
MEN'S LIBERATION: A CRITIQUE

Roger Melvin

Kua kaha te tipu ake o ngaa roopu waahine e mahi kaha ana mo te whaanau, mo ngaa take katoa e paa ana ki a taatou katoa. Kua tiimata hoki ngaa roopu taane ki te puta atu. Engari e whakahee ana te kaituhi nei, araa, a Roger Melvin, i ngaa mahi a ngaa roopu taane. Me aata titiro eenei roopu taane ki ngaa aahuatanga katoa o to taatou nei ao e peehi ana i ngaa waahine. Ko te mea nui kee ki taa te kaituhi, me tautoko ngaa roopu taane i ngaa roopu waahine.

Ko te tuhinga a whai atu i teena o Roger Melvin ko teenei na Sally Ruth. Ko toona whakapae ko teenei, ko ngaa tikanga o ngaa roopu taane ko eena anoo e peehi ana i te wahine.

INTRODUCTION

When I began reading about the social role of men and the ways in which men could support the women's movement, I was vaguely irritated by a lot of the material. It took me some time to discover the source of my discomfort: that much of the writing suggested that men are "oppressed" by our masculine role, and that we must change our attitudes, so that not only women, but we too may become liberated. I felt that this was missing the point that feminists were making: that men gained and women suffered in real, physical ways from our dominance over women.

The notion of the "masculine role" and the belief that men can liberate themselves from this role emerged from the men's liberation movement that started in the early 1970s in the United States. I thus centre my discussion of these ideas on the ideology, aims and activities of the men's liberation movement. I also briefly describe the divisions that have occurred in the men's movement since the 1970's and the development of "Men Against Sexism" groups. Finally, I examine the activities of men's groups in Aotearoa, particularly those in Christchurch, in terms of some of the criticisms I make of men's liberation.

MEN'S LIBERATION AND THE MASCULINE ROLE

In 1973 Barbara Katz reported that in America "an estimated 300 men's groups now meet regularly to explore the ways in which sex-role stereotypes limit and inhibit them."¹ From these groups the ideology of the men's liberation movement developed, and this was captured in books such as *The Liberated Man: Beyond Masculinity*, by Warren Farrell; *Men and Masculinity*, by Pleck and Sawyer; and *Men's Liberation*, by Jack Nichols.²

The motivation for the establishment of the men's liberation movement at the beginning of the

1970s in the United States was clearly the growing women's movement. Many men felt the need to react in some supportive way to the women's liberation movement, especially those men whose partners were involved with women's liberation. These men felt a need to make personal changes that would complement and support the changes their partners were trying to make.

Just as feminists had redefined and sought to change the female sex-role, the men's liberationists wished also to question the expectations of the "masculine role". That such a role existed was a discovery which coincided with, and which was no doubt partly a product of, the emerging men's liberation movement. Although men's liberation literature often approached masculinity in terms of the personal experiences of men in the movement, psychologists and sociologists were also producing more "scientific" studies on the subject.³

It became generally agreed that men, like women, had a set of expectations to live up to. The masculine role required men to be successful, confident, unemotional, rational, competitive, aggressive, dominating and to take the responsibility of being the bread-winners for their families. This role was imposed upon boys from the day they were born by the socialisation process, and continually reinforced when they were men.

No matter what their reputation or the validity of their studies, the vast majority of writers on the subject evaluated the traditional male role as negative and harmful, and included an imperative that this role must be changed.

The masculine role was regarded as harmful in several ways. For a start, it was harmful to women and encouraged men to be dominating, discriminatory and condescending, and to condemn their female partners to the housework and childcare. Secondly, it could be shown that masculine values were responsible for a whole range of social ills. The aggressiveness and "rationality" of politicians, military chiefs and business executives had caused war, the nuclear threat, third-world poverty, pollution and racial strife.

