

FEMINISM FOR GIRLS

An adventure story

Edited by
Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe

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FEMINIST THEORY



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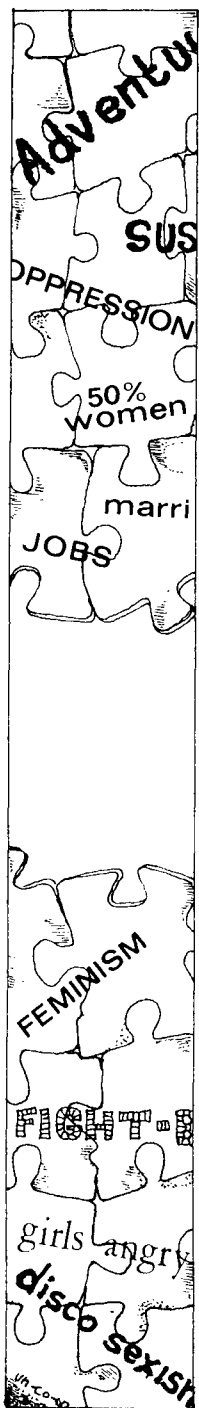
1 Introduction

Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe

Illustrated by *Phil Goodall*

Dangerous girls!

To the world at large it might seem a bit strange, linking the Women's Liberation Movement and feminism with ideas of adventure. Hardly surprising, when most of the mass media do their best to reduce anything to do with women's liberation to the antics of a minority fringe group. As far as they are concerned, we are all dull, boring, and quite united in our lack of humour. With this kind of publicity to contend with, it does indeed take an adventurous girl to give feminism more than a second thought. But what exactly is the basis of this war waged on women who refuse to conform to society's image of how women should look and act and be? This is a question that touches on the whole way in which sex and gender are understood in our culture. It also relates to the way in which any challenge to the patriarchal *status quo* is greeted with fear and dismay if not outright terror. In this sense it is possible to interpret these stereotypical characterisations of feminism and feminists (bearing grudges, unpopular with the boys) as something which is created right across a range of institutions, precisely as a response to this threat, and as a clearcut defence of patriarchy – the power of men over women. If the women who challenge this power, who question the inevitability of their own subordination and the 'naturalness' of their inferiority, are reduced to a group of eccentrics, then half the battle is won. The threat is deflected and diluted – what woman in her right mind would want to join with this mob? Yet such unrelenting ridicule suggests something deeper. The fears, perhaps, of a patriarchy which is somehow beginning to lose its grasp, but doesn't know quite where to put the pressure on. The easiest way to deal with it is to hit back wildly, caricature it, trivialise it . . . and then hope it goes away. This anti-feminist promotional campaign depends then on transforming some of its representatives, those women who are no longer captured by suave masculinity, by machismo and charisma and charm ('your sex life complications are not my fascination' as the song



by Grace Jones puts it), into 'unfeminine' oddballs, women who are going against nature.

The problem for us is that these vindictive images do feed into popular (mis)conception, they do penetrate consciousness and create prejudices. Two recent examples of this will suffice. At an interview for a job, one gentleman thought he was paying me a compliment: 'You don't look like someone who bears grudges,' he said, 'do you have a happy personal life, are you a' (nervous cough) 'a, women's libber?' Even more obvious was the uproar surrounding newsreader Anna Ford's claim that 'body fascism' was virulent in television and ensured that only young and attractive women got jobs and succeeded, where such criteria simply were not relevant for men. The popular press took this comment, made at a Women In The Media conference, as an insult to men and to themselves as indeed it was intended. They responded in terms of 'how dare she bite the hand that feeds her', and then resorted to suggesting that 'she's got a nerve to speak', and then the usual, 'She's got extremely large hands and a big bottom.' So she's not really so 'feminine' after all! Later that week on television Robert Robinson mocked her, 'Whatever next?' he said, 'Plain women reading the news!'

