

Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots, A View From Some English Towns, c1968-1990

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Historical scholarship on the women's liberation movement (WLM) across the UK is as yet underdeveloped. This article argues against the commonly held assumption that London socialist – feminist accounts speak for England as a whole. This article examines the history of the WLM in England as refracted through a range of different English urban localities, specifically Bristol, Brighton, Norwich, Bolton and Leeds/Bradford. It attempts to show the importance of local studies to appreciate the diversity of the English women's liberation movement. The movement had very many unifying characteristics, but how they played out across the country differed according to local contexts.

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It has been noted that within historical studies the women's liberation movement (WLM) is as yet underdeveloped. Natalie Tomlinson has described the historiography of the WLM as 'threadbare' as we do not as yet have even one full length historical monograph for the UK.¹ There have been many autobiographical accounts from WLM activists. These have been very London focussed and coming mainly from socialist-feminists.² This tendency has been reinforced by the media which has given a great deal of attention to WLM events in London such as the disruption of the Miss World Competition November 1970.³ This article attempts to counter this tendency by outlining the history of the WLM in England as refracted through a range of different urban localities.⁴

Over the last fifteen years or so a great deal of oral testimony has been collected relating to the history of the WLM in England, funded largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Whilst community based oral history projects have proved to be a very valuable resource for 'recovery work' with marginalised groups, the oral testimony generated needs to be handled with care and sensitivity.⁵ Kalwant Bhopal argues for the need for interviewers to be empowering and reflexive, allowing

women space to make their voices heard.⁶ Moreover, researching the history of women's liberation through documents of the self is problematic. Sasha Roseneil and Margaretta Jolly have acknowledged the 'conundrum of how individuals can represent a necessarily collective process'.⁷ Valuable though accounts are, there are limitations to the autobiographical/life history approach.⁸ As Lynne Segal has noted 'memory is not history'.⁹ Although many autobiographical works are historically aware and thus provide fascinating insights into the period in question this is not the same as accounts by academic historians who have put the material into historiographical context and assessed its overall historical significance. Moreover, the WLM was characterised by a widespread network of local autonomous groups which eschewed both centralised control and any notion of leadership. There is a danger of elevating individual lives into personalities who somehow speak for the movement and are regarded as 'leaders'. The recent British Library 'Sisterhood and After' Oral History Project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, created a data base of fifty 'core activists' who were said to 'power' the WLM.¹⁰ This is misleading as it will be taken by many to mean 'leaders'.

We need historical accounts to create a record of the WLM as a key feature of post war British society, culture and politics. As the movement was politically libertarian, deliberately choosing to avoid the 'vanguardism' current on the far left, which many WLM activists had escaped from, this research necessarily involves a 'bottom up' approach, paying particular attention to local communities and 'lived experience'. Early studies of the WLM described the movement as in decline in the late 1970s, particularly after the national WLM Conference in Birmingham in 1978 in which a major split emerged between socialist feminists and revolutionary feminists.¹¹ This has been shown to be inaccurate due to a failure to appreciate the diversity of the WLM and the fact that the movement had always contained divisions.¹² Jean Radford drew attention to the national and London focus, writing that 'local, autonomous women's liberation groups, great in number and diversity, have almost been written out of Women's Liberation histories'.¹³ It is only in the last few years however that scholars have begun to address the issue of regional diversity within the UK WLM and significant work has been done by Sarah Browne in Scotland and Jeska Rees in West Yorkshire.¹⁴ This article will aim to contribute to the on-going historiography of the WLM by tracing the social and cultural history of the movement in England from the late 1960s to the early 1990s by examining the work of a selection of local groups and women's centres. It will show how women pursued feminist campaigns, challenged sexism and built feminist counter cultures in their own communities and in the process changed their own lives. It will point to a sense of regional diversity within the movement whilst acknowledging that much more in depth research will need to be conducted to fully comprehend the complex regional variations within the English WLM.

