WOMEN IN SOCIETY

A Feminist List edited by
Jo Campling

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The last 20 years have seen an explosion of publishing by, about and for women. This new list is designed to make a particular contribution to this continuing process by commissioning and publishing books which consolidate and advance feminist research and debate in key areas in a form suitable for students, academics and researchers but also accessible to a broader general readership.

As far as possible, books will adopt an international perspective incorporating comparative material from a range of countries where this is illuminating. Above all they will be interdisciplinary, aiming to put women's studies and feminist discussion firmly on the agenda in subject-areas as disparate as law, literature, art and social policy.

Published

Christy Adair **Women and Dance: sylphs and sirens**
Sheila Allen and Carol Wolkowitz **Homeworking: myths and realities**
Niamh Baker **Happily Ever After? Women's fiction in post-war Britain**
Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron **Women's Worlds: ideology, femininity and the woman's magazine**
Jenny Beale **Women in Ireland: voices of change**
Jennifer Breen **In Her Own Write: Twentieth-century women's fiction**
Valerie Bryson **Feminist Political Theory: an introduction**
Ruth Carter and Gill Kirkup **Women in Engineering**
Joan Chandler **Women without Husbands: an exploration of the margins of marriage**
Angela Coyle and Jane Skinner **Women and Work: positive action for change**
Gillian Dalley **Ideologies of Caring: rethinking community and collectivism**
Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (editors) **Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work**
Emily Driver and Audrey Droisen (editors) **Child Sexual Abuse: a feminist reader**
Elizabeth Ettorre **Women and Substance Use**
Lesley Ferris **Acting Women: Images of women in theatre**
Diana Gittins **The Family in Question: changing households and familiar ideologies**
Eileen Green, Diana Woodward and Sandra Hebron **Women's Leisure, What Leisure?**
Tuula Gordon **Feminist Mothers**
Frances Heidensohn **Women and Crime**
Ursula King **Women and Spirituality: voices of protest and promise**
Muthoni Likimani (*Introductory Essay by Jean O' Barr*) **Passbook Number F.47927: women and Mau Mau in Kenya**
Jo Little, Linda Peake and Pat Richardson (editors) **Women in Cities: gender and the urban environment**
Susan Lonsdale **Women and Disability**
Sharon Macdonald, Pat Holden and Shirley Ardener (editors) **Images of Women in Peace and War: cross-cultural and historical perspectives**
Mavis Maclean **Surviving Divorce: women's resources after separation**
Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover **A Hidden Workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850–1985**
Vicky Randall **Women and Politics: an international perspective** (2nd edn)
Diane Richardson **Women, Motherhood and Childrearing**
Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway (editors) **Caught up in p. + Conflict: women's response to political strife**
Susan Sellers **Language and Sexual Difference: feminist writing in France**
Patricia Spallone **Beyond Conception: the new politics of reproduction**
Taking Liberties Collective **Learning the Hard Way: women's oppression and men's education**
Clare Ungerson (editor) **Women and Social Policy: a reader**
Kitty Warnock **Land Before Honour: Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories**
Annie Woodhouse **Fantastic Women: sex, gender and transvestism**

Forthcoming

Eileen Aird and Judy Lown **Education for Autonomy: processes of change in women's education**
Maria Brenton **Women and Old Age**
Joan Busfield **Women and Mental Health**
Tuula Gordon **Single Women**
Frances Gray **Women and Laughter**
Annie Hudson **Troublesome Girls: adolescence, femininity and the state**
Ruth Lister **Women and Citizenship**

Women's Leisure, What Leisure?

Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward

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EILEEN GREEN
SANDRA HEBRON
DIANA WOODWARD

Introduction

The impetus for this book was our irritation and confusion about the over-defined concept of leisure. It seemed at its least relevant when applied to the lives of the majority of women, as they juggled children, domestic lives and jobs, and attempted to squeeze in 'time for themselves'. We ourselves were no exception, we wryly observed, as we struggled to write about leisure amid the competing demands of employment, children and long-suffering partners! During the writing the leisure services boom has intensified, with local authorities joining the race to provide upmarket leisure 'palaces' modelled on the revolutionary Whitley Bay experiment of the 1970s – a British leisure pool equipped with wave machine, water slides and assorted tropical 'forests'. Prophets of this approach to meeting our leisure 'needs' enjoyed a high profile at the 1988 International Leisure Studies Conference at Brighton, where the audience were subjected to a mesmerising visual display of leisure 'worlds' encapsulated in heated glass domes. Alert members of the audience considered the reactions of elderly users of community leisure facilities: would they approve of such hi-tech replacements to their neighbourhood pools, assuming they could afford the entrance fee? The feminists among us wondered cynically where 'Mum' fitted into this picture of glamour and self-actualisation. Was she changing nappies in the non-existent creche, or chatting to the other women as they observed their offspring braving the delights of the water slides?

The theoretical approach developed throughout the book is informed by our commitment to feminism, together with a socialist perspective through which we attempt to analyse the social

structures within which women's leisure experiences are set. It is our contention that feminist approaches to leisure have reached a critical stage, characterised by the beginnings of debate among feminists on differences of theory and related politics. The critique of traditional approaches within leisure studies is now paralleled by a collective concern to shape feminist perspectives which both 'allow women a voice' and provide a framework with which to analyse major changes (see Wimbush and Talbot (1988) for a more detailed discussion of different feminist perspectives on women's leisure). In Chapter 1 we map out such theoretical developments.