But there is something more to this than just a childish ritual exchange of insults. For so many years any kind of media recognition, any kind of visual publicity, has been the epitome of success for a woman. 'Getting your picture in the paper'; whether as actress, model, television presenter or pop singer, the result has been the same. Made-to-measure images, glamour, smiles and 'thank you very much, I owe this all to my manager, my producer, or to the talent scout who saw me on "Opportunity Knocks"', and so on. Women have been so flattered to succeed in these spheres that they have rarely dared to voice any complaints that they may have. Until recently they haven't ever publicly challenged the authority which has kept them in their places and which continually reminds them that there is always a large army of eager young women just dying to take their place. So when one of these figures does articulate her exasperation, not only is she risking her career, she is also directly accusing all those men who work around her. And she can be assured of having a far from easy future with them. Fortunately, she's not quite alone. The fact that Anna Ford made these statements at a Women In The Media conference, and that she has the support of this group behind her, is evidence enough of this. So perhaps patriarchy, in this case the media, really does have something to fear. For example, the tabloids may resist it wherever they can, but women's magazines *have* changed. They have been influenced by ideas from the Women's Movement and they no longer depict women as only housewives, only dolly birds. Controversial issues, previously avoided by magazines like *Woman* and *Woman's Own*, can now be discussed with some frankness. Careers are recognised as worthwhile and important,

3 Introduction

and there is life beyond *House and Gardens*. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* are clearly not feminist, but at least they have jettisoned completely the idea that happiness for a woman lies only in housework and childcare. Of course, what they offer instead, the new Superwoman, is as much a myth as any other. Some women argue that this is just another male fantasy, a view of women who are ever-available sexually and unhampered by domestic responsibility. Quite true, except that it at least provides its readers with the idea that there are alternatives and that marriage and settling down are not the only possibility for women. Recent issues have carried strongly feminist pieces written by increasingly sympathetic women journalists, so perhaps the rest of the mass media has good reason to flex its patriarchal muscles.

Our aim in putting together this collection is not so much to create new and feminist myths, but rather to demolish those which flourish so freely in everyday life. We want to unmask the fears they hide, and expose their rationale. But in carrying out this work we will not be suggesting that seeing through such representations and understanding their basis is enough to rid ourselves of them. Patriarchy is about power relations and never in history has power been redistributed without a bitter struggle. Even trying to live apart from, and in opposition to, society's myths about women is hard, to say the least. This is because these notions have, over history, become built into the very fabric, the cement, of Western society. They provide people with 'basic common sense'. When real life seems a great deal less reliable, less certain, these values are referred to for support: 'It's only natural after all isn't it?' The saying 'a woman's place is in the home', plays a similar kind of role as the Royal Family or Hollywood movies. Happy families and happy endings. Until, that is, housework becomes insufferably boring, the baby's cries intolerably endless, and the husband's absence (football, work, drinking, friends) simply unacceptable. Only then does the myth begin to crumble, the glamour fade and the resentment mount.

It is our belief that alternative myths have little to offer in terms of finding ways of struggling against women's oppression. Myths are circular, they foreclose discussion because they're complete, coherent and polished. They take the easiest route to the simplest answer. One of the most familiar and damaging to women goes something like this: women are physically weaker than men; they bear children and are responsible for feeding them; men have always been aggressive; they have provided for their families whilst the women have stayed at home and looked after the young. This pattern has been seen to serve as the very basis of society, from the earliest stages onwards. It is therefore natural and consequently right. (A crude summary of a well-worn argument.) Biology is destiny, whisper these myths, just below the surface. 'Really?' we ask. Yet if women are so weak how come they have for centuries

managed to combine back-breaking hard work (tedious and repetitive – carrying water, fuel, washing, scrubbing, cleaning) with childcare, child education, with care of the family, the husband, with servicing him and his needs, with paid work in factory, office, or shop? If women really were that weak then the species would have died out centuries ago, and anybody who needs further convincing of women's strength need look no further than those first-hand accounts collected in Sheila Rowbotham's and Jean McCrindle's book, *Dutiful Daughters*.