In a single article which seeks to foreground local activism it is not realistic to look in detail at the whole of England. Instead the focus will be on five urban centres which were chosen because of their geographical spread, variation in socio-economic make up, variety of engagement with the women's

movement and availability of sources. A combination of oral and archival sources has been used based on material held in the Women's Library, the Feminist Library, Feminist Archive North (Leeds) and Feminist Archive South (Bristol).¹⁵ Bristol developed as a key English sea port, second only to London. Situated in southwest England it played a major role in colonial trade. The city's undoubted affluence is directly related to the role that Bristol played in the slave trade. By the late twentieth century it had a strong manufacturing sector and something of a reputation for innovation, technology and the arts. Brighton is a large town situated on the south coast. With easy access by rail to London, it developed a thriving tourist trade and is sometimes referred to as 'London by the sea'. The opening of Sussex University in 1961 as the first of the 'new' universities had an important impact on the town. Brighton and the surrounding area, including the nearby town of Lewes, developed a distinctive identity and reputation for radicalism, counterculture and the gay movement and also a strong interest in the arts. Norwich is a small historic city and the regional centre for the county of Norfolk in Eastern England. In the late twentieth century the Norwich area was a significant base for a diverse collection of light industries, some of whom were known for low wages and poor conditions. Bolton is a former cotton town. The Lancashire cotton towns were significant employers of women and known for their organised working class women, in both the suffrage movement and the weaving industry.¹⁶ Like many urban centres in the late twentieth century, Bolton developed a range of service industries. Leeds and its smaller neighbour Bradford are two closely connected northern cities which dominate West Yorkshire. This area was traditionally known for the woollen industry and for the mass production of clothes, both large employers of women. This area too gave way to service industries and public sector employment. In the late twentieth century the area was transformed by immigration from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent. Leeds and Bradford had important distinctions. Bradford, for example, became known in the 1970s for its very strong gay movement which continued to be united, long after gay men and lesbians had split elsewhere.¹⁷ There was, however, a strong regional identity and this was carried over into many joint WLM initiatives between the two cities. There is not space here to examine each town in detail. In any case this would become repetitive. Instead the intention is to provide a counter balance to the domination of London socialist – feminist accounts of the WLM, paying attention to both national characteristics across England as a whole and local/regional distinctions.

Establishing Women's Liberation

We consider first modes of organising – how did women's liberation establish itself in these English towns and cities? As has been said women's liberation was not a single organisation but an amorphous network of loosely affiliated local groups with no formal membership or hierarchy. As word spread about the new movement women's liberation groups sprung up in the early 1970s. In larger towns and cities a whole network of local groups quickly formed, including university WLM groups.¹⁸ In Bolton three women, Gay Bennett, Vicki Turbville and Gaby Lewis came together and

secured a piece on women's liberation in the local press and the first women's liberation group in Bolton was formed.¹⁹ For many women it was a big step to attend their first meeting. In an interview recorded in 1983 Barbara Gray admitted that she was 'shaking like a leaf with nerves' when she attended her first WLM meeting in a pub Norwich, but she came away feeling that 'I've come home'.²⁰ Most groups met weekly and were for women only unless there was a special reason to invite men. Meetings were informal and often chaotic although Bolton appears to have adopted a much more conventional approach with a chairman (who was given guidance notes), secretary and minutes taken. Such formality was very unusual and may have been a result of the tradition of women working in industry and participating in the formal apparatus of the labour movement in Bolton. Bristol was more typical, described by Caroline New as 'shambolic at times, but by god we got things done'.²¹

Women's liberation had to be negotiated at a local level, the first challenge being the need for women only physical space. To create a sense of identity the new movement needed women only safe spaces to hold meetings and collectively develop ideas. Feminist geographers, notably Doreen Massey, have pointed out that the spatial organisation of society is crucial for the production of gender relations and not just the result of it.²² Frequently there was no choice but to hold meetings in women's houses. In Leeds much of the housing stock in the 1970s was of poor quality with small rooms and often with no indoor sanitation. When Al Garthwaite decided to buy a flat she consciously chose one with a large living room which would be suitable for meetings.²³ The second problem was one of communication. In the pre digital age communication was by face to face contact, letter or home phone and many women did not have a phone. To find out what was going on women had to attend weekly meetings or subscribe to a monthly newsletter which was sent in the post. By the mid 1970s most towns and cities produced a monthly WLM newsletter with notices of events and articles on a range of topics. Following the WLM conference in Manchester in 1975 the national WLM newsletter WIRES (Women's Information and Referral Enquiry Service) was launched with a group of women in the Chapeltown area of Leeds taking on the task of producing the bimonthly newsletter. This group produced WIRES for over two years before handing over to another collective in Nottingham at the end of 1977. The Chapeltown WIRES group made an important contribution to the WLM in Britain. The WIRES workers (who were paid from subscriptions) often had to type up copy from handwritten drafts, sometimes adding personal comments from their own experiences. Frequently, articles in WLM newsletters were not signed as women regarded themselves as acting collectively not individually and did not want the media to latch on to particular feminists and attempt to elevate them to any sort of leadership role. There is also the added problem for the historian that WLM leaflets and other material were frequently not dated, often making detailed local chronologies difficult to establish.