The third harmful effect of masculinity, and the one most emphasised by the men's liberation movement, was that it restricted and damaged men. The anxiety and stress involved with learning and living up to the male role was shown to be responsible for many male health disorders.⁴ Health aspects aside, the men's liberationists regarded the male role as "sub-human", because it did not allow men to take advantage of their full potential to be more caring, passive and emotional. Men's liberationists claimed: "We are oppressed by conditioning which makes us only half-human."⁵

Because of its harmful effects, the men's liberation movement sought to change the traditional masculine role. Since this role had been imposed on men through social conditioning, the way to make changes was to have men unlearn their conditioning. They could then develop new, less damaging and less restrictive ways to act: hence men's "liberation".

The means by which men could make the required changes was through the "consciousness-raising group". In small groups which met regularly, men could question the assumptions and limits of the masculine role, and they could develop ways of overcoming these limits; they could learn to trust one another enough to show their feelings and to break down competitive barriers; they could challenge one another's sexist attitudes and learn how to be less oppressive towards women.

The central feature of men's liberation was the belief that inequalities between men and women, and the resulting problems of sex-role stereotyping, could be corrected if both sexes changed the attitudes produced by their social conditioning. Men's liberation literature, however, did not elaborate much on how men's behaviour might be affected by these changes of attitude. When changes in behaviour were considered, this was usually in terms of men and women in one-to-one relationships: men would share housework and child-rearing, share the primary breadwinning responsibilities and reduce their emotional dependence on women.

There was, in men's liberation ideology, little suggestion of how the liberated man would change political, economic and social organisation. The men's liberation movement had a low awareness of (or chose to ignore) the relationship between the masculine role they were seeking to modify and wider social structures.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE MASCULINE ROLE

Heidi Hartmann defined patriarchy as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, through hierarchy, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."⁶ There are two important points in Hartmann's analysis which the men's liberation movement played down or did not fully acknowledge. We can see how deficient the theory of the masculine gender role is when we compare it to a much more structural account, such as Hartmann's.

The first point made by Hartmann is that patriarchy has a material rather than ideological base, and that it benefits men in real material ways. Men, as a group and individually, control women's labour power and can thus extract services from women in such forms as child-rearing, housework and sexual services in the home, and as a cheap reserve labour force in the capitalist marketplace.

Men's liberation literature stresses the gains men will make from breaking out of the limits of the traditional masculine role. Warren Farrell, in *The Liberated Man*, lists "twenty-one specific areas in which men can benefit from women's liberation". But he adds, "All of these benefits must be seen in the context of the accompanying responsibilities, particularly the sharing by men of the responsibility for childcare and housework."⁷ Much

of men's liberation literature examines the greater opportunities men can experience by becoming liberated. However, the ways men benefit at present from patriarchy, and the real limits on their opportunities should the changes come about which feminists advocate, are given little attention.

The second point of interest Hartmann makes is that "both hierarchy and interdependence among men and the subordination of women are integral to the functioning of our society; that is, these relations are systemic".⁸ She shows that patriarchy is more than mere ideology: it is an essential feature of our present society, and any significant shift in the inequalities of gender power will coincide with a fundamental change in the structure of this society.

The men's liberationists showed little awareness of how vital were gender, race and class hierarchies to the functioning of modern Western societies. They used the term "role" without reference to the political and economic organisation within which these hierarchical relations existed. According to the men's liberationists, the oppression of various social groups resulted from the faulty social conditioning of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Paul Hoch, in *White Hero, Black Beast*, found that men's liberation had some common theoretical ground with radical feminism: that both movements stress "the priority of sex over economics, and the causal priority of male attitudes to the social systems which they create."⁹ Just as the radical feminist concept "male chauvinism" suggests, he says, that men will naturally dominate women, men's liberation identifies the "traditional male role" as the reason for men's oppression of women. Hoch claims that both groups fail to adequately relate attitudes to social structure, and cannot explain why or how these may be changed.