Of course, other factors do come into play. Rich, middle-class women have not had to work and struggle just to make ends meet in this way. Biology, far from being a static quality, in fact seems to be an exceptionally elastic quantity. Or maybe it's just more accurate to recognise that biology is so tightly tied up with culture and its oppressions that it's virtually impossible to separate the two. We learn to become girls; we learn femininity just as boys learn to be men. And society invests a great deal of energy in ensuring that these processes don't go wrong.

If we're not interested in feminist mythology, where does the adventure start? We can't promise that struggling for women's rights is the stuff that glamorous movies are made of. So where does the adventure come into it? In fact we use the word loosely. Adventure is founded on initial confusion, even fear. It demands enterprise and ingenuity. It necessitates tactics and manoeuvres. Unlike myths, adventures are open-ended, there are no foregone conclusions. We won't be offering a step-by-step guide to the feminist 'Good Life'. We prefer to deal with clues, suggestions and ideas, all of which are based on a number of basic assumptions. First, that girls and young women are capable of a great deal more than they're ever allowed to imagine (this being one of the ways in which they are oppressed). Second, that they need space and autonomy from men to work out the hows, whys, and wherefores of this situation, and third, that this process of exploration and discovery can be fun. Challenging authority, questioning what seem to be God-given rights and undermining patriarchy *can* bring about change, they can also be rewarding and exciting experiences. And just like a good story, when the picture falls into place, the relief is great, it makes you smile.

There is, however, a limit to the usefulness of the analogy. Everyday life goes on where fiction ends, and the adventure is invariably partly of the girl's or woman's own making. This book, a collection of pieces written from different feminist perspectives, cannot possibly provide all the clues, never mind answer all the questions. And this is how we want it. We offer neither a manifesto nor a set of demands or statements and we would be doing an injustice to the Women's Movement in trying to summarise all its aims, all its points of tension. As a result, this introduction is itself a little unconventional. What we want to do is actively to apply one of the central tenets of feminism. The claim that the

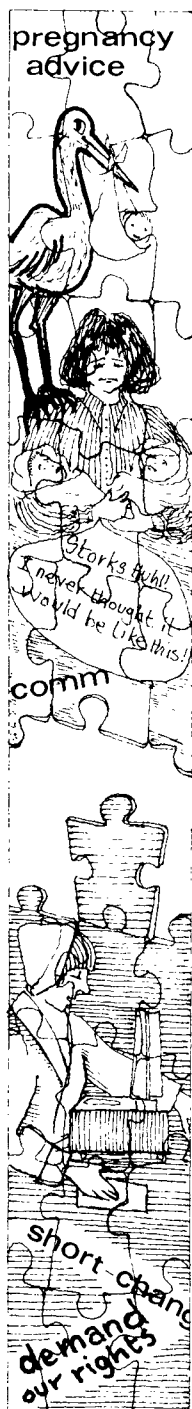
personal is political. We will try to interlace parts of our own personal histories with this particular project on adolescence, with our work outside this volume and with our commitment to the pieces inside it. We'll describe how and why the book came about and what kind of problems are inevitably experienced in such an attempt. And we'll try to deal, briefly, with some of those issues which seem to us to be of fundamental importance to women. What we'll hopefully avoid is the patronising attitude often adopted by people writing about adolescence. We don't consider ourselves grown up — wise and adult as the word is commonly meant. This is because 'growing up', as it is presented to girls, is about becoming settled in outlook, stable in disposition. 'Maybe some day you'll get those silly ideas out of your head,' my mother used to say. But growing up for girls is little more than preparation for growing old prematurely. Real life is more complicated than the stages and the phases which psychologists so willingly label us with. Getting into the Women's Movement can mean learning to reinterpret our past as well as re-assess our present. It means holding onto some images and abandoning others, even if we still remain complex and possibly muddled persons.

Amidst such speculation and hesitation, what can we hope for? First, a realisation that women and girls can work together, that they can overcome the obstacles which society puts in their way and which aim at keeping them apart. Mutual help and support have characterised women's culture for centuries, even though its official history is only beginning to be written. Second, a confidence that has to be fought for. Without seeing everything in society as a conspiracy against women, it is none the less easy to see that it hasn't been in society's and men's interests for girls to be frank and outspoken about their needs, their desires; about what they want and what they can do (particularly in times of high youth unemployment — but more on this later). Third, access to knowledge and information and to those channels which encourage such exchange in a free and democratic way. We need to know more about other women's situations, more about our rights, about contraception, about power and politics and even about nuclear power. We have to know what we need before we can hope to find ways of getting it. Maybe this is where a new kind of adventure starts.