The third challenge in establishing the movement was to develop a language of empowerment. Women were swept into women's liberation in considerable numbers, but were often unable to find a narrative structure to verbalise their innermost feelings. Many women, especially isolated full time mothers, were often felt lacking in confidence and self esteem. Left wing women were accustomed to activism, but became increasingly angry as they were unable to persuade male leftists to take women's issues seriously.²⁴ Pen Dalton was active on the left with her husband in Brighton in the 1970s. Meetings were held in their house. Whilst the men talked about equality and liberation she was 'reduced to the role of tea making'.²⁵ Consciousness raising, sometimes known as 'the small group process', developed as a response to these needs.²⁶ Through CR women could learn to trust each other in a supportive environment, reflect on their experiences of sexism and collectively develop ideas for change; the personal became political. It is clear from the many examples of personal testimony we have on the WLM in these towns and cities that CR was a vitally important aspect of the movement. Elizabeth Shorrocks said 'it gave me an analytical framework into which I could try and fit my life'.²⁷ Barbara Gray recalled that it took one woman six weeks in her group in Norwich before she could speak, finally blurting out 'I know... that's it... that happened to me' and then bursting into tears.²⁸ Many groups were very long running, often lasting for several years. Helen Taylor belonged to a Bristol CR group for about five years. In her interview she recalled that there were 'some very intense times...but it was also a very happy time....it felt like a safe space to talk about how we felt about being women'.²⁹ CR could be very emotionally draining. Meetings were very emotional with women expressing anger, but also euphoria, for some it was like finding a new life.

Consciousness-raising was not restricted to dedicated CR groups. In smaller towns and cities many WLM groups were 'multi-purpose' undertaking CR, activism and sometimes theoretical work. The Norwich WLM was set up in 1970 after the first WLM national conference at Ruskin College Oxford. According to Barbara Gray, average attendance was about twenty and they worked their way through many CR topics. The group also seems to have undertaken other activities such as assigned reading. It was not uncommon for a CR group to develop into a study group. WLM activists became adult education lecturers through the WEA (Worker's Educational Association) and developed feminism through their classes aimed at women.³⁰ Brighton had a women's branch of the WEA which ran a very successful course on women's liberation in the autumn of 1978 which continued into the following term.³¹ Feminist academics developed university courses aimed at women which also challenged the male bias of many university courses. There was often a CR element to these classes.

The movement also looked outwards and sought to symbolically occupy public urban space by setting up Saturday morning stalls in shopping precincts, distributing leaflets and organising petitions. Public meetings were held with visiting speakers and talks given in local schools and colleges. The Bolton group developed an educational play called *Sweetie Pie* about sex role stereotyping and a slide show both of which were shown to local school and college pupils.³² Bolton

also produced a manual on local health services for women. MPs were lobbied about local feminist issues. In the large cities of Bristol, Leeds, Bradford and Brighton multiple WLM groups were established and the women became very bold and assertive, sometimes engaging in direct action. In the more conservative cultures of Bolton and Norwich WLM activists initially tried hard to be polite and 'respectable'. In the mid 1970s Norwich WLM gave talks to church women's groups, the Housewives Register and the Women's Institute, but they had to tread very carefully. They were prevented from using such words as 'abortion' in the title, but had to refer to 'motherhood' instead.³³ Bolton activists attempted to embed themselves into local institutions such as the health authority and the trades council. In an effort to reach out to as many women as possible Bristol WLM initiated a series of 'Introductory sessions' to explain what the movement was all about. A rota was established and long standing activists took it in turns to run the meetings. Nicola Harwin, who was involved, described these sessions as 'excellent'.³⁴ An article in WIRES stated that over a two year period 1975-77 248 women had come into the movement in Bristol via this method, leading to about twenty new CR groups.³⁵ Women also reached beyond their local area. Women's liberation conferences were a huge spur to activism. Besides the annual national conferences between 1970 and 1978 there was a multiplicity of regional and special interest conferences such as socialist feminism, radical feminism and sexuality. In the autumn of 1978 Bristol held an 'anti-rape' conference which was attended by 200 women.³⁶ Barbara Gray said that very few women from Norwich went to conferences 'because we were still living in the system', adding that when she did go, 'we came back mindless, blown out of our minds...it was so good'.³⁷

