (cited in Tannen 1996: 175). But, Lee's work (1992) alerts us to the danger of assuming mitigated forms are invariably less coercive. He argues that they are often mitigated precisely because they are more likely to threaten the negative face needs of those addressed,

whereas 'the bare imperative is used when the action is perceived as being in some sense to the benefit of the reader.' (Lee 1992: 150). Attention to the specific co(n)text of use is therefore required before the illocutionary force of a given speech act can be established.

The assumption that men are less sensitive about threatening others' face appears to be borne out by reference to the speech acts they favour when addressing each other. However, in her study of the speech of young adolescent males, Cameron (1997) argues that it is a mistake to regard speech acts such as ritual insults as purely competitive linguistic behaviour, since they also serve an important interpersonal function, 'Participants in a conversation or other speech event may compete with each other and at the same time be pursuing a shared project or common agenda (as in ritual insult sessions)' (*ibid*: 59). In other words, ritual insults constitute both verbal duelling *and* an instance of co-operative talk. They represent an integral part of a stylised performance of heterosexual masculinity, whereby participants affirm their solidarity as members of an in-group, at the expense of those positioned as outsiders. In this instance, the homosocial bonds affirmed between participants were achieved by identifying homosexual men as an out-group. In mixed-sex organisations and institutions, such behaviour is likely to position both gay men and women as excluded others, since there is some evidence that women may experience such behaviour as alienating (Holmes 1995: 153; Tannen 1996: 76). Cameron's essay is important, therefore, not only because it casts doubt on the competitive/co-operative dichotomy that underpins a good deal of feminist research, but because it highlights the fact that co-operative discursive strategies can serve an exclusive, as well as an inclusive, function, something noted above in relation to the pronominal choices speakers make.

As well as differences in the speech acts preferred by men and women, there is some evidence to suggest that there are differences in the types of speech act used when addressing both sexes. For instance, in her New Zealand data, Holmes noted, 'a clearly observable tendency for women to be complimented on their appearance more often than men.' (1995: 131). She goes on to assert that:

Provided it is not sarcastic, a compliment on someone's appearance such as *you're looking wonderful* is difficult to interpret as anything other than a positively polite utterance. An appearance compliment is clearly an expression of solidarity, a positively affective speech act.

(Holmes 1995: 131)

Despite her stated commitment to the context-dependence of meaning, Holmes largely ignores questions of context here. She does make reference to the relative status of participants when she observes that, 'males are even more likely to compliment women of higher status than women are.' (*ibid*: 135). Yet, I would argue that the context of situation in which compliments occur is at least as important as the question of the relative status of those involved. In professional contexts, for instance, even compliments between equals can function to personalise the relationship between complimenter and recipient in a way that may be perceived as inappropriate. This was certainly the overwhelming response to this practice amongst the women interviewed for this study, all of whom had examples of occasions when compliments on their appearance made by male colleagues had, they felt, drawn unwelcome attention to their sexual identities, when they were hoping for the focus to be on the content of their talk. In other words, in the majority of cases, my respondents did not perceive compliments as *positively* affective speech acts, but as *negatively* affective speech acts, establishing the wrong sort of relationship between themselves and the colleagues who addressed them in this way. Once again, this is a situation that lends itself to strategic

misunderstanding, as Uchida (1992) notes:

Against the addressee's charge of insult or harassment, the addresser can justify himself by saying that it was only a compliment; he was trying to be nice and friendly; and no, of course he had no intention of dominance!

(Uchida 1992: 558)

Holmes also notes that men appear to perceive compliments as 'more referentially orientated evaluative utterances' (*ibid.*: 143). This may be due less to their differing perceptions of these speech acts, as she suggests, than to the fact that they are more likely than women to be complimented on their competence, rather than on their appearance.

In relation to speech acts where the function is to give advice, I will suggest that alternative media produced by women-oriented groups and organisations challenge the tendency evident in the mainstream media to position female readers as *recipients* of advice. In his analysis of media coverage of food scares in the late 1980s, Fowler (1991: 17 ff.) reveals how both the problem and the solution for these scares were located with housewives. Female readers were addressed in language, 'phrased in classroom fashion, with plenty of imperatives, modals of obligation ('have to', 'must'), absolutes ('never', 'immediately')." (Fowler 1991: 190). The assumption that such readers were profoundly ignorant was reinforced by the ubiquity of lists of do's and don'ts which were 'spelt out' for them in a wide range of media. I will argue that this type of patronising address is much less likely to characterise the approach to links between food, health and the environment adopted in the campaign literature of women-oriented environmental groups, such as the Women's Environmental Network (Chapter 5).

*(Inter)textual Traces and Cues*: Holmes (1995: 130) provides extensive empirical evidence from her own research and that of others which, 'supports a view of women's conversational style as more interpersonal, affective and interaction-oriented compared to the impersonal and content-oriented style more typical of male interaction'. This manifests itself in textual features such as latching, co-operative sentence building, back-channelling and a propensity to use informal discourse markers, such as 'oh', 'well' and 'right' and conjunctions, like 'so' and 'coz'. Women's greater orientation towards the interpersonal metafunction means that their increasing entry into public sphere roles is likely to have contributed towards the conversationalisation of public sphere discourse types noted by Fairclough (1992; 1994; 1995b). Fairclough (1994) points out that this does not necessarily mean that a more egalitarian relationship exists between text producers and addressees. On the contrary, 'conversationalized discursive practices might be regarded not as eradicating the power of producers, professionals, bureaucrats, and so forth, but as backgrounding and disguising it, and making it more difficult to challenge' (Fairclough 1994: 264). In her provocative book on alternative medicine, Coward (1990), for instance, is sceptical about whether the more person-oriented discursive approach employed by alternative practitioners is in fact as empowering for women patients, as many analysts, including Fairclough (1992: 144 ff.), have claimed.

The link between the relatively intimate mode of address increasingly employed by media producers and the interactional style said to be favoured by women has led some commentators to refer to this shift as the 'feminisation' of the news media (see van Zoonen 1998: 41 ff.). The tendency for discursive strategies associated with women to be denigrated is, however, evident in the slide from 'feminisation' to 'dumbing down' and, more recently, to 'bitch journalism', a term employed by the politician David Steel

(cited in the *Guardian* 7 September 1999: 13). The latter appears to be alluding to media coverage of the so-called 'honey trap' technique whereby young female investigative journalists are alleged to act as 'bait' in order to trick male celebrities into revealing damning personal secrets. A comment made by one of these journalists, Dawn Alford, reveals the extent to which this coverage drew upon stereotypes of the predatory female, 'columnists used up hundreds of inches inferring I was a cross between Mata Hari and a black widow spider' (*Media Guardian* 31 May 1999: 2). This mythical narrative of *femmes fatales* and helpless male victims conveniently glosses over the fact that many of these women were accompanied by male colleagues, while the so-called 'king of the sting' is the *News of the World's* Mazher Mahmood.

The metaphors employed by text producers often serve an important relational function. Mills (1995) regards metaphor as operating at the level of discourse, and I would go further by suggesting that it should be viewed as an inherently *intertextual* phenomenon, since metaphors, by their very nature, evoke pre-texts and even entire genres and/or semantic fields. For instance, in their influential study of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors do not simply serve an aesthetic function as stylistic ornament, but are fundamental to ways of thinking and structuring discursive domains. In particular, they claim that the pervasive use of the 'argument as war' metaphor presupposes that the relationship between participants in public discussions and debates is a combative one (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4). A similar role is performed by the widespread use of sporting metaphors. Thus in a recent article reporting debates in the Commons, Simon Hoggart noted that a 'thrust' at the Prime Minister, made by the Liberal Democrat MP, Jackie Ballard, failed, whereas a male MP and old pal (of Hoggart's), Mickey Fabricant, 'scored against' him and two difficult 'bouts' with William Hague tired him out (*Guardian* 24 June 1999).

Hearn (1992) argues that the conflictual model of public debate created by such metaphors is favoured by men since it affords them opportunities for competitive displays of masculinity:

...standing up, strutting, performing in public, orating, arguing, saying your piece, in the competitive world of men involves a symbolic waving around of the penis, and sometimes going the whole hog, 'wanking off', as a display to others, women and men, but most importantly men.

(Hearn 1992: 207)

In other words, he sees such performances not only as constitutive of their identities as men, but as helping to constitute the homosocial bonds between them and other men.

Evidence from this study would suggest that women are less comfortable with the 'yah boo' style of debate that sporting and military metaphors help to normalise.

It is somewhat surprising, then, that in an empirical study of speeches made by politicians in the European Parliament, Footit (1999) found no significant difference in the overall percentage of military metaphors used by men and women, 15% and 13% respectively. This could be taken as evidence that women feel constrained to adopt the dominant discursive norms that prevail in male-dominated institutions and organisations. However, a more nuanced investigation undertaken by Footit into the metaphorical fields drawn upon and the types of participants involved revealed that women were more likely to use metaphors that refer to small scale and localised engagements, rather than to the classic grand army campaigns alluded to by men. Her analysis also reveals the creative use many women made of metaphors drawn from the domestic realm, leading her to conclude that they are, in fact, imagining both politics and inter-party relationships differently. Chapter 4 of this study will provide further evidence in support of this view, especially in relation to the reverse political discourse being developed by members of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. Their

creative use of metaphor seems calculated to challenge the tendency of the language of political debate to exclude the lifeworld of women. Yet, a note of caution needs to be sounded, since Thatcher's well-known practice of discussing economic policy in terms of domestic metaphors did not *materially* benefit women. On the contrary, most women's lives worsened considerably during her period in office.

My research points to the fact that the news frame (Norris ed. 1997) of gender antagonism is pervasive in media coverage of the relations between men and women in public life. With reference to the metaphorical phrase the 'battle of the sexes', Mills (1995) points out that:

in assuming at a metaphorical level that the relations between the sexes can be considered only as if they were always antagonistic, the user of this phrase will be led to consider males and females in terms of battle and warfare, rather than considering other forms of thinking.

(Mills 1995: 137)

Media texts often provide traces of women's resistance to this construction of their relationship with male colleagues. For instance, responding to a request from an interviewer to reveal stories about her unfair treatment at the hands of male colleagues, Monica McWilliams of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition replied, 'there is a danger of tarring all men with the same brush and some of my best friends are men in politics, genuinely good people.' (*Belfast Telegraph* 10 October 1998). As will become evident, media recontextualisations of women's accounts of their experiences do not always allow space for such alternative 'forms of thinking' about gender relations. A pre-scripted gendered schema of male aggressors and female victims is much more in keeping with the news value of 'negativity', and more specifically with the reporting of 'conflict between people' noted by Bell (1991: 156).

### **2.8.2 The Ideational Metafunction**

As observed above (2.8), there has been a tendency in functional approaches to language to define the ideational in narrowly referential terms, ignoring its evaluative dimension. In this study, the ideational will be taken to refer to the linguistic and semiotic realisation of information, facts and content, as well as the perspective text producers take in relation to these. Gee (1990) offers a corrective to the assumption that the referential function of language is more important than its evaluative role:

It is a mistake to think that the primary function of human language is to talk about the world. Rather, any human language primarily functions to allow speakers to take various *perspectives* or *viewpoints* on the world. Each human language is rich with devices for talking about the same situation in the world in multiple ways, depending upon the perspective one wishes to take on that situation.

(Gee 1990: 112, italics in the original)

The emphasis in what follows is precisely on questions of viewpoint and stance since the issue of how women's speech is evaluated is a crucial one. The question that will be answered in detail in this section is how the ideational metafunction is realised (inter)textually in ways that are relevant to the production, reproduction and transformation of normative ideologies about gender.

***Lexical and Collocational Choices:*** The connotative meanings associated with lexical items is clearly an important resource which text producers can exploit in order to signal their ideological stance in relation to represented individuals. Evidence, including from this study, suggests that pejorative epithets such as 'strident' remain depressingly persistent in evaluations of the speech styles of women who occupy public sphere roles (see also K. Ross: 1995a; Tannen: 1996). Such gender specific dysphemisms provide traces of the continuing unease with which women who perform such roles are viewed. Other adjectives may not carry negative connotations in all

co(n)texts, but may do so when they enter into specific collocations. One such instance is the adjective 'formidable' when it collocates with 'woman'. A straw poll amongst feminist friends and colleagues revealed that no-one would regard the epithet as a compliment if used in relation to them, in spite of its ostensibly positive connotations. On the contrary, when asked to comment on its connotative meaning, terms like 'overbearing' and 'aggressive' recurred. Interestingly, several people mentioned that, where spoken, it is likely to be accompanied by a predictable pattern of paralinguistic behaviour, namely the rolling or widening of the speaker's eyes and/or the raising of her/his eyebrows. Although often neglected, this type of ostensive behaviour (Sperber and Wilson 1986) serves an important function in delimiting meaning. Despite the many gains made by feminists, the collocation 'formidable woman' would appear to indicate a residual surprise that women should be powerful, as well as an implicit anxiety that this should be so. In other words, it provides a textual trace of the tensions that arise when gendered identities undergo a process of adjustment and change.

While the language used to judge women's performance of public sphere roles may be both predictable and stereotypical, this study suggests that the lexical and collocational patterns employed by many women in public life are ideologically creative. Many women have also sought to contest pre-existing classification schemes by which vocabulary is organised, particularly in the discourses of politics and organised religion. An obvious example is the way feminist-identified women have used their institutional status and organisational roles to promote the use of inclusive language. Another strategy has been to subvert existing idioms, since this is a powerful way of challenging folk wisdom about the nature of gendered identities and relationships. Mills (1995: 130) says of idioms, 'because of their formulaic nature, these phrases do open themselves up to the possibility of being subverted'. Other, more discourse-

specific, examples of women's ideologically creative use of language will be discussed in some detail in the chapters that follow.

***Pronominal Choices:*** Given the debates surrounding gender inclusive language, the decision by a text producer to employ the so-called generic pronoun 'he' can no longer be regarded as ideologically neutral. Such a choice presupposes a view of the world in which men are the chief actors, in this case, in public sphere roles. This study provides further evidence in support of the view, noted by a number of feminists, that such generics are, in any case, revealed as anything but once the surrounding co(n)text is taken into account. Another noticeable pattern in my data is that pronoun slippages provide traces of text producers' affinity with, or ideological distance from, the views expressed by represented subjects. For instance, in press reports of the 1994 Labour Leadership campaign, slippages between corporate and inclusive functions of the pronoun 'we' were found to signal the alignment of different newspapers with the policies of one or other of the two male candidates. The structured absence of this slippage in the case of the one woman in the race signalled their relative distance from her campaign pledges (see 3.8.2). This type of pronoun slippage acts as one of a number of evaluative framing devices available to text producers. Similar framing devices are discussed below.

***Epistemic Modality Choices:*** Text producers can employ modality markers from the cautious to the categorical to signal their degree of commitment to the truth of propositions expressed. Although realised through the same formal features as relational modality, namely modal verbs, modal adverbs and aspects of tense, they therefore perform a primarily evaluative, rather than an interpersonal, function. The subjective evaluations of media producers can attain the status of fact by being cast in

terms of categorical modality. Alternatively, by employing what Halliday (1994: 272) refers to as impersonal projections (e.g. 'It may be the case that...'), media producers can distance themselves from evaluative judgements that are in fact their own. Modality choices can, therefore, cue readers in to accepting producers' evaluations of represented individuals. Although this is true whether these individuals are male or female, I will suggest that women are likely to fare less well in an industry where a masculinist culture still prevails (van Zoonen 1998: 33).

The fact that individual linguistic items and/or semiotic modes are, to use Coates' (1987: 114) term, 'polypragmatic', can give rise to indeterminacy of meaning. Thus while a woman in a public sphere role may well intend her modal utterances to be interpreted as markers of social solidarity, empirical evidence suggests that they are often perceived as signifying a lack of authority (Holmes: 1995; Tannen: 1996 ). Lee (1992: 151) argues that, 'ambiguity in the area of modality typically occurs as an exponent of the tension between interacting discourses'. This is a point that will be explored further in this study with reference to a co(n)text-sensitive analysis of modality choices. One of the claims that will be made is that some of the cautious modality choices made by women are linked to discourse type rather than gender, since such choices are in fact characteristic of certain public sphere discourse types, notably the discourse of party politics.

***Transitivity Choices:*** According to Halliday (1994: 179), 'Transitivity structures express representational meaning: what the clause is about, which is typically some process, with associated participants and circumstances'. A link between gender and preferred transitivity choices is illustrated in Chapter 5 with reference to the persuasive rhetoric employed by male and female-oriented environmental groups. Transitivity

choices in media texts are also considered on the grounds that such choices are likely to reveal a good deal about their producers' perceptions of represented subjects. It will be shown that, in spite of their institutional status and/or organisational role, women in public life are often portrayed as being acted upon by people and events outside their control. Likewise, the *absence* of media reporting of their activities means that in many instances women in the public domain are constructed as invisible. During political leadership campaigns, this may mean that female candidates are 'written out of influential news narratives. Interestingly, Lee (1992: 113) notes that, even where their activities are reported in news articles, women's agency is often obscured by the fact that they do not appear in accompanying photographs, a pattern that I also discovered. Mills' (1995: 143 ff.) call for a co(n)text-sensitive approach to transitivity choices is likely to prove useful, however, for understanding the apparent investment some women have in occupying subordinate roles. Halliday also points to the connection between transitivity choices and issues of voice (*ibid.*: 161 ff.), and it will obviously be important to consider whether agency is made clear in media reports, or whether information is attributed to unspecified sources.

***Framing Devices:*** One way in which text producers can signal their own position vis-a-vis the views expressed by represented subjects is through the use of framing devices such as overtly evaluative reporting verbs and inquit tags. Caldas-Coulthard (1995) argues that, although relatively rare in her corpus comprising news reports, the use of what she terms 'stage direction verbs' revealed stereotypical assumptions about the speech of men and women, 'Men "shout" and "groan" while women (and children) "scream" and "yell".' (Caldas-Coulthard 1995: 235). In an earlier study, I noted a similarly gendered pattern of use for the verb 'giggle'. Of the 124 occurrences of this verb in the then 7.3 million word Birmingham Collection of English Text, 66% were

used to refer to the paralinguistic behaviour of adult females and children, while 12.5% referred to that of effeminate men (Ramsey 1987: 63 ff.). This trivialising verb is used to frame the speech of high profile women in all of the domains included in this study. I will suggest, however, that the *structured absence* of evaluative framing can be as ideologically significant as the *presence* of reporting verbs and inquit tags that draw on stereotypes about women's speech. Finally, in his discussion of the polyphonic nature of media texts, Fairclough makes the point that, 'how voices are woven together, how they are ordered with respect to each other, becomes decisive.' (1995b: 84). Again, I will suggest that gender is often a relevant factor in determining patterns of discourse representation.

***(Inter)Textual Traces and Cues:*** In news genres, decisions about layout can, of course, be ideologically significant. For instance, since material in headlines and lead paragraphs is informationally foregrounded, these can slant the entire article for the reader. So too can accompanying photographs and other visual cues, such as cartoons. On occasions, however, it is the incongruity between linguistic and visual cues that a reader is invited to recognise. For instance, the potentially positive phrase, the 'politics of empathy', which occurs in the strapline accompanying a profile of Mary McAleese, the then newly elected President of Ireland, is wholly at odds with the image of her supplied in the accompanying photograph (*Guardian* 14 April 1998: 4-5). In it, a frowning McAleese is pictured in a combative stance, doing verbal battle with an unseen opponent (Figure 2.4: 95). Both her hands are outstretched in a gesture that, far from inviting an empathetic embrace, unambiguously tells viewers to, "Back off". The tension between the strapline and the photograph prepares the reader for the gradual unmasking of her approach to politics as more in keeping with the 'politics of ego'.



**Figure 2.4: Photograph of Mary McAleese (*Guardian Weekend* 1 November 1997)**

As well as an ideologically creative approach to lexical classification frames, noted above, I will suggest that women also have a creative approach to the institutionally and culturally ratified genres that circulate in the public sphere. Text producers can mix elements from existing genres to produce hybrid texts, but the resulting disjunction between genre expectations and the actual text types produced may provoke a negative reaction. This is certainly true of female politicians who have sought to challenge the traditional masculinist genre of politics. As in the profile of McAleese referred to above, charges of insincerity and effusiveness abound. Thus both she and her predecessor, Mary Robinson, are credited with little more than a facility for 'vacuous talk'. In an article on Mo Mowlam's approach to her job as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the columnist, Charlotte Raven, claims that this approach is not even intelligible *as politics*, 'That Mowlam is good at what she does is undeniable - as long as you accept that what she does is not politics.' (*Guardian* 20 July 1999: 4). Again, it is her rhetorical style that is singled out as being incompatible with that expected of a politician:

I cannot escape the suggestion that Mowlam might make a better marriage counsellor than Minister for Difficult Problems...Mowlam is a *consummate chatter* and, thus, it is as *a talker* she is judged. Since canonisation following her tumour operation, people have rushed to praise her "forthright" *way with words*, her "no bullshit" approach to politics, her lack of "airs and graces". (*Guardian* 20 July 1999: 4, my italics)

The implication is that her language is both inappropriately *excessive*, a common folklinguistic charge levelled against women's speech, and insufficiently formal. Related to the latter is the recurrent charge that women in public life are too 'touchy-feely', a charge which implies that they have transgressed some unwritten law of proxemics about the proper distance that should be maintained between individuals in public spaces. It is clear then that the uncritical acceptance of socially sanctioned

generic norms constitutes a barrier to change in gendered identities and gendered relations in the public domain.

The power of cross-institutional fraternal networks means that women are rarely called upon as accessed voices in the media, with the result that their ideas and perspectives on events are often omitted or marginalised. Where women's public sphere activities are discussed in the media, the metaphors used to refer to them often evoke stereotypically gendered genres which afford them very limited roles. An extreme instance is the epithet 'cyborgs', widely used to refer to Labour's new female MPs, an allusion intended to signify their alleged passivity and automaton-like adherence to Party policy. Where women are assigned more proactive roles, the metaphorical fields drawn upon are often contradictory. On the one hand, they are constructed as a problem, most strikingly in the case of the recurring metaphor of 'woman as chaos' used in relation to women priests, while, on the other, they are viewed as a panacea for all institutional ills, as in the case of the frequent metaphor of 'woman as civiliser' of unruly male spaces. Such metaphors often evoke what Mills (1995: 187) refers to as gendered schemata, larger discursive frameworks which operate across the boundaries of public sphere discourse types. One such schema casts women in subordinate support roles in relation to visionary men, while another, identified by Threadgold (1997: 128), rationalises their marginalisation by assuming they are in need of care and protection. The phenomenon of role encapsulation (Powell 1993: 115) means that as long as such schemata persist, women are likely to continue to be assigned a limited number of roles within organisations and institutional structures.

## **2.9 Macro Level Analysis: The Relationship Between Text and Social Context**

Whereas the micro level of critical discourse analysis focuses on textual traces and cues, the macro level of analysis is concerned with the way institutional and broader social constraints operate on the whole process of text production and interpretation. Fairclough (1989) refers to this as power *behind* discourse to distinguish it from what he terms power *in* discourse, which applies to the immediate context of situation in which texts are interpreted. As Fairclough (1989: 110) notes, 'in analysing texts, one's focus is constantly alternating between what is "there" in the text, and the discourse type(s) which the text is drawing upon'. In the previous chapter, a number of social-structural constraints relevant to this study were discussed in some detail. In the remainder of the study, the focus will, therefore, alternate between the critical analysis of a wide range of spoken, written and visual texts and the analysis of more global factors that contribute to the production, reproduction and transformation of normative gendered identities and gendered relations in the public sphere.

## **2.10 Methodology used for Data Collection and Analysis**

In the chapters that follow, I apply the critical framework set out above (2.8) to the analysis of a wide range of media texts in order to establish whether any 'patterns of habituation' (Toolan 1996: 302) are discernible in the coverage of women in public sphere roles. As in the preceding sections, I also draw upon larger quantitative studies on language and gender carried out by feminist sociolinguists. Information from such studies is intended to complement the more qualitative analysis of data from interviews with women in all four of the communities of practice investigated in this study. The aim is thereby to achieve the sort of 'triangulation' effect referred to by Bergvall (1999):

Without careful attention to local practice, we cannot understand how individuals shape and interpret their gender and their social practice

with the available linguistic resources. Without broad surveys and collections, we cannot know the significance of individual uses - the convergence, divergence and movement of social practices. Without the broader studies of ideologies at the textual and global levels, we cannot understand how interpretations of gender by gatekeeping elites are generated or spread.

(Bergvall 1999: 288)

Crawford (1995: 74) sets out a number of criteria for an 'ecologically valid' feminist methodological practice. She argues that, as far as possible, research should be conducted in naturalistic and interactive contexts which downplay the 'expert' status of the analyst. My interviewees were made fully aware of the purpose of my research and were sent a range of likely interview questions in advance. Thereafter, the interviews were conducted as informally as possible, with interviewees being encouraged to digress into areas they felt to be of particular importance. As a critical discourse analyst, my role is, of course, to go beyond the surface features of what was said to interpret the underlying assumptions that respondents brought to the interview situation. In a number of cases, the validity of these interpretations can be checked against the selective transcriptions included in appendices. In other instances, where respondents were interviewed by telephone, or where a tape recorder was not available, emphasis is placed solely on the content of what was said, rather than on the interactional style employed by the interviewee.

I conducted a total of twelve interviews, resulting in approximately seven hours of taped material, as well as supplementary field notes (see Appendices). I chose to interview Margaret Beckett in 1995 (22 November 1995) because her high profile campaign for the Labour leadership the previous year coincided with the early stages of my research on women in public life. A follow-up interview in 1998 with Joan Ruddock, then Deputy Minister for Women (11 June 1998), seemed to offer an ideal

way of updating my information on possible changes to the culture of the Commons in the wake of the dramatic increase in the number of female Labour MPs as a result of the May 1997 General Election. It also afforded an opportunity to find out more about the role of the newly established Women's Unit in Government. Once I decided to extend my research on women in politics to include the newly emerging devolved UK bodies, the decision to focus in detail on the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition stemmed partly from its unique status as the UK's only women-only political party, and partly from the fact that its leader, Monica McWilliams, kindly agreed to be interviewed by me (29 January 1999). However, I was less fortunate in my request to interview the Welsh Agriculture Secretary, Christine Gwyther, with the result that I had to rely on media coverage alone.

For the purpose of my research on the Women's Environmental Network, discussed in the third chapter of the study, I decided to include an element of participant observation, by spending a day at the WEN office in London (17th September 1997). In addition to interviewing three WEN officers on this occasion, I conducted telephone interviews with WEN's founder, Bernadette Vallely (26 November 1997), and with a young anti-roads protester, Eleanor Hudson (27 August 1997), who had come to prominence in the media. For the final chapter on women in the Church, I contacted the Women's Officer in my local diocese of St Albans, who supplied me with a list of women priests. I tried to ensure that my interviewees practised their ministry in a range of different settings. Thus Priest A (interviewed 30 April 1996) is priest-in-charge in a relatively middle-class rural parish in Bedfordshire; Priest B (interviewed 14 May 1996) is priest-in-charge in a relatively middle-class parish in central London, while Priest C (interviewed 10 May 1996) is part of a clergy couple who minister to a largely working class urban parish in South Bedfordshire. Since I was also interested in media

representations of the campaign for women's ordination, and the subsequent media representations of women's ministry as priests, I also undertook an in-depth interview (19 July 1996) with the Public Relations' Officer for the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW), and its successor, Women and the Church (WATCH).

***Conventions of Transcription:*** Broad transcription conventions are employed, whereby normal punctuation, other than the use of capital letters for proper nouns, is omitted. Line numbers are included for ease of reference:

- {Responding to...} Curly brackets are used to enclose paraphrases of questions asked by the interviewer.
- ... Three consecutive dots indicate where short sections of the tape have been omitted.
- (indeciph) This is used to signify speech that is indecipherable.
- [laughs] Square brackets are used to describe marked prosodic features, such as tone of voice, and any non-verbal behaviour perceived to be relevant.
- italics* Italics are used for emphatic stress on particular words.
- and~and The tilde character (~) is used to indicate where words run into one another, often in instances of build-up repetition.
- ↑ The up-arrow symbol is used where the speaker employs a marked questioning intonation.

## **2.11 Conclusions**

To summarise, the theoretical approach adopted in this study is one that seeks to connect the detailed analysis of spoken, written, and visual texts and intertexts to an

analysis of the hegemonic ideologies that operate at the institutional and societal levels of discourse. The assumption is that such an approach is likely to yield a nuanced account of the changing nature of gendered identities and relations in the public sphere, at least with regard to the situation in contemporary Britain. While I have rejected an analytical framework that relies on a global metalanguage, I have argued that it is possible to identify recurrent patterns of use in (inter)texts that contribute to the production, maintenance, and transformation of normative gender ideologies. However, I have stressed that these need to be analysed in a co(n)text-sensitive way. A corollary of viewing language as a fluid, rather than a fixed, code is that the process of (inter)textual interpretation needs to be seen as a potential site of ideological struggle and contestation. For instance, I have suggested that the ideologically creative approach many women adopt to public sphere discourse types is often evaluated negatively *because* it departs from accepted norms and conventions. This will be illustrated in the first case study in Chapter 3, on female Labour MPs at Westminster, where I seek to highlight the tensions between the choices women MPs make in discourse and the way in which these are perceived and evaluated by others, especially by the media.

### **End Notes**

1. I would agree with Cameron's (1992: 100) view that so-called 'gender-neutral' definitions of this term ignore the fact that, 'sexism is a system in which women and men are not simply different, but unequal...and it works to the disadvantage of women, not men'.

2. For instance, the same photograph appeared in the *Daily Mirror* (8 May 1997), but in this instance the offending headline, 'Blair's babes', is accompanied by the bracketed alternative headline, 'Oh sorry...we mean Labour's brilliant 101 women MPs'. The 'oops' tone of this pseudo-apology appears to be calculated to let readers know that the producers know they have naughtily transgressed the rules of political correctness, but that this shouldn't be taken too seriously. After all, they might argue with some justification, the overall tone of the article is positive. For instance, they claim that the newly elected women are, 'determined to end the male domination of politics forever'. The implication that this may prove to be a naive hope is reinforced, however, by the revelation that their 'innocence' of parliamentary procedures led them to clap on the arrival in the Commons of the new PM.

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter, and the three chapters that follow, provide an account of my research into women's involvement in four different communities of practice within the public sphere. The definition of the 'public' sphere employed throughout the study accords with Habermas' (1989) extended definition of this term, which includes what other social theorists have referred to as 'civil' sphere domains. Indeed, one of the central theses of this study is that women's increasing presence in public institutional spaces has helped to weaken the boundaries between the public, civil and private domains. This pattern of discursive restructuring is likely to have been overlooked had my research been confined to state institutions alone. Although the inter-relationship between institutions of the state and civil society is investigated in all four communities of practice, it is explored most fully in Chapters 4 and 5, where the emphasis is on the cross-fertilisation between grassroots political activity and public opinion formation. The emphasis in this chapter, by contrast, is on the central political decision-making body in Britain, namely the House of Commons.

When compared to a number of other institutions in the public sphere, women are relatively established in the House of Commons. They have been eligible for election since the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Bill was passed in 1918, although the percentage of women elected as MPs has, until recently, remained very small. For instance, Puwar (1997: 2-3) points out that, 'the number of women barely altered between 1945 and 1983'. Since this averages out as less than 4% of the total number of MPs, it is not surprising that the majority of women elected to the House appear to have

internalised prevailing masculinist discursive norms, rather than seeking to challenge

them. Thus according to Shirley Williams, MP:

Over the years, a few women MPs have made the betterment of women's lives their priority, fighting their corner and punching above their weight... Most women MPs, however, have conformed, conscientiously done their job as a representative of their constituency and drawn very little attention to themselves.

*(Guardian 15 December 1997)*

For most women MPs a strategy of accommodation was, therefore, the norm. The 1997 general election was a potential turning point, since the gender composition of the House underwent a dramatic change. This was due in no small part to the controversial quotas policy<sup>1</sup> adopted by the Parliamentary Labour Party (hereafter, the PLP). Overall, the number of women in the PLP almost tripled, from 37 in the 1992 Parliament, to 102 in 1997 (31 of these were selected from women-only short lists). Women currently comprise 18% of all MPs, although this is some way off the figure of 30% that Dahlerup (1988) argues constitutes a 'critical mass'. Nonetheless, the widespread view, and indeed expectation, is that women are now in a position to change the masculinist discursive practices and policy agenda that prevail in the House of Commons.

Before going on to explore how these expectations and beliefs have helped to shape the gendered identities of women MPs, I shall begin by outlining some of the institutional constraints that have, in the recent past, impeded the efforts of female politicians who have sought to challenge the masculinist culture of the House, and that are likely to continue to do so in the future. The discussion concentrates on the PLP as a community of practice, since, as Lovenduski (1997: 709) notes, 'between 1992 and 1997, [it] was the main site of activity to increase women's representation in British politics'.

However, the central argument of this chapter is that it is also necessary to examine the

way political parties interrelate with the broader culture of the Parliament and with the media, since the boundaries between different communities of practice in the public sphere are permeable. For this reason, I include a detailed analysis of media coverage of Margaret Beckett's campaign for the Labour leadership in 1994, since this provides an ideal opportunity to assess the relative treatment of high profile female and male politicians who run for political office. Rather than treating women MPs as a homogeneous group, differences *between* women, as well as differences between women and men, will also be explored.

### **3.2 Masculinism in the Institutional Discourse of British Parliamentary Politics**

It is ironic that Westminster has been called the 'mother of parliaments', since it is, in so many ways, a male-gendered institutional space. This is due partly to the historical fact that its organisational structures and procedures were invented by middle and upper-class men of an earlier era. For instance, the hours the House sits were designed to accommodate the needs of men who combined their Parliamentary roles with managing their estates or with careers in the professions, but patently *not* with caring for children. Likewise, gruelling late-night sittings are due to the operation of an antiquated gentlemanly code of fair play which permits the Opposition to call a vote at any time. The toll incurred by these long and erratic hours has been exacerbated by what the Labour MP, Harriet Harman, has referred to as a 'culture of presenteeism' that, in turn, results from the new managerialism that now pervades Parliament. When a number of new women MPs from the 1997 intake complained that this 'hours culture' is inefficient and tantamount to 'time-wasting', they were constructed in the media as victims of work-related stress (*Guardian* 28 March 1998). It is not, of course, only women who are likely to find these hours antipathetic. David Hinchliffe, for instance, resigned from Labour's front bench in 1995 in order to devote more time to his

family (*ibid*). However, the tendency of members of both sexes, in all parties, to cherish the traditions of the House, no matter how arcane and out-of-date, means that they are often deeply entrenched in institutional structures. How else can one account for the tediously rehearsed, but still unchanged, situation whereby the Commons has a rifle range, but no crèche? Joan Ruddock claims that women are much *less likely* to be 'sucked into' this culture and that the majority of Labour women MPs, in particular, are committed to changes that will render the House more women-friendly (Appendix II: 160 ff.).

The discursive style that predominates in debates in the chamber, as well as in a good deal of work in cross-party committees, is an adversarial one which many women say they find alienating (Sreberny-Mohammadi and K. Ross 1996; Puwar 1997). Ruddock recalls her sense of shock when she realised that this competitive ethos also extends to relations between peers within the same party (Appendix II: 102-6). This is exacerbated by the Whips system within individual parties which effectively means that a culture of bullying is not only tolerated, but is integral to the Parliamentary system. Brian Sedgemore, MP, points out that the physical layout of the Commons' debating chamber encourages confrontation, a view he frames using appropriately militaristic metaphors:

Two armies face each other, separated by a thin neutral line, nerves stretched and sinews stiffened for battle on a daily basis. The job of the Opposition is to destroy the government. The job of the government is to ignore the Opposition. If the differences between them are small, then they must clearly be exaggerated. If there are no differences, then they must be artificially created.  
(Sedgemore 1995: 54)

If the overall culture of the Commons resembles a gentlemen's club, the chamber is a site of theatrical display. Debates are rarely genuine, since questions have to be put down two weeks in advance, yet, both MPs and ministers are expected to engage in a

paradoxical *performance* of spontaneity. This explains the censure incurred by a number of new women MPs who elected to read questions (*Guardian* 9 October 1997). The heckling they subsequently received is, of course, an integral part of the 'yah boo' debating style that prevails in the chamber.

However, countless women MPs from all parties have complained that, in addition to the usual political insults that are traded across the floor of the chamber, they are also subjected to sexist abuse. For example, instances of verbal sexual harassment have been recorded by women MPs in surveys carried out by K. Ross (1995a) and Puwar (1997). Ruddock implies that intolerance of *overt* sexism has led to an increase in more *covert* forms of abuse, 'some of the new women MPs tell me there are still you know pretty ugly remarks being made but they're not being made loudly enough to be detected' (Appendix II: 130-32). Although the Speaker and her deputies can request that 'unparliamentary language' is withdrawn, this only applies to language recorded in Hansard. This means that the undercurrent of sexist, and therefore presumably 'unparliamentary', language reported by numerous women MPs does not officially exist and is unofficially tolerated. A recent study by S. Shaw (1999) reveals that men are more likely than female colleagues to make illegal interventions in debates, and are also more likely to engage in intense barracking. She concludes that although they belong to the same 'community of practice' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 95), male and female MPs do so on unequal terms, with men being the more powerful participants.

The televising of Parliament has increased the importance of the performative element in Parliamentary debates, with the result that prosodic and paralinguistic features of speech have been foregrounded for a wider audience, as has accompanying body

language. I would suggest that this process has had contradictory effects on the perception of women MPs and ministers. On the one hand, it has reinforced the distracting emphasis on their physical appearance, which tends to attract more comment than men's (K. Ross 1995a). On the other hand, the use of microphones, to ensure that output is of broadcast quality, has incidentally rendered less relevant the widespread perception that women's voices do not carry authority (Macdonald 1995: 45). Another incidental effect, noted by Montgomery (1999: 29), is that, 'television's focus on the face throws issues of sincerity into a different kind of sharp relief. He goes on to suggest that this shift in modalities of communication is, therefore, one factor that helps to explain why sincerity appears to be assuming increasing salience as a public virtue. Again, I would argue that there is more at stake in this respect for women MPs and ministers, since there is evidence to indicate that the validity of their performance is more likely than men's to be evaluated in terms of the criterion of sincerity. For instance, the 1992 British Candidate Survey revealed that women were perceived to be more honest and more principled than their male counterparts (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 135). In this context, women have to be particularly adept at negotiating the perilous territory involved in the 'performative paradox' (see 1.3.4).

Puwar (1997: 3) refers to a tradition of vertical segregation in Parliamentary institutions whereby women tend to be concentrated in subordinate roles, while men occupy major decision-making roles. Between 1924, when Margaret Bondfield became the first woman minister, and 1997, there were only eight female Cabinet ministers, most of whom were given so-called 'soft' portfolio roles, primarily in the departments of health and education. As W. Webster (1990: 124) observes 'In the male-defined world of politics these were understood as subordinate areas'. The idea that women are particularly suited to these roles is symptomatic of the tendency to define women's

public sphere roles by analogy with the roles they have traditionally performed in the private sphere. The promotion of five women to the Labour Cabinet in 1997 therefore marked a considerable advance for gender equality, especially since two of these appointments, those of Mo Mowlam as Northern Ireland Secretary, and Margaret Beckett, as President of the Board of Trade, were in non-traditional areas. However, both roles have always been perceived by aspiring ministers as 'poisoned chalices'. The Northern Ireland Office is notorious as a graveyard for ministerial careers, while the top job at the Department of Trade and Industry is widely regarded as 'the biggest lame duck of all' (*Guardian* 9 January 1999). And so it proved to be, since Beckett had little over a year at the DTI, before ignominiously being replaced by Peter Mandelson. Although Mowlam, fared rather better, lasting for two and a half years in her role as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, a role for which she attracted widespread praise, when she was displaced, again coincidentally by Mandelson, she departed amidst rumours that she had mishandled the Peace Process (*Guardian* 7 January 2000).

All five women who currently hold ministerial office occupy what Diane Abbot has described as 'fixer' roles, in that they are roles which exploit what are stereotypically perceived to be women's highly developed interpersonal and organisational skills. Another Labour backbencher is quoted as saying, 'At the top level, the girls have ended up with nannying and housekeeping jobs, while the men get the real work.' (*Guardian* 29 July 1998). According to journalist, Lucy Ward, the Downing Street spin machine has not denied this, but instead, 'has sought to paint a picture of a clutch of powerful females keeping the boys under control.' (*ibid*). Only Clare Short, as Minister for International Development, is in charge of a spending department and this involves a very small budget, when compared to the other departments of state. When it comes to

appointments to the policy group that constitutes the heart of political decision-making, informal rules still apply, with the result that only one member of the group is a woman. This supports my thesis that women continue to occupy subordinate roles within public sphere institutions, in spite of apparent gains.

### **3.3 Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: the Thatcher Legacy**

No discussion of the progress made by women in British Parliamentary history would, of course, be complete without a consideration of the role played by Margaret Thatcher, whose long period in office as Britain's only female prime minister lasted from 1979 to 1992. The focus in this section will be on the way her performance of this role has affected women who have since pursued Parliamentary careers. As noted earlier, while in government, her record of promoting other women to positions of authority was extremely poor. She only ever included one other woman in her Cabinet, Baroness Young, briefly present as Leader of the House. In this way, she constructed an identity for herself as an *exceptional* woman, who owed her success to her difference from other women. Indeed, as W. Webster (1990) argues persuasively, her period in power was a reaction against feminist gains of the 1960s and 1970s and a reassertion of a regressive social morality about the proper division of labour within the family. A key factor, of course, is that she was a woman, but not a feminist. Yet contrary to the widespread description of her as 'the best man in the Cabinet', she did not embrace exclusively androcentric discursive norms. Instead, as Fairclough (1989: 182 ff.) points out, she combined carefully selected features associated with white middle class femininity and 'authoritative expressive elements' used by male politicians. This hybrid rhetorical style, which involves strategies of accommodation *and* a performative approach to gender, nonetheless made her assimilable to the

dominant discourse that prevailed in Parliamentary institutions, 'Paradoxically, then, what looks like a gain for women is a defeat for feminism.' (Fairclough 1989: 195).

Lovenduski and Randall (1993) suggest that, at the very least, Thatcher achieved a symbolic victory for women, making it easier for them to attain positions of authority within Parliamentary institutions:

Surely, the very fact of her occupation of the supreme political office and the confidence and authority with which she carried out its duties, had some effect. She must have made it seem more possible for women to be powerful, to succeed in a 'man's world'.

(Lovenduski and Randall 1993: 53)

On the contrary, I would argue that the fact that Thatcher presented the only real role model for women who subsequently aspired to high political office in Britain has had a detrimental effect on feminist-identified women who have sought to promote an alternative way of doing politics. That this is a view shared by some women politicians is evident in the comment made by Labour's Helen Liddell, 'every woman in politics has to live down the record of Mrs Thatcher.' (*Guardian* 5 June 1997). This is partly because her idiosyncratic discursive style has since become a normative touchstone against which the leadership styles of other women have been judged. Textual traces of this practice abound, especially in the media where references to her are endlessly recycled. For instance, when Margaret Beckett ran for the Labour leadership in 1994, media commentators discussed her campaign using language which had unmistakable echoes of Thatcher's dogmatic and intransigent rhetorical style. Thus one interview with Beckett in the *Guardian* (18 June 1994) carried the headline, 'The lady's not for losing'. Comparisons made by others extended also to include alleged similarities in their appearance and manner, as is evident in the comment made by Sally Weale in a profile of Beckett in the *Guardian* (2 July 1994), 'political observers have detected a

growing resemblance to that other Margaret. The troublesome spray-held hair seems to have an extra Thatcher-style lift, her deportment has become more regal, her manner in the Commons more icily confrontational'. These similarities were underlined in the *Daily Mail* (1 July 1994) via juxtaposed photographs (Figure 3.1: 114). Reductive comparisons such as these obscure the very real differences in the personalities, style and, of course, politics of the two women and were therefore damaging to Beckett's campaign. This is certainly Beckett's own perception of the Thatcher legacy, 'I thought at the time that it might have been *something* of a help [but] I came more and more to the view that it was a liability' (Appendix I: 56-60).

### **3.4 Masculinism in the Institutional Discourse of the Parliamentary Labour Party**

Although the Conservative Party has, on average, had fewer women MPs than Labour, up until the last general election it was perceived as more woman-friendly, partly because of the Thatcher legacy, and partly because of a long-standing tradition of female activism at grassroots level in the Party (Short 1996: 26). This contrasts with the picture presented by Cockburn (1987: 25) of the male-dominated political culture in the Labour movement, 'that brings together the umbrella of masculine identity, of male fraternity: work, working class allegiance, trade union membership and Labour Party affiliation'. This ideological package, she argues, creates an impression of a masculine power structure in the PLP. Likewise, Perrigo (1996: 121) refers to the bureaucratic and rule-bound discursive practices that prevailed in local Labour Party branches and constituencies and that are likely to have discouraged women from participating at grassroots level. Lovenduski and Randal suggest that women who overcome these initial barriers to entry are often prevented from progressing further:

...incumbency and patronage continue to be important barriers to women who seek entry to established committees...Many of the powerful party positions are occupied by male incumbents who are skilful at choosing

BECKETT'S DOUBLE-TAKE . . . BUT NOT A SINGLE POLICY DETAIL



Pearl necklace, pearl earrings: Margaret Thatcher in characteristic pose



Pearl necklace, pearl earrings: Mrs Beckett in her campaign picture.

# The name is Margaret, not Maggie

Figure 3.1: Juxtaposed photographs and headline, accompanying an article (*Daily Mail* 1 July 1994)

their (usually male) successors. The result is that the progress of women into prized political positions is slow.

(Lovenduski and Randal 1993: 142)

Although, as will be clear from the section below, much has changed in the Party, largely as a result of feminist challenges, there is still a perception that a masculinist culture persists (see section 3.11).

### **3.5 Feminist Challenges to Masculinism in the Parliamentary Labour Party**

It is important to stress that power struggles occur over the determination of discursive practices and that historical transformations in discourse practices are an important element in social change. Such a struggle has been taking place in the PLP since the late 1970s, when the Party's move to the left made it attractive to a number of socialist feminists who had previously been suspicious of the mainstream political process. In the early to mid-1980s the Women's Action Committee was established and made radical demands, but networking with other grassroots feminist groups led to hostile media coverage. Media-generated epithets for female Labour MPs included 'crazy Clare', for Clare Short, 'hard left harpy', for Margaret Beckett and 'harridan Harman', for Harriet Harman, thereby exploiting stereotypical assumptions about women as shrewish and/or out of control. Curran (1987: 1) notes that the collective dysphemism, 'loony left', meant that equal opportunity initiatives could be dismissed out-of-hand by opponents, in a way that anticipates the current deployment of the all-purpose dysphemism of 'political correctness'. As a result, the response to feminist initiatives from an increasingly media-sensitive leadership throughout most of the 1980s was one of 'containment' (Perrigo 1996: 125-7).

The main goal of feminist activists was to challenge the discursive practices that deny women *access* to participation in the PLP. The campaign to secure quotas for women illustrates clearly the operation of a dialectic between institutional structures and feminist agency. The election defeats of 1987 and 1992 led to a crisis in the Party which, in turn, offered a space for feminist intervention. The rhetorical strategy employed by socialist feminists, like Clare Short, Jo Richardson and Harriet Harman, was to persuade their colleagues to recognise an ideologically creative synonymy between feminising and modernising the Party's structures and policy. Thus according to Perrigo (1996: 119), 'They have been able to use the modernisation process, and the impetus it has generated for internal party change, to press their own agenda'.

Following the example offered by the US Democratic Party, 'Emily's list' was established by the then Labour Party Public Relations Officer, Barbara Follett, in 1992. Standing for 'early money is like yeast', it was set up to provide financial support and training for prospective female Parliamentary candidates, but with the proviso that only those who were pro-abortion should be so supported. It was not until 1993 that the controversial policy of quotas was finally agreed for selecting Parliamentary candidates.

Inevitably, these changes have been contested both within the Party, notably by the elder statesmen Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, and in a sustained and vitriolic campaign in the media. A comment in the *Daily Mail* (27 July 1995) captures the tenor of this coverage, in which charges of 'political correctness' and 'tokenism' are rife and in which the term 'feminist' collocates antonymically with 'moderate'. It describes the lists as part of a, 'politically correct system aimed at increasing the number of women MPs by barring men from standing in key constituencies' (*ibid*). These recent and temporary overt barriers to the entry into politics of male candidates have provoked

outrage, while the covert barriers which have excluded female candidates from entering the party political arena for decades have gone unremarked. Whereas tabloid coverage framed the issue by drawing on the 'battle of the sexes' news frame, the broadsheet press foregrounded differences *between* women along the axes of class and gender politics, caricaturing those who subscribed to Emily's list as metropolitan middle class 'power feminists'. Thus one of its founders was described by a woman columnist as, 'Barbara "Lipstick is Power" Follet' (*Guardian* 29 July 1995). This type of negative media coverage is likely to have played a key role in the decision announced by the leadership in July 1995 to abandon the quotas policy after the 1997 general election.

However, for quite different reasons, the quotas policy is not without its critics amongst feminists. Some, like Perrigo, have expressed their concern that National Executive Committee approval of the policy was, 'as much to do with the instrumental rationality of the party leaders once they were convinced that increasing women's visibility would further Labour's electoral fortunes.' (1996: 129). This same instrumental rationality has since constituted a barrier to the implementation of feminist goals (see section 3.10). Nonetheless, by the time Margaret Beckett stood for the leadership of the PLP in June 1994, the structure of opportunity was particularly favourable to the promotion of women to senior positions within the Party. However, whereas feminist efforts have concentrated on securing access for women, this study suggests a need for these struggles to be extended to include the crucial areas of intersection and tension between the orders of discourse of professional politics and the media.

### 3.6 Masculinism in Mediatized Political Discourse

In the realm of party political discourse, the media play a central and increasingly important metadiscursive role in mediating *between* politicians and the public, yet, the institutional discourses of the media are strongly masculinist. Sorlin (1994: 129) points out, 'Two thirds of the people who work in media management are men. Among the women employees, four fifths are restricted to subordinate tasks with slim promotion prospects which implies that the most profitable jobs, editorship, journalism, reportage are heavily male-dominated'. Hard news coverage, including that of political affairs, seems to be particularly subject to a male monopoly. By contrast, 'women tend to work in areas of journalism that can be considered an extension of their domestic responsibilities and their socially assigned qualities of care, nurturing and humanity.' (van Zoonen 1998: 34). It is not surprising, then, that where women are employed in non-traditional areas, they tend to embrace masculinist news values and language (Macdonald 1995: 49). Beckett claims that, during her campaign for the Labour leadership, 'some of the most unpleasant and bitchy things that were written about me were wo~written by the women mostly by women I had never met by the way' (Appendix I: 139-40). One does not have to be male to be a member of the fraternity of media workers, any more than one has to be male to be a member of the masculinist fraternity of professional politicians, as Thatcher made clear.

In his book, *Media Discourse*, Fairclough (1995a: 200) acknowledges the role of, 'apparatuses which political parties have developed to train their members in using the media', but somewhat surprisingly fails to highlight the independent role of party spin doctors who seek to manipulate the mediatization of the public discourse of party politics. In an article in the *Guardian* (29 July 1995) analysing the appeal and influence with journalists of the PLP's chief spin doctor, Peter Mandelson, Martin

Wainwright points out that, 'he is almost one of us; indeed, he *was* one of us in a successful TV interlude to an otherwise relentlessly political career'. The 'us' referred to here is of course the fraternity of media men. Alistair Campbell's defection from his job as political columnist on *Today* newspaper to take up the role of Blair's press secretary provides further evidence of the growing perception of the need to utilise 'insiders' to manage the media's reporting of political events. The Lobby system, with its rule enforcing non-attribution of news sources, is the chief mechanism by which this is achieved. Sedgemore (1995: 78) alludes to, 'the rituals of secrecy and freemasonry' which govern its activities. This cross fertilisation between the media fraternity and the fraternity of professional politicians underlines the inherently masculinist nature of mediatized political discourse. It is not surprising, then, that Lobby briefings appear to have been used to damage the standing of a number of female politicians, including, Clare Short (*Independent on Sunday* 31 August 1997), and, more recently, Mo Mowlam (*Guardian* 7 January 2000).

Fairclough (1995a), amongst others, has noted that mediatized political discourse is undergoing a process of increasing commodification. A central thesis of this chapter is that the colonisation of political discourse by the discourse of advertising has had a particularly adverse effect on *female* politicians. As Norris and Lovenduski (1995: 87) note, 'the typical candidate in all parties tends to be a well-educated, professional, white male in early middle age'. Given that she fails to match the stereotypical image of a senior politician, a female who aspires to high political office is more difficult to *sell* to the Party as a credible product. Likewise, due to the apparent shift in power from producers to consumers, news media are in the competitive business of recruiting readers in a market context in which their sales or ratings are decisive for their survival. Consequently, 'producers...market their commodities in ways that maximise their fit

with life styles and aspired to life styles of consumers' (Fairclough 1992: 110). They cultivate characteristics which are taken to be typical, in common-sense, usually stereotypical, terms, of the target audience. In this context it was perhaps inevitable that, in the 1994 Labour leadership campaign, the two male candidates in the leadership race, Tony Blair and John Prescott, would receive more favourable coverage than the one female candidate, since media producers generally address an ideal reader who is gendered as male. This is evident from the fact that both broadsheets and tabloids have female ghettos, for instance 'The Women's Page' in the *Guardian* the 'Femail' section in the *Daily Mail* and those euphemised as 'lifestyle' sections, which personalise 'issues', if/when they occur, apparently to make them more palatable to female readers.

Equally easy to sell is the male MP and his wife, of either the 'homely supporting' variety, or the 'glamorous trophy' variety, who together represent a promotional package. In the case of Margaret Beckett, a mismatch arises between this image and the reality of her career as an experienced female politician with a supporting husband. K. Ross (1995a: 502) identifies this mismatch as part of a more general positive-negative framing of Beckett and Blair during the leadership campaign, 'Where Blair was a youthful 40-something, Beckett was post-menopausal;...where Blair was happily married to the daughter of an actor, Beckett had stolen another woman's husband'. The latter comment refers to a sensational article about Beckett which appeared in the *Daily Express*, on 24th June 1994, under the headline, 'I lost my husband to Margaret Beckett'. Beckett implies that this information may have been deliberately leaked to the press at this time to deflect attention away from her high-profile involvement in an international conference in Corfu (Appendix I: 227). One feature of the so-called feminisation of media discourse, noted by van Zoonen (1998), has been a tendency to

focus on this type of salacious human interest angle. Again, this is likely to have different consequences for men and women, since as Macdonald (1995: 50) points out, double standards about sexual morality in the private sphere operate equally in the public sphere reproducing, 'the dishonest cliché that male adulterers are "virile", while female ones are "sluts" and "whores"'. I would argue that this is symptomatic of a general tendency for women's involvement in the public sphere to be pulled back into the orbit of the private sphere, thereby undermining women's claims to be regarded as serious political actors.

Just as the visual image has become increasingly potent in advertising, so, following the American example, the image of candidates in a political leadership race has become a key factor by which media commentators gauge their electability. For a number of reasons, the media obsession with image is likely to have a disproportionate effect on evaluation of female politicians. Firstly, as W. Webster observes in her study of Thatcher, *Not a Man to Match Her* (1990: 75), women tend to be judged more on their physical appearance than men, 'Surface appearance has always been more important for women than for men...Glamour is a notion which applies almost exclusively to women and is usually to do with the production of a particular surface - youthful, made-up and beautiful'. This view is borne out by a survey of twenty-eight female politicians which revealed that they believe their outward appearance attracts more media comment than that of their male colleagues (K. Ross 1995b: 16). Another key factor is that noted by King (1992: 133), 'Most images are made by men for men, creating a closed, collusive relationship between makers and prime consumers'. With the exception of Lynn Cullen at the *Independent*, all other Fleet Street picture editors are men, so it is not surprising that a recent four-week survey of nine national newspapers revealed that women were grossly under-represented (*Guardian* 29

November 1999). Only 30% of all photographs featured women, either on their own, or accompanied by men. Where women did appear, they were more likely to feature as celebrities or members of the public (42%), than as professionals (25%) or politicians (14%).<sup>2</sup> Image making and consuming can therefore be seen as one more manifestation of fraternal networks.

Unlike Thatcher, Beckett has refused to be 'made-over' by Party image makers. That her appearance was self-evidently judged to have hindered her bid for the Labour leadership in 1994 is clear from a comment made by Edwina Currie in *Cosmopolitan*, 'Looks are important in politics - ask Margaret Beckett' (June 1995). Beckett's own frequent allusions to her untelegenic appearance throughout the campaign provide evidence of the additional surveillance-by-self which seems to be more characteristic of women in public life, than of men. It is interesting to draw a comparison with the references made to the untelegenic appearance of the potential male candidate, Robin Cook. What is noticeable is that these references were offset by an emphasis on his sense of humour in a way that references to Beckett's appearance were not. Beckett claims that the widespread perception that she is humourless stems from her refusal to fraternise with the media, with the result that, when she makes witty remarks, they tend to be written up as 'waspy' (Appendix I: 143-6). In the case of Cook, a potential electoral disadvantage became transformed, in numerous articles, into a basis for arch collusion between male journalists and a popular male MP. As Mills (1995: 139) observes, amongst males, 'humour has often been portrayed as a form of bonding and solidarity display'.

In an effort to promote a newsworthy angle during the Labour leadership campaign in 1994, the media tended to focus on Beckett's gender as her most distinctive feature,

ignoring her attempt to construct herself first and foremost as an experienced politician, and only secondarily as a female politician. A comment by Dave Hill in the *Guardian* (17 May 1994) is particularly telling in this respect, 'As for Margaret Beckett, the acting leader, nobody seems to be sure which set of brackets she should be slotted into except that of "woman", which at least makes her distinctive'. This reveals the difficulty that political commentators had constructing an identity for her as a political leader, in spite of the precedent established by Thatcher. The common-sense solution was to categorise her by appealing to the totalising fiction of 'woman'. Postfeminist claims that gender is irrelevant, and poststructuralist claims that it is only one of the many and complex axes of identity, are in danger of underestimating the extent to which it continues to circulate as a salient discursive category, however much one might wish it to be otherwise.

### **3.7 Gender and Rhetorical Style**

As noted above, the hybrid rhetorical style developed by Thatcher did little to challenge the adversarial discursive norms associated with political leadership. In contrast to Thatcher's imperious demeanour, the journalist, Jan Moir, reveals that on an interpersonal level Beckett immediately minimises the status distinctions between herself and an interviewer, 'She will always insist, during the first moments of introduction, that you call her by her first name.' (*Guardian* 4 November 1992). In an interview in *The Times* (21 June 1994), she also stressed her commitment to a consensual style of politics, repeating the phrase 'coalition of support' three times, as something a politician should build on. Whereas Thatcher was notorious for her ruthless treatment of political enemies, in the same interview Beckett deliberately eschews competitive discursive strategies, saying, 'No, I am not fighting against others.'

I am talking about my strengths'. She claims this was both a personal and political

stance:

in a sense if you like you could say I deliberately chose to emphasise the powers of others at my own expense at no point did I seek to say *only I* can do this I said there are eight-ten more who could do this job among whom I hope I am one I believe I am one... so in that sense it was a *very very* conscious decision to be consensual I hope I would have done it anyway because that is part of the way I approach things

(Appendix I: 131-36)

Indeed, throughout the campaign she scrupulously avoided any sort of personal attack on her opponents. Yet, evidence suggests that the consensual style pursued by Beckett was misunderstood and/or deliberately misrepresented by political commentators. For instance, her move from the far left to the centre right of the political spectrum paralleled the recent history of the Labour Party, as did her change of heart on Europe, but this was presented as opportunism, rather than as the outcome of her consensual approach to politics. Thanks to the Thatcher legacy, the less confrontational style favoured by many women politicians, such as Beckett, is likely to be judged as deviant and ineffective.

### **3.8 Encountering the Glass Ceiling: A Case Study of Margaret Beckett's bid for the Labour Leadership in 1994**

#### **3.8.1 Critical Analysis of Media Strategies During the Campaign**

I intend to demonstrate, with particular reference to the coverage of Margaret Beckett's campaign for the Labour leadership in the summer of 1994, the ways in which the institutional orders of masculinist political discourse and the equally masculinist discourse of the print media operate through fraternal networks to segregate and subordinate women once they have entered the arena of party politics. It needs to be acknowledged that it is not always easy to isolate the influence of gender as a separate variable on press coverage. It could be argued that the evident bias against Beckett in

the majority of newspapers had more to do with hostility towards her political ideas or personality, than towards her as a female politician *per se*. However, the inability of leadership candidates to change established policy meant that there was little to choose between the candidates in terms of their politics. This leaves the question of personality. I would argue that the so-called personal attacks against Beckett in the press often disguised attitudes which were either explicitly or implicitly sexist. In what follows, I consider a number of key issues: the extent of media coverage which her campaign received; her treatment relative to the other candidates; overtly sexist coverage and coverage which betrayed implicitly sexist attitudes.

### **3.8.2 Discourse Representation and Gender Bias**

Fairclough (1995b: 54) distinguishes 'primary discourse', the representing or reporting discourse, and 'secondary discourse', the discourse represented or reported. In some styles of discourse representation there is an explicit boundary between the voice of the person being reported and the voice of the reporter(s), while in others they become merged, creating what Bakhtin terms 'double voiced' discourse. In an editorial in the *Daily Mirror* (11 June 1994), involving the common format of juxtaposed profiles of the three candidates, Beckett, Blair and Prescott, it is noticeable that the voice of the media commentators often becomes merged with the voice of the two male candidates (Figures 3.2a and 3.2b: 126-127).<sup>3</sup> For instance, the profile of John Prescott blends primary and secondary discourse seamlessly, both reproducing and positively evaluating his campaign pledges. The entire profile is dialogic in that it systematically addresses and answers criticisms made in other media, particularly the right-wing press, about his candidacy. Thus the claim that, 'Only a fool would under-rate his intellect' (1.20), is intended to counter the widespread charge that he is an intellectual lightweight. By contrast, the praise for the fraternal *loyalty* he showed to John Smith

# Forward to victor

NEVER has a new Labour leader had such a perfect springboard from which to launch the assault on power.

Yesterday Margaret Beckett and John Prescott announced they would stand for the leadership. Today Tony Blair joins them.

Labour is spoilt for choice — and Britain is fortunate one of them will be the next Prime Minister.

None of the prospective leaders will wish to count their chickens so far from a General Election.

But this weekend the Tory chicken is almost dead. Its neck was wrung by the voters on Thursday. John Major is finished. His fate in-



## DAILY Mirror COMMENT



calculable. More remarkably, the Conservative Party could be near its end too.

Thursday's by-election results were spectacular for Labour. The European poll will inevitably follow them.

*This is no mere mid-term protest. It is a positive vote for the new Labour Party so brightly and skilfully fashioned by John Smith.*

His legacy to his successor is a party that is fit to govern, poised for power and trusted by the British people. In the past four General

Elections, the Conservatives won because the opposition to them was divided. Thursday's results show that Labour is now the voters' first choice. It is the opposition to Labour that is divided.

Yet none of the potential leaders needs telling that it is not enough to rely on the Tories' disarray.

The voters are turning to Labour, but they must have positive reasons to stick with them.

The Mirror is delighted that there

is to be a genuine coalition leadership. Particularly between honourable men of such high calibre.

*This is the perfect opportunity to parade its new policies and its vision to the British people with the vision of a caring, prosperous nation.*

This is a truly momentous end. After so long out of power, Labour is poised to seize opportunities.

To bury the Tories on new leader. That is a challenge. Neither must we. FROM TODAY THEY ARE ONE SLOGAN: THEIR ONE VICTORY.

## Three in the bid for No. 10

By GILL MEERS and SHELL UDD

MARGARET Beckett and John Prescott yesterday launched the Labour leadership race. And Tony Blair will today join the running with a pledge to sweep the Tories away for a new dawn.

MR BLAIR will offer himself as the candidate to win not just the next election, but to launch a new era of Labour in power.

MRS BECKETT is offering herself as the continuity candidate, bringing long experience to the job.

MR PRESCOTT's campaign theme is getting Britain back to work with a pledge to full employment.

Seven Shadow Cabinet members and former leader Neil Kinnock have publicly declared for Mr Blair, with four more Shadow Cabinet members doing so privately. That is a majority of the 12.

Yesterday Mo Mowlam, Ann Taylor, Frank Dobson, Chris Smith and Donald Dewar all publicly pledged their support, joining Gordon Brown and Jack Dromiaghain.

### Insisted

Transport spokesman Mr Dawson said: "Tony Blair commands the support of the vast bulk of the Shadow Cabinet and a large proportion of MPs."

So far only Michael Meacher and Jonathan Lector have declared against Mr Blair. Mike Lector will back Mr Prescott, while Mr Meacher has not committed himself.

But Mr Prescott and Mrs Beckett announced their intention to fight it. "The leadership and deputy leadership contests will be fought without drama, bitterness or rancour — a pledge Mr Blair has given in recent weeks."

He will enter the race today with a speech at the Durham stadium.

Shadow Trade Secretary Robin Cook disappointed many supporters by announcing he would not stand for the leadership, but stopped short of endorsing any candidate.

Former frontbencher Dennis Healey put his name forward but has little hope of winning; the 31 MPs needed to support his nomination.

Party chairman David Blunkett will oversee the contest.

## TOP JOB FOR THE WINNER



**JOHN PRESCOTT**

POSITION: Shadow Employment Secretary  
AGE: 50

JOHN PRESCOTT is presenting himself as the man to put Britain back to work.

He was bold enough to put a figure on full employment — no more than 2.5 per cent jobless. But he was cautious enough to stress it might take a decade.

There you have John Prescott — a brave politician, tackling difficult issues head on, but careful too. He knows that Labour needs to think big, but be sensible.

By the Prescotts & Co. full employment means ending the debt spiral by around 1995. How? That question is likely to dominate the campaign. He said yesterday: "The themes that will form the core of my leadership bid will be the policy initiatives John Smith had already set in train: full employment and social justice. These are the essential elements of a modern, civilized society."

Nobody should doubt Prescott's ability to answer the full employment question. "I believe I can combine the conviction of the heart with the intellectual authority necessary to bring Labour to power," he said.

Only a fool would underestimate his intellect. He proved himself an original thinker with his plans for private finance to fund public sector projects.

He called that "putting traditional values in a modern setting" — which sounds like a campaign catchphrase, crossing the phoney divide between traditionalists and modernisers.

John Prescott has come a long way from his beginnings as a railway worker's son who failed his 11 plus and left school at 15 to go to sea.

There would be no doubt about Premier Prescott's wealth of ideas. He didn't file it from confirming his belief in progressive taxation.

Nor is there any doubt about the support and affection for John Prescott — assets he drew on in helping John Smith deliver re-election votes.

He, more than anyone, deserves the chance to lead the new democracy.



**MARGARET BECKETT**

POSITION: Shadow Leader  
AGE: 51

"I CAN do this job," said Margaret Beckett. "I can do it well."

We know she can because she has led the Labour Party with dignity and distinction since John Smith died. Now she asks for the chance to do it for good — all the way to Number 10.

She said she is offering herself "for nomination to continue to lead the Labour Party". And she stressed the "bread and butter" of her experience — both in the party and in the last Labour government.

Margaret Beckett is not only the only woman in the contest — she is the only candidate with government experience. She was a junior Education Minister in the 1970s.

It is her ability to manage and unify one party and to communicate its ideals to the British public, she said.

Mrs Beckett is appealing to the party as a regular stateswoman — or woman. And she clearly realised that there had already been a woman leader of the Opposition, who had overcome the difficulties of "the worst job in politics" — Margaret Thatcher.

Mrs Beckett is now the foremost woman in British politics, but she is no mere token woman (unlike Lady Thatcher). She said she had been under great pressure to stand for women "whose votes Labour needs to win".