Angela McRobbie

What is feminism?

Considering that this is obviously a crucial question for a book like this, it seems a bit odd to say that we don't really know the answer. But then you've already been warned that this book is about clues and questions, not answers. Feminism is a word you may be familiar with,



though feminists are more often called, or rather put down, as ‘women’s libbers’ — or something even less polite. The image of ‘women’s libbers’ that we all get from the media, and from most other people, tends to be of ‘bra burning’, ugly (or at least unattractive), screaming women who only cause trouble and make a fuss over nothing because they can’t get a man. Hopefully, it will be clear from this book that in fact feminism is about women, all women; it’s about the way we live our lives, the things that happen to us and the things we make happen, being able to talk together, act together, and support each other. It’s not about what you look like, how you have your hair cut, whether you wear Doc Martins or high heels, dresses or trousers. It *is* about having *choices*, about not having to wear high heels because you’re small, not having to wear flat shoes because you’re tall. Feminism is about being who you want to be — and finding out who you are in the first place.

Some of us find the idea of women’s liberation frightening, off-putting, fascinating, exciting, intimidating. None of us felt confident about it when we first got involved. For young women it’s probably more difficult. Have you ever sat in a meeting, or in a room full of older women, and not known what they were talking about? Or been bored out of your head? Or felt out of it because they didn’t notice you? Or felt intimidated because it seemed as if everyone but you understands — about childbirth, marriage, sex, children, relationships? Feminism can often seem as if it’s for older women, it’s got nothing to do with *your* life.

There is one basic reason why, although most of us have felt like this at some time, this can’t be the case. There’s no single feminism. Because feminism is about all women, and for all women, it means different things to all of us. It takes different forms, it’s concerned about different things. If you’re having a relationship with a man, the most important thing to you could be getting hold of decent contraception. If you’re pregnant, it could be getting an abortion, or good ante-natal care. If you have kids, it could be nurseries or childcare. If you go to a youth club, it could be getting a go on the pool table, or getting events or space just for girls. If you’re at school, it could be learning woodwork or learning how to cook for yourself — not always for a family. If you’re black, it could be stopping the school from treating you as less important than the white girls. If you’re married, it could be forcing people to see you in your own right. If you’re a lesbian, it could be stopping other people from always assuming you’re heterosexual, being able to say you’re not. If you’re low paid, it could be equal pay and training that matter most to you. We’re all in very different situations and at every point in our lives our priorities, the issues that affect us most, are different too. But we also care about other women, and know that every struggle by any group of women makes us all stronger. So we’ve got the right to demand support and to get it — something that

young women need to fight for, even from other women. We do think that young women and older women can work together, but it has to be on *your* terms, since girls often have different needs and are seen as less 'grown up' than adult women, with fewer rights and never taken seriously. I remember adolescence as probably the most difficult period of my life so far, not because *I* was disturbed, but because of boys, parents, teachers!

On top of all this, if you read through the lines in this book, you'll see that the different chapters, though they're all written by feminists, have different perspectives. The fact that we're all women doesn't mean we agree with each other all the time. So different chapters will be arguing different things. Within the WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) there are lots of different politics and women put their energy and time into the areas that they see as the most important, or relevant, to them. We have big disagreements, not to mention rows. Women aren't nice to each other all the time! Our ideas can be so different that it can make it difficult, or impossible, to *always* work together. And feminists outside of the WLM may have different ideas again. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't listen to each other, or that we aren't all fighting for the same thing. The however-many thousands of women that are involved in the WLM in this country (and there are millions more, in every country of the world) obviously don't agree on how to end women's oppression, or exactly what kind of society we want to build. The WLM is a movement, not a political party or a social set, precisely because it can encompass so many different political positions. The movement has broad aims — not a political programme — and what we have in common is that we all want women's liberation, we all want changes, and we all want choices.