The prevailing notion of 'sisterhood' in the movement meant that women strove very hard to be supportive of each other and hold the movement together. The years from 1968 to the mid 1970s were characterised by a huge surge of feminist energy and euphoria but, beneath the veneer of a universalising feminism, all kinds of tensions were soon evident. As Miriam David observed in an interview in Bristol, it was 'only obvious subsequently ... just how white and middle class we all were'.³⁸ Although working class women did join the movement, their position was often problematic and marginal. This could perhaps be expected in the more affluent towns but it was also true of working class Bolton. Sheridan Homer wrote that although the group was 'very friendly' she felt 'uncomfortable as they were mostly middle class or highly articulate, well read, political types'.³⁹ In the early 1980s the Brighton women's centre struggled with this issue and designated Friday as 'working class women's day' when only working class women could use the centre, which somewhat underlines the fact that it was predominantly a middle class set up.⁴⁰

Bradford is exceptional in the towns depicted here in that Bradford WLM did gain substantial numbers of very assertive working class women. Bradford Dykes were an informal grouping of mainly working class lesbians who became notorious within the WLM.⁴¹ They acquired a reputation for being anti-intellectual 'rough and ready', 'heavies' and 'boozers'.⁴² Bradford Dykes were a

noticeable presence at WLM conferences, being particularly known for their drinking and impatience with feminist theory.⁴³ They complained that WLM conferences were too middle class and working class women were not listened to.⁴⁴ Individuals had to negotiate their own relationship with the movement. In the early years the great majority do not seem to have been very motivated by ideological discussions and debates about feminism and were keen to get on with practical activism. The Bolton minutes reveal that ‘some members were worried about getting bogged down in theory’.⁴⁵ One of the key activists in Bolton, American born Elaine Glover, said in an interview that she found theory ‘hard to understand’.⁴⁶ Women’s liberation was never static but constantly in flux, evolving and transforming itself: particularly noticeable by 1976-7 was the growing lesbian presence in the movement with many women abandoning heterosexual relationships and conventional nuclear family life.

Women’s Centres

Attention has been drawn to the fact that much emphasis has been given in WLM historiography to biographical accounts, often in the form of oral testimony. For some aspects of WLM history these sources are not sufficient, women’s centres being a case in point. Evidence from biographical narratives on women’s centres in this period is fragmentary. Consequently this area is as yet very underdeveloped. A key aim of this article is to help to remedy this situation. As we have seen, a sense of physical space for women within urban centres was very important. Bearing in mind the traditional gendered concept of ‘public and private’ and the designation of much urban space as masculine, it is not surprising that many WLM activists sought to establish a local safe place for women. This women only space could be not only a place of support and information, but also empowerment and learning new skills. In seeking to provide a physical home for women’s liberation women’s centres were challenging the gendering of urban space.

Local WLM groups had varying degrees of success with this ambition. The Bolton archives have numerous references to the search for premises for a women’s centre. Despite raising funds for a women’s centre, suitable premises could not found.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, even when premises were found, women’s centres had a precarious existence, often existing in rather squalid squats or very short life tenancies. Another option was for someone to give over room in their own home. In 1973 Ellen Malos’ basement of her house in the Redland area of Bristol became the base for the Bristol Women’s Centre. The centre was largely a resource and information service only. Women in Bristol preferred to put their energies into activism and the community rather than trying to build women’s liberation by bringing the community to the Women’s Centre. As we shall see other towns had more ambitious ideas for their women’s centres. Bristol Women’s Centre did carry out pregnancy testing however, with the aid of trained volunteers. This was a vital service when no self-administered kits were available. They also gave women post test counselling and information. Around 1976/7 the Bristol