She underlined her belief in Labour as a broad church, as well as a former Campaign Group member who went on to serve John Smith as a parliamentary treasury spokeswoman before to make spending "flexible".

And she emphasised the respect she gained in holding her marital seat, Drury South, by gathering broad support — the same process Labour needs to undertake throughout the country.



**TONY BLAIR**

POSITION: Shadow Home Secretary  
AGE: 41

TONY BLAIR has established himself in the Tories as the party of law and order.

He has done this by presenting a party of strong community values and the modern version of traditionalism.

He will broaden this theme to cover the framework of policy as a leadership candidate — providing the framework for industry.

He is a strong believer in personal responsibility. He would like to see the Government do the people, while never abandoning the people. While never abandoning the people, he takes the commonsense view that something to be done is to be done.

He believes that social division and down to earth in hand with poverty to be seen, to do things to be done, to be done — but also that the community's sense of security.

Mr Blair's opening campaign speech: "I want to lead a Labour Party by change, radical in intent, and conventional in content. It is the best of us to win the battle of ideas and new values away — not just for a particular generation."

A former ally of Gordon Brown, he echoes the policies of the 1990s, arguing that Labour end its proposals of providing what has been a life.

Labour, he feels, must offer a new caring, Conservative as a new success. Better education and training are key themes — not just in terms of the hope to those with no state.

He will commit himself to fill in the minimum wage, which he believes is the key to Labour's employment.

He was a barrister specialising in law before entering the Commons.

Figure 3.2a: Editorial in Daily Mirror 1994

## TOP JOB FOR THE WINNER

- JOHN PRESCOTT is presenting himself as the man to put Britain back to work.
- 5 He was bold enough to put a figure on full employment - no more than 2.5 per cent jobless. But cautious enough to stress it might take a decade.
- 10 There you have John Prescott - a brave politician tackling difficult issues head on, but careful too. He knows that Labour needs to think big, but be sensible.
- 15 By the Prescott definition, full employment means cutting the dole queues by around two million. How? That question is likely to dominate the campaign.
- 20 He said yesterday: 'The themes that will form the core of my leadership bid build on the policy initiatives John Smith had already set in train: Full employment and social justice. These are the central elements of a modern civilised society'. Nobody should doubt Prescott's ability to answer the full employment question. 'I believe I can combine the conviction of the heart with the intellectual authority necessary to bring Labour to power', he said.
- 25 Only a fool would under-rate his intellect. He proved himself an original thinker with his plans for private finance to fund public sector projects.
- 30 He called that 'putting traditional values in a modern setting' - which sounds like a campaign catchphrase, crossing the phoney divide between traditionalists and modernisers. John Prescott has come a long way from his beginnings as a railway worker's son who failed his 11-plus and left school at 15 to go to sea.
- 35 There would be no doubt about Premier Prescott's socialist direction. He didn't flinch from confirming his belief in progressive taxation.
- 40 Nor is there any doubt about the support and affection for John Prescott - assets he drew on in helping John Smith deliver one-member-one-vote.
- 45 He, more than anyone, deserves the chance to test the new democracy.
- 50 'I can do this job', said Margaret Beckett, and I can do it well.
- 55 We know she can because she has led the Labour Party with dignity and distinction since John Smith died. Now she asks for the chance to do it for good - all the way to Number 10.
- 60 She said she is offering herself 'for nomination to continue to lead the Labour Party'. And she stressed the 'breadth and depth' of her experience - both in the party and in the last Labour government.
- 65 Margaret Beckett is not only the one woman in the contest - she is the only contender with government experience. She was junior Education Minister in the 1970s.
- 70 'I ask my colleagues to judge me on my ability to manage and unify our party and to communicate its ideals to the British public', she said.
- 75 Mrs Beckett is appealing to the party as its elder statesman - or woman. And she deftly recalled that there had already been a woman Leader of the Opposition, who had overcome the difficulties of 'the worst job in politics' - Margaret Thatcher.
- 80 Mrs Beckett is now the foremost woman in British politics, but she is no more a token woman than Lady Thatcher. She said she had been under great pressure to stand from women 'whose votes Labour needs to win'.
- 85 She underlined her belief in Labour as 'a broad church', as befits a former Campaign Group member who went on to serve John Smith as a parsimonious treasury spokeswoman refusing to make spending pledges.
- 90 And she emphasised the experience gained in holding her marginal seat, Derby South, by gathering broad support - the same process Labour needs to undertake throughout the country.
- 95 'Labour, he feels, must offer an alternative to uncaring Conservatism as a route to economic success. Better education and training will be among his key themes - not just to create prosperity, but to give hope to those with no stake in society.'
- 100 He will commit himself to full employment and the minimum wage, which he defended at the last election as Labour's employment spokesman.
- 105 TONY BLAIR has established himself by destroying the Tories as the party of Law and Order.
- 110 He has done this by presenting Labour as the party of strong community values, saying this is the modern version of traditional socialism.
- 115 He will broaden this theme to cover the full range of policy as a leadership candidate - social action providing the framework for individual fulfilment.
- 120 He is a strong believer in personal responsibility - but also in the Government's obligation to all the people. While never condoning the criminal, he takes the commonsense view that crime is more tempting to youngsters brought up amid fractured families amid high unemployment.
- 125 He believes that social division and family breakdown go hand in hand with poverty and crime. That, he says, is damaging Labour supporters in poorer areas - but also threatening to the whole community's sense of security.
- 130 Mr Blair's opening campaign speech today will say: 'I want to lead a Labour Party that is driven by change, radical in intent, underpinned by conviction, confident of its beliefs and strong enough to win the battle of ideas and sweep the Conservatives away - not just for a parliament, but for a generation'.
- 135 A close ally of Gordon Brown, he will base his economics on the policies of the Shadow Chancellor, arguing that Labour must not give the impression of promising what it can neither deliver or afford.
- 140 Labour, he feels, must offer an alternative to uncaring Conservatism as a route to economic success. Better education and training will be among his key themes - not just to create prosperity, but to give hope to those with no stake in society.
- 145 He will commit himself to full employment and the minimum wage, which he defended at the last election as Labour's employment spokesman.

Figure 3.2b: Text of *Daily Mirror* article (11 June 1994), reproduced on p. 126.

during the One Member One Vote (OMOV) debate in 1993 (ll. 32-4) implicitly sanctions the criticism of Beckett, made in many sections of the media, for her alleged *disloyalty*, a breach of the implicit fraternal contract. The fact that at the time his 'loyalty' had been widely regarded as a betrayal of his trade union roots is suppressed, as is the fact that Beckett had been praised by the unions for her integrity. This piece of information would have conflicted with their construction of Prescott as a working class candidate whose credentials are calculated to appeal to its assumed working class *male* readership, in a way that frequent references to Beckett's gender are not.

Elsewhere, the assumption of a commonality of values between media men and male readers is implicit in the slippages which occur between the corporate and inclusive functions of the pronoun 'we' in media reports of the OMOV debate. For instance, an editorial in the *Sunday Mirror* (10 July 1994), seeks to implicate its readers in its condemnation of Beckett's alleged disloyalty, 'we cannot forget Mrs Beckett's failure to support Mr Smith's vital one-member-one-vote party reforms last year'. It is significant that this 'failure' is not qualified by 'alleged', despite Beckett's repeated claim that this was a mis-representation of the facts. In an interview in the *Guardian* she is quoted as saying, 'I was very surprised in the press that I was portrayed as being disloyal. But in fairness to the press, it did become my impression that there were *people in the Labour Party* who were of that view, and who were *feeding that view.*' (22 June 1994, my italics). The charge of disloyalty which was fed to the press by Party spin doctors was followed by what can only be described as the 'smear' that Mrs Beckett had known that John Smith would have resigned had he lost on the OMOV vote. Fairclough (1992) says of media producers:

They systematically transform into 'facts' what can often be no more than interpretations of complex and confusing sets of events. In terms of modality

this involves a predilection for categorical modalities, positive and negative assertions...Presupposition [is] taking categorical modality one stage further, taking factuality for granted.

(Fairclough 1992:161)

Beckett's denial of any knowledge of what was a piece of unattributed information could only be read as either a lie, or as evidence of extreme political naiveté.

The profile of Blair in the *Daily Mirror* (11 June 1994) involves a similar merging of the voice of the producers with that of the candidate himself (Figures 3.2a and 3.2b: 126-127). There is only one instance of secondary discourse in the entire piece, but his views are both incorporated and favourably evaluated in the primary discourse. The producers not only review his past commitment to 'strong community values' and a 'modern version of traditional socialism', but anticipate the future direction of his campaign. Thus we are told that, 'He will broaden this theme to cover the full range of policy as a leadership candidate - social action providing the framework for individual fulfilment' (ll. 78-80). The latter is recognisable as a campaign catchphrase, but the absence of quotation marks makes it clear that it is one with which the producers align themselves. The categorical modality used here occurs elsewhere, making it clear that the producers predict that Blair *will* become leader unopposed. Their positive evaluation of his policy statements is implicit on a number of occasions. He is said to be 'a *strong* believer in personal responsibility' (l. 80), while his position on crime is described as 'the commonsense view' (l. 82), indicating that it accords with the producers' own ideological position.

Numerous studies of media discourse have highlighted the role played by reporting verbs in providing an interpretative frame for secondary discourse. Interestingly, the accompanying profile of Beckett (Figures 3.2a and 3.2b: 126-127) has none of the

illocutionary glossing verbs referred to by Caldas Coulthard (1995: 233) and defined as verbs, 'that convey the presence of the author in the text, and are highly interpretative'. Instead, the most frequently occurring reporting verb is the so-called 'neutral' glossing verb 'say'. Unlike the other two profiles, the profile of Beckett consists of a series of instances of secondary discourse, embedded in only occasional passages of primary discourse. There is no blending of the two. Thus we have the chaining of, 'She said...she stressed...she said.....she said...She underlined her belief...she emphasised' (Figure 3.2b: 127). Although none of these statements is evaluated, either positively or negatively, *cumulatively* they have the effect of conveying the editorial team's ideological distance from the case Beckett is making. This underlines the need to focus on global discursal effects, rather than on isolated linguistic items. As is clear in this instance, allowing a reported individual to speak in her or his own voice, with only minimal evaluative framing, can serve to undermine the legitimacy of what is said. In other words, the structured absence of such framing can be more ideologically loaded than framing which is either overtly positive or negative. This alerts us to the need for a more co(n)text-sensitive model to account for the ideological function of discourse representation.

A segregationist strategy is evident in the foregrounding of the fact that Beckett is the only woman in the race, relative to the information about her experience in government. The problem the editorial team have in accommodating her within the terms in which they usually discuss politics is evident in the description of her as the party's 'elder statesman - or woman' (ll. 52-3). The use of the dash here, setting the phrase 'or woman' apart syntactically from the 'normal' collocation, makes it seem like an awkward afterthought and emphasises the oddness of her candidacy. Again, the description of her as the 'foremost woman in British politics' (l. 55) ignores her efforts

to promote herself in terms of a broader agenda. Likewise, although the primary discourse apparently deflects the view of potential critics that she is 'a token woman', this is undercut by the subsequent narrow focus on the issue of gender, both in terms of her motivation for standing, or 'being stood' (l. 57), as a candidate, and in terms of her appeal to women voters. An editorial in the *Daily Mirror's* sister paper, the *Sunday Mirror* (10 July 1994) is less covert, stating that 'The argument that Mrs Beckett should be the deputy because she is a women (sic) is mere tokenism'. 'The argument' remains unattributed, but by re-producing it the editorial team afford themselves an opportunity to imply that Mrs Beckett has no other claims to aspire to a senior position in the party, thereby furthering their own agenda of promoting Prescott as the most suitable candidate for the deputy's post. In the *Daily Mirror* editorial, the producers' ideological distance from Mrs Beckett candidacy is less explicit. It is nonetheless evident in the use of the dysphemism 'parsimonious' (l. 61) to describe her cautious performance as treasury spokeswoman, and by the fact that there is only one instance in the entire profile where their editorial voice merges with hers.

Beckett's identity was constructed as 'other', not only in terms of her gender, but also in terms of generation, in relation to Blair, and class, in relation to Prescott. Although Prescott is five years older than Beckett, his age was rarely alluded to by journalists, while the fact that Beckett was 51 at the time of the campaign was gratuitously foregrounded, as if to underline the point that she was literally and metaphorically 'old Labour'. This unequal treatment is evident also in relation to the axis of class. For instance, it was alleged that in private Prescott referred scathingly to Beckett as 'the duchess' (*The Times*, 3 July 1994). This social class 'slur' was reproduced in numerous articles and no doubt helps to explain why, 'Labour men still regard her as unforgivably horsey' (*Sunday Times*, 22 May 1994). According to Beckett, 'not only was

it [the epithet 'duchess'] not meant to be a compliment but it was meant to be damaging... [it] was meant to get to the Party members not to the public' (Appendix I: 61-63). Significantly, while Beckett's relatively middle class background attracted negative coverage, Blair's appears to have been viewed as an electoral asset.

A detailed critical analysis of the relative treatment of the candidates in the *Daily Mirror*, here and in the subsequent more extended interviews with them on the 22, 23 and 24 of June 1994 respectively, is at odds with the claim expressed in the editorial on 7 July, 'We alone among the media have reported this contest without the slightest favour to any candidate'. Whether consciously or not, the all-male editorial team aligned themselves, and invited their assumed male readers to align themselves, with the two male candidates in the leadership race, segregating and subordinating Beckett as a candidate promoting herself on a narrowly gendered platform.

### **3.8.3 Gender and the Genre of the Political Interview**

Negrine (1989: 191) points out an inherent conflict which exists between what politicians expect of the media and the way in which media workers perceive their role, 'politicians seek, in the main, favourable publicity', whilst media workers, 'seek to hold politicians to account'. This tension is likely to be exacerbated when male journalists have to accommodate a woman in the relatively unusual position of political power.

This is evident in a number of articles written during the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign which record interviews between Beckett and journalists. Typical of many such articles is the one in *The Times* (21 June 1994), recording an interview she had with the political correspondents, Peter Riddell and Philip Webster (Figure 3.3a and 3.3b: 133-134). I chose this article because K. Ross (1995a: 505) regards it as one of the 'most balanced representation(s) of Beckett's views of herself and her potential to

Is Margaret Beckett destined always to be the bridesmaid, ask **Peter Riddell and Philip Webster**

# 'One of my women colleagues said to me: They buried you with John'

**M**argaret Beckett has never been taken seriously as a possible leader of the Labour Party, and it obviously hurts. Even though she has more experience than the other candidates, she has been seen as the safe and competent deputy, not never a likely successor to John Smith. No other member of the shadow Cabinet even nominated her as leader.



The first in a series of interviews with the Labour leadership candidates

During a lengthy interview in the shadow Cabinet room, the public face of the cool, composed politician at times slipped. She can be prickly and defensive, wondering whether there is a hidden point behind a straightforward question. She is like the eternal supporting actress who wants to be the leading lady, the best friend aspiring to be the heroine. For her it is not enough to be the highly competent party organiser, whether as Chief Secretary ("the keeper of the keys") before the election, or as deputy leader for the past two years, combining the roles of Mr Smith's frequent stand-in, shadow leader of the Commons, in charge of reorganisation of party headquarters and coordinator of its campaigning and elections.

Mrs Beckett was clearly upset when, in the days after Mr Smith's death, she was virtually written out of the script. She was seen purely as the acting leader and never talked of as the next leader — "or at all", she interposed.

"One of my women colleagues said to me: 'They buried you with John'. There is no doubt that I disappeared from the frame as far as most media commentators were concerned. I cannot say I was surprised. I am standing because I am doing the job of leading the Labour Party. I believe I can continue to do it well. Was the ignored because she was a woman?" I think that that is one of the reasons. It has been repeatedly said to me, so there must be something in it. A man in my circumstances would not have been assumed not to be a candidate for the leadership. It would probably have been the other way round."

She has suffered, from being seen as an apparatus, a manager rather than a visionary, going

back to her days as a party researcher. She seemed surprised at the suggestion: "I suppose in a sense I have been seen for some time as somebody who will do difficult jobs." She and Mr Smith had agreed she would take on a higher public profile by going out and making more speeches. "That was the next step."

The only candidate to have experience in office, as a junior education minister, she drifted in from the dark days of the last Labour Government. She would have done things differently. "People who end up in senior posts tend to have long periods of unbroken service. The Labour Government of 1974-79 would not have taken some of the decisions it did in the autumn of 1978 if it had had more people in the Cabinet who represented marginal seats than safe seats. In marginal seats you have to build a coalition of support and cannot take your support for granted."

"I have never had a safe seat. I stand or fall with the Labour Party. If the Labour Party wins, I win. If the Labour Party loses, I may well lose."

"That leaves your political interests. The question of support you have to win to hold a marginal seat is exactly the question of support Labour needs to win in the country."

Mrs Beckett determined not to

be ignored. Sharp in the public debates, she has been the only one to disturb the bland surface of the campaign, and, incidentally, give ammunition to Tory researchers, by making controversial statements.

She will, however, advise her party against making specific and dated policy pledges so far away from the next election. "We should resist the notion that we can't suggest anything unless it is in specific detail and dated down to the last taxpayer. People in the Labour Party are just as prone as anybody else to say 'we can't say we want to improve the NHS unless we say precisely by how much' but you can't say exactly how much three years from an election."

"We thought if we had detailed policies, accurately rooted and clearly defensible, that would answer the question of trust. But it didn't. They still didn't trust us. It was an emotional thing, it wasn't based on the figures."

Referring to the often said during the interview, to John Smith, she said: "That was John's great strength. John was a believable person, so when he was saying things that were maybe more specific, maybe less specific, he could carry trust with him. We've got to find a way of doing that."

"Most people most of the time are not particularly interested in the details. What they want to know is there a different way of doing something? Is there a good chance that will be better? And if there is a good chance that will be better, can someone deliver it?"

**T**hroughout, Mrs Beckett perceived herself as Mr Smith's heir. Despite her longstanding doubts about electoral reform, she promised to honour his pledge of a referendum.

"A referendum was the right answer because I feel passionately that it is a trust and a decision to think that in some way we are uniquely disadvantaged by the first past the post system." She said: "The British people are being sold a pup. They are being told that if they had PR it would be easier to influence and change



In the leadership debate, Margaret Beckett has been the only candidate to disturb the bland surface of the fight. Portrait by Stephen Martin

the decisions of government. I think it would be more difficult."

She revealed that she persuaded Mr Smith to make the offer. "Speaking as a practical politician, there is only one way to put to bed the constant banner."

Continuously, she is opposed to making further changes in Labour's constitution, whether affecting the role of the trade unions or Clause Four on public ownership. "I think that to engage ourselves in making great changes to the party's constitution at this stage of the electoral cycle would cause more problems than it gave

us."

"Mrs Beckett was guarded about taking any of the privatised utilities back into public ownership, although on a case she is prepared to go further than existing policy. "It was John's view, and it is mine, that there is one area of particular sensitivity where we would wish to exercise all the powers of the legislature and where we might be looking for some new forms of

public control, and that is water."

A former social security spokesman, Mr Beckett is committed to the continuation of the state pension, but did not rule out changes in child benefit, which she might consider taking. She supports a "gradual and fundamental re-shaping of the welfare state."

But surely it must have been disappointing, after all she had done, not to have received the backing of just one of her shadow Cabinet friends? "You must ask my colleagues. It is open to each one of us to make our choice as to who we think is best fitted to lead.

It may well be that when my colleagues made their choice they were being told that I was not running. But that is a matter for them."

Was it a tactical mistake to go for both the leadership and the deputy leadership? Was she having second thoughts? Even the professional, she was uncertain. "Not for a second. I have no doubt that I am capable of doing this job well and winning the election for Labour. I believe I am the best candidate fit to do that and in those circumstances it would be wrong not to allow my name to go forward."

**Figure 3.3a: Profile of Margaret Beckett by Peter Riddell and Philip Webster in *The Times* (21 June 1994)**

**Is Margaret Beckett destined always to be the bridesmaid, ask Peter Riddell and Philip Webster**

**'One of my women colleagues said to me: They buried you with John'**

Margaret Beckett has never been taken seriously as a possible leader of the Labour party, and it obviously hurts. Even though she has more experience than the other candidates, she has been seen as the safe and competent deputy, but never as a likely successor to John Smith. No other member of the shadow Cabinet even nominated her as leader.

5     During a lengthy interview in the shadow Cabinet room, the public face of the cool, composed politician at times slipped. She can be prickly and defensive, wondering whether there is a hidden point behind a straightforward question. She is like the eternal supporting actress who wants to be the leading lady, the best friend aspiring to be the heroine. For her it is not enough to be the highly competent party organiser, whether as Chief Secretary ('the keeper of the keys') before the election, or as deputy for the past two years, combining the roles as Mr Smith's frequent stand-in, shadow Leader of the Commons, in charge of reorganisation of party headquarters and co-ordinator of its campaigning and elections.

10    Mrs Beckett was clearly upset when, in the days after Mr Smith's death, she was virtually written out of the script. She was seen purely as the acting leader and never talked of as the next leader 'or at all', she intervened.

15    'One of my women colleagues said to me: "They buried you with John"'. There is no doubt that I disappeared from the frame as far as most media commentators were concerned. I cannot say I was over-surprised. I am standing because I am doing the job of leading the Labour Party. I believe I can continue to do it well'. Was she ignored because she was a woman? I think that is one of the reasons. It has been repeatedly said to me, so there must be something in it. A man in my circumstances would not have been assumed not to be a candidate for the leadership. It would probably have been the other way round'.

20    She has suffered from being seen as an apparatchik, a manager rather than a visionary, going back to her days as a party researcher. She seemed surprised at the suggestion: 'I suppose in a sense I have been seen for some time as somebody who will do difficult jobs'. She and Mr Smith had agreed she would take on a higher public profile by going out and making more speeches. 'That was the next step'.

25    The only candidate to have experience in office, as a junior education minister, she draws lessons from the dark days of the last Labour Government. She would have done things differently. 'People who end up in senior posts tend to have long periods of unbroken service. The Labour Government of 1974-79 would not have taken some of the decisions it did take in the autumn of 1978 if it had had more people in the Cabinet who represented marginal rather than safe seats. In marginal seats you have to build a coalition of support and cannot take that support for granted.

30    'I have never had a safe seat. I stand or fall with the Labour Party. If the Labour Party wins, I win. If the Labour Party loses, I may well lose.

35    'That hones your political instincts. The coalition of support you have to win to hold a marginal seat is exactly the coalition of support Labour needs to win in the country'.

40    Mrs Beckett is determined not to be ignored. Sharp in the public debates, she has been the only one to disturb the bland surface of the campaign, and, incidentally, give ammunition to Tory researchers, by making controversial statements.

45    She will, however, advise her party against making specific and costly policy pledges so far away from the next election. 'We should resist the notion that we can't suggest anything unless it is in specific detail and costed down to the last tuppence. People in the Labour party are just as prone as anybody else to say "we can't say we want to improve the NHS unless we say precisely by how much". But you can't say exactly how much three years from an election.

50    'We thought if we had detailed policies, accurately costed and utterly defensible, that would answer the question of trust. But it didn't. They still didn't trust us. It was an emotional thing, it wasn't based on the figures.

55    Referring, as she often did during the interview, to John Smith, she said: 'That was John's great strength. John was a believable person, so when he was saying things that were maybe more specific, maybe less specific, he could carry trust with him. We've got to find a way of doing that.

60    'Most people most of the time are not particularly interested in the details. What they want to know: is there a different way of doing something? Is there a good chance that it will be better? And if there is a good chance that it will be better, can somebody deliver it?'

65    Throughout, Mrs Beckett portrayed herself as Mr Smith's heir. Despite her longstanding doubts about electoral reform she promised to honour his pledge of a referendum.

70    Contentiously, she is opposed to making further changes in Labour's constitution, whether affecting the role of the trade unions or Clause Four on public ownership...

75    But surely it must have been disappointing, after all she had done, not to have received the backing of just one of her shadow Cabinet friends? 'You must ask my colleagues. It is open to each of us to make our choice as to who we think is best fitted to be lead. It may well be that when my colleagues made their choice they were being told that I was not running. But that is a matter for them'.

80    Was it a tactical mistake to go for both the leadership and the deputy leadership? Was she having second thoughts? Ever the professional, she was unrepentant. 'Not for a second. I have no doubt that I am capable of doing this job well and winning the election for Labour. I believe I am the best candidate fitted to do that and in those circumstances it would be wrong not to let my name to go forward.

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**Figure 3.3b: Text of a profile of Margaret Beckett that appeared in *The Times* (21 June 1994), reproduced on p. 133.**

lead the party'. In particular, she points out that the article acknowledges the way Party and media sexism have served to marginalise Beckett throughout the course of the campaign.

A detailed critical analysis of the article reveals an alternative reading. For instance, it is clear that Beckett wishes to emphasise her record as an experienced politician, while Riddell and Webster choose to foreground the issue of her gender, partly through their choice of metaphors (see 3.8.4 for a detailed discussion of these). Furthermore, a number of textual traces reveal the way in which the two journalists actively construct a subject position for her, which they claim is prevalent among Parliamentary colleagues and media commentators, as merely 'competent' (l. 4). This view is reinforced by their selective depiction of the roles she has performed as bureaucratic gatekeeping ones: 'keeper of the keys', and as deputy leader 'in charge of organisation' and 'co-ordinator of its campaigning and elections'. Her considerable political experience and expertise could have been presented in a very different light, especially given the relative inexperience of her two rivals. Instead, we are told that, 'She has suffered from being seen as an apparatchik, a manager rather than a visionary, going back to her days as a party researcher' (ll. 36-8). The use of the agentless passive here, together with the choice of the verb 'to suffer', not only serve to disguise agency, but cast her stereotypically as acted upon. That this is, in fact, the producers' own view is evident in the earlier collocational chaining of phrases such as 'safe and competent' and 'highly competent'.

Significantly, she chooses to resignify the dysphemism 'apparatchik' as 'somebody who will do difficult jobs' (l. 38). Ultimately, though, it is the producers who control the way the interview is slanted for readers. For instance, it is their prerogative to interpret

the interviewee's paralanguage for readers. In this instance, Riddell and Webster attribute a range of *emotions* to Beckett, when her cool public face is said to slip (l. 8). For instance, they claim that she was 'obviously hurt' (l. 2) and 'clearly upset' (l. 19) that she has not been taken seriously as a potential leader. They also attribute 'surprise' to Beckett that she should be seen as an apparatchik (l. 36), whereas she says, 'that wouldn't surprise me in the slightest I mean erhm you know I'm very conscious of the fact that I have never been seen as a sort of visionary politician' (Appendix I: 10-12). Their assertion that she *is* surprised at this suggestion once again calls into question her political judgement. Likewise, their perception that, 'She can be prickly and defensive' is given the status of an objective 'fact', while their view of themselves as professionals, asking 'straightforward' questions, casts her in the role of a paranoid politician (ll. 10-11).

This analysis highlights the tensions and contradictions inherent in the genre of the political interview when the politician being interviewed is a woman. The account of the interview which appeared in the final article serves both to expose the overt gender bias of media coverage, while at the same time re-producing this gender bias in a covert form. This is achieved by the segregationist strategy of constructing a subject position for Beckett as someone whose main strength is her ability to occupy a practical supporting role vis-vis the activities of visionary men. In this way, the article helps to contribute to the gendered division of labour within political parties, noted by Burstyn (1983: 73). The stereotypical assumptions underlying this division of political labour emerge more clearly if we place it in the context of the larger discursive framework or schema which operates across the boundaries of public sphere discourse types, casting women in subordinate support roles, while men are cast in powerful leadership roles.

Opposition to militarism and war has been an important strand in British feminism, but it introduces further dissonance into women's relationship to the role of an aspiring political leader. As Pateman (1989: 49) observes, 'Of all the male clubs and associations, it is in the military and on the battlefield that fraternity finds its most complete expression'. The military duty to defend one's country underlines the gender sub-text of a politician's role. One of the objections raised to the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro for the vice-presidential role in the 1984 US presidential election was, according to Faludi (1992: 302), 'that her gender would render her incapable of defending the nation'. During the Falklands War, Thatcher had to search far back in history to find an appropriate image of a warrior woman in Boadicea. Rather than confronting the links between masculinity and war, Thatcher constructed an image of herself as a reluctant non-combatant (W. Webster, 1990: 166).

It is in this broader context that we need to interpret Anthony Bevins' interview with Beckett during the Labour leadership campaign (*Observer*, 26 June 1994), an interview in which he deliberately chose to foreground her commitment to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) (Figure 3.4: 138). He presents his discussion with her on this subject as a sequence of questions and answers, a format which sets it apart graphically from the remainder of the article. Bell, (1991: 210) cites a study by Clayman (1990) of stories drawn from the *Los Angeles Times*, which revealed that this format was used largely to signal interactional resistance, 'They show the news source as hesitating to reply, refusing to answer, giving non-answers, or admitting something under repeated questioning'. This is precisely the effect produced by the layout of this section of Bevins' interview with Beckett. It appears under the negative sub-headline, 'Never ask a CND member if she would use the bomb', alerting us to the fact that it is what Beckett refuses to say in her replies which is significant.

## Never ask a CND member if she would use the bomb

- AS A member of the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Mrs Beckett's views on Britain's nuclear weaponry would be of interest if she became Labour leader, and then Prime Minister - with button-pushing powers.
- 5 **Q: What would you want to do with our nuclear weapons?**
- 10 A: I would want to see them, as I would want to see all nuclear weapons across the world, (as) part of a framework of negotiations that mean, hope-fully, perhaps almost everywhere, no-body would have nuclear weapons...
- 15 **Meanwhile, we have them.**  
Meanwhile, we have them.  
**And what are the circumstances in which you could use them?**
- 20 (Pause) You know as well as I do that's not a question you should ever put to a Prime Minister or a potential Prime Minister.  
That's not a question I propose to answer.  
**That's preposterous.**  
It's certainly not preposterous. It's like a devaluation question.
- 25 **But you've got these monsters in the cupboard.**  
They go into negotiation. Other than that, I ain't going to discuss it.
- 30 **There are circumstances...**  
I'm not going to discuss it.  
**Not even to say that there are circumstances in which they could be used?**  
Not even.
- 35 **Of course, if there are circumstances in which they would never be used, if there are no circumstances in which they would be used, there would be no point in having them.**  
You and I have know each other a long time; don't waste your time piling hypothesis upon hypothesis. If I say you're not going to get an answer out of me, you're not going to get an answer out of me.
- 40  
45

Figure 3.4: Text of part of an interview of Margaret Beckett by Anthony Bevins (Observer, 26 June 1994).

Bevins' contributions begin with a series of bald interrogatives, clearly designed to put Beckett on the defensive. Although, Beckett evades his attempts at framing the issue in a hypothetical way with 'what if?' questions, the precise detailing of her evasive replies has clearly served his purpose, which appears to have been to discredit her claim to represent a viable future prime minister. This implicit reluctance of Beckett to countenance 'pushing the button' was recycled in a series of media accounts throughout the following week and is likely to have damaged her standing as a candidate amongst the modernisers in the electoral college. It is significant that this was an issue which featured only marginally in interviews with the other two candidates, despite the fact that Blair, in particular, had been a longstanding and active member of CND.

#### **3.8.4 News Narratives and Gender Bias**

A number of media analysts have identified hard news as a sub-genre of narrative discourse (see, for instance, Fairclough 1995b; Caldas-Coulthard 1995). Analysis has tended to focus almost exclusively on the narrative function, often central to hard news stories, of recounting past events. Even more ideologically implicated, however, are those hard news stories in which the narrative function of *predicting* future events is to the fore. Such predictive narratives do not structure events that have already occurred, but privilege a particular construction of events which have yet to take place. In this context, fact and forecast are apt to trade places. Although some analysts have called into question the media's influence on voting behaviour, I would suggest that voter-impact analysis needs to be more context-aware. For instance, a particular configuration of circumstances in the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign created ideal conditions for the media to influence the outcome. Changes to the Party's electoral college created a mass electorate and as Hugo Young, the *Guardian's* chief political commentator, pointed out, 'With a mass electorate the media have much

greater power to make their *story* come true than they would if the vote lay with the Parliamentary party' (19 May 1994, my italics). A second point is that the unexpectedness of John Smith's death on the 12 May 1994 meant that opinions were not pre-formed, as they often are in intra-party campaigns which are foreseen. Finally, the moratorium on official campaigning which prevailed between Smith's death and the European elections on 9th June created an ideal space for media speculation.

In the event, the story constructed in the media during the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign was a masculinist narrative in which the only female political actor, having initially been excluded completely, was admitted only as a minor character. The striking feature of the Blair bandwagon and the all-male 'dream ticket' of Blair and Prescott in the 1994 election campaign is the degree of homogeneity about them across newspapers of all shades of opinion. Five days after John Smith's death, seven national newspapers had declared their support for Blair, including the right wing tabloids the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, and broadsheets the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*. This homogeneity can be explained partly by the tendency noted by Fairclough (1995b: 198) for stories in the media to become recycled, forming inter-textual chains. These inter-textual networks, which operate across different media texts, make it very difficult for oppositional narratives to occupy a discursive space.

Sorlin (1994: 112) insists that coverage in the media is in itself an asset to politicians 'if they are named, it means that they are important and deserve attention'. Conversely, in a leadership campaign, if they are not named, or are marginalised, their political ambitions are likely to be ignored or dismissed. As early as 19 May, Isabel Hinton noted that, 'in the forest of comment, reporting and speculation on the forthcoming leadership contest that has filled the pages of the national press since the death of John

Smith, the name of Margaret Beckett has hardly been mentioned...Mrs Beckett, in a remarkable piece of prestidigitation, has become invisible.' (*Independent*, 19 May). The invisibility is particularly surprising given her high profile role as acting leader and the media bias to office, noted by Seymore-Ure (1987: 14). The oddness of this situation was noted even in the right-wing press. Writing in *The Times* (21 June 1994), Riddell and Webster acknowledge that 'in the days after Mr Smith's death, she (Beckett) was virtually written out of the script'. Lakoff (1995: 29) argues that women's lack of interpretative control and, in particular, the fact that their narratives are evaluated by male authority, helps to explain their continued marginalisation in public sphere roles. A revealing comment in this respect is that made by Hugo Young, 'With the help of Mr Paxman, each *man* will have been obliged to stake out the priorities *he* believes in.' (17 May 1994, my italics).<sup>4</sup> This statement illustrates clearly the fraternal networks which exist between male politicians and male commentators in a variety of media, in this case the press and television. In it, one media man foregrounds the central role in the campaign of another well-known media man in literally *mediating* the political claims of implicitly *male* political contenders.

Female politicians are not only generally excluded from the masculinist narratives which pervade coverage of the public discourse of politics, if they do feature, they tend to be referred to in terms of metaphors which are drawn from low status narratives associated with girl or women readers. Riddell and Webster (*The Times*, 21 June 1994), describe Beckett as 'the best friend aspiring to be the heroine' (Figure 3.3b: 134, l. 12). This serves to belittle her political ambitions by linking them metaphorically to the prospects of a heroine in the genre of the girls' school story or popular romantic novel. A related discursive strategy is the tendency to refer to women who enter the public sphere in terms of metaphors drawn from the private sphere. The

same article in *The Times* carried the headline, 'Is Margaret Beckett destined always to be the *bridesmaid*' (Figure 3.3b: 134). The reader is, of course, expected to supply 'and never the bride', thus, implicating her or himself in what is a trivialising metaphorical construction, given that it is used to assess the prospects of a woman aspiring to one of the highest political offices in the land.

Common collocations are less *fixed* than metaphors, yet these can also function to implicate the reader in sexism. For instance, an article in the *Sunday Mirror* (10 July 1994), carried the huge headline, in bold white-on-black, 'DESERTED', to describe the apparent defection of 'up to 12' MPs who had allegedly switched their support from Beckett to Prescott. The choice 'deserted' here invites the reader to see Beckett as a victim, by analogy with the common collocation 'a deserted wife'. In fact, the paper only names three MPs who are prepared to acknowledge this publicly, two of whom qualify their switch of allegiance. At this late stage in the campaign, when the defection of a few MPs could mean the difference between winning and losing, this is a blatant attempt by the producers to influence readers/voters to follow the paper's own stated policy of supporting Prescott for the deputy's role. It is likely, of course, that many female readers found themselves at odds with the often male-gendered reading positions established for them. K. Ross (1995b: 507) argues that this is confirmed by the fact that, despite the media's limited and largely unfavourable coverage of Beckett's campaign, she lost the deputy leadership by a narrow margin. Interestingly, her support among women MPs outnumbered Prescott's by two to one (Alderman and Carter 1995: 450).

During political campaigns, the media have a ready-made stock of masculinist military metaphors which mean that the terms of the debate are already adversarial. These were

invoked by the columnist Andrew Rawnsley in his attempt to discredit claims of institutional sexism as feminist paranoia. In a characteristically glib article in the *Observer* (10 July 1994), he argues that, 'There was no male conspiracy to deny the job to a woman', but the metaphors he chooses in which to frame the terms of political debate betray his own masculinist assumptions, 'I would be asking myself who I would prefer to go into the jungle with. Mr Prescott will get him (Mr Blair) into far more fights, but when the crocodiles close in, the leader could be reasonably confident that his deputy will be fighting on the same side'. The genre evoked here is the boys' adventure story. By choosing to draw his metaphors from this particular genre, Rawnsley inadvertently indicates the difficulty women experience in being taken seriously as political actors, since the inclusion of a woman in an active role would violate the norms of what Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) terms the 'homosocial bonding' on which this genre, and by implication party politics, are premised.

When women in political life *are* referred to in terms of military metaphors, these often carry connotations of unfeminine aggressiveness which are readily caricatured, as is evident in Steve Bell's satirical cartoons of Thatcher. The caption for an inset photograph of Beckett, accompanying an interview with her in the *Daily Mirror* (22 June 1994), carries the epithet 'Battler'. The picture depicts an unsmiling Beckett in mid-debate. The term 'battler' can be interpreted in a number of ways. It appears to invite the reader to view her as a woman battling against the odds in the campaign, but it also carries connotations of an unfeminine 'battle-axe'. The latter interpretation is supported by the juxtaposed quotation which also serves to underline her contrariness, 'My origins are on the left, as John Smith's associations were on the right'. The selective use of this quotation also serves to undermine the claim, which she made the cornerstone of her campaign, that she was the continuity candidate.

### **3.8.5 Conclusions**

The hidden power of media discourse to reinforce women's segregation and subordination in the public sphere does not depend on a single article, or even a series of articles, but on systematic tendencies in news reporting, the effect of which is cumulative. The coverage of the 1994 Labour leadership campaign needs, therefore, to be seen in this broader context of media bias against individual female politicians and, more generally, against feminist strategies aimed at challenging masculinist practices in party politics. As deputy leader, Margaret Beckett had been the most senior, as well as by far the most experienced, of the potential candidates for the leadership of the Party. When she attempted to translate what was a symbolic role into a substantive one, she was punished by the loss of both. The belittling assumption, promoted by the media, that she had over-reached herself in running for the office of leader has been uncritically reproduced in post-election analyses of the campaign (see, for instance, Alderman and Carter 1995).

### **3.9 Media Coverage of the 1997 General Election: the Emergence of 'Blair's Babes'**

The next major electoral event in the British Parliamentary calendar was the general election which took place on 1st May 1997. A Fawcett Society survey of one week's television coverage of the election makes clear that the media bias against female candidates is not confined to the print media (*Watching Women*, 1997). Not a single government spokesperson interviewed was a woman, and women made only eight out of a total of one hundred and seventy seven appearances by national politicians. It could be argued that the lack of air-time granted to female politicians does not seem to have harmed their electoral chances, since they were voted in in record numbers. However, the structured invisibility of women is likely to sustain the damaging myth

that politics is primarily a 'man's game'. This is not really surprising, given that the coverage was dominated by male reporters, with four out of five election items being covered by men. This pattern was replicated on the night of the election itself. The front cover of the *Radio Times* in election week carried pictures of the BBC's four star presenters, all men, dubbed variously: the 'king of swing' (Peter Snow), the 'ruler of the airwaves' (James Naughtie), 'the grand inquisitor' (Jeremy Paxman) and 'master of ceremonies' (David Dimbleby). The impression of politics as a 'man's *game*' is reinforced further in an article inside the magazine, in which we are told, 'While Dimbleby provides all the appropriate gravitas, it is left to Peter Snow to supply the boyish enthusiasm' (26th-2 May 1997). Snow himself admits, 'Oh yes, I do get a terrific schoolboy thrill from all this' (*ibid*). The only woman to feature on the election-night teams of any of the terrestrial channels was ITN's Sue Lawley, whose appropriately feminine role was to interview the studio audience.

The *Guardian's* Joanna Coles provides a fascinating insider's view of the masculinist culture that prevailed amongst political journalists during what she describes as a 'testosterone-driven' election (*Guardian* 28 April 1997). In one anecdote, she recalls the laddish behaviour of both male reporters and photographers on the Conservative campaign bus, where they whooped over soft-porn images down-loaded onto their laptops from the internet. The fraternal bonding between male politicians and male journalists is captured in a description of one press conference at Conservative Central Office, 'John Major, Brian Mawhinney and Michael Heseltine sat facing an ocean of male hacks, with whom they started sparring.' (*ibid*). Her observation that only two of the females who *were* present ventured to ask questions appears to lend support to other studies that have found that women ask significantly fewer questions than men in mixed-sex public forums (Swacker 1979; Holmes 1988; Bashiruddin *et al.* 1990).

This is generally interpreted as a sign of women's lack of assertiveness, yet, Coles offers a more context-specific explanation. She insists that female journalists deliberately refrain from fielding questions at high profile press conferences on the grounds that such questions function as showcases for the egos of male journalists and politicians, as opposed to being genuine requests for information. The sense of disaffection experienced by female journalists, such as Coles, in the male-dominated and confrontational atmosphere of political journalism makes it difficult to imagine any immediate change in the coverage of so-called 'hard news' stories, however much women may be infiltrating other areas of journalism. The tediously recycled description of Labour's record 101 female MPs as 'Blair's babes' in the post-election period certainly offers little hope of an imminent shift away from the masculinist bias of the print media.

### **3.10 Post-Election Feminist Gains**

In the wake of the dramatic increase in the number of women MPs in the 1997 general election, there is undoubtedly a widespread expectation that their presence will make a difference. The Labour MP, Clare Short, expresses this view with absolute conviction:

Most institutions change significantly in their culture and style as women are promoted in significant number. We should therefore expect the culture and style of the Labour Party to change significantly. It is also likely that the presence of such a large number of women in the House of Commons will lead to major change.

(Short 1996: 26-7)

Squires (1996: 77), however, points out some of the problems implicit in this view, 'This argument relies on a cohesive notion of "woman" and assumes that simply guaranteeing the number of women present can secure the values of the women present'. In particular, I would argue that Short's optimism fails to take account of the

many barriers to discursive and institutional change outlined in the sections above, including the central role played by the media in shaping public perceptions of MPs' identities and of their success, or otherwise, in performing their various roles.

However, one does not have to accept an essentialist notion of 'woman' to posit the existence of a good deal of common ground between the women elected, especially since a Fawcett Society survey carried out after the election discovered that four fifths of the new intake regarded themselves as feminists (Weldon 1999). The denial of this common ground is too often used by anti-feminists to undermine feminist gains. Thus the former Conservative Chair, Brian Mawhinney, dismissed the creation of Labour's Women's Unit on the grounds that, 'Lumping women together as if they were either one homogeneous group or an oppressed minority is...insulting' (cited in the *Guardian* 13 July 1996).

Since the general election, the Women's Unit has been responsible for promoting women-friendly policies, despite being handicapped in a number of ways. For instance, Harriet Harman's role as Minister for Women was tagged on to an already demanding brief, while her deputy, Joan Ruddock, was forced to defend the ludicrous situation whereby her own role was unpaid. As the journalist Yvonne Roberts points out, Harman's dual roles set up a conflict of interests, 'As Social Security Secretary, her aim is to get lone mothers out to work - as women's minister, shouldn't she be arguing for a woman's right to care for her child full-time, if she so desires?' (*Guardian* 8 May 1997). This clash of subject positions culminated in the Commons' revolt over the proposed cut to lone parents' benefits in December 1997, and to the ignominious sackings of both Harman and Ruddock in July of the following year. Ruddock claims that the policy has been misrepresented. Far from compelling women to go out to work, the aim had been to afford them real choices (Appendix II: 293 ff.). However, it

is difficult to escape the conclusion that Harman and Ruddock allowed their feminist principles to be cynically exploited by the Government to justify unpopular welfare cuts that targetted the most vulnerable group of women in society. Yet, this unfortunate episode needs to be placed within the broader context of their achievements for women. They introduced the first national strategies on childcare, and violence against women; they instigated a process of mainstreaming, designed to encourage all departments to consider the impact on women of policy-making, and they set up women-only juries to hold ministers to account for all policy areas affecting women. The latter was a key mechanism in Harman's stated commitment to improve, 'the connection between people and Parliament' (*Guardian* 3 May 1997). Both she and Ruddock should also be credited with helping to ensure that the budget announced in April 1998 was widely perceived as a 'women's budget'.

### **3.11 Post-Election Feminist Losses**

The revelation that Harman's replacement as Minister for Women, Baroness Jay, has eschewed the 'feminist' label makes the comparisons between herself and Thatcher rather more ominous than usual. A recent profile of Jay, carrying the headline, 'the other iron lady', states that she shares with Thatcher 'an unavoidable air of authority.' (*Guardian* 6 February 1999). Significantly, this authoritative air does not render her immune from the media's tendency to define women in public life in terms of their familial roles, 'That Jay wears the heavy mantle of power comfortably is always attributed...to the influence of her prime minister father, Jim Callaghan, and her former husband, Peter Jay, sometime ambassador to Washington' (*ibid*). The appointments of Jay, and, more recently of Fiona Reynolds, a Blairite with a strong business background, to the Women's Unit, seem calculated to foreground the perceived tension between 'New Labour' and 'old style' seventies feminism'. For instance, *Guardian*

journalist, Anne Perkins, reports that Reynolds, 'speaks in carefully gender-neutral terms, fearing a backlash could be provoked by too aggressive a promotion of women's interests.' (1 June 1999). It could be argued that this strategy of accommodation is reflected in the Unit's new slogan in which gender equality appears to have been diluted in favour of a less radical equality-for-all agenda, hence, 'better for women, better for all'. In October 1999, the findings of the Unit's 'Listening to Women' roadshows, were published in a glossy magazine format, entitled 'Voices'. None of these findings came as a surprise to the many women's groups and academics who had available research on women's policy priorities, and one is left to wonder whether the Unit is becoming 'a tokenistic dumping ground' (Short 1996: 25), rather than a powerful force for promoting substantive policy changes.

The gains feminist-identified women MPs have achieved are even more qualified when it comes to overturning the dominant discursive norms and procedures that operate in the Commons. S. Shaw's (1999) close analysis of patterns of illegal interruption in five Commons' debates between July 1998 and March 1999 reveal that masculinist discourse styles continue to be treated as the interactional norm. Meanwhile, Ann Taylor's modest attempts to reform the 'hours culture', when Leader of the Commons, have met with considerable resistance from traditionalists. As a result, stories of burnout, especially amongst women MPs, have been reported widely in the media. In the *Guardian* alone, alarmist headlines have included the following: 'Election success turns sour for stressed out MPs' (28 March 1998); 'New Labour women MPs face "super-couple" crisis' (3 August 1998) and 'Are Labour women heading for burnout?' (4 August 1998). More recent media attention has focused on the alleged dilemma of Yvette Cooper in having to combine her new appointment as Minister for Public Health with the care of a young baby. Madeleine Bunting asks, 'Why is no one wondering how Ed

Balls (Cooper's husband) can juggle his job as [Gordon's] adviser with a small baby?' (*Guardian* 13 October 1999). The answer is, of course, that the majority of media producers continue to construct women, even high profile career women, primarily in terms of their private sphere roles as wives and mothers.

In her Charter 88 speech, delivered while shadow Leader of the House, Taylor had called for reforms that would, 're-engage the gears of the political process in a fundamental way so that ordinary voters feel genuinely connected with the people who represent them.' (Hansard 14 May 1996). The laudable aim would appear to have been to bridge the gap between political institutions and the public. There is a widespread suspicion, however, that some of the changes that have been introduced by Taylor to 'modernise' the practices and procedures of the House have, if anything, rendered the Government less accountable to both Parliament and to 'ordinary voters'. One ostensibly positive change has been a greater reliance on consensual 'programme motions' (i.e. motions timetabled in advance), rather than the more confrontational 'guillotine motions' available to governments with a large majority. Yet these have had the effect of easing legislation through, effectively suppressing proper debate, leading Seaton and Winnetrobe (1999: 156) to describe them as 'guillotines by agreement'. This illustrates the way in which the type of consensual discursive practices favoured by women can be used to manufacture consent. Seaton and Winetrose (1999) see a similar process at work in relation to other proposed changes:

sending MPs away from Westminster through 'constitutional Fridays' and 'constitutional weeks'; making the Prime Minister open to question-ing once rather than twice a week: all these may be seen by some as a gain for government rather than for Parliament.

(Seaton and Winetrose 1999: 159)

There is a danger that the legitimate feminist agenda of promoting more family-friendly hours and more efficient procedures in the Commons has been appropriated by the Government to further its own very different agenda of marginalising Parliament's role in the process of policy making. This interpretation is keeping with the fact that ministers routinely make policy announcements in the media. It is also supported by the Government's determination to replace Betty Boothroyd as Speaker, on the grounds of what it sees as her resistance to the process of modernisation, but what she sees as the Government's encroachments on the rights of Parliament (*Guardian* 26 October 1999).

This provides one instance of Cameron's (1998: 433) claim that, 'the process of interpretation is also a site where social inequalities and conflicts may have significant effects'. The potential for conflict over the interpretative assumptions participants bring to a speech event is illustrated even more clearly in the disagreements that have arisen over allegedly sexist comments and behaviour experienced by women in the House of Commons since the 1997 General Election. Six months after taking up their seats, six out of ten female Labour MPs complained that they had experienced harassment. A comment by Labour MP, Brian Sedgemore, is not untypical of the rationalisations of this type of speech and behaviour by some male MPs, 'innocent touching, gallant males taking women by the arm, and innuendo are common-place in the House of Commons' (1995: 126). By contrast, some women MPs have perceived this type of 'innocent' and 'gallant' behaviour as both 'inappropriate' and 'disgusting' (Puwar 1997: 5). It also, of course, offers an additional source of ammunition during Commons debates. Thus Jane Kennedy, a Labour Whip, highlights what she regards as the subtext of such behaviour, 'They are trying to throw you off balance.' (*Guardian* 9 October 1997). Yet, in this instance, discursive conflict is not confined to female

and male MPs; a number of Conservative women MPs deny that these complaints are justified. For instance, Gillian Shepard described them as 'absolute rubbish', while Cheryl Gillan advised Labour women not to have 'a sense of humour bypass' (*ibid*). It seems that strategic misunderstanding can also be exploited by *women* to distance themselves from the charge of political correctness, or of lacking a sense of humour.

In addition to more traditional forms of masculinity on both sides of the House, Helen Wilkinson (1998), co-founder of the Blairite think-tank, Demos, has identified what she perceives to be a 'new lad' culture in the PLP. More specifically, she claims that, 'where it really counts (lobbying, policy wonkery and spin mastery) power remains firmly in male hands.' (*ibid*: 9). The article was partly a response to media revelations about the activities of the political lobbyist, Derek Draper, who had boasted that he had access to the seventeen people in the Government who really 'count'. Unfortunately, Wilkinson's criticisms were undermined by the romantic metaphors in which she chose to frame them. For instance, she claimed to feel, 'like a lover who has been abandoned and who fears she is about to discover a betrayal' and to find herself, 'recoiling and seeking solace in the arms of the only other Labour I know.' (*ibid*). This led some media commentators to interpret her comments literally, as the spiteful accusations of a woman spurned by one of the very Labour lads she was criticising (*Guardian* 11th August 1998). However, her article prompted others to examine more critically the gender balance of the policy group at the heart of Government decision-making, only to discover that men outnumber women by four to one. This led one commentator to conclude that, 'New Labour's power is brokered by a closed circle of elite white males who share the same culture and values, who enjoy power and do not want to give it up.' (*Guardian* 11 May 1999).

It would seem, then, that the 'old boys' network' that held sway in Parliament for decades has been replaced by a 'new lads' network'. Whereas the criteria for entry to the former included a public school education and/or an Oxbridge degree, the criterion for membership of the new lads' network appears to be a passion for football. Thus Charlie Whelan, former adviser to the Chancellor, recalls, 'My own experience was that football was the first thing we talked about of a Monday morning just as it is for *people* across the country.' (*Guardian* 1 March 1999, my italics). Although some women are, of course, interested in football, Whelan's claim seems calculated to establish common ground between Government policy makers and the lifeworld of an implicitly *male* citizenry. This is subtly reinforced by his choice of the colloquial prepositional phrase, '*of a Monday*'. However, there is none of the irony here that characterises Nick Hornby's best-selling novel, *Fever Pitch* (1992), in which football functions as a metaphor for the alleged contemporary crisis in masculinity. Irony loses its edge somewhat when those playing the game are the most powerful men in the country.

Blair's very public association, both metaphorical and real, with football culture is analogous to his much publicised switch to Estuary vowels on the Des O'Connor show. This represents an instance of what sociolinguists have termed 'downward convergence', in which speakers alter their accent, consciously or otherwise, away from the prestige norm in order to signal solidarity with addressees. This is a phenomenon which is particularly characteristic of the speech of middle-class men who seek to appropriate the covert prestige associated with male working class speech (Trudgill 1988: 91). Such linguistic behaviour therefore serves both an identity and a *inclusive* relational function, but, when it is used by male policy makers, it may serve discursively to *exclude* women. In the transition from the government of John Major to that of Tony Blair, the dominant sporting metaphors may have shifted, from cricket

to football, and the dominant accents may sound more like Estuary than modified Received Pronunciation (RP), but the norms that prevail remain distinctly masculinist. There is, however, evidence of resistance to this adversarial culture and language amongst women MPs in the Labour Party. For instance, Harriet Harman has criticised what she terms the 'militaristic' and 'macho' language of the laddish coterie who surround Blair, claiming that talk of 'big guns', 'big hitters' and 'big beasts' is not how women refer to one another (*Guardian* 9 March 1999).

To invert an observation made by Cameron (1997), male bonding does not preclude rivalry. The rivalry between the Blairites (allies of the Prime Minister) and Brownites (allies of the Chancellor) is framed appropriately enough in terms of that between the rival football teams, Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur (*Guardian* 1 March 1999).

Headlines at the time of the 1994 leadership race had talked about Blair and Brown as 'blood brothers', but Brown felt their mutual friend and colleague, Peter Mandelson, had betrayed fraternal solidarity by co-ordinating Blair's campaign. Labour MP, Diane Abbot, has described the jockeying for power between them since as, 'like nothing so much as Just William and competing gangs' (*Guardian* 29 July 1998). This feud culminated in a series of three resignations in December 1998, including those of Mandelson and Charles Whelan, Brown's spin doctor. Interestingly, the personal assistants who have been credited with keeping the relationship between them relatively amicable are both women: Anji Hunter, special adviser to Blair, and Sue Nye, who fulfils a similar role for Brown. This accords with Abbott's view that 'fixing' in the Party, including at Cabinet level, is largely regarded as the province of women (*Guardian* 29 July 1998). This is in keeping with the expectation, implicit in a good deal of media coverage after the election, that the increasing number of women in the House will help to civilise it.

The expectation that women will constitute a panacea for the widespread 'crisis of sincerity' (Fairclough 1996: 77) in British Parliamentary politics may explain the media witch-hunt of the allegedly corrupt Labour MP, Fiona Jones. Her conviction in March 1999 for falling foul of the arcane rules governing election expenses was the first time in seventy five years that a sitting MP had been found guilty of electoral malpractice. It later emerged that the charges had, in fact, been engineered by 'old Labour' dissidents within her own constituency party. However, media coverage of her conviction made clear that Jones' image as a quintessential Blair's babe was also on trial. The metonymic signifiers of this image in media reports included her hair colour, her smart clothes, her mobile phone and, most damning of all, her Millbank pager. Readers are invited to infer a connection between Jones' carefully constructed image and her fraudulent and unscrupulous behaviour, hence the description of her in the *Daily Mail* as a 'ruthless blonde' (20 March 1999).

Likewise, all the papers foreground the claim made by her campaign manager that they were going to 'spend, spend, spend'. This alludes intertextually to the title of a popular west end show based on the exploits of another profligate blonde, Viv Nicholson, who won the Littlewoods pools in 1961. The phrase is therefore likely to have cued many readers to connect the two women as illustrative of a certain kind of brash femininity. This connection is reinforced in the *Sun*, with the revelation that Jones, 'splashed out on flash cars' (*Sun* 20 March 1999). In the account of her trial reported in the *Guardian* her car is identified more specifically as a 'metallic red Toyota', and lest the significance of this is lost on readers, the prosecuting lawyer is quoted as saying that, 'this rather smart red vehicle was all to do with image.' (24 February 1999). When an appeal court later overturned Jones' conviction, enabling her to retake her seat, this event attracted far less media interest. As a result, the whole episode is likely to have

undermined the standing of *all* women MPs and to have cast doubt on their claims to have brought a new integrity and sincerity into politics.

### **3.12 Conclusions**

Given the increasing importance of mediatized discourse in politics, the media bias against female MPs is likely to undermine their ability to challenge and change the masculinist culture of the House. However, the masculinism of both Parliament and the media is increasingly coming under scrutiny by feminist monitoring groups, including, 'the Fawcett Society, the new Women's Communication Centre, as well as organisations inside the parties and think tanks, especially Demos and Barbara Follet's "British Women" project at the IPPR.' (Lovenduski 1997: 713). Such monitoring activity has not, however, prevented the current intra-Party struggle for the Labour nomination as Mayor of London from being constructed in the media as a contest between the two male candidates, Ken Livingstone and Frank Dobson, while Glenda Jackson has been depicted as an also-ran (*Guardian* 22 October 1999). The media have also been complicit in the whispering campaign promoted by Party spin doctors to let it be known that old style seventies' feminists, like Jackson, Short and the rehabilitated Harman, are 'off-message'. Short, for instance, has been systematically marginalised in a role far from the centre of power, while the dangerous popularity of Mowlam has been contained by her appointment to the elusive role of Cabinet Enforcer. It would seem that there is still much for feminist monitoring groups to do in order to ensure that women are treated as equals within communities of practice within the public sphere. In Chapter 4, I turn my attention briefly to the gains and setbacks women have experienced in the recently established devolved political institutions in Scotland and Wales, before going on to a more detailed analysis of the contribution made by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition to the Province's new Assembly.

1. The quotas policy meant that all-women shortlists of candidates were employed in 50% of winnable seats and seats where incumbent Labour MPs were retiring.  
However, in terms of the proportion of women in the lower House, the UK still achieves a relatively low ranking (twenty-sixth in the world) when compared with its European partners, ahead only of countries like Italy, Ireland and Belgium.
2. The survey, carried out for the monitoring group, Women in Journalism (WIJ), by Publici's trends group, also revealed that women featured in 80% of the pictures that were deemed to be irrelevant to the articles they accompanied. The survey concludes that these images were employed purely to 'lift' otherwise dull stories.
3. This difference of treatment in terms of discourse representation is also strikingly evident in the accompanying photographs of the three candidates. Blair and Prescott are both smiling. Prescott's broad grin makes him seem approachable, while Blair's smile exudes confidence. Both men engage the reader in direct eye-contact. By contrast, Beckett is unsmiling; if anything, her's is a worried expression. Her gaze is directed upwards, almost in a look of supplication. This has the effect of making her appear remote from the reader and in a weak position relative to the male candidates.
4. Although it might be claimed that both 'he' and 'man' are intended to be understood generically, their non-generic reference in this instance is made clear in the context in which all the potential candidates alluded to are *male*. This is particularly ironic since the article is self-reflexively critical in tone, bemoaning the media-led nature of the campaign which is said to have rendered it anti-democratic. This inadvertently betrays a view of significant political actors in the democratic process as implicitly male.

#### 4.1 Introduction

There is a growing trend world-wide away from centralised nation states towards political and cultural secessionism, often based on devolved political institutions (Shiels ed. 1984). Interest amongst linguists in this trend, known variously as 'ethno-nationalism' or the 'new tribalism', has focused almost exclusively on its implications for the status and role of minority languages, such as French in Quebec and Maori in New Zealand (see, for instance, Wardhaugh 1987; Fishman 1991). In almost all of the situations in which devolution has occurred, women have sought to take advantage of the discursive space opened up by constitutional change in order to increase their participation in the process of political decision-making. With reference to devolution in the United Kingdom, I will attempt to assess the impact, if any, that women's efforts have made thus far on the gendered nature of the language and broader discursive practices that prevail in the new and emerging devolved bodies. According to Joan Ruddock MP, there is an expectation amongst women MPs at Westminster that the devolved assemblies will offer a model of what is possible when a more equitable gender balance is achieved:

I have great hopes you know that the developments that are happening in the Welsh Assembly and in the Scottish Parliament will actually demonstrate that there can be a completely new way forward and I think when we have a model of something that looks~feels~is very different I'm hoping that will encourage people somehow to see how backward we look by comparison.

(Appendix II: 168-172)

Although the situation in both Scotland and Wales will be explored briefly, the main focus of this chapter will be on the contribution made by the Northern Ireland Women's

Coalition (NIWC) towards shaping the new Northern Irish Assembly, since this offers an opportunity, unique in the UK, to examine the self-construction and representation of an all-women party political grouping. The question I will attempt to answer is whether feminist-identified women are doing, or, at least are proposing to do, politics differently and, if so, how. As in Chapter 3, I will also consider the role played by the media in shaping public perceptions of the identities of the women involved, as well as considering how the media have chosen to represent measures to create institutions that are more woman-friendly than is true of Westminster.

Before turning to a detailed consideration of devolved politics in the UK, I shall begin by considering in general terms some of the reasons that have led women to assume that devolved institutions offer them greater opportunities for political participation than more established and centralised parliamentary bodies. Partly this is due to a coincidence of goals between identity politics based on cultural, ethnic and/or regional autonomy, and identity politics based on gender. According to Squires (1996: 83), other types of secessionist groupings share with feminists the aim of achieving, 'cultural justice without assimilation and the public recognition of different group experiences and identities'. This in turn facilitates cross-party strategic alliances amongst women, something that is difficult at Westminster where all other interests are expected to be subordinated to party loyalty. The electoral system favoured in devolved institutions, including those in the UK, is often one based on some form of Proportional Representation (PR). Women candidates stand a much better chance of being fielded and selected in elections based on PR, unlike in single-member constituencies, which favour candidates of least risk, and in which factors such as incumbency and patronage tend to work against women (see Appendix: II: 70-76). Perhaps most important of all,

however, is the fact that devolved institutions are closer to the type of grassroots political activity in which women have traditionally been very active. In addition, in practical and financial terms, such institutions are likely to be more accessible to women, especially those with family commitments, than is true of remote centralised parliaments, usually based in the national capital.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4.2 The Gendering of the Scottish Parliament**

Following the general election in 1997, the Labour Government announced plans to honour its manifesto pledge to enable Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to decide their own constitutional futures via referenda. Women activists in all three regions saw this as affording an opportunity for a fresh start, and in particular for ensuring a more even gender balance in the process of political decision-making. When it was established that a two-question referendum was to take place in Scotland on the 11th September 1997, women formed a cross-party alliance on the basis of a minimum agenda in support of the proposed parliament and in support of fifty-fifty representation for men and women. As in Sweden, the threat of the creation of a women's party was sufficient to encourage all parties to field women candidates (A. Brown 1998: 442). According to A. Brown, 'Women were successful in gendering much of the debate, using the language of democracy, participation and representation to stake a claim on behalf of women.' (ibid: 441). Thus in the election campaign that followed, all the major parties, with the exception of the Conservatives, supported mechanisms to maximise women's participation. For instance, the Scottish Labour Party employed a 'twinning' arrangement, whereby if a man was chosen to stand in one constituency, a woman was chosen to stand in a neighbouring constituency. In the event, 37.2% of those elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 1999 were women, making it the third

highest proportion of female representation in national government in the world, and exceeding the number of 30% that Dahlerupp (1988) claims constitutes a 'critical mass'.

This is a considerable achievement, given that prior to the 1997 general election women comprised only 9.7% of Scottish MPs, increasing to 17% after the election. Alice Brown (1996) attributes this tradition of under-representation to the unsocial hours in the Commons, the adversarial nature of political debate, the male-dominated nature of the Scottish Labour Party, and the remoteness of Westminster. In other words, 'the whole political culture and way in which politics is conducted is perceived as a disincentive to women's participation and a more subtle way of excluding them from the political process.' (A. Brown 1996: 33). Elsewhere, A. Brown identifies the bitter resentment of the anti-women policies promoted by Margaret Thatcher as an important factor in encouraging Scottish feminists in the 1980s to overcome their suspicion of, and alienation from, formal electoral politics, 'She mobilised women because of the severity of the cuts she made in all our lives. Women have been forced into political discourse and realise they have to make contact with Government.' (cited in the *Guardian* 23 April 1998).

Paradoxically, then, although making no efforts to promote other women while in power, Thatcher inadvertently produced a resurgence of interest in party politics amongst women in Scotland. What is perhaps even more paradoxical is that the assumption that women could make a real difference to the culture of politics persisted, *in spite of* the apparent counter-example offered by Thatcher herself. The growing feeling amongst Scottish feminists that "'voluntarism" does not produce parity' (A. Brown 1998: 437) led to the establishment of the lobbying and research group,

Engender, in 1992. Its aim was to bridge the gap between women politicians and women community activists and, to this end, it distributed 2000 questionnaires to women's organisations throughout Scotland in order to obtain their views on how the new Parliament should function. One of the legacies of this wide-ranging process of consultation is that all those putting forward parliamentary Bills in the Scottish Parliament have to demonstrate with whom they have consulted, thereby institutionalising the weakening of the boundary between the political and civil spheres.

A. Brown sees women's activities across and between mainstream and grassroots politics in Scotland as symptomatic of the emergence of a more general 'third wave' of feminism, 'The third wave is pluralist. It aims to work creatively with difference while forging a common agenda.' (1998: 443). However, I would argue that this pluralist project, also discernible in the activities of some women MPs and ministers at Westminster, is often undermined by the impact of masculinist mediatized discourse which seeks to magnify differences between women, rather than the commonalities that they themselves seek to emphasise. For instance, despite the fact that, during the referendum campaign, Scottish women transcended party political allegiances in order to pursue a feminist agenda, A. Brown notes that, 'Coverage has generally been reserved for the few occasions when there have been differences between women on the issue of representation.' (1998: 442). Female MSPs have been instrumental in ensuring that the parliamentary time-table is more family friendly than the one that operates at Westminster. For instance, rather than sitting in the evenings, the Scottish Parliament sits during office hours, and parliamentary recesses are designed to coincide with school holidays. However, some sections of the tabloid press have chosen to

construct these family-friendly measures in negative terms, by suggesting that MSPs are rewarding themselves with seventeen weeks holiday, suppressing the fact that much of this time is used for constituency work. A telephone poll conducted by the *Daily Record*, inviting its readers to vote on whether the holiday allowance of MSPs should be reduced to six weeks, was clearly calculated to emphasise the social and occupational divisions between women, as well as between men.