The men's liberationists carefully defined and analysed the masculine role, but they did not look



beyond this to the historical and social structures which shaped the role. They regarded the traditional masculine role as detachable and so gave it a life of its own. In order to end the harmful effects brought about by the masculine role, men simply had to learn a new role, a task more psychological than real. If the men's liberation movement had looked deep enough into why men acted according to a particular role, they would have been forced to recognise social structure and history.

FOR A MORE RADICAL MEN'S MOVEMENT

The men's liberation movement recognised the need for a change in men's attitudes and behaviour, but it sought to make these changes only within one-to-one relationships with women rather than on a basis of more institutional reforms. A number of issues arise from this study of men's liberation which suggest how pro-feminist men, individually and in groups, should work for change.

Pro-feminist men's groups must have a comprehensive theoretical base from which to work. Attitudes and behaviour do not exist in a strictly causal relationship of one to the other, but are interdependent. Useful theory should express this relationship and explain how the two might be changed. Paul Hoch states that "it is only by obtaining a clear understanding of how sexual attitudes and roles can change with different social structures that we can arrive at perspectives for putting such changes into practice."¹⁰

Although the men's liberation movement recognised itself as predominantly white, middle-class and heterosexual, it did not see how these attributes gave it a unique relationship to women not shared by other male groups. Useful theory should distinguish between different groups of men along lines of race, class and sexual orientation. The relationship between groups of men, and how these affect relations between men and women, must be understood.

One might expect that the theory men's groups used would be well-grounded in feminist analyses. However, although the movement took the "role" concept from feminism, it then developed that concept without reference to more structural, material feminist theories. Men's liberation seemed to lose sight of the fact that it was women who alerted men to their oppressiveness in the first place, and it did not follow the development of feminist analyses away from psychological accounts of gender inequalities.

Both Paul Hoch and Chris Wainwright¹¹ offer good examples of the way in which social structure and men's attitudes can be related in order to develop a comprehensive programme of reform in both.

The men's liberation movement has sometimes been accused of more serious offences than that of having a flawed ideology. A review of a few of these criticisms will indicate some guidelines which pro-feminist men should follow.

Some feminists regard men's liberation as catering for those who have felt "left out" as the women's movement has grown, or for those who wish only to adapt themselves sufficiently to attract the "liberated woman". The men's liberation movement has been described as "really a part of the backlash propping up damaged male egos in the wake of feminism."¹²

Barbara Ehrenreich described men's liberation as another phase in a broad historical trend of men trying to relieve themselves of work and marriage responsibilities.¹³ Perhaps men's liberation offered men new opportunities to see more of their children and to share the breadwinning without decreasing (perhaps increasing) the inequalities between women and men.

In a *Broadsheet* article, "Pigs Might Fly", Sandra Coney says that men's liberationists have warped feminist analysis to include themselves as oppressed and adopted feminist rhetoric and tactics for their own ends.¹⁴ Men's liberationists were learning how to lead happier personal lives while gaining from the institutionalised oppression of women.

Men's liberation at times tended towards more selfish activities than attempting to avoid oppressing women. Some groups connected with the movement have even formed to fight custody cases for fathers and to campaign in other areas where they claim that men are unfairly discriminated against.

The scope for men's groups to err from the feminist path is considerable, and the men's liberationists seem sometimes to have twisted feminist analysis and the course of events to make gains for themselves. That some men should wish to support the feminist cause is a hopeful sign. Whilst I support the view that men are not naturally dominant and believe that there are men who could effect real pro-feminist change, I would suggest that feminists should not regard pro-feminist men's groups as above suspicion but should subject them to the same critical analysis given the rest of maledom. In fact I think it would be worthwhile for feminists to take the time and energy to check on and make critical evaluation of allegedly pro-feminist men.

While it is likely that women are in a better position to judge whether particular actions are of benefit to themselves, men are not totally unable to distinguish between good and bad pro-feminist practice. Therefore pro-feminist men should evaluate other men's groups also.