Women's Centre found its own premises in a small hut in 'The Grove' which is between the river and Queen Square, central Bristol. Jackie Barron was new to Bristol in 1979 and found herself volunteering at the Grove, doing a rota slot, answering the phone, providing information and 'just facilitating a drop in for women new to the area or lonely or who had problems and who would come in and have a cup of coffee and a chat about their lives'.⁴⁸ The Grove was vandalised and the Bristol Women's Centre went through two further premises, eventually running out of steam and closing due to lack of funds and volunteers sometime in the mid-late 1980s.⁴⁹

Despite the numerous obstacles, by 1979 over forty women's centres had been established in Britain all aiming to make a positive impact on women's lives.⁵⁰ The centres ran on a strictly 'women only basis' although in Norwich a room was allocated for men accompanying women to wait. Norwich and Brighton are both examples of cities which sought to build the women's movement around the women's centre. The Norwich Women's Centre began life as a room in an arts centre in the mid 1970s and from 1977 was housed in a grim licensed squat from which was said to be off-putting to some women. In 1983 it moved to better accommodation and also adopted a formal constitution and charitable status. It had about 120 women using the centre a week, including black women, lesbians and disabled women, who all felt various degrees of exclusion from wider society.⁵¹ Lesbians made use of the centre as they could freely express their sexuality, unlike other public places.⁵² The centre ran consciousness raising groups, training courses and provided a drop in advice service, most often relating to maintenance/matrimonial issues, benefits, housing, health and the usual pregnancy testing.⁵³ In the years 1987 to 1990 the Norwich Women's Centre reached its peak. With help from the local council, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Princes Trust, the centre acquired a four storey listed building close to the city centre with facilities including a crèche, coffee bar and courses on anything from women's rights to bricklaying.⁵⁴

Women's centres were usually initiated by a collective who undertook to work a rota on a volunteer basis. In Brighton the WLM secured an abandoned maternity hospital in Buckingham Road in 1974 from social services with a £6,000 grant towards renovation with the idea that the women's centre would reduce the load of social workers.⁵⁵ This arrangement only lasted two years, consequently from 1976 until 1989 the centre went through several changes of premises, each time providing a home for a thriving mix of users, including groups for Jewish lesbians, woman and photography, the matriarchy network, women and health and women's self-defence as well as the usual prominent national WLM campaigns. Collective management could be chaotic. As Jen Murray in Brighton put it, 'it was never terribly well organised, as you can imagine'.⁵⁶ There were constant appeals for women to volunteer for the rota. In August 1978 Alison Hammer wrote that 'The centre seems to be perpetually on the verge of collapse...the organisation of the place and the way the centre is run is in a mess or non-existent'.⁵⁷ Rosemary Lovatt was a volunteer in Brighton for nine years in

the 1980s. When she arrived the women's centre 'did not believe in accounts, did not even keep cheque stubs'.⁵⁸

If women's centres were to be largely the provision of information and resources, then it was possible to run on a voluntary and collective basis, as in Bristol. If education and training, and serious inter agency case work with social services, police, medical personnel etc. were to take place (as in Brighton and Norwich) then serious funding was required from local state or central government and for that the culture had to change.⁵⁹ In 1989, when Norwich Women's Centre acquired substantial financial assistance and a part time paid worker, a management committee was adopted with monthly meetings and each member taking a specific responsibility, attended by two council officers and an elected councillor.⁶⁰ Not all WLM activists were prepared to go down this route. In Brighton there were opposing views on the question of a paid worker, with some arguing that it would establish unequal power relations which were not in the WLM spirit of collective self management.⁶¹