An even more overt instance of negative coverage occurred when the Women's Advisory Group (WAG) was set up, to advise the new Minister for Women, since it was dubbed in the media as 'NAG' (A. Brown 1998: 439). It would seem that the stereotype of whingeing women persists, perhaps because women's voices are no longer muted, but instead carry institutional force. Feminist-identified women occupy three key ministerial posts in the Scottish Cabinet: Susan Deacon, at the Department of Health; Sarah Boyack, at the Department of Transport and Wendy Alexander, at the Department of Social Inclusion. Deacon, in particular, has courageously championed measures to improve the access of women and girls to sexual health education and family planning provision, in spite of, or, perhaps, because of, fierce criticism from some members of the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland. Alexander has put the issue of domestic violence firmly at the top of her policy agenda. In practical terms, she has managed to earmark an extra eight million pounds to provide help for survivors of domestic violence (*Guardian* 13 December 1999). Domestic violence has already been debated twice in the Scottish Parliament, and, on both occasions, women from across the political spectrum united in support of tougher measures to prevent violence against both women and children. Despite the best efforts of women MSPs to shepherd the press physically into the press gallery during a pause in one of these debates, the

issues discussed went unreported in the mainstream media.<sup>2</sup> However, the successful implementation of a number of feminist policy initiatives has rendered rather lame the efforts of the media to dub the new women MSPs 'Donald's dollies', by analogy with their sisters at Westminster, but this time in relation to the First Minister, Donald Dewar.

#### **4.3 'It's Not Because She's a Vegetarian': A Critical Analysis of The Treatment of the Welsh Agriculture Secretary, Christine Gwyther.**

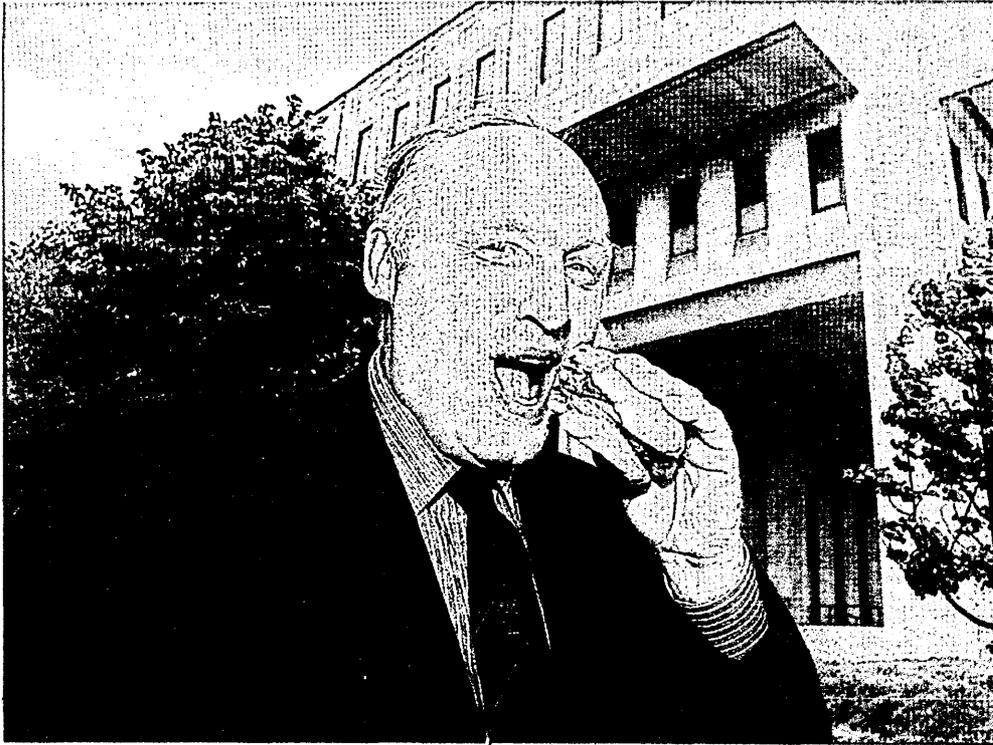
The proportion of women elected to the Welsh Assembly in May 1999 was even higher than the proportion of women elected to the Scottish Parliament. This was achieved by a similar twinning system as the one that operated in Scotland, although it met with considerably more resistance in Wales. A number of female candidates received poison pen letters during their selection process, and, when Anita Gayle, General Secretary of the Welsh Labour Party, attempted to persuade a reluctant constituency party in Cynon Valley to accept the twinning policy, one heckler called her a 'feminist and a trollop' (*Guardian* 4 January 2000). According to Wilkinson (1999/2000: 54), 'The macho culture of the Labour Party in Wales - working men's clubs, rugby union, male voice choirs and the rest of it - is notorious'. This probably explains why so few women in Wales have been elected as Westminster MPs. The current number stand at four out of a total of forty, and three of these were elected on the basis of women-only shortlists in marginal seats. Huw Lewis, Welsh Assembly Member (AM) for Merthyr Tydvil, claims that positive discrimination initiatives on behalf of women have created a good deal of resentment, 'There are a lot of bitter and bruised men out there. Many simply cannot accept that a woman beat them and they won't forget that in a hurry'. (quoted in the *Guardian* 4 January 2000).

Women occupy twenty-four out of a total of sixty seats in the Assembly, which means they comprise 40% of those elected. They have already used their numerical strength to promote family-friendly working hours and, in marked contrast to the crèche-less Westminster, the Assembly lobby is equipped with toys and books for children (Wilkinson 1999/2000: 54). Four out of five of those holding Cabinet posts are women, including the beleaguered Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development, Christine Gwyther. Unlike the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly does not have powers of primary legislation; instead its role is to scrutinise the £7 billion pound annual budget. Partly for this reason, and partly because his is a minority administration, the Labour Leader, Alun Michael, expressed his hope that the Assembly would work on the basis of consensus politics and an inclusive style of debate (*Guardian* 10 May 1999). However, in its short history, the Assembly has been beset by controversy, centring mainly on Gwyther and the issue of her competence, or otherwise, to fulfil her ministerial brief. I intend to examine the controversy surrounding Gwyther's alleged lack of qualifications for her ministerial role, since it offers a salutary tale of how a critical mass of women, whether in a centralised or devolved decision-making body, is no guarantee of a woman-friendly environment.

As soon as Gwyther was appointed, there were calls for her resignation, ostensibly on the grounds that she is a vegetarian and therefore, it was claimed, unable to represent the Welsh livestock industry. The whole tenor of media coverage of the staged walk-out at a meeting between Gwyther and the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) is trivialising. An article in the *Guardian*, carrying the strapline 'Farmers' knives out for vegetarian in charge of Welsh agriculture', is accompanied by a photograph of the leader of the FUW, Bob Parry, looking archly at the viewer, while simulating the eating

of a beef burger (25 May 1999, see Figure 4.1a: 167). The visual cues in this photograph seem calculated to make the whole issue, and indeed Gwyther herself, appear something of a joke. Likewise, a schoolboy snigger lies behind the comment attributed to an unnamed union member who is said to have, 'likened the appointment to installing an atheist as Archbishop of Canterbury' (Figure 4.1b: 168, ll.28-30). Gwyther herself is reported as stressing that Alun Michael assured her she was 'the best *person* for the job', while he is reported as reassuring farmers of 'the *strength* she would bring to the job' (ibid: ll. 37-8; ll. 46-7, my italics). I would suggest that the words in italics provide textual traces of an assumption, shared by Gwyther and Michael, that it is as much Gwyther's gender that is at issue, as her vegetarianism. In other words, they seem to assume that the vegetarian angle is a cover for a less acceptable sexist discourse in which being a woman is perceived to be incompatible with a male-gendered portfolio such as Agriculture. The claim made by the text producer that, 'Yesterday's meeting was the start of a difficult week for Ms Gwyther' (ibid: ll. 70-1) provides an instance of an ideologically loaded predictive narrative, one that constructs Gwyther's week as 'difficult', even before it happens. In this way, the text producer implicitly aligns himself with the FUW's position that Gwyther lacks the competence to do the job assigned to her.

This negative, and often trivialising, media coverage of Gwyther at the outset of her ministerial career undoubtedly made her vulnerable to a second attack on her competence, this time from within the Assembly itself. This occurred in the wake of a ruling by the European Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, that a compensation package for calf slaughtering, promised to farmers in Wales and Scotland, was illegal. On this occasion, the three Opposition parties in the Assembly, Plaid Cymru, the



Union leader Bob Parry says a non-meat eater can't represent an industry 90% dependent on livestock Photograph: Dave Hollins

## Minister refuses to quit

### Farmers' knives out for vegetarian in charge of Welsh agriculture

**Geoffrey Gibbs**

Welsh farmers angrily walked out of their first face to face meeting with the newly appointed Welsh agriculture secretary yesterday after failing to force her resignation because she is a vegetarian.

Christine Gwyther, one of four women in Labour's first Welsh assembly cabinet, said she was more than capable of representing the country's farming community, despite not having eaten meat for more than 20 years.

Leaders of the Farmers' Union of Wales, which represents about half of Wales's 25,000 farmers, walked out of the pre-arranged meeting at the Welsh Office in Cardiff after calling on the 36-year-old minister to reconsider her decision to accept the crucial agriculture and rural affairs portfolio.

Delegates at an emergency debate at the union's recent annual meeting unanimously voted to oppose her appointment. They argued that placing a non-meat eater in charge of an industry that is 90% dependent on the livestock industry was insensitive and would drain the remaining confidence in the already hard-hit farming sector.



**Gwyther: 'Letters of support'**

One delegate likened the appointment to installing an atheist as Archbishop of Canterbury. Others threatened to disrupt this week's royal opening of the assembly if she refused to go.

Yesterday Ms Gwyther said she would do her utmost for all farmers in Wales.

She said that when the Labour leader, Alun Michael, offered her the post he had assured her that she was the best person for the job. "Nothing since has changed my mind about that."

She added that she had received several letters and phone calls from supportive

farmers, including livestock producers.

Accompanying her at the meeting, Mr Michael, the assembly's first secretary, said he was sure farmers would see the value of the appointment and the strength she would bring to the job.

But Bob Parry, president of the FUW, said his members would not be happy until she reconsidered her position. "Somebody who does not eat meat cannot support the agriculture industry."

About 30 farmers, mainly from the Brecon and Glamorgan areas of south Wales, turned up to protest outside the meeting, which was also attended by landowners and leaders of the rival National Farmers' Union.

Bryan Jones, 55, a dairy and sheep farmer, said it was unfair on the industry for someone to make decisions "when she hasn't got a clue what meat tastes like".

However, Hugh Richards, president of the NFU of Wales, said farmers should give Ms Gwyther a chance.

He said: "At this point in time I see no problem in working with Ms Gwyther. I was surprised at the appointment but, having said that, we will work with her."

Yesterday's meeting was the start of a difficult week for Ms Gwyther. Today she will be called to speak on a Liberal Democrat motion calling on the assembly to revoke the ban on beef on the bone as soon as possible.

Figure 4.1a: Article about the Welsh Agriculture Secretary, Christine Gwyther, that appeared in the *Guardian* 25 May 1999

# Minister refuses to quit

## Farmers' knives out for vegetarian in charge of Welsh agriculture

5 Welsh farmers angrily walked out of their first face to face meeting with the newly appointed Welsh agriculture secretary yesterday after failing to force her resignation because she is a vegetarian.

Christine Gwyther, one of four women in Labour's first assembly cabinet, said she was more than capable of representing the country's farming community, despite not having eaten meat for more than twenty years.

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25 One delegate likened the appointment to installing an atheist as Archbishop of Canterbury. Others threatened to disrupt this week's royal opening of the assembly if she refused to go.

Yesterday Ms Gwyther said she would do her utmost for all farmers of Wales.

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40 She added that she had received several letters and phone calls from supportive farmers, including livestock producers.

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50 But Bob Parry, president of the FUW, said his members would not be happy until she reconsidered her position. 'Somebody who does not eat meat cannot support the agriculture industry'.

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He said: 'At this point in time I see no problem in working with Ms Gwyther. I was surprised at the appointment but, having said that, we will work with her'.

70 Yesterday's meeting was the start of a difficult week for Ms Gwyther. Today she will be called to speak on a Liberal Democrat motion calling on the assembly to revoke the ban on beef on the bone as soon as possible.

Figure 4.1b: Text of the *Guardian* article on Christine Gwyther (25 May 1999), reproduced on p. 167.

Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, united in calling for Gwyther to be censured, making it clear that they held it to be a matter of honour that she should resign, if the motion was passed. Despite the expectation of a consensual style of politics prevailing in the Assembly, the *Guardian* reported that it had become a 'battle ground' and referred to a 'confrontational mood stalking' the building in Cardiff '(19 October 1999). During the censure debate, the leader of Plaid Cymru, Dafydd Wigley, asked, 'How on earth could any minister who was on top of her work be in such a situation?' and drew a patronising analogy with sending a 'naive apprentice' to discuss a major contract with the Chair of another company, even though it was in fact part of Gwyther's brief to negotiate the scheme (*Guardian* 20 October 1999). Not surprisingly, the censure motion was carried. In reality, the decision about the scheme for slaughtering unwanted calves had been outside Gwyther's control, something that was recognised in the Scottish Parliament, where the Scottish Agriculture Minister was subject to no such censure. In her discussion of the representation of women in politics, Norris (1997: 162) alludes to the concept of 'dequalification', a term coined by Jeane Kirkpatrick (1995) to describe the process whereby women's experiences and capabilities are undervalued in the male-dominated world of politics. This is borne out by Gwyther's treatment at the hands of both the FUW and by political opponents, since both sought to discredit her by calling into question her qualifications for the ministerial role to which she was appointed.

#### **4.4 The Opposite of Politics?: A Case Study of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

When the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) was established in the spring of 1996, it was reported that its members had mysteriously come from nowhere. In fact,

all of those involved had long been active in a wide range of cross-community

grassroots women's groups and other non-governmental organisations. As Rosin Mc

Donagh notes:

Northern Ireland has a vibrant civil society, especially in territorially defined communities. This energy and dynamism has benefited, directly and indirectly, from the displacement of mainstream political activity, which rapidly became preoccupied post-1968 with constitutional concerns, to the cultural exclusion of all else.

(McDonagh 1996: 25)

A survey published in 1996 revealed that two thirds of female respondents believed that politicians were not giving enough attention to issues of particular concern to women in Northern Ireland, while just under two thirds claimed that the parties did not encourage women to participate (cited in Wilford 1996: 49). According to the NIWC's Monica McWilliams,

we were aware of what had happened in other conflicts in in other countries where women have been extremely active at the informal level and grass-roots level and then when the big decision making comes to sit down at the table the men say well good on you women for making sure that you know we didn't have an all-out~all-out war but now it's the time for us to sit down and resolve it so you just go back into your communities and there was that level of patronism umm that attitude that erhm women weren't the real players on the political scene

(Appendix III: 3-10)

It was partly to remedy this situation that the Women's Coalition came into being.

#### **4.4.2 A Brief History of the NIWC**

McWilliams (1995) traces the origins of women's activism in Northern Ireland to the Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet, despite the high profile role played by civil rights activist Bernadette Devlin, the primary focus of the

movement on the struggle for equal rights for Catholics meant that equality for women was barely addressed. Indeed, virtually all of the grassroots women's groups identified by McWilliams were positively hostile to feminism. In an earlier article, she attempts to offer some explanation for this marked disidentification with feminist concerns amongst women on both sides of the religious divide, 'The traditional link between nationalists (both Orange and Green) and their respective Churches has ensured that the ultra-conservative view of women as both the property of, and inferior to, men remains strongly entrenched in Irish society.' (McWilliams 1991: 84). As the women-led Peace Movement of the 1970s came under the increasing control of church elements, its radical potential to oppose the emergence of what has been termed 'armed patriarchy' in Northern Ireland was gradually diffused. In this instance, an appeal was made to women's moral *superiority*, based on a connection between pacifist and motherist ideologies. As Sara Rudick notes, 'Peace, like mothering, is sentimentally honoured and often secretly despised. Like mothers, peacemakers are scorned as powerless' (cited in Seager, 1993: 238). By acquiescing to this equation of motherhood and peace-making women activists may have inadvertently contributed to their own segregation and marginalisation within mainstream politics in Northern Ireland. This may also explain why the NIWC, unlike all of the other political parties in the Province, has been careful to distance itself from these type of essentialist claims about women.

The roots of the NIWC lie in more recent events. One such event was the appointment of Mary Robinson as President of the Republic of Ireland in 1990. She was instrumental in forging links between cross-community women's groups North and South. Likewise, the then US Ambassador to Ireland, Jean Kennedy Smith, sent Northern Irish women to the States to network with women's groups there. Similar

networking with women's groups in Europe led to the formation of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP), a key player in subsequent events. This process of political networking was to culminate in an international conference in Belfast in September 1998, entitled 'Women and Democracy', attended by Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright and the first ever female Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam. Such cross-border and trans-national networking amongst women was to provide the moral, practical and financial support that enabled the NIWC to confront the powerful homosocial networks that were deeply embedded in and between mainstream political parties and the media. This process was facilitated by the emergence of a pluralist feminist discourse which chimed well with the need to accommodate women divided from one another by class, religion and political allegiance. In particular, as Porter points out (1998: 54), the NIWC was inspired by the theory of 'transversalism' that emerged out of the concrete practices of Italian feminists.<sup>3</sup>

The type of support and encouragement provided by high profile women in public life was particularly important in the Northern Irish context since its own history offered few role models for women who aspired to careers in party politics. In its 77 year history, Northern Ireland has elected only three women to Westminster as MPs, the last being the civil-rights leader, Bernadette Devlin, more than thirty years ago, in 1969. Currently there are no women amongst MEPs from Northern Ireland. A similar pattern of gross under-representation characterised the 51-year history of the Stormont parliament in which only nine women sat, and continues to characterise local government in which only 15% of Councillors are female. The Northern Irish media therefore had little experience of dealing with female politicians of *any* political complexion, and absolutely none of dealing with politicians who are openly feminist in

their views. For this reason, McWilliams believes that the appointment of Mowlam was particularly fortuitous:

Mo came in like a breath of fresh air...took no bullshit from anybody squared up to them and it helped us to do the same and it was good to have her operating there and it's been so hard for her too but it's been good to have another very *strong* woman in the mainstream which kind of took a bit of the emphasis away from us as being you know people that were so *unbelievably radical*  
(Appendix III: 346-353)

However, I will suggest that the Northern Irish media had great difficulty in accommodating the approach to politics adopted by *both* Mowlam and the NIWC.

The NIWC's move from grassroots politics into the mainstream of the political process was achieved by an act of sheer political opportunism. In order to ensure that smaller Protestant paramilitary groupings were included in the all-party talks, the British and Irish governments devised a complicated top-up system of Proportional Representation which meant that the ten parties that attracted the most votes in the election in May 1996 would each be permitted two representatives at the Talks table. It is ironic that a mechanism designed to admit the 'men of violence' should also have opened the way for the entry of very different oppositional voices into the Talks process. The NIWC's determination to transcend traditional sectarian and other boundaries is evident in the fact that of the two women elected, Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar, one was a Catholic nationalist from a rural background, the other a Protestant loyalist from Belfast. One of its aims, stated in its campaign booklet, is to offer, 'a comfortable space for those who have difficulty defining themselves in terms of the majority cultures.' (*Common Cause*: 7). Indeed, the NIWC owes its existence to the belief that women can suppress their horizontal differences, defined along the axes of class, age

and religious and political allegiances, in order to pursue common goals *as women*.

The very real risks involved in this strategy were vividly illustrated when Pearl Sagar and her family were forced to move to a different neighbourhood because of systematic intimidation. The intimidation did not, however, end there.

#### **4.4.3 Changing Political Structures**

It is worth considering what motivated the shift from grassroots to mainstream politics. Despite McRobbie's (1994) optimistic assessment of the potential power of new social movements, it is obvious that, like feminist activists in Scotland, the women who later formed the NIWC were frustrated by their inability to effect real political change. At best, their involvement in grassroots equality groups seemed to offer a slow track option when it came to improving the lot of women. They perceived a danger in accepting the role of second rate political actors, reliant on those stereotypical feminine qualities of patience and self-effacement. McWilliams and Kilmurray say of the decision to form the NIWC:

It was a risk, but it was felt that all the Discussion Papers in the world would not have had the same impact on the male dominated political decision-making process in Northern Ireland as the decision by the 70 women to put their names forward for election.

(McWilliams and Kilmurray 1997: 17)

However, this did not mean accommodating themselves to the type of hierarchical institutional structures that prevailed in the existing mainstream parties. They were determined to incorporate the 'organising strategies learned from years of community networking and interest group advocacy work' (ibid: 18) into the structures of the new party. Policy is decided in open monthly meetings, with a rotating chairperson and notetaker. Links with the wider women's movement are maintained through a series of

conferences based around specific themes. The decision to share leadership, rather than appointing a formal leader, has, to some extent, been frustrated by circumstances. For instance, there was an initial requirement to identify a nominal leader for the purpose of the Electoral Order. This nominal status was accorded to McWilliams, but the media attention she has received subsequently has meant that she has, in fact, come to be perceived as the party leader. McWilliams is, however, careful to employ the inclusive pronoun 'we' when discussing the NIWC's achievements (see Appendix III), supporting Tannen's observation that women in positions of power are often loath to claim credit for themselves (Tannen 1996: 137). In any case, the ability to bring non-elected representatives into the negotiations means that all members of the Coalition who wish to do so have been afforded opportunities to become actively involved in shaping policy.

The NIWC's transition from grassroots activism to party politics has in itself helped to challenge the boundary between civil and public sphere political action in Northern Ireland. Fearon (1999: 78-9) says of the Talks, 'In an environment where every utterance was filtered before articulation, the NIWC tried to act as a conduit between civil society and the secretariat'. In addition, it has managed to ensure a more fundamental discursive restructuring of the spheres through its innovative proposals for a Civic Forum, proposals which have subsequently been enshrined in the plans for the new Assembly, albeit with significant alterations. The Civic Forum was intended to bridge the gap between the public sphere of party politics and the civil sphere of community activism, from which NIWC members sprang. It is described in its campaign booklet as follows, 'a completely new body that will complement the work of elected representatives from the various sectors of civil society - community activists,

'Trade unionists and employer bodies, youth groups and the education sector.' (*Common Cause*, 1998: 8). The NIWC argued that members should be nominated by the groups themselves, whereas in the final Agreement this has been diluted, since they are to be appointed by the first minister and deputy minister. Nonetheless, the creation of the Forum is likely to mitigate some of the limitations of representative democracy by creating a greater sense of accountability to the community at large. The NIWC was, however, given little credit in media coverage for this important contribution to the structure and workings of the new Assembly.

#### **4.4.4 Changing the Language of Political Debate**

The NIWC's campaign posters carried the slogan, 'Wave Goodbye to Dinosaurs', revealing the extent to which it defined itself in opposition to the monolithic and masculinist nature of traditional party politics in Northern Ireland. Its members constructed a collective identity for themselves as pro-active agents of change whose aim, incorporated as the strapline in its manifesto for the Assembly elections, is no less than to 'shatter the mould of politics in Northern Ireland'. This was underscored by the key phrase that acts as a constant refrain throughout the manifesto, 'a new voice for new times'. This self-conscious focus on issues of language did not derive from essentialising ideas about how women ought to speak, or even do speak, but from a desire to forge an alternative to the aggressive, confrontational and, often militarist, discursive mode that had become 'normalised' in Northern Irish politics. As Wilford points out:

Since its inception, Northern Ireland has been a divided society within which politics has resembled a proxy war which has infused the terms of political debate with martial, thus, 'manly', virtues, epitomised in the republican camp

by the 'ballot and bullet' strategy and on the loyalist side in the slogan 'not an inch, no surrender.'

(Wilford 1996: 42)

In an article in the *Irish News* (19 May 1998), McWilliams eschews this militaristic language, proposing an alternative political discourse based on co-operation and interdependence, 'we either win together or we lose together'. This approach is calculated to protect the face needs of others, unlike the so-called 'zero sum game' advocated by the major parties. Rather than reproducing the conflictual 'us' and 'them' political discourse that had held sway in Northern Ireland for decades, the NIWC employed an uncomfortably inclusive 'we', 'we're all part of the problem, and therefore we're all part of the solution' (McWilliams cited in Fearon 1999: 100). NIWC members also contested other taken-for-granted collocations, such as the equation of intransigence with strength, 'The politics of conflict is easy. You just sit there being as bigoted and obstructive as you can be. But when peace comes, people will begin asking more of their politicians' (McWilliams cited in the *Irish Times* 27 April 1998). It is obvious, then, that McWilliams and other Coalition members were forced to devote a good deal of the media space afforded to their own party in order to challenge the metalanguage in which masculinist political debate was framed. Rosemarie Bennis (*Women's News*, June 1998) is one of the many journalists who has commended the 'refreshingly open and honest' language used by McWilliams herself, with its emphasis on positive terms such as 'healing', 'listening', 'embracing' and 'growing'.

The NIWC's three core principles of 'Inclusion, Equality and Human Rights' would be viewed as relatively uncontroversial in most other western democracies, but in the conflict-ridden context of Northern Ireland, they have been perceived as radical. For

instance, it appealed to the concept of inclusivity in order to justify the involvement, without preconditions, in the preliminary Talks, and subsequently in the Assembly, of parties with paramilitary connections, namely the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Sinn Féin. Likewise, its promotion of an egalitarian discourse has been perceived as a direct challenge to the traditional loyalist discourse of supremacy, which stresses domination. Finally, its advocacy of human rights led it to campaign for the release of Roisin McAliskey on humanitarian grounds, since she was forced to remain in prison before and after the birth of her baby, despite the fact that she was suffering from severe depression. This afforded unionist politicians an ideal opportunity to accuse the party of being covert republicans, despite the care it took to construct itself as a broad coalition of interests, transcending the sectarian divide. The NIWC's sense of its own marginalisation in the political process became a source of strength, however. For instance, it led it to champion the rights of other marginalised groups, notably those of ethnic minorities, the disabled, victims of violence and those seeking official recognition for minority languages.

Fearon argues that the single most important contribution of the NIWC has been to 'untaint the concept of compromise' (cited in the *Guardian* 17 February 1997), something that proved essential if the Good Friday Agreement was ever to come into being. It did this by facilitating debate between the opposing parties, on the grounds that no such debate was taking place. Instead, according to Fearon (1999: 79), the Coalition members were of the view that the major parties were literally talking past one another because they were operating with two distinct discursive frames, 'Nationalists were much more likely to be concerned with the big picture, with vision, and were less concerned with detail, while unionists prioritised structures and were

almost obsessed with detail'. In this context, the NIWC's aim has been to prioritise the interpersonal function of language over its ideational content, in that it has sought to open up a discursive space for genuine dialogue, rather than for the reaffirmation of fixed positions. McWilliams explains its approach as follows:

we are very process-focused and it was the process we kept addressing all of the time and told people to stop addressing the outcomes 'cos everyone was addressing their *own* outcomes and hadn't thought through if they were only going to do that they weren't ever going to achieve an agreement and whereas we address the process of how we could arrive at eh reconciliation of our differences

(Appendix III: 41-45)

Perhaps its most important contribution to date, however, has been to the language and substance of the Good Friday Agreement. While male politicians 'wheeled and dealt' with one another in the corridors of power, the NIWC concentrated on detailed and laborious drafting. It used the relationships it had established with everyone, 'from secretaries to the Secretary of State' (Fearon 1999: 105) to ensure the insertion of clauses on the rights of women and victims of violence. Meehan (1999: 10) is among a number of commentators who have noted the fact that the Agreement bears the unmistakable imprint of the NIWC's rhetorical style. McWilliams also makes this clear, 'everything that was said at the end about creating a pluralist society an inclusive one reaching an honourable accommodation that was all our language... because it wasn't seen as [tapping the table for emphasis] are you nationalist or are you unionist↑' (Appendix III: 322-337). Chris McCrudden, an anti-discrimination lawyer, is quoted in the *Guardian* as saying, 'It is one of the few documents I've read over the last 20 years that I'm completely happy with. It is unambiguous that equal treatment is a central theme of its proposals.' (*Guardian* 20 May 1998). Despite the deeply conservative attitudes enshrined in Northern Irish law around issues of sexuality, the document even

extends equality on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Agreement the NIWC helped to frame is not without its detractors, however. A number of political commentators have suggested that the language of accommodation that the Coalition lobbied so hard to have adopted has led to the current political deadlock in the peace negotiations. In trying to accommodate everyone, it has been claimed, it has ended up pleasing no-one. Time alone will reveal whether this assessment is justified.

In addition to its contribution to the framing of the Agreement document, one of the key functions of the NIWC has been to put pressure on the other parties to make clear their policies on gender equality in the pre-election debates, helping to foster healthy discussion around issues of identity politics. An article in the *Irish News*, (14 April 1997), for instance, comprises juxtaposed statements from all the main parties on this issue, with the telling omission of the Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The statement from the NIWC occurs first, with the implication that all the other policies need to be measured and evaluated against this. A number of these are implicitly in dialogue with the gender specific nature of the NIWC itself and with the related policy of quotas for women which had generated considerable controversy within the Parliamentary Labour Party (see Chapter 3). For instance, the Social and Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) spokesperson insists that gender equality is 'not about jobs for the girls', while the statement released by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) rejects the quota system as 'perverse'. The NIWC was well aware of the fact that its all-women list of candidates for both the Talks and the Assembly elections could be said to offend the principle of inclusivity, but this was felt to be justified by the traditional failure of the other parties to field sufficient numbers of women candidates. For instance, in an article in the *Irish Times* (9 May 1996), Eddie McGrady of the SDLP

referred to 'an appropriate gender balance' in his party, when in fact only 20 out of a total of 74 candidates who stood were female. Certainly, in its short period of existence the NIWC has done much to raise the profile of women in all of the other parties. Unfortunately, this has led some media commentators to assume that this is its only goal, thereby failing to give due recognition to its many contributions to language, structures and policy.

#### **4.4.5 Confronting Masculinism in the Talks Forum and All-Party Talks**

Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar were the only women permitted to speak in the 'Northern Ireland Forum for Political Understanding and Dialogue', and it soon became clear that they had not been admitted on equal terms. Indeed, their experiences led them to resignify it as the 'Forum for Political Misunderstanding and Monologue'. The purpose of the Forum, which was established in May 1996, was to set the agenda for the Talks process proper. However, Sinn Féin representatives never assumed their seats, while the SDLP withdrew in the summer of 1996. McWilliams notes:

we were a group of Catholic and Protestant women so we were the double other we were women and we were coming from different backgrounds so they had no enemies so they had to make an enemy out of us because we contested every political stand that they took on things that we felt would not stand up in both communities

(Appendix III: 148-52)

The systematic verbal, and, on occasions, physical, harassment that McWilliams and Sagar were subjected to by the remaining loyalist parties was well documented in the media. The fact that the public were permitted access to the Forum discussions appears to have encouraged a number of male politicians to play to the press and the public gallery. They performed very much to an extreme misogynist script, perhaps as a

defensive strategy against these feminist invaders of what had been a safe male-oriented space. One notorious example, broadcast on national television, was when the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP's) Ian Paisley Junior told McWilliams to, 'shut up and sit down, you stupid woman' (Appendix III: 111). Other epithets included, 'whingeing women', 'dogs' and 'scum', with the result that two women posted an 'insult of the week' notice-board in the hall outside the negotiations. When McWilliams tried to address the issue of BSE, or so-called 'mad cow disease', in one Forum debate, she was greeted by 'moos' by DUP members. Cameron (1997) discusses the way ritualised insults can be used to affirm a sense of solidarity between men, but, on this occasion, they clearly function to position the two women as members of an out-group. McWilliams interprets their behaviour as follows:

I think in the early days that was their attempt was really to insult us so much that we wouldn't find our voice erhm that we'd lose our confidence and our self-esteem and we didn't it was very difficult and in order to counteract it we had to become very very well prepared  
(Appendix III: 160-63)

The orchestrated nature of these attacks was commented on by Sagar, 'The men from some of the parties hunted in packs.' (*Irish Times*, 27 April 1998).

One very effective way of exposing this abuse was the use of the media to publicly 'name and shame' politicians who engaged in sexist name-calling (McWilliams and Kilmurray 1997: 19). Fearon (1999: 55) argues that this meant that McWilliams and Sagar were thereby forced to accept a watchdog role, policing the language and discursive procedures of the Forum. Although ostensibly a constructive role, the expectation that they would set the standards for polite debate in institutions that were inherently conflictual proved something of a strain on occasions. This is illustrated by

an episode related by McWilliams that occurred during the all-party Talks:

I got very angry one day in the Assembly quite rightly because one of the members said I wouldn't go upstairs with you anytime which to me was a *horrific* sexist comment...and I made the erhm the presiding officer eh comment on it and he didn't rule it as un-parliamentary language he ruled it as discourteous but not un-parliamentary and I said that I wanted it put in the record and I got very very angry 'cos it seemed to me that the men were colluding in not having it in the record so it wouldn't look too bad so I said I'm going to put it in the record because I'm about to repeat what he just said and I did and I was very angry so the two journalists said afterwards one of them said God Monica you shouldn't ever let yourself get angry I said when you start saying that to the men in there and every day the men are angry then you can feel you've a right saying it to me  
(Appendix III: 247-61)

This is worth quoting at length since it provides a vivid illustration of the way in which the credibility of NIWC representatives was undermined by the sexualising of their identities. It also provides evidence of McWilliams' rejection of the journalists' assumption that her behaviour should be judged according to different standards from those applied to the behaviour of her male colleagues.

The strategic use of humour acted as one means of deflecting attacks. According to McWilliams, when, 'John Taylor described us as the WC...we told him, "Yes, and we'll flush away your certainties"', thereby deftly turning an intended slur into the means of exposing masculinist dogmatism. Likewise, their response to the stated mission of the DUP's William McCrea, 'to teach these two women to stand behind the loyal men of Ulster', was to burst into an ironic rendering of the Tammy Wynette song, *Stand By Your Man* (*Irish Times*, 30 March 1998). In a somewhat paradoxical twist, given the total lack of respect shown for both women, members of the main loyalist parties insisted on calling the NIWC, 'the Ladies' Coalition', thereby intimating how inappropriate it was for 'ladies' to dabble in politics. This was followed by a request

for them to go and 'breed for Ulster'. These epithets and exhortations were clearly calculated to remind the Coalition representatives, and by extension women throughout the North, that their proper sphere was the domestic one and that their proper roles were the subservient ones of wives and mothers. This outmoded message is likely to have alienated, rather than to have attracted, women voters.

The vehement sexist attacks of loyalist politicians on the NIWC can partly be explained by the religious fundamentalism that underpins loyalism and which has the effect of militating against gender equality (Porter 1998: 44). However, there was also a great deal of resentment that the top-up system had accorded the NIWC a disproportionate influence in the Forum; its candidates had jointly attracted fewer than 8000 votes, while the DUP had attracted more than 141,000. McWilliams recalls, 'they said that we were not serious political players and we'd got in the back door and therefore we shouldn't be taken seriously therefore everything we said was nonsense' (Appendix III: 153-55). Mills (forthcoming) argues that, 'It is possible for someone who has been allocated a fairly powerless position institutionally to accrue to themselves a great deal of interactional power'. The concept of 'interactional power' is helpful in accounting for the NIWC's ability to use 'what little influence it had to optimal effect' (Fearon 1999: 114). In particular, it pressed for consensus and reconciliation in both the Forum and the Talks. These concepts were anathema to politicians who were accustomed to believing that integrity and obduracy are synonymous. Yet, due to the influence of the NIWC, among others, this was precisely the type of language in which the Agreement document was ultimately couched. Its attempt to have non-gender specific language adopted in the Agreement was unfortunately less successful. All-too-familiar appeals

to tradition and legal precedent were made to justify the ludicrous references to the female Secretary of State as 'he' and 'him' (*Irish Times* 4 May 1998).

#### **4.4.6 Gender and the Genre of Politics**

It is clear, then, that the NIWC has sought to challenge the institutionally and culturally sanctioned masculinist norms that govern the genre of politics in Northern Ireland. Its novel approach to political campaigning was demonstrated particularly clearly in its lively and visual 'yes' campaign for the referendum on 22nd May 1998. It decked its campaign bus with the suffragette colours, filled it with children, and took it on a whistle-stop tour of the Province. It distributed postcards to homes throughout Northern Ireland, inviting voters to express in writing their hopes and reservations about the Agreement. It was careful to avoid negative campaigning, 'we never ever tried to be disparaging of anyone else's views along the way' (Appendix III: 342). Not only did it try to make the campaign itself an enjoyable experience, in which everyone, young and old, was involved, but its members openly showed their joy when the campaign proved successful. The force of the image that occupied the entire front page of the *Observer* (24 May 1998), depicting the NIWC's Jane Morrice and Ann McCann hugging one another, can be explained by the fact that it challenges both the assumption that victorious politicians should maintain a dignified air of detachment, and a more general, though implicit, rule governing the distance that should be maintained between bodies in public spaces. However, Fearon (1999: 133) makes the wry comment, 'Women were covered in the celebration of the referendum, whilst men had been given most coverage in the decision-making process'. This is in keeping with the media tendency, noted by Norris (1997: 149 ff.), to use women to provide what she

describes as a 'splash of colour in the photo op', rather than treating them as serious political players.

On an interpersonal level, NIWC members have consciously sought to cultivate a style of address that reduces the distance between themselves and addressees. For instance, one journalist praises McWilliams for eschewing what she terms 'the politician's usual shield of jargonese' (Figure 4.2b: 195, ll. 49-50). In the interview undertaken for the purpose of this study, McWilliams' style is characterised by a high density of affective modality markers, notably the recurrent use of the pragmatic particle 'you know', which she employs no less than twenty-eight times in a an interview lasting approximately half an hour (see Appendix III). A context-sensitive analysis of these occurrences reveals that they are not operating as mere fillers, but, in almost all instances, are employed as positive politeness devices, designed to establish common ground between McWilliams and myself, as the addressee (P. Brown & Levinson 1987). This is evident from the following extract, where she is trying to explain some of the particular problems the NIWC faces in attempting to transcend the traditional tribal and sectarian allegiances on the basis of which most Northern Irish people define themselves:

but it's also much more difficult for us too Clare...to try and say well I-I understand how it would be for anyone else erhm and that's you know much harder to do...to bring a different angle to it which is you know not just my own eh background but you know from the Coalition's perspective and I said to the Coalition that we have to be aware and alert to the fact that we will make mistakes but you know not to be hard on people when they do it because em you know there are times when you're jumped on for a quick soundbite

(Appendix III: 305-17)

According to Holmes (1995: 91), used in this way, 'you know', 'reduces power and status differences and emphasises what participants share'. This interpersonal orientation is to the fore in the extract above, despite the relative formality of the interview setting in which it was recorded. The extract also illustrates the preferred strategy of NIWC members of addressing individuals using their first names, inviting their addressees to reciprocate. In the campaign for the Assembly elections, it was unhappy with the formality implicit in the standard practice of using candidates' surnames alone on campaign posters, a convention designed to facilitate the task of marking ballot papers. It devised a novel strategy to overcome this problem by including both the first name and surname of candidates, but making the latter visually larger and bolder. Fearon (1999: 147) notes, 'it was close to the original design, but it stretched it a little'. As in the case of the Secretary of State (see 2.8.2), the Coalition's novel approach to the genre of politics was not always intelligible to others, including media commentators, *as politics*. The identities its representatives constructed for themselves as political actors, and the interpersonal style they adopted, were welcomed by many, but were evaluated negatively by others. Hence, when McWilliams made a plea on BBC Northern Ireland's *Hearts and Minds* programme (March 1998), for a less adversarial and inflammatory style of political debate, her comments were dismissed as 'trite' and 'naive' by the Ulster Unionist Party's (UUP's) John Hunter.

#### **4.4.7 Press Coverage of the NIWC**

**Introduction:** Whereas feminist MSPs have complained about the lack of media coverage of their activities and, Gwyther is unlikely to have welcomed the largely negative coverage of her, media coverage of the NIWC has been generally positive. This is no doubt due to the fact that its arrival on the political scene in Northern Ireland

provided journalists with a novel news angle in a climate in which the battle lines between the parties are drawn in wholly predictable ways. The coverage that followed confirms Norris' finding that crude sex stereotyping is relatively rare in depictions of women in politics, but that 'gendered framing remains common' (1997: 165). According to Norris (ibid: 2), 'news frames give "stories" a conventional "peg" to arrange the narrative, to make sense of the facts, to focus the headline, and to define events as newsworthy'. She argues that they can be positive, negative or neutral in their effects, depending on the broader political context in which they are produced. I would suggest that their effects are also likely to depend on whether individual readers/viewers take up a compliant or resistant subject position in relation to the way in which the news item is framed, something Norris largely ignores. For instance, feminist readers are likely to read *against* an item which draws on one or more stereotypically gendered news frames, irrespective of whether the broader political culture is reactionary or progressive in respect of gender equality issues. The analysis that follows will concentrate primarily on coverage of the NIWC in the Northern Irish press, although reference will also be made on occasion to significant coverage, or the lack of it, that it attracted in the national press and in the Province's broadcast media.

***Masculinism in the Northern Irish Media:*** The press in Northern Ireland is organised along sectarian lines, although readers also have access to localised editions of British and Irish newspapers. The main Protestant owned dailies are the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *News Letter*, while the main Catholic owned daily is the *Irish News*. There is also a Catholic owned weekly newspaper published in West Belfast, the *Andersonstown News*. Partly because of its support for the unconditional entry of Sinn Féin into the Talks, coverage of the NIWC was most sympathetic in the latter, and least

so in the loyalist *News Letter*. The largely negative coverage in the *News Letter* appears to have been calculated to appeal to traditional loyalist female readers. Thus the stand-first in one article identifies female voters/readers in terms of their familial roles as 'wives, mothers and partners' (27 May 1998). The woman journalist, Sandra Chapman, presupposes that her readers will be hostile to feminism in general, and to affirmative action in particular, 'What the Assembly doesn't need are strident females, some of whom are in the Women's Coalition, who believe they should be listened to just because they are women.' (*News Letter*, 27 May 1998).

In Chapter 3, I argued that informal fraternal networks operate between the masculinist institutions of party politics and the equally masculinist institutions of the media, segregating and subordinating women who enter the political arena. In Northern Ireland this situation is likely to be exacerbated by the operation of more formal networks, channelled through Orange and Masonic Lodges (*Who's Making the News?* 1996: 33). The perception of female journalists in a 1996 survey is that editors often appeal to a paternalistic discourse of care and protection in order to preclude them from covering stories where there might be a risk to their security (ibid: 31-2). This survey vividly illustrates van Zoonen's (1994) contention that the media is infused with masculinist values and may also help to explain why the small number of female journalists employed in the Northern Irish press appear to accommodate themselves to these values, rather than seeking to challenge them.

***Gendered News Frames:*** One ostensibly positive news frame identified by Norris (1997: 161) in relation to women in politics is that of women winning through against the odds. The coincidence of this news frame with world-wide secular trends explains

the intense interest the NIWC attracted from the international media when it was first formed in 1996. This was in stark contrast to the initial absence of coverage in the local media. It would appear that local journalists, more accustomed to locating politicians on either side of a polarised sectarian divide, were unsure *how* to frame representatives of the Coalition. As a result, their activities went largely unreported. For example, when three of its representatives were invited to Downing Street for talks with the Prime Minister in January 1997, neither BBC Northern Ireland nor Ulster Television covered the story, while the *Belfast Telegraph* devoted only 300 words to the event. One exception to this early pattern of non-coverage is an article written by the political editor of the *Belfast Telegraph*, Mark Simpson, when the Coalition won sufficient votes to have two of its representatives appointed to both the Forum and Talks:

The Women's Coalition had the last laugh of the polls. Critics nicknamed them the 'hen party' and called them naive, and an election distraction. But the new cross-community female group won enough votes to be at the talks table. In doing so they edged out more-established parties like the Ulster Tories, the Workers' Party and the Democratic Left. Not bad for an organisation which was formed only six weeks ago.

*(Belfast Telegraph, 31 May 1996)*

This clearly fits into the news frame of women defying all of the predictions of political pundits by achieving an unexpected victory at the polls, but its potentially positive impact is considerably weakened by the decision of a sub-editor to insert the headline, 'Hen Party Comes Home to Roost'. Whereas the article itself contests the trivialising connotations of the collocation 'Hen Party', the sub-editor's decision to include this phrase in the headline, significantly *without* scare quotes, serves to give it informational prominence. This is suggestive of the way in which efforts made by

individual journalists to challenge stereotypical gendered news frames can be offset by the institutional constraints that operate on the whole process of news production.

Another gendered news frame referred to by Norris (1997: 163) is one that represents women in politics as agents of change. Although this frame is discernible in media coverage of the NIWC, I would suggest that it is not given full credit for the constructive role it played in the Talks process in particular. Its major political strength in the Talks undoubtedly lay in its unaligned status, since its representatives were able to adopt the unique maverick role of moving between unionist and nationalist groups, helping to facilitate the process of negotiation. Although this facilitating role was acknowledged in press coverage, the way in which it was framed merits careful attention. A typical comment was that made by *The Times* correspondent, Martin Fletcher, 'It discreetly facilitated, arbitrated and drafted'. This positive evaluation is immediately offset, however, by the trivialising, albeit ironic, comment that follows, 'The nearest they had been to a negotiating table before that day was to polish it.' (*The Times*, 15 June 1998). This is characteristic of the contradictory tendencies in media coverage of women in public sphere roles since it manages to be simultaneously positive and patronising.

Another way in which the agency of NIWC representatives was undermined stems from the media obsession with its treatment at the hands of male colleagues. In the early days of its involvement in the Forum, such coverage was undoubtedly encouraged by the Coalition itself, as part of its deliberate strategy to name and shame persistent offenders (see 4.4.5 ). However, almost all the coverage it received thereafter was framed by a presupposition of gender antagonism that cast both McWilliams and Sagar in the stereotypical role of victims of male abuse. This was true, despite the fact that, as

McWilliams points out, both she and Sagar refused to accept such a role, 'we weren't afraid of them we weren't prepared to be bullied or silenced' (Appendix III: 159-160). In media interviews, McWilliams strove to make her resistance to this construction clear, 'There is a danger that whenever one gets asked, "How do men behave towards you?" that I end up ghettoising and marginalising myself.' (Figure 4.2b: 195, ll.95-8). But the majority of media texts suppressed traces of this resistance, preferring to reproduce a more familiar scenario in which women are portrayed as the inevitable losers in the age-old 'battle of the sexes'.

A related gendered news frame that accords a degree of agency to Coalition representatives is one that constructs them as civilisers of unruly male spaces. Thus the headline carried by the article in *The Times* alluded to above, is, 'Women who make it hard to behave badly' (15 June 1998). This is an intertextual reference to the TV series in which the female protagonists curtail the wayward behaviour of their laddish partners. The stereotypical assumptions underlying this construction are made more explicit in the advice proffered by two male communications consultants approached by the Coalition during its campaign for the Assembly elections, 'Both suggested that the NIWC should depict its candidates as "mummies" keeping the bad boys from fighting and making everything all right.' (Fearon 1999: 148). The cumulative effect of these gendered news frames is to create the impression that NIWC representatives are, at best, apolitical facilitators of the Talks process, rather than as key players in that process, thus obscuring the many innovative policies that the party put forward.

*Gender and the Genre of the Political Interview:* Fairclough (1995a) notes that texts often bear the intertextual traces of competing discourses and therefore serve as barometers of social change. This is strikingly true of a profile of Monica McWilliams in the *Belfast Telegraph* (10 October 1998) by Gail Walker, (see Figures 4.2a and 4.2b: 194-195). Walker characterises McWilliams' rhetorical style as, 'a beguiling mix of strident intellectual point-making mostly proffered in a soft country accent, making her at once authoritative and homely' (Figure 4.2b: 195, ll. 43-6). The collocation of 'strident' and 'intellectual' here is itself telling, since women who have intellectual pretensions or who speak out with authority in public are often viewed as 'strident'. However, it is the antonymic collocation of 'authoritative' and 'homely' which provides a trace of the competing discursive norms that women in public sphere roles often have to manage. Walker's comment is reminiscent of Fairclough's (1989: 182 ff.) analysis of the rhetorical style of Thatcher which he claims was ideologically creative in that it combined features associated with white middle-class femininity and 'authoritative expressive elements' used by male politicians. I would suggest that this was not a peculiar feature of Thatcher's speech, but is the outcome of institutional constraints that operate on all women in public sphere roles. The difference between Thatcher and McWilliams is that while the former saw no problem in embracing the adversarial masculinist norms that infuse political institutions, the latter has sought to challenge these and to promote alternative ways of 'doing politics'. However, McWilliams is careful to refute any assumption that this means giving up on tough political debate, 'I'm not asking people to be gentle, though, just to be co-operative and collaborative' (ibid: ll. 87-9).

In a large photograph accompanying the aforementioned article, McWilliams is

# Monica McWilliams gets down to earth on gritty issues



Monica McWilliams: 'If I was part of the problem then I'm going to be part of the solution.'

Figure 4.2a: Photograph of Monica McWilliams accompanying a profile of her in the *Belfast Telegraph* (10 October 1998), the text of which is reproduced on p. 132.

5	Monica Mc Williams, feisty blonde mother-of-two, university lecturer and founding member of the Women's Coalition, is passionate about the Stormont Agreement and the peace she believes it can bring. But then, at 44, she has had long, tough personal experience of violence - and its bitter legacy. She escaped serious injury several times when her childhood home, a farm nestling in the centre of Kiltrea, Co Derry, was badly damaged in a series of IRA bomb attacks at the telephone exchange directly opposite. I remember on one occasion waking up to find a soldier standing above my bed, shouting at me to get out immediately, that there was a bomb...	40	'At least now there appears to be a way forward. A chance of a new beginning. A better future.' McWilliams' style is a beguiling mix of strident intellectual point-making mostly proffered in a soft country accent making her at once authoritative and homely. She is also a very plain speaker, all matter-of-fact and commonsense, not given to hiding behind the politician's usual shield of jargonese. For example, as leader of a party which transcends all the traditional descriptions of unionist or republican, loyalist or working class, and proudly draws support from the working class Shankill and Falls as well as the leafier suburbs, was Monica herself ever sectarian? Of course. If you live in a society that is sectarian then you must have been on the moon if you say that you were not. It's a horrible thing to admit to. 'But I was a part of this community and therefore clearly a part of what went on in it. 'But if I was part of the problem I hope, part of dealing with that problem. I believe that change comes from inside. 'I now believe that I can have my own respect without subordinating someone else's'. That, of course, is something of a moot point given that although the Coalition is barely three years into existence, it has been on the receiving end of some of the most vicious - and sexist jibes ever banded in Ulster politics. 'Moo' said the DUP's Ian Paisley jnr, 'Moo, moo, moo', when Monica was	80	trying to speak on the BSE crisis at the Forum. Other regularly used disparaging adjectives included 'whingeing', 'whining' and 'feckless' women. Which male politicians have been the most vicious? 'Oh, they know who they are. But some have also been as the word suggests 'gentle'men. I'm not asking people to be gentle, though, just to be cooperative and collaborative. 'But there are two risks in talking like this. First there is the danger of fanning all men with the same brush and some of my best friends are men in politics, genuinely good people. 'And secondly there is the danger that whenever one gets asked "How do men behave towards you?" that I end up ghettoising myself... [25 paragraphs follow, providing details of her childhood, familial relations, education, and lecturing experience (x: 3)] Does her burgeoning career as one of her party's two Assembly members leave much time for life at home with her husband Brian, a civil servant whom she met at a friend's wedding, and children, Gavin, 12, and nine-year-old Rowen? Is she guilty at not having enough time? Monica is defensive. 'They are great wee fellas and they are the centre of my life. They are bored with politics, which is enormously healthy, and are more interested in watching telly, or playing computer games. I can put my hand on my heart and say they see as much of me as any other kids see of their mother who is in full time employment. The question is more: is	120	anyone working not walking around with some guilt in some form as a parent and how much more does that affect a mother than a father? 'I'm there to get the sports gear ready, to make the packed lunches. And I have a fantastic childminder, one of the dearest people in my life. It's all about being organised. The basic thing is that if you are there for them and love them and care for them...that's where it counts. I think my children benefit from what I do...
15	But the worst was still to come for Monica and her chums, drawn from both sides of the community and all parts of the province. One evening, during the tense days of the Ulster Workers Council strike in 1974, a close friend, Michael Mallon, set about hitching a lift from Toome, Co. Antrim, back to the city and university life. He never made it. 'I will never forget one of the students coming back to the house and saying Mickey - we always called him Mickey - had been murdered... So many people lost their lives and I have never believed that anyone should have been killed just because someone else believed there was a cause that justified it.	45		85		125	
20		50		90		130	
25		55		95		135	
30		60		100		140	
35		65		105		145	
		70		110		150	
		75		115		155	

**W**as she always keen to have children? 'Good question. Throughout my 20s I was always saying "Not now" but yes I did want to have them. I see them as the centre of the marriage...  
The most traumatic event that ever happened to her was the near fatal traffic accident of her much-loved sister Mary...  
It's like so many people who have suffered through the Troubles. So many victims... although that's a strange word...most of them are survivors, tremendously good human beings.  
For me, every time I think of someone in intensive care I think of the family standing around...it brings my own sister back to me.  
'It's like the young policeman who died this week...he seemed like such a good man, taking the kids to football, trying to make a difference, not just in his own life but for the community.  
'What a horrible way to die...'

**Figure 4.2b: Text of a profile of Monica McWilliams by Gail Walker that appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* (10 October 1998), accompanied by the photograph reproduced on p. 194.**

depicted sitting on the floor, looking up at the viewer (see Figure 4.2a: 194). The high angle perspective from which the photograph is taken is extremely unusual in a portrait of a politician. This is not surprising, since such an angle places the viewer in a position of superiority vis-a-vis the subject. Politicians generally go to great lengths to appear authoritative, yet the effect here seems calculated to make McWilliams appear *lacking* in authority. It could be argued that a more positive reading is cued by the strapline, where we are told that she 'gets down to earth on gritty issues.' This more positive spin is, however, in tension with the fact that she is pictured surrounded by multiple campaign posters of herself. This evokes a pre-scripted schema of politics as a shrewd game of self-promotion. The egotism implicit in this image is something that McWilliams herself singled out as an unwarranted instance of media misrepresentation:

there was this big blow-up which looked~made me look like I had this enormous ego you know all of these huge posters of myself and my face which were for the flaming lamp-posts you know and I was getting them ready and it made it look like I just loved to look at myself sitting in the middle of it so I was very cross I knew instinctively when I was doing it that I didn't *want* to do it but because he told me it was not going to be seen in the country I thought well I couldn't be bothered you know fighting with him

(Appendix III: 283-289)

This provides a striking instance of the power photo-journalists have to manipulate the image of electoral candidates, even, as in this instance, when the subject herself expresses a sense of unease about how the image is likely to be perceived.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, the visual and textual cues are already contradictory, before readers approach the main body of the text.

Fairclough (1995b) argues that one of the functions of mediated political discourse is to mediate between the public discourse of politics and the lifeworld discourse of

readers. The genre of the political interview offers a very good instance of this, since the intention is to personalise politicians, providing insights into the life experiences that gave rise to their political convictions. On the surface, the account of the interview of McWilliams by the *Belfast Telegraph's* Gail Walker appears to be positive in tone. It was for this reason that I chose to analyse this particular article in detail, since Toolan (1997: 94) urges critical linguists to move away from pointing out obvious instances of sexism, identifying instead the, 'subtler and hence more insidious discriminatory and exclusionary discourses that abound'. The article begins with a rather blatant and common instance of sexism, however, by thematising the stereotypical dossier epithet, 'feisty blonde mother-of-two', considerably undermining the force of the academic and political qualifications that follow (Figure 4.2b: 132, ll. 1-5). The adjective 'feisty' is, of course, a gender-specific cliché, used to describe often diminutive women who battle against the odds to make their mark. This description is followed by the information that she feels 'passionate' about the Stormont Agreement, reinforcing the view that women respond to political issues emotionally, rather than rationally. It could be argued that McWilliams' *status* as a major politician is undermined by the tendency throughout the article to employ her first name only, yet this would seem to be part of a deliberate strategy to construct a subject position for her as an empathetic *person*, rather than a remote political figure.

What follows is a fairly predictable chronology of events in McWilliams' life. Such chronologies generally function in media profiles of politicians to illuminate the political stance arrived at by the subject being interviewed. According to Fairclough (1995b: 189), this usually results in a hybrid text 'an amalgam of the discourses of professional politics and ordinary life'. What is noteworthy in this instance is the

*structured absence* of references to McWilliams' politics and an almost exclusive focus on her personal history *per se*. The only 'facts' we learn are that she is a founder member of the three year old Women's Coalition which has a broad constituency in terms of class, political allegiance and region (Figure 4.2b: 195, ll. 51-6). We are told that she was fascinated by politics as a child and has been subjected to 'vicious' and 'sexist' abuse by male colleagues (ibid: ll.73-83). We learn nothing, however, about the NWC 's policies on any of the major political issues affecting Northern Ireland and nothing about its contribution to the drafting of the Agreement. By contrast, there are seven paragraphs devoted to McWilliams' views on children and her role as a mother. The interviewer's questions on these issues are reproduced in reported form as follows:

Does her burgeoning career as one of her party's two Assembly members leave much time for life at home in Belfast with husband Brian, a civil servant whom she met at a friend's wedding, and the children, Gavin, 12, and nine-year-old Rowen? Is she guilty at not having enough time?

(Figure 4.2b: 195, ll. 102-108)

Hovering beneath the surface of these questions is the assumption that feminism is anti-family, but this is resisted by McWilliams. In particular, she queries why working mothers should be expected to accept a greater burden of guilt than working fathers (ibid: 121-2). Yet, Walker's subjective impression that McWilliams adopts a 'defensive' tone throughout these answers is given the status of a 'fact' as a result of the categorical modality she employs (ibid: l. 104). The obsessive focus on McWilliams' roles as wife, mother, and, elsewhere in the article, as nurturing grand-daughter and sister, as opposed to her status as a politician, is suggestive of the way in which media coverage of women in public life can paradoxically serve to eclipse their public identities, even when it appears to be drawing attention to them.

#### 4.4.8 Managing the Media

While NIWC representatives have undoubtedly been subjected to selective and distorting media coverage, they have also used the media for their own ends.

McWilliams makes it clear that they were aware from the start of the need to write themselves *into* news narratives:

we knew from day one that the press had to be on our side and the we had to get coverage because no-one would have known who we were and that therefore we needed as much coverage and we worked *extremely* hard at getting press coverage...the media's absolutely crucial they're a big player in all of this and you do get elected or de-selected on the back of how the media portray you

(Appendix III: 28-31; 301-3)

One such instance occurred when male politicians on both sides of the religious divide closed ranks by rejecting the NIWC's proposals for a more inclusive top-up system of proportional representation for the Assembly elections in June 1998. The system chosen, based on a single transferable vote, was calculated to exclude some of the smaller parties, including the NIWC. The Coalition responded by running a vigorous campaign in the media to foreground the fact that its representatives were in danger of being excluded from the Assembly they had helped to shape. It managed to secure coverage in the local, national and international press, with headlines such as, 'Anger as women are closed out' (*Andersonstown News* 16 May 1998), "'It's cheerio girls and thanks for the laughs" in sexist North' (*Irish Times* 27th April 1998) and 'Irishwomen call foul as new political rules leave them out' (*The New York Times* 2 April 1998). It even attracted support from the Prime Minister, after McWilliams and Sagar were featured on BBC Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour'. Blair appeared on the programme the following day to announce his view that, 'It would be both counterproductive and wrong if we didn't find some way of involving those people.' (cited in the *Irish Times*

27th April 1998). In the event, there was a certain poetic justice in the fact that the Coalition owed the two seats it won in the June 1998 Assembly elections to the cross-community transfer of votes from male dominated parties on the two extremes of the sectarian divide. The NIWC's support for other minority parties and its courageous stand against loyalist intransigence and intimidation paid off, securing it a long term future on the political landscape of Northern Ireland. It is unlikely that it could have achieved this, however, without a well-orchestrated and high profile media campaign.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

The transition made by women in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from grassroots activism to mainstream politics has led to record numbers of women having their voices heard in institutions responsible for political decision-making. There is evidence that their presence is making an impact on the language and structures of these institutions. One effect has been to set in motion a process of deconstruction between the civil and public spheres, a process that is likely to be of particular benefit to women. They have also raised the profile of women and issues of relevance to women amongst all political parties. With differing degrees of success, they have helped to promote an alternative set of discursive norms for the conduct of political debate. In the case of the NIWC, its treatment at the hands of male colleagues has helped to expose the shockingly masculinist nature of politics in the Province. More positively, it has helped to ensure that a new egalitarian language, based on inclusiveness, respect for the rights and traditions of others and political accommodation, has become enshrined in the Agreement document.

In all three contexts, the media have played a key role in shaping the perception of the intervention feminist groups have made to secure greater gender equality in political decision-making. In Scotland, there are some signs of a media backlash against the gains women have made, as well as signs of indifference towards policy issues relevant to women. Media coverage of the Welsh Agriculture Secretary, Christine Gwyther, has been complicit with a process by which women in leadership roles experience a process of dequalification. By contrast, media coverage of the NIWC has been surprisingly positive, given the entrenched masculinism of media institutions in Northern Ireland. I hope to have shown, however, that even *ostensibly* positive coverage has often been patronising and, in particular, has served to reinforce women's connection with domestic sphere roles when they have sought to construct identities for themselves primarily as credible political actors. I would suggest that this is symptomatic of a more general process of discursive restructuring whereby the gendered division between private and public is being reproduced *within* the public sphere. One way in which women have sought to challenge this interpretative control is by becoming more adept at media management, as well as by utilising their own alternative media. The NIWC has employed both strategies, in its mass media campaign to lobby for places at the Assembly and in the creation of its own website, conferences and publications. Thanks to its influence, the language of the Agreement and the structures of the new Assembly are likely to be less adversarial and more gender-inclusive than would have been true had they confined themselves to lobbying activities alone. However, my study of a women-oriented lobbying group in Chapter 5 will suggest that such grassroots organisations can afford a space of political participation for women who might never contemplate more formal party-political activism.

1. This remains a problem for both men and women in remoter parts of Scotland.

Thus the Highlands and Islands Alliance claimed that only a job-sharing arrangement would enable MSPs to combine family responsibilities with attendance at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. One founder member, Alice Mann, said, 'The thing people are really concerned about in the Highlands and Islands is the remoteness of politicians. At the moment, as soon as they are elected they are required to leave the area. People are very frustrated by that.' (*Guardian* 22 January 1999).

2. This was reported by the Director of the Fawcett Society, Mary Ann Stephenson, at a conference in Canada House in London on 'Women's Equality and Participation in Public Life' (21-22 October 1999).
3. According to Porter, the central feature of transversalism is dialogue based on a respect for different positionings. For a detailed discussion of the practice of 'transversal politics' in Italy see Yuval-Davis (1996) 'Women and the Biological Reproduction of the "Nation"', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 1(2), pp. 17-24.
4. McWilliams notes that NIWC members have become more practised at controlling the photographs used of them in media coverage:

a couple of times the media have come and wanted me to put on a kettle in the kitchen and I've said no I want to be reading the newspaper or at the computer or doing whatever so I am very very conscious now of not being stereotyped into that you know if they want photographs of children or taking them to school or doing whatever now sometimes I don't mind doing the family stuff 'cos it's very important for women to show that they have a family and erh during the elections my children *were* coming out and canvassing with me so I didn't mind those photographs being taken but it's the kind of trivialising piece that's forced on a serious interview and then they want to take a little shot of

you making the tea erh I just noticed yesterday a local group had written erh  
may the women in the Assembly never have a teapot near them when a camera  
is close [mutual laughter] it was a kind of prayer for the women of the  
Assembly

(Appendix III: 290-301)

## 5.1 Introduction

Having looked at women's involvement in central and devolved political institutions in the previous two chapters, in this chapter, I intend to turn my attention to grassroots politics, and more specifically to an examination of the structure and campaigning style of the London-based Women's Environmental Network (hereafter, WEN). The decision to focus on an *environmental* pressure group was motivated largely by the fact that this enabled a comparison between a women-oriented organisation and non-gender specific groups, the aim being to establish whether gender and gender politics make a difference to organisational structures and campaign style. Habermas (1987 [1981]) classifies environmental new social movements (hereafter, NSMs) as being marked by resistance and withdrawal, in contrast to the women's movement, which he regards as emancipatory. As an environmental pressure group informed by the emancipatory impulse of feminism, WEN renders this classification problematic. More fundamentally, I will argue that the activities of feminist green consumer groups, such as WEN, by their very nature trouble the systems/lifeworld distinction<sup>1</sup> that underpins Habermas' theory of communicative action, since they employ strategic means in order to achieve communicative ends. For instance, by strategically exploiting the gender subtext of the consumer role, WEN manages to generate relations of solidarity between women and to create for them new spaces of political participation. Rather than passively succumbing to the intrusion of systems of money and power, it proactively seeks to use women's purchasing power to assert lifeworld control over the state-regulated economy. Fraser (1995) and Threadgold (1997) are likewise critical of Habermas' over-rigid demarcation of the discursive boundaries between systems world and lifeworld. They argue that the absolute distinction between them can only be

supported in a theory that is gender-blind and that ignores the fact that gender inequalities are replicated in both domains. My research lends support to this view in relation to the civil sphere, since it reveals that women are no more likely to be admitted as equal participants to mainstream NSMs, than they are to the political decision-making institutions of the state, discussed in the previous two chapters.

In an influential article in *New Left Review*, McRobbie (1994: 109) explains the rise of NSMs in Britain as a response to the vacuum created by the failure of 'conviction politics' amongst mainstream political parties, especially the Parliamentary Labour Party, throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. More significantly, in terms of this study, she argues that these NSMs offer, 'a space of engagement which is particularly open to women.' (*ibid*: 115). Her analysis is supported by my discussion in Chapter 4 of the way in which the Conservative Party's monopoly of power at Westminster throughout the period referred to by McRobbie helped to mobilise grassroots women's groups in Scotland, which, in turn, ultimately influenced the gender composition of the new Scottish Parliament. Likewise, I hope to have shown that the emergence of the NIWC as a party political force could not have taken place without the existence of a vibrant civil society in Northern Ireland in which women were, and are, very active. People's disillusionment with party politicians and political institutions also meant that the environmental movement underwent something of a renaissance in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, the British Green Party experienced unprecedented success in the European Elections in June 1989 when it took 14.9% of the vote (Fowler 1991: 181).

According to McRobbie (*ibid*: 114), the success of NSMs was facilitated by the increasing 'porosity' of the media throughout this period, creating spaces for opposition

and contestation. This contradicts Habermas' view that the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere has occurred in inverse proportion to the rise of a mass-mediated culture industry. Through the access they have afforded to NSMs, media institutions could be said to have contributed to the revival of a vibrant civil sphere, and one less subject to a male monopoly. Although this is true to some extent, it has not prevented media coverage of such oppositional voices from being, at the very least, contradictory, as was noted in Chapter 4, and as will also be demonstrated in relation to media coverage of WEN's campaigns. I have chosen to focus on WEN because it is the only UK group which campaigns primarily on issues that link *women*, the environment and health, although men are free to join and make up about 5% of its 2000 strong membership (Appendix IV: 153-4). Before going on to consider WEN's use of, and representation in, mainly the *print* media, I shall begin by exploring how its emphasis on *women* and the environment affects its organisational structures and campaign rhetoric. In the course of this discussion, comparisons will be made between WEN and other environmental groups, notably Friends of the Earth (FOE) and, to a lesser extent, Greenpeace.

## **5.2 Brief Background Details on WEN**

WEN is part of an international network of women and environment groups first started in Canada in 1973 and now operating in over thirty-two countries. The British branch of WEN was launched in September 1988 and is a non-profit making organisation with the stated aim of, 'educating, informing and empowering women who care about the environment' (Newsletter No 1, Autumn 1988). The central office is in London, and is staffed by a few paid officers and numerous volunteers, who receive basic expenses. One of the major ways in which it aims to 'empower' women is by giving them the necessary experience of, and expertise in, national campaigning on issues relevant to

them, something it claims they are often denied in other environmental groups.

Reflecting on the achievements of the organisation over the past ten years, its founder, Bernadette Vallely, says, 'I am most proud of the hundreds of women who have come through the doors of WEN and have been personally empowered' (Newsletter No 38, Summer 1999). However, as the term 'network' implies, there has also been a strong emphasis from the outset on the importance of local groups and locally based campaigns. At the height of its popularity, there were about thirty locally active groups throughout Britain. When this number dropped to about ten in 1997, a local groups' co-ordinator was appointed, and several new groups have been set up since (Appendix IV: 234 ff.). Every effort is made to disseminate information to local groups via tape recordings of London-based meetings, seminars and so on. In terms of funding, WEN relies mainly on membership fees and donations, although individual campaigns have attracted one-off funding, including from the National Lottery. In return for their membership fee, members receive a quarterly newsletter, as well as more detailed information about specific campaigns, on request.