Consequently it is important that feminists ensure that men's groups, professing to be pro-feminist, have clear aims and engage in positive activities so that genuine pro-feminist males can be steered towards the right groups.

DIVISION IN THE RANKS OF THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

The men's liberation movement that began in the United States in the early 1970s continued into the 1980s. However, a split developed between "men who believed that their primary mission was to provide support for the feminist and gay movements, and those who emphasised men's (typically heterosexual men's) self interest."¹⁵ In both America and Britain, "Men Against Sexism" groups have developed who wish to distance themselves from the men's liberation movement. In the United States, in 1977, Jon Snodgrass edited a book called *For Men Against Sexism*.¹⁶ This was an anthology of articles by authors who were dedicated to transforming themselves and patriarchal society using more radical and direct means than those employed by the men's liberationists. The book included articles

which directly confront men's liberation with criticisms similar to those I have made. The writings are much more analytical than men's liberation literature, and they show greater awareness of structural theories about patriarchy and its links with capitalism.

Despite these attacks on men's liberation, much of the ideology of the movement has survived. Today men's groups seem to have an image of being introspective and purely personal rather than political. The name "men's liberation" has largely lost popularity in the men's movement, but unfortunately the ideas are alive and well. In the book *Men in Difficult Times* edited by Robert Lewis and published in 1981,¹⁷ I could find no mention of "men's liberation", but the themes of masculine roles and the oppression of men embodied in the book are so strong that this could have been a standard text for the early men's liberationists.

In Aotearoa there are similar divisions in the men's movement between those who adopt and those who reject the men's liberation approach. And in "Pigs Might Fly", Sandra Coney commented that the first New Zealand Men's Conference was particularly concerned with men's liberation, and involved such topics as consciousness-raising, sexuality, bodies, and assertiveness-training. Coney heavily criticised the conference for concentrating on men and their immediate relationships with women rather than on the larger structural issue of men as a class oppressing women.

I am unsure as to when men's groups in Aotearoa began to challenge the men's liberation approach, but the division is definitely present now. A split between groups leaning towards the "personal" and those towards the "political" is evident in a combined men's groups newsletter *Malestrom* published in Auckland in early 1984. In Auckland at that time there were a number of men's groups, some more interested in "personal" activities than others, but none of which called themselves "men's liberationists". There was an Auckland Men Against Sexism Collective which took its aims and commitments directly from Jon Snodgrass's book, and which distinguished itself from "support" groups.

In Christchurch at present there are a number of men's groups which have been involved in various events throughout the past year. These groups range in their intentions from ones which aim at institutional and structural changes to those working for purely personal reforms. At a recent "Men's Weekend", participants included members of at least seven specifically "men's" groups in Christchurch: a Young Men's Gay Support Group, at least one and up to four men's "support" groups, a "Men Against Rape" group and the University Men Against Sexism Group.

I was very involved with the activities of the university group and so will outline my experiences with that group and attempt some objective comments in terms of the criticisms I have made of the men's liberation movement.

MEN AGAINST SEXISM

The University Men Against Sexism Group has been functioning in varying degrees for over two years now. The name of the group was taken from the men's anti-sexism movement in the United States. Our group never really managed to specify its aims and intentions in the time I was involved but a

review of some of our activities in the past six months should offer some indication of our approach.

Although there were over twenty members, most meetings attracted only from five to ten men. The group met once a week most weeks for discussion and planning, and then at other times when activities required it. Some of our activities included:

Support for the Women Against Pornography group picket at the "Top Cat Revue" men-only night at the Richmond Working Men's Club, together with a media statement by a representative of our group;

The organisation of several stalls in the Student Union Building in support of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill at which people were asked to stop to write letters to Members of Parliament;

Helping the Women's Collective with a series of anti-pornography stalls;

When the Women Against Pornography group failed to get a policy motion on pornography passed at a Student Representative Council meeting because of opposition from several men, they combined with our group in a joint meeting with the male dissenters and sorted out an acceptable compromise;