For all of us, our ideas come from who we know, what we read, what we see and listen to. We aren't born with ready-made ideas; we learn them, develop them, adapt them. But some ideas are around a lot more than others; we hear them more often, we look at images of them more often — and ideas are catching. Not many of us 'catch' the ideas of feminism, because they're just not around as much. We're trying to spread the germs and hoping you catch them! Or at least know they're there. How many other books, magazines and films are spreading the feminist germs? How many magazines have you read recently that discuss feminism seriously or sympathetically? How many people do you know who think women's liberation is important, or a good idea? How many television programmes and advertisements show women as strong, positive, independent, making decisions for *themselves*? Then again, how many magazines only talk about how to get boyfriends, which clothes and make-up styles are 'in', what you should look like? How many people have you heard say women's libbers are making a fuss over nothing, going too far? How many times have you seen

Page 3 staring at you on the bus?

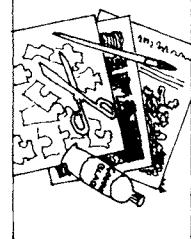
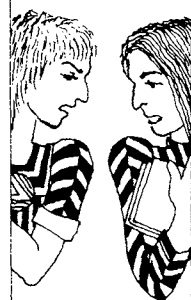
One reason we all wrote this book is because we think that the ideas of feminism — the differences as well as the similarities — should be around and available — in schools, colleges, techs, because if you're going to say that feminists are talking rubbish, at least you should know what we actually *do say*. But we also wanted to show that you don't have to believe any one thing to be a feminist, there's no signing on the dotted line, that if the issue is choice then we also have to be free to choose our own ideas. And if it's about all women, then it's also about listening to each other and learning. Not learning the right answers, but learning that there aren't any — not until we make them.

Most of us don't really get the chance to make up our own minds because we don't get all the sides of the story, especially not the sides that threaten the people who want to make up our minds for us. The mass media, the books you read, the films and television programmes you watch are usually written, produced and controlled by men. Feminists are women and we have the other side of the story. Not only that, but feminism's story has different sides — and you might not have heard all, or even any, of them before. Being a feminist is a bit like washing out your ears, opening your eyes, and telling everyone else to shut up for a bit. Above all, it's about taking risks, being open to new ideas, being prepared to explore new possibilities, discovering what women's lives are like, what your life is like, and what you haven't recognised in yourself. Women's oppression is normal, it's 'common sense' that women can't walk down the road at night alone, need a man for protection, automatically want marriage, children and a 'home of their own'. It's only if we start to make it *not* normal, *not* make sense, ask questions, that we start to find out what women *are* and can be. So it's time to decide what kind of women you want to be, what options are open, it's time to give yourself *space* — forget the washing up and the babysitting and think what *you* want to do. Taking risks and asking questions is dangerous, but it can also be exciting and fun. Young women spend most of their lives having decisions made for them. Maybe it's time for you to make a change for yourselves.

Trisha McCabe

Politics, personal life and publishing

How is a book like this produced? We think it's worth trying to answer this question in some detail. Why? Because conventionally the whole process of writing books, researching and publishing is presented as something which is above most people's heads, a mystified activity requiring mysterious skills. Typically, you have to be exceptionally clever, talented, or at least highly educated before you can put pen to



paper with any hope of seeing what you write appear in print. Likewise, writing is seen as an intensely personal and isolated activity, carried out in solitude and demanding gifts like inspiration, insight, style, even genius.

Of course, writing and publishing do demand skills and abilities which have to be learnt and can take several years to master. And writing does tend to be something done alone, although, (as two of our chapters here show), this need not necessarily be the case. Our aim in this short section is to normalise the whole procedure and hopefully to make it more accessible to other women and girls. We'll describe the background to this particular collection, the way it was conceptualised, the problems we encountered and the kinds of people who have contributed to it. We will not be saying that any of these processes was straightforward or easy; nor will we be suggesting that everyone can or should want, automatically, to do this kind of work. The point is that discussing, collaborating and working collectively are especially important for women. It certainly doesn't save time; frequently it would be quicker to work alone — its advantages are possibly less immediately visible and more long-term in effect. Ideally, it would mean that *more* women and girls have *more* self-confidence about writing and that, in a sphere very much dominated by men, they too would have the pleasure of seeing their texts available and on the counters.