An immediate question arises as to why an environmental group should choose to adopt a so-called 'woman's perspective'. In the case of WEN, this appears to have been motivated by both practical and theoretical considerations. Prior to setting up WEN, Vallely had been Assistant Director of FOE, but had felt that issues of particular concern to women were either trivialised or, more often, marginalised, within FOE's overall campaign priorities. She gradually became convinced that there was a constituency for a woman-oriented environmental group. Social attitude surveys have consistently shown that women are more concerned about environmental issues than men. This continues to be true as was evident in the much-publicised study, *What Women Want*, carried out in 1996 by the Department of the Environment. It revealed that nearly 90%

of women consider themselves to be 'very' or 'quite' concerned about the environment. This concern translates into action. For instance, women comprise 66% of the total membership of FoE, and according to Seager (1993: 264) this proportion rises to 80% or more of small grassroots groups and animal rights groups. Valley was also keenly aware that as primary consumers, women's purchasing power could be harnessed for ethical and political ends.

### **5.3 Ecofeminism and the Critique of Masculinism within the Environmental Movement**

Valley claims to have drawn her initial inspiration for setting up WEN in the UK from the newly emerging academic discourse of ecofeminism (Appendix VI: 13-16). In its 'difference' guise, ecofeminism is suffused with essentialist ideas about the 'authentic female mind' as the source of the planet's salvation (Spretnak 1990), as well as new age spirituality (Starhawk 1990). In its 'dominance' guise (Merchant 1980, 1996; Plumwood 1993, 1995) it emphasises the link between man's exploitation of both women and nature. This more politicised approach to ecofeminism has also generated a critique of the masculinist assumptions said to be embedded in the theory of deep ecology, and in the practice of male-oriented environmental groups like Greenpeace (Kheel 1990; Seager 1993). As one instance of the latter, Seager (1993: 202 ff.) points to the way women were demonised in the anti-fur advertising campaign run in the UK in 1985 and 1990 by Greenpeace-Lynx and Lynx respectively. The former depicts a woman trailing a fur coat, which, in turn, leaves a trail of blood in its wake. The caption reads, 'It takes up to 40 dumb animals to make a fur coat...But only one to wear it'. The follow-up campaign poster in 1990 was even more misogynist since it juxtaposes a picture of a model wearing a fur coat, with the caption 'Rich bitch', and one of a dead fox, with the caption, 'Poor bitch'. Seager contrasts this sexist and

woman-blaming strategy, with an equally striking poster by the woman-led American group, Friends of the Animals. By depicting a series of frames in which a male trapper hunts and then stomps on the throat of the coyote to kill it, its poster locates the blame where it belongs: with a male-led industry.

Vallely suggests that traces of the more implicit masculinist bias at work in FOE are evident in an officially sanctioned history of the organisation by Lamb (1996). In particular, she claims that the agency of women activists is elided by their structured absence from the many photographs that occur throughout the book, recording various successful FOE campaigns (Appendix VI: 35-38). This tendency to obscure the contribution women have made to environmental politics is also evident in the second edition of an anthology of work in the field entitled, *Environmental Policy in the 1990s* (Vig and Kraft eds. 1994). Despite claiming in the blurb to record, 'the most important developments in environmental policy and politics since the 1960s', it makes no reference to WEN, its only reference to gender being in relation to population control. Paehlke (*ibid*: 364) makes the cautious, almost grudging, claim that, on this issue, there is, 'some potential for co-operation between those advancing gender equity and those seeking environmental protection'. He thereby fails to acknowledge that feminist activists are *integral* members of the environmental movement, rather than outsiders who just might, in certain narrowly defined circumstances, represent potential allies. The belief that masculinism is endemic in all mainstream environmental groups led Vallely to adopt the segregationist, though not separatist, strategy of setting up WEN.

#### 5.4 Liberating Structures?

Despite McRobbie's optimism about the woman-friendly nature of NSMs, evidence suggests that women are *no more* likely to be represented in the higher echelons of

non-gender specific environmental groups than in party political organisations. In particular, a gendered split appears to have developed over time between high-profile managerial and campaigning roles, performed mainly by men, and fund-raising and administrative roles, performed mainly by women. For instance, a survey of twenty-one different environmental groups, carried out by Teverson for the British Association of Nature Conservationists in 1991, revealed that, 'while almost 50% of employees were women, at top management level 87% were men.' (*Guardian* 19 December 1991). Seager (1993: 186) sees this gendered split as symptomatic of a more general shift taking place in the societal order of discourse around professionalisation, 'a process whereby men have wrested control of activities away from women (who often conducted them as extensions of their work in the private sphere) and reconstituted them as exclusively male activities within the public sphere'.

The organisational structure of FoE, in particular, has tended towards permanent bureaucracy and an increasingly hierarchical management style. This was especially true under the high profile leadership of old Etonian, Jonathon Porritt, who had threatened to leave the Green Party unless it abandoned its 'wholly *irrational* abhorrence of political leadership' (*Guardian* 22 March 1991, my italics). Despite the relatively high status position Vallyly had held as Assistant Director of FoE, she still felt stereotyped as a 'fixer' (Appendix VI: 39). She recalled a comment made by Porritt to explain why he thought women could not be successful campaigners, '[They] haven't the balls for it' (*ibid*: 41). It is clear from this comment that, within FoE at least, women were viewed as semi-participants in the new participatory politics. This is confirmed by Iris Webb, another female FoE activist, 'For a long time it was very male-dominated and macho...I don't know if they were conscious of it, but there was an association between being aggressive, obsessive, not supportive, with being a good campaigner.'

(cited in Lamb 1996: 141). The organisational structure of WEN, with its emphasis on fluidity, networking and collaborative working practices, was conceived in direct opposition to the masculinist and bureaucratic structure of FOE (Appendix VI: 23-25). However, as in the case of Monica McWilliams in the NIWC, media pressure to identify a high profile 'personality', led Vallely herself to assume this role, and, in her case, she also assumed the nominal title of 'Director'.

The problem with such nominal leadership roles is, of course, that they are open to abuse. Sarah Miller, editor of the WEN newsletter, admits that the degree to which an egalitarian ethos has prevailed since within the organisation has depended on the interactional style favoured by individual directors, some of whom have been 'quite hierarchical' (Appendix IV: 248 ff.). It would seem, then, that even feminist-identified women who have a *theoretical* commitment to more egalitarian ways of working can, in practice, succumb to the lure of power. Miller tries to explain the dilemma posed by such a role:

someone with the role of the director...should theoretically get paid more than other people and they should have more responsibility and they should be more accountable and so if~if someone's going to be more accountable and more responsible it's difficult to address...how much power they should have and~and you know it's a really hard balance to find and we haven't found it really  
(Appendix IV: 261-266)

This has led to a deliberate policy in WEN of allowing the role of director to lapse and, instead, of vesting *collective* authority in the Board of directors and trustees.

However, it has been deemed *practically* necessary to introduce an office co-ordinator, since, as another respondent points out, the absence of such a person has increased the administrative burden on everyone (Appendix IV: 80-82).

Ann Link, who has been involved as an active campaigner since WEN was founded, says that irrespective of structural problems, 'a lot of mutual support goes on and em except for the last few months when there's been a funding crisis *generally* I find it so positive that I want to do it' (*ibid*: 379-80). Likewise, Bonnie Groves, a recent recruit, says, 'Though new and inexperienced, I am not made to feel like the office dogsbody'. (Newsletter No. 39, autumn 1999: 3). Significantly, when WEN recently moved offices in central London, a collective decision was made to opt for an open-plan layout to facilitate the cross-fertilisation of ideas between those working on different campaigns. One of WEN's science researchers, Becky Price, tried to explain some of the benefits of working from the London office, as compared to her experience of working in other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), 'there is more freedom to actually try things out and to do things in a slightly different way erhm that would be difficult to get recognised as being important within the other NGOs...the way we do things here has a slightly different feel' (*ibid*: 69-74). The implication seems to be that WEN offers a safe environment in which to develop new ideas and that, unlike in other NGOs, issues of relevance to women are automatically accorded value.

It is, of course, possible to exaggerate differences, including gender differences, *between* environmental groups, since all my respondents acknowledged that there is a good deal of co-operation between WEN and other mainstream environmental groups, and that they have often assumed complementary roles in jointly-run campaigns. For instance, Vallely notes that, 'Greenpeace provided the £10,000 for printing leaflets in WEN's sanpro campaign. In a *quid pro quo*, WEN supported *its* campaign on chlorine in paper' (Appendix VI: 32-33). However, Link suggests that FoE's perception of itself as a major institution, and its tendency to assume an agenda-setting role, has proved a barrier to fruitful collaboration over the years. This is implicit in her comment, 'I

expect to work in coalitions...I expect some sort of positive em sharing of ideas and communication', whereas FoE is, 'less open to brainstorming exciting ideas' (Appendix IV: 314-6; 332-3). It is clear from this that, unlike FoE, WEN favours the type of jointly constructed or 'collaborative floor' referred to by Edelsky (1981) in her study of female academics. WEN's advocacy of egalitarian structures and interactional strategies, and its resistance to the type of bureaucratisation willingly embraced by organisations like FoE, suggest that gender and gender politics *can* make a difference in environmental groups.

### **5.5 Image and Campaign Rhetoric**

In terms of image and campaign style there appear to be marked differences between FoE and WEN. In the case of FoE, a discursive drift away from the communicative imperatives advocated by the movement's founder, David Brower, and towards the strategic imperatives of scientific professionalism, was evident even in the first decade of the movement's history. Brower, who drew his inspiration from the nineteenth century nature writer and Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, believed that, 'thinking objectively is the greatest threat to nature in America' (cited in Lamb 1996: 23) and proposed instead a more intuitive approach based on a subjective bond between people and nature. The fact that both Thoreau and Brower were men offers a timely reminder that men and male-led organisations can, and do, adopt so-called feminine interactional strategies. Sue Clifford, a British FoE board member from 1971-82, expresses the deep reservations she felt at the move away from this ethos:

What happened all through the 1970s...was that the arguments and ways of arguing strayed ever closer to other people's frame of reference. We started outside the frame, saying: Come on, you ought to come over here. But the arguments got to be more and more an exchange of expert opinions.

(cited in Lamb 1996: 51)

The implication is that the discursive boundaries between environmental groups like FoE and government and industry were becoming ever more permeable. As the feminist Carol Cohn famously found when she tried to talk to experts at a defence policy think-tank, it was a short step from speaking their language to sharing their point of view (in Cameron 1992: 223). Mills (1997: 12) points out that this is by no means inevitable, 'it could equally be argued that government policy is framed precisely in reaction to pressure groups such as environmental groups; therefore, each group will have its discursive parameters defined for it by the other'. Seager is more pessimistic, 'Entry into the established political arenas has clearly changed the environmental movement; it is not clear that the establishment has been changed.' (1993: 193). It is perhaps not surprising that dominant discursive norms are more likely to influence oppositional ones than vice versa.

In the mid- to late-1980s in FoE this discursive drift away from the philosophy of its founder became a conscious *shift* in style under the high profile directorship of Porritt, who used the media to launch the movement's new image. The standfirst accompanying an article in the *Guardian* (7th January 1986) sums up this change, albeit in a slightly mocking tone, 'FoE are out to shed an image of cranky do-gooding. Jonathon Porritt says virtue is not enough. So he has picked up a tie and the techniques of persuasion'. It is interesting that a 'tie' is intended to function here as a metonymic signifier of the organisation's decision to embrace a new bureaucratic image, since it unintentionally betrays the fact that such an image is simultaneously masculinist in its orientation. FoE's decision to distance itself from a more feminine orientation is implicit in Porritt's comment that its traditional, 'appeal to the *emotions* has blunted our impact on the people who should, ultimately, be affected by our arguments - the decision-makers.' (*ibid*, my italics). Although he pays tribute to the 'naiveté', which he

claims is fundamental to FoE's potential success, his own emphasis is on its near-antonym, 'authority'. For instance, he stresses the '*authority* of accepted research' and expresses his determination to commit FoE only to campaigns that lend them 'an element of *authority*' (*ibid*, my italics). The emphasis of FoE's campaigning since has been chiefly oriented to lobbying and corporate negotiations. This has happened despite the fact that its reputation for integrity stemmed, in large part, from its independence from the policy-making process.

Seager suggests that, 'Women are not *inherently* less susceptible to the "cooptation" of power - but more accustomed to being outsiders in the halls of power, [they] are in a position to be more critical of the rules of the game in ways that men on the inside can't or won't see.' (1993: 190-1). Women may also experience less pressure to be taken seriously by the (usually) male representatives of government and industry. It is significant, then, that the main critics of FoE's increasing tendency to prioritise its lobbying role have been female activists within the organisation, such as Val Stephens, Uta Bellion and Elaine Gilligan, who have urged a return to a local focus on real communities (Lamb 1996). They would appear to share Seager's (1993: 195) view that a reliance on bureaucratic procedures and science, 'takes environmental assessment further and further away from the realm of lived experience - which is, not coincidentally, the realm in which most women are expert'. Valley's decision to leave FoE in order to set up WEN was largely due to her desire to reclaim the communicative imperatives which she felt FoE had abandoned. For instance, in an article in the *Guardian*, (19 December 1991), she argues for a different value system on the grounds that, 'Science and statistics are not enough'.

Seager (*ibid.*: 276) identifies the dominant news frame that governs media coverage of contemporary environmental issues, '[they] are often scripted as the drama of "the hysterical housewife meets the man of reason"'. Somewhat paradoxically, WEN has adopted a strategy which does not so much reject the image of 'housewife', as celebrate it (Appendix IV: 172-6). This is evident in one newsletter which recalls, with obvious delight, that, 'women in pinnies and rubber gloves made an odd sight outside the Office of Fair Trading', only to be revealed as WEN activists campaigning against the duopoly on detergent by Proctor and Gamble and Lever Brothers (No. 26, spring 1995). The intention here would seem to be to point up the apparent incongruity between women's private sphere identities and the reality of their roles as agents of public protest. However, the metadiscursive gap, referred to earlier (see 1.1), means there is no guarantee that this is how their intentions will have been perceived and it may have led some to dismiss them as 'cranks'. Its innovative campaign on sanpro made it clear that 'housewifely' protest can be nonetheless radical, hence its iconoclastic aim of 'smash[ing] the myths around menstruation'. Its briefing sheet states that, 'Western society's concealment of menstruation has given rise to expensive, wasteful, polluting sanitary products which bring unnecessary health and period pains for women'. When Vallely told a senior FoE colleague that she was going to campaign on this issue, 'he burst out laughing and said she would get no coverage' (*Scotsman* 6 January 1994). Yet, against the odds, *and* the expectations of male ex-colleagues, this particular campaign won the 1993 British Environment and Media award, and led to changes in industry practice and government legislation.

Goldblatt (1996: 128) notes how such, 'unconventional political protest subverts and ridicules the dominantly strategic quality of conventional political participation'. WEN's playful and creative engagement with both language, and gesture politics, is

designed to challenge the dominant discursive norms of both industry and government, as well as of other environmental groups, like FoE. Its critique of the advertising industry has included spoof chocolate advertisements which aim to expose the contradictions inherent in using slim models to advertise what is in reality the major binge food for women with eating disorders. Its taboo-breaking campaign to promote the binning of sanitary protection was likewise lightened by humour. One brightly coloured toilet door sticker carried the image of a bather with a beach towel and the accompanying message, 'Make sure this is the only towel you find on the beach'. Disposal bags, supplied on request by WEN, replace the euphemistic image of the crinolined woman, who poses coquettishly on more traditional bags (Mills 1995: 119), with a cartoon depiction of a bewildered family on a beach, beset by sanpro waste. A 'subvertisement' that appeared in one newsletter juxtaposed the carefree image of a windsurfing menstruating woman, familiar from TV ads, with the same windsurfer looking somewhat nonplussed as she encounters sanpro waste (Figure 5.1: 218). According to Vallely, this subversive use of humour was calculated to refute the view, including within the environmental movement, of feminist activists as humourless (Appendix VI: 19-22).

Unlike FoE's strategy of addressing its campaign rhetoric to gatekeepers in government and industry, WEN primarily addresses those affected by environmental policy and industry practice. Its campaign on Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) was personalised by drawing on the actual experiences of women who had recovered from the rare disease. One leaflet was produced to publicise the plight of a young girl, Alice Kilvert, who died from TSS in November 1993. This uncharacteristically sensationalist leaflet, which seems to reproduce the language of tabloid journalism, was not produced by

# Don't Flush!

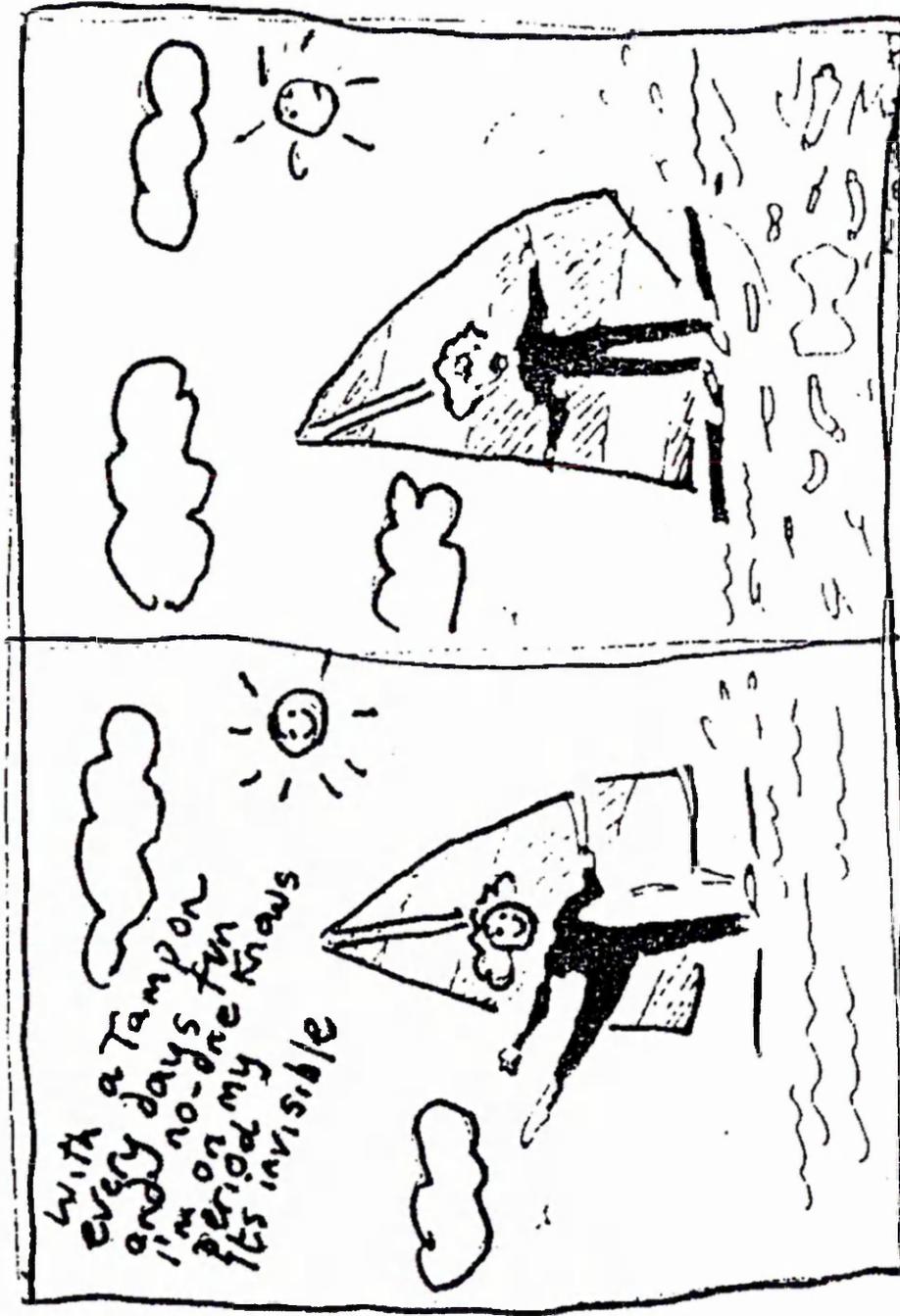


Figure 5.1: Sanpro subvertisement that appeared in the WEN Newsletter (No. 13, Winter 1991: 3)

WEN, but by Kilvert's grieving parents. Given that there are relatively few reported cases, ten per year, and few deaths, the alarming headline, 'Tampons - the silent killer' hardly seems justified. However, WEN insists that women have a right to know about the risks, no matter how small, and successfully campaigned to persuade manufacturers to provide on-pack warnings offering practical advice on how to minimise these risks. In an article in the *Guardian* (19 December 1991), Valley seeks to expose what she believes are the limitations of a purely objective approach, 'At WEN, we're often accused of being "just a load of emotional women" and recently we've begun to say, "Yes, I am emotional and I believe that's a correct response to something that might kill me"'. By suggesting that it is rational to feel emotional about personal health risks, Valley seeks to call into question the conventional wisdom, implicitly accepted by FOE, that reason and emotion are, in fact, incompatible.

One campaign that vividly illustrates WEN's characteristic tendency to prioritise the (inter)personal over the ideational is its recent breast cancer mapping project. The project, which took place between April 1997 and June 1999, was designed to collate evidence from women, including survivors of breast cancer, about their perceptions of environmental risks in their locality and possible links between these and the incidence of the disease. Through local WEN groups, trade unions and various women's organisations, those concerned about breast cancer were encouraged to come together to share their experiences and concerns. The aim was to avoid the normal practice inherent in more conventional surveys of positioning women as study subjects; instead, they were to, 'be their own experts' (*Putting Breast Cancer on the Map*, 1999: 11). The findings do not, therefore, claim to have the status of 'scientific facts'; they simply constitute one element in a broader picture of the disease. However, WEN hopes that evidence about clustering may prompt conventional medical researchers to focus their

attention on possible environmental causation<sup>2</sup> and positive measures to prevent cancer, rather than focusing exclusively on finding a cure. There are undoubtedly risks in this type of project. For instance, Seager cites numerous case studies in which, "scientific facts" are thrown up in opposition to community-based and "amateur-collected" evidence against environmental agitators.' (*ibid*: 196). In addition, WEN's reliance on a human-needs approach has had implications for the type and extent of coverage its campaigns have received in the media (see 5.8). Yet, the gains for the individual women involved appear to have been considerable. Although some respondents found the theory-driven concept of 'mapping' their environments alien, or even embarrassing, 41% found it useful or very useful (*Putting Breast Cancer on the Map*, 1999: 40). The consciousness-raising and solidarity-affirming nature of the project has also helped to revitalise existing local WEN groups and has led to the setting up of several new groups (Newsletter No. 38, summer 1999: 12).

## **5.6 A Detailed Comparison of Differently Gendered Rhetorical Styles**

It is interesting to compare the rhetorical strategies used in two information sheets produced by FoE and WEN on issues relating to paper and the environment (Figures 5.2: 221-2 and Figure 5.3: 223-4). In terms of subject matter, the most striking difference is that, whereas FoE's information sheet moves from the international context of deforestation to recycling in the home via industrial processes, the equivalent sheet produced by WEN immediately locates both the problem and a range of solutions within the home by focusing on mundane items of household waste, including those of particular relevance to women. Only thereafter is the chain of causality traced via industrial waste disposal processes to the global crisis. The style of WEN's fact sheet is more inclusive of the lifeworld of readers than FoE's, mainly because it makes

INFORMATION SHEET

***RECYCLED PAPER***

The production and disposal of paper impacts on the environment in a number of different ways. Friends of the Earth's research has shown that recycled paper is better for the environment than virgin paper on a number of different counts:

**Forestry**

In some parts of the world, for example in the United States, Canada, parts of Scandinavia and Indonesia, ancient natural forest is being cut down and cleared to make pulp for the paper industry -destroying a habitat for wildlife and plants that has taken centuries to evolve.

In some areas, such as Scandinavia and Brazil, new forests are being planted where the natural forests have already been cleared. These 'factory forests' do not provide a habitat for the same variety of wildlife that lived in the area before, and many species are disappearing as a consequence. On top of this the chemicals used to treat the trees pollute rivers and streams can contaminate drinking water supplies. So although the paper industry claims that it 'plants more trees than it cuts down', their methods of forestry can in fact seriously damage the environment.

**Energy**

Some people point out that a lot of energy is used by collecting waste paper for recycling and that it would be better to burn paper to create energy. However, research has shown that considerably more energy is saved by recycling paper than is generated by incinerating it. Furthermore, paper that is not collected for recycling still has to be collected for disposal.

**Pollution from Paper-Making**

Paper and pulp mills discharge polluting effluent into rivers, estuaries and sewers. Some UK paper mills discharge more pollution than they are legally allowed. Comparative studies show that recycling paper causes less pollution than making virgin paper.

One of the most polluting processes in paper-making is chlorine bleaching. The paper industry is, however, now moving towards using less polluting forms of bleach. Most recycled papers are not re-bleached and as far as we are aware none of the recycled paper in the UK has been bleached with chlorine.

**Pollution from de-inking**

One of the arguments used against recycling printed paper is the pollution caused by the de-inking process. Printed paper, which is to be recycled, must first be de-inked. The de-inking process uses detergents or oxygen bubbles to remove the ink from the pulp and produces a by-product which can contain heavy metals. This sludge is usually disposed of to landfill or an incinerator.

**Figure 5.2: Friends of the Earth information sheet on Paper and the Environment (updated June 1996, 1/2)**

However, the disposal of this sludge is no more polluting the disposal of waste printed paper which has not been recycled. The heavy metals in the ink will be released into the environment in either case.

#### **Paper from non-wood fibres**

Friends of the Earth is now calling for a major reduction in the consumption of wood products in order to take the pressure off the world's forests. This involves using less wood and paper products, re-using them, and then recycling them. Another possibility is to use alternative fibres in the production of paper. A 1995 study called 'Out of the Woods' investigates how this major reduction could be achieved in the UK and explains how straw, flax and hemp as by-products of industries such as agriculture and textiles could be used to manufacture paper thereby reducing the demand for wood.

#### **Friends of the Earth is campaigning for**

- Industry, governments and individual consumers to reduce levels of consumption of wood products.
- The reuse of all wood products as many times as possible before recycling.
- Development and improvement of recycling facilities and their use.

What you can do:

- Reduce - use less paper.
- Reuse - envelopes can be used again and again, use scrap paper for messages.
- Recycle - collect your old newspapers, domestic and office waste paper for recycling.
- Buy recycled paper.
- Join Friends of the Earth.

#### **Further reading**

For further information on these topics read:

*Out of the Woods* - This briefing explains and puts forward proposals on how the UK can cut its paper consumption.

Updated by G Green January 1996

**Figure 5.2: Friends of the Earth information sheet on Paper and the Environment (updated June 1996, 2/2)**

## Forests, Paper and the Environment



From kitchen rolls to paper tissues, glossy magazines to mail order catalogues, newspapers to junk mail, paper is everywhere. Our lifestyles revolve around an ample supply of cheap paper products which provide us with an impression of convenience. Paper companies spend millions of pounds each year convincing consumers, especially women, that they need to buy soft yet strong high quality toilet roll with appealing images of puppies and children. But is this the best use of fibres from trees which took a lifetime to grow?

Reusable alternatives to paper, for example terry nappies, are made from cotton which takes just one year to grow but can be used for generations. In contrast, it takes at least 100 years to grow a tree and thousands of years to grow a forest ecosystem, but we, as consumers, endorse the conversion of these ancient plants into paper products which last just a few moments and are then thrown away.

Our current level of paper consumption is ecologically unsustainable. For every paper nappy and kitchen roll we buy, there is a chain of environmental damage. The ancient forests of Canada are currently being devastated by extensive logging. In Sweden and Finland, old growth forests have been replaced by tree farms - barren systems which offer little opportunity for wildlife or stability. Toxic substances, including dioxins and other organochlorines, are released into the waterways during paper production, and pollutants are released into the air contributing to global warming and acid rain.



Much of the 13 million tonnes of paper used every year in the UK is unnecessary and is soon discarded. Over 10% of each person's annual paper consumption is disposable products which are, by design, one use and non-recyclable. They are subsequently disposed of, along with the bulk of our paper, into brimming landfill sites, fed into polluting incinerators or flushed into the sea.

Paper is an essential part of modern life as a medium for information and writing, but it is undervalued when it is thrown in the dustbin before any of its recycling potential can be realised. Now that the environmental impact of paper production has been exposed, ethical consumers are motivated to reject wasteful and non-recycled paper products in favour of durable reusables or low grade recycled alternatives.

These are relatively easy choices considering most women in the world do not have any other options. An average woman in the UK consumes 163 kilos of paper every year, compared to the average African woman, who uses less than one kilo a year.

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is a non-profit organisation educating, informing and empowering women who care about the environment.

The WEN Information Department answer enquires, produces briefing, papers and other information related to women and the environment.

For further details contact:

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London N5 2EA

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Fax: 071 354 0464

Printed on recycled paper

ISBN 0-951 4297-4-4

The WEN Information Department gratefully acknowledge the support of The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Department of the Environment.

Figure 5.3: Women's Environmental Network information sheet on Paper and the Environment (updated May 1992, 1/2).

## What you can do

Whenever possible avoid disposable non-recyclable paper products. Use the right fibre for the right job. This may mean 100% low grade recycled paper for toilet rolls and it could also mean substituting paper tissues with cotton handkerchiefs or using washable crockery instead of a paper cup or plate. Switching to reusables will save the consumer money as well as saving precious resources.

- Buy only 100% recycled, unbleached toilet paper.
- Try washable nappies or a nappy washing service.
- Buy recycled stationery, cards and books.
- Support or set up local recycling initiatives.
- Recycle the paper you use.
- Switch to cotton handkerchiefs instead of paper tissues.
- Avoid overpackaging: buy in bulk or hand back excess packaging.
- Recycle your envelopes with WEN reuse labels.
- Give up your paper kitchen towels - you can live without them.
- Share your newspapers with colleagues and neighbours.
- Use returnable drink bottles instead of disposable cartons.
- Support your libraries or swap books with friends.
- Use loose tea in a pot instead of tea bags.
- Take cotton napkins to restaurants so you can reject paper cones.
- Opt for washable towels in workplace toilets.
- Try reusable sanitary towels.
- Reject free local papers if you do not read them.
- Remove your name from mail shot lists and send junk mail back.
- Reject paper bags by taking a reusable bag to the shops.

## Stockists

### Re-usable Sanitary Towels and Nappies

Ganmill supply Ecofern reusable sanitary towels, Nappitex shaped washable nappies and reusable incontinence aids: Ganmill Ltd, 38-40, Market Street, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 3EP. Tel 0278 423037

For the full range of reusable nappies and sanitary towels, please refer to the WEN nappy and sanitary protection briefings.

### Nappy Washing Services

A growing number of new services are listed on the WEN nappy briefing.

### Reusable Coffee Filters

Lorraine's unbleached cotton filters are made in Ireland and stocked in many wholefood stores. Plastic filters are stocked in most supermarkets

### Recycled Toilet Paper

Edet is 100% recycled and 85% low grade waste. Sainsbury, Safeway, Tesco, Asda and Gateway all stock own brand low grade recycled, unbleached toilet paper.

### Recycled Stationery

Paperback Ltd, Bow Triangle Business Centre, Unit 2, Elenor Street, London E3 4NP. Tel 081 980 5580.

Contact the WEN information department for an extensive list of stockists in your area.

### Alternative Papers

Traidcraft produce a catalogue which stocks a variety of paper products made from alternatives to wood: Traidcraft Plc, Kingsway, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, NE11 0NE.

### Mailing Preference

Write and request that your name is removed from junk mail lists: Mailing Preference Service, Freepost 22, London W1E 7EZ.

### Recycling Information

Contact Friends of the Earth information department: 26-28, Underwood Street, London N17JQ. Tel 071 490 1555.

The Women's Environmental Network is one of Britain's leading environmental pressure groups. WEN is a non-profit organisation funded by membership and donations. Our aim is to educate, inform and empower women who care about the environment.

**Subscription rates**  
Supporting £30, Ordinary £13  
Unwaged £7, Overseas £20  
**Affiliations** £35  
**Membership** entitles you to receive our quarterly newsletter and to be informed of all public meetings and events.

**Acknowledgements**  
Researched and written by Helen O'Hara, Cat Cox and Bernadette Vallely. Desk Top Published by Helen O'Hara. Photograph page 3 supplied by The Environmental Picture Library. Cartoon by Angela Martin.  
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Figure 5.3: Women's Environmental Network information sheet on Paper and the Environment (updated May 1992, 2/2).

extensive use of inclusive pronouns, as in 'our lifestyles' and 'we as consumers', as well as of rhetorical questions. By contrast, the high proportion of passive constructions in the FOE fact sheet, together with its exclusive use of the pronoun 'we', creates the impression of a more impersonal address. Where it does use active sentences, abstract processes and non-human participants almost invariably occupy the subject position. The opening sentence of FOE's fact sheet provides a representative example, 'The production and disposal of paper impacts on the environment in a number of different ways' (Figures 5.2: 221). The subsequent technique of listing is characteristic of technical and scientific prose, although there is a careful avoidance of alienating jargon. Also characteristic of scientific prose is the frequent reference to empirical research which is alluded to on four separate occasions to back up its claims, and to refute the counter claims of critics. The inclusion of the latter makes the style dialogic, helping to create the impression of balance, as does the acknowledgement of the improvements industry has made to date. This impression of objectivity is reinforced by the cautious deontic modality of, '*as far as we are aware* none of the recycled paper in the UK has been bleached with chlorine' (*ibid*: 221, my italics). This hedge on the maxim of quality implicitly addresses the accusation often made by opponents that environmentalists tend to employ a rhetoric that is irresponsibly alarmist, even apocalyptic.

The style of WEN's information sheet is characterised by the complete absence of many of the aforementioned analytic features (Figures 5.3: 223-4). It openly derides what it regards as the spurious claims made by industry and the misleading rhetoric it is said to employ, 'Paper companies spend millions of pounds each year convincing consumers, especially women, that they need to buy soft yet strong high quality toilet roll with appealing images of puppies and children'. The rhetoric of quantification, which

Fowler (1991: 168-9) identifies as the dominant stylistic feature of *media* discourse on environmental crises, *is* used, but rather than contributing to an impression of 'huge and shifting numbers', statistics are translated into figures which reflect *individual* consumption of paper products. Because of the need to expose the detrimental effects of current bad practice, both fact sheets inevitably include the collocational chaining of negative vocabulary. Both presuppose an understanding of the positive benefits of recycling, but only the WEN version makes an explicit appeal to *ethical* arguments with the claim that paper products have an intrinsic value and are currently being 'undervalued'. This confirms Seager's (1993: 259) observation that women-oriented environmental organisations are more likely than mainstream groups to make an appeal on the basis of values and moral reasoning. The ethical dimension in WEN's fact sheet is underscored by a stark comparison between the average paper consumption of a woman in the UK and that of her counterpart in Africa.

The north/south divide is also alluded to intertextually in the accompanying cartoon with its caption 'Adopt a tree!' The image of a woman and a child hugging a tree is an implicit reference to the Chipko (literally 'hug') movement in India in the 1970s when women and children did just this to prevent the exploitation of local forests by an international conglomerate. Once again it is clear that WEN is prioritising the interpersonal over the ideational metafunction, since its information sheet invites the reader to bridge the north/south, black/white and local/global boundaries via human empathy. This reference to the impact on indigenous peoples is also evident in the subsequent discussion of the international forestry industry, whereas the *human* cost is alluded to only indirectly in reference in FoE's leaflet to the possible contamination of drinking water. The link between damaging pre-birth effects in babies and the incineration of toxic waste is also stressed in WEN's leaflet. Both conclude with a list of

bullet points which use verbs in the imperative mood and which exhort individuals to take action. The FOE list comprises just five verbs, 'reduce', 'reuse', 'recycle', 'buy', culminating in an injunction to 'join'. WEN's list enumerates a total of *nineteen* ways in which consumers can take immediate action, emphasising the much greater emphasis it places on *individual* agency. Significantly, though, these include verbs with a less overtly directive illocutionary force, such as 'try', 'support', 'share' and 'opt for'.

Drawing on the Hallidayan model of field, mode and tenor choices, J. Martin (1986) analyses the discursive features of two texts written from opposing positions in the ecological debate. His argument is that genre choices are predictable once the ideological stance of an organisation is known. However, my analysis would suggest that gender and gender politics are likely to have an influence on genre choices, even where environmental organisations are on the same side of the ecological debate.

Given that it is based on a human needs approach and eschews scientific and technological paradigms, the hortatory mode employed by WEN is akin to that used by the progressive Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) in J. Martin's study. The analytic style employed by FOE, with its foregrounding of non-human participants and its replication of conventional features of scientific prose, is closer to the rhetorical style favoured in the article produced by the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF), an organisation committed to protecting the right to go seal hunting. I am not suggesting that FOE's analytic style is in itself reprehensible, but it is interesting that many former environmental purists, like Richard North, have crossed over with apparent ease to the opposing camp and are using much the same rhetorical strategies to express what has become known as the 'contrarian' view. Exponents of this position challenge the construction of commerce and industry as 'evil empires'. Theirs is a pragmatic, rather than idealist, approach based on the view that big business alone has the spending

power to solve many of the problems, 'our industrial past has visited on us' (Lamb 1996: 190). Such an approach is reminiscent of Porritt's rationale for embracing the 'executive model' for FoE, since he likewise stresses that the real agents of change are the gatekeepers in government and industry, rather than individual consumers or environmental groups.

### **5.7 Taking Science and Industry to Task**

Goldblatt (1996: 95) points out that, 'a special feature of environment politics [is] its reliance on contestable technical information'. This opens up a discursive space for intervention by representatives of NSMs, like WEN. It is important to stress, then, that WEN does not completely eschew scientific research. Rather, as an organisation informed by ecofeminist perspectives, it employs its own scientific experts to call into question the view of scientific research as invariably disinterested, suggesting instead that it is often used to justify conservative political and social values. For instance, the geneticist, Ricarda Steinbrecher, who works for WEN, has used her own expertise in the field of genetics to show how scientific uncertainty almost invariably works to the advantage of those who pollute the environment. In an article on genetically engineered crops in the *Ecologist* (November/December 1996: 279), Steinbrecher argues that, 'industry is already applying the limited and incomplete knowledge gained so far on a wide scale for commercial purposes - no matter what risks the infant technology might pose to the environment'. In this way, WEN has helped to challenge, rather than simply reject, scientific paradigms.

Indeed, WEN has been at the forefront of the debates about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), and more specifically has sought to challenge the food industry's construction of women as compliant consumers, a tendency noted by Fowler (1991) in

his discussion of the food scares of the late 1980s. WEN's Test Tube Harvest campaign was the first of its kind in Britain to cast doubt on the environmental credentials of international biotechnology companies, such as Monsanto. Instead, it constructs them as ruthless corporate giants who are callously willing to sacrifice the health of consumers in their relentless pursuit of profits, 'Wherever we live in the world, massive corporations increasingly decide over our heads what we eat and how it is produced, whilst they reap the profits.' (Test Tube Harvest information sheet, December 1996: 1). The issue has attracted an unprecedented amount of media attention, partly because WEN's campaign leaflet deliberately uses emotive lexis and collocations, designed to act as bait for tabloid journalists in particular. For instance, although those who produced WEN's leaflet on GMOs are trained geneticists and biologists, and therefore capable of using a much more technical idiom, they employ the phrases, 'Frankenstein foods' and 'mutant foods', as well as the compound nouns, 'superweeds' and 'superpests' (*ibid*: 3-4). Such language cannot simply be explained by the need to make complex information accessible, something stressed by WEN's plant scientist, Becky Price (Appendix IV: 105-10). It is symptomatic of an ideologically creative attempt to produce a hybrid rhetorical style that communicates carefully researched scientific facts in language designed to appeal to the emotions.

With the Gaia Foundation, WEN subsequently founded the Genetics Engineering Network (GEN), and in April 1997 co-organised the first Big Gene Gathering, which helped to bring the issue of GMOs to the attention of a wider public. The consumer backlash it helped to engineer, in spite of support for GMOs at the highest level of Government, has led most of the major supermarket chains to remove genetically engineered ingredients from their own brand products. The media's acceptance of WEN's strategy of locating the blame unambiguously with the food industry contrasts

markedly with their practice of scapegoating housewives in general, and working mothers in particular, in the moral panic over listeria and salmonella in eggs in the winter of 1988-9 (Fowler 1991: 46 ff.). On that occasion, ecological arguments about the benefits of freshly prepared and healthy foods, and the need for hygiene in the kitchen, became part of a backlash narrative against women who had strayed from their 'proper sphere'. By contrast, media pressure over GMOs led the normally bullish Monsanto to announce, in October 1999, that it was suspending its research into the Terminator gene and, in a dramatic *volte face*, its chairperson, Robert Shapiro admitted, 'Our confidence in this technology and our enthusiasm for it has, I think, been widely seen - and understandably so - as condescension or indeed arrogance.' (*Guardian* 22 November 1999).

In the case of GMOs, WEN was quick to challenge the appropriation of green rhetoric by companies like Monsanto, and in particular to cast doubt on their claims that GMOs would offer an ecologically sound way of resolving the practical and ethical problem of third world hunger. It mounted a similar challenge to the Department of the Environment's acceptance in 1989 of the chemical industry's claims that toxic waste incinerators offered an environmentally friendly solution to Britain's burgeoning waste problem. In this instance, Ann Link undertook a detailed investigation into the harmful dioxins given off by the incineration process and produced an exhaustively researched report of all the available evidence, which, in turn, meant that she came to be viewed as something of an expert in the field. For instance, her evidence outweighed that of two other experts, with more mainstream academic credentials, in a waste disposal forum in Berkshire, with the result that the Council opted for recycling, rather than incineration (Appendix IV: 405 ff.). The fact that successive governments since have been cautious about uncritically promoting toxic waste incineration, despite protests

from industry, indicates just how effective environmental NSMs can be in curbing the expansion of capitalist enterprise.

However, the battle lines in debates are not always so conveniently drawn between representatives of industry, on the one hand, and environmentalists, on the other. For instance, environmental groups have themselves been divided about the relative merits of incinerators and landfill sites as methods of waste disposal, with FoE supporting the former, and Greenpeace the latter. When I asked Link how she manages to negotiate her way through such competing claims, she said that her response has been to move beyond the polarised arguments espoused by rival environmental groups:

to focus on positive alternatives to wasteful products and to initiate the~the Waste Prevention Bill to make it more possible and to raise awareness as well really for~for Councils to start to prevent the waste at source...it really lets me out of the argument between incineration and landfills you know I think you have to move on from that and usually there is something which you can say and do which cuts through a lot of that

(Appendix IV: 295-303)

The successful passage through Parliament of the Waste Prevention Bill in 1998 was announced in WEN's newsletter under the sub-headline, 'WEN gives birth to Waste Minimisation Act' (No. 36, winter 1998: 1). As Link notes above, the new Act gives local authorities the formal power to prevent waste, something they were unable to do under the existing law. This anomaly was highlighted by Link's research and the metaphor of childbirth no doubt seemed apt to describe the painstaking process that followed over almost a decade in order to effect the necessary change in the law. The Act is particularly important because it encourages local councils to empower householders, including young mothers, the elderly, the disabled and those without cars, to become involved in practical waste prevention measures, thereby extending the base of participation in environmental activism beyond a narrow privileged elite.

## 5.8 The Relationship Between Environmental NSMs and the Media

In his discussion of environmental politics, Goldblatt argues that, 'as with the struggle over impact identification and cost establishment, differential power and resources utterly determine the policy influence of actors.' (1996: 99). However, this view underestimates the vital role that media intervention can play in shaping policy decisions. According to Lamb:

A love-in between the mass media and environmental groups during the late 1970s and 1980s was a crucial factor in establishing a popular power base for Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the rest. The media also grew to become powerful pro-environmental persuaders in their own right, especially the tv documentary genre.

(Lamb 1996: 189)

McRobbie (1994) claims that this was made possible because those involved in NSMs became increasingly practised at using the media. They were/are specially trained to become 'extremely articulate and televisually skilled' (*ibid*: 111). As such, they have taken their place alongside, and in some cases have even displaced, other experts who have, in the past, comprised the narrow elite of 'accessed voices' represented in the media. Traditionally these have been professional politicians from mainstream parties, academics and so-called 'moral guardians'.

As with other NSMs, WEN's success, or otherwise, has been determined to a large extent by the media's exercise of interpretative control over its campaign claims. Its tendency to prioritise the interpersonal over the ideational in its campaigns means that the issues raised have often been taken up by the tabloid press, rather than by the broadsheets.

This, in turn, has meant that its campaign rhetoric is often susceptible to what Fairclough (1995b: 58) terms 'incorporation', whereby secondary discourse is translated into the voice of primary media discourse, through vocabulary and other changes. This

can result in changes in both the interpersonal and ideational meanings of the former.

Fairclough argues that incorporation often functions in media discourse to legitimise the voices of officialdom by translating them into the lifeworld discourse of readers, but I will suggest that it can equally serve to trivialise and distort the voices of *unofficial* representatives of NSMs, by accommodating them to pre-existing news frames. One only has to compare the matter-of-fact tone of some of WEN's campaign leaflets, especially those relating to taboo areas of women's experience, with the sensationalist coverage these issues have received in articles in the tabloid press in order realise how powerful this control can be.

This is vividly illustrated by the superficially sympathetic coverage its campaign on sanpro received in the *Mail on Sunday* (12 February 1989). Because Vallely had refused to grant the paper exclusive rights to the story, which was to be covered in ITV's *World in Action* the following evening, the *Mail* ran 'a spoiler' which made wholly unfounded allegations, deflecting attention away from the real issues and making WEN campaigners look like irresponsible scaremongers (Appendix VI: 50-53). For instance, the producers of the article made claims about sanitary products being made from 'recycled beer mats' and they went on to attribute to WEN spurious 'shock findings' and 'horrifying revelations', including the discovery of 'rats' droppings, needles, fish-hooks and cockroach eggs in tampons', none of which WEN had ever alleged. It is difficult to account for these bizarre allegations, other than in terms of deep-rooted anxieties about feminine hygiene and taboos surrounding menstruation. WEN's Sarah Miller feels that the media are less likely *now* to report these issues in an irresponsible way. For instance, she points to the noticeable absence of prurience in an article in the *Daily Express* which reported WEN's promotion of reusable sanitary protection, 'they mentioned it and it wasn't like [simulating a disgusted tone] erhh woah...it was kind of

this is a choice you can make and...you know I was quite pleasantly surprised by *that*' (Appendix IV: 191-3). However, it is easy to forget how instrumental WEN's groundbreaking campaigns have been in helping to alter this climate of opinion.

In any case, negative media coverage can prove effective in raising public awareness about taboo subjects, as WEN discovered in the case of the coverage of *Blossom*, a magazine it produced in December 1994 with the aim of educating girls and young women about issues surrounding menstruation. The tenor of the coverage is captured in the *Express's* claim that the producers of the magazine were nothing short of pornographers promoting sex to nine year olds (Appendix VI: 67-69). The magazine itself both reproduces and parodies the prurient style of articles in teenage magazines, with its playfully intertextual titles such as, 'The ins and outs of advice centres', 'A womb with a view' and 'Sex ed - are you getting enough?'. The coy tone of many of the articles that appear, even in so-called sexually explicit teenage magazines, like *More*, is parodied in another feature entitled 'Sshhh... masturbation. What does THAT word mean-and others?', while the advice genre, readers' true stories and the romantic photostory are each given a suitably subversive twist. Despite, or perhaps because of, the storm of sensationalist coverage in both the print and broadcast media, WEN received over a thousand requests for copies from individuals, schools, health authorities and youth groups. These were readers who had clearly resisted the attempt by the tabloids to portray WEN as irresponsible, choosing instead to make up their own minds about the magazine's style and content. As is evident from the taboo-breaking nature of its sanpro campaign and of its advice to girls on menstruation in *Blossom*, WEN addresses women and girls as anything but passive subjects. These were campaigns about self-definition and about challenging the interpretative control that the media have over so-called 'women's issues'.

The tendency of groups like FoE and Greenpeace to prioritise the ideational over the interpersonal has meant that their campaign rhetoric has more often been subject to a process of 'dissemination', especially in the broadsheet press, rather than incorporation into tabloidese. According to Fairclough (1995b: 58), 'dissemination' occurs when the voice of the primary media discourse borrows that of the secondary discourse. The analytic style favoured by mainstream environmental groups, like FoE in particular, chimes more with the characteristic style of news narratives in 'quality' newspapers, since as Fairclough notes, 'News tends to be seen as very much a conceptual and ideational business, a matter of statements, claims, beliefs, positions - rather than feelings, circumstances, qualities of social and interpersonal relationships and so forth.' (1995b: 64). He goes on to point out that this:

...seems to be characteristic of what is generally regarded as within the 'public' as opposed to the 'private' domain. There is also a system of values here: the 'public' has greater prestige than the 'private', and implicitly those aspects of discourse which merit public representation - the ideational aspects - are ascribed greater import than those which are of merely private significance.  
(Fairclough 1995b: 64)

A joint campaign run by WEN and Greenpeace into the harmful effects of emissions of dioxins in the incineration of toxic waste offers an insight into the relative media coverage received by the two groups. A *Guardian* article (30 August 1991) disseminates at some length the detailed scientific rhetoric of Greenpeace, through the use of both direct and free indirect discourse, which has the effect of merging Greenpeace's voice with that of the reporter. The voice of WEN, by contrast, is only reproduced in a single instance of direct discourse in which its scientific officer, Ann Link, translates a cautious scientific discourse about the inconclusive effect of dioxins on hamsters into a common-sense idiom, 'After all, we live a lot longer than hamsters'. There are, of course, dangers in such appeals to common-sense, not least of speculating

beyond the available scientific evidence. However, as in the case of GMOs, WEN's justification is that the burden of proof about the unambiguous *safety* of industrial practices should lie with government and industry. Yet, the positive proof of the harmful effect of dioxins, uncovered by the independent *scientific* research carried out by Link (see 5.8), is more likely to have influenced government policy than WEN's promotion of healthy scepticism, however much such scepticism may have been in keeping with common-sense assumptions.

One instance in which WEN used the media to good effect was in its campaign over dioxins in milk. An obstacle to the success of NSM campaigns on such issues is a lack of access to official government information. However, as in this instance, attempts to *deny* pressure groups such access can sometimes prove counter-productive. Having spent a year fruitlessly trying to get the Government to release an official report on the levels of dioxins in milk, WEN decided to use the media to expose this reluctance to release details as potentially sinister. The possibility of a Government cover-up then became a central theme in the intertextual chaining of stories in the media. On this occasion, the Milk Marketing Board even aligned itself with WEN against government secrecy. Thus, a spokesperson was reported as saying, 'We are having to get a copy of these official government results from the Women's Environmental Network because they are not being made available from the ministry. We are very concerned.'

(*Guardian* 7 August 1990). When the Government countered via the media in an attempt to discredit WEN's claims, WEN forced it to retract its disclaimer and again this retraction was reported in the print media. Although undoubtedly a principled commitment, WEN's focus on the potential repercussions for the health of the nation's children increased the story's news value and made the Government's duplicity look all the more reprehensible.

Recently, however, the media have been instrumental in constructing a backlash narrative on environmental issues. The comment made by FoE's Tom Burke, 'Those who live by the spotlight die by it' (cited in Lamb 1996: 190), is nowhere more vividly illustrated than in the case of media coverage of Brent Spar in 1995. Burke himself acted as chief advisor to the Government, indicating the degree to which FoE activists have been accepted into the corridors of power. Interestingly, in the second in a Channel 4 series, *Against Nature* (7 December 1997), Burke claimed that the campaign over the disposal of British Petroleum's disused oil installation had never been conceived as a 'scientific' campaign and that the pressure for 'facts' came from the media. The implication is that the media, rather than FoE, were dictating the analytic style of its campaign rhetoric. In the end, FoE got its 'facts' seriously wrong and the media subsequently had a field day. The exposé of FoE's unfounded and alarmist claims over Brent Spar was only one of many doubts cast upon the claims of environmentalists in the three part Channel 4 series. In media terms, the series fits into the long, and often distinguished, tradition of attacks on sacred cows in TV documentaries. It has become clear that the media are to some extent 'punch drunk' and that the sort of staged events favoured by WEN and Greenpeace do not so easily penetrate their defences. However, trends in media coverage are often unpredictable and contradictory. The so-called 'conversationalisation' of mediatized discourse, noted by Fairclough (1995a: 9), may well make the broadcast media and the broadsheets more receptive to the interpersonally-oriented style of WEN, especially since the reliability of FoE's scientific rhetoric has been cast into doubt.

## 5.9 The Politics of Self-interest?

It would be easy to dismiss WEN as an ideologically reactionary organisation that inadvertently colludes with commodity capitalism. Mellor (1992: 192) warns that, 'Without a strong political focus, the present concern for environmental issues can easily be turned to the advantage of the market and may well increase rather than reduce consumption'. Green consumerism could also be said to *reinforce* women's connection with the domestic sphere, through its appeal to their roles as housewives and mothers. Perhaps more worrying is Seager's point that it can drive a wedge *between* women of different social classes by introducing, 'a new *environmental* measure of privilege - the privilege of being safe from household environmental hazards' (Seager 1993: 262, italics in the original). In addition to these potential losses in terms of feminist politics, WEN's campaign rhetoric seems to have chimed rather conveniently with a Thatcherite discourse based on buzz words and phrases like 'individual responsibility', 'consumer choice' and so on. Thatcher herself seemed all-too-willing to embrace green issues, with her sudden declaration of concern for the ozone layer, heralded in the *Observer* (26 February 1989) under the headline, 'Thatcher hogs the green line'. I would like to suggest that the situation is, however, both more complicated and more ideologically creative than this reading would suggest.

The fact that WEN's primary focus is on issues both domestic and local undoubtedly lays it more open to charges of NIMBYism ('not in my back yard-ism') than groups with a primarily national and international focus. Most social theorists agree that no discussion of contemporary environmentalism can afford to ignore global constraints on nation states created by organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), as well as the growing body of international legislation on the environment. This supranational

emphasis can be disabling for individuals who feel that the realm of political decision making is becoming more and more remote. WEN's Bernadette Vallely, for instance, argues that the view that individuals cannot effect structural change is disempowering and leads to political ennui, especially since global forums on the environment often seem to be little more than excuses for high profile political inaction (*Women and Environments*, winter/spring 1991: 54). In any case, WEN does not ignore the national and international context, as is evident in its own thoroughly researched publications on paper mills and deforestation; it simply approaches them in a bottom up way, putting into practice René Dubois's famous dictum, 'Think globally, act locally'.

It is true that unlike other mainstream environmental groups, WEN has made consumer power a central plank in its campaign rhetoric. Yet, its aim is to transform the *fiction* of consumer power into a real basis for opposing the excesses of commodity capitalism, partly by translating women's, 'unpaid and usually unrecognised work - of purchasing and preparing goods and services for domestic consumption' (Fraser 1995: 34), into the power to 'vote with their purse'. In this way WEN has appropriated the rhetoric of commodity capitalism to hold commodity capitalism to account. Mellor (1992: 223) underlines the paradoxical fact that the ecological crisis has been *politically* productive since, 'it has succeeded where socialism has failed in calling into question the mythic power of the market'. It seems particularly ironic that environmental issues, once dismissed by the Left as a retreat from politics, should be at the forefront of re-radicalising democracy movements throughout the world. The potential power of this type of 'homespun revolution', as the environmental activist George Monbiot terms it (*Guardian* 6 January 2000), was dramatically illustrated by the street protests that led to the collapse of the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle in December 1999.

WEN's somewhat more modest demand that consumers should have *access* to information to allow them to make ethical choices has also helped to challenge the gender politics of consumer abuse, as has its exposé of attempts by companies like Tambrands and Proctor and Gamble to label products as 'eco-friendly' when they are anything but. Male-dominated industry, including the advertising industry and the media, have traditionally viewed women as easily manipulated consumers with little political power. As noted above, WEN is careful to avoid positioning consumers as passive (see 5.8). On the contrary, it seeks to offer them real and informed choices about what they buy. While it is wise to be cautious about the concept of 'empowerment', patronising media comments in coverage of food scares of the 1980s about profoundly ignorant housewives is transformed into fighting talk in WEN's campaign rhetoric. This is recognised in a wittily intertextual headline in the *Evening Echo*, (6 March 1989), alluding to one of its early campaigns, 'We'll fight on bleaches say an army of women'. This underlines the novelty of a rhetoric which addresses issues not normally discussed at all in the public domain, let alone in such a politically charged way. Whereas Habermas (1987) regards the role of active citizen as being displaced by that of the passive consumer, WEN has shown that it is possible to use women's power as consumers to expand their political participation.

WEN's campaign rhetoric therefore produces a novel restructuring of traditional discursive boundaries, notably the gendered dichotomy between an apolitical private sphere and a politicised public sphere. It is a rhetoric which also challenges the traditional Left/Right opposition in its appeal to both the language of 'rights', associated with the political Left, *and* the language of 'consumer choice', associated with the Right and, more specifically, with the political discourse of Thatcherism. Like the discourse of Thatcherism itself, it is therefore ideologically creative (cf. Fairclough 1989: 192-3;

1995: 177-181). Further boundary breaking is evident in the fact that, as an actively campaigning group, WEN combines an unashamedly therapeutic function, based on the pleasure of participation, with the more overtly political function of challenging existing institutional structures. As McRobbie notes, grassroots movements generally function to, 'provide support and 'self-help' *as well as* feeding into the broader political culture in terms of public debate.' (McRobbie 1994: 115, my italics). Organisations like WEN therefore help to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy that these two functions are not only incompatible, but are almost invariably at odds with one another.

John Vidal (*Guardian* 9 August 1993) argues that far from pedalling a reactionary ideology, women have been instrumental in politicising the determinedly apolitical male-led tradition of green politics. The reluctance of the mainstream green movement in Britain to address issues about poverty and politics was, he claims, due in part to historical factors such as charity laws, as well as to, 'a jealous separatism between groups which puts boxes around individual "issues"' (*ibid*). He goes on to suggest that the reliance of feminist political rhetoric on arguments about equity, civil rights, social justice and so on, means that, 'Environmentalism is being driven inexorably to a new agenda which at its root owes much to feminism.' (*ibid*). He points out that this debt is, however, rarely acknowledged by the almost exclusively male executives of most British environmental groups.

It is worth considering whether WEN is likely to appeal to a new generation of women, or whether it is very much a movement that grew out of a particular coincidence of circumstances that no longer operate. Despite scepticism about some (eco)feminist claims, the mainly *young* women who currently staff WEN's head office in London believe that it offers them a unique opportunity to gain the type of campaigning

expertise relevant to them they are still unable to obtain in mainstream environmental groups (Appendix IV: 67 ff.). This experience has convinced them that WEN offers an important space for foregrounding women-oriented issues that would either be ignored, or would be seen as trivial, by groups like FoE and Greenpeace (*ibid.*: 158 ff.). Some, however, feel the need to combine their campaigning role in WEN with more radical direct action. Thus, Becky Price, a science officer at WEN, said she likes to alternate her desk job at WEN's London office with a spate of guerrilla style action in the anti-roads protests around the country (Appendix IV: 110 ff.).

One female anti-roads protester interviewed by me is Eleanor 'Animal' Hudson. At sixteen, she became something of a media folk hero after her involvement in the Fairmile protest, confirming McRobbie's (1994) view that the media offer a space for 'folk devils' to 'fight back'. Her slight physique and feminine appearance attracted a good deal of attention, especially since it was very much at odds with the expectations aroused by her media-generated alias (Appendix V). Both Price and Hudson imply that gender-crossing behaviour is common amongst younger environmentalists involved in direct action campaigns. For instance, Hudson says she considers herself to be 'one of the boys' (Appendix V: 27), while Price, responding to a question about her experience of the anti-roads protests, claims that, 'the macho stuff and the home-making stuff is done by *both men and women*' (Appendix IV: 117-8). Such gender-troubling direct action by young women seems to present a challenge to the common-sense assumptions of an earlier generation of environmental campaigners, and perhaps inadvertently reinforced by WEN, that females should confine themselves to campaigning activities that represent an extension of their roles as housewives and mothers.

## 5.10 Conclusions

The role of NSMs is, if anything, likely to become more important in the light of the increasing fragmentation of oppositional political discourses in Britain, as elsewhere. On the evidence of environmental organisations like FoE, there is little likelihood that women will be admitted as equals to communities of practice in the reinvigorated civil sphere, any more than they have been admitted on an equal footing to public sphere institutions. Perhaps more promising is the politicising of the private sphere promoted by organisations like WEN. In spite of media misrepresentation, WEN has given a voice to women who would probably never otherwise have become political activists.

Perhaps even more significant than the concrete and specific gains WEN has made, such as helping to get woman-friendly legislation on to the statute book, the organisation has helped women to seize interpretative control over the social meanings of their bodies, especially in relation to issues around menstruation and, more recently, breast cancer.

However, there is a danger that the feminist shibboleth that the 'personal is political' can be taken to the point where the political disappears. For instance, Valley regards her involvement in the 'What Women Want in Bed' survey, and in the new age spirituality network called 'Angels', as a natural extension of her work in WEN (Appendix VI: 6-10). It could equally be interpreted, however, as a predictable retreat into the *apolitical*, confirming Elshtain's view (1993: 217) that the erosion of the distinction between the public and the private signals an end to politics. This need not be the case. For many women, organisations like WEN can provide a springboard for the kind of political activism that stopped global capitalism in its tracks at the World Trade Talks in Seattle. Significantly, on this occasion protesters mobilised and coordinated their campaign by utilising the internet, thereby by-passing the hegemonic interpretative power of the mass media. In the future, women, *and men*, need not even

stray beyond the confines of their own homes in order to participate in political and environmental networks locally, nationally and globally. The focus in Chapter 6 on women's involvement in the Church of England would seem to mark a shift away from this type of subversive grassroots activity to the type of institutions of the state that formed the basis of my investigations in Chapters 3 and 4. However, I will suggest that the Church's sphere of influence is such that it cuts across the boundaries that traditionally separate the private, civil and public domains.

### **End Notes**

1. Habermas elaborates on the systems/lifeworld distinction in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981, trans. 1987). He defines the lifeworld as a socially integrated domain of symbolic representation, comprising both the private sphere of family life and the 'public' or civil sphere of political participation and opinion formation. The systems world, by contrast, comprises both the official economy and the state and is, therefore, a domain dominated by what he terms the 'media' of money and power. However, he argues that the lifeworld is increasingly being colonised by strategic, rather than communicative imperatives. In his subsequent discussion of new social movements, Habermas claims that their success should, therefore, be judged in terms of the extent to which they help to decolonise the lifeworld.
2. The BBC2 documentary series, *Horizon* (5 January 2000), revealed that a number of cancers, including stomach and cervical cancer, are now known to be caused by viruses, so it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that environmental factors may prove to contribute to the onset of breast cancer.

## 6.1 Introduction

The decision to focus on women's involvement in the Church of England in the final case study in this thesis might appear rather surprising, given the more overtly political orientation of the institutions and organisations examined in the preceding chapters.

What interested me about the Church is its peculiarly hybrid status as an institution which *connects* the state and civil society. For instance, it is the one mainstream institution that McRobbie (1994) links to new social movements, mainly on the grounds of the inner fragmentation it has undergone, and continues to undergo, as a result of the campaigns for women priests and gay rights. In other ways, however, as an official state church it is obviously associated with the vested interests of the ruling establishment. For instance, the Prime Minister has ultimate control over the appointment of bishops, most of whom continue to be drawn from public school and Oxbridge backgrounds, while they, in turn, are in the unique position of having an automatic right to sit in the House of Lords. General Synod, the Church's governing body, has modelled itself on the practices and procedures of the House of Commons. It is not surprising, then, that the Church is often referred to as the 'Tory Party at prayer'.

Yet, throughout the Thatcher years in particular, a number of events led the Church to earn a reputation as a 'surrogate opposition' (Medhurst 1999: 281). Its call for a spirit of repentance on all sides in the aftermath of the Falklands War produced the first signs of a cooling in the relationship between Church and state. Relations deteriorated further during the miners' strike (1984-5), when Church leaders urged the Government to adopt a conciliatory policy, rather than engaging in outright confrontation. The final blow came in 1985 with the publication of the *Faith in the City* report which was

openly critical of the Government's economic and social policies, especially as they

impacted on inner city areas. According to Medhurst (1999):

The term 'marxist' was even deployed in an attempt to discredit this Church initiative – an initiative that some commentators have seen as something of a watershed in terms of the contemporary Church's attempts to re-engage with the public arena in fresh and newly relevant terms.

(Medhurst 1999: 281)

For these reasons, McRobbie suggests that, 'the Church might even be seen as existing alongside the pressure groups, the charities and the voluntary organisations which when taken as a whole represent a strong body of public opinion.' (McRobbie 1994: 112).

Unlike Medhurst (1999), who completely ignores the contribution of women priests in his 'progress report' on the Church, I intend to explore the role women's ordination to the priesthood has played in shaping the Church's view of itself as an institution relevant to the needs of society in the twenty-first century.

When General Synod, the legislative body of the Church of England, voted on 11th November 1992 to admit women to the priesthood, it was perceived as an historic victory for women. It also brought into being a new subject position for women in the Church, that of the 'woman priest'. Of course, other denominations, and even other branches of the Anglican Communion world-wide, had had women priests for many years, even decades, in some cases.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of the 'woman priest' commanded sufficient novelty value to ensure that there was a good deal of speculation, including amongst the largely non-church going general populace, about what women's priestly ministry would mean. The majority of women aspiring to priesthood were acutely aware of the expectation that they would fashion a distinct identity for themselves, rather than embracing uncritically a masculinist conception of

the sacerdotal role. As in the other contexts discussed in previous chapters, the media framed the story about women's ordination by portraying female aspirants to priesthood as potential agents of change. In this way, they contributed to the expectation that women priests would transform not only the nature of priesthood, but the fundamental structures of the Church, as well. A study of the pre- and post-ordination period affords an ideal opportunity to explore the tensions between women's construction of themselves, as both campaigning outsiders and as recently ordained insiders, and the sometimes very different ways in which they have been constructed by others, including by the media. In the course of this discussion, I intend to consider the extent to which the performative view of the relationship between language use and gendered identity, set out in a recent collection of essays edited by Bergvall *et al.* (1996), can account for the complex negotiations women priests have made with the various subject positions available to them.

## **6.2 Background to the Ordination Debate**

### **6.2.1 A Brief History of Women's Involvement in Anglican Ministry**

Women have experienced a long history of segregation and subordination within the institutional structures of the Church of England. Since the early days of the nineteenth century, for instance, there have been separate spheres of ministry for men and women, with women helping to manage the welfare function of the institution in their subordinate positions as community and youth workers, parish assistants and administrators.<sup>2</sup> Milroy and Wismer (1994) argue that the nature of the work women performed for the church calls into question any simple binary model of the private/public spheres. Yet, in the 'space' in between, women in the church performed, and in many cases continue to perform, valuable roles without due recognition, either

in terms of status or remuneration. When the Anglican Order of Deaconesses was set up in 1862, it was widely regarded as affording official recognition to women for their contribution to the Church's pastoral work. However, in 1935 it was made subordinate to the male Order of Deacons and was deemed part of the laity, rather than part of the threefold ministry. As Aldridge (1987: 380) points out, the diminutive suffix '-ess' underlined this anomalous position, while the designation of roles as 'non-stipendiary' was, and remains, a euphemism for 'non-salaried'. Discussing the Church of England prior to women's ordination, Robson (1988) points out that two sets of contradictory discursive practices, or what she terms 'language games', appeared to be in operation and that on closer inspection these were differently gendered. Women in the Church, whether lay or ordained as deacons, appeared to have been evaluated according to a set of vocational norms, emphasising 'service'; 'self-giving'; 'self-effacement'; 'empowerment of others' and a *lack* of interest in worldly forms of wealth and prestige, while men were judged according to a set of middle class professional norms, stressing 'status'; 'preferment'; 'stipends'; 'job descriptions' etc. As will become evident, these differently gendered lexical sets have persisted into the post-ordination period.