Hosting Bob Scott, the co-ordinator of the National Council of Churches' Programme on Racism, and anti-sexism campaigner. He spent a couple of hours in discussion with our group and then gave a public address at the Student Union at lunch-time;

A member of our group gave a very informative talk on the history and present situation of abortion availability in Christchurch. The meeting was attended by several non-members and a good discussion ensued;

Discussion and partial planning of several activities which never eventuated, for example, to produce a series of leaflets aimed at men, on issues such as sexual harassment, pornography, the situation of women on campus and the reason why a Women's Room is necessary; to co-ordinate with the Women's Collective and giving talks in schools about feminist issues, and at university hostels about sexual harassment.

The Group held many discussions over the last six months concerning its aims, even though these were never actually defined. A number of issues relating to our aims were discussed, for example:

Support Groups - whether we wanted to be a "support" or an "action" group, or both. Initially all were interested in action, while some were definitely not interested in the support idea. A support group was defined as a small, closed group of members who would meet regularly to talk about the more personal issues involved with trying to be anti-sexist. Some men suggested that this type of group is more constructive because it helped men to

relate better to each other and to move away from reliance on women for emotional support. Also a support group can develop a strong basis of co-operation in more action-oriented activities. It was also argued that support could be gained from each other through undertaking action together. In the end it was decided to form a support group, but it never got underway.

Ground Rules - in discussion with Bob Scott, he suggested that men's groups were beginning to establish for themselves, either consciously or unconsciously, two basic rules:

1. Man-to-Man: men must take responsibility for educating other men. Men should confront, present issues to and talk with men outside anti-sexism groups.
2. Monitoring: either a formal or an informal system of monitoring should be established so that women could be kept informed of the group's activities, which should include positive action rather than just talk and "navel-gazing".

Decision-Making - how to decide what action to take is a recurring theme for discussion. Should we just accept feminist analysis and support feminist aims and actions without question? When may we differ? In a discussion on whether women should have the sole right to censor material they find offensive, there seemed to be mistrust of the women's movement: we did not want them to have a power that could be used against ourselves as men, or that could be monopolised by a particular group of women. We often talked in terms of giving up our power to women, but only on the condition that we had a say in how that power was used.

It is difficult to assess whether the group was effective in any way. However, it did seem to be on the right track towards becoming a credible pro-feminist group, for two reasons.

First, most of the members of the group had a good understanding of feminist issues and analyses. Many in the group were in other "political" groups and also understood something of the relationship between race, class and gender. This meant that we were able to have well-informed discussions and, more importantly, we were able to make quick decisions regarding any action required.

Second, the group was subject to good "monitoring". Many of the men in the group had women friends who were interested in our activities, and therefore we received good feed-back. The group was not closed and sometimes women would sit in on meetings to see how the group operated. On one occasion we held a joint meeting with the Women's Collective so as to learn more about each other's plans, and to co-ordinate some joint ventures.

That Men Against Sexism was a university group, and that nearly all its members were students or ex-students, was of great significance in giving the group its direction. In an environment of ever-changing issues and new ideas, it was easier to avoid stagnation of either action or theory.

POSTSCRIPT

This article was written in August 1985 and, because I no longer live in Christchurch, all my comments may not now apply. However, I presume that similar situations exist in men's groups both in and outside the university. I would like to conclude by expressing a hope that this article will stimulate further discussion and perhaps some change with reference to the issues I have raised.



NOTES

¹Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer eds., *Men and Masculinity* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), p. 152.

²Warren Farrell, *The Liberated Man: Beyond Masculinity: Freeing Men and their relationships with Women* (Random House, 1974); J. Nichols, *Men's Liberation* (Penguin, 1975).

³See, for example, the articles by Ruth Hartley and Sidney Jourard in Pleck and Sawyer.