It is certainly the case that men have dominated the literary world, but historically, writing (everything from novels to love-letters) has played a vital role in women's culture — as has reading. We want to suggest that the value that women have, through the ages, placed on these forms is very much worth holding on to and actively encouraging. As Gill Frith suggests in her article, becoming aware of women's oppression demands that we learn anew 'how to read'. Learning also anew 'how to write' and how to make women's writing as widely available as possible is a necessary part of this 'consciousness raising'. But still there are limits to the kinds of consciousness raising that we as *white* women have been involved in, be it talking, reading or writing.

One of the most difficult areas in writing a book like this for girls is that in our society we tend to immediately think of white girls. To try to counteract this racism we have to be careful not to fall into adding a token chapter about black girls. In some ways, this is what we've done, and we are aware of the problems this raises. The chapter by Pratibha and Val in fact challenges lots of the assumptions that we, and all white people in a racist society, make about black women. I found that chapter challenging and threatening to read; it was hard work. It seems likely that most white readers will feel the same, because the article shows how, as white people, we benefit from racism, however much we may try to be anti-racist. In many ways this is the only type of chapter that could have been written in a book that is predominantly about

white girls. Black girls can't just be added on as a footnote or an appendix, as a special case. It's more important to have a chapter like this because it makes clear an unwritten assumption, which is that the other chapters are, in fact, about white girls. I think that Pratibha's and Val's chapter shows us how the rest of the book should be read; it indicates that we, as white women, have to be aware that girls or women 'in general' in fact means white girls and women. It makes us aware of the insidious ways in which racism operates, by almost making black girls invisible – or at least masking the fact that the other chapters are about whites. As I said before, reading that chapter is hard work for white women – though for black girls reading this book it's probably a breath of fresh air – and it's difficult not to take it as a personal criticism of us as white women. But then again, maybe it's about time that we *did* take it personally. Racism is our problem and we have to start making changes.

Originally, the idea was that this book would comprise of a set of readings. These would be chosen from already existing feminist work, particularly that which dealt with adolescence. But after a few informal conversations we began to realise that there was a great deal of new work on girls in the pipeline, work which we could publish for the first time and which would bring completely fresh perspectives to the subject. We immediately set about commissioning pieces. This we did in an admittedly haphazard way, not advisable in retrospect, but fortunately not too disastrous. The women we discovered were willing to contribute were mostly researchers, but they did include an ex-secretary, a number of teachers, youth workers, and a German social worker. Altogether, this now seemed a more exciting project than scanning years of women's literature for relevant passages.

After we worked out exactly who would be contributing, two all-day sessions were organised and were attended by most of the writers. In the first session basic guidelines for writing were discussed – like clarity and accessibility, and several women summarised the main points they would be raising in their papers. Some months later the group met again, this time to listen to draft versions of completed contributions and to iron out problems that had arisen on the way. Next came the slow process of waiting for chapters to come in – discussing them, editing them, sending them back for comment, suggesting rewrites and so on. At the same time we had to collaborate with the women who had undertaken to be responsible for the illustration, an important dimension in a hopefully 'popular' book like this. Each chapter, when completed, had to be sent out to an artist, and if the writing was delayed then so, in turn, was the artist and if when it did arrive the artist was already busy then it had to wait. Only three chapters, all of which were possibly the most difficult to write, demanded a lot of discussion and rewriting and this went on, quite

literally, for weeks. It meant contributors coming from London and Sheffield to Birmingham on at least five different occasions. On top of this two chapters got lost in the post, one on the way from Jamaica, the other, less exotically, somewhere between Sheffield and Birmingham! Eventually we got them all to the typist and to the illustrators. It has taken almost eighteen months, exactly a year longer than we had anticipated. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, organising this book has given us sleepless nights, vast telephone bills, and countless migraines (more of an ordeal than a gripping adventure). At the risk of sounding clichéd, we still think it was worth it.