Whilst leisure theorists and journalists suggest that leisure as a way of defining oneself has become somewhat 'déclassé' now that unemployment means there is so much of it around, the leisure industry feverishly competes to come up with the ultimate leisure experience. This will no doubt be enjoyed by the fabled 'dinkies' (dual income, no kids) and 'yuppies' (young, upwardly mobile professional people), who are young, white, middle class and primarily male. The regeneration of British industry is highly dependent upon the expansion of the service industries, with the development of new personal services ranging from dinner parties to house sitting – services which seem to combine the gentility of Victorian England with the efficiency of contemporary Manhattan. Labour market statistics tell us that the bulk of workers employed in these new industries are, and increasingly will be, women, whose share of the job market is predicted to rise to 50 per cent by the 1990s, with most of the increase in the area of part-time employment. If more women are taking on paid work in addition to domestic responsibilities and childcare, their opportunities to partake of the new leisure experience will be even more constrained than they are at present. A body of evidence exists to confirm that women generally have less time, resources and opportunities for leisure than men (Deem, 1986a; Wimbush, 1986; Wearing and Wearing, 1988) and a narrower range of options on where and with whom to spend it (Green, Hebron and Woodward, 1987b).

In order to explore the issue of leisure for women we need to examine it in context, noting the current increases in part-time employment rates which appear to offer flexibility and therefore choices, until the anti-social hours and low rates of pay are considered (Beechey and Perkins, 1987). Also noteworthy is the phenomenon of 'teleworking' – working from home with the tools of

information technology, which involves mainly women as paid workers, or unpaid workers servicing the work of male partners. Teleworking is portrayed by employers as 'liberating' more time to spend with the family, which ignores the well-known fact that women are more likely than men to be involved in homeworking anyway, whether paid (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987) or unpaid. Shifting employment back into the domestic sphere will undoubtedly reduce employers' overheads, but is also likely to reduce further women's free time – time that is potentially available for leisure.

This book aims critically to address the issue of women's leisure, drawing upon research data collected during a three-year project on gender and leisure funded jointly by the English Sports Council and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Our analysis developed out of a study of women's leisure in Sheffield, carried out between 1984 and 1987. Our interest has been not so much in the amount and type of leisure that women engage in, but in the cultural significance of leisure, an issue which clearly has a gender dimension. We are also concerned with leisure as a site of potential conflict, which highlights the contradictory nature of the 'freedom' and 'pleasure' labels traditionally attached to it. Leisure cannot be compartmentalised and explored in isolation from other parts of life, as the character of its vital ingredients – time, resources and commitment – are indicative of the broader social structures within which they emerge; for women that generally involves a web of inequalities. A woman's right to freedom in leisure is circumscribed by her employment status and income level, her family situation and, most important, her lack of status as a woman in a patriarchal society.

The structure of the book encompasses these broad themes; they appear in each chapter and are explored from a variety of perspectives. Chapter 2 builds upon the theoretical premises outlined in the first chapter, and attempts to move towards an understanding of leisure from a socialist feminist perspective. To this end we draw significantly upon cultural studies in order to explore the connections between cultural forms, ideology and class relations, assessing their impact upon patriarchy. A crucial historical dimension is provided in Chapter 3, which traces the social history of women's leisure. Uncovering this history is no easy task, owing to the grave lack of published material. Oral histories, diaries and biographies are among the richest sources, as Stanley notes in her

recent discussion of historical accounts of women's leisure (in Wimbush and Talbot, 1988). Such informal accounts combine rich personal experiences with reflections on the changing social fabric within which they took place. Chapter 4 reviews existing data on women's leisure patterns, drawing extensively on our own research material and placing it within a broad, comparative context through the use of both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The most fascinating part of this evidence appears in the form of personal accounts, for example of the operation of gendered social control processes in relation to leisure. This process is explored in depth in Chapter 5, which also examines the centrality of sexuality in negotiations between women and their male partners about women's access to independent leisure outside the home. Sexuality is a crucial component of ideological representations of women, both in pursuing their own leisure interests and in servicing the leisure of others. We argue that it is this component that accounts for the often highly charged nature of gender relations, in private negotiations about how and with whom women spend their leisure time, and in public leisure venues where women are often indiscriminately viewed as part of the entertainment. Chapter 7 attempts to draw together some of the positive attempts to improve and extend women's leisure opportunities. The discussion ranges from an analysis of good practice in leisure provision by public and private agencies, to informal strategies which rely heavily on time-honoured female networks of women friends, relatives and neighbours.

Substantial sections of the book involve a detailed examination of the structural constraints that operate to limit both the form and frequency of women's leisure opportunities. However, we are also concerned to emphasise the importance of leisure as a rich source of pleasure and continuity in the lives of many of the women we interviewed. A night out for a 'laugh with the girls' is a jealously guarded pursuit which counteracts social isolation and reinforces the female solidarity that has endured across time and cultures of difference.

In conducting the study of Sheffield women's leisure experiences we sought to operate as a team, with non-hierarchical working practices. This book is likewise the product of a genuine collaborative effort, although the subsequent dispersal of team members to other jobs and research projects has made this ideal

increasingly difficult to realise. The ideas expressed here are by and large shared by us all; as far as the writing is concerned, Eileen Green was primarily responsible for the Introduction and Chapters 1 and 6, Sandra Hebron for Chapters 2 and 3 and the Conclusion, and Diana Woodward for Chapters 4, 5 and 7.