COMMENTS ON "MEN'S LIBERATION"

Sally Ruth

I think the article by Roger Melvin is a good one and my criticisms arise more from a wish to see points more fully covered than from dissatisfaction with the text as presented.

I think it is really important, in light of the introductory paragraph, to cover the discussion of "oppression", which I understand to be an institutionalised system of keeping a category of people down, a system of domination. While feminist analysis has proved that this is true of men over wimmin, nowhere can it be said that men are oppressed, a claim often made by men's liberation groups. Maybe men are disadvantaged or alienated from aspects of themselves in an individual sense, but structurally they still wield great power and have advantages over wimmin, as Melvin points out. However I feel that any critique of Men's Liberation has to include a more substantial critique of this basic misinterpretation.

Do men's liberation groups claim to be pro-feminist or is their "brief" merely to be pro-men? If in fact they are the latter, then Melvin's criticism misses the point. Can we criticise them for not doing what they never intended to do? What is the distinction between men's liberation groups, men's support groups and men's self-help therapy groups? Do men's liberation groups even aim or pretend to be political?

Melvin does not really address the argument that, if men change themselves as individuals this will bring about structural changes that will benefit wimmin. Personally, I am sceptical of this claim, especially if individual change is the only action taken, and I think the argument should be addressed directly. However, I realise a critique of it is implicit in Melvin's paper. Nevertheless, I am still interested in the questions of who gets

involved and why. How do these motivators affect the nature, the purpose and the outcome of the groups men choose to belong to?

It would have been useful to see an assessment of where men's liberation ideology and the experience of "consciousness raising" has actually taken the men involved. I totally agree that if they aim to be pro-feminist then what they do is not sufficient, but even so, I wonder if the men involved see the groups as having helped them in such matters as their personal lives and their relationships with feminists. It seems to me that they are still struggling with the "macho versus wimp" problem and, in viewing the "masculine role" as intrinsically harmful and therefore to be discarded, they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

I support a programme for personal change that aims to develop inner power and strength and to eradicate the expression of power over others which is usually associated with maleness. Unfortunately, many of those in men's groups seem to discard the notion of having power of any sort, and so give rise to wimmin's dissatisfaction with "soft" men or "wimps". It also seems that many men are trying to make these changes to please wimmin rather than for themselves. Thus emotional dependence on wimmin has often merely been restructured into an emotional dependence on feminist approval. I believe that emotional dependence will only give way to personal strength through real therapy, not through simply understanding it.

Another criticism of men's liberation groups and support groups is that wimmin are seeing some men using the safety, support and minimal challenge of these groups to avoid having to confront real difficulties with real wimmin. They protect

⁴See, for example, the article by Sidney Jourard in *Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards and More Progressive Union," in Lydia Sargent ed., *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1981), p. 14.

⁷Farrer, p. 175.

⁸Hartmann, p. 19.

⁹Paul Hoch, *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism, and the Mask of Masculinity* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), p. 30).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹C. Wainwright, "Male Oppression: Emotions, Sex and Work," in P. Bunkle and Others, *Learning About Sexism in New Zealand* (Learmouth, 1976).

¹²Friedman and Sarah, 1982; p. 183.