The experiences of two of my respondents, Priests A and B, are fairly typical of those of many women who were later ordained. They both undertook training in social work, *as well as* in theology, and both performed a wide range of welfare roles as non-stipendiary ministers (see Appendices VII and VIII). As a result of a campaign by the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) in 1985, they secured the right to be ordained to the diaconate, thereby enabling them to use the title 'Reverend' and to wear clerical collars for the first time. Priest A notes that they were easily recognisable because of their 'feminine blue cassocks' (Appendix VII: 17). Aldridge argues that a discourse of an enriched distinctive diaconate was conveniently constructed to

legitimise women's continuing subordination in the clerical profession, mobilising 'different but equal' arguments discussed below (see 6.2.2). Thus despite their admission to holy orders, female deacons continued to be denied automatic progression to priesthood. They could not consecrate the bread and wine, nor could they pronounce absolutions and blessings. Priest B said she liked to describe herself at this time as a 'common-law priest' (Appendix VIII: 24). In practice, like many female deacons, she employed subversive tactics to overcome her subordinate status. For instance, by distributing the reserved sacrament to parishioners unable to attend church, she managed, by proxy, to include herself in saying what Farrington (1994: 73) terms the 'magic words' of the eucharist.

### **6.2.2 Rationalisations of Women's Exclusion from Priesthood**

Cameron (1990) makes reference to women's exclusion from religious ceremonial language, 'it is not just that women do not speak: often they are explicitly *prevented* from speaking, either by social taboos and restrictions or by the more genteel tyrannies of custom and practice.' (1990: 4, italics in the original). Dowell and Williams (1994: ix) endorse this view in relation to the debate surrounding the ordination of women in the Church of England, 'it became clear to us both that what was often really at work in this particular debate was not theology at all but prejudice and custom'. Alluding specifically to this debate, Cameron sees it as symptomatic of, 'an irrational dread of women taking over priestly and ritual functions, including the linguistic ones of public prayer, preaching, and saying the liturgy.' (1990: 5). 'Irrational dread' manifested itself in metaphors of disease used by opponents to describe women supporters and their campaigning style. For instance, Furlong (1994: 23) notes that speakers in the 1984 General Synod debate spoke of women as 'a virus in the bloodstream' who were engaged in 'destroying' and 'disembowelling' the Church. The expansion of the debate

into conflicts over sexuality, language, and authority revealed just how endemic sexism and the subordination of women had been in the Church's traditional structures.

*Arguments Based on 'Headship':* As long as male scholars had a monopoly on the metadiscourse of biblical commentary, they were able to promote dominant readings which selectively foregrounded certain texts, such as the infamous Pauline passages invoking women to remain silent in church. Evangelical opponents, in particular, relied on scriptural arguments about 'headship', based on the assumed God-given structure of creation in which man is the head of women, albeit in a way which was assumed to be nurturing and benevolent. Once women were permitted to 'speak' in the field of biblical hermeneutics they were in a position to promote oppositional readings which give precedence to what they claim is the overriding fact of the inclusiveness of Jesus' call to slaves, Gentiles *and* women. Dowell and Williams (1994: 14) point out that in both cases appeals to scripture had to be *constructed*, 'One set of texts - either the ones about a new standard of relationships between Christians, or the ones about the subordination of women - has to be *chosen*, and the other minimised'. In this way the bible became a site of ideological struggle, with a complex set of competing readings becoming polarised along gender lines. Hence, the two extreme wings of the Church, the evangelicals and the Anglo Catholics, suppressed their theological differences in a fraternal alliance designed to block women's ordination, as did women supporters under the umbrella of MOW. However, in the final debate, the persuasive power of feminist biblical scholarship was to prove decisive. MOW's public relations spokesperson records how its members strategically targetted evangelicals whose last-minute decision to support the motion was the key factor in shifting the balance in favour of the motion in the House of Laity (Appendix X: 57-58).

***Arguments Based on Tradition:*** The strength of the fraternal networks between male clerics was most forcefully illustrated by the Anglo Catholic belief in an unbroken male line from Jesus through his apostles to their successors. This position was underscored theologically by a belief that the male priest performed an iconic function of standing in for Christ. On this reading, the maleness of the priest is not incidental, but theologically essential. Proponents countered that this view was close to heresy, given the orthodox belief that, 'what He (Jesus) did not become he could not redeem'. This seemed to put women beyond the pale of salvation, as well as legitimating and maintaining the patriarchal structures of the Church. It was nonetheless argued that the ordination of women would not only sever the 2000 year old tradition of male priesthood, but would also threaten opportunities for greater unity with Rome. Robert Runcie, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, arguing against women's ordination in the November 1984 debate, did so on the grounds that such a move would be seen as an, 'unfraternal disregard of very large Catholic bodies with whom we share the very fundamentals of faith.' (cited in Petre 1994: 90). As Margaret Webster (1994: 145) wryly observes, 'it was easier to be concerned about the cousins in Rome than about the sister at your palace gate'. Likewise, from a Roman Catholic perspective, Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 270) sees the feminist cause betrayed 'in the name of "fraternal unity"'.

***The 'Different but Equal' Argument:*** A third cluster of arguments against women's ordination appealed to the belief that women are not inferior to men, but different. It drew its theological justification from the cult of the Virgin Mary which emphasised a view of women as docile bodies to be acted upon by men. The construction of the debate in terms of embodied tropes underlines the Foucauldian view of the body as a site of power. McClatchey records her distaste for the same view expressed in explicitly sexual terms, 'I was deeply offended by reading an article by an American

priest who saw the divine initiative in terms of the sexual initiative, a divine semen being transmitted to the believer.' (cited in Petre 1994: 55). The intention was to show that priesthood is a creative, penetrative act which thereby disqualifies women whose 'natural' roles are passive and nurturing ones. Although such claims, symbolised by the image of the church as the 'bride of Christ', were said to provide a theological justification for women's exclusion from the priestly ministry, it could just as easily have been used to argue that the priesthood was by definition the proper preserve of women. Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 252) notes this paradox of naming, 'Although the church is called "our mother" and referred to with the pronoun "she", it is personified and governed by fathers and brothers only'.

In effect, 'different but equal' arguments were traditionally exploited by the Church to provide a theological justification for women's subordinate status. A comment which typifies this position is one made by the arch-opponent of women's ordination, Graham Leonard, then Bishop of London, who wrote, in a letter to *The Church Times* in 1971:

Although there is equality between the sexes, a proper initiative rests with the male, even if it often has to be elicited by the female. Although normally the woman is paramount as the centre of the family, the man is normally the link between the family and society at large...do we want *ab-normal* women in the ministry?

(cited in M. Webster 1994: 38)

This stigmatising of women who step outside their 'proper' sphere as 'abnormal' is a powerful mechanism for maintaining their exclusion from the public sphere and for reifying the existing separate spheres model. This was a view internalised by many women in the Church. Thus one of the main strands in the arguments put forward by the exclusively female organisation, Women Against the Ordination of Women (hereafter, WAOW), is that women who seek to hold powerful roles are 'unwomanly'.

McNay (1992) invokes the notion of 'investment' to explain the semi-conscious manner in which individuals take up different subject positions, including those which appear to be at odds with their own best interests. Women opponents invested in a theology which affirmed a sense of their 'authentic womanhood'. What was at stake in the debate, then, was no less than their sense of self. According to one of my respondents, Priest C, the view of priests as 'father' also goes some way towards explaining *women's* opposition to women priests (Appendix IX: 182 ff.). This accords with the analysis put forward by the psychiatrist, Dr Robert Hobson who explains the opposition of some women to women's ordination on the grounds that women priests threatened the, 'roundabout symbolic satisfaction of incestuous desires, which can be achieved in the relationship with a father-priest' (cited in Petre 1994: 39). Although one needs to be cautious about accepting such Freudian explanations of women's behaviour, the idea that women also invested psychologically in an exclusively male priesthood may help to explain why so many *women* in the Church of England felt women priests were an anathema.

An apparently paradoxical argument against women priests is that women are not just equal, but superior, to men. This view is rooted in the Victorian romanticised myth of females as the morally superior sex. Again, the Virgin Mary was appealed to as an ideal role model for women to follow since the reward for her joyful submission to male initiation was said to be an enriched spiritual life. Again, this view flatters women, since it emphasises the distinctiveness of the contribution they can make to the church. A common theme in the rhetoric of women opponents was that priesthood would mean losing this distinctive 'feminine' vocation, forcing them instead to mimic men. During the ordination debate in November 1992, WAOW member, Sara Lowe, bemoaned the 'fact' that, 'the complementarity of male and female has been debased to

a banal interchangeability.' (*The Synod Debate*, 1993: 43). Dowell and Williams (1994: 31) point to the limitations that this position imposed, 'We all take it for granted that there are more women than men in church congregations, but this spirituality becomes instantly invalid, apparently, if it moves beyond the domestic confine, or out of the convent'. An appeal to the complementarity of the sexes had the effect of rationalising a situation in which women's spirituality was deemed unfit for the more prestigious functions that ritual language serves in the public domain.

Interestingly, 'difference' arguments were mobilised by both sides in the debate with some supporters promoting what were equally essentialist claims about the so-called 'womanly' gifts women would bring to the priestly ministry. Thus Farrington (1994: 74), a supporter of women's ordination asks, 'Where will the menstrual cycle fit in here, with its often pervasive influence on a woman's capacity for effective working?'. Such a question presupposes an extreme biological determinist view of women's nature which would not be out of place in the writings of the most misogynist opponent of women's ordination. Others referred to women's different life experiences as holding out the promise of a distinctive approach to ministry. Speaking in the ordination debate, one proponent argued that, 'women, who know so much suffering love [will] carry that into the leadership' (*The Synod Debate*, 1993: 27). Yet others, like Dr Christina Baxter, spoke in less essentialist terms about a coincidence between the preferred interactional style of women and 'the need for a new pattern of collaborative ministry' (ibid: 18). Whereas opponents, like Lowe, believed that women's ordination would, regrettably, make women more like men, proponents hoped it would make men more like women.

*The Doctrine of 'Unripe Time':* A final group of opponents put forward the so-called doctrine of 'unripe time'. They stressed the danger of schism and disunity should women be ordained. According to M. Webster (1994), WAOW fell into this group, as did the clergy group, Cost of Conscience. As in many institutions where women have struggled to achieve equality of access and status, the argument that there were more pressing priorities acted as a convenient way of marginalising their concerns. This is implicit in the contribution made by John Gummer MP to the ordination debate, 'I hate the fact that we have wasted all these years arguing about this instead of winning souls for Christ.' (*The Synod Debate*, 1993: 36). However, proponents countered with their conception of '*Kairos*', a Greek word meaning the time when action is opportune and necessary. Chopp (1989: 51) interprets this as time which calls all borders into question. The reality was, perhaps, more mundane. According to Petre (1994: 143), 'As much as anything, it was the manpower crisis within the Church of England which was forcing it to turn to women for salvation'. It is no accident that it was only when the influence and standing of the Church of England as an institution had been drastically diminished that women were finally admitted to the hallowed ranks of the priestly ministry.

### **6.3 Campaigning Outsiders: the Movement for the Ordination of Women**

The Movement for the Ordination of Women (hereafter, MOW) was launched in 1979 because ordained women from abroad were refused the right to officiate at services in England. Whereas opponents hoped the decision in 1985 to ordain women to the diaconate would defuse MOW's campaign, it perceived this decision as an important step towards full priestly ministry for women. It would be another seven years, however, before a measure permitting women's ordination was to be passed and an additional two years before the first women priests were finally ordained. The

unwieldy bureaucratic structures of synodical government seemed calculated to slow up the process of change. As a result, as Wakeman (1996: 50) notes, 'Until 1994 the priesthood was the one area of work closed to women in this country'. Many women aspiring to priestly ministry stressed the symbolic, as well as practical, significance of their exclusion. Schneider, a Roman Catholic theologian, refers to women's sense of 'sacral unworthiness' and their 'total sacramental dependence on men' (cited in Baisley 1996: 107).

### **6.3.1 Establishing a Common Identity**

Not surprisingly, in the Church differences of identity are primarily constructed along the axis of Church affiliation. Aldridge (1989) identifies the four main traditions in the Church of England as evangelical, liberal, centrist and conservative catholic, and MOW members were drawn from all four. The significance of the waiting period is that it opened up a discursive space for re-thinking an affinity that did not erase or undermine these theologically-based differences. As in the case of the NIWC, such differences amongst MOW members were contained by the goal of pursuing benefits for women *as women*. At that time, in this particular institution, it was felt to be politically necessary for women to temporarily suppress all other differences in order to unite on the basis of a sexual identity that was used by opponents as a sufficient reason to perpetuate their exclusion. By definition, then, issues of sex, sexuality, gender and gender politics were unambiguously to the fore as identity categories throughout the campaign. For instance, although not all those involved in MOW regarded themselves as feminists, the majority seemed happy to identify themselves as such in the pre-ordination period. If anything, being committed to feminist goals was more important than being female, hence MOW's decision, in 1991, to merge with Priests for Women's Ordination (PWO).

### 6.3.2 Developing Alternative Structures

The significance of the period of waiting is that it enabled campaigners for women's ordination to construct a coherent set of oppositional norms designed to resist, challenge, and ultimately transform hegemonic discursive practices in the Church. These included the confrontational style which prevailed in synodical government throughout the decades during which the issue had been debated (Wakeman 1996: 3). According to M. Webster (1994: 10), MOW developed structures that transformed the potential for conflict between its members into a 'creative and fruitful tension'. It was chaired along non-hierarchical lines by a 'moderator' whose role it was to develop new and creative ways of dealing with disagreement. Peter Selby provides an insight into the self-conscious search for alternative discursive practices:

Whether we wanted it to or not, the group had to consider how the fact that it was a group for the ordination of women would affect its style of meeting, its way of worshipping and its exercise of concern for its members...The grace of mutuality seemed intrinsic to our task. So also, we found we had to find ways of combining a strength of conviction with a gentleness of execution - qualities which elsewhere seem to pull in quite opposite directions.

(cited in Furlong 1991: 128-9)

An even more radical approach was adopted by the St Hilda Community which was founded in East London in 1989, partly to worship in inclusive language and partly to experience women's ministry. For instance, when General Synod prohibited women priests from abroad from celebrating in England, its members subverted the Church's rules by taking part in 'illegal' eucharists. One of its founder members was Monica Furlong and she explains the aims of the Community, 'We wanted a community that worked by consensus and not by hierarchy...and we wanted to share - gifts, leadership, vision and perhaps sometimes possessions and money.' (1991: 6). Women's construction of, and participation in, communities of practice, such as MOW and the St Hilda Community, offered new visions of gender relations in the church. Both

involved women *and* men in an exploration of discursive practices which implicitly critiqued those accepted as normative in the Church, since they enacted the values of solidarity, and co-operation, while respecting difference (M. Webster 1994: 169).

### **6.3.3 Developing Inclusive Language**

Like many campaigners for women's ordination, Furlong (1991: 72) sees the campaign to have inclusive language accepted as central to the feminist project of securing equality for men and women in the Church, 'a change in language indicates whether the change in church attitudes to women goes "all the way through" or is merely cosmetic'. She points out, however, that on this issue, as on many others in the Church, men have the power to legislate on behalf of women. A Commission set up in 1988 to investigate the issues surrounding inclusive language comprised two women and fourteen men. One of the two women notes the contradictory responses evoked by the issue, 'A feature of the response to pressure for inclusive language is the paradoxical insistence that, on the one hand, the issue is too trivial to be discussed and, on the other, that to raise it is positively satanic.' (Morley 1984: 60). Objections, include claims that it leads to a 'lack of dignity', a 'weakening of sense' and 'a diluting of richness' (Thomas 1996: 168). Interestingly, research shows that it is older *women* who are most offended by its use, 'It as if having accepted the *status quo* all their lives, they have come to see that after all they are not included.' (Baisley 1996: 113). Yet, as long as public prayer and liturgy implicitly gender readers/listeners as male, the majority of women are likely to feel discursively excluded from their address. This point was made by one of my respondents, 'it jars with me every *time* I hear something that is non-inclusive' (Appendix IX: 16). Her reaction challenges the oft-quoted claim that it is *inclusive* language which constitutes a needless distraction in Church services.

Rather than awaiting inclusive material officially sanctioned by the Church, the St Hilda Community produced a non-sexist prayer book that was used by the networks of women's liturgy groups which met up and down the country throughout the pre-ordination period. It was, however, disowned by Lambeth Palace and condemned by some as blasphemous. Petre (1994: 113) scathingly describes the liturgies the Community devised as 'New Age-style feminist' because they referred to God as 'mother' and 'her'. Yet, this ignores the fact that *both* maternal and paternal address forms were used. For instance, the revised version of the Lord's prayer began, 'Beloved our Father and Mother, in whom is heaven'. Clack (1996: 149) is among many feminists who argue that, "'God the Father" is an image which...supports patriarchal claims to male supremacy'. This recalls Mary Daly's (1973) famous dictum, 'Since God is male, the male is God'. The feminist counter strategy to conceptualise God as mother, or father *and* mother, as in the case of the St Hilda prayer book, is dismissed by Bishop Graham Leonard in the book *Let God Be God*, on the grounds that it distorts, 'the whole fine balance of the content of revelation. It is to introduce sexuality where none was intended.' (1989: 55-6). As Furlong (1991) observes, Leonard's position betrays the erroneous assumption that the image of 'God the father' is somehow neutral in respect of sexuality.

#### **6.3.4 Encounters with Feminist Theology**

Women's relatively recent role as theologians has been a crucial means of seizing interpretative control within the Church. According to Dowell and Williams (1994: 50), 'Women's exclusion from the means and sources of theological reflection has proved as dispiriting as our exclusion from the Church's ministerial structures'. In order to disseminate the rich body of work that has been produced by Christian feminists in both Britain and the US, Women in Theology (WIT) was founded in 1983 and operated

thereafter via a network of cell groups throughout the country. Some, inspired by the American feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's (1983) conception of 'womanchurch' as an exodus church, decided to leave what they came to see as an intrinsically patriarchal institution in order to seek an 'authentically woman-centred' spirituality (Dowell and Williams 1994: 58). For others, the encounter with feminist theology seems to have influenced their sense of the 'proper' exercise of their sacerdotal role. The existence of a link between feminist theology and sacerdotal practice is borne out by Lehman's (1993) survey of women in ministry in the US. He found that younger women, trained in seminaries with courses in feminist theology, manifested more 'feminine' ministry styles.<sup>3</sup> He concludes that these styles have therefore been *constructed*, rather than arising spontaneously from women's life experiences (ibid: 198).

A central theme of feminist theology is an attack on what is seen as the pervasive heresy of dualism in the Church, whereby body and spirit are seen as incompatible. Furlong (1994: 21) points out that this denigration of the body goes back to the early church and is tantamount to a denigration of women, 'to despise the body is to despise women's unique ability - that of giving birth - and to despise sexuality is to despise the one who inspires sexual desire'. The very word 'pregnant', as used by Janet Morley in the phrase 'pregnant with power' in a draft edition the Church commissioned report, *Making Women Visible* (1988), was felt to be too loaded and was removed without her permission (in Furlong 1991: 81). The view of women as culpable inspirers of lust is illustrated by a comment made in a radio interview by Graham Leonard, then Bishop of London, to the effect that, 'if he saw a woman in the sanctuary, he would be unbearably tempted to embrace her.' (in Dowell and Williams 1994: 33). This comment betrays a view of women's bodies as saturated with sexuality, whereas, as noted above, men are

perceived as sexually neutral. The Old Testament's ritualised taboo about blood, and the tradition of churching which it produced, have likewise contributed to a view of women as 'unclean'. Feminist theologians argue that these taboos, though rarely acknowledged, help to explain the irrational dread some opponents felt about women as embodied subjects performing priestly functions. Many feminist theologians believe that the sight of women ministering the sacraments in itself constitutes a powerful challenge to these taboos.

#### **6.4 Marginalisation and Subordination in The Post-Ordination Period**

The idea that the passing of the November 1992 legislation introduced equality for male and female priests is, according to Maltby (1998: 44), 'a deeply inaccurate perception'. Despite fears expressed by opponents in the debate that *they* would subsequently be marginalised and denied preferment, the opposite has proved to be the case. In fact, the second and third most senior appointments in the Church are currently held by men who do not ordain women as priests and do not have a record of appointing women to positions of responsibility<sup>4</sup>. This means their views are at a variance with the majority view of the Church which is supportive of women's ministry. In the sections that follow I will outline a number of ways in which women priests have effectively exchanged exclusion for subordination and marginalisation within the Church's institutional structures.

##### **6.4.1 Legislating for Inequality and the 'Doctrine of Taint'**

Even opponents acknowledge that institutional subordination was built into the November 1992 legislation, since Clause 1(2) states that, 'Nothing in this Measure shall make it lawful for a woman to be consecrated to the office of bishop'. It is difficult to imagine any other public institution which would explicitly legislate to exclude women

from its most senior positions. This was a point strategically mobilised during the ordination debate by the main speaker for the Opposition, David Silk, Archdeacon of Leicester, who claimed that the legislation, 'discriminates against women, confuses the theology of order by driving a wedge between the episcopate and the presbyterate, and invites the Synod to vote for legislation barring women from the episcopate.' (*The Synod Debate*, 1993: 14). Other clauses ensured that, 'No parish was obliged to receive women priests, no male priest was obliged to work with them, no bishop was obliged to ordain them.' (Mayland 1998: 71). In this way, legislation designed to ensure equality for women within the Church simultaneously denied that equality. Under this legislation it is clear that some priests are more equal than others.

The subsequent Act of Synod (1993) enshrined further concessions to opponents in perpetuity, unless rescinded. The Act was intended to enable bishops to preserve their fraternal collegiality at all costs, as is evident from a comment made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, 'It was the sense that we had been drawn together in a brotherhood, which was historic and deeply moving.' (cited in Petre 1994: 169). This fraternal unity was only achieved, however, by further institutionalising the subordinate status of women priests. Particularly detrimental to the force of the original legislation was the concept of the 'two integrities', a piece of casuistry which states that there are two *equally legitimate*, albeit opposing, views on women's ordination. Christina Rees, who has come to regret bitterly her support for the Act and who feels MOW's charitable inclinations were cynically exploited, points out the incoherence of this concept:

if you feel that that God is calling women to be priests you can't really accept that God is *not* calling women to be priests that is not a valid option either he is or he isn't and if you believe that God is *not* calling women to be priests you can't really go along with people who say oh yes he is...you cannot *have* two integrities 'cos one is always counteracting the other

(Appendix X: 121-135)

The Act also ensured that the pastoral needs of opponents were catered for by making provision for the appointment of three Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs), the so-called 'flying bishops', whose activities, despite denials, are implicated in the 'doctrine of taint'. The PEVs act as a 'safe pair of hands' for those who perceive their own bishop as having been compromised by his involvement in the ordination of women. For instance, one opponent in the diocese of Durham said of his bishop, who ordains women, 'I find it very difficult to even contemplate receiving communion at his hands' (cited in Mayland 1998: 74). This is mirrored by the behaviour of parishioners within individual parishes. For instance, my respondent who is priest-in-charge of a parish in London explained that a male priest comes in on the first Sunday of every month to administer the eucharist to those who refuse to accept it from her hands (Appendix VIII: 42-3). Jane Shaw (1998: 21) concludes that the Act thereby gives legitimacy to a view of women and their sacramental ministry as 'polluting'. Fraternal conflict amongst bishops was avoided, but only at the cost of reviving and legitimising deep-seated fears about women and women's sexuality. In turn, this has made it difficult for some priests to employ the premodifier 'woman' as a mark of pride, despite the obvious joy they experienced in finally being ordained as '*women* priests'.

#### **6.4.2 Tainting the Concept of Sexual Harassment**

Textual traces of deep-seated prejudices about women and women's sexuality can be found in a report on sexual harassment produced *since* women's ordination to priesthood, in the diocese of Oxford. The report, entitled *The Greatness of the Trust: The Report of the working Party on Sexual Abuse by Pastors* (Easter 1996), implicitly genders its readers as male, even though women also occupy professional roles as priests and lay pastoral workers in the Church. Appendix III of the report contains much special pleading on behalf of male perpetrators of abuse whom it constructs as

misguided individuals who are unwittingly led into sin by their 'high moral standards'.

At one point we are told, without any supporting evidence, that, 'men in particular are more vulnerable to affairs when they pass through critical stages of their life.' (ibid: 43). This is reinforced by a whole section, attributed to the 'expert' psychologist, Dr Archibald Hart, which re-produces the kind of outdated stereotypes of the symptoms of the female hysteric one would expect to encounter in popular usage, rather than in the academic discourse of psychology:

One particular personality type is particularly risky for the male minister: the female hysterical personality. This person is typically shallow, overly reactive, even vivacious, uninhibited in displaying sexuality, given to flirtations, coquetry, and romantic fantasy - such a person is also impressionable and craves excitement but is naive and frigid. She is, in essence, a caricature of femininity, drawing attention to herself to obtain admiration...the pastor who falls prey to her seduction is bound to be destroyed.

*(The Greatness of the Trust, 1996: 43-4)*

This passage manages to reproduce an entire set of stereotypical assumptions about destructive and predatory women who lack sexual restraint, but who ultimately prove (disappointingly?) frigid. Given that the implicit addressee is a male priest, it is also likely to evoke a theological schema of woman as the wicked temptress of man and instigator of his spiritual downfall, which has its origins in the biblical story of Eve and is reinforced by the terms of the Act of Synod. The implication, however, of the psychological turn given to this theological narrative is that it is now the vulnerable priest, rather than the brazen woman who seduced him, who is likely to be 'destroyed' by their mutual contact. This conveniently glosses over the asymmetrical power relationship which exists between a male pastor and a woman who is the subject of his pastoral care.

Elsewhere, it is presupposed that the addressee has a wife whose unsupportive behaviour and attitude once the adultery has been discovered is deemed reprehensible, 'What she doesn't know is that her pastor/husband desperately wants to confide his struggle to her. He wants to channel his arousal back to her, where it belongs. But sometimes her veil of silence and condemnation only increases the emotional distance.' (ibid: 46). It is he who is desperate and who struggles, whereas she is cold and unforgiving. The analyst's 'voice', in this case that of another psychologist, Paul Tournier, who is cited here by Hart, merges with that of the male adulterer in a way that makes it very clear where his sympathies lie. Indeed, we are told that the adulterer's view of his wife as 'the incarnation of moral law' is the 'driving force of much adultery' (ibid). This suggests that women who are 'over virtuous' are just as likely to incite sexual waywardness in their husbands as female hysterics. In what is a remarkable piece of prestidigitation, the victim of the abuse is not only turned into the abuser, but the perpetrator's wife is made to bear a considerable portion of the blame for his failure to renounce his adulterous relationship. The credibility of these views is underscored by the long list of qualifications and 'numerous journal and magazine articles' attributed to Professor Hart. In addition, the reader is told at the outset that, 'It [the Appendix] sets out with great clarity the issues involved, and it should be read by everyone engaged in pastoral work.' (ibid: 18). The 'everyone' referred to, however, takes no account of female addressees who will find nothing here to guide their conduct when dealing with those in their pastoral care and everything to reinforce their sense of alienation from a church which is deeply imbued with masculinist assumptions.

#### 6.4.3 Covert and Overt Discrimination Against Women Priests

Women priests are still very much in a minority in a male-dominated institution, with projected figures for 2001 of 11% (*Numbers in Ministry*, 1996, 2-3). All the evidence suggests that a two-tier clerical system is likely to persist for decades, with women priests disproportionately clustering in assistant roles, almost half of which are unpaid. Purchas (1996: 123) makes the observation that, 'It is hard to imagine, for instance, women solicitors, accountants or doctors accepting a situation where nearly half their profession were expected to work unpaid because they are women'. Particularly adversely affected are women priests in clergy couples, 'Some couples found that they were only offered one and a third stipends for two full-time jobs; others had been told that the Church would never pay the woman in a joint clergy couple team although they would be happy to give her a job for no remuneration!' (*Guardian* 10 March 1999). This may be due in part to the Church's tradition of relying on women in ministry to respond to the language of service.

In addition, as Aldridge points out, a woman's access to career routes is often blocked by the operation of informal fraternal network, whereas for the male priest, 'There are frequent meetings with brother clergy for him to attend and there are many clerical societies for him to join. If he aligns himself to one of the "churchmanship" groups, he gains access to a nationwide network of debate, information exchange, sponsorship, sociability and friendship.' (1989: 55). The *Windsor Consultation Document* (September 1995) also notes the way job advertisements reveal implicit masculinist assumptions about the limitations of women priests, including their alleged inability to carry out church maintenance and their greater vulnerability in relation to security

issues. It reproduces the following from a parish profile:

After deep and prayerful discussion, we feel that although we seek the best person for the post, in view of:

- a. the extremely large plant.
- b. the combination of church and parish problems.
- c. the security problems we are facing at the moment.
- d. the feelings of a minority of the congregation which must be respected.
- e. the loneliness of the situation of the Rectory...

the position would not be suitable for a woman incumbent at the moment although we are open to the ministry of women.

*(The Windsor Consultation Document, 1995: 5)*

This is reminiscent of the doctrine of the 'unripe time' used to rationalise women's exclusion from ordination, and is consonant with a general climate in which the views of a minority of opponents hold sway. Potential candidates have no grounds for appeal against these strategies of exclusion, since the clergy's conditions of employment are not covered by equal opportunities legislation. Indeed, it is perfectly acceptable within ecclesiastical law to discriminate against women where Parochial Church Councils pass the relevant motions to this effect. This means that hundreds of parishes remain no-go areas for women priests. A recent Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union survey (1998) of women priests already in post revealed that 75% of respondents had been subject to bullying and harassment by both parishioners and male clergy. The most common strategy used to marginalise them was verbal abuse, including pejorative naming, sexual innuendo and patronising comments.

#### **6.4.4 The Exclusion of Women Priests from Decision-Making**

Although they have finally achieved the right to be ordained, women in the Church of England do not participate as full members of decision making bodies. This means that they are not entirely free of what Herbert (1994: 36) terms their 'long adolescence' in the structures of the Church. For example, the Turnbull Committee, set up to review

the central policy-making and financial structures of the Church of England, comprised eleven men and one woman. The theological consultant was also a man, as were all three assessors, but two women were represented in secretarial roles. The Report employs the exclusive term 'chairman/men' (1995: 47 ff.), sporadically acknowledging in brackets that some of the posts referred to could be filled by a female (ibid: 47). The pattern of pronoun use throughout the report is also very uneven, as if the inclusion of women ministers were an afterthought. Although it is the most wide-ranging review of the Church's structures ever undertaken, it makes no reference to the recently implemented ruling on the ordination of women as a substantive issue. In the introductory chapter entitled, 'The Organisation of the Church in the light of the gifts of God', no reference is made to the potential contribution women might make to priestly ministry. Despite the Chairperson's opening remarks about the Church's need to face 'cultural change', the report fails to address the most dramatic cultural change that has occurred in its recent history. Its most important recommendation is the establishment of a National Council. However, no women, clerical or lay, are automatically included on the Council. One conservative lay woman, Rachel Stowe, was initially appointed as the sole female voice amongst 20 men. A second lay woman has since been co-opted after protests, but no women priests have been included.

In order to challenge the continuing mechanisms for subordinating and segregating women priests, MOW was relaunched under the new name of Women and the Church (WATCH) on 9th November 1996. Its aim is to keep statistical information on the deployment of women priests and to press for positive discrimination to encourage more black women to seek to enter the priesthood. Its biggest challenge, however, is to secure women's access to episcopal appointments. Rees describes it as, 'a logical step and it's a step of justice you can't have women priests without having women bishops

because there is nothing qualitatively different between the two' (Appendix X: 152-4).

Darling (1994: 223) records the effect this had on the US Episcopal Church in 1989, twelve years after the first female ordinations, 'The actual admission of women to the brotherhood of bishops shattered a powerful symbol of male control over women that the episcopate had represented'. However, according to WATCH's newsletter, *Outlook*, this is unlikely to occur in the Church of England until at least 2009 (1999, no. 7: 15). Yet, as long as women are excluded from becoming bishops in the Church of England, they will remain second class priests.

### **6.5 Clerical Self-fashioning: from Woman Deacon to Woman Priest**

Postructuralist theorists, such as Butler (1990), stress the instability of identity categories and the potential individuals have to 'perform' different sexual and gendered identities, in particular. Such identities are, she argues, constituted through a variety of different discursive routes or acts (ibid: 145). To some extent, this performative thesis is supported by my research into women priests in the Church of England, since what is interesting is the *range* of different, sometimes contradictory, subject positions they occupy. In particular, their behaviour since ordination, linguistic and otherwise, cannot be accommodated within a polarised gendered framework. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a set of competing expectations and norms with which they have had to negotiate and which constrain the subject positions available to them. On the one hand, they are aware of the expectation that they will promote discursive norms that challenge the dominant masculinist ones that prevail in the Church, but, on the other, they have had to confront an institution that is not only male-dominated, but in which they occupy officially sanctioned subordinate roles. This involves them in an entirely different set of negotiations from those they engaged in as campaigning outsiders, often connected to women-oriented communities of practice.

I will suggest that, by underestimating the type of material constraints that operate on speaking subjects, linguists who draw on Butler's (1990) work tend to overstate the constitutive nature of discourse (see Bergvall *et al* eds. 1996). I will illustrate this by outlining some of the constraints that influence both the subject positions adopted by women priests, and the ways in which these are evaluated by colleagues and parishioners. The latter are particularly important, since, as I argue elsewhere (1.3.4), advocates of a performative approach to language and gender also tend to neglect the metadiscursive control exercised by those who evaluate the appropriacy of the language used by women in public sphere roles. Following D. Smith (1990: 86), I will suggest that women priests, 'actively work out their subject positions and roles in the process of negotiating discursive [and, I would add, material] constraints'.

### **6.5.1 The Role of Mediatized Discourse**

A particularly potent source of the widespread expectation that women will be priests in a completely new way is the mass media. The ordination debate attracted the sort of attention in the mainstream media that is usually reserved for important Parliamentary occasions and political party conferences, despite the fact that fewer than 5% of the population are regular church-goers. A trial vote in July 1992 was narrowly defeated and the uncertainty this generated created an ideal space for media intervention. The fact that the coverage which followed was wholly at odds with the cultural importance of the event for a largely secular society, suggests that its cultural significance lay elsewhere. It can be explained partly by the Church's status as one of the last bastions of male exclusivity in British society and partly by the symbolic investment people have in an institution inextricably tied up with English history. Opponents saw a media conspiracy at work, designed to promote a liberal secular agenda. Yet, the conspiracy theory ignores the trivialising coverage of women's aspirations to be priests and the

disproportionate focus on the opposing minority following the passing of the legislation.

Nonetheless, coverage prior to, and including, the November vote was largely sympathetic to women aspiring to priesthood, with every newspaper, except the *Telegraph*, coming out in favour. This is in marked contrast to the largely hostile coverage campaigners for ordination received throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This apparently dramatic *volte face* was mainly due to a shift in attitudes towards issues of gender equality in society as a whole. Hence, the tenor of media coverage reflected the fact that 80% of the general public supported women's ordination, as did two thirds of all church-goers (Petre 1994: 88). Another factor, however, was MOW's decision early in 1992 to appoint Christina Rees as its PR officer in charge of co-ordinating the media campaign. Recognising the crucial role the media would play in influencing public opinion, like the NIWC and WEN, MOW decided to ensure it maintained a degree of control over how its campaign was represented. Rees relates how she set out to cultivate close working relationships with the religious affairs correspondents on all the major national dailies, as well as with those who worked for the church press (Appendix X: 80 ff.). She would phone them and say what she wanted them to report and, in general, she feels they responded responsibly. It got to the stage where they contacted her for verification and/or comments. However, she admits, 'it was not a smooth ride because the media was not entirely in favour and could also trivialise it as well' (ibid: ll. 57-8). One third of traditionalist Church-goers were adamantly against and this seems to have been the constituency addressed by the *Telegraph*, whose Editor, and religious affairs correspondent, Damian Thompson, remained steadfastly opposed. The following discussion is designed to give some indication of the contradictions inherent in media coverage, as well as central role it played in *mediating*

between women priests' construction of themselves, and the image of them that circulates in the public domain.

***Women Priests as Problem Insiders:*** In the aftermath of the debate, almost all newspaper headlines re-produced the apocalyptic rhetoric of opponents. The headline in *The Times*, 'Joy, Dismay and Warnings Greet Synod Vote' gives a relatively accurate impression of the 'balance' of the coverage. Perhaps not surprisingly, given its oppositional stance, the *Telegraph's* headline is marked by the structured absence of any mention of joy, but instead focuses selectively on the alleged, 'Turmoil Over Synod Vote'. Its address is to traditionalists for whom women's ordination opened up, 'a Pandora's box, after the lid had been opened, out would pop women bishops, practising gays and lesbian clergy and feminist, pagan liturgies which referred to God as her.' (Petre 1994: 12). Yet, the metaphor of 'woman as chaos' is pervasive, even in the majority of newspapers that had openly come out in support. For instance, George Austin, an outspoken opponent, was quoted in the *Guardian* (12 November 1992) as saying that women priests would bring something 'wild' into Christianity. While some of the more extreme views of opponents were negatively evaluated by media producers, there was a *general* acceptance of opponents' construction of women priests as even more of a problem as insiders than they had been as campaigning outsiders, clamouring to be let in.

This can, of course, be explained by the fact that 'negativity', and, more specifically 'conflict between people', is perhaps *the* key factor that renders an event newsworthy (Bell 1991: 156). In this context, the possibility of schism afforded more opportunities for sensational revelations than accounts of the hopes and fears of women priests. This is especially true since the majority of women priests were anonymous individuals,

whereas a number of defectors to Rome were *elite* people, including the high profile Conservative MPs, John Gummer, Emma Nicholson and Ann Widdecombe. The *Church Times* wryly observes, 'more column inches were devoted to John Gummer's departure than to the event which precipitated it.' (4 March 1994). By August 1993, three hundred clergy and lay people had defected to Rome, but it was not the high profile exodus that had been threatened and anticipated, and which had fuelled claims that the Church would suffer financial ruin. The latter fear was due to the fact that each priest who left was to receive compensation of £30,000, leading the *Daily Mail* to produce the alarmist headline, '£100m Church threat over women priests' (23 February 1994). Petre acknowledges that, 'the departures have constituted a trickle rather than a flood' (1994: 183).

M. Webster (1994) suggests that the disproportionate focus on the opposing minority in the media led to a distorted view of the mood in the aftermath of the debate:

The conviction of two-thirds of Church-going Anglicans was being set aside while all eyes were fixed on a vociferous minority. The women, who over so many years had been told that they must not speak about their pain and frustration, were now faced with the spectacle of the pain of the opponents being publicised with considerable effect.

(M. Webster 1994: 190)

The burden of guilt fell upon the very women who should have been celebrating a hard-won victory. It is likely that media coverage, together with episcopal warnings about the dangers of triumphalism, helped to create a climate which was conducive to the relatively unopposed passage a year later of the retrograde Act of Synod (see 6.4.1). This in turn is likely to have had a negative impact on the conditions in which the first generation of women priests have practised their ministry. For example, some women

priests who were formerly deacons claim to have experienced a rise in hostility among those previously unconcerned.

***Women Priests as Agents of Change:*** Almost all media coverage, whether sympathetic or hostile, presupposed that women's ministry *would* be distinctive and the question then became *how* this would manifest itself. This suggests the extent to which the 'difference' arguments advanced by feminist sociolinguists, psychologists and so on, have come to infuse everyday discourse and have attained the status of 'common-sense' (Mills 1998; Coward 1999). The presuppositions cued in the majority of media texts served to construct women priests as stereotypically gendered subjects.

Fairclough (1989: 154), argues that 'presuppositions can ...have *ideological* functions, when what they assume has the character of "common sense in the service of power"'. Intertextual traces of the process of ideological framing and of resistance to it are implicit in the following account of an interview between the journalist, Christian Tyler, and a London curate, Rev Dilly Baker (Figure 6.1: 275). Tyler reports, 'I asked her how women priests would differ from men. *Once more*, she was reluctant to employ "stereotypes". She *finally* agreed that women *might* find it easier to extend sympathy, especially to other women.' (ibid, ll. 173-76, my italics). The sentence

adverb, 'finally' implies a degree of resignation by Baker to the journalist's pre-scripted schema of gender difference. However, the cautious modality she employs reveals her obvious efforts to resist the compliant subject position established for her by the interviewer's repeated cues.

An article by Neal Ascherson, in the *Independent on Sunday* (11 December 1994), is suggestive of the way in which even those journalists who seek to refute, rather than

# A mother in waiting to be a priest

- DILLY BAKER is expecting to become a mother in two weeks' time and an Anglican priest within two years...
- Dilly Baker's tomboy haircut and progressive views could suggest a militant feminist, a woman subconsciously trying to be a man. But there is nothing mannish about her big eyes, wide mouth and giggly laugh - she is younger than her 30 years - and nothing strident about the way she talks. I asked her to describe her vocation...
- Have you a vocation or do you really mean you want a career?
- It depends how you want to define vocation. I feel that I have. I can pinpoint the time when I felt very, very strongly that this was something that I had to do: it was during a pilgrimage week at Iona.
- How do you know your vocation is for the priesthood?
- I feel my ministry is incomplete without the priestly part. When you've been involved in people's lives, birth and death and everything in between, and then the shutter comes down on Sunday morning that feels very, very wrong.
- And if ordination were denied you?
- I would find it very difficult to continue in the church in my present position.
- Do you see it as a woman's right to be ordained priest?
- It's a very loaded term, that'.
- Yes, I said; it was deliberate.
- The curate sighed, 'I don't think I want to talk in terms of rights because that just turns people off. I might want to talk in terms of justice.
- Men and women are created together in the image of God and to deny women the ability to represent Christ is, I think, a fundamental break with justice. But I'm not the sort of person to go around talking about women's rights too earnestly'.
- Is what you're doing part of the feminist movement?
- I'm reluctant to say Yes because feminism is such a dirty word for a lot of people. But feminism has helped us to see more clearly what has been going on in the church, the way women have been treated and understood...
- Dilly Baker (her real name is Hilary) acknowledged a theological connection. 'It's not simply a matter of who says the Eucharistic prayer. We're dealing with something very important: how we understand God, how we understand sexuality and relations between women and men. So long as the church says that women cannot adequately represent Christ at the altar then out theology is open to question.
- Is the gender of God separate from the issue of whether women should be priests or not?
- 60 She hesitated, 'I personally don't think it's separate. But let's be honest. There's no sex to God. It's a convenient metaphor. We're talking metaphors all the time here and I think we ought to enlarge our vision of God all the time. But "women priests equals female God" is not what I want to say at all'...
- She agreed that the Church of England could be seen as the last male bastion. 'Men have been heading this show for so long. Women will bring a breath of fresh air, a little more imagination and creativity, and will open the whole thing up. Maybe that is why some men are so very threatened by the whole issue'.
- I asked her how women priests would differ from men.
- Once more, she was reluctant to employ 'stereotypes'. She finally agreed that women might find it easier to extend sympathy, especially to other women. The family of a parishioner whose funeral she recently conducted had said as much.
- Finally I asked her: do you think it's God's will that women should be priests?
- 'Yes', she said, very quietly, 'I certainly do'.
- Do you kneel down and pray to be told this is the right thing for you?
- 'Yes. That would be quite an apt way of putting it'...

Figure 6.1: Text of an article recording an interview between Christian Tyler and Rev Dilly Baker (*Financial Times* 22 February 1992).

reinforce, stereotypical assumptions about women's ministry as priests, nonetheless create unrealistic expectations about their power to transform the Church as an institution. Ascherson begins by rejecting the idea that women will merely become, 'vicars plus feminine intuition', but then goes on to assert his belief that, instead, they will, 'bring a different sense of the sacred that in the end will be implacable towards the compromises on which this particular church is founded' (ibid). By inverting the traditional prejudice against women as biologically tainted, he seems to imply that their spiritual integrity is superior to that of their compromising and compromised male colleagues. He does not offer any details of what their 'different sense of the sacred' might be, but he takes for granted that it has the power to challenge, and ultimately transform, the whole cultural and spiritual ethos of the Church of England. This is something of a tall order, given that women's continuing subordination within the Church's institutional structures was built into the November legislation (see 6.4).

***Familial Relationships and Bodily Tropes:*** One way in which the subordinate status of women priests was reinforced by media coverage is that they tended to be represented as embodied sexual beings attached to families. The emphasis on their role as mothers amounted to a positive obsession. For instance, Christian Tyler's profile of the London curate, Dilly Baker, carries the headline 'A mother in waiting to be a priest' (Figure 6.1: p. 187), while all the major newspapers featured photographs of the Rev Susan Mayoss-Hurd, the first woman priest to give birth, holding her baby in a madonna-like pose. This preoccupation also manifested itself in the widespread use of bodily tropes, notably in punning headlines about pregnancy such as, 'Women expectant: from deacons to priests' (*Tablet* 19 February 1994) and 'Pregnant pause for ordinand' (*Guardian* 21 February 1994). Such coverage was not only calculated to magnify the difference between female and male clergy, but in the process reinforced

women priests' connection with nurturing roles in the home at a time when they were trying to escape the assumption that was their 'proper' sphere. This assumption has been cleverly and humorously subverted in the MOW slogan, 'A woman's place is in the house of bishops', a slogan that has, somewhat paradoxically perhaps, since appeared on aprons, mugs and tea-towels in its campaign to secure women's access to episcopal roles.

***Femmes or Frumps:*** Another way in which media commentators can undermine the efforts of women who aim to achieve a public voice is by exhibiting an inappropriate interest in their appearance at the expense of what they are actually trying to say. This trivialising tendency is evident in media coverage of women priests, most notoriously in the headline in the *Sun* the day after the successful passage of the legislation, 'Church say yes to their vicars in knickers' (12 November 1992). Numerous articles since have focused on the implications for clerical dress (*Guardian* 25 November 1993; *The Sunday Times* 25 June 1995). The anomaly that was felt to exist between the priestly role and feminine appearance is strikingly evident in an article by Mary Kenny in the *Express* (17 February 1997: 11). Referring to the Rev Lucy Winkett, she begins by posing the rhetorical question, 'How could one see such a pretty little thing as a priest?', thereby ostensibly establishing a dialogic relationship with her reader. Like many commentators, she views earrings as particularly jarring metonymic signifiers of an inappropriate femininity in women priests. She concludes her article with a lame bid for tolerance which is undermined by the terms in which she frames it, 'If pretty girls in earrings can perform a holy and priestly function for some worshippers, then so be it'. The collocational chaining of the trivialising lexical items, 'pretty' (twice), 'little' and 'girl' are designed to make it difficult for readers to resist the conclusion that women and the priestly role are wholly incompatible.

Tannen's (1995) claim that women's appearance is marked, no matter what choices they make, is confirmed by the fact that those women priests who strategically distanced themselves from traditional signifiers of gendered identity were, and continue to be, found wanting for this very reason. For instance, an article in *The Times* (25 June 1995) reports that, 'Newly ordained Anglican women priests have already gained a reputation for frumpiness'. Both responses have signalled unequivocally to women priests that they are women in a male environment. The cumulative effect of representing women priests in terms of familial relations, bodily tropes and aspects of their dress and appearance is to undermine their claims to professional status. Such practices of representation contribute to a more general discursive restructuring, discussed throughout this study, whereby the gendered nature of the private/public dichotomy is reproduced *within* the public sphere.

***Patterns of Naming:*** The increasing priority of newspapers to sell in a competitive market probably accounts for their tendency to report some of the worst rhetorical excesses of those opposed to women's ordination. For instance, the term 'priestess', used as a dysphemism by those who view women priests as an anathema, became a peg on which to hang numerous sensational stories bearing headlines such as, 'Call for women priests to be burnt at the stake' (*The Times* 9 March 1994: 4) and 'Cathedral circle dancers accused of witchcraft' (*Daily Telegraph* 29 June 1994: 4). The implicit charge that women's ordination as priests has led the Church beyond the theological pale into the dangerous territory of neo-paganism was invariably discredited by the liberal press. Nonetheless, such coverage may have contributed to a discursive context which has made it more difficult for women priests to be taken seriously when they raise theological objections to exclusive language, including the tendency to gender God as male.

*Fictional Representations of Women Priests:* Women priests are generally positive about the effect fictional representations have had on the way their ministry has been received. Radio 4's long running soap, *The Archers*, made a well-intentioned attempt to expose some of the problems confronted by the new woman vicar, the Rev Janet Fisher, and included conversion stories of hardline opponents, such as Tom Forest. This may have helped to assuage the fears of some of the more conservative members of the Church who, like Forest, were wary about change *per se*. By far the most well-known fictional representation of a woman priest, however, is the eponymous heroine of the BBC sitcom, *The Vicar of Dibley*, a role played by the popular comedian Dawn French. It is based loosely on the ministry of a London priest, Joy Carroll, although the idyllic rural setting for the series could not be more remote from Carroll's experience of working with people on the margins of society in inner city London. Wakeman (1996) feels that the series has been very effective at countering stereotypes through humour, 'The caricature of a forceful and aggressive woman minister seems to be fading. Possibly the sting was drawn by *The Vicar of Dibley*, television's series about a lovely but terrible woman vicar who must have been an amalgam of everyone's worst fears.' (Wakeman 1996: 15). The *Windsor Consultation Document* (September 1995) likewise records the unanimous opinion expressed by all those present that the series brought humour and humanity to the new role of women priests. So positive is the perceived impact of the series that one Synod member referred to it as the 'Vicar of Dibley spread of tolerance' (*Guardian* 15 March 1999).

The response from one of my respondents was, however, more qualified. She noted that the media have a long standing record of trivialising the Church and cited the role played by Derek Nimmo in the popular 1960s sitcom, *All Gas and Gaiters*, as establishing a precedent for subsequent depictions of priests as effeminate and

ineffectual buffoons (Appendix VII: 50-54). This is a tradition which has been reproduced more recently in the Channel 4 sitcom, *Father Ted*. In this context, she felt that the character played by French is likely to perpetuate, rather than challenge, the popular image of vicars, and in this case women vicars, as figures of fun at a time when they are striving to be taken seriously. Yet, the writer of the series, Richard Curtis, claims he deliberately set out to subvert the traditional image of the 'wet male buffoon' by making Geraldine 'compassionate and intelligent' (*The Times* 5 November 1994). More suspect is another of his comments on the series, quoted in the same article:

Many recent comedies, including *Blackadder*, *Fawlty Towers*, *One Foot in the Grace*, etcetera, are about people who are rude, dismissive, angry. I thought it would be fun to write about someone who was keen, enthusiastic and, in moments of conflict, has to be the soul of sweetness.  
(*The Times* 5 November 1994)

While male characters in comedies are permitted to get angry, Geraldine is, as Curtis notes, invariably the 'soul of sweetness'. Such saintly restraint may be possible for Geraldine in the face of the comic antics of the inhabitants of Dibley, but it may be much less so for the many women priests who have had to confront hostility and abuse from their parishioners. Likewise, while Geraldine is both a strong and attractive character, much of her humour is self-denigrating, and a number of storylines have centred on her frustrated attempts at romance. A particularly poignant episode was that the 1998 Christmas special in which she mistakenly assumes that a handsome BBC producer is attracted to her. Although the series has undoubtedly countered some stereotypical assumptions about women priests, it may have reinforced others, particularly the assumption that single women turn to priesthood because of their failure to find fulfilment in heterosexual relationships. It may also have contributed to

the demanding expectation that women priests will invariably be models of good-humoured restraint.

### **6.5.2 Strategies of Subversion or Accommodation: Priests or Women Priests?**

Some women priests have chosen to distance themselves from the identity criteria of sex, sexuality and gender that were necessarily to the fore in the pre-ordination campaign. Instead, they emphasise the insitutional force of their ordination as priests and insist that gender is largely irrelevant to the exercise of many aspects of their sacerdotal role. For instance, one of my interviewees feels that the use of the premodifier 'woman' is self-marginalising, 'I think it's time we stopped referring to ourselves as women priests we're priests that's all...I'm a little worried that we shall hive off into our little ghetto' (Appendix IX: 108-116). The implication is that the gender-marking of what should be a gender-neutral occupational role is an unnecessary distraction, 'whether you're a woman or a man shouldn't make any difference at all your gender should~*I feel* your gender should disappear in a service' (ibid: 147-49). Hence, her rejection of the 'feely' and 'personal' aspects of some women's approach to ministry, and of their propensity to 'go on endlessly about birth' (ibid: 94). She also admits to minimising aspects of her appearance and dress that would draw unwarranted attention to her femininity:

I will do all sorts of things when I'm in mufti erhm I like bright colours when I'm off duty it's an antidote to the sort of quietness and so on of clergy dress I like earrings I~I very quickly decided that it wasn't appropriate to wear fun earrings when taking a service because it's a distraction you do not want people looking at your earrings instead of listening to what you're saying so I tone every-thing down then and big rings and so on I don't wear those during services  
(ibid: ll. 151-156)

These de-gendering strategies may have been influenced by the media's trivialising focus on the appearance of women priests (6.5.2). However, they are also likely to be connected to Priest C's conviction, stated later in the interview, that men in the Church

have a 'deep' and 'unacknowledged' fear of women's sexuality (ibid: 197 ff.). This is a fear that many women priests feel has been reinforced, rather than challenged, in the post-ordination period because of the revival of the 'doctrine of taint' (see Furlong ed. 1999).

While both Priests A (Appendix VII: 58-61) and C embrace occupational norms as gender-neutral, such norms have been perceived by others as male-identified, because of their connection with a traditionally male-dominated institution. Maggie Ross (1994), for instance, is critical of what she sees as the failure of women priests to challenge the male-oriented bureaucratisation of the Episcopal Church in the US, 'the women seem more and more to be adopting the "executive" model, and they dress like upper-level management cum dog collars'. This is reminiscent of Daly's (1979) dysphemistic neologism, 'fembots', to designate women careerists who, in her view, inevitably collude with masculinist institutional norms. Such negative evaluations of women priests are not confined to feminist critics, but have been appropriated by those who oppose women's ministry on quite different grounds. This is evident in an article recording the reaction of traditionalists to the ministry of Miriam Byrne, Provost of St Paul's Cathedral in Dundee and the first woman priest in Britain to take control of an Anglican cathedral (Figure 6.2: 283). She has been dubbed 'Atilla the nun', because, in the words of one parishioner, 'She is a woman doing a man's job and is over-compensating because of that. She is dictatorial and does not care what other people think' (ibid: ll. 26-29). The implication is that hers is an exaggerated performance of a certain kind of authoritarian masculinity, yet, when journalist Gerard Seenan attempted to find evidence to substantiate claims of her 'Thatcher-like decision-making', it was not 'readily forthcoming' (ibid: ll. 44-5). Instead, he discovered that for Byrne's opponents even a professionally corrupt man (the previous incumbent had embezzled

# Knives out for first woman provost

From the beginning it was going to be a difficult job. But for a twice-married former Roman Catholic nun, the mantle of being arguably Britain's most senior Anglican woman priest is proving to be more arduous than she could ever have imagined.

Only months after her appointment, Miriam Byrne, aged 52, is facing calls for her resignation from the church committee that presided over her installation.

Some parishioners at St Paul's Cathedral, Dundee, have dubbed her Atilla the Nun, accusing her of over-compensating in her role as a 'woman in a man's job'.

Worse still, a petition was yesterday circulating among her flock for the reinstatement of her predecessor, Michael Bunce, who was forced to resign after embezzling £44,000 from a company he set up to help the unemployed.

Despite this disgrace, to some sections of the highly conservative congregation at St Paul's, Dr Bunce retains one advantage over Ms Byrne: he is a man.

'She is a woman doing a man's job and over-compensating because of that. She is dictatorial and does not care what other people think.

'She is throwing her weight about in a way no man would dream of, said one member of the congregation...

When news of Ms Byrne's appointment broke, George Greig, the cathedral's honorary chaplain for 13 years, resigned. He took with him around a dozen members of the congregation.

Another faction who continue to attend St Paul's refuse to take communion when Ms Byrne is conducting the service...

Although precise accounts of how Ms Byrne has earned her Atilla the Nun moniker and her reputation for 'Thatcher-like decision-making' are not readily forthcoming, there is a dedicated corps in the congregation who are intent on seeing her leave before Christmas.

It is also claimed that the Bishop of Brechin, Neville Chamberlain, has asked her to consider leaving the church. But there are some members of the church who say Ms Byrne is merely the victim of traditionalist intolerance. She came to St Paul's on a convoluted route.

She began her religious life as a nun with the Vocation Sisters - but, although she spent seven years with the order, she never took her final vows and eventually she left the convent to get married to a former monk.

They divorced 18 years later, and Ms Byrne married again to a university librarian. She later returned to the religious life working her way up to her present position...

For the traditionalists, the provost of St Paul's was always going to be a difficult job for a woman to fill. But for a woman with a past and strident views to boot, it may simply be beyond the pastoral pale.

Figure 6.2: Text of an article about the Right Rev Miriam Byrne that appeared in the *Guardian* (16 November 1998).

£44,000 from a company he set up to help the unemployed) is preferable to a 'strident' female who is merely playing at being a man.<sup>5</sup> This illustrates the 'performative paradox' (Montgomery 1999), whereby women who seek to construct themselves as competent professionals are, nonetheless, vulnerable to the charge of mimicking men.

This is particularly paradoxical, since priestly ministry is, in many ways, a feminine occupation. Indeed, priesthood can be seen as an instance of socially and institutionally sanctioned gender-crossing behaviour by men. Thus the Roman Catholic theologian, Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 100), says of the sacraments, 'as rituals of birthing and nurturing, [they] appear to imitate female powers of giving birth and nurturing the growth of life'. The psychiatrist, Robert Hobson, believes men who are drawn to the priesthood are motivated by an envy of women's reproductive powers, finding 'refuge in the "motherly aspects" of priesthood and such "feminine" expression as ceremonial or ritual dress.' (cited in Petre 1994: 39). Indeed, Wakeman (1996: 6), implies that a large measure of the hegemonic power which has historically been vested in the priesthood appears to come precisely from the fact that men have been performing women's private sphere roles in a public institution, 'He [the male priest] does not become female, but by adding female functions to his own masculinity becomes culturally hermaphrodite or complete'. This may help to explain the bitterness experienced by many male clergy who recognised that women's entry into the priesthood would unmask their masquerade, rendering their feminised rituals a parodic imitation of the 'real thing'. This has led some opponents to engage in exaggerated and reactionary performances of masculinity.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Bing and Bergvall (1996: 6-7) suggest that both sexes are equally penalised for transgressing normative gender roles, in the Church at least, men and women are clearly not equal players in the game of gender-crossing.

Interestingly, all three of my respondents refer to empirical studies that indicate that male priests have traditionally taken up gendered subject positions at variance with their sexual identity (Francis 1991; Lehman 1993). They appear to regard this 'fact' as offering them a way out of defining *themselves* in narrowly gendered terms. Referring to the Myers Briggs personality test, a test widely used in the Church's training institutions, Priest B alludes to her own masculine character trait of being 'guided by the head, rather than by the heart' (Appendix VIII: 40). Her comment is suggestive of the way in which so-called gender-crossing behaviour can reify stereotypical assumptions about gender, even as it appears to trouble them. Her identification with a masculine subject position does not, however, preclude a radical stance on gender politics. For instance, she regards the Act of Synod as an 'act of apartheid' (ibid: 45), and, in her own ministry, actively promotes inclusive language via an inclusive style of address (ibid: 33).

The strategic appropriation of a range of discursive subject positions is especially likely to occur in liminal periods in an institution's history, such as that which currently exists in the Church of England, where newly ordained women priests are in an ideal position to negotiate the boundaries of gendered identity. For instance, Priests A and C both claim that their gender affiliation is contingent on the gendered nature of the domain in which they find themselves. They strategically exploit connections between women and qualities such as empathy and sensitivity in situations where this seems appropriate, like funerals, but elsewhere, for instance in mixed-sex meetings working to male agendas, they suppress these. In other words, women priests construct themselves as 'like men' in some respects, in order to assert their equality in relation to, for instance, the criterion of competence, and 'like women' in other respects where the aim is to point up male 'lack' of qualities such as empathy. According to Priest C, 'at

moments of emotional stress and so on women are quite welcomed because...men disappear into the back room and get on with the job or something they're afraid to show their emotions or something' (Appendix IX: 54-7). This is in marked contrast to her claim, noted above, that gender is irrelevant to the exercise of the priestly role. The apparently contradictory, and often highly qualified, claims she makes about gender and occupational role can be explained by the fact that she stresses the importance of gender in informal interactional settings where it is likely to be perceived as advantageous to women, and she minimises its importance in more formal interactional settings where it might be perceived to disadvantage women. Yet, both Priests A and C are aware that their gender-crossing behaviour may be negatively evaluated by others. Priest A, for instance, notes that male Church Wardens in her parish regard her leadership style as 'bossy' (Appendix VII: 45-6), while Priest C says of herself:

I have to be conscious very much that I don't come over too powerfully...I haven't experienced {negative evaluations} because I am very careful not to fall into that trap I can be sharp-tongued and I know I'm powerful... I have found that I can sway a meeting but I have to be careful when I use it [laughs]  
(Appendix IX: 136-43)

This offers an insight into the type of pragmatically motivated form of self-surveillance that women in professional roles have to engage in in order to overcome the perennial double bind.

### **6.5.3 The Strategic Disidentification with Feminism**

There is a good degree of unanimity when it comes to how women priests choose to situate themselves in relation to gender politics in the period since ordination. Time and again my interviewees, and numerous other women priests who have written about their experiences, seek to distance themselves from the 'feminist' label, even though they admit that they were happy to employ it in the pre-ordination campaign. It could

be argued that this is symptomatic of the recent and widespread post-feminist backlash, but this does not explain the reluctance with which women priests give up the label. It becomes clear from their responses that this is a strategic decision designed to enable them to promote an implicitly feminist agenda more readily in an institutional environment that is particularly hostile to feminism. For instance, one of my interviewees said she wouldn't admit *publicly* to being a feminist because in the Church it is equated with being an 'aggressive fighter for women's position' (Appendix IX: 32-33). This is a view shared by Frances Ward, 'I know if I am labelled a feminist it gives people a good excuse for marginalising me and not listening to me.' (in Loudon ed. 1994: 86).

A poststructuralist feminist might be tempted to applaud this as a masquerade designed to further feminist goals. However, this ignores the personal investment subjects have in identity labels, especially since this public denial of a feminist stance is not *freely* chosen. If, as poststructuralists, like Butler (1990), claim, language is constitutive of our sense of self, then this type of strategic disidentification is likely to be accompanied by a feeling of self-betrayal. This is evident in the following anecdote related by Ward:

I remember preaching a sermon once and coming down and shaking people's hands at the end of the service and someone came up to me and said, 'You're not one of those feminists, are you?' and I was caught on the hop and said, 'No', which I've always regretted because it felt like a loss of integrity.  
(in Loudon ed. 1994: 86)

If women priests are reluctant to be labelled 'feminists', it seems unlikely that they will be prepared to confront the equally hostile reaction engendered by the issue of inclusive language. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the process of strategic disidentification with overtly feminist goals in the post-ordination period appears to have gone hand-in-hand with a relative retreat on the issue of inclusive language (*Daily*

*Telegraph* 13 July 1994). As noted earlier (1.2.4), from a feminist perspective, not all strategic uses of language are equally valid and some may even be positively reactionary. In this case, the danger is that the subversive power of self-confessed feminists who campaigned for women's ordination is being co-opted and neutralised, leaving the Church's masculinist discursive practices intact.

#### **6.5.4 Celebrating Gender Difference**

Many women priests continue to stress the distinctive nature of their ministry as *women* priests in the post-ordination period. Priest C claims that the most significant change women have introduced is their different approach to the question of sacerdotal authority. Both she and Priest A say that they are conscious of seeking an alternative to the authoritarian approach to ministry that many men adopt. Although careful not to generalise about *all* men, Priest C argues that the Western conception of masculinity means that, 'men are about er dominance leader of the pack erhm going out and fighting their corner achieving that's the male thing it's expected', which in turn means that some male priests are, 'into power and relish the thought of being you know erhm emperors of their own little domain absolute rulers' (Appendix IX: 122-9). The more egalitarian concept of authority promoted in MOW and the Hilda Community may account for the preoccupation with re-visioning modes of authority evident amongst my interviewees and numerous other women priests. Priest A, for instance, resignifies 'authority' as 'leadership' and expresses the ideologically creative idea that 'vulnerability' is an integral feature of any leadership role. She goes on to contrast the self-assuming nature of authority with the self-effacing nature of leadership, when this is properly exercised (Appendix VII: 47-50).

Priest C's focus is less on practical leadership skills, and more on moral leadership.

She seeks to disentangle the responsible exercise of 'moral authority', which she conceives of as context-dependent, and being morally 'authoritarian', which she feels relies on abstract reasoning and an appeal to moral absolutes (Appendix IX: 64 ff.). She tentatively suggests that these two approaches to moral authority may be gendered, 'women meet people more where they are than men do...men do intellectualise an awful lot' (ibid: 46-57). This accords with, and may have been influenced by, Gilligan's (1982) work on women's tendency to draw on an 'ethic of care' and men's tendency to rely on an 'ethic of reason'. However, perhaps because of her legal training, Priest C employs much more cautious modality than Gilligan when making this claim. Hence, she uses a series of hedging devices to mitigate the illocutionary force of her utterances, including, 'that's a sweeping statement', 'generally speaking', 'now I have to qualify that', and 'I may be entirely wrong' (ibid: 39; 46; 47; 51). Contrary to the assumption that a high density of hedges renders women's speech weak and uncertain (Lakoff 1973), in this instance, the effect produced is to make Priest C's propositions appear more authoritative, *because* carefully weighed. This impression was reinforced during the interview by the extremely confident tone in which her assertions were delivered, something that is difficult to capture using transcription conventions. As Holmes notes, 'It is often important in terms of *accuracy* to qualify a proposition or indicate that it cannot be asserted with complete confidence.' (1995: 79, italics in the original). Nowhere is this more important, perhaps, than when making claims about the correlation between gender and language use. Significantly, Priest C was also careful to refute the idea that her context-sensitive approach to moral reasoning absolves her from what she perceives to be her moral obligation to challenge people (ibid: 61).

Related to the issue of authority is the interactional style favoured by women priests.

Once again, Priest C contrasts this with the tendency of some male vicars to adopt an 'exceedingly patronising' and paternalistic mode of address, thereby infantilising lay people and fostering a culture of dependency within the parish (Appendix IX: 43-4). In her experience, women priests, on the other hand, employ a self-consciously empathetic interactional style and are more 'feely' (ibid: 49ff.). Priest A claims that she consciously tries to give a 'feminine slant' to the content of her sermons, in order to make female listeners feel included, but says she prefers interacting with people in small groups to formal preaching. She is committed to a collaborative approach to ministry, devolving leadership roles to others, especially to other women (ibid: 35-6). Priest B expresses her regret that her role as priest-in-charge of a small parish denies her the opportunity to work co-operatively with others as part of a ministry team, something she values (Appendix VIII: 35). None of the three priests interviewed regarded these feminine/feminist discursive norms as either 'natural' or inevitable; instead, they consciously employed them as alternatives to dominant masculinist norms. In fact, Priest C admitted that so-called feminine norms go against the grain of what she believes to be her 'naturally' more assertive speech style (Appendix IX: 135 ff.).