Campaigns

Surveying WLM activism in this period it is apparent that there were some very big national campaigns which penetrated, with varying degrees, across the whole women's liberation community. The National Abortion Campaign (NAC) is a case in point, a 'woman's right to choose' being one of the first demands adopted in 1970. On the whole NAC activists were heterosexual socialist-feminists. By the mid 1970s there was significant opposition to the Abortion Act of 1967, most notably from the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) which triggered the campaign to defend the Act. Along with several other NAC activists in Bristol, Betty Underwood became involved because of her own painful experience of back street abortion.⁶² Bristol and Brighton both had very strong NAC groups. In Brighton a hundred women marched against the Corrie Bill to reduce access to abortion in 1980.⁶³ Campaigns were also raised against numerous other attempts to undermine the Abortion Act in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On NAC demonstrations women chanted 'not the church and not the state, women must decide their fate'.⁶⁴ In Brighton the NAC group aimed to do more than defend the 1967 Act, working towards improving access for abortion facilities locally and gradually becoming more involved in women's health generally.⁶⁵

It was often the case that the establishment of a women's centre was linked to other projects and campaigns. In Brighton in 1974 the building for the women's centre was next to another council property allocated for a Women's Aid refuge, with a convenient passageway between the two, allowing battered women a cover whereby they appeared to enter the centre but were actually entering the refuge, which was of course not made public.⁶⁶ When the Bristol Women's Centre was founded a bed was put in for occasional overnight use. It began to be used by women escaping violent relationships. When women started to sleep on the floor the Women's Centre started the Women's House Project for a women's aid refuge.⁶⁷ After a two year campaign they managed to secure a tiny

house which was soon overwhelmed, leading eventually to a local housing association granting them a larger property on the edge of town. Bolton feminists did not succeed in finding premises for a women's centre but they did open a refuge, which they named Fortalice, and a hostel for homeless young women, Radclyffe Hall.⁶⁸ One of the Bolton women remembered how hard it was emotionally to be involved in refuge, as women sometimes came to Fortalice straight from hospital with visible injuries inflicted by domestic violence.⁶⁹

Central to the concept of the women's aid movement was the breaking down of the traditional divisions between 'client' and 'social worker'. However, as with women's centres, the movement gradually moved from collective to hierarchical management structures and cultures in order to secure funding. Inevitably this led to a degree of institutionalisation. In an oral history workshop in 2009 Jenn Bravo talked about Sahara, an organisation in Leeds which works with black women subjected to violence, which was founded in 1982. She spoke about the need for Sahara to adopt a much more professional approach in order to secure funding from social services, 'you've got to jump to different tunes'.⁷⁰ West Yorkshire feminists developed work in the area of both women's aid and sexual violence, with Leeds establishing a rape crisis centre in the late 1970s and Bradford in the early 1980s. Ruth Ingram worked on sexual violence and young women in Leeds providing support, counselling and a safe house called 'One in 4', referring to the fact that it was estimated that one in four young women were subjected to sexual abuse in their own families. The project was very successful and by the late 1980s was attracting substantial Department of Health grants for paid workers. Ruth Ingram eventually withdrew however, complaining that 'the values had changed' and the management was no longer feminist.⁷¹

With the notable exception of Jeska Rees, little historical work has been conducted hitherto on radical and revolutionary feminism and the shift in the late 1970s towards a new focus on violence towards women.⁷² By the mid 1970s many radical feminists had evolved towards revolutionary feminism, arguing that men were 'the enemy' and that the system of hetero patriarchy was maintained through violence or the threat of violence towards women. Around 1977-8 Sheila Jeffreys and a number of revolutionary feminists moved from London to the Leeds/Bradford area which had cheap housing and a thriving gay community. Jeffreys and other revolutionary feminists in West Yorkshire began discussing 'political lesbianism'.⁷³ They argued that women in the WLM should not 'sleep with the enemy' as they saw heterosexual women as 'collaborators'.⁷⁴ This paper created uproar in the WLM, not least because it was a direct challenge to the dominance of London based socialist-feminism.

To explain the extraordinary growth of revolutionary feminism in West Yorkshire and the rapid explosion of work around violence we need to look at the local context. Revolutionary feminism had been developing in Britain over several years, fuelled by blatant sexism in society, sexual