Most books include, either in the foreword or else in the introduction, some kind of personal dedication to the people who have helped on the sidelines, who have given advice, emotional support, and friendship. They are usually mentioned fleetingly and, when the books in question are written by men, these shadowy figures are most often wives or girlfriends. Instead of simply reproducing this pattern, we want to show just how doing this work has invaded our personal lives. The people we have depended on know this and it would be little more than tokenism to 'name' them. As editors, our role has obviously been more demanding, more involved, but as a product, the book has been the result of a whole set of working relations, some harmonious, some stormy. Inevitably, friends have been involved in all the debates, they have read the chapters, discussed them and helped to solve some seemingly intractable political problems.

One such weighty problem related to the whole question of editorship, and what it demonstrated conclusively to us was the extent to which any purely neutral 'professional' definitions of this role are blown apart when the personal politics of the Women's Movement are involved. Traditionally, the task of the editor is quite clear – to commission articles and maintain a balance between taking risks and guaranteeing 'good copy' on time. Certainly, the job doesn't end there, but when there is an issue at stake, the focus is generally on the text or the script itself. But while clarity, good writing, the flow of the argument and the overall coherence of the piece are vital, regardless of politics, external issues do intervene when the book comes out of the Women's Movement.

One of us commissioned a chapter, yet it does not appear in this volume. There is no point in rehearsing all the ins and outs of the arguments which resulted in this decision. This simply isn't the place to dwell on the various positions represented within feminism; it's sufficient to say that one of us wanted to publish it, the other didn't. A battle raged for at least six weeks until it was clear that one of us had to concede.

It would be easy to say, 'Well, we learn by our mistakes.' Or that we should have been more systematic or rigorous about how we

commissioned, or that *if* we had discussed our differences in relation to this chapter earlier . . . and so on.

Yet even the most watertight set of editorial principles couldn't legislate against issues like this emerging. Nor could they guarantee that they would be any less stubborn. Whatever the decision, one of us was bound to feel a little jaded. Perhaps all that can be said is that feminism can't and doesn't (nor should it) protect us from conflicts and disagreements between women. It would be both unrealistic and absurdly romantic to expect anything else. The adventure of feminism may be embarked upon with wildly optimistic expectations, but the exhilaration shouldn't blind us to the way in which it can at times tear us apart. Sisterliness and solidarity would be meaningless if they implied that we had to stop disagreeing with each other.

What we *have* clearly agreed about is who the book is aimed at and the importance of keeping this readership firmly in view throughout our quarrels. Once again, we started out with fairly inflated notions of our readership. In fact, girls aren't often encouraged to read 'seriously' unless it's for 'O' or 'A' levels, so it was probably a little unrealistic of us to imagine hordes of girls fighting to get their hands on a copy of *Adventure Story*. It is rare to come across books quite unprompted; usually it's a matter of someone telling you about *Wuthering Heights* or *The Joys of Sex*. Girls do tell each other about books, but they, in turn, are 'turned on to them' by groups as divergent as elder sisters, grandmothers, youth workers, teachers, even boyfriends, though we hope in this case to bypass this particular tradition. The point is that all sorts of influences act to push girls in one direction or the other and books don't just magically appear in front of them from nowhere. Realising this, we tried to stretch out our 'catchment area' to include women working with girls. Teachers, mothers, social workers and youth workers. We also hope that it will have some relevance to women returning to education after years of housework and childcare. As Dorothy Hobson's chapter shows, adolescence is an important turning point in most women's lives and is very definitely remembered as such. For the housewives in her sample, it represented their last taste of freedom, adventure and warm friendship. If our book and its various contents can also speak to women like these, perhaps attending evening classes in sociology or modern studies, then we will be more than thrilled.

What all this indicates is that, like it or not, we are in the business of education. But this doesn't just mean studying in the narrow sense to pass exams, it means learning in a much broader way to understand how society works and what it does to women. To have the confidence to challenge we must possess knowledge as well as conviction.

Angela McRobbie