In terms of its impact on theological issues, Robins (1996: 71) believes that women's ordination to the priesthood has helped the Church to move closer to the feminist ideal of embodying spirituality and sexuality together. Although the Act of Synod has revived the 'doctrine of taint', taboos surrounding women's sexuality are challenged every time a woman, especially a pregnant woman, performs sacred priestly rites. Whereas Priest C consciously eschews marked signifiers of femininity, Rev Joy Carroll, a priest-in-charge in a parish in London, habitually foregrounds such signifiers,

by, for instance, wearing short skirts and striking earrings. In an article in the *Sunday Times* she manages to make a symbolic link between the work she does on her body and a central tenet of feminist theology when she says, 'I don't think you should hide your sexuality in the same way that you shouldn't hide your spirituality' (25 June 1995). The body/spirit dualism is also troubled by the marked tendency amongst some women priests to employ bodily and familial tropes when discussing their ministry. Rev Penny Martin (1996: 94), for instance, compares the pain engendered by the ordination debate to the pangs of childbirth, while the resistance she has encountered since is alluded to metaphorically in terms of the problems faced by mothers with difficult offspring. She also explains co-operative ministry in terms of the relationship between different parts of the body (ibid). Such tropes simultaneously blur the boundary between private and public language, re-valuing language associated with women's private sphere activities by deploying them in descriptions of activities that are both public and sacred. But, as noted above (6.5.1), when re-contextualised in punning media headlines such tropes tend to reinforce women's connection with the private sphere and/or with certain subordinate roles within the public sphere. This reveals the way in which oppositional discursive strategies employed by women can have unintended effects when appropriated by others, especially by the media.

There is a surprising degree of consensus amongst those who have been ordained and other commentators in the book *Crossing the Boundary* (Walrond-Skinner ed. 1994) about the gifts women bring to their sacerdotal role. The question arises as to whether this type of uniformity about women's sacerdotal ministry will serve to inscribe a new set of orthodoxies which may inadvertently lead women to collude in their own marginalisation. For instance, some women explain the distinctive gifts they bring to ministry in essentialist terms. Wakeman (1996: 5-6), herself a priest, re-produces the

idea that, 'for biological reasons [women] have innate pastoral and nurturing skills'.

Such essentialist claims may help to reinforce women's supposed suitability for low status roles within the Church, replicating *within* priesthood the separate spheres of ministry that operated in the pre-ordination period *between* female deacons and male priests. This is a point also made by Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 191), 'The categories of "service" or "selfless", "sacrificing" love have always allowed society and the church to exploit women and to "keep them in their place" and in low-status, low-pay, servant-type occupations.' Citing her own experience, Priest A fears that women who place too much emphasis on the distinctively 'womanly' gifts they bring to priesthood will be assigned to failing parishes (Appendix VII: 56-8). Prior to her appointment, the parish where she is currently priest-in-charge was on the verge of closure, mainly because her male predecessor had neglected his pastoral duties. Unusually, those parishioners remaining requested a *woman* priest on the stereotypical grounds that women are more likely than men to prioritise the pastoral side of their ministry.

### **6.5.5 Reactions to Women's Ministry**

The acceptance, or otherwise, of women's priestly ministry depends on how it is received by male colleagues and by those in the pews. Bentley (1999) points out that approximately 2000 women have been ordained as priests since 1994, and that many of these have been successfully integrated into clergy teams and have been warmly welcomed by parishioners. However, Susan Cooper, one of the organisers of WATCH, makes the pertinent observation that, 'However favourable men are to the idea of women priests, if they've been involved in the Church for a long time they have no experience of working with women as equals.' (*Church Times* 23 September 1994). Rev Mary Robins (1996), a priest at St James parish in Piccadilly, records a number of anecdotes revealing the stereotypical expectations of male colleagues who believe

women priests are mainly ex-school mums whose chief function it is to patch up other people's problems. She argues that the attitude of hostile male peers range from control by ridicule, to a misplaced chivalrous attentiveness. The undermining effect of the latter is referred to by one of my respondents:

another friend I can't remember what the actual words were but she'd been she'd preached and she came down from the pulpit and the vicar who's been sitting in one of the other desks behind and who'd got up and then spoke to the con~congregation and made some remark which I suppose he thought was complimentary but it was devastatingly patronising she was *furious*... they've still got this thing about being chivalrous it's all very nice but there's times for chivalry and it's not in front of the congregation

(Appendix IX: 147-54)

When asked in various surveys to evaluate the ways in which women's skills as priests differ from those of their male counterparts, parishioners have done so in largely stereotypical terms. Negative stereotypes include the view of women priests as scheming, manipulative and vain. Among the many trivialising comments was that made by one male respondent who said, 'The effect of our new curate is most noticeable for we have girlish giggles, yes, but no firm direction.' (cited in Wakeman 1996: 11-12). Wakeman also notes that comments about the 'natural weakness' of women's voices have been used as grounds for objecting to their ministry (ibid: 16). In her study of women in the media, Macdonald (1995: 45) argues that, 'Attitudes to male and female voice pitch have...been a peculiarly powerful tool in determining where and when men and women might be granted speaking rights'. Positive reactions are also framed in stereotypical terms. Wakeman (1996: 4) records the comment of one man who was impressed by their 'tremendous sensitivity' which, he claimed, enabled women to enter situations difficult for most men; their 'gentleness' in bereavement work was singled out for special praise. He also re-produced the folklinguistic belief that women are 'better listeners' than male colleagues (ibid).

Lakoff (1995: 28) highlights the potency of non-response as an mechanism of control in discourse, '[it is] annihilating in that it signifies that the speaker does not exist, that the utterance did not happen'. *The Windsor Consultation Document* (September 1995) reveals that women priests have been subjected to various mechanisms of discursive control, including silence, back-turning and the slur of tainting of altars. In relation to the latter, a strategy of outright avoidance is recommended by the organisation REFORM which circulated a 'Good Church Guide', listing churches throughout the country where women priests have not ministered. A few reactions have been extreme, with some women priests having been audibly hissed by members of the congregation (Wakeman 1996: 19), and one priest, Rev Suzanne Fageol, being severely bitten while offering a cup to a communicant (cited in Dowell and Williams 1994: 72). All of these practices have occurred without official censure. Rees is not alone when she expresses her unease about the absence of official monitoring by the Church of the reception of women's ministry, 'a lot of journalists who phone me just can't believe that that wasn't built into the system because you know you start something that big and that new and usually there is someone you know surveying it researching it and just monitoring it in an official way and there's no-one doing that' (Appendix X: 24-28). It was partly to remedy this situation and to provide a support network for women priests that WATCH was set up.

### **6.5.6 Strategies for Overcoming Prejudice**

There is plenty of evidence of those who campaigned for women's ordination engaging in playful and creative uses of language in order to subvert the Church's dominant belief system. Throughout her book, *A New Strength, A New Song*, which records the history of MOW, M. Webster selects for special praise women supporters who mobilised a sense of humour to further their cause (1994: 54; 73; 110; 116; 120). She

suggests that an important function of humour is its cathartic potential; it acted as a safety valve for women's sense of anger and frustration at having been denied the right to fulfil their vocations as priests (ibid: 202). This emphasis on the ability of proponents to exhibit a sense of humour also seems to have been calculated to refute the prevailing view of MOW campaigners as humourless feminists, in the knowledge that charges of humourlessness have often been used to rationalise women's exclusion from male-dominated institutions (Gray 1994: 139).

The belief that humour can be used strategically to counter prejudice has carried over into women's exercise of their priestly ministry. Rev Penny Martin, a vicar of a three parish benefice in Durham, records how she playfully resignifies the 'business agenda' of the priestly fraternity in numerous meetings she has attended as 'gossip' (1996: 80), thereby deftly challenging the stereotypical assumption that women have a monopoly on trivial speech. She also provides examples of occasions when she has used humour to disarm critics, 'Once, twenty-five of us planned a day out...I rapturously announced I had all I needed; a drink of water, a lipstick and a change of earrings' (ibid: 81-82). She claims that this preemptive statement seemed to silence the anxiety of those who felt uncomfortable in her presence. However, as in the case of the vicar of Dibley's use of self-deprecating humour, it is difficult to assess to the extent to which such strategies challenge gender stereotypes, and the extent to which they help to reinforce them. As Cameron (1992: 225) points out, 'Questions of how to express one's ideas in language without being marginalised but also without compromising them are particularly hard, because language is interactive: its effectiveness depends to a large extent on the attitude of the hearer'.

## 6.6 A Creative Dialectic Between Structure and Agency?

As is evident from the previous section, women are not passively positioned in relation to the institutional and societal constraints that operate on them. An important strand in the feminist critique of the church has been a commitment to challenging the power asymmetry of the clergy/lay divide. There is no doubt that the relative insecurity of *some* women priests has led them to appear even more clericalised than male colleagues, but the majority claim to minimise status differences between themselves and lay members of the Church (see 6.5.4). The irony is that, having struggled to achieve powerful subject positions as priests, the majority of women who have been ordained feel obliged to emphasise the egalitarian concept of the 'priesthood of all believers'. In an address to members of WATCH, before the 1998 Lambeth Conference, Penny Jamieson, Bishop of Dunedin in New Zealand, set out the ideal of 'Mutual Ministry' as one that all women priests should actively strive towards. She defines it as, 'a style of leadership that shifts the relationship between the ordained and lay to one of partnership rather than privilege' (*Outlook*, 1998, no 5: 12). However, the ability to realise this goal in practice in the Church of England is, of course, a prerogative of the newly acquired institutional status of women priests. Dowell and Williams (1994: 73) point to independent factors that are likely to facilitate this goal, 'Recession and falling numbers have brought about a decline of the old parochial system...So there is simply no way, even if they wanted to, that women priests can be seen to be buying into the kind of clerical status many people (particularly urban dwellers) associate with the Tory shires'. This illustrates the complex interplay between structure and agency that is often difficult to disentangle, but which, in this instance at least, has helped women priests to put into practice in their everyday relations with those to whom they minister a central tenet of feminist theology.

As in other contemporary institutions, the Church of England has been moving increasingly towards a business model in order to modernise its structures and improve its mode of operation. For instance, an article in *The Times* reports the Church's commitment to using Total Quality Management (TQM) techniques to improve its efficiency (February 1 1996). Medhurst (1999: 289) has referred to the Church's 'preoccupation with managerial structures', resulting in the setting up of the Archbishop's Council to facilitate strong centralised decision-making. As a result, the strategic discourses of bureaucracy and professionalism have for some time been in the process of expanding at the expense of the more communicative discourse of ministry. Women's entry into the priestly ministry has led to a reclamation of the communicative discourse of ministry since, for some of the reasons outlined above, they have come to be identified with collaborative styles of ministry based on the foregrounding of interpersonal goals. The task of reclamation has, in turn, been facilitated by the increasing importance of team ministries and by the growing emphasis on the social and pastoral functions of priesthood as a result of the decline of the welfare state. In this context, male priests are more likely to move in the direction of a stereotypically feminine discursive style than vice versa. This likelihood is reinforced by the fact that the discourse of professionalism is itself changing. According to Baisley (1996: 108), the increasing emphasis on adaptability has led to a new evaluation of the multi-skilled approach she claims women bring to ministry and which was formerly denigrated. Again, rather than being undermined by discursive shifts taking place at the institutional and societal levels of discourse, the goal of promoting a more communicative discourse of ministry, advocated by organisations like MOW, has been facilitated by these shifts.

## 6.7 Conclusions

What I hope to have shown in this chapter is that a question which seeks to establish whether women priests have challenged, or colluded with, the dominant masculinist discursive norms that prevail in the Church of England is too simplistic. What *is* clear is that their language and behaviour is more likely than those of male colleagues to be fractured by competing, and often contradictory, norms and expectations. From the outset, stereotypical assumptions about what their ministry would mean has constrained the subject positions available to women priests, leading some to adopt feminine norms that are at odds with their preferred discursive style. Their officially sanctioned subordinate status within the Church has led others to distance themselves from feminism in the post-ordination period, while nonetheless covertly pursuing feminist goals. The issue of whether these subject positions are compliant or oppositional is contingent upon a number of factors, including the context in which they are assumed and, crucially, upon how they are perceived and evaluated by others, however playful and subversive the 'performance' is *intended* to be. This offers an important corrective to those who emphasise the performative aspect of the theatrical metaphor of identity construction, while downplaying the critical role of the audience. This is particularly important, since, as my study of women priests suggests, such critical judgements are often differently gendered.

It is often assumed that there only two possible relationships between dominant and dominated discourses: either the latter can continue to function oppositionally as a reverse discourse, helping to challenge the legitimacy of the former, or it can simply be incorporated and its subversive power neutralised. However, my research into all four communities of practice investigated in this study reveals that a creative dialectic can exist between institutional structures and the ability of individual agents to subvert and

transform these. In the case of the Church, the acceptance of so-called 'feminine' styles of leadership and discursive practice has been facilitated by independent changes in its structures and social role as an institution. In order to influence the discursive norms that operate in the public sphere, feminists need to identify and exploit the areas of potential convergence that exist between these norms and the independent discursive shifts that are occurring at the institutional and societal orders of discourse. This applies to all four of the communities of practice investigated in detail in this study. In the concluding chapter, I intend to draw out the global implications of all four case studies for feminist linguistic theory and praxis.

### **End Notes**

1. Despite their reputation for conservatism on issues of gender, low church denominations have been much more accepting of women's ministry. For instance, the Congregationalists have had women ministers since 1918, while the English Presbyterian Church ordained its first women ministers in the 1950s. The Church of Scotland followed suit in 1969, as did the Methodist Church in 1974. The first ordinations of women within the Anglican Communion took place in the diocese of Hong Kong in 1971, thereby opening the floodgates for other Provinces to follow. Three Anglican Provinces, New Zealand, Canada and the US, also have women bishops, and in another six provinces, as far apart as Ireland and Burundi, women bishops are canonically possible, although none has yet been elected.
2. One obvious exception to this subordination was the pioneering work women performed as missionaries. The area of missionary work, especially work abroad,

permitted women an unprecedented degree of autonomy and license to teach and instruct the deprived and 'the heathen' (Armstrong 1993: 173).

3. Lehman (1993) derives the criteria for a 'feminine' style of ministry from the research of what he terms 'maximalist' feminists, 'the feminine stance incorporates personal communities, holistic relationships, egalitarianism, empowerment of lay people, democratic decision making, co-operation with nature, open and flexible theology, existential ethics of responsible sharing, and inclusion of women and minorities.' (ibid: 4).
4. In 1995, Dr David Hope, Bishop of London, and a leading opponent of women's ordination, was appointed to the archbishopric of York. He was replaced in the see of London by the Right Rev Richard Chartres, Bishop of Stepney, another vocal opponent of women's ordination.
5. Byrne has since been suspended from her post, having lost the support of her bishop, Neville Chamberlain, despite the fact that a new vestry committee gave her *its* full support. Commenting on Byrne's removal in a recent article in the *Guardian*, a senior church official is quoted as saying, 'This has put the cause of women priests back decades' (13 January 2000).
6. In the US, and to a lesser extent in the UK, this has given rise to a male spiritual backlash. The Promise Keepers, over a million of whose members gathered at a rally in Washington in 1997, is a particularly reactionary organisation committed to creating an environment of 'godly masculinity'. The UK branch is a much smaller grassroots movement which has nonetheless attracted support in a range of towns and cities around the country (*Guardian* 1 November 1997).

The question I set out to answer in this study is whether women's entry into previously male-dominated institutional spaces and organisations has made a difference to the hegemonic discursive norms that prevail in these communities of practice, as well as to the ways in which the identities of, and interpersonal relations between, social actors are constructed. I have argued that, at the very least, the increasing presence of women has called into question the unproblematised status of the implicitly masculinist belief systems, values and discursive practices that predominate in these domains. In some cases, however, this has led to the defensive strengthening of traditional fraternal networks, that are often productively competitive, rather than purely co-operative, in terms of their mode of operation. The fact that these networks often transcend the boundaries of institutional discourses is one factor that has helped to ensure that women do not participate as equals within state institutions and grassroots organisations.

Women have responded by developing counter-networks and, in some instances, by establishing women-only groupings, based on alternative discursive structures and norms. Indeed, I hope to have shown that access to civil and public sphere roles has afforded women new opportunities for self-fashioning and that, rather than simply replicating masculinist interactional norms, the public rhetoric of feminist-identified women in particular is often ideologically creative. This study has demonstrated that even a small number of women can make an impact on dominant discursive norms, if they pursue a 'critical difference' approach, whereas the voices of larger numbers of women can be assimilated, if they choose to adopt a policy of accommodation to pre-existing norms and practices. Whatever strategy they employ, women have to negotiate with the many competing and contradictory expectations that exist about how they

*should* perform occupational roles differently, including those generated by both women themselves, and by the mass media. For instance, on the one hand, they are constructed as problem insiders, with the result that their language and behaviour is more likely than the language and behaviour of male colleagues to be perceived as contradictory and/or at odds with the roles they perform. On the other hand, they are often constructed as agents of much-needed change, which means that they carry an additional burden, over and above that normally associated with the successful fulfilment of a particular occupational role.

This raises a question about how women's empirically attested tendency to shift strategically between masculine and feminine discursive styles should be interpreted. I have argued that, rather than being conscious attempts to disrupt the symbolic meanings attached to the normative gender ideologies that circulate in the public domain, such discursive shifts are often a means of managing socially ascribed expectations that pull in opposite directions. In other words, not all of the performative shifts women engage in are freely chosen, and some are undertaken at considerable personal cost. Likewise, while differences *between* women within a given community of practice undoubtedly arise as a result of the differing negotiations they make with institutionally and socially ascribed expectations, these differences are sometimes exaggerated, or even manufactured, by vested interests. Hence, the media-generated Blair's babe is placed in opposition to her equally caricatured older socialist feminist sister in the Parliamentary Labour Party. This does not do justice to the wide range of subject positions occupied by women in the PLP. Such reductive and divisive stereotypes abound in media coverage of women in the public domain. The power of mediatized public sphere discourse to produce, as well as re-produce, synthetic identities for women is illustrated by the way in which 'Blair's babe' became 'Dewar's

dolly' and 'Michael's moll' as she crossed the border into Scotland and Wales

respectively.

The metadiscursive and material constraints that operate on women in civil and public sphere roles mean that some of the more utopian accounts of the performative theory of gender need to be qualified. Such accounts tend to underestimate the extent to which the process of interpretation is a site of discursive struggle, including struggles over gender. For instance, I have pointed to the metadiscursive gap that often exists between the way women in the public domain intend their speech to be interpreted and the way it is perceived and evaluated by others, especially after it has been recontextualised and framed in media texts. Hence, women who have uncritically embraced professional norms have been accused of mimicking men, a clear illustration of what Montgomery (1999) refers to as the 'performative paradox'. I agree with Montgomery's (ibid) view that linguists therefore need to pay more attention to the criteria by which interpreters evaluate the speech acts of others. Following Montgomery (ibid), I have tried to show how the validity claims of speakers are often judged on the basis of paralinguistic traces and cues, as well as linguistic ones, and that attention also needs to focus on these. Perhaps inevitably, validity criteria such as 'appropriacy' and 'sincerity' are likely to be contested in cross-sex interaction. Following (Cameron 1998: 447), I have argued that what some 'difference' feminists term 'miscommunication' is, in fact, the result of 'strategic misunderstanding'.

The analytical model set out in Chapter 2 of this study is designed to foreground the way in which texts, including media texts, are often riven by competing and contradictory ideologies of gender. This requires a shift away from a focus on the linear ordering of surface textual features to a more dynamic intertextual model for

feminist text analysis that can take account of the complex ways in which texts interact with prior texts and with elements in, or presupposed in, the context of use. In common with a number of other feminist sociolinguists, I have emphasised the centrality of language in constituting social identities and relations, but I have called into question the tendency to assume that other-oriented interaction is invariably collaborative. I hope to have shown that co-operative discursive strategies can exclude, as well as include, others. Likewise, the fact that certain speech acts are intended to be egalitarian does not mean that this is how they will be perceived by addressees.

I have also suggested that the concept of a 'community of practice' needs to be re-examined to take account of the fact that practices that are deemed normative are just as likely to be subject to contestation and change, as consensus. Likewise, it is often necessary to go beyond the norms and constraints that operate *within* given communities of practice to a consideration of those that cut across the boundaries of different communities, including the global beliefs, ideas, assumptions, and so on, that circulate in the wider society. I would argue that media texts offer a rich resource for investigating the latter. Such texts afford access to shared interpretative assumptions and 'patterns of habituation' (Toolan 1996) by which normative gendered identities and relations are disseminated, recycled and, increasingly, contested. I hope to have shown that limited and limiting gendered news frames contribute to the (re)production of expectations and beliefs that constrain the subject positions available to women in the public sphere. Yet, it is the contradictory nature of media coverage that is perhaps most striking. Thus many media producers are critical of overt gender stereotyping, while at the same time contributing to the perception of women's lack of 'fit' with the public sphere roles they occupy, often through their choice of metaphors and the intertexts they draw upon. This has led many women, individually and collectively, to

recognise the value of becoming skilled at media management. However, given the metadiscursive gap alluded to above, even more important are the activities of women's groups which aim to monitor media coverage of women in a systematic way, since media institutions can thereby be rendered more accountable for the often trivialising way in which they report the activities of women in public, and, indeed, in private, life.

I have argued throughout this study for a more socially situated theory of language and gender to account for the constant tension that exists between the freedom of individuals to make choices within discourse and the normative practices that function to limit these choices. For instance, the expectation that women will civilise and/or transform previously male-gendered institutional spaces fails to take account of the many mechanisms by which they are segregated and marginalised within these institutions. In the case of the Church of England in the post-ordination period, the subordinate status of women has been overtly sanctioned, whereas in other institutions and organisations this is achieved by more covert means. Appeals made by others, and sometimes by women themselves, to their putative qualities as good listeners, good communicators and 'fixers' have been used to rationalise their concentration in a narrow range of, usually subordinate, institutional and organisational roles. A central thesis of this study is that, as a result, the traditional gendered division between the private and public spheres has, to some extent at least, been replicated *within* civil and public sphere institutions and organisations. As Pateman (1985) notes, 'it is not that women are absent from the paid workplace; it's rather that they are present differently' (in Fraser 1995: 33).

In terms of the macro-level of discourse, I have argued throughout this study that feminist-identified women have contributed to the novel restructuring of traditional

discursive boundaries. For instance, women formerly active in grassroots politics have exploited the growing trend towards secessionism to secure places for themselves within the new regional assemblies and Scottish Parliament. All the signs, thus far, suggest that women elected to these devolved bodies are using their influence to ensure that grassroots organisations have a much greater say in the process of political decision-making than is true at Westminster. In their own way, women priests have also contributed to the deconstruction of the spheres by minimising the status differences between themselves and members of the laity. Women activists also predominate in new social movements which have helped to enliven the civil sphere as a space where home, work and community all intersect. Women's involvement in these plural sites of political participation make the continuing masculinist 'habitus' that prevails in state institutions less detrimental to the cause of promoting more equitable gender relations in society than might otherwise have been the case. In all of these domains, women have sought the help of the media to publicise their campaigns, but have also exploited new media technologies to bypass the hegemonic power of the media and to challenge media misrepresentation.

It is a moot point as to whether this process of deconstruction is necessarily a good thing from a feminist perspective. Elshtain's (1993) position is typical of those who argue for a reconstruction of the public/private dichotomy, rather than its dissolution. Her initial premise is that there are dangers inherent in the feminist project of seeking to erode the distinction between the public and private spheres since, 'it follows that no differentiated activity or set of institutions that are genuinely political, that are, in fact, the bases of order and of purpose in a political community, exist.' (ibid: 217). This conclusion presupposes an acceptance of what is a narrowly circumscribed definition of the 'genuinely political', a definition that feminist-oriented groups like the NIWC,

MOW and WEN have, by contrast, sought to extend. Elshtain's argument that this strategy is also in danger of assisting a process whereby strategic values colonise the private sphere is once again contradicted by the activities of organisations like WEN. Through active involvement in WEN, women can translate their everyday private sphere activities into the kind of political capital which enables them to resist such colonisation. Yet, there is some evidence that women previously active in social movements like WEN have succumbed to the danger referred to by Cameron of, 'replacing collective politics with an individualized quest for "personal growth".' (1995b: 179). This is by no means an inevitable consequence of a blurring of the boundaries between the spheres, since, as this study illustrates, many more women have kept a clear focus on the *collective* goals of feminism.

A number of feminist theorists (Coward 1999; Young 2000) have called into question the importance of gender as an identity category, given the increasingly heterogeneous and complex nature of most western societies. What I hope to have shown in this study is that gender remains highly salient, not only in terms of the public identities women and men construct for themselves, but also in terms of how they are perceived and judged by others, including by the mass media. By investigating women's participation in a number of different communities of practice in this study,<sup>1</sup> I hope to have shown that women's performance of gendered identities and relations is nonetheless contingent upon the nature of the communities of practice in which they find themselves, as well as upon the degree to which they subscribe to the normative practices that prevail in these communities. The complex negotiations in which they engage cannot be accommodated within a dichotomous theory of language and gender. In practice, many feminist-identified women in institutions and organisations within the public sphere have moved beyond a mere critique of masculinism, a position where

'dominance feminists' tend to stop, to a positive advocacy of more gender inclusive discursive norms. I have characterised this as a 'critical difference' approach to gender. I would argue that this sort of critique of the metadiscursive norms that prevail in communities of practice in the public sphere is a logical extension of feminist verbal hygiene practices that come under the umbrella term of 'political correctness' and that focus primarily on lexical and grammatical features of language. This critique has contributed to a discursive shift, whereby interpersonally-oriented language is increasing its importance within the public sphere at the expense of ideationally-oriented language. However, this increasingly interpersonal orientation in public sphere discourse has not always resulted in promoting empathy between individuals, or in building solidarities between women and/or between women and men. Instead, it often involves competition and conflict, especially in cross-sex interaction, but also in interaction *between* women. And so, a feminist critical discourse analysis needs to be *critical* also of the so-called women-oriented discursive practices that are being promoted in certain public sphere institutions and organisations, since the value attached to these is contingent upon their context of use and on how they are perceived and evaluated by addressees.

### **End Notes**

1. A possible area for further investigation would be to consider the gendered identities and relations that arise in communities of practice in which men are in a minority, such as nursing and primary teaching.

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**Appendix I: Selective Transcription of Interview at Westminster with Right Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP (22<sup>nd</sup> November 1995)**

{Responding to a question about how media producers re-present interview material} I don't~don't erhm *recall* feeling any particular resentment that things I had said were altered and I don't *recall* examples where I felt where I had given an interview and where I felt that interview had unfairly been put together with other things that I had said erhm so  
5 as to dis~distort or misrepresent what I had said erhm however what I think did happen and what I think is evident here but I mean to some extent this is a political thing generally erhm I mean for example in this article by Peter Ridell and Philip Webster erhm there's a lot of I don't know quite how to describe it erhm it's almost a slight patronising tone to it if I can say so erhm [reading from the article] she seems surprised at the suggestion that  
10 she was seen as an apparatchik well that wouldn't surprise me in the slightest I mean erhm you know I'm very conscious of the fact that I have never been seen as a sort of visionary politician I've got opinions about why that happens which are a lot to do with the idleness of the press so you don't either yourself or you don't have people who go around all the time telling them how visionary you are and telling them to pay attention I mean a lot of  
15 the things that other people have said which have been hailed as visionary and forward-looking and which are very erhm right and germane to Britain's problems I mean often they're things I was saying ten years ago but because I don't have I've never had anybody spinning for me erhm I've never cultivated the press erhm and I'm a woman I suspect then nobody ever looks at speeches of mine to see if I have anything to contribute unless they  
20 stumble across them by accident... I can't remember whose article it was in... they either quoted or were making a remark about wasn't I or you know didn't I come across as rather sharp and I'm not disputing this because I probably *do* but I do remember distinctly saying it was an interview with Michael White and maybe Patrick Wintour or Andrew Rawnsley I don't remember erhm tell me is this the quality that in a man is described as  
25 having the a sharp forensic mind<sup>↑</sup> which went down like a lead balloon I must say... [reading from the article] the claim was made that I was the only one to disturb the bland surface of the campaign... by making controversial statements... now actually we were all three extremely careful during the campaign to say nothing whatsoever that was not Party policy...I wouldn't claim that *that* is distinctively how they treat a woman it's  
30 how they chose to treat my candidacy... and there's the sort of thing about referring as I often did to John Smith as if as if that was rather a strange thing to do erhm [reading] she actually portrayed as Mr Smith's heir well it was a simple fact I was Mr Smith's heir however temporarily and also the thing that I thought was extraordinarily gall~I mean my top priority throughout this was to get the Labour Party through a hugely difficult period  
35 with no damage at all if it could be avoided and hopefully to secure for us electoral success in the European elections that we would not have you know that could only have been denied us by John's death I was determined to try and make sure at all costs whatever the cost to my own career that you know the Labour Party did not lose ground and preferably did just as well as we might have done and there was no doubt that erhm the degree to  
40 which people had begun to trust John and then~then realising that to the full because he was no longer there was very much important to us electorally as a potential candidate in the argument that we were a leaderless bunch and how can you vote for a party that couldn't even take over the so I mean that was I thought a bit snide to sort of imply that

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45 there was somehow something erhm in terms of personal advantage I mean certainly I took  
the view that John's and mine had been to a degree a collective leadership ah and that my  
role in that was an important factor in my deciding to stand and it was very much a role~a  
factor in deciding that I could do the job and I would not have stood otherwise I would not  
have been interested in having a job that I didn't think I could do well erhm so to that  
50 extent it was~it was relevant but erhm it was it was more relevant to me than to the others  
because I was the only person whose qual~qualifications for standing were really being  
called into question...the other thing it mentions is wasn't it disappointed not to have been  
nominated by any other member of the Shadow Cabinet of course I had forgotten the and  
as far as I'm aware it wasn't mentioned throughout the contest that Margaret Thatcher  
55 wasn't nominated by any of her Shadow Cabinet colleagues either {Responding to a  
question about whether Thatcher's role as former PM was a help or a hindrance} as often  
it's a mixture I thought at the time that it might have been *something* of a help in that if she  
hadn't been prime minister undoubtedly everyone would have said that a woman can't  
possibly be the leader so therefore there's no need to consider her so it was an *answer* to  
the question that can a woman do this job on the other hand I came more and more to the  
60 view that it was a liability you know oh no we're having another woman {Responding to  
the allegation that Prescott privately referred to her as 'the duchess'} not only was it not  
meant to be a compliment but it was meant to be damaging...that remark about the  
duchess and so on that was meant to get to the Party members not to the public... during  
that particular interview I felt that I was talking at least to one person who was very much  
65 not on my side and I'm sure it would be contested and the argument would be no I'm  
completely impartial but I didn't feel I was in the presence of someone who was there  
impartially to assess either me or my chances... {Responding to a question about her  
attitude towards the issue of gender} I would not have been prepared to stand because  
there ought to be a woman candidate ah I only was prepared to stand because first of all I  
70 had come to the conclusion I could do the job and do it well and secondly because partly  
as a result of all this public reaction that we were getting erhm I began to wonder whether  
this might not be what the public thought we ought to do so as I say the Party ought to have  
that option before them to consider no more erhm but no less erhm and so in that sense  
erhm the issue of standing was completely separate from the issue of gender and I didn't~I  
75 didn't ever want to be trapped into anybody suggesting either thinking it was a good thing  
or a bad thing but of course I had to stand because I was a woman there was a sense in  
which I having said that I'm contradicting I did have to stand because I was a woman  
*having concluded* I could do so erhm and a number of women erhm a number of friends in  
particular whom I greatly respect and whom I would not necessarily have thought would  
80 support my candidacy said if you had not stood you would have let a lot of people down  
it's evident that you could do the job and if you had said oh but I'm just a little woman I  
won't put myself forward that would have been very belittling and I think that was a valid  
judgement but I was *very very* wary of it being suggested that erhm that I had stood even  
though unqualified to do so because I was a woman so in that sense you are quite right I  
85 was very wary of playing the gender card as for erhm John Prescott's anger well I don't  
know whether erhm he was angry or not but I mean really he was on a two-way bet there

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90 erhm yes because I mean he could attack me or or his group could be seen to be saying I ought not to be claiming the support of women because I was a woman erhm and erhm he was just as good a feminist as I was and I~I think really if it~if it is true erhm that he was  
95 angry about it erhm then I think that would as much as anything be because I think it was quite likely that quite a lot of women said to him that he ought not to be standing against a woman the first and only woman candidate for the leadership of the Party so in that sense that was his problem and that was how he dealt with it {Responding to a question about whether she consciously pursued a consensual style of politics} yes I did consciously  
100 pursue~I mean I had a~this goes back to~let me tell you something that I'm not sure is in the public domain... the weekend after John died there had begun to be a huge amount of speculation in the news media about the contest even though we had sought from the beginning to say there would be no contest 'til after the Euro elections erhm and not only was there a lot of speculation a lot of it had begun to be divisively attacking in terms of  
105 different candidates and I saw this and I thought a halt has to be called erhm and who ought to do it and I thought well I'll ring the Chief Whip and get him to ring around and I thought no just a minute yes it could be a job for the Chief Whip but actually it is a job for the leader of the Party to say to people this must stop because it will damage the Party and we'd all agreed we were not going to damage the Party going into the Euro elections erhm because I'm not erhm because I'm very experienced as well as not being stupid I *knew* that the minute I picked up that 'phone and started to ring other members of the Shadow Cabinet and say this to them I would create a backlash a) a genuine backlash of who the hell does she think she is and b) an opportunity for that backlash to be exploited by people who didn't support my candidacy I also knew that it was my duty to the Party to do it so I  
110 rang erh I think every member of the Shadow Cabinet there were one or two I couldn't get hold of... and spoke to them personally and I said to them all erhm you know I know that by doing this I will be arousing some resentment but this has to stop [taps the table once] you know things are being said about who will be candidates erhm things are being said about whether I will run *I have not decided* whether or not I will run I *will not* decide until  
115 the Euro election's over are over erhm and you know nothing is to be assumed about whether I will or will not stand but in the meantime I have decided that whatever the damage to my *own* personal standing and position I must act as the leader of the Party and carr~and carry out my *own* judgement about the things that have to be done in the interests of the Party and I want you as members of the Shadow Cabinet to know *that's what I'm going to do* [tapping the table] erhm and I will live with the consequences no matter what they are but you know I'm not going to sort of behave as if I'm not the leader of the Party erhm you know keep running to everybody else to what to do and so on I'm going to act as the leader and let what happens happen... while I was doing that yes I did very much  
120 consciously pursue a consensual style if you look back at the things that I said from the  
125 very first interview I did after John died I kept saying people said to me erhm you should have encouraged them to postpone the contest until October I thought it would be *hugely* damaging to the Party to have that running all summer... people said to me well you should exploit your position as the leader not just *do it* but consciously exploit it in a way which undermines others I wasn't prepared to do that because I thought the Party had to make its

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130 free choice... from the beginning every time I was interviewed I said no we're not a  
leaderless Party we had a team of twenty-two and now we have a team of twenty-one... in  
a sense if you like you could say I deliberately chose to emphasise the powers of others at  
my own expense at no point did I seek to say *only I* can do this I said there are eight-ten  
135 more who could do this job among whom I hope I am one I believe I am one... so in that  
sense it was a *very very* conscious decision to be consensual I hope I would have done it  
anyway because that is part of the way I approach things {Responding to whether she  
believes there is a fraternity comprising male media managers in the Party and male media  
men} yes I think so I'm sorry to say it but yes I think that is true erhm although having said  
that some of the most unpleasant and bitchy things that were written about me were  
140 wo~written by the women mostly by women I had never met by the way... you're either  
not taken seriously or if you are taken seriously then that's deeply boring {Responding to a  
question about whether the media tend to depict women as humourless} yes I think it is  
true erhm although partly to be completely fair I think it may be in my case I tend not to  
mix with the press much socially and erhm although there are journalists with whom I am  
145 sufficiently at ease erhm to make what I hope will be somewhat amusing remarks mind  
you having said that often it's erhm described as my waspish remarks waspish not witty  
{Responding to a question regarding the link between gender and the assignment of  
portfolios} I think that is right and in fact I~I think it's *very difficult* to know how to  
handle it I mean erhm when I first got into the Shadow Cabinet everyone thought I was  
150 going to be ah Shadow Secretary of State for Social Security including me erhm because  
I'd been doing that job (indecipher) erhm and it didn't happen and there's no doubt erhm but  
whe~when everybody thought it was going to happen during the day a number of  
journalists said to me erhm oh well of course you'll obviously get Social Security because  
of course that's a woman's job isn't it<sup>↑</sup> so we do have to try and reclaim that ground  
155 because no-one says it's a woman's job now but they would the minute a woman was  
appointed to it erhm on the other hand certainly I have always wanted to specialise more  
on the industry economy side because that's where my personal interests lie I'm not  
interested in health I mean everybody must be but erh so you know in that sense that would  
have been my preference but I did~I did think that I probably never would be offered it  
160 because I thought that erhm that nobody would ever think of my name at the point when  
they were try~when there was a sort of a need to appoint someone to Trade and Industry  
and people weren't sure who to appoint and it was being discussed I always thought that  
my name would never have come up because I'm a woman so in that sense it's a surprise  
but an encouragement... {Responding to a question about the idea that she should have  
165 been content with the deputy leader's role} it had been said repeatedly that I'd been really  
very stupid to bring forward the contest for the deputy leadership because if I hadn't done  
so I could have held on to the Deputy Leadership at least until after the General Election as  
if kind of you know my fin~fingers might have to be prised from this from what was also  
by the same people being described in rather contemptuous terms as this sort of non-job  
170 erhm but you know if I really wanted to I could be allowed to hang on to it at least until  
after the Election and then of course I would have to make way for some really qualified  
candidate or whatever but the whole implication was very belittling and clearly intended to

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175 be so but that belittling was about saying this is not a leader {Responding to a question  
about the Anthony Bevens interview with her about her CND membership} of course the  
answer I gave is the answer that Neil Kinnock always gave no prime minister will answer  
such a question {Responding to a question about whether things had improved for women  
during her time as a parliamentarian} oh yes it's improved a huge amount erhm and I often  
180 tell the story which is a sort of joke that when Virginia Bottomley took her seat if you  
come in at a by-election you are sponsored by two members and one of them was her  
husband as they came forward to the chair to take the oath one of my male parliamentary  
colleagues who was sitting behind me shouted out who's looking after the children and the  
one sitting the other male colleague sitting next to him *immediately* turned to me and said  
[delivered in a stagey surprised voice] it was him it wasn't me it wasn't me and I hadn't  
185 opened my mouth I hadn't said a word I hadn't even twitched but what I-I thought was  
evidence of a real cultural change was that five years before that neither of them would  
have thought there was anything out of the way in saying so erhm but immediately it was a  
sort of jokey reaction but it very much was a reaction of you know he shouldn't have said  
that erhm... we have got a lot of excellent women candidates and that will very *much*  
190 change the culture in the House of Commons so yes I think it has changed it's enormously  
easier but that doesn't mean the barriers are not still there in some ways {Responding to a  
question about whether women's voices are a handicap in the Chamber} ah I think  
volume can be a problem at the despatch box but funnily enough the televising of  
Parliament I think in one sense has made that easier because erhm you can drown  
195 somebody out in the Chamber of the House of Commons but you can't drown them out for  
the viewer so if somebody is prepared to keep going because you know they always just  
turn the volume up erhm so your message can get across to the country even if somebody  
is trying to make it more difficult for you to try to get it across in the House of Commons  
that's actually a very profound change and it's a change that is of benefit to women  
because it's not so easy to drown women out... candidates get more training now erhm and  
200 this is partly why our '92 intake are excellent it isn't only that they are very good they've  
also had more training than any group of candidates in the Labour Party's history erhm but  
there's a sense in which... there's a limit to how much you can prepare it's down to doing  
it {Responding to a question about whether in retrospect she felt media coverage made an  
impact on her campaign} I think the media coverage had an *enormous* impact for Tony  
205 erhm and in that sense there is no doubt at all in my mind that the media coverage had a  
great impact and I think that perhaps that the lack of media coverage of me may have  
made something of an impact in that let me give you one example erhm and it's one of a  
number erhm but when we went to Normandy ah for the D-Day commemorations I was  
literally mobbed in the cemetery in Bayeux by D-Day veterans ah and that's not only my  
210 description because my Shadow Cabinet colleague who was with me came back and told  
the Shadow Cabinet that it was never reported erhm and in fact a Tory who was with us  
Tom King happened to mention *en passant* to one of my other colleagues about ten days or  
two weeks later now I didn't take all of that for me a lot of it was that I was Leader of the  
Labour Party and I was there but the fact is that it happened and it was never reported in  
215 any way shape or form and I mean I'm saying to you that was part of the thing it was

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before I announced my candidacy it was part of the~of the of seeing that there were there were elements of the public who did seem to be responding to me but that was never reported to the Party now it probably wouldn't have made any difference but it wasn't an element that they were able to take into account because nobody ever said it nobody ever said it nobody ever showed it... I was in Corfu representing the Labour Party at a meeting of socialist and social democrat leaders including prime ministers erhm and leaders of their government negotiating *successfully* erhm eh an agreed package to get the leadership of the party of European socialists the majority party in the European Parliament for a British MEP and what was in the British newspapers was a story about my husband's first marriage which was sixteen years old and that precisely coincided with my acting on behalf of the Party at ah in effect a summit of leaders of socialist and socialist democratic parties erhm which I suspect was not wholly an accident eh so I got no coverage at all for what we were doing in Corfu... we took a very deliberate decision my husband and I that we would not pursue it in any way we wouldn't attempt to counter it or whatever but I'm quite sure that even if only for an excuse for not voting for me it was something that was intended to be damaging and it was damaging because the perception was we were the people who had skeletons in our closet and nobody else had and that was intended to be the perception {Responding to a question about the damaging coverage of her part in the OMOV debate} the only thing that I~about which I have some continuing resentment and always will have was the attempt in the news media to portray me as having been disloyal I resented that deeply and I thought it was quite disgraceful erhm and the and the excuse for that was the fact that John and I had not seen eye-to-eye over OMOV although in fact I had loyally defended the position he adopted to the best of my ability... {Responding to a general question about coverage of women politicians} I did Social Security for five years it's a *huge* amount of work but you never get any press coverage for it very very difficult to get press coverage but during that period certainly towards the latter end of that period when I'd been in the job for a while in the House of Commons I felt and people continually told me that I had built up a reputation now there have been other people who have done that job in the past for whom that reputation had from time-to-time filtered into the public domain they were seen to be an expert they were seen to be good they were reported in that way most of the time I did that job I don't think I was really reported at all and it was never it was never put as part of my public persona that I had built up this reputation... and the same thing when I was Shadow Chief Secretary erhm the same remarks would be made to me privately but none of that ever came through in what the Lobby ever wrote about me it is just starting to come through now occasionally erhm but I've been here off and on for twenty years and it's just starting now sometimes to be written that I'm a serious politician but most of the time if they write about the heavy weight Labour politicians today you'll notice it's a list of men's names I don't contest any of the men's names but there are no women and it's not and funnily enough although its seen as so backward that's it's not like that in the House itself to the same degree it is within the media that's it's much more the perception erhm and as I say it also goes back then to this thing about erhm you know do you release your speeches does somebody go round and say you know this person is going to make a very exciting speech and of course

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260 they're a visionary politician you know and then they all loyally write down this person's a  
visionary politician... because I knew I was seen as a bit of an apparatchik who did all the  
dull jobs etcetera erhm I deliberately set out to try to put a bit of a of a new analysis and  
spin on the political debate and this argument about the politics of despair and so on erhm  
which was actually a theme I had been pursuing for a very long I'd been pursuing this for  
265 ten years *minimum* erhm erhm and talking about erhm the undermining of the welfare  
state... it was a bit different it was a bit new erhm it was the only thing that *was* frankly {a  
number of off-the-record comments follow}

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{Responding to a question about why she had gone into politics} erhm I suppose for the usual reasons that I wanted to change the world that's what one always sets out to do in politics I was kind of involved in a lot of politics which weren't party politics when I was at school and then when I went to university I decided that a lot of the things that I felt  
5 needed tackling erhm were things that the Labour Party were *saying* it wanted to do something about so I was drawn to the Labour Party at University so I joined and then became very active in *international* affairs for the College we had a very *big* number of students from overseas at a time when there were huge issues about emerging nations in Africa and looking at the whole liberation stu~struggles in Africa and so that is really were  
10 most of my politics were based which was very much in international issues rather than home politics erhm and that went on for some years erhm and I wasn't particularly active in the Party except as most people are who join up first of all which was at times of election I didn't play a great part other than working at election times being a Party member erhm and involving myself in all of these international issues I was always  
15 involved in anti-apartheid and causes of that kind especially human rights' issues {Responding to a question about whether she recalls her selection process} yes I certainly do erhm what I did was for a long time I resisted any idea that I would become a full-time politician erhm I'd spent what twenty-odd years of my life I suppose having left science where I was originally where my career originally started erhm to work with people in all  
20 kinds of agencies where I suppose I was looking to try to provide some kind of assistance and advocacy mainly for poor people you know unemployed people and homeless people I worked for Shelter at one time I did a lot of jobs that provided direct assistance to people who were disadvantaged erhm and ultimately I began to think that I was helping over and over again thousands of people who if we were able to change the government if we were  
25 able to change the policies then people might not need the kind of help I was providing under the many agencies that I worked for so that led me to think that political change is the key and that I'd need to be in government I'd need to be in Parliament that's where I can make the most change having had twenty-odd years of experience of working at the grassroots erhm and I was coming to that conclusion but not very focused when my own  
30 constituency party which was in Newbury at that time in Berkshire needed a new parliamentary candidate I was the Chair of the constituency party at the time and because we were rural Berkshire and because the Labour Party had not~had no hope whatever of winning the seat erhm very few people came forward to be the candidate ah so ultimately people kept saying why don't you stand<sup>↑</sup> and I thought well why not<sup>↑</sup> why not I'm doing  
35 all his work in the locality it doesn't make much odds it's quite easy so erhm to cut a long story short I entered into the contest and I was selected but I was being selected by people who had very little choice of candidates where everybody knew me I was the only person on the spot so that selection was very very easy very straightforward erhm and eh and frankly it was not typical it was only typical of trying to get an opportunity to fight what  
40 was a totally hopeless seat an experience that many women have erhm and the only surprise at the end of it obviously I was terribly nervous because I thought this is really important even if it is totally unwinnable you know parliamentary candidates are you know quite big thing to do but I was pretty conventional and pretty conventionally dressed and

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45 all the rest of it it was a Party that was not erhm peopled by eh fashion gurus or anything of  
that nature it was very ordinary people in Newbury the only surprise was after the selection  
when I had been selected a woman who was a very ordinary woman herself came up to me  
and said will you be getting a new wardrobe now<sup>↑</sup> [laughing] I was *absolutely amazed* and  
I kind of looked at her and thought goodness me I thought I was quite well turned out erhm  
and that was my only surprise but I remember it that was 1976 I remember it to this day  
50 because I just thought it was so *extraordinary* and so you know it seemed completely out  
of character for the woman herself she wasn't being snide or nasty she just thought  
[laughing] you're a public figure now you know in rural Berkshire but I just remember  
that and I say that to you because I think it's quite instructive that you know people have  
this kind of idea and the Labour Party has been so much criticised in recent years for trying  
55 to erhm go with that you know the fact that people do you know your public image is  
important there you are in rural Berkshire that long ago for someone who was quite  
conventional and quite a conventionally dressed woman and quite well turned-out and that  
was the comment the *only* comment that was made to me after the selection that was of  
any kind of significance so that was my first selection but as I say not typical the real  
60 selection the selection that led to my erhm becoming an MP erhm was like the third real  
attempt albeit that they happened in close con~con~in close sequence and the '83 Election  
I chose not to stand I had *many* invitations to be a candidate but I didn't take any of them  
up didn't enter any contest come '86 when I knew there'd be an election I did enter first of  
all I entered into a contest in my home town in South Wales which was Leo (unclear) was  
65 retiring and I hadn't lived there obviously for years but I had lots of contacts people  
wanting me to stand a certain group of people wanted me to stand so I entered into a  
contest and that again is typical this is much more typical first of all *incredibly* hard I was  
having to travel from London to South Wales for meeting after meeting after meeting it  
cost a lot of money very difficult to do lots of time erhm very nerve-wracking and at the  
70 end of it it was under the old system which doesn't exist now of nominations where the  
nominations counted much more than individual members but the leading man had twenty  
two nominations I had eighteen nominations and I did indeed come to be the runner-up to  
Paul Murphy who got elected as the MP he was already the Secretary of the Constituency  
Party and very much the favourite son and proved to an excellent MP so I've no quarrel  
75 with Paul but that was it was a very typical one where most of the people making the  
selection were *men* it was very heavily erhm and there was some erhm adverse comment  
about me put out into the local newspapers *by men* erhm you know about kind of who was  
this woman you know kind of you know she isn't wanted here that sort of thing erhm so  
my taste of a *really tough* contest with a lot of difficulties and one which again for a lot of  
80 women would have been extremely difficult not least just the financial thing because you  
know to be able to fund yourself to travel those kind of distances at any time at the drop of  
a hat ah is is problematic and my third experience was even *more extraordinary* selection  
in Deptford was selection to a Constituency Party that had been suspended for two years  
because of malpractice [laughs] so it was incredibly controversial a very safe seat and  
85 there was the bitterest of contests but clearly a safe seat erhm it took eight months the  
selection process took eight months *constant* meetings *very very difficult* erhm very

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demoralising at times and at the end of it I was selected after a five hour selection process  
erhm by about eight votes I think and I remember that very much because some people  
who were completely opposed to me came up to me afterwards and said you'll never stand  
90 here again [laughs] so ah you know you have to be *really tough* erhm and most of the  
women who go into politics may not start out really tough but *my goodness* when you've  
gone through those processes you know you've been up against things that can be tougher  
than when you stand up and face the electorate {Responding to a question about initial  
impressions of working in the House of Commons} well I went on record when I first  
95 came here it was published in the House magazine and I got a lot of stick for it saying that  
the House is the least friendly place I'd ever worked erhm I hold~held then it was the least  
friendly that's how it *felt* to me that was the genuine and you know I was a person who was  
pretty good at social contact I mean I could make contact pretty easily I mean I wasn't a  
shrinking violet or anything but I did find it unfriendly and that really was because  
100 suddenly here you are ah one Party thinking you're coming to be a lot of people working  
together for a common good what *all* Labour politicians find and this is true even today is  
that you come and you find yourself in an incredibly competitive atmosphere and the  
competition is amongst your own peers on your own side but the competition is about  
proving you know yourself doing well being noticed erhm you know all of ah and you  
105 know that is a hell of a a shock because you expect to come and being e~em~embraced by  
a political party where you're all working for the same cause and particularly being in  
Opposition I think there is far less to coalesce around and much more to compete about  
erhm as as coming into opposition so I did find it a very unfriendly place erhm I also found  
it the most disorganised the worst run place I had ever worked in the most badly run  
110 institution I had *ever ever* encountered and I had run operations of my own where I had  
been entirely in charge of budgets and premises and fleets of cars and all the rest of it I  
couldn't *believe* the way this place was organised it's improved over the years but I still  
think that in terms of its sort of atmospherics if I can put it that way I~I coined the phrase  
[laughs] it's em which I use in speeches and things which is a cross between a public you  
115 know a boy~a boys' public school and a gentlemen's private club the atmospherics are still  
there a great deal of change is coming about and there's a there's a significant change in  
the atmosphere because of the larger numbers of women but the in it's in it's heart still the  
House has got that kind of musty hinterland of the gentlemen's club {Responding to a  
question about her experience of either overt or covert sexism} *oh* I mean it when we were  
120 first here it was overt erhm I was speaking once in an army debate eh talking about strip  
searching and one of the Tory men said I'd like to strip search *you* and this was said eh  
[nervous laughter] (indeciph) and Teresa Gorman has gone on record as you know erhm  
giving many many examples of really *outrageous* remarks of that kind which have been  
made to Teresa by her own side erhm the sexism amongst Labour men erhm is far less  
125 overt but there but the House of Commons and the parliamentary parties are a reflection of  
society so you'd expect it to be there I think what you wouldn't expect is the kind of  
remark that I've just erhm you know erhm told you which was said to me and some of the  
things that were said to Teresa because they are said essentially publicly because they are  
said in the Chamber in everybody's hearing erhm and you know that sort of thing is just

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130 utterly outrageous and that I have to say would not be allowed today there are still some of  
the new women MPs tell me there are still you know pretty ugly remarks being made but  
they're not being made loudly enough to be detected so in that sense there is far  
less ah kind of permission there nowadays f~for anybody to make these remarks and they  
will be quite *readily* stamped upon you know by women and by men erhm but the sexism  
135 in in more subtle ways is still there erhm and certainly when I get up to speak in the House  
as Minister for Women eh you know the Opposition benches often are rocked by loud  
guffaws which is about you know a women's agenda is is not seen to be politically serious  
so that there's that kind of sexism which is goes wider than the individual but is about  
women you know and and the fact that there there is something schoolboy~there's a  
140 schoolboy giggle that goes up about a women's agenda ah so we're constantly having to  
you know cope with that erhm but again I just have to say that whereas it's it's worthy of  
comment because it's unacceptable equally the vast majority of women MPs well I think  
probably all the women MPs can take it I mean you know we often say that it~we speak  
about it because it's unacceptable but nobody should think it's 'cos it makes us you know  
145 that we go off weeping about it you know it's not that in any sense you know the women  
MPs can give as good as they get {Responding to a question about whether parliamentary  
structures have become more woman-friendly} well the Women's Unit doesn't actually  
have any role in this because what we're talking about here are the procedures of the  
House erhm which are governed by in various ways but they're not government itself does  
150 not govern the procedures of the House erhm there is a Modernisation Committee which  
has been set up by Ann Taylor eh in my own view sadly the progress it's making is far too  
slow eh there is modernisation is going on there are significant changes about the ways  
that legislation is going to be handled so they've just started to make some changes so this  
in time could make it easier to cope with major legislation in a more erhm programmatic  
155 way so that we could get the hours sorted out but em we just had a a questionnaire about  
voting procedures and by all accounts eh at least half the people are content with the  
situation that we have which is extraordinary because it's completely out of line there's no  
other parliament in the world that actually behaves in the arcane way that we do so I don't  
know what happens to people I think somehow people get sucked into a culture when they  
160 come here far fewer women get sucked into the culture erhm you know perhaps Margaret  
Thatcher Ann Widdecombe are *very much* in the culture of the House but the majority of  
the Labour women actually are not and the majority of Labour women *want* change and  
are campaigning always for change but we are a very very long way from having a  
parliament that looks at all like the modern parliaments of the rest of the world particularly  
165 in terms of working hours so that some of the change that is happening is going to be good  
procedural change it'll make for better government but not at the moment much change  
that is making it a more woman or indeed man-friendly or family-friendly working  
institution I have great hopes you know that the developments that are happening in the  
Welsh Assembly and in the Scottish Parliament will actually demonstrate that there can be  
170 a completely new way forward and I think when we have a model of something that looks~  
feels~is very very different I'm hoping that will encourage people somehow to see how  
backward we look by comparison but there's so little challenge and there are lots of vested

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interests {Responding to a question about whether she thinks women have a different rhetorical style than male colleagues} yes I do but you have to be very confident to  
175 maintain your natural style and not to adopt a parliamentary style because again all the plaudits even to the extent of all the awards you know there are these parliamentary awards which I actually know very little about but I know they exist but there's always been an und~a sort of sense that you need to be a great orator that you need to be  
180 parliamentary in your speaking tone and and content and and of course there are some great speakers fewer now than ever before erhm but and then there are people who have~ are not perhaps in the tradition of the great orators of the past but are nonetheless intellectually very kind of striking and very entertaining and can~can hold people's attention of which Robin Cook for example is a very very good example you know a superb intellect very witty very engaging speaker in the Chamber now Robin and virtually  
185 everyone else I can think of they have a style which is male and is not easily emulated it's not easily done by anybody let alone by~by women but I think for a lot of women erhm there is~it would be hard to do that and to do it well but a lot of women in the past certainly and I would count myself among~amongst them have not had the confidence to feel that we could make our own style erhm 'cos we see that as the sort of benchmark we want to try to you know to do things in the way that they've always been done and what's  
190 happened and this is the significance of the large intake of Labour women is that because of the much larger numbers they've been able to be themselves *much more* than we were in that you know eleven years ago when I see them speaking I see that they bring the women's perspective in in a much clearer way and when you see a lot of them speaking in  
195 any one~one debate you'll hear that there are some themes there that are there because they are women and they don't have to make any apology for that and nor should they I think there is a new voice being heard I don't think perhaps it's not being reflected in the media the media is not treating them in a serious way and is not hearing these messages and analysing them I'm confident that they are there and I think there's a sense from  
200 wa~from watching television that there's a sense that it is a bit different {Responding to Beckett's claim that the televising of Parliament has proved advantageous to women} that's right and I think the you know all those sort of clever sort of constructions in the parliamentary phrases that depend on parliamentary timing and all the rest of it which is a *performance* art erhm that that comes across very well on the radio and is very much a  
205 heard thing whereas as you rightly say with the women the women both in in what they say but also *how* they say it and the degree of I think a lot of a lot of people can see that when the women get up the kind of commitment they have to their politics and the fact that it is a human face and I think that is something that television can convey and so I~my guess is and what we do know as far as I can tell anyway women MPs are popular with the public  
210 {Responding to a question about the perception of women as humourless} [laughs] it's dire it's dire it's never funny it's never funny that's right... I'm no good at jokes I'm absolutely no good at jokes and although I hate to say that ah women are not equal to men what I would say is that women are different from men and I do think you know I do think this is one of the differences I think that women are~find it more difficult to use humour in  
215 terms of performance art I think it's true... but that it quite different from having a sense of

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humour being able to laugh at other people either jokes or to engage and to laugh at yourself I do think that women are *perfectly* capable sometimes more capable than men of laughing at themselves and having a sense of humour is about being able to recognise when something's funny not necessarily telling the joke yourself erhm and eh I don't find it at all difficult if the other side is hooting with laughter then I don't find it at all difficult to respond to that... if there are other members who lack a sense of humour then there are just as many men I don't think *that* is a significant difference it's the use of humour {Responding to a question about whether women MPs communicate differently on an interpersonal level} well I think there are different kinds of people and the majority of women fall into the one category and that is the more concerned and committed politician who sees being in politics as very much engaging with ordinary people in their ordinary lives as opposed to being a creature apart though there are plenty of men who also fall into that category but there are some significant numbers of men who I think don't get all that close to their constituents they may do surgeries but they may not have a great sense of feeling that their lives wrap round their constituents an awful lot of the women do and some of them work themselves into the ground as a consequence ah but there is a slight difference in attitude and if it's also because women have to be so much more engaged locally to become in a position to become selected so a lot of a lot of reasons for that erhm women tend to be more co-operative and wanting to work in more co-operative ways less competitive ways and that is where they are of course accused of being too compliant erhm but it's about women are more likely to want to work as a team {Responding to a question about media coverage of women MPs} what makes me cro~exc~exceedingly angry is things that are not necessarily personal to me but the way they kind of tar us all with the same brush you know we're all rich self-seeking lazies you know erhm hands-in-the-till you know all those kind of corrupt images and the sense in which politicians are rubbished that makes me extremely angry 'cos I know how hard people work the commitment they have erhm you know how good their motivations are in general {Responding to a question about whether she considers herself to be a feminist} yes yes oh absolutely and also for the ten ten~eleven years I've been here things have changed ... the group of women I came in with erhm was a lot of us would have said yes we are feminists and we made certain decisions we worked on them we did try modernisation we did get lots of things done... but things like how we were labelled by the House authorities because we were all put down as Mrs you know if we were married and things like that and we had our titles a group of us had our titles taken off the order papers altogether we'll be known as you know first name and second name you know it~it should be clear I want to be called Joan Ruddock that's my *name* that's what I want to be called little things like that that we all did that probably others would not have know about or noticed but we made small in lots and lots of places so these things are not issues any more they're not any more and ah there has been progress {Responding to a question about whether there has been resistance to the mainstreaming initiative promoted by the Women's Unit} {it's} been agreed all round Government as the way forward when it come to implementing it at the level of the individual official *of course* there will be difficulties... and it will take years to embed this process in government it requires a huge culture change but the political will you know

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260 coming from the top coming from the Prime Minister and the Cabinet that is what counts  
you can't start a process of this kind unless you've got that consent around the cabinet  
that's we've got and that's what's really important it's the way I suggest that the Ministers  
for Women could work themselves out of a job... {Responding to a question about  
resistance from the new intake of women Labour MPs to the Women's Unit} what I would  
265 say to that is that em I don't expect women MPs to be particularly eh eh committed or  
expressing themselves as being there to tackle women's issues I personally am against I  
don't label us as Ministers as working on women's issues 'cos I think women's issues *per se*  
are gynaecological and that what we bring and what the Ministers for Women bring to  
Government is a women's perspective and it's about delivering for women ah and the  
270 women MPs by and large see that as part of their agenda so it's not a case that it's the only  
agenda they've got but for most of them it is a conscious part of the agenda because they  
know and understand obviously that women are you know are not receiving equal  
treatment at all levels of society government or anywhere else so they are there as women  
MPs there are a few a few women who will say I do not see myself as a *woman* member of  
parliament I see myself as a member of parliament but those are actually in my experience  
275 the minority most you know say I am a woman member of parliament and a lot of us feel  
and I feel this very strongly I know Harriet does we feel a *very very* strong loyalty to other  
women that *we* have made it we must help oth~other women and so we must give others  
our support... there's a sort of way that women MPs look out for each other they're aware  
what happening in each other's personal lives for example erhm we've had some very  
280 difficult situations already occurring to women and there's a you know there's quite a lot  
of women who will watch out for another woman even if they don't know her *well* erhm  
and you know if something's happening they'll make contact eh Harriet herself is one of  
the people who encouraged me to get selected for the seat that I have at the moment she  
wrote me a note I hardly knew her she wrote me a note saying go for it go for it you know  
285 and ah so in those ways there are *lots and lots* of ways in which there is a kind of loose  
network of concerned individuals who focus on other women and making sure that we  
help one another {Responding to a question about the most important challenges ahead for  
the Unit} we've adopted six priorities which are childcare family-friendly employment  
action on violence against women mainstreaming... continuing dialogue with women and  
290 the representation of women which is about making sure we get public appointments for  
example fifty-fifty women and men... the childcare strategy you know for the first time this  
is the first and biggest achievement to date {Responding to a question about whether the  
strategy of getting women back into work has been divisive amongst women} I thin~I  
think it is very much acknowledged that we could've we could've presented our ideas on  
295 the change erhm in in a much more in a much more comprehensive we probably could've  
given much more explanation of what lay behind our thinking and what plans we have to  
do lots of additional things in the future and how these are all going to come together and  
stress from the outset that we were looking to give women opportunities not to compel  
300 them we never *did* compel we never intended to compel and we *do not* compel we wanted  
to bring opportunities and we were recognising that women's lives have changed that most  
women want to combine family life with paid work and we were recognising and I know

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305 this well from my own constituency as does Harriet that amongst lone mothers there is a strong motivation often to get into work but no *opportunity* to get into work and so it's like almost we didn't explain sufficiently well eh the background the extent to which we had been listening to women the extent to which we had we felt we understood and knew women wanted erhm and so we came in perhaps without sufficient background explanation then we immediately got a)backlash and b)misrepresentation and even today people are still going on about the fact that we're compelling women to go into work when there is no compulsion in the programmes where they are entirely voluntary and people  
310 keep talking about snatching babies from their mothers' breasts when the voluntary programme that we instituted only in a pilot programme *only* actually went out to women whose youngest child was already at school so there's no *question* of trying to take women away from their babies so there was a great deal of misrepresentation misunderstanding people got on a bandwagon you know and tried to kind of hit us over the head with things  
315 which we were not actually doing and it was on the basis of one change which was instituting the changes in th~the~the child benefit which brought the lone parent in line with couple families erhm and I still actually I do hold that we *do* have to focus on the poverty of the children we have many many children living in dire poverty in two person households both of whom are out of work so I think we've learnt that presentation... I  
320 don't think that any of us feel tha~that the changes we've made eh in themselves are wrong or will prove to be wrong in fact we've we've created the potential for much greater change into the future working families' tax credit with child car~credit with tax credits built in for the first time ever that will actually make for a *much better* economic situation for women and a recognition of where women's lives are going to go and frankly with  
325 sadly the break-down in modern marriage you know we *have to see* women and their need very very clearly in this light because women's economic status depends on the opportunity to work the opportunity to provide for a pension the opportunity to provide for children if you become a lone mother the Government needed to recognise the reality of women's lives no government had been doing that

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...we got organized in April '96 and of course the window of opportunity was there for us to umm compete in the elections which would bring us to the negotiating table and we didn't want a women's movement to miss this opportunity because we were aware of what had happened in other conflicts in in other countries where women have been extremely active at the informal level and grass-roots level and then when the big decision making comes to sit down at the table the men say well good on you women for making sure that you know we didn't have an all-out~all-out war but now it's the time for us to sit down and resolve it so you just go back into your communities and there was that level of patronism umm that attitude that erhm women weren't the real players on the political scene and that of course that was reflected in mainstream politics because there were no women MPs and no women MEPs and we said right umm when we heard the Government were going to bring ten parties to the table mainly because they wanted the loyalist parties to be involved then we figured that we could be amongst the first ten if we could get well organised and brought all the networks of women together so we called a number of preliminary meetings and at that stage the press got interested and particularly when we announced that we were going to stand and so we had a *lot* of Press coverage so we were literally thrown in at the deep end and all~suddenly the international world was interested that this women's party were standing for elections and we'd chosen the suffragette colours the green white and purple which was~gave women the vote the green the white and the violet the amusing thing about that is that everybody thought the colours stood for peace and strength [mutual laughter] and all the rest of it and umm we try to connect with history and the women who've gone before us to try and kind of imbue ourselves with some of that spirit and eh we eh some of us had a lot of experience in dealing with the press eh so it wasn't that daunting but it was daunting to turn up at just an ordinary meeting and discover there were loads of cameras at the back and when you were trying to do work as well so we had to make strategic decisions about when the press would be involved and when they wouldn't because it was off-putting for new women who were coming in and who hadn't found their voice and wanted to speak so eh but umm we knew from day one that the press had to be on our side and~the we had to get coverage because no-one would have known who we were and that therefore we needed as much coverage and we worked *extremely* hard at getting press coverage and of course the press loved it because we were a different story everything else with the election was quite boring and so~but we were worried about being ghettoised into only being able to speak about the lack of women in politics but the reason why *we* were standing was also because we'd serious things to say in terms of addressing the constitutional issues and we wanted to be taken seriously in terms of our views on how we felt that we could arrive at an honourable accommodation if the process was right and the process included players who'd never been at the table before combatants and ex-combatants as well as constitutional parties international chairpersons and two gov~governments so we felt that if the ingredients came together then we could facilitate that process as well as be negotiators of that process we are very process-focused and it was the process we kept addressing all of the time and told people to stop addressing the outcomes 'cos everyone was addressing their *own* outcomes and hadn't thought through if they were only going to do that they weren't ever going to achieve an agreement and whereas we address the process of how we could arrive