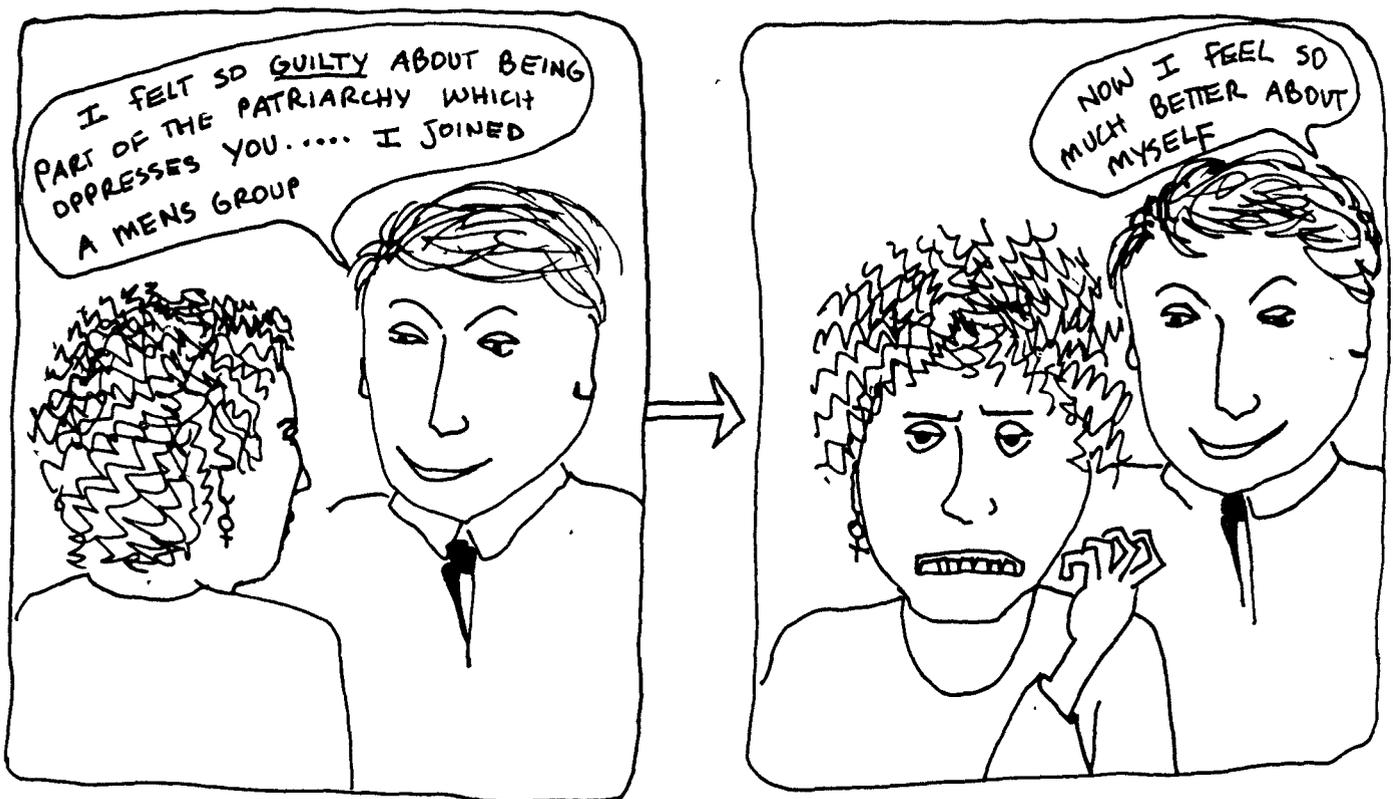
¹³Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (London: Pluto Press 1983), p. 122.

¹⁴Sandra Coney, "Pigs Might Fly," *Broadsheet*, No. 67 (March 1979).

¹⁵Ehrenreich, p. 122.

¹⁶Jon Snodgrass ed., *A Book of Readings for Men Against Sexism* (New York: Times Change Press, 1977).

¹⁷R. A. Lewis, *Men in Difficult Times* (Prentice-Hall, 1981).



themselves from political realities which may make them uncomfortable by building their lives around "alternative" men. I think more radical men's groups are aware that real change for wimmin and then for men will require some considerable risk and discomfort for men, especially in challenging other men who are unlikely to be interested in men's groups.