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45 at eh reconciliation of our differences umm and eh there *was* quite a lot of sexist  
commentary umm and luckily we were a good strong mixture of women we were cross-  
community women because we would have got criticised had we just been umm seen as  
the very articulate elite highly educated women but because we had very very strong  
50 working-class women who were *long* identified with erhm as potential leaders in the in  
Northern Ireland and in Protestant communities in particular because that's what Catholic  
communities are associated with is women's struggles women's rights civil rights  
women's rights human rights but not so much with the Protestant community and therefore  
it was very important that we had these key figures in the Protestant community who were  
identified as being anti-sectarian and having also worked on poverty issues and  
55 community issues and held~and *were held* in a great deal of respect so May Blood was  
very central from the Shankill community to all of that erhmm and the view was initially  
that she and I would share this dream ticket erhm 'cos I came from a rural background and  
she was from an urban background a trade union woman I was a university teacher  
etcetera and I taught women's studies she'd worked you know on the ground I'd been  
60 involved with domestic violence for twenty years she'd been involved in well in fact both  
of us had met in the trade union movement so there was also a good working relationship  
but May had to pull out because she was intimidated her car was destroyed and she was  
told you know in the community that she lived in that because there was a fear she would  
attract so many votes votes away from some of the Loyalist parties that were standing and  
65 she obviously for her own safety she had to stand down so Pearl Sagar was chosen and  
again working-class inner-city background in the Loyalist community so again we were  
*always* alert to the fact that if we became identified too strongly with one community or  
one class group or one occupational group or one geographical setting then we wouldn't  
be speaking to people as being a truly inclusionary organization and so we tested ourselves  
70 all the time to be as inclusive as possible and that was quite difficult 'cos there were many  
who didn't want to see themselves any longer as an actual Ulster unionist and we had to  
make the point it didn't matter it was how others saw them umm and the geographical  
spread was very important to us so within the first six weeks we had we actually managed  
to get seventy women to put their names forward umm and went into the elections and of  
75 course succeeded umm but the memory for me of the media at that time was umm being  
very conscious that they were almost on the~on the day of the count starting to treat us  
that morning as failures because they didn't expect us to win and having to almost turn  
that around and say well it was good for us to have the experience and it was good for us  
to do this and you know it's not always the case that people who when they stand the first  
80 time *do* win and we have to start somewhere and about an hour later word was coming  
through that we were winning and I had to learn myself how to talk up success I had two  
press statements one for if we didn't win and one for if we did I'd memorized the one for  
if we didn't win and erhm you know a lot of funny stories are told because I have ninety-  
six first cousins and they come from you know very rural communities and the first count  
85 came in from that community and it was an outstanding number of votes and I knew  
immediately that it was all my extended family [laughter] all there but I wasn't about to  
tell the press that [laughs] so I said well I expect this to be the case all the rest of the day  
and eh so immediately after that first count everybody was running around saying you

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90 know we were going to be elected so it was a good feeling having all the time all my life  
always voted for people who never won and also been involved with people who were  
always trying to make a difference but were never going to success~be successful in the  
tribal conflict situation so erhm in the Belfast Telegraph that night had erhm a big heading  
women's hen party comes home to roost and the rest of the piece was a very *good* piece on  
95 how we'd done it and worked but the sub-editor had stuck this title in and then on the front  
of the paper the next day was the circular peace table with the ten leaders at the table and  
all ten leaders in the first edition had little suits and white shirts and a black tie erhm  
someone must have told them that one of them would not be wearing a black tie and a  
white shirt so that night they had a blouse and a jacket on one of the little cut-out shapes  
because they were little toilet figures so they had umm to do a kind of different imagery so  
100 they had a new edition of the paper where they had this different eh eh circular table and I  
thought well that was *absolutely* what we've done is we've changed the visual image of  
politics and I was the only woman leader and now they're reproducing lots of historical  
documents on the back of the Agreement and they've just produced a wonderful CD-ROM  
which you should get called The State Apart and umm it's documented from '69 to the  
105 Agreement you know the Troubles and literally women are absent from the entire picture  
and I'm the only woman erhm that jumps up as being part of the agreement and then Pearl  
comes in you know as as the other woman but umm women from Northern Ireland are just  
absolutely scarce in the big picture erhm and I mean there's obviously quite a lot of  
commentary then from the other parties initially from the DUP it's very sexist erhm and  
110 we've written about that whinging women whining women on one of the very first days in  
the Forum I was told to shut up and sit down you stupid woman and you know to try and  
contain yourself and to remain dignified and we used humour all the time to combat that  
but it was very difficult in a very sexist arena and it remains so 'til the present now  
there're only fourteen women in the Assembly umm just about thirteen percent erhm and  
115 again it took myself Jane my colleague and one other woman from Sinn Féin who speak  
and the others we never hear from erhm and so women's voices amongst that huge bastion  
of men is very rare and the image of the Assembly one day when we had to walk out we  
were meeting Clinton I think we were all walking down the stairs [audily inhales] I just  
couldn't get over the *overwhelming* mass of men and you could literally spot the one or  
120 two women amongst the whole group and of course whenever leaders' delegations are  
coming or we're invited to go anywhere again I find I'm the only woman among those  
and at the business committee of the Assembly that runs the place I'm the only woman at  
the table erhm and you know it's a *very very* male dominated environment I mean and  
they do make sexist comments at the table {Responding to a question about why women  
125 have had such a low profile in Northern Irish politics}the profile is as a result of the  
culture I mean it tended to be the case that both interaction and the influence of the  
Church in the traditional role of women in the home the absence of childcare~post-War  
and the churches here didn't allow the nurseries to remain open like they did in Britain  
after the War so we'd no infrastructure of nursery provision erhm there tend-and it's not  
130 because women weren't economically active because they were in the linen industries and  
the shirt factories umm but erhm they were just never profiled in mainstream politics the  
aristocrats were erhm and post-1922 only three women ever made it into Westminster two

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of them were married into families of very wealthy erhm landed capital Unionist families and the other was Bernadette Devlin the complete opposite erhm and since then since the  
135 1970s no woman had made it through nor did the parties *care less* the conflict partly had an impact on that in that women probably didn't feel very secure or safe standing for election and having a public profile since so many politicians *were* assassinated and murdered and had their homes burned and whatever but it's also the case that...feminism was very delayed in its embedding itself here and men really were so unconscious of the  
140 fact that there wasn't a woman about the place that they really just didn't notice nor did they care so really that whole equ~equal opportunity movement in politics has only really started in the last two or three years {Responding to a question about the sexism the NIWC had encountered} yes well first of all I have to say the process itself is very adversarial so the attit~attitudes of the men is that they are doing a fine job in scoring  
145 wonderful points for themselves when they're shouting and being aggressive and they tend not to notice how bad that looks when they're being aggressive towards women and they tend also in the Forum which was set alongside the peace talks every Friday a Forum Sinn Féin weren't there the SDLP weren't there we were a group of Catholic and Protestant women so we were the double other we were women and we were coming from different  
150 backgrounds so they had no enemies so they had to make an enemy out of us because we contested every political stand that they took on things that we felt would not stand up in both communities and said that we felt that we knew that because of the process that we'd engaged in and they said that we were not serious political players and we'd got in the back door and therefore we shouldn't be taken seriously therefore everything we said was  
155 nonsense in fact we became seen publicly as a very radical organisation but in any other situation we would have been seen as a very umm not even a reformist just a kind of very quiet eh group of women making basic sense but they saw us as just revolutionary radicals erhm because of the different views that we took and the different *ways* that we went about doing things and also because we weren't afraid of them we weren't prepared to be  
160 bullied or silenced umm which I think in the early days that was their attempt was really to insult us so much that we wouldn't find our voice erhm that we'd lose our confidence and our self-esteem and we didn't it was very difficult and in order to counteract it we had to become very very well prepared and initially we made the mistake of m~me going down there alone and standing up because the peace negotiations were the serious business of  
165 the peace negotiations and we treated the Forum as a joke erhm which it was and erhm but we knew that's where the media were and we had to erhm have good relationships with the media because the media weren't allowed into the peace negotiations and in order to build up one-to-one relationships that was the place to be well in the early days I didn't want all of our resources to go down there because we were still building up our teams I  
170 wanted them all to be focused on the negotiations so we made a decision you know in the early days it was kinda not a conscious decision that I would carry on on my own Pearl was gone on holiday and those were the some of the worst days erhm and it was very difficult for Pearl when she was on her own 'cos only the two elected people can speak and~but we spoke and we pointed out to them how they were breaking the rules and  
175 deviating from the legislation which had established the Forum and they didn't like that erhm so I we went in quite well prepared but later we had to realise that in order to

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resource a sense of solidarity around us we had to bring more people down there and that's what we started doing it's like the concept of a women's army we just started bringing more and more bodies down so that we looked like we were large numbers and running a tight organisation even though it really frustrated us because there was no work being done  
180 I mean there was n~n-nothing pragmatically coming out of that Forum that was going to be of any use to anyone but to constantly make it look like we were a strong group of women erhm and not to be picked off one-by-one we walked around the place with women we went to the toilets together we went to the canteen together you know we went into the  
185 Forum and the galleries together so that there was a sense that none of us were alone and so er er the press started taking us very seriously as well because they had nobody to give a counter view to what was happening down there and so we often were approached for~from that point of view it was very intimidating I mean they used to stand up and say they had heard me speaking that morning on radio and what disgraceful comments I'd  
190 made when your name is constantly being put out like that you're always constantly being put in the position of defending yourself erhm it's very very tough but we did it and it's almost like as if those days never had happened 'cos we look back and laugh now eh because we've got so confident of how to deal with it but we'll never collude with it and we'll always counteract it the difficulty is that because you become so accustomed to their  
195 bad behaviour you don't notice it as much as being unacceptable as you did when you started and I think that's the comments which I think outsiders would make about politics erhm and then you think inside God have I got that used to it that I'm not noticing it {Responding to a question about the tenor of media coverage of the NIWC} they were sympathetic but there were loads of differences within the media...we had to write  
200 numerous letters to the BBC [a side sequence occurs when a colleague enters the room] yeah erhm we had to frequently write to the BBC erhm to the Chief Executive complaining about our coverage or the lack of coverage because once we became main players we kind of diverted once we got elected we knew that the novelty element would wear off and erhm there's two things about the media if you have very serious journalists  
205 you want them to take your issues and undestand them spend time to get briefed on them and erhm we you know don't get vey much of that from the main players erhm and when we do get it it tends to be of novelty interest like when at the referendum we had a bus and we were taking it around the country and at the election itself all of the kind of innovative imaginative things that we were doing erhm they were interested in those erhm but it's it's  
210 vey difficult to maintain the media's interest in you especially when your'e a small group 'cos they don't think you'e big players in a tribal conflict like ours they want the combatants rather than the ones who are trying to be more moderate and try to put forward all the time pragmatic views that will work erhm but we had to meet with the BBC at one stage to put our complaints in and they said that we had genuine complaints there's two  
215 things that had happened and erhm on both counts they had to apologise to us erhm and you know things had improved a bit and then they fell off again and erhm the other main channel her Ulster Television which is the equivaent of ITV literally just never came near us erhm and the chief political correspondent there again you know he knows us well we ended up travelling together to the States again very r~rare I think maybe only twice at  
220 the night of Good Friday Agreement interviewed us but then the rest of the time nothing

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much {Responding to a question about the effect if any of the sectarian divide within the print media in Northern Ireland} print media we can work at a lot more print media tell you that they'll take anything if you put it out but they don't~they're still much more interested in the combative politics Coalition slammed for attending rally as opposed to the three pieces we put out last week on health cuts on cut back of ACE which is an Action for Community Employment scheme which was running very successfully here in our communities and is now to be abolished with a new deal being introduced not interested in doing much on that and with a couple of my constituency issues I have to make them a big blow-up combative issue like the closure of a maternity hospital and a merger with another hospital and I didn't want the other hospital to feel bad about what I was doing but in order to get coverage that's all the media wanted to do and I wanted to talk about how badly managed the process had been for the hospital that was closing *not* criticise the hospital that~with which they were merging and of course again they want that to be a combative issue because I want women to be able to work together for you know the maternity services that they want erhm and they weren't interested in that angle so it's very difficult but erhm it's a very soundbite industry it's a very entertainment-led industry even when you're dealing with very serious issues and it's very personality-led {Responding to a question about whether the media are male-dominated} *completely* there are no female political correspondents erhm in the in the broadcast media in the print media there is one again she tends to only come at us and we've said this over and over again when the boys are behaving badly and we have to *keep reminding the media* that they're not going to ghettoise us but why don't they go to the men and ask them what they think when the boys are behaving badly and why don't they come to us and ask us that as part of a much longer project which is what do you think of that along with all of the other things that are happening at the minute so it's been unrelenting from that point of view erhm and and *oh God* they drive us insane the two chief journalists in NI said to Jane and I recently erhm because because I got very angry one day in the Assembly quite rightly because one of the members said I wouldn't go upstairs with you anytime which to me was a *horrific* sexist comment 'cos I was talking about how Sinn Féin and the DUP we'd we were all upstairs at meetings upstairs in this building and I said how hypocritical it was for them to pretend that they were going to run Sinn Féin out of the building and straight after the plenary they were going to be upstairs and this wisecrack from the back shouts I wouldn't go upstairs with you anytime thinking it was funny and I made the erhm the presiding officer eh comment on it and he didn't rule it as un-parliamentary language he ruled it as discourteous but not un-parliamentary and I said that I wanted it put in the record and I got very very angry 'cos it seemed to me that the men were colluding in not having it in the record so it wouldn't look too bad so I said I'm going to put it in the record because I'm about to repeat what he just said and I did and I was very angry so the two journalists said afterwards one of them said God Monica you shouldn't ever let yourself get angry I said when you start saying that to the men in there and every day the men are angry then you can feel you've a right saying it to me and then they said to Jane and you shouldn't smile so much so I said right boys in order to conform to you principles one of us should smile far more and the other should get angry far more so that we suit what you think makes you know the kind of standard cardboard cut-out politician and I thought how

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265 sexist I'm absolutely certain sure that they never said to Seamus Mallon or to erhm John  
Taylor we think you should smile more or we think you shouldn't get so cross I was  
absolutely-but I say that to them all the time when they comment on my clothes and on the  
colours of my clothes and what suits me and what doesn't suit me I-I keep saying well  
you know I hope you told him that about his tie or about the colour of his socks I mean  
270 they absolutely pick off everything that you're wearing...I suppose I'm conscious too of it  
when I'm doing media that eh you know I-I normally would not worry about if it was in a  
relaxed way of going in front of the camera but I'm very conscious of feedback because  
the women here internalise so much of what you're wearing that that's the feedback  
predominantly from them too so it's not just men who are commenting on this women are  
275 as well you know I liked your hair like that you shouldn't wear that or don't ever go on  
with that again or you know don't do interviews outside when the wind's blowing in your  
face I've also learnt that actually to control interviews erhm at the start they controlled me  
in terms of we want you here we want you there now I'm much more controlling and  
saying I'm not doing that photograph because it looks like I'm sitting there posing there  
280 was one photograph I was really cross about where I was surrounded by all my election  
posters and I was sitting on the floor and I didn't want to do the photograph and the  
photographer told me it was for a German magazine and the next day there was a piece in  
the paper about me and there was this big blow-up which looked~made me look like I had  
this enormous ego you know all of these huge posters of myself and my face which were  
285 for the flaming lamp-posts you know and I was getting them ready and it made it look like  
I just loved to look at myself sitting in the middle of it so I was very cross and I knew  
instinctively when I was doing it that I didn't *want* to do it but because he told me it was  
not going to be seen in the country I thought well I couldn't be bothered you know fighting  
with him so but as it turned out it was so I had to be *so careful* not to do that and  
290 instinctively if you're not comfortable with something then don't do it and a couple of  
times the media have come and wanted me to put on a kettle in the kitchen and I've said  
no I want to be reading the newspaper or at the computer or doing whatever so I am very  
very conscious now of not being stereotyped into that you know if they want photographs  
of children or taking them to school or doing whatever now sometimes I don't mind doing  
295 the family stuff 'cos it's very important for women to show that they have a family and erh  
during the elections my children *were* coming out and canvassing with me so I didn't mind  
those photographs being taken but it's the kind of trivialising piece that's forced on a  
serious interview and then they want to take a little shot of you making the tea erh I just  
noticed yesterday a local group had written erhm may the women in the Assembly never  
300 have a teapot near them when a camera is close [mutual laughter] it was a kind of prayer  
for the women of the Assembly...but there's all kind of erhm learning experiences but the  
media's absolutely crucial they're a big player in all of this and you do get elected or de-  
selected on the back of how the media portray you erhm I suppose I've been lucky in that  
I've known quite a bit before I came in how to deal with the media and so it wasn't as  
305 daunting as it might have been but ah but it's also much more difficult for us too Clare  
because we're a cross-community women's group so every time I open my mouth I'm  
conscious I'm not speaking to my own constituents I'm also speaking to the people from a  
different community and erhm I think that that's very important much harder to do very

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310 easy in a contested tribal situation to be able to speak only with the voice of anger that  
represents the voice of-from *your own* side much more difficult to try and say well I-I  
understand how it would be for anyone else erhm and that's you know much harder to do  
so I'm going on there one as a woman trying to find a space amongst the other men who  
are doing the same interview or on the same panel and two to bring a different angle to it  
which is you know not just my own eh background but you know from the Coalition's  
315 perspective and I said to the Coalition that we have to be aware and alert to the fact that  
we will make mistakes but you know not to be hard on people when they do it because em  
you know there are times when you're jumped on for a quick soundbite now what we've  
done in the Coalition is that when we get into very contested waters is we try out our  
po~position on a woman from a different community so nationalist (indeciph) will always  
320 ring a unionist woman and vice versa to see how this would stand up in both communities  
{ Responding to a question as to whether commentators find the NIWC's approach  
intelligible *as politics* } they didn't at the start but they do now because actually everything  
that was said at the end about creating a pluralist society an inclusive one reaching an  
honourable accommodation that was all our language and a year before the agreement one  
325 of the loyalists said to me on our way back from South Africa he actually said that he  
knew that we would arrive at the final agreement weeks and months ahead of the rest  
because of the process we were engaged in so I mean a lot of them could have succeeded  
in their elections if they'd gone in with the language that we'd gone in with we knew we  
*could* but that it was going to be misunderstood as~as not having a constitutional position  
330 the constitutional position was the one that was agreed in the Good Friday Agreement that  
there will not be an Assembly without a North-South Ministerial Council there will not be  
a North-South Ministerial Council without an Assembly and that you know that all parts of  
the Agreement worked as a wholistic piece erhm that we were mutually dependent on each  
other there would be no majorities that people would in future have to secure the  
335 confidence of the other community in order to get their policy passed that's all our  
language but because it wasn't seen as [tapping the table for emphasis] are you nationalist  
or are you unionist<sup>↑</sup> and the Agreement now shows that you can be either or both British  
or Irish or both or *neither* depending on how you want to erhm perceive yourself and  
legitimate aspirations to be something other than that are genuinely legitimate but that's  
340 not what you're going to be putting here in terms of working through this particular  
process it's gonna be the needs of this community to live together and we said all of that  
and we never ever tried to be disparaging of anyone else's views along the way and that's  
why we took quite risky stands in supporting Sinn Féin and the PUP and the UDP at  
different stages { Responding to a question about whether having a Northern Ireland  
345 Secretary who was a woman was a help } yeah it *was*...[a side-sequence occurs when  
someone enters the room] Mo came in like a breath of fresh air and just completely a  
different personality took no bullshit from anybody squared up to them and it helped us to  
do the same and and of course she was a friend of mine long before she came in 'cos she'd  
been a shadow Spokesperson so I knew her very well and eh we remained friends although  
350 occasionally *we'd* political differences but we remained friends and it was good to have  
her operating there and it's been so hard for her too but it's been good to have another very  
*strong* woman in the mainstream which kind of took a bit of the emphasis away from us as

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355 being you know people that were so *unbelievably radical* you know erhm that we were never going to be accepted I mean the electorate have now accepted us but I mean what the mainly Paisley's party tried to do to us was to make us out to be you know a group of *dervishes*

**Brief Background Notes:**

I spent a day as an observer at WEN's offices in Worship Street in London. As well as being able to see the working environment, I recorded interviews with a number of officers.

5

**Becky Price , Science Officer, Involved Primarily in the Test Tube Harvest**

**Campaign:**

{Responding to a question about how she got involved in WEN} I came down to London to get some information on genetic engineering erhm and just came down for a couple of weeks really to check out all the NGOs came in to meet Ricarda and have a chat with her she said that you know she was snowed under basically with work and then I went back up to Sheffield and said I'd come back down for a few weeks to help her erhm by which time Zoë had arrived also the same~the same position as me really (indeciph) to get involved and then the three of us for a while were all down here ahm then Ricarda and Zoë went off to do a No Patents on Life campaign which they ended up running from her home because they~they really needed a lot of focus and~and they you know they were finding it hard they couldn't actually give the time to the office so I stayed here to basically keep the Test Tube Harvest campaign ticking over and give the time to the office as well to the office running {Responding to a question about her background}erhm I'm a plant scientist I've got a degree in plant science erhm from Liverpool and I guess been involved in the environmental movement for quite a long time all the way through my 'A' levels and my degree really...I worked with the University Green Group and ran that for a couple of years and we did various things there and got involved in a whole plethora of other organisations through that...[laughing] I'm still not a paid-up member of any organisation whatsoever {Responding to whether this is a deliberate choice} I kind of sit down and think I ought to join them~I ought to join them...and if I actually sat down and *did* it~it would cost me about a hundred quid a year to do and I don't have a hundred quid a year to do it and I don't think I would be able to make the decision about joining one er~or another {Responding to a question about whether it is useful that WEN prioritises gender issues} erhm I think~I think it can be useful and I think WEN is useful in providing a *space* for ehm I mean there's a lot of issues that we've picked up which haven't been picked up by other organisations erhm and I guess I mean some of them pretty much are exclusive to women in terms of things like sanitary towels and sanitary protection ehm and then there's other things which~which almost by default are picked up by women's organisations which are things like the nappy stuff and I mean all of these are waste prevention issues erhm and I guess with the genetic stuff it's~it's by being the Women's Environmental Network we're kind of really focused on members of the public shopping...weekly shopping erhm which tends to be done by women still {Responding to a question about whether WEN might reinforce the link between women and domestic duties} erhm no because the other side of it at least a third of our members are men {sic} a lot of information requests and stuff that we do etcetera are by men wanting to know information...these yellow leaflets...we had fifty thousand of them done they were given out~given around supermarkets all over the country and that was done by men and women it was done by Friends of the Earth groups it was done by Greenpeace groups it was just that we'd had the money and we'd written a good leaflet everybody liked it so we shoved out fifty thousand of them erhm {Responding to a question about whether rivalries between groups get in the way} no...when you're trying

50 to look at environmental issues in many ways you're ehm you really have to take on the whole~the whole of society really and you're actually challenging society in a lot of ways and that's~that's something that's very daunting and I think as environmentalist if you~you are forced to be~to have rivals amongst ourselves is pretty ridiculous it does *happen* occasionally and it was happening more a few years ago ehm and I think now there's really there's quite a strong feel I go~I go to an NGO meeting with (indeciph)

55 which is just on genetics...and we also have a thing called uhm Genetic Engineering Network which covers just all campaigners whatever organisation they're from who try to stop genetically engineered food really erhm and so I link up with all of those people and most of what we do now within this campaign is specifically targetted as fitting in this is our contribution towards~we've got a fortnight of action coming up and there's

60 certain things that WEN said okay we'll do this and other people said we'll do this and what~whoever can lend their strengths on different things you know ehm Greenpeace are much better at doing a lot of the lobbying...and we're much better at getting information out to the public...so that's the kind of roles that we've taken {Responding to a question about whether she has ever had to justify to other groups the need for a

65 women-oriented focus}no...the flip side of the whole thing [laughs as a lot of background noise intrudes] is having lots of women all working together in an office particularly when the mayhem starts again~is that I think for a lot of women having that space to actually do things in a slightly different way it~it you know maybe it's wrong that it is so but it is so that ehm there is more freedom to actually try things out and to do things in a slightly different way erhm that would be difficult to get

70 recognised as being important within the other NGOs which isn't to say that there aren't lots of women working really really well and there aren't lots of blokes working really really well within those organisations at all ehm but there's there is just the kind of I don't know the way we do things here has a slightly different feel {Responding to a

75 question about whether not having a director is a deliberate choice} I suppose default really but I think everybody's fairly happy about it~we need an office manager back again which we haven't got at the moment and we definitely need that back just because we are actually you know two thousand plus members quite a large office erhm you know four different campaigns running out of this office ehm and it's just you

80 know the overseeing of it the co-ordination of it all it's~it's very difficult and it means that we all basically have to give one or two days a week each week to doing~doing that and that can be very difficult {Responding to a question about whether this has caused tensions} yeah...'cos it's not something we were all expecting and you know you kind of right~you kind of set yourself tasks of what you're going to do in the next few

85 months and then all of a sudden you can't do *that* because you've got to do something else so you know yeah obviously it's hard {Responding to a question about her experience with the media} erhm we tend to although we sort of informally share media contacts you know gossip channels you sit down and have a cup of tea with whoever you're talking to erhm...each campaign builds up its own media people to

90 work on...there are environmental editors and correspondents erhm and~and most groups know them and will send them their stuff and they'll tend to know what's going on ehm so we work~work through those erhm there's also Ricarda writes articles for more sort of alternative press...she wrote for the New Internationalist and also for the Ecologist...that was much more in-depth media {Responding to a question about the

95 tenor of media coverage of GMOs} you see that they've got the wrong end of the stick really or they've been misinformed ehm and in many ways that's~that's actually

probably you know being cynical will be inevitable with genetic engineering because it's not it's not a simple issue and it's erhm different campaigning organisations take slightly different tacks on it...there also tends to be lots of misinformation surrounding the EU and anything that happens with the European Commission {Responding to a question about whether she finds it difficult to communicate the complexities of the issue in accessible language} it took us *months* to write that leaflet [pointing to the leaflet, while laughing] it was ripped up and started again you know I mean we knew the format...but we wanted it to be something that would really stand its ground...I think you need to be very careful about the facts you state...in this new briefing sheet I'm actually going to have a glossary I've got a glossary of terms erhm because that's just~just very helpful and I think people probably need to start learning those terms you know so always having them in the stuff you're writing explaining what everything is~is a good idea...there are ways round it I don't think you need to I don't think you end up being patronising {Responding to a question about her future plans} I'm looking at moving out to Norfolk and doing some more grassroots campaigning from there {Responding to a question about who her contacts are there} it's through people I know from anti-roads campaigns [laughs] living up tree houses {Responding to a question about whether there is a lot of macho bravado about the anti-roads protests} erhm yeah there probably is some macho bravado about it all erhm there's also kind of a lot of home-making [in a mock-sweet voice] and the laying of pretty little paths and things..the macho stuff and the home-making stuff is done by *both men and* women...there is an element of men within Earth First or within the environmental roads movement who~who are ehm getting into eh basically little boys' games erhm and~and there is also an element of women who are so uptight and sensitive to it~it's ridiculous so there are those two extremes but most people are quite down-to-earth

**Sarah Miller, Editor of the WEN Newsletter**

{Responding to a question about the history of WEN} it was set up in 1988...by a woman called Bernadette Vallely...basically she was working at Friends of the Earth and kind of thought that lots of things that she thought were important weren't being addressed and so WEN was set up and it started off sort of looking at paper and chlorine in paper erhm with sort of particular reference to nappies and that's what we looked at and so that sort of stemmed off into a big paper campaign which was sort of involved in stopping cutting down forests and that sort of thing erhm it was stemmed from kind of the nappy angle and so a lot of our early work was around nappies and sanitary protection and that's continued over the years...and they are two things that definitely haven't been covered by any other environmental organisations...there's been quite a few campaigns sort of around menstruation and now we are basically promoting reusables and focusing on taboos we brought out a magazine for teenage girls on menstruation Blossom...it was really popular...some big newspaper anyway thought we were like promoting under-age sex...and that kind of helped us as well in a way because sometimes bad publicity is good press...it's just kind of tackling teenage girls from a sort of different perspective rather than saying you have to be *thin* you know it wasn't like that it was kind of [whispered] different and more natural {Responding to a question about how WEN manages to avoid over-burdening women with impossible demands} we try and offer a choice we don't actually kind of go out and directly oppose anything and say this is wrong you shouldn't do it we kind of say look these~this is what's involved you know these are the facts and~and provide the information and then

145 you know people can at least make sort of aware decisions and that's kind of what we  
do we try and raise awareness so that it's up to kind of women and men 'cos we you  
know we do work with men a bit as well...ultimately you have to look at how much it's  
going to cost and how much time it's going to take I mean there are issues that affect  
particularly kind of young mothers who are quite a lot of our members {Responding to  
150 a question about the membership profile} I know that probably most of our members  
are sort of middle-class and white and some of them are teenage girls some of them are  
students some of them are young mothers some of them are retired and some of them  
are professionals so they kind of go from the age of thirteen to eighty...five percentish  
are men they're just men who are environmentalists basically they probably support a  
155 variety of environmental groups and they support WEN as well because a lot of our  
work hasn't been women exclusive and anything that affects women is going to affect  
men as well {Responding to a question about whether it is still useful to focus on  
women} I think it's just because no-one else *does* and essentially you know we might  
be campaigning on waste prevention which basically is a male and female issue but  
160 then we'll kind of look at some things that may be more female...we try and put the  
focus on women and then say you know this is what could be done and hope that men  
kind of follow the lead {Responding to the question about whether there are internal  
debates about the continued relevance of the focus on women} yeah...as much as some  
people are attracted to us because we're a women's organisation some people are  
165 probably alienated from us because of that and so we kind of win some support and  
lose some support erhm I mean from a funding point of view it's a quite a good thing to  
because you know if you're a marginal organisation anyway you attract funds quite  
often...people come up to you and say...you've got the *women's* you've got the  
*environment* you're a *network*...it's kind of a bit maybe daunting for some people to  
170 think about all those issues at once {Responding to a question about whether some  
campaign strategies may reinforce the popular media image of WEN members as  
hysterical housewives} I think as a woman you have to celebrate some of the things  
about being a woman erhm you know some of us~a lot of us *are* housewives you know  
89% of all shopping is done by women it's something~and so at the same time as  
175 thinking right maybe it shouldn't be that way at the same time it *is* and you've got to  
kind of accept that fact and acknowledge it as~as a power I think {Responding to a  
question that rather than being 'empowered', WEN's approach may reinforce the burden  
on women} I think if we looked at it negatively then it probably would be but because  
we try and look at it positively and say and we're not saying that this is good and  
180 women do all this shopping and that's the way it should be we're kind of saying look  
you know women do shopping so do men but ultimately you know if you're a consumer  
you have power to kind of choose what you buy and therefore if women are most of the  
shoppers then women have quite a lot of consumer power and can~can change things  
quite radically {Responding to a question about her experience over two and a half  
185 years of media coverage of WEN campaigns} it's been fairly mixed I'd say erhm I mean  
recently we haven't had that much media coverage because we haven't had a press  
officer so there's only so much we can do and I kind of take some press calls and I write  
the occasional article one thing recently we got an article in the Daily Express which is  
about green consumerism...they talked about reusable sanitary protection and I thought  
190 that was a massive step because to talk about that in kind of a national tabloid is just  
you know it *is* extraordinary and they mentioned it and it wasn't like [simulating a  
disgusted tone] erhh woah...it was kind of this is a choice you can make and that was

quite you know I was quite pleasantly surprised by *that* erhm and then we get we had a  
 195 lot of coverage over the genetics campaign Ricarda Steinbrecher was on like lots of TV  
 and radio and 'cos we were quite at the forefront of that kind of whole issue yeah and  
 so that's been good and the breast cancer campaign's getting a lot of interest~a lot  
 because it's such a major issue anyway it's the biggest killer of women in the country so  
 and it's not I don't know it's kind of a bit~a bit more acceptable I suppose than quite a  
 200 lot of the other work we've done {Responding to a question about whether she is  
 happy with the way the breast cancer campaign is being dealt with} erhm well no not~I  
 mean we're not happy with the whole kind of way that breast cancer's being dealt with  
 ultimately because it all kind of looking for cures and not looking for preventative  
 measures and that seems to be the case with pretty much the whole of the medical  
 205 practice...that's the way you know we've always worked we've looked at preventative  
 measures and kind of you know if we didn't do this then this wouldn't happen and that  
 seems a much more logical way with dealing with stuff and breast cancer hasn't been  
 dealt with in that way {Responding to the criticism made by FOE's Sandy Ervine that  
 green consumer groups exaggerate risks and contribute to an exaggerated perception of  
 210 risks, specifically in relation to Toxic Shock Syndrome} ultimately all we wanted was  
 for there to be warnings on the packets so that people are aware of the risks that are  
 associated and now even even on TV they're kind of mentioning that you know Toxic  
 Shock Syndrome does exist I mean we weren't sort of using scare mongering tactics  
 saying [in a mock sensational tone] you will *die* if you use this tampon...I think the  
 215 problem with green consumerism is that so many manufacturers have jumped on the  
 bandwagon and there's all these products that are overpriced I mean it is changing and  
 gradually things are I mean supermarkets are kind of making their green products the  
 same price but ultimately we kind of say well I mean do you need all these products  
 anyway do you need like five different cleaners one for you bath one for your~you  
 know what I mean<sup>↑</sup> it's all pretty silly when one cleaner would do the same job and  
 220 you know there are natural kind of resources we can use to clean as well {Responding  
 to a question about whether she thinks green labelling is helpful} erh possibly eh I  
 mean I don't know I think labelling is quite an important thing anyway in a sense  
 because it would be nice to be able to look at a product and think right this is what's in  
 it this is what it does but I'm not sure how good the labels are going to be and how  
 225 accurate...it's more about a kind of intuitive knowledge we all should have about what  
 is good for us and what is bad for us {Responding to a question about WEN's role in  
 mediating between experts and the public, given that much of the information is  
 contestable} we've always had people with a lot of scientific knowledge here who can  
 kind of look at things very scientifically [laughs] {Responding to a question about  
 230 tensions between national WEN and local groups} it has probably happened in the past I  
 mean we used to have about probably thirty local groups who were fairly active now  
 we've only got about ten and so obviously there's been a problem with kind of maybe  
 we haven't given out enough and we also don't even know what *they're* doing so they  
 don't give back enough we've now appointed a local groups' co-ordinator as part of the  
 235 breast cancer project and so I mean her job is specifically to kind of go out and *get*  
 local groups active and try and set up new ones and erhm...that's a mapping project  
 anyway and so we're trying to get into local communities where local communities will  
 be very active so hopefully that'll change the whole nature of WEN I mean we've been  
 talking about it recently and we *do* very much want to be a network and we haven't  
 240 necessarily been one recently and so it's kind of trying to get that back through the

breast cancer project initially but kind of through other projects as well so our members are more active and they're a proper part~d'you know what I mean they're as much a valid part of WEN as people who work here are and they're all~they've all got a part to play and so we're kind of the core office we're central but then all sort of stemming out and getting stuff back in so we are hoping to build on that {Responding to a question on structures} we've always tried to work in a non-hierarchical way and that's you know that's been quite important to us but ultimately it hasn't always worked and we've had directors who've~who've been quite hierarchical and then there's been a problem because you know it's not necessarily what the staff want or what the members want WEN to be like erhm and now we've kind of we've got a board of directors which I mean we have to have as a charity anyway who kind of make ultimate decisions and they've had a very hands on role recently they've kind of been in the office a lot erhm because we haven't got a director here we haven't got an office manager we haven't got all sorts of things that normal kind of organisations would have because we had a funding crisis so that's kind of changed the structure of things quite a lot recently but it's also probably centred us all a lot more and~and I don't know changed the balance a bit so that may~now we can look at what we really *do* want and kind of make our own structure a bit whereas before it was more forced on us {Responding to a comment that having a female director would not appear to be a guarantee of a non-hierarchical approach} I don't think you can generalise about women or men and it's quite a hard~it's a very hard balance to address anyway 'cos someone with the role of the director it's difficult I mean they should theoretically get paid more than other people and they should have more responsibility and they should be more accountable and so if~if someone's going to be more accountable and more responsible it's difficult to address the power and how much power they should have and~and you know it's a really hard balance to find and we haven't found it really well probably with Bernadette but Bernadette was the founder and WEN was a lot smaller then and it was her baby and so it was quite~it was very different then

270 **Ann Link, Science Officer and WEN Member since 1988**

{Responding to a question about why Vallyly left FOE} she tried to set up a women's group there and that had been partly successful some things had happened...there was a steering group to start with that~that was women from Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and elsewhere but erhm they must have felt the need for us as well {Responding to a question about Vallyly's initial thinking about the organisation} I think it was two really and those two strands have run along side each other all the time one was women campaigning and on issues that other groups wouldn't address like san~sanitary protection and so on and the other was to build up a network for local groups and to~to have~involve members but I think the erhm partly because of the you know it was *easy* really to set up an environ~relatively easy there was a green~all that green interest so I think we were quite in our style we were quite ehm quite like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace you know we were bracketed with them as once famously major org~major environmental organisations...'cos we were doing~we did such solid work on dioxins and stuff and~and it was so new but em but you know we did carry on with our other campaigns which are similar which are actually~the chocolate one got us quite a lot of notice ehm but I think we were always better at initiating them than getting the solid support and funding to carry them on to their conclusion {Responding to how she negotiates her way through competing expert claims} I'm not sure entirely

290 successfully but I'll give you an example erhm there is an argument about incineration  
versus {landfills}...whether incinerators produce dioxins whether incineration's bad  
that kind of thing and I was involved on the on you know assisting campaigns against  
incinerators...I gave evidence about health effects and where the dioxins go and how  
much is in the ash and that sort of thing so I was erhm I think I was doing a reasonably  
295 useful job erhm in assisting campaigning and erhm I~but I did want to move on from  
that issue and the way~the way I've moved on is to focus on positive alternatives to  
wasteful products and to initiate the~the Waste Prevention Bill to make it more  
possible and to raise awareness as well really for~for Councils to start to prevent the  
waste at source there was no le~there was no official legal em entitlements you know  
they weren't~they hadn't the power to do that specifically so it was very revealing how  
300 the waste disposal culture you know even recycling was very small and ehm so  
emphasising that positive image~it really~it really lets me out of the argument between  
incineration and landfills you know I think you have to move on from that and usually  
there is something which you can say and do which cuts through a lot of that...you  
know what we said publicly now we're simply going for positive alternatives  
305 {Responding to a question about whether WEN feels hard science is important} it is  
important to be *reliable* and not to be talking off the top of your head erhm I mean you  
can go into things quite thoroughly and still be regarded as campaigning rather  
than~you know an advocate rather than an authority and em you know we do our best  
but Tidy Britain's just described us as an advocate of reusable nappies as if this  
310 discounts anything we said about how you know environmentally it's better to use  
reusables {Responding to a question about whether she has had to defend the 'Women's'  
in WEN's title} no I think~I think that that's because Friends of the Earth and  
Greenpeace accept us as~as a group with something to say but I think we~I have found  
that erhm I~I expect to work in coalitions...if a group of people from different  
315 organisations come together for waste prevention I expect some sort of positive em  
sharing of ideas and communication and that's~that's been a bit difficult not~not as  
easy as I expected... Friends of the Earth's attitude on waste is we will by our research  
say what the environment can stand in terms of resources we will set the goal posts...we  
will get all our supporters to campaign for it and em then the Government will have to  
320 change its policy whereas erhm I'm inclined to say I want~I want you know I want  
your feedback on positive things that are actually helping people to prevent waste  
Councils and all that sort of thing and that's~working together on those has been more  
difficult than I expected because I knew I didn't know it all so I went out to say please  
add to my ideas and I didn't get a response because they think it's their job to set the  
325 goal posts and em to set the agenda really and em I do much more feel both nationally  
and for activists working locally that going ahead in practical ways and saying  
this~these are things you can do em is well it's equally needed and em it needs valuing  
more I think we're not the only ones like that but we've got more in common with some  
more practical groups than other campaigning groups have I think {Responding to  
330 whether she thinks this is a gender issue} they {FoE}see themselves as a major  
institution a reliable strong force within the land you know...I think there's a place for it  
but I think it is different and it is less~probably less open to brainstorming exciting  
ideas at suggesting positive things that will get somewhere and eh you know I think you  
need both because if the hard campaigners...find a chemical or they establish you have  
335 an (indeciph) disrupter in something then...there's more awareness for us to deal with  
alternatives to it em but there's also a sense in which we have em come out with things

when they were much newer ideas and there was *less acceptance* and we've helped to lead the way em we always worked on dioxins and Greenpeace International supported our first work and we had a lot of communication with them...we went on to highlight

340 dioxins in milk and em you know connections with incineration we had a very big happening in 1990 on that and continued to do work on it and then in 1994 we worked well with Greenpeace on this~on this issue and erhm Friends of the Earth at that time were more ambivalent about incineration but the new evidence on dioxins was

345 gradually changing and they...came and played a part in a press conference that em Greenpeace and us and Friends of the Earth did jointly and em so they were saying you know this~this is the beginning on our work on this and they changed their position they worked they did this joint press conference with us...in that we did things like erhm the campaigner then got the you know she put a lot of imaginative ideas into...the

350 press conference in that we had~because we had a sort of very impressive medical conscience centre so because we were talking about the health effects we got somebody over from America to talk had a seminar in the afternoon which I chaired and em in the morning you know we had really good press there and I think our point there is that we had co-operated {Responding to a question about whether WEN as an organisation has changed during the time she has been involved}yes and I think we're

355 probably still changing and some of~I think we were a bit uncertain about future directions as long ago as '93 or something like that and em I wasn't really aware of that at the time em and I think that has caused us to be em a bit less successful but then I think that things have em changed for environment groups anyway it's more difficult to get out with~with a particular campaign but you know...I think the emphasis has

360 changed to you know the Food Transport campaign also is~is again on positive alternatives to *avoid* pollution from food transport you can work farmers' markets which involve less transport em but biotechnology has~Ricarda is very knowledgeable...scientifically and eh so we've still got that in a way so and that's that's more~that's a classic campaign where there's something to worry about and to mobilise...I can see exactly the same em tactics being used by industry on toxics~on biotechnology as far as I~as far as I can tell as were used on toxics you know getting Government to genuinely believe it and pretending to screen it you know that's happening *and* denial {Responding to a comment about what has kept her going as a volunteer all these years} it's given me such an opportunity to do things and eh you

370 know first of all finding a use for the scientific knowledge I had that I hadn't really used much except for teaching and em being able to go on to dabble in changing the law and things like that it's a bit more personal the waste prevention you know the dioxins to produce this huge report [holding up a copy of the report] now I wouldn't do another one like it~it fits better with me to do something more positive {Responding to a

375 question about whether her expertise has gone unrecognised in terms of remuneration} I think it's got its down side because you're not counted em at some stage I was acknowledged and valued in the accounts but it's more a matter of lack of support for em you know lack of management but I think that happens in paid positions as well...a lot of mutual support goes on and em except for the last few months when there's been

380 a funding crisis *generally* I find it so positive that I want to do it and I've been it's not as if I'm in dire need and I'm a person who's very close to what I do anyway so em I find it hard to probably push for vast amounts of money for *myself* and that's probably biased getting money for things I've been doing could~could've done more but it would have needed somebody else to go ask for it I think...I don't think I ever wanted to be an

385 expert in academia and I think~you need to be a manager and you know you have to  
push for your place I think which is em I think in science that's not something I  
probably ever wanted to do but eh as I say~I think I am right to get recognition for  
things I actually want to initiate I feel that's come with the Waste Prevention Bill and  
it's probably come more quickly still it's not as much notice for it as I'd like but em you  
390 know the Government's given us positive support...it's amusing...all these politicians  
bending over backwards to say it was a good idea so that's really nice because it's a bit  
like the emperor's clothes they find this gap in the law and they can't disagree with it  
and for once they couldn't say oh this will be bad for business we got them arguing that  
it was good for business in the end and really it seems to have been a catalyst because a  
395 lot~I'm not quite sure where they got some of their ideas from it was just that the time  
was right for it {Responding to a question about whether it bothers her that her profile  
hasn't been higher in relation to the Bill she engineered} it does a bit but I think I  
haven't em I haven't got the sort of force to demand it and I've done things like I was an  
expert witness in the McLibel trial...I didn't really think it was all that difficult and I  
400 think I did all right and the reason why it wasn't all that difficult was that it was still  
their position on packaging and reuse and eh the McLibel people are so em they're so  
wonderful to bring~one of them particularly Dave~Dave Morris he brings on and  
nurtures his witnesses so~so well and Helen is very clear what eh he's doing and  
together they make a team and they make~made it a pleasure to do it...I've been a sort  
405 of expert witness at a couple of em incinerator inquiries that sort of thing..I was once  
in...a waste disposal forum in Berkshire and em giving the arguments against the  
dioxins and for waste prevention and eh there was a very strong advocate for  
incinerators who was at em the Open University and eh he was there and there was at  
least *at least* one other proponent of incinerators very fierce...I prepared for it very  
410 carefully and had someone here who came and helped a bit...but at some point he did  
lose his rag and say I think [laughing] she's had far too much to say for herself already  
and they have indeed gone for a much better system they didn't go~didn't go for  
incineration they've gone for recycling in a very big way...at times I feel you know that  
I haven't achieved a lot and then you get reminders the nappy report gave all the nappy  
415 services em a real boost and eh I gave them cut price versions of it...and I said send it  
out to all your Councils...that sort of networking is producing projects in hospitals...that  
is giving encouragement all over the country to antenatal teachers and what have  
you...if you believe in it it somehow makes a difference

**Brief Background Notes:**

Sixteen year old Eleanor 'Animal' Hudson came to media attention in 1997 because of her high profile involvement in the Fairmile site protest. She was profiled thereafter in numerous newspapers and local and national radio and TV programmes as the female equivalent of the ecowarrior and media darling, 'Swampy'. The epithet 'Animal' stems from a reporter having 'misheard' the name 'Eleanor' as 'Animal'. Her interest in environmental issues was prompted by a visit in the summer of 1996 to an ecovillage in Wandsworth, immediately after she had finished her GCSEs. Her parents are supportive of their daughter's involvement in direct action and have always encouraged her to regard herself as equal to any boy (her younger sister, Lucy, plays women's rugby).

**A Questions on How She Became Involved and Her Experience Thus Far:**

She regards her involvement in environmental politics as part of her wider commitment to anti-Capitalist protest. She visited the Newbury roads protest after her GCSEs because it seemed to be *the* big issue of the day. Awareness of other environmental issues followed. {Responding to a question about whether she considers herself to be either a feminist or an ecofeminist} 'Generally, I run a mile from gender issues, not because I am anti-feminist, but because I don't feel I have a gender identity yet. I am still feeling towards the edges of this. Also, I have tended to think it was beside the point'. She had heard of 'ecofeminism', but wasn't entirely clear about its associations. She had never been involved in an all-female organisation or protest, but would be interested in participating in all-women peace camps and, possibly, in joining WEN and . She stresses the importance of networking between environmental groups, so one group doesn't feel it has to appeal to every interest group. There is a lot of cross-fertilisation between groups involved in different protest sites, including between the Fairmile and Monmouth Hill sites. She personally hasn't experienced any unequal treatment because she is female at the Fairmile site, and considers herself to be 'one of the boys'. However, she says other female friends *have* experienced problems, while male friends have said that they have noticed that female activists have not been given equal recognition. She feels that one good thing is the fact that the community at Fairmile is very self-reflexive. Collectively, they try to ensure that everyone feels involved in decision-making. She believes that there are some ways in which women are closer to the earth, especially during their period, but that men are likely to be closer to nature in other ways. She feels that the type of males drawn to environmental protests include *both* gentle sandal-wearing vegans, *and* those who revel in climbing trees, building lock-ons, swinging tackle in figures of eight, and so on. But she thinks these macho antics are okay, because a non-macho culture prevails otherwise. She sees such gung-ho antics as a sign of youthful exuberance, as much as anything else. She says she has personally changed out of all recognition since she joined the protest. One of her most memorable experiences occurred when she led a workshop at the River-rats site on non-monogamous relationships. She had expected a few interested people, but the workshop had attracted 150 people and people continued to talk about it thereafter. In an indirect way, she wanted to call into question traditional patriarchal relationships. She feels resentful, however, that she is under a supervision order to do her 'A' Levels, since she feels this has been forced on her by the state.

**B Her Experience of the Media:**

50 She feels that coverage has focused disproportionately on how protesters have sought  
media hype, when in fact the media have come to them. She feels that she and other  
protesters have been adopted by the media for their own ends and made into media  
'personalities'. Although she does not see this as necessarily a bad thing, and in some  
ways is desirable, their message tends to get changed beyond all recognition. I remind  
55 her that she had said in the programme, *Relative Values*, broadcast on BBC Radio 4  
the previous day (26 August 1997) that she didn't mind being a 'bit of a media tart'. She  
laughs and says that some of the others would make sure her ego didn't become too big.  
She found the attitude of some media men towards her very patronising. For instance,  
when she appeared on television programmes, it was assumed that she would be very  
nervous and everyone went out of their way to put her at her ease, whereas she said she  
60 had generally felt fine. Likewise, the then environmental Minister, Steven Norris, had  
been well meaning, but over-protective, adopting a sort of 'father figure' role.

**Brief Background Notes:**

Bernadette Vallely cut her campaigning teeth in the anti-apartheid movement in the early 1980s. She then went on to become Assistant Director of Friends of the Earth, which she left in order to set up WEN in September 1988, with £10,000 of her own money. Although still a director of WEN, she now acts as an independent consultant to various campaigning groups. For instance, she was actively involved in organising the 'What Women Want' and 'What Women Want in Bed' nation-wide postcard campaigns, and is currently involved in organising a New Age spirituality group, called 'Angel Love', activities that she considers to be a natural extension of her campaigning work in WEN.

**A Questions on the Origins and Early History of WEN:**

Vallely says her initial inspiration for WEN came from reading ecofeminist texts, notably by Starhawk, and books on environmental ethics, especially the work of Judith Cook at Lancaster, someone who was sidelined by the academic community because of her work on Gaia. However, she was even more inspired by the practical example offered by grassroots activists, such as Gro Harlem Bruntland in Norway, and Elzbiela Rawicz-Oledzka in Poland. The WEN logo is intended to signify its emphasis on 'looking at the world through women's eyes'. She says there was a deliberate policy from the outset to lighten campaigns using humour, hence the inclusion of visual material, such as cartoon strips, in the newsletters, since there is a widespread perception of feminists as humourless. The decision to permit men to join was a strategic one to avoid distracting arguments about WEN being anti-men. It was established as a limited company with a board of directors, all of whom had other jobs. There was a lot of preliminary discussion about how to develop egalitarian structures and a co-operative mode of operation, as a conscious alternative to those Vallely had encountered in FOE.

**B Links with Other Environmental Groups:**

From the outset, there was a good deal of co-operation with other groups on specific campaigns, something that was sustained through close interpersonal contacts. For instance, Greenpeace provided the £10,000 for printing leaflets in WEN's sanpro campaign. In a *quid pro quo*, WEN supported its campaign on chlorine in paper. A tactical decision was made to ensure that there was always one member from FOE on WEN's board of directors. Vallely felt that Robert Lamb's book on the history of FOE grossly underestimates the contribution made by women as campaigners and that this contribution is most strikingly elided in the accompanying photographs, where women very rarely feature, even though she knows that they were, in reality, highly visible. Despite her own high profile role at FOE, she felt typecast as a 'fixer'. Jonathan Porritt dismissed her suggestion that women should be involved more actively in campaigning by saying "Women haven't got the balls for it". A central function of WEN, as she envisaged it, was to challenge this perception by providing women with the necessary training and experience to make them into successful campaigners. She also wanted WEN to be the 'conscience' of other environmental groups in relation to issues of gender, and gender equity, in particular.

**C Questions on WEN's Relationship with the Media:**

50 She feels personal contacts are important in ensuring that the media take up issues.  
She cites the ITV's *World in Action* programme based on WEN's sanpro campaign.  
While Vallely was researching a WEN book on the subject, she had the idea of  
contacting someone on the programme's research team. They then carried out their  
own research, before broadcasting the programme on 13 February 1989. Previews  
about the programme's content, in turn, generated interest in the press, although the  
55 campaign was utterly distorted by salacious coverage in the *Mail on Sunday*, which  
decided to run a 'spoiler' the previous day. She believes this was an act of pique  
because WEN had refused to accept £10,000 to grant them exclusive coverage of the  
story. Another instance of the media trivialising WEN's campaigns occurred when she  
was interviewed by a journalist from the *Express*, ostensibly about WEN's opposition to  
60 the Government's policy on transport. When the article appeared, there was no mention  
of transport as a political issue; instead, media producers at the *Express* combined the  
information that Vallely was soon to be married, with a photograph of her on her  
bicycle, and came up with the headline 'Green Bride Bikes it to the Altar'. A  
completely spurious claim was made to the effect that no-one was allowed to attend the  
65 wedding, unless they arrived on a bicycle. Vallely highlights the contradictory nature  
of press coverage by pointing out that the *Express* later bought the rights to serialise  
Vallely's book, *The Young Person's Guide to the Planet* in 1990. In 1995, however,  
the same paper made wild accusations about WEN being a 'shady organisation', after the  
publication of the teenage sex education magazine, *Blossom*, whereas Marjorie Proops  
70 in the *Daily Mail* was very positive about it.

**D Possible Criticisms of Organisations like WEN:**

Responding to a question about whether there might be a danger that WEN is adding to  
the disproportionate burden women carry for household management, Vallely argues  
75 that it seeks to give women clear choices, not to make them feel guilty. Responding to  
the view of critics that WEN sometimes engages in scaremongering, by speculating  
beyond the available scientific evidence, she admits that it did take risks over dioxins  
in milk. However, she feels that it has subsequently been vindicated and that  
sometimes risks need to be taken when the stakes are so high and when access to  
80 wholly objective scientific information is not easy to obtain.

**Brief Background Notes:**

Priest A is in her late forties, is single and is the priest-in-charge of a rural parish in North Bedfordshire. Her parishioners are predominantly middle-class and white.

5 **A Experience Prior to Becoming a Priest:**

In the late 1960s Priest A was involved in Church-related social work. This led her to undertake an accredited qualification at the Josephine Butler College in Liverpool. The qualification combined practical training in social work, with a course in theology. Both parts of the course placed an emphasis on 'service'. Although, she also had training as a preacher, evangelical churches did not permit her to speak from the pulpit. In other churches, she was only permitted to preach about her missionary work. In 1972 she went to work in Kenya for a Church missionary society. On her return, she underwent a selection process to become a deaconess, although she is careful to point out that deaconesses were not equivalent to male deacons, since the latter were in training for full priesthood. Although not part of the House of Clergy, lay members of the Church perceived them as such. In 1987 she became part of the lay order of deaconesses, easily recognisable because of their 'feminine blue cassocks'. As a deaconess she could preside at baptisms, but not at marriages. She became a missionary tutor in an ecumenical parish in Selly Oak in Birmingham. She deliberately avoided the feminist label and tried not to alienate people by focusing on issues of inclusive language. She felt that conservatism on textual issues was symptomatic of conservatism on a range of issues within the parish.

**B Experience as an Ordained Priest:**

25 After making the transition to priesthood, Priest A acted for a short time as an assistant minister in a parish, where she particularly enjoyed the pastoral side of her role. Prior to her current appointment, the parish was on the verge of closure. The previous incumbent had apparently neglected his pastoral duties. The parishioners actually requested a woman priest because of the stereotypical assumption that women are more likely than men to take the pastoral side of their work seriously. Far from encountering opposition, she felt that the novelty value of her appointment drew people back to the Church. Because she was the first woman in Bedfordshire to be inducted as a vicar, she attracted a good deal of attention from the local media, most of it positive. She feels her address to parishioners from the pulpit is gendered, in that, whatever the subject of her sermon, she deliberately tries to give it a feminine slant. She prefers teaching in small groups, rather than formal preaching from the pulpit. She encourages other women to take an active role in parish affairs, hence, her choice of a woman to act as her pastoral assistant. Women responsible for children are drawn in by ensuring child care provision is made available when the evening prayer group meets. She feels that her gender is a distinct advantage in her pastoral role, in her relations with *both* sexes. Older men do not see her as a threat and tend to flirt with her. She is of the view that women's 'natural empathy' is a definite advantage when performing offices such as funerals and weddings. However, she also refers to a survey based on the Myers Briggs test which reveals that women priests often have masculine personality traits. She is committed to 'a collaborative approach to both authority and leadership', since she regards this as a distinct advantage in parish life. Yet, she stresses that she also needs to be authoritative on occasions, and that this has the male Church Wardens to joke about her leadership ability as 'bossy'. She emphasises leadership rather than authority; she regards 'vulnerability' as an integral part of any leadership role.

50 Thus, she feels that it is very important to allow other people space to have 'flops' when she devolves leadership roles to them. She contrasts authority, which she sees as self-assuming, and leadership, which she believes should be self-effacing. She says the series, *The Vicar of Dibley*, has been something of a mixed blessing for women priests, much as she enjoys it personally, since it conforms to the long-standing tradition of portraying ministers of the Church as figures of fun, going back to the Derek Nimmo character in *All Gas and Gaiters*.  
55 The major problem she envisages for women priests is that they still face barriers when applying for jobs, since male candidates are likely to be seen as the 'safe' choice, and because of the operation of the 'old boys' network'. Citing her own case, she fears that women will be appointed to failing parishes, where the odds are likely to be stacked against them from the beginning. She is also worried that by emphasising their gender, women priests are segregating themselves and inviting others to ghettoise them.  
60 She believes women priests should focus on their role as professionals as a way of overcoming a narrowly gendered perception of their role. In her view, the biggest issue that the Church will have to confront in the immediate future is the issue of women bishops.

65

**Brief Background Notes:**

Priest B is in her early fifties, is single and is priest-in-charge of a small parish in London comprising about 120 parishioners. The parish has the sort of social and ethnic mix one would expect in inner-city area London. During the ordination debate, the then Bishop of London, David Hope, actively campaigned against women's entry to priesthood, with the result that London was, and, to some extent, still is, a particularly hostile environment for women in ministry.

**A Experience Prior to Becoming a Priest:**

From 1960-63 Priest B undertook training as a Church lay worker and then went on to complete a degree in theology at King's College, London. During her degree studies, she lived in the Women's Training House in London, where there was a real sense of sisterly solidarity. In the mid-1960s she became involved in an ecumenical project in a mining village in the North East of England. One of her roles was to set up a baby clinic in a doctor's surgery. The attitude of the rural community was that it was better to have a woman than no-one. She performed all the duties of a priest, except consecrating the eucharist; a male vicar came in to perform this role. After undertaking social work training in Glasgow in the early 1970s, she was appointed in 1972 as a non-stipendiary minister to St Thomas' church in Newcastle, a church attached to the University of Newcastle. She then moved to the St Pauls area of Bristol, again working as a non-stipendiary minister. After undertaking further training in child psychiatry, she became Deputy Head of a school for children in care. She became a deaconess in 1984 and an ordained deacon in 1987, enabling her to wear a clerical collar and to use the title 'Reverend' for the first time. She described herself at this time as a 'common-law priest'. She says that she, like many other women during the pre-ordination period, employed subversive tactics to overcome the limitations imposed by the subordinate role of deacon. One such tactic was to distribute the reserved sacrament to parishioners who could not attend Church, even though she was not actually allowed to consecrate it.

**B Experience as an Ordained Priest:**

Priest B was finally ordained as a priest in 1994. Because the Bishop of London refused to ordain women as priests, the ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Woolwich, following her attendance at a collective retreat in Southwark. Since her current parish is relatively small, she does not have an opportunity to work co-operatively as part of a larger team, something she enjoys. She finds her role as priest in charge rather lonely. She says she tries to adopt an inclusive style of address and to employ inclusive language, where possible. However, she does not see gender as the most important factor in influencing her approach to priesthood. Referring to the Myers Briggs test, she points out that she is rational, a typically masculine trait, rather than intuitive, a typically feminine trait. In her own words, she is 'guided by the head, rather than the heart'. She says her male parishioners have proved less difficult than she expected, partly because as a woman she does not represent a threat. A male priest comes in to the parish on the first Sunday of every month to cater for parishioners who refuse to receive communion at her hands. Despite this, she argues that the attitude of parishioners towards her has more to do with a general conservatism and resistance to change, than being a reaction to her gender *per se*. Nonetheless, she has been actively involved in the London-based monitoring group,

Women and the Church. She also feels very strongly about the Act of Synod which she regards as an 'act of apartheid'.

**Brief Background Details**<sup>1</sup>: Priest C is in her forties and is married to the vicar of the parish where she serves as curate; they have no children. The parish is located in a predominantly working class area of Luton. The diocese of St Albans is generally regarded as one that has been welcoming towards, and supportive of, women priests. She practised as a lawyer for many years, but was made redundant in 1994. Although she had no *formal* training in rhetoric, she finds that her experience as a practising lawyer has proved helpful when writing sermons and when preaching. Carry-over skills include those of analysis, synthesis and the ability to express oneself clearly. In the early 1980s she began part-time training as a lay minister. Like others, she was simultaneously encouraged to think about whether she had a vocation. Canon law prevented her from becoming ordained because her husband was divorced and his wife was still living; she herself was a widow. Instead, she was licensed as an accredited lay minister, the equivalent of a deaconess, a role which no longer exists. Then, when the law was finally changed, she was ordained as a priest.

### **Selective Transcription**

5 ...there was absolutely no discrimination on the course we had a lot of fun we had a good group the whole thing was an exceedingly good experience and we built some very very close friendships...we keep in touch and we know what we are doing and a lot of us have stayed within the diocese {Responding to a question about whether the issue of language was addressed} oh yes...in fact it sparks *so much* controversy I am constantly surprised at how uptight people get about inclusive language which I assume's what your focusing on↑...it wasn't an issue for most people I think on the course...it was for me...erhm~I got up people's noses by *insisting* on using inclusive language but by the end of the course people had seen the sense of it I mean it was a very simple strategy of just turning things round and you know always talking you know of the female and then men felt un~unhappy and the women saw that it was silly to *always* say something in the female or *always* in the male...so yeah it wasn't a~erhm~divisive issue it was just...well...erhm...it was just something that we opened 10 our minds to...and got on with discussing erhm...I find it very very hard to be non-inclusive because it jars with me every *time* I hear something that is non-inclusive I just~y'know~I've got an antenna which just picks it up I accept that other people~they don't connect with it at all~they don't *hear* the non-inclusive language they're not tuned in but it's very important to me {Responding to a question about how it felt when she was finally ordained} you...it's like...erhm...people who have been baptised-by-total-immersion understand this...the going down into the water and then the coming up a new person in a sense it's like that there's a physical pressure of all the hands and then you...you...suddenly you come up and there's the light...and you know you *are* different there *is* ...a bestowing of something, which is the spirit {Responding to a question 20 about the authority vested in priesthood} people are very shy about using the word authority because they mix it up with authoritarianism...there *is* authority in priesthood and people are quite...nervous about exercising authority because they equate it with power and they are nervous about ooh no we mustn't talk about power in the Church...but it is there...it is powerful and there's a tremendous need to exercise it responsibly it's quite sort of forcible [laughs] {Responding to a question about whether she would call herself a feminist} ...erhm...no I probably wouldn't use it...ahmm...publicly because I~I hope I'm not ahmm an aggressive fighter for women's position because I don't~I think that's terribly counter-productive erhm I'm very 25 30

saddened in fact that the the feminist movement has meant that men are now terribly  
35 threatened I~mean one half of me says serve them right they've had it all their own way  
for donkeys years [laughs] but the pendulum has swung the other way and now we're  
getting things like you know men's spirituality groups celebrating their maleness the  
poor souls they don't know what to *do* with us it'll come back...it'll find a level...I think  
40 that's {i.e. authority} probably the biggest change that women bring to ministry and I'm  
not just talking about women priests...any woman in ministry I think is different from  
the way men do it...that's a sweeping statement...some men...are also different but the  
the model of the~the vicar as in charge can be...I know some vicars who...bless their  
hearts...are exceedingly patronising they don't mean it but they *are* they...nanny their  
45 congregations and they foster a dependency culture and I think that's...I mean that's  
more to do with a man's personality than anything else I mean a lot of vicars are  
insecure and possibly the reas~one of the reasons they are where they are is because  
there's this basic insecurity in their make-up I've seen it all-too-often and it's very  
unfortunate...erhm but I think generally speaking women meet people more where they  
50 are than men do...now I have to qualify that some women do that more than some men  
do erhm but all you can do is speak in generalisations in that sort of that sort of  
question erhm women are more able more easily able to show their emotions in  
something like a funeral visit a woman is far more likely to sit with someone give 'em a  
hug and have a good weep as well I don't know any men that would do that I may be  
entirely wrong but I~I don't know and certainly at moments of emotional stress and so  
55 on women are quite welcomed because they [sighs] they (indeciph) men disappear into  
the back room and get on with the job or something they're afraid to show their  
emotions or something and I've often had it said to me especially at a funeral it's so nice  
to have a woman take it you know because the empathy's there so I think that's  
probably something that women bring erhm [sighs] women are more feely men do  
60 intellectualise an awful lot because they do tend largely to be afraid of their emotions  
erhm there are so many illustrations from family life and so on wo~women bring you  
know all~all of themselves to things whereas men tend not to they tend tend to talk  
about things out there {Responding to a question about how she exercises moral  
authority}erhm in terms of~of ethical issues<sup>↑</sup> I like to challenge people I mean whilst  
65 I'm not somebody who says there's an absolute truth ah and you know when it comes to  
it [said in a mock authoritarian tone] this is what you do this is right because I don't  
think it's possible to say that but there are certain guidelines that you have to take on  
board and ideally I do see part of my role as helping people to see what they're being  
called to be in their lives in their situations now those situations their contexts will be  
70 enormously varied and you simply cannot go barging in and say to one person this is  
what the guidelines are and this is what you must here~adhere to come what may and  
to another person the same thing because those two people may absolutely be so  
different that they cannot come to erhm a position in quite the same way erhm I mean  
for instance [sighs] it's very easy to say to one person who's coming to you for their  
75 children to be baptised erhm they're a nice middle-class family and point four of their  
two point four has just arrived [laughs] the husband's in a job and so on and you can  
talk to them on the one hand about what is right and how you know you bring up  
children what are moral ideals and so on they'll sit there and agree with every word you  
say it's wonderful it's *easy* now if you go into some house where the husband's been out  
80 of work or maybe there isn't a husband erhm the children are running round in rather  
scruffy clothes erhm the woman's at her wits end to know where the next penny's

coming from there's absolutely no hope in their lives at all you~you *can't talk to people about moral absolutes* you know why have you got three different children by three different fathers↑ and so on but nevertheless there's a need to hold up some basic things and what it comes down to is accepting where they are and showing love and then help~helping them to find love in *their* lives where is God in their mess↑ some people's messes are pretty awful that's a challenge back to your original question that's authority I have the authority to preach the gospels what is the gospel↑ the gospel is that people should have a full life and know love and acceptance and that's the basis and you work from that {Responding to a question about whether women should emulate male speech norms or should celebrate women's difference}I certainly don't think we should emulate men I mean emulate some men by all means just as some men should emulate some women erhm but one of the concerns when women were priested and when we were all deciding what we would wear for instance [shared laughs] do we find our own clothing and do we dress up in black and so on I happen to be happier in fairly conservative colours and plain clothing I don't go for the frilly bit that some of my sisters do that's fine that's them what we have to do is celebrate ourselves and I don't always fin~feel happy with some of the the women's celebrations that go on endlessly about birth and and well [laughs] it's a bit too feely and an' personal for me erhm but that's where *I am* if they want to do that [laughs] that's fine...in celebrating difference there's a danger there because it can once again put us in a ghetto and instead of saying well we need to come together to be enmeshed and to operate as~as equals but different with our own gifts it's not a it's something to do with gender here people get very mixed up about gender and sexuality [sighs] I think we're still working through this and women can feel defensive just as much as men can men go off and have their men's clubs and so on and some women do the same erhm f~instance I'm getting increasingly irritated on the one hand and concerned on the other about two things I think it's time we stopped referring to ourselves as women priests we're priests that's all and another thing in this area we've got a group it used to be called the women's er women deacons' support group this was at the time when we were *working* for priesthood and we used to meet at a local pub about every six weeks or so and that's evolved and so on and of course now we're all priested we still meet and have a nice little chat session I'm beginning to wonder whether we should do it or whether we should say well why are we doing this↑ shouldn't we have the men around as well I mean some people just say well men have their groups why can't we have ours I'm a little worried that we shall hive off into our little ghetto {Responding to a question about whether men attracted to priesthood are unlikely to be stereotypically masculine} erhm are you are you into Myers Briggs at all↑ [I respond in the negative] ah right erhm personality testing and and typing and so on it's~it's a bit stereotyping but the majority of er well men as it then was as I understand fell into a particular personality type erhm which bears out your comment just now erhm the servant model is not a male thing on the whole because men are about er dominance leader of the pack erhm going out and fighting their corner achieving that's the male thing it's expected certainly in the Western culture and so therefore to go into ministry and be a servant and not to think of yourself and to put everyone else befor~before yourself that's not the traditional male thing so there are bound to be~it's going to attract people who are not quite erhm the norm if there's such a thing as the norm on the other hand you may get some erhm priests who *are* into power and relish the thought of being you know erhm emperors of their own little domain absolute rulers I mean if you if you're a vicar if you're an

130 incumbent and you've got the freehold of your parish nobody can shift you unless you  
do something absolutely appalling and even then it's difficult so it's a *very* powerful  
position and open to abuse and misuse and all sorts of things and others just~are  
frustrated actors who like getting up in a pulpit and good at it they are too [laughs]  
{Responding to a question about whether she has experienced the double bind of being  
135 seen as either too strident or not assertive enough} I'm never seen as not assertive  
enough...I have to be conscious very much that I don't come over too powerfully...I  
haven't experienced {negative evaluations} because I am very careful not to fall into  
that trap I can be sharp-tongued and I know I'm powerful erhm and I have to be very  
careful not to be too powerful because it can be disempowering it's useful in committees  
140 {Responding to a question about how she would feel if she were described as a  
'formidable woman') that wouldn't bother me because I *think* if it was said of me it  
would be because I'd used it in the right context I'd feel quite chuffed at that actually  
erhm and I have found that I can sway a meeting but I have to be careful when I use it  
[laughs] {Responding to a question about whether her appearance attracts more  
145 comment than that of male colleagues} yes [simulating a patronising tone] oh don't you  
look nice dear they'd never say that to a man or you're coming out of the pulpit and  
somebody says [delivered in a mock whisper] she's got great ankles ...another friend I  
can't remember what the actual words were but she'd been she'd preached and she came  
down from the pulpit and the vicar who's been sitting in one of the other desks behind  
150 and who'd got up and then spoke to the con~gregation and made some remark  
which I suppose he thought was complimentary but it was devastatingly patronising she  
was *furious* erhm you know men don't know how to they've still got this thing about  
being chivalrous it's all very nice but there's times for chivalry and it's not in front of  
the congregation and whether you're a woman or a man shouldn't make any difference  
155 at all your gender should~*I feel* your gender should disappear in a service erhm at a  
personal level {Responding to a question about whether she deliberately plays down  
aspects of her femininity} yeah yeah if it's a distraction I mean I will do all sorts of  
things when I'm in mufti erhm I like bright colours when I'm off duty it's an antidote to  
the sort of quietness and so on of clergy dress I like earrings I~I very quickly decided  
160 that it wasn't appropriate to wear fun earrings when taking a service because it's a  
distraction you do not want people looking at your earrings instead of listening to what  
you're saying so I tone everything down then and big rings and so on I don't wear those  
during services erhm but apart from that I wear perfume and I wear make-up and yeah  
...it's all to do with the context {Responding to a question about whether there are  
165 fundamental theological and other differences *between* women clergy in the group to  
which she belongs} yes it doesn't it's interesting and and in the group that we have it  
doesn't cause a problem although we do have quite a broad experience and likes and  
dislikes and so on where it has been very interesting I'm the convenor of another  
women's group which is just in Luton and it's just women in ministry and it's an  
170 ecumenical group and we had had until recently she's gone back into a community but  
until recently we've had Baptists Methodists URC Anglicans and an Anglican who was  
*so spiky* you know she was almost Roman Catholic in fact she is now she's gone to  
Rome over the over the women issue along with her parish priest and half his  
congregation now she came to that group I have no idea why she came to it originally  
175 because she *knew* I'd convened it she *knew* the women's issues before ordination she  
*knew* it might be uncomfortable for her but we made her welcome and we over the  
period she began to come out and be able to discuss things and as we listened to her

and allowed her to say where she was and I mean some of the things I was very much  
in common with her I'm not an evangelical I'm not a low church I'm rather spiky myself  
180 so I felt very much in sympathy with much of what she had to say it's just that we  
disagreed on the women's issue {Responding to a question about why so many women  
opposed women's ordination} a little scene said it all for me once I used to be on  
General Synod (indeciph) and erhm we meet or we met then in York for the  
185 summer~July meeting of Synod and I was in the bar we were staying in York campus  
in the bar just before a meeting and one of the bishops one of the London bishops was  
there sitting in the bar with a little coterie of women round him and a very competent  
attractive well-dressed articulate woman I know on Synod a lay woman who runs her  
own business quite a high powered company came to the bar and saw him and almost  
190 threw herself at his feet she'd have sat on his lap if she could I could tell by the body  
language she sat at his feet eventually curled up there wasn't a chair for her and sat  
there looking adoringly while he held forth and I thought here's a little girl sitting at  
daddy's knee and it was the transformation from the very adult competent mature  
woman you know suddenly transformed into this little girl and there's a lot of that about  
it it's daddy I'm not saying they couldn't relate to their mother but it's daddy again  
195 there's a lot the whole thing about women's ordination for woman and for men has been  
about sexuality...well there is the daddy thing and to take away the male priest they've  
lost daddy and girls do relate to father just as sons relate to mother so I think there's  
that about it erhm priests can also I mean an awful lot of women fall in love with their  
parish priest it's really quite a hazard I haven't yet heard of any men~men in the  
200 congregation falling in love with a woman it may it may happen I just don't know so  
there's that and so you see it's safe it's like a school girl crush there's a certain  
immaturity about it you know you fall in love erhm with a head prefect and that sort of  
thing but it's safe to do it...you see you can do that with a parish priest and you can be  
his favourite and do little errands for him type his letters make him cakes but it's safe  
205 so there's that and I mean from the men's point of view I think a lot of men are just  
afraid of women they're afraid of their sexuality afraid of the fact that they *can*  
procreate and that they do have a power which men haven't got and there is tremendous  
power held by women and you know at a very very deep level just totally  
unacknowledged too often there's this great fear I mean we've been through all the  
210 arguments the reasonable rational arguments against women priests and they just don't  
hold water so what else is there<sup>↑</sup> {Responding to a comment from me about the  
revulsion some people experience at the idea of a pregnant woman behind the altar} yes  
what they don't do is connect that~pregnant what a wonderful image a pregnant woman  
at the altar imaging Mary actually producing Christ you know and they haven't made  
215 that connection bec~because it's a dualism it's actually heresy it's dividing spiritual  
from physical and that is a terrible thing {Responding to a question about whether  
ordination has produced equality for women or whether there is still some way to go}  
[laughs] quite a way to go *quite* a way to go it varies *enormously* from diocese to  
diocese if you've spoken to {she names Preist B} she'll have told you all about that I  
220 think things *will* get better in London because there has been a change and shift in  
quite *sensible* appointments of bishops recently erhm in St Albans we're very very  
blessed we really are oh yes we've had a very easy ride compared to some others well  
they're just not welcome at all and you know...our issue now is not about women but  
about positions of greater responsibility erhm and again that's where we're good here  
225 erhm but what worries me is that the opposing camp those who cannot accept women

priests their position is becoming institutionalised and always the you know their position is allowed for and it's become accepted that is so despite the fact that we haven't got a split there nevertheless is a stream within the Church that is being allowed to do all its own things and the longer that goes on the longer it will will be accepted and won't be driven out and dealt with and allowed to dissipate as it *should do* it *should* die a natural death and I think prejudices and difficulties will go on for a generation *at least* {Responding to a question about whether and how the Church is going to change as an institution as a result of women's ordination} I hope it will make it a more understanding more accepting and open institution and I hope that somehow people will begin to find that it is not the irrelevance that some people think it is but in order to do that I mean we just gotta get out there and stop hiding behind our walls and try to get people in and go out and meet people where they are now whether women are up to that I don't know a friend of mine she's actually a vicar she's the first vicar in Luton erhm she is on the the evangelism team in this diocese and she does regard herself as a missionary and an evangelist and she went to conference in erhm Portsmouth diocese and she was very much in a minority there there was only one or two other women there at this conference and somebody in the group she was talking to almost as if she was invisible said why is it that there are no women evangelists<sup>↑</sup> now she is actually a very large lady she looks like the Vicar of Dibley and she said excuse me but...[laughter] so there is this assumption that women don't go out and convey the gospel and don't become evangelists and yet for goodness sake the majority of missionaries were women that's what they've been doing par excellence for centuries you know and yet women aren't evangelists {Responding to a question about whether she thinks women may have been admitted as priests in order to compensate for the decline in men seeking a priestly vocation} no no it's a grassroots thing

### End Notes

1. This is a summary of information contained in the first part of the taped interview.

**Brief Background Information:** Christina was appointed as Public Relations Officer for MOW early in 1992, prior to the November 1992 vote and she has continued in this capacity in relation to the post-ordination organisation, Women and the Church (WATCH). She is also a lay member of General Synod.

**Selective Transcription:**

{Responding to a question about why there was a need for WATCH to be set up} because of the experiences of women priests in the Church of England now it is that they they have encountered discrimination they have encountered prejudice even  
5 from supposed allies colleagues male colleagues who erm sort of stories of being side-lined at clergy chapters not being involved in in some of the the decision processes that even are open to-for them to be involved in and decisions taken out of their hands or assume~ things assumed about what they would want...and also being short-listed for  
10 jobs and then the job going to a less qualified man and if it happens once or twice you think well okay maybe they were unlucky this happens or maybe they weren't the best person maybe they were looking for someone just like that man but when it happens over and over again you begin to get an idea that people are not willing to take a step and it's still seen as a risk having a woman as an incumbent...it's being reported that parishes the councils are saying things like this oh it would be nice to go for a woman  
15 but this next time let's go for a man one more time in other words in principle they are in favour they *would* like the ministry of a woman but they *still* when it comes to the crunch for whatever reason opt to have a man and for some reason that is playing safe erhm in other words having a woman priest is still seen as~as~as taking a risk  
{Responding to a question about whether an informal network of women priests exists}  
20 yes we have an informal network and em ah and Jenny the secretary has a database with 3-400 names on it and em they often write or phone and whenever we bump into each other we're always exchanging stories so a lot of it is anecdotal or a lot of it is oral... {Responding to whether there has been any official monitoring by the Church}  
25 there's *no* official survey if you can believe it to find out how the women priests have been taken up by the Church which is a lot of journalists who phone me just can't believe that that wasn't built into the system because you know you start something that big and that new and usually there is someone you know surveying it researching it and just monitoring it in an official way and there's no-one doing that and that's one of the goals of the new MOW {Responding to a question about the key moments in the  
30 ordination debate} when women were allowed to be deacons I think that was a key thing because all of a sudden they were in the threefold ministry...and they could be called Reverend and they could wear clerical collars and I think that was a big turning point all of a sudden congregations became used to seeing women up front with the collar called Reverend and taking leadership roles...there was a vote in the July 1992  
35 Synod sort of a draft vote...if it had been the real vote it would have gone down in the House of Laity by fourteen votes...that's when I was brought in because I was there and I spoke in that debate {Responding to a question about campaign strategies} a lot of evangelicals came to {our} meeting and they seemed much reassured by Dr Christina Baxter and Ruth Eccles...we had people take people out to lunch you know people who  
40 are able to talk without being aggressive and they'd say tell me your problems because I think it's important that this go through now this timing let me talk to you...and then

won them over and then we also...commissioned David Gillett who's the head of the Bristol theological college to write a leaflet aimed at evangelicals...and then we had other literature that MOW had commissioned from various writers...talking about Jesus and gender Mary and the role of women about authority...and how it was perfectly  
45 permissible for women to hold positions of authority in the Church...and we prepared a glossy leaflet that we sent to every member of Parliament and em just sketched out the issue for those who may not have followed it and em showed the anomalies...and that  
50 together with a press conference that I called for the 26th October 1992 where we had {lists MPs} as well as several bishops and other people leaders from other churches...a lot of press did come and some television came as well as radio as well as papers and that got some write up...my strategy was two~a two-pronged thing one aimed at the general public so that the whole climate would become more and more favourable to the idea of women priests and the other one was aimed specifically at evangelicals on  
55 General Synod so that that we could take them and reassure them that if they voted yes on the 11th November vote it would *not* be contrary to anything they'd been brought up believing in and in the end it did it and it did it by sixteen sixteen people changed their vote {Responding to a question about the importance of the media in influencing the outcome} I think it was very important forming lay opinion and I'd say it was not a  
60 smooth ride because the media was not entirely in favour and could also trivialise it as well...the press didn't always get it right they didn't always represent us correctly but *every single* paper by the time of the vote had come out in favour *except* the Daily Telegraph the Leaders in The Times the Independent everyone who wrote about it and of course they all were taking it seriously had come round and so for anybody picking  
65 up their daily paper at their breakfast table except for those who read the Daily Telegraph it would have been this is a good thing let's get on with it and I think *that* was very important as well as a *strong* lead by the Archbishop of Canterbury even though that would have irritated maybe some Anglo-Catholics it would have helped to reassure the very people who were most worried which was the conservative  
70 evangelicals who felt that they here they had an archbishop *they* could trust because he understood their point of view and the media helped to you know spread that so I think the media is very~the media *is* the marketplace it is it is where we meet and talk because we there's too many of us to meet and talk at the street corner or whatever and I~I think I think it just helped to see that this was the right right thing and a lot of the  
75 people writing said well we don't see what the fuss is all about and certainly erhm I mean this is a funny a funny way of gauging the mood of the thing but because right in front of the vote I had to do a lot of interviews I was always jumping into a cab to go from one studio to the next or one studio to catch a train and not *one* cabbie I ever had between when July '92 and November '92 was against it...{Responding to a question  
80 about whether personal contacts with journalists were important} crucial I became friends with em the correspondents of The Times the Independent the Guardian got to know some of the Church press correspondents and it got to the point where they would phone me up and ask me for comments or verification and it got to the point where I could phone them up and just say look this is what I want to say and this is  
85 important or this is what we're doing now you really ought to be covering that and on the whole they responded very responsibly again it was the Telegraph with Damian Thompson and Damian Thompson was a problem but he wasn't the only problem his editor wanted it to be to be slanted that way and erh you just couldn't make a an inroad

90 with Damian but all the others were in favour {Responding to a question specifically  
about tabloid coverage} erhm I mean they're always looking for an angle and they're  
always looking for some amazing headline and and something outrageous but in the  
end they were all in favour I mean they they wanted to highlight the things the tabloids  
are always trying to highlight which is bizart~bizarre forms of behaviour preferably to  
95 do with sex and em there just wasn't a lot of that with this issue so they were probably  
more responsible than they would have liked to have been because it was just [laughs]  
you know the issue was not about that {Responding to a question about coverage in the  
Church papers} cautiously optimistic cautiously in favour they were you know eh I  
mean we really wanted to see people going [in an enthusiastic tone] yes let's go for it  
100 but we didn't get that from the Church press but even The Tablet which is as you know  
is em Roman Catholic they were as~as~as warm and welcoming to this as they as I  
think they could feel they could afford to be without incurring the wrath of the Vatican  
or something I mean they were very positive and always printed very fair articles em  
they could have slanted it the other way they didn't...Chrysalis...was an in-house journal  
105 it was to women and their supporters around the world it was sent all over the place  
America Australia New Zealand and eh it was to encourage women and their  
supporters {Responding to a question about how tensions were managed between  
conservatives and radicals within MOW} on the whole it was incredible in the run up  
to the vote everybody forgot their differences and *everyone* pulled together and then  
110 afterwards people started going back into their own natural ways of being sort of saying  
I'm more radical you just drag your feet em several people became disenchanted with  
the movement by saying it had gone soft and was not radical enough and earlier some  
people became disenchanted and said it's too radical so you know that was difficult and  
eh when MOW supported the Act of Synod which came in '93 where the two integrities  
115 came from it lost *a lot* of supporters it never should have done that and the reason why  
MOW did that is that it said at least there'll be no no-go dioceses for women now I have  
to admit that I was in the debate and I voted for the Act of Synod it was brought before  
us as the charitable thing to do when Habgood...was Archbishop of York and I now  
wish that had never been brought before us I think I would've rather risked having no-  
120 go dioceses that might have changed when that particular bishop died or re~resigned or  
retired rather than have this two integrities because it's locked us into playing a game  
that no-one believes because you see if you feel that that God is calling women to be  
priests you can't really accept that God is *not* calling women to be priests that is not a  
valid option either he is or he isn't and if you believe that God is *not* calling women to  
125 be priests you can't really go along with people who say oh yes he is and it's this little  
polite little dance step we're playing and at the time we there were only about eleven  
people who stood up and voted *against* the~I mean it was an *overwhelming vote* in  
favour of it and my emotional reaction right now as well as my intellectual reaction is  
to~to resent the people who brought that to us because I was doing it as an act of  
Christian charity to those who'd lost something the Church as they knew it and I look  
130 back and say wh~wh~what were we playing at<sup>↑</sup> ...now this has institutionalised the  
differences and now they can sm~the opponents of women priests can smile sweetly in  
my face and say [in a mock sympathetic tone] oh but we just have different integrities  
where before it would have been well I'm sorry but this is the way the Church feels God  
is calling us to go please stay with us if you can and I just think it was a dishonest thing  
135 to do...you cannot *have* two integrities 'cos one is always counteracting the other you

can't move forward so that that remains to me a~an increasingly sore point in the *whole thing*...because if you're interested in structures okay the Church as an institution took a big step forward in faith and *then* the Act of Synod it went wobbly and took a step backwards you see that's what *really* happened or it the Act of Synod cast a doubt on what we did with saying yes to women priests or took some of the power away from it by all of a sudden still allowing men and it is mainly men in the Church particularly the clergy to say I don't have to have you my integrity doesn't contain you you don't exist in my integrity and I~I only started to see a few months ago what a lot of my friends had been saying telling me for three years it~it was just such a bad thing to do...now this is in perpetuity unless it's rescinded {Responding to a question about what she feels are the main issues for future debate - women bishops, for instance?} yeah that's a biggie and that's an obvious one and I hope it will happen as soon as possible erhm in that I hope it will come through the General Synod without there needing to be a campaign and I hope that it will go through within the next five years the present Synod ends in the year 2000 the new one comes in 2001 and I hope that either at the end of this Synod or the beginning of the new Synod the vote comes before us and we we say yes and in this way Forward in Faith is actually supporting us saying it's a~a logical step and it's a step of justice you can't have women priests without having women bishops because there is nothing qualitatively different between the two...so that'll happen quite how it happens I'm not sure erhm but at that point Forward in Faith will demand their own province the third province...that's where they draw the line and they have repudiated the taint theory erhm so they say but from the way they behave it is very clear that they have a deep theology of taint the flying bishops not wanting women to share altars you know with some of their men em just on and on if you look at it it's clear that they they feel there is taint running through the hand of all who have had~have laid their hands on women or em been involved in the process...the Church has been terribly hypocritical about homosexuals it's living a lie it's playing a game everybody knows there's gays in every House in the Church of England bishops clergy and laity and they know they're practising and they know they're people with so-called lavender marriages... {Responding to a question about whether homosocial bonding, including homosexual bonding, played a part in the exclusion of women priests} I spoke to a professor off the record from a college..she told me *watch out* for the closet gays because by and large she says they're closet the ones who are against you they're they haven't come to terms with their own sexuality they're gay they don't really like themselves half the time and they hate women and they're a danger and I spoke with the lesbian and gay Christian movement on the record and they said watch out for the closet gays they're even against us they speak out against their own kind but once someone has come out they are okay on the women priests issue by and large and it literally was the dividing point was the closet versus the open {Responding to a question about the old boys network in the Church} it's very insidious and there's no way you can well I haven't figured out a very clever way except sort of patience and and stubbornness of dealing with it because it happens every time I go to Synod...and I'm chatting in a mixed group and inevitably there'll be two or three middle-aged males who don't know each other and if they're clergy particularly they'll say [in a mock upper class accent] oh and where did~where were you<sup>↑</sup> meaning where did you do your theological studies [again, in a mock upper class accent] oh I was there were you there when old so-and-so oh and [snapping her fingers] they're off and the names that come

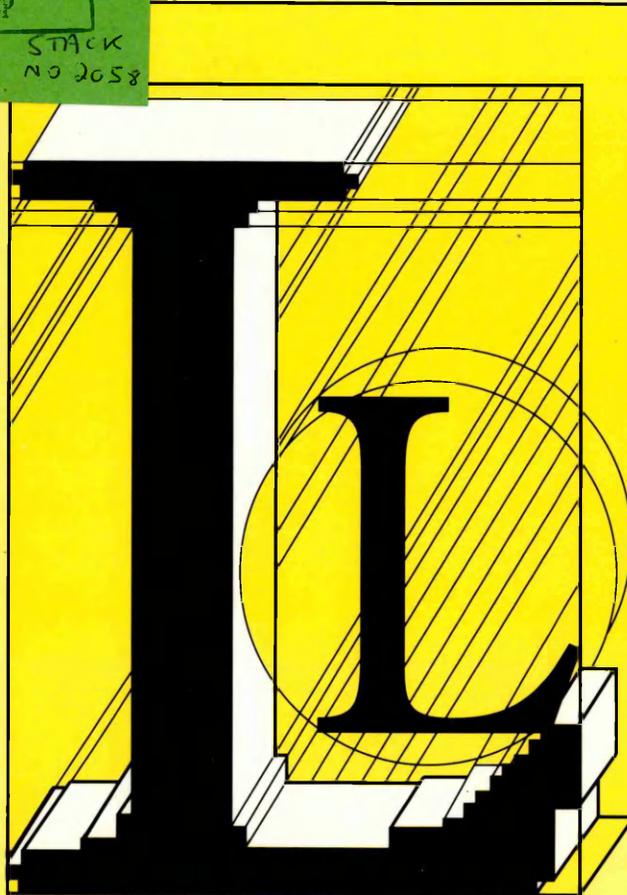
up and and going through that list and [re-producing the mock upper class accent] oh  
do you know where so-and-so went and it totally excludes me because I didn't go to  
185 that school I'm not part of their age range and I don't know *anybody* they're talking  
about and even if I'm trying to be polite and interested in their agenda I'm excluded and  
they don't want my input anyway and half the time if they're if they're em old-fashioned  
middle-aged men which a lot of them are from public schools they're not even polite  
190 this must be *dreadfully* boring for you but...so-and-so and I-I know many people so in  
other words they don't even make an attempt to do that which is very em you're out and  
we're in and even though I know some of them probably wouldn't *mean* to do that...it's  
a form of excluding women and they *must* realise it is {Responding to a question about  
whether this is surprising given that the Church is believed to attract men who are not  
195 stereotypically masculine}.. it's true even if they're heterosexual they're definitely more  
they show they have more feminine qualities which to me makes a man nicer but in  
extremis em some of them are probably guilty of the wimp label uhm and some of the  
women are probably guilty of the bossy-boots label {Responding to a question about  
whether women priests both deny the relevance of gender and simultaneously claim  
200 credit for stereotypically feminine virtues} it's very difficult and and and we can  
stumble up very easily on getting it wrong with those two arguments because on one  
hand we want to be taken seriously irrespective of our gender in every sphere of life  
don't we↑ on the other hand look around and it's *so* skewed against us we need special  
things done for us we need we need special groups we needs deans of women's ministry  
205 we need special ministries of women of this and that and the other thing and uhm  
Suzanne Moore writing in the Guardian section two ah yesterday wrote about who uhm  
needs a minister for women↑ highlighting Tessa Jowell which I found very interesting  
and I liked her uhm sort of reversal you know we need a minister for men and of course  
what we need is more women in politics more women in the Church and then we won't  
210 need all this *special* grouping and organising for us but until that happens we do and  
that's the sad reality...all of us would rather just operate as human beings in a~in a  
climate of fairness and justice without always having to say what about the women↑ I  
mean who wants~that is boring about this Turnbull thing it's boring to have to say [tuts]  
there's no women on this group why aren't there fifty per cent women fifty per cent men  
215 ↑ without question and just you know and and I think a lot of us well~well a lot of the  
women priests who finally made it are just so fed up of having to fight their corner they  
they're now saying I mean some of the women priests are saying to me a lot~a lot of  
women priests just don't want to get involved any more [tuts] I don't know why I think  
you know look I can I can really understand it it gets tiring after a while and you just  
220 wanna if they were called to be priests that's what they want to do they weren't called to  
be campaigners and politicians and to a lot of them they hate all this campaigning stuff  
and they couldn't wait just to go back into a village somewhere and be a vicar uhm and  
other women love the campaigning you know *fight fight fight* uhm I can't wait for the  
time when we won't have to have the fight but until then I want to be involved in it and  
225 I want to highlight the issues and call people to account {Responding to a question  
about MOW's relationship with secular feminists and the view that the ordination  
debate is an irrelevance} well for a Christian the Church is not irrelevant and we need a  
social human structure while we're on planet Earth we just can't do without it otherwise  
it's hit and miss and individual private religion...so it's important and it's important to

230 get it right and those who say well you'll never get it right with Christianity you know  
it's beyond the pale it's a~it is a misogynistic religion I say it isn't you know the core of  
the gospel... [a side-sequence occurs when the telephone rings] {Responding to a  
question about the fact that most women priests are from a narrow white middle-class  
elite and that there are few black women priests} I hope we'll address it I mean there  
235 are black women priests and black male priests but not enough and em there are blacks  
in the decision-making bodies of this country both secular and sacred but not enough  
and I just think that that it's again just chipping away at old prejudice and uhm I mean  
if you're asking do I favour po~positive discrimination I think it's really difficult  
because uhm I think if we don't have positive discrimination in some on some issues  
240 nothing will change because they'll always choose someone who's had more experience  
and of course that person is white because they've been in it longer uhm and yet other  
ways there are other issues I'd say do we need positive discrimination on this issue  
because it it actually demeans the whole thing...but I think there's probably a case for it  
in some ways I~I really do because otherwise you're going to have to go out of your  
245 way to look for a black when there will be many whites there just sitting there able to  
do it with with a good track record {Responding to a question about whether there has  
been an unhealthy interest in the sexuality of women priests} well I'll put it this way I  
don't think there's been an unhealthy interest in it I think that we've been hearing about  
the unhealthy interest in it because the sad thing is that there has been an unhealthy  
250 attitude to it for so long and it's just come out since women have got priested ehm  
about women being pregnant in the sanctuary about women menstruating in the  
sanctuary about women presiding at communion while menstruating and all sorts of  
issues where's it's very clear that some people think that sexuality is debased and not of  
God and where some people think women's sexuality and women's physicality is  
255 debased and that's become clear so I'm glad it's come out in the open because you can't  
fight it if it's always under wraps...and that's why we in MOW decided that the slang  
term for a clerical collar is dog collar...and we took a decision at our executive in  
MOW before the vote that we would *never ever* refer to clerical collars as dog collars  
because uhm the female equivalent is of course bitch and so from then on we've only  
260 referred to them publicly certainly and probably privately as well as clerical collars and  
that's minor but it just shows uhm that we're taking great care and we've always  
countered the term priestess which of course harks back to sort of pagan profligate sort  
of prostitutes who were priestesses of temples and things uhm and New Directions  
which was started as a Forward in Faith magazine insert in the Church of England  
265 newspaper used to refer to women priests as priestesses and em they've recently  
decided that that is not fair and they've dropped it from their magazine...so it's small but  
it's really important when you think that there are a lot of people out there who think  
that women are dirty em tha~that the woman's monthly cycle is something that is nasty  
uhm and and you realise that that it's not only that we're under-represented in Church  
270 structures but actually people don't want us there because they actually think that we  
are uhm unclean still and our Judaeo-Christian heritage which has given us so many  
positive things also gave us th~the Jewish prayer that a man prays every morning thank  
you thank you lord for not making me a woman

SHEFFIELD HALLAM  
UNIVERSITY LEARNING CENTRE  
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SHEFFIELD S10 2BP

ISSN 0963-9470

101 651 8196 <sup>STACK</sup> NO 2058



EDITOR

KATIE WALES

ASSISTANT EDITORS

PAUL SIMPSON

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Volume 7

Number 3

October  
1998

# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

JOURNAL OF THE POETICS AND  
LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION



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# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

JOURNAL OF THE POETICS AND LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION

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*Language and Literature* (ISSN: 0963 9470) is published three times a year, in February, June and October by SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi).

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**Subscriptions** Annual subscription (1998): full rate: £100/US\$160; reduced personal rate: £34/US\$54. Student rates, full subscription, advertising and back-issue details available from SAGE Publications Ltd, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU, UK; and in North America from SAGE Publications Ltd, PO Box 5096, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359, USA. Or visit the SAGE website at <http://www.sagepub.co.uk> for a range of information on this and other SAGE journals.

Articles in *Language and Literature* are abstracted in *Linguistics Abstracts*, *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts*, *Sociological Abstracts*, *Sociofile* and *Translation Studies Abstracts*; and indexed in *Annotated Bibliography for English Studies* and *MLA International Bibliography*.

**Instructions to Authors** Details on the inside back cover.

Typeset by Land & Unwin, Bugbrooke, Northants, UK.

Printed in Great Britain by The Alden Press, Oxford, on acid-free paper.

**Membership of the Poetics and Linguistics Association** Details can be obtained from the Membership Secretary: Dr Keith Green, School of Cultural Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, 36 Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield S10 2BP, UK.

## ARTICLE

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### Gender and mediatized political discourse: a case study of press coverage of Margaret Beckett's campaign for the Labour leadership in 1994

Clare Walsh, *De Montfort University, Bedford, UK*

#### Abstract

Drawing upon the work of the philosopher Carole Pateman and the critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough, this article will argue that fraternal networks operate within and between the institutional order of masculinist political discourse and the equally masculinist discourse of the print media, marginalizing female political actors. It will be argued further that the colonization of mediatized political discourse by market values has had a particularly detrimental effect on the representation of female politicians. A comparative analysis of press coverage of the three candidates in the 1994 British Labour leadership campaign reveals a distinct gender bias in the way in which they were treated. This is evident at the metadiscursive level in terms of patterns of discourse representation which suggest that the fraternity of media workers address an ideal reader who is gendered as male. The dominant metaphors and collocations used to describe Margaret Beckett's qualities as a potential party leader in both the national tabloids and broadsheets reveal the extent to which the genre of the political interview in particular, and news narratives in general, are premised on masculinist assumptions. There are, however, contradictory tendencies. For instance, much of the coverage addresses the issue of overt gender bias, while at the same time reproducing it in more covert forms. The case study needs to be seen in the broader context of systematic and sustained negative coverage in the media of feminist strategies aimed at challenging patriarchal practices in British party politics.

Keywords: *collocation; discourse; gender; media; metaphor; news narratives; politics*

#### 1 Introduction

In her book, *Public Man, Private Woman*, Elshtain (1993: 202) argues that the key question confronting women who enter, or seek to consolidate their place in, the public sphere is what sort of public language they should speak. One answer, implicit in Margaret Thatcher's rhetorical practice, is that they should simply embrace pre-existing androcentric norms. However, as Lakoff (1995: 29) points out, whatever strategy they adopt, 'it will be up to men (typically men of the politically dominant group) to determine what both their own and women's communication are to mean'. In the realm of British party political discourse, the media play a central metadiscursive role in *mediating* between politicians and the public. Fairclough (1995b: 176) alludes to the resulting discourse as 'mediatized' political discourse; the gendered nature of this discourse will be the subject of this article.



Although Foucault's analysis of power undermines feminist formulations of patriarchy as a monolithic power structure, his concept of orders of discourse (1982) nonetheless allows for an understanding of discursive formations as masculinist in their expression. The political philosopher Pateman (1989) argues that the masculinist character of political discourse was intrinsic to the bourgeois public sphere from its inception. *Fraternity*, one of the three founding principles of bourgeois civil society is not, according to Pateman, a metaphor for a gender-neutral sense of communality, but 'means exactly what it says: brotherhood.' (1989: 40). I intend to demonstrate, with particular reference to the coverage of Margaret Beckett's campaign for the Labour leadership in Britain in the summer of 1994, the ways in which the institutional orders of masculinist political discourse and the equally masculinist discourse of the print media operate through fraternal networks to segregate and subordinate women once they have entered the arena of British party politics.

However, it is important to stress that power struggles occur over the determination of discursive practices and that historical transformations in discourse practices are an important element in social change. Such a struggle has been taking place in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) since the 1980s, although the main focus has been on challenging the discursive practices that deny women *access* to participation. Indeed, by the time Beckett stood for the leadership of the PLP in June 1994, the *structure of opportunity* was particularly favourable to the promotion of women to senior positions within the Party. This article suggests a need for these struggles to be extended to include the crucial areas of intersection and tension between the orders of discourse of professional politics and of the media.

It also needs to be acknowledged that it is not always easy to isolate the influence of gender as a separate variable on press coverage. It could be argued that the evident bias against Beckett in the majority of British newspapers had more to do with hostility towards her political ideas or personality than towards her as a female politician per se. Without denying the importance of either of these factors, I hope to demonstrate that so-called *political* and *personal* attacks against Beckett in the press were often framed in terms which were either explicitly or implicitly sexist.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, I will argue that postfeminist claims that gender is irrelevant, and poststructuralist claims that it is only one of the many and complex axes of identity, are in danger of underestimating the extent to which gender continues to circulate as a salient discursive category, however much one might wish it to be otherwise. In what follows, I consider a number of key issues: the extent of media coverage which Beckett's campaign received; her treatment relative to the other candidates; overtly sexist coverage and coverage which betrayed implicitly sexist attitudes. The aim is not to 'prove' that biased coverage led to her defeat, something that would be very difficult to do, but to illustrate the way in which media intervention ensured that the proverbial playing-field was far from level.

## 2 Masculinism in commodified political discourse

Cockburn (1987) offers an insight into the patriarchal political culture in the Labour movement, 'that brings together the umbrella of masculine identity, of male fraternity: work, working-class allegiance, trade union membership and Labour Party affiliation' (1987: 25). This ideological package, she argues, creates an impression of masculine power structure in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Likewise, the institutional discourses of the media are strongly patriarchal. Sorlin (1994: 129) points out that 'Two thirds of the people who work in media management are men. Among the women employees, four fifths are restricted to subordinate tasks with slim promotion prospects which implies that the most profitable jobs, editorship, journalism, reportage are heavily male-dominated'. Hard news coverage, including that of political affairs, seems to be particularly subject to a male monopoly.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising then, that where women are employed, they often embrace masculinist news values (see Van Zoonen, 1994). One does not have to be male to be a member of the fraternity of media workers, any more than one has to be male to be a member of the masculinist fraternity of professional politicians, as Thatcher made clear.

Fairclough (1995b: 200) acknowledges the role of 'apparatuses which political parties have developed to train their members in using the media', but somewhat surprisingly fails to highlight the *independent* role of party spin doctors who seek to manipulate the mediatization of the public discourse of party politics. In an article in *The Guardian* (29 July 1995: 25) analysing the appeal and influence with journalists of the PLP's chief spin doctor, Peter Mandelson, Martin Wainwright points out that 'he is almost one of us; indeed, he *was* one of us in a successful TV interlude to an otherwise relentlessly political career'. The 'us' referred to here is of course the fraternity of media men. Alistair Campbell's defection from his job as political columnist on *Today* newspaper to take up the role of Blair's press secretary provides further evidence of the growing perception of the need to utilize 'insiders' to manage the media's reporting of political events. This cross-fertilization between the media fraternity and the fraternity of professional politicians underlines the inherently masculinist nature of mediatized political discourse.

One of the theses of this article is that the colonization of political discourse by the discourse of advertising, noted by Fairclough (1989: 211), has had a particularly adverse effect on female politicians. Here commodity capitalism and patriarchy are articulated together, accommodating themselves to one another. As Norris and Lovenduski (1995: 87) note, 'the typical candidate in all parties tends to be a well-educated, professional, white male in early middle age'. Given that she fails to match the stereotypical image of a senior politician, a female who aspires to high political office is more difficult to sell to the Party as a credible product.

Likewise, due to the apparent shift in power from producers to consumers, news media are in the increasingly competitive business of recruiting readers in a market context in which their sales or ratings are decisive for their survival.

Consequently, 'producers ... market their commodities in ways that maximise their fit with life styles and aspired to life styles of consumers' (Fairclough, 1992: 110). They cultivate characteristics which are taken to be typical, in commonsense, usually stereotypical terms, of the target audience. In this context it was perhaps inevitable that two male candidates in the leadership race, Tony Blair and John Prescott, would receive more favourable coverage than the one female candidate, since media producers generally address an ideal reader who is gendered as male, as will be demonstrated. This is evident from the fact that both broadsheets and tabloids have female ghettos: for instance, 'The Women's Page' in *The Guardian*, the 'Femail' section in the *Daily Mail* and those euphemized as 'lifestyle' sections, which personalize 'issues', if or when they occur, apparently to make them more palatable to female readers.

Equally easy to sell is the male MP and his wife, of either the 'homely supporting' variety or the 'glamorous trophy' variety, who together represent a promotional package. In the case of Beckett a mismatch arises between this image and the reality of her career as an experienced female politician with a supporting husband. Ross (1995b: 502) identifies this mismatch as part of a more general positive-negative framing of Beckett and Blair: 'Where Blair was a youthful 40-something, Beckett was post-menopausal; ... where Blair was happily married to the daughter of an actor, Beckett had stolen another woman's husband.' the latter comment refers to a sensational article about Beckett which appeared in the *Daily Express* on 24 June 1994, under the headline 'I lost my husband to Margaret Beckett'. This lends support to the observation made by Macdonald (1995: 50) that double standards about sexual morality in the private sphere operate equally in the public sphere reproducing 'the dishonest cliché that male adulterers are "virile", while female ones are "sluts" and "whores"'. This is symptomatic of a general tendency for women's involvement in the public sphere to be pulled back into the orbit of the private sphere.

Just as the visual image has become increasingly potent in advertising, so, following the American example, the image of candidates in a political leadership race has become a key factor in gauging their electability. For a number of reasons, the media obsession with image is likely to have a disproportionate effect on evaluation of female politicians. First, as Webster observes in her study of Thatcher (1990: 75), women tend to be judged more on their physical appearance than men: 'Surface appearance has always been more important for women than for men ... Glamour is a notion which applies almost exclusively to women and is usually to do with the production of a particular surface - youthful, made-up and beautiful'. This view is borne out by a recent survey of 28 female politicians which revealed that they believe that their outward appearance attracts more media comment than that of their male colleagues (Ross, 1995a: 16). Another key factor is that noted by King (1992: 133): 'Most images are made by men for men, creating a closed, collusive relationship between makers and prime consumers.' Image making and consuming can therefore be seen as one more manifestation of fraternal networks.

That Beckett's appearance was self-evidently judged to have hindered her campaign is clear from a comment made by Edwina Currie in *Cosmopolitan* (June 1995: 142): 'Looks are important in politics – ask Margaret Beckett'. Beckett's own frequent allusions to her untelegenic appearance throughout the campaign provide evidence of the additional surveillance-by-self which seems to be more characteristic of women in public life than of men. It is interesting to draw a comparison with the references made to the untelegenic appearance of the potential male candidate, Robin Cook. What is noticeable is that the references to his 'pixie-like' appearance were almost invariably offset by an emphasis on his sense of humour in a way that references to Beckett's appearance were not. For instance, there is an implicit sneer in the view, reported by Sarah Baxter (*The Sunday Times*, 22 May 1994: 8), that 'Labour men ... regard her as unforgivably horsey'. By contrast, in Cook's case, a potential electoral disadvantage became transformed, in numerous articles, into a basis for arch collusion between male journalists and a popular male MP. As Mills (1995: 139) observes, amongst males, 'humour has often been portrayed as a form of bonding and solidarity display'.

In an effort to promote a newsworthy angle, the media adopted the niche marketing strategy of focusing on Beckett's gender as her most distinctive feature. This ignored her attempt to construct herself first and foremost as an experienced politician, and only secondarily as a female politician. A comment by Dave Hill in *The Guardian* (17 May 1994) is particularly telling in this respect: 'As for Margaret Beckett, the acting leader, nobody seems to be sure which set of brackets she should be slotted into except that of "woman", which at least makes her distinctive'. This reveals the difficulty that political commentators had constructing an identity for her as a political leader, in spite of the precedent established by Thatcher. The commonsense solution was to categorize her by appealing to the totalizing fiction of 'woman'. Fowler (1991: 103) notes how this concept of woman-as-group is *traded* in discourse and has the effect of reinforcing and naturalizing gender categories.

### 3 Gender and rhetorical style

The journalist Jan Moir reveals that on an interpersonal level Beckett immediately minimizes the status distinctions between herself and an interviewer: 'She will always insist, during the first moments of introduction, that you call her by her first name' (*The Guardian*, 4 November 1992: 6). In extended interviews throughout the campaign she was almost invariably asked whether she felt her gender had counted against her, either with voters or the media. One might be tempted to interpret the high density of hedges in her replies as lending weight to the view that women adopt a more tentative, and therefore less powerful, interactive style than men (Lakoff, 1975; Brown, 1980; Preisler, 1986). A representative instance is Beckett's comment about PLP colleagues (*The Guardian*, 18 June 1994: 26): 'I might take the view that they might have judged

me differently if I had been a man'. In terms of Hodge and Kress's (1988) social semiotic approach, the repetition of the low modality marker *might* here would suggest low affinity with the view being expressed. However, context shapes the way modalized utterances are to be understood. In the broader context of the interview as a whole, it is clear that the repetition of the epistemic modal auxiliary *might* and the conditional clause 'if I had been a man' are in what Simpson (1993: 153) terms 'harmonic combination', consolidating the level of commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed. Their presence is evocative of the cautious discourse of politics in their careful specification of probabilities. Given Holmes's (1995: 69) finding that 'Women tend to be more orientated to or sensitive to the social messages conveyed by talk', it is also probable that Beckett is regulating her comments to avoid threatening the face of colleagues who are likely to have been defensive about overt charges of sexism. This reinforces Holmes's view that it is important to 'consider the illocutionary force of the speech acts being modified' (1995: 78–9).

Fairclough (1989: 193–4) predicts that 'women will find it easier to hold leading political positions thanks to the ground Margaret Thatcher has broken, but within severe limits'. However, I would argue that the Thatcher legacy proved a distinct *disadvantage* to Margaret Beckett in her efforts to become leader of the rival Labour Party in 1994. For instance, media commentators tended to discuss Beckett's campaign using language which had unmistakable echoes of Thatcher's dogmatic and intransigent rhetorical style. Thus an interview with Beckett in *The Guardian* (18 June 1994: 26) was entitled 'The lady's not for losing', an intertextual allusion to Thatcher's much-quoted phrase 'The lady's not for turning'. Comparisons made by others extended also to include alleged similarities in their appearance and manner, as is evident in the comment made by Sally Weale in a profile of Beckett in *The Guardian* (2 July 1994: 6): 'political observers have detected a growing resemblance to that other Margaret. The troublesome spray-held hair seems to have an extra Thatcher-style lift, her deportment has become more regal, her manner in the Commons more icily confrontational.' Reductive comparisons such as these obscured the very real differences in the personalities, rhetorical style and, of course, politics of the two women and were therefore damaging to Beckett's campaign.

As Fairclough (1989: 182 ff.) points out, Thatcher constructed a subject position for herself which made her assimilable to the norms of patriarchal discourse by carefully blending features associated with white middle-class femininity and 'authoritative expressive elements' used by male politicians. By contrast, Beckett refused to be 'made-over' by Party image makers, and in an interview in *The Times* (21 June 1994) she stressed her commitment to a consensual style of politics, repeating the phrase 'coalition of support' three times, as something a politician should build on. Characteristically, in the same interview she deliberately eschews competitive discursive strategies, saying 'No, I am not fighting against others. I am talking about my strengths.' Throughout the campaign she scrupulously avoided any sort of personal attack on her opponents.

There is evidence to suggest that the consensual style pursued by Beckett was misunderstood and/or deliberately misrepresented by political commentators. For instance, her move from the far left to the centre right of the Party paralleled the recent history of the PLP, as did her change of heart on Europe, but this was presented as opportunism rather than as the outcome of her consensual approach to politics. As long as an isomorphic relationship continues to exist between a masculinist style of discourse and the public discourse of political debate, the more consensual style favoured by many women politicians, such as Beckett, will be judged as deviant and less effective. Even a linguist like Coates, who appears to sanction the use of collaborative speech styles by women (1995: 13), nonetheless acknowledges that 'gender-differentiated language use may play a significant role in the continued marginalisation of women in the professions, particularly in terms of career development and progress'. This is certainly borne out by the negative way in which the media chose to evaluate Beckett's discursive style in the 1994 Labour leadership campaign.

#### 4 Critical analysis of media strategies during the campaign

##### 4.1 Discourse representation and gender bias

Fairclough (1995a: 54–5) distinguishes 'primary discourse', the representing or reporting discourse, and 'secondary discourse', the discourse represented or reported. In some styles of discourse representation there is an explicit boundary between the voice of the person being reported and the voice of the reporter(s), while in most others they become merged, creating a Bakhtinian *double-voiced* discourse. In an editorial in the *Daily Mirror* (11 June 1994: 6), involving the common format of juxtaposed profiles of the three candidates, Beckett, Blair and Prescott, it is noticeable that the voice of the media commentators often becomes merged with the voice of the two male candidates. For instance, the profile of John Prescott blends primary and secondary discourse seamlessly, both reproducing and positively evaluating his campaign pledges. We are told that 'He is bold enough to put a figure on full employment ... But he was cautious enough to stress that it might take a decade'. This not only reproduces his campaign pledges, but incorporates a positive evaluation of them. The entire profile is dialogic in that it systematically addresses and answers criticisms made in other media, particularly the right-wing press, about his candidacy. Thus the comment that, 'Only a fool would under-rate his intellect' is intended to counter the widespread charge that he is an intellectual lightweight. By contrast, the praise for the fraternal loyalty he showed to John Smith during the 'One Member One Vote' (OMOV) debate implicitly sanctions the criticism of Beckett, made in many sections of the media, for her alleged disloyalty, a breach of the fraternal contract. The fact that at the time his 'loyalty' had been widely regarded as a betrayal of his trade union roots is suppressed, as is the fact that Beckett had been praised by the unions for her integrity. This piece of information would have conflicted with

their construction of Prescott as a working-class candidate whose credentials are calculated to appeal to its assumed working-class *male* readership, in a way that frequent references to Beckett's gender are not.

Beckett's identity was constructed as 'other', not only in terms of her gender, but also in terms of generation, in relation to Blair, and class, in relation to Prescott. Although Prescott is five years older than Beckett, his age was rarely alluded to by journalists, while the fact that Beckett was 51 at the time of the campaign was gratuitously foregrounded, as if to underline the point that she was literally and metaphorically 'old Labour'. This unequal treatment is evident also in relation to the axis of class. For instance, it was alleged that in private Prescott referred scathingly to Beckett as 'the duchess' (*The Times*, 3 July 1994:1/5). This social class 'slur' was reproduced in numerous articles and no doubt helps to explain why 'Labour men still regard her as unforgivably horsey' (*The Sunday Times*, 22 May 1994: 8). Significantly, while Beckett's relatively middle-class background attracted negative coverage, Blair's appears to have been viewed as an electoral asset.

The assumption of a commonality of values between media men and male readers is also implicit in the slippages which occur between the corporate and inclusive functions of the pronoun *we* in media reports of the OMOV debate. For instance, an editorial in the *Sunday Mirror* (10 July 1994: 2) seeks to implicate its readers in its condemnation of Beckett's alleged disloyalty: 'we cannot forget Mrs Beckett's failure to support Mr Smith's vital one-member-one-vote party reforms last year'. It is significant that this 'failure' is not qualified by 'alleged', despite Beckett's repeated claim that this was a misrepresentation of the facts.

Numerous studies of media discourse have highlighted the role played by reporting verbs in providing an interpretative frame for secondary discourse. Interestingly, the profile of Beckett has none of the illocutionary glossing verbs referred to by Caldas-Coulthard (1995: 233), defined as verbs 'that convey the presence of the author in the text, and [are] highly interpretative'. Instead, the most frequently occurring reporting verb is the so-called 'neutral' glossing verb *say*. Unlike the other two profiles, the profile of Beckett consists of a series of instances of secondary discourse, embedded in only occasional passages of primary discourse. There is no blending of the two. Thus we have the chaining of 'She said ... she stressed ... she said ... she said... . She underlined her belief ... she emphasised'. Although none of these statements is evaluated, either positively or negatively, cumulatively they have the effect of conveying the editorial team's ideological distance from the case Beckett is making. This analysis suggests that allowing a reported individual to speak in her or his own voice, with only minimal evaluative framing, can serve to undermine the legitimacy of what is said. In other words, the *structured absence* of such framing can be more ideologically loaded than framing which is either overtly positive or negative. This alerts us to the need for a more co(n)text-sensitive model to account for the ideological function of discourse representation.

A detailed critical analysis of the relative treatment of the candidates in the

*Daily Mirror*, in the juxtaposed profiles (11 June 1994: 6, see earlier) and in the subsequent more extended interviews with them on 22, 23 and 24 June, is at odds with the claim expressed in the editorial on 7 July, 'We alone among the media have reported this contest without the slightest favour to any candidate'. Whether consciously or not, the all-male editorial team aligned themselves, and invited their assumed male readers to align themselves, with the two male candidates in the leadership race, segregating and subordinating Beckett as a candidate promoting herself on a narrowly gendered platform.

#### 4.2 *Gender and the genre of the political interview*

Negrine (1989: 191) points out an inherent conflict which exists between what politicians expect of the media and the way in which media workers perceive their role: 'politicians seek, in the main, favourable publicity', whilst media workers 'seek to hold politicians to account'. This tension is likely to be exacerbated when male journalists have to accommodate a woman in the relatively unusual position of political power, and this is evident in a number of articles written during the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign which record interviews between Beckett and journalists. Typical of many such articles is the one in *The Times* (21 June 1994: 15), recording an interview she had with the political correspondents Peter Riddell and Philip Webster. I chose this article because Ross (1995b: 505) regards it as one of the 'most balanced representation(s) of Beckett's views of herself and her potential to lead the party'. In particular, she points out that the article acknowledges the way Party and media sexism have served to marginalize Beckett throughout the course of the campaign.

A detailed critical analysis of the article reveals an alternative reading. For instance, it is clear that Beckett wishes to emphasize her record as an experienced politician, while Riddell and Webster choose to foreground the issue of her gender, partly through their choice of metaphors (see 4.3 for a detailed discussion of these). Furthermore, a number of textual traces reveal the way in which the two journalists actively construct a subject position for her, which they claim is prevalent among parliamentary colleagues and media commentators, as merely 'competent'. This view is reinforced by their selective depiction of the roles she has performed as bureaucratic gatekeeping ones: 'keeper of the keys', and as deputy leader 'in charge of organisation' and 'co-ordinator of its campaigning and elections'. Her considerable political experience and expertise could have been presented in a very different light, especially given the relative inexperience of her two rivals. Instead, we are told that 'She has suffered from being seen as an apparatchik, a manager rather than a visionary, going back to her days as a party researcher'. The use of the agentless passive here, together with the choice of the verb 'to suffer', serves both to cast her stereotypically as a passive victim and to disguise agency. That this is, in fact, the producers' own view is evident in the earlier collocational chaining of phrases such as 'safe and competent' and 'highly competent'. Significantly, she chooses to resignify the dysphemism 'apparatchik'

as 'somebody who will do difficult jobs'. Ultimately, though, it is the producers who control the way the interview is slanted for readers. For instance, their perception that 'She can be prickly and defensive' is given the status of an objective 'fact', while their view of themselves as professionals asking 'straightforward' questions casts her in the role of a paranoid politician.

This analysis highlights the tensions and contradictions inherent in the genre of the political interview when the politician being interviewed is a woman. The account of the interview which appeared in the final article serves both to expose the overt gender bias of media coverage and at the same time to re-produce this gender bias in a covert form. This is achieved by the segregationist strategy of constructing a subject position for Beckett as someone whose main strength is her ability to occupy a practical supporting role vis-a-vis the activities of visionary men. In this way, the article helps to contribute to the gendered division of labour within political parties, noted by Burstyn (1983: 73). The stereotypical assumptions underlying this division of political labour emerge more clearly if we place it in the context of the larger discursive framework or schema<sup>3</sup> which operates across the boundaries of public sphere discourse types, casting women in subordinate support roles while men are cast in powerful leadership roles.

Opposition to militarism and war has been an important strand in British feminism, but it introduces further dissonance into women's relationship to the role of an aspiring political leader. As Pateman (1989: 49) observes, 'Of all the male clubs and associations, it is in the military and on the battlefield that fraternity finds its most complete expression'. The military duty to defend one's country underlines the gender sub-text of a politician's role. Thus one of the objections raised to the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro for the vice-presidential role in the 1984 US presidential election was, according to Faludi (1992: 302), 'that her gender would render her incapable of defending the nation'. During the Falklands War, Thatcher had to search far back in history to find an appropriate image of a warrior woman in Boadicea. Rather than confronting the links between masculinity and war, Thatcher constructed an image of herself as a reluctant non-combatant (Webster, 1990: 166).

It is in this broader context that we need to interpret Anthony Bevins's interview with Beckett during the Labour leadership campaign (the *Observer*, 26 June 1994: 8), an interview in which he deliberately chose to foreground her commitment to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). He presents his discussion with her on this subject as a sequence of questions and answers, a format which sets it apart graphically from the remainder of the article. Bell (1991: 210) cites a study by Clayman (1990) of stories drawn from the *Los Angeles Times*, which revealed that this format was used largely to signal interactional resistance: 'They show the news source as hesitating to reply, refusing to answer, giving non-answers, or admitting something under repeated questioning'. This is precisely the effect produced by the layout of this section of Bevins's interview with Beckett. It appears under the negative sub-headline, 'Never ask a CND member if she would use the bomb', alerting us to the fact that

it is what Beckett refuses to say in her replies which is significant. Bevin's contributions begin with a series of bald interrogatives, clearly designed to put Beckett on the defensive. Although Beckett evades his attempts at framing the issue in a hypothetical way with 'what if?' questions, the precise detailing of her evasive replies has clearly served his purpose, which appears to have been to discredit her claim to represent a viable future prime minister. This implicit reluctance of Beckett to countenance 'pushing the button' was recycled in a series of media accounts throughout the following week and is likely to have damaged her standing as a candidate amongst the modernizers in the electoral college. It is significant that this was an issue which featured only marginally in interviews with the other two candidates.

#### 4.3 News narratives and gender bias

A number of media analysts have identified hard news as a sub-genre of narrative discourse (see, for instance, Fairclough, 1995b; Caldas-Coulthard, 1995). Analysis has tended to focus almost exclusively on the narrative function, often central to hard news stories, of recounting past events. Even more ideologically implicated, however, are those hard news stories in which the narrative function of *predicting* future events is to the fore. Such predictive narratives do not structure events that have already occurred, but privilege a particular construction of events which have yet to take place. In this context, fact and forecast are apt to trade places.

Although some analysts have called into question the media's influence on voting behaviour, this article would suggest that analysis needs to be more context-aware. For instance, a particular configuration of circumstances in the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign created ideal conditions for the media to influence the outcome. Changes to the Party's electoral college created a mass electorate and, as Hugo Young, *The Guardian's* chief political commentator, pointed out (19 May 1994), 'With a mass electorate the media have much greater power to make their *story* come true than they would if the vote lay with the parliamentary party' (my italics). A second point is that the unexpectedness of John Smith's death on 12 May 1994 meant that opinions were not pre-formed, as they often are in intra-party campaigns which are foreseen. Finally, the moratorium on official campaigning which prevailed between Smith's death and the European elections on 9 June created an ideal *space* for media speculation.

In the event, the *story* constructed in the media during the 1994 Labour leadership election campaign was a masculinist narrative in which the only female political actor, having initially been excluded completely, was admitted only as a minor character. The striking feature of the Blair bandwagon and the all male Blair-PreScott 'dream ticket' in the 1994 election campaign is the degree of homogeneity about them across newspapers of all shades of opinion. Five days after John Smith's death, seven national newspapers had declared their support for Blair, including the right wing tabloids the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*,

and broadsheets the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Times*. This homogeneity can be explained partly by the tendency noted by Fairclough (1995b: 198) for stories in the media to become recycled, forming intertextual chains. These intertextual networks, which operate across different media texts, make it very difficult for oppositional narratives to occupy a discursive space.

The initial absence of coverage of Beckett's high-profile role as acting leader is particularly surprising given the media bias to office (she was acting leader) noted by Seymore-Ure (1987: 14). The oddness of this situation was noted even in the right-wing press. Writing in *The Times* (21 June 1994: 15), Riddell and Webster acknowledge that 'in the days after Mr Smith's death, she (Beckett) was virtually written out of the script'. Lakoff (1995: 29) argues that women's lack of interpretative control and, in particular, the fact that their narratives are evaluated by male authority, help to explain their continued marginalization in public-sphere roles. A revealing comment in this respect is that made by Hugo Young: 'With the help of Mr Paxman,<sup>4</sup> each *man* will have been obliged to stake out the priorities *he* believes in' (*The Guardian* 17 May 1994, my italics). This statement provides evidence of the fraternal networks which exist between male politicians and male commentators in a variety of media, in this case the press and television. In it, one media man foregrounds the central role in the campaign of another well-known media man in literally *mediating* the political claims of implicitly *male* political contenders.<sup>5</sup>

Female politicians are not only generally excluded from the masculinist narratives which pervade coverage of the public discourse of politics, but also, if they do feature, tend to be referred to in terms of metaphors which are drawn from low-status narratives associated with women readers. Riddell and Webster (*The Times*, 21 June 1994: 15) describe Beckett as 'the best friend aspiring to be the heroine'. This serves to belittle her political ambitions by linking them metaphorically to the prospects of a heroine in the genre of the popular romantic novel. A related discursive strategy is the tendency to refer to women who enter the public sphere in terms of metaphors drawn from the private sphere. The article in *The Guardian* (17 May 1994) carried the headline 'Is Margaret Beckett destined always to be the *bridesmaid*?'. The reader is, of course, expected to supply 'and never the bride', thus implicating her or himself in what is a trivializing metaphorical construction, given that it is used to assess the prospects of a woman aspiring to one of the highest political offices in the land.

Common collocations are less *fixed* than metaphors, yet these can also function to implicate the reader in sexism. For instance, an article in the *Sunday Mirror* (10 July 1994: 6) carried the huge headline, in bold white-on-black, 'DESERTED', to describe the apparent defection of 'up to 12' MPs who had allegedly switched their support from Beckett to Prescott. The choice 'deserted' here invites the reader to see Beckett as a victim, by analogy with the common collocation 'a deserted wife'. In fact, the paper names only three MPs who are prepared to acknowledge this publicly, two of whom qualify their switch of allegiance. At this late stage in the campaign, when the defection of a few MPs could mean the

difference between winning and losing, this is a blatant attempt by the producers to influence readers/voters to follow the paper's own stated policy of supporting Prescott for the deputy's role. It is likely, of course, that many female readers found themselves at odds with the often male-gendered reading positions established for them. Ross (1995b: 507) argues that this is confirmed by the fact that, despite the media's limited and largely unfavourable coverage of Beckett's campaign, 'she lost the deputy leadership by only 9 percentage points'.

During political campaigns, the media have a ready-made stock of masculinist military metaphors which mean that the terms of the debate are already patriarchal. These were invoked by the columnist Andrew Rawnsley in his attempt to discredit claims of institutional sexism as feminist paranoia. In a characteristically glib article in the *Observer* (10 July 1994: 24), he argues that "There was no male conspiracy to deny the job to a woman', but the metaphors he chooses in which to frame the terms of political debate betray his own patriarchal assumptions. 'I would be asking myself who I would prefer to go into the jungle with. Mr Prescott will get him (Mr Blair) into far more fights, but when the crocodiles close in, the leader could be reasonably confident that his deputy will be fighting on the same side'. The genre evoked here is the boys' adventure story. By choosing to draw his metaphors from this particular genre, Rawnsley inadvertently indicates the difficulty women experience in being taken seriously as political actors, since the inclusion of a woman in an active role would violate the norms of what Sedgwick (1985) terms the *homosocial bonding* on which this genre, and by implication party politics, are premised.

When women in political life *are* referred to in terms of military metaphors, these often carry connotations of unfeminine aggressiveness which are readily caricatured, as is evident in Steve Bell's satirical cartoons of Thatcher. The caption for an inset photograph of Beckett, accompanying an interview with her in the *Daily Mirror* (22 June 1994: 14–15), carries the epithet 'Battler'. The picture depicts an unsmiling Beckett in mid-debate. The term 'battler' can be interpreted in a number of ways. It appears to invite the reader to view her as a woman battling against the odds in the campaign, but it also carries connotations of an unfeminine 'battle-axe'. The latter interpretation is supported by the juxtaposed quotation which also serves to underline her contrariness: 'My origins are on the left, as John Smith's associations were on the right'. The selective use of this quotation also serves to undermine the claim, which she made the cornerstone of her campaign, that she was the continuity candidate.

## 5 Conclusion

The hidden power of media discourse to reinforce women's segregation and subordination in the public sphere does not depend on a single article, or even a series of articles, but on systematic tendencies in news reporting whose effect is cumulative. For instance, the issue of women-only short lists has been subject to a

sustained and vitriolic campaign which is likely to have played a key role in the recent decision by the Labour Party to abandon the policy. A comment in the *Daily Mail* (27 July 1995) captures the tenor of this coverage, in which charges of 'political correctness' and 'tokenism' are rife and in which the term 'feminist' collocates antonymically with 'moderate'. It describes the lists as part of a 'politically correct system aimed at increasing the number of women MPs by barring men from standing in key constituencies'. These recent and temporary overt barriers to the entry into politics of male candidates have provoked outrage, while the covert barriers which have excluded female candidates from entering the party political arena for decades have gone unremarked. The coverage of the 1994 Labour leadership campaign needs, therefore, to be seen in this broader context of media bias against individual female politicians and, more generally, against feminist strategies aimed at challenging patriarchal practices in party politics.

As Deputy Leader, Margaret Beckett had been the most senior, as well as by far the most experienced, of the potential candidates for the leadership. When she attempted to translate what was a symbolic role into a substantive one, she was punished by the loss of both. It is significant that after losing both campaigns, she was given the 'soft' portfolio of Shadow Health Secretary, rather than either Tony Blair's previously high-profile brief of Shadow Home Affairs or John Prescott's former brief as Shadow Employment Secretary, widely predicted for her by Party colleagues. The idea that women are particularly suited to these roles is symptomatic of the tendency to define women's roles under public patriarchy by analogy with the roles they have traditionally performed under private patriarchy, replicating the private/public dichotomy *within* the public sphere. It would appear, then, that one effect of women's access to public discourse types has been to effect a discursive reconstruction of the public sphere. It has become an asymmetrical two-tier system in which women occupy a subordinate role. It will be interesting to examine whether, and in what ways, the recent shift in the gender balance in the House of Commons<sup>6</sup> will do anything to change its masculinist culture. The 'ironic' caption, 'Blair's babes', accompanying an inset photograph in the *Daily Mirror* (8 May 1997: 9) of the new Prime Minister surrounded by Labour's record 101 female MPs does little, however, to offer hope of an imminent shift away from the masculinist bias of the print media.

## Notes

- 1 I would agree with Cameron's (1992: 100) view that so-called 'gender-neutral' definitions of this term ignore the fact that 'sexism is a system in which women and men are not simply different, but unequal ... and it works to the disadvantage of women, not men'.
- 2 This is supported by a recent Fawcett Society survey of one week's television coverage of the 1997 British General Election. The survey revealed that 4 out of 5 election items were covered by men. Of the professionals and experts whose opinions were called upon, 93 percent were men, while only 8 out of a total of 135 politicians invited to comment were women; not one government spokesperson was a woman (see 'Watching Women: Election 1997', Fawcett Society, London).

- 3 Mills (1995: 187 ff.) defines 'schemata' as frameworks, often, as in this instance, gendered, which represent an intermediate stage between language and ideology. 'These structures are well-trodden pathways, which because of their familiarity take on an air of commonsense knowledge. It is only by describing these seemingly commonsense structures that we begin to expose their constructed nature and at the same time their perniciousness' (p. 197).
- 4 This is an allusion to the influential British journalist and broadcaster, Jeremy Paxman, renowned for his robust interviewing technique on the BBC's news and current affairs programme, *Newsnight*.
- 5 Although it might be claimed that both *he* and *man* are intended to be understood generically, their non-generic reference in this instance is made clear in the context in which all the potential candidates alluded to are *male*. This is particularly ironic since the article is self-reflexively critical in tone, bemoaning the media-led nature of the campaign which is said to have rendered it anti-democratic. This inadvertently betrays a view of significant political actors in the democratic process as implicitly male.
- 6 The number of women MPs in the 1997 British General Election almost doubled, from 60 (9.2%), in 1992, to 120 (18%). Of these, the vast majority (101) are Labour MPs, largely as a result of the short-lived, but effective, policy of women-only short lists. However, in terms of the proportion of women in the lower house, the UK still achieves a relatively low ranking when compared with its European partners, ahead only of countries like Italy, Ireland and Belgium.

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# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

## INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

**1 Submission of manuscripts** Four copies of the manuscript (typewritten), illustrations and tables should be submitted to Professor Katie Wales, *Language and Literature*, School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK. All manuscripts will be refereed.

**2 Preparation of manuscripts** Manuscripts should not normally exceed 6,000 words and should be typed *double-spaced* on one side only of A4 or US standard size paper with a 3 cm margin all round. Pages should be numbered consecutively throughout. A cover sheet should include author(s) name(s), affiliation, full postal address and email address, telephone and fax numbers where possible. The principal author responsible for correspondence concerning the manuscript should date and sign the top copy of the manuscript. A brief (max. 250 words) abstract should be provided plus up to 10 keywords. No more than three levels of subheading should be used; the first two levels should be numbered 1, 1.1, 1.2, 2, 2.1, etc. Acknowledgements should appear at the end of the text. Spelling should follow that of the Oxford English Dictionary. Endnotes, not footnotes, should be used. Quoted words or sections in running text should be in single quotes with double quotes within. Passages of more than 50 words should be indented. Please avoid 'generic' *he* and 'authorial' *we* (for I).

**3 References** Use the Harvard system, which *in the text* cites authors and year of publication, e.g. (Rose, 1995: 43) or Rose (1995: 43); use 'et al.' when citing a work by more than two authors and a, b, c, etc. to distinguish citations of different works by the same author in the same year. All references cited in the text should be listed alphabetically and presented in full after the notes, using the following style:  
*Articles in journals:* Pilkington, A. (1990) 'A Relevance Theoretic View of Metaphor', *Parlance* 2(2): 102-17.  
*Books:* Doughty, P., Pearce, J. and Thornton, G. (1972) *Exploring Language*. London: Edward Arnold.  
*Articles in books:* Cooper, W.E. and Ross, J.R. (1975) 'World Order', in R.E. Grossman, L.J. San and T.J. Vance (eds) *Papers from the Parasession on Functionalism*, pp. 63-111. Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistics Society.

*Unpublished works:* Cook, G. (1990) 'A Theory of Discourse Deviation', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds.

**4 Tables** Tables should be typed (double line-spaced) on *separate sheets* and their position indicated by a marginal note in the text.

**5 Illustrations** All line diagrams and photographs are termed 'Figures' and should be referred to as such in the manuscript. They should be numbered consecutively. *Line diagrams* should be presented in a form suitable for immediate reproduction (i.e. not requiring redrawing by the Publisher), each on a separate A4 or US standard size sheet. They should be reproducible to a final printed width of 104mm and a max. depth of 192mm. *Half-tones* are acceptable only if they are essential to the understanding of the text. Please supply clear, glossy, unmounted prints of black and white photos, with a good range of contrast. All *captions* should be provided as separate copy.

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# LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

JOURNAL OF THE POETICS AND LINGUISTICS ASSOCIATION

Volume 7 Number 3 1998

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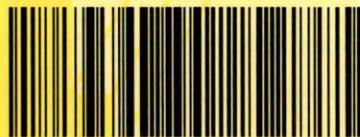
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