My chief dissatisfaction with men's groups arises from Hartmann's definition of patriarchy: that a set of social relations between men enable them to dominate wimmin. There is scant recognition of the fact that men's groups are, of course, part of that set, except that on the whole they "choose" not to dominate or oppress wimmin. Since they definitely "create interdependence and solidarity amongst men" to an even greater degree than many other sets of social relations, they have a massive potential to be counter-feminist and anti-wimmin. I think there is a dishonesty, based on liberal "obligations" to wimmin's rights, about the nature of this circumstance in men's groups. There can be a self-righteous arrogance in the groups, whose members may come to believe they are in some way not part of "the system" by virtue of their membership.

In fact, men's liberation and support groups prop up the system by making individual men in crisis feel happier about their lot and more able to distance themselves from anger and dissatisfaction with the patriarchy, as Coney has pointed out. The question of what motivates men to

change a system that benefits them also needs to be addressed much more directly. The members of men's liberation are not motivated to do this, but aim merely to make their lives more pleasant and fuller in a changing society where wimmin are becoming strong and less forgiving. This may have been what Melvin meant, but it was not said clearly enough to impress those who have not thought of it before.

I particularly like Melvin's plea for men's groups to be accountable to wimmin, but of course there is a difficulty: negotiating the feminist argument that men need to do it for themselves and not depend on wimmin, and the men's argument that they should not allow wimmin to determine their actions, even though men have been determining wimmin's actions for centuries. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Certainly improving the public image of men's groups is important. Sue Kedgley's *Sexual Wilderness* is interesting in that regard and the largely negative attitudes to men's groups expressed by the New Zealand men she interviewed are very revealing.

I also do not support "political" men's groups, whose members are not prepared to examine themselves or to see where and how they oppress wimmin and how they might effect personal changes. I feel all groups should have an aspect of political action, appropriate alternative group procedures, and encourage and assist personal change. The personal is political, but the political is also personal.

conclusion was weak and did not stress this point; rather the authors' approach remained at an idealistic, cultural level which, in my opinion, will

not be a decisive or main factor in the Black struggle to create a new social order.

MOVIES

Mr Wrong. Directed by Gaylene Preston. Academy Cinema.

Reviewed by Donna Avia

In the film *Mr Wrong*, Gaylene Preston demonstrates a flair for showing that things are not always as we commonly perceive them. So it follows that her first fiction film should be a seeming contradiction: a thriller with little in the way of blood or special effects.

Meg (Heather Bolton), fresh from the country, moves to the big city, further declaring her independence by buying a Jaguar car. At first this appears to symbolise her new-found freedom and self-reliance, however, rather than freedom, the car brings fear into her life, and also the ghost of the murdered Mary Carmichael (Perry Piercy) who is bent on vengeance, and the thoroughly evil Mr Wrong (David Letch).

Mr Wrong initially shapes up as a true thriller with an engrossing plot and plenty of scary moments, but Preston snubs thriller conventions by constantly twisting the plot and introducing red herrings. Thriller expectations are juxtaposed and interplayed with fears of everyday life, making it

startlingly familiar to the audience. Preston shows up the sexism of the genre in giving us an alternative to the norm. Our heroine is not the beautiful, thin, fragile victim rescued by the muscle-bound hero from the malevolent male predator. Although the victim is female and the predator definitely male and malevolent, the similarity ends there.

The success of the film lies in its realism, its familiarity to the New Zealand audience. We see the heroine as she appears first thing in the morning, not in a *haute couture* negligée with the flawless makeup of a *Vogue* model, but rather a small town ordinary girl in her wincyette pyjamas. Meg deviates from the 'shrinking violet' that Hitchcock and his disciples have always favoured. Sure she's scared, but she deals with her fear and gives Mr Wrong a good run for his money.

Preston has as much fun making this film as the audience does watching it; continually hoodwinking the audience, building up tension with fear and suspense and then unexpectedly turning the situation so that we laugh at our own fear. The long-established Hitchcock conventions of the thriller genre are always undercut and Preston pokes fun not only at us but at the film. But above all, Preston and, of course, the audience, have fun watching *Mr Wrong*.

INFORMATION

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CORRESPONDENCE

The Coordinating Collective,
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Christchurch.

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