violence and the inability of left wing groups to take feminism seriously. What gave it special poignancy in the late 1970s in West Yorkshire was the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ Peter Sutcliffe who killed thirteen women between 1975 and 1980. The Chapeltown area of Leeds, where many of Sutcliffe’s victims came from, was also home to many feminists. Police took very little notice of the first victims as they were prostitutes. Only with the fifth victim, who was not a sex worker, did the police begin to take serious interest. This outraged the local feminists. These events led Leeds Rape Crisis Centre to initiate a conference in 1980 in which Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) was founded.⁷⁵ WAVAW organised ‘Reclaim the Night’ marches in which women would carry flaming torches through red light areas, chanting ‘women unite, reclaim the night, wherever we go, yes means yes and no means no’. Sometimes this was met with opposition from local porn shop owners leading to scuffles and police intervention.⁷⁶ WAVAW spread to other areas of the UK, its reach going well beyond revolutionary feminist enclaves. Sandra McNeill estimates that there were about forty WAVAW groups across the country in the early 1980s.⁷⁷ Brighton WLM was quick to organise Reclaim the Night marches and also sent delegations to national marches, including two coaches for the London Reclaim the Night on January 20th 1979.⁷⁸ Bolton women were initially reluctant to become involved in WAVAW. In June 1978 Bolton WLM recorded that ‘it did not feel able to do anything’ for a Reclaim the Night, but in March 1982 they are recorded as having ‘a wonderful march, marred slightly by the presence of men at the beginning, who were, with one exception, persuaded to go away’.⁷⁹ Bolton women also organised protests outside sex shops. During the 1980s Norwich revolutionary feminists similarly developed an interest in combating violence against women, which was taken to include pornography. In 1988-9 they undertook a spate of direct actions, including ripping porn magazines from shelves and tearing down posters for a theatre event which was deemed to be violent towards women. On the night the play was staged, the theatre received a bomb threat half way through the performance and the theatre had to be evacuated. In a press release a group calling itself WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Coven from Hell –Norwich branch) claimed responsibility.⁸⁰ This may have been one of the factors which led Norwich Council to cut their grant of £5,000 a year to the women’s centre.⁸¹ This event calls into question the idea that the feminist campaign against violence against women petered out after the early 1980s.

In the early years of the movement there were many ‘all purpose’ local WLM groups. Gradually, more specialist groups developed and the movement became hugely diverse moving from utopian imaginaries to more practical campaigns. This was accompanied by an increased awareness of difference. By the late 1970s black women were organising their own groups and there was a new recognition that women of colour had a different agenda from white women. In Bristol, mixed race Cristel became active in the WLM and was pleased to find a black women’s group. Overall though Cristel felt that the WLM did not offer much for black and immigrant women because ‘issues that were being addressed never included us, or if it did it was very much at a tokenistic level’.⁸² In West

Yorkshire Women's Aid the situation of Asian women gradually became apparent when large numbers began using the refuges, seeking to escape from violent relationships.⁸³ Asian families were prepared to pay 'bounty hunters' to secure the return of their women.⁸⁴ White feminists realised that they had to do more to combat passive racism. In 1986 Norwich women's centre developed an anti racist policy which demanded a thorough review to ensure that the group became as inclusive as possible, including subscribing to the Asian women's magazine *Mukti*, buying African, Chinese and Indian dolls for the children's room and making sure that all women's centre publicity reached the local ethnic communities.⁸⁵

Bristol had a large and extremely active women's movement covering many different national campaigns. Wages for Housework was particularly strong in Bristol although they were constantly in conflict with other feminists, leading to their expulsion from the women's centre by a majority vote.⁸⁶ Academic Hilary Land, based in Bristol, was a key player in the campaign for women's financial and legal independence. This movement, which sought changes to the taxation and benefit systems, became known in the late 1970s as 'YBA Wife'.⁸⁷ The peace movement was also strong in Bristol. Many Bristol women visited the Greenham Common peace camp and some stayed for extended periods. Juley Howard is a good example of a Bristol feminist peace activist. She was resident at Greenham for three and a half years and imprisoned nine times. In an interview she described in graphic terms the evictions she endured,

'The evictions had a terrible effect really, everything had to be mobile...you couldn't leave your tent up. Even if it was pouring with rain you had to take your tent down and pack up all your bedding. Several times all my stuff got taken by the bailiffs, even when I was there... they'd just thump you and take your stuff and shove it in the back of a dustcart....it was awful.'⁸⁸

Besides national issues there were struggles based around local issues. Many WLM groups made serious attempts to reach local working class women based on their own particular needs. Sometimes this work was undertaken jointly with local left groups, for example under the umbrella of the Working Women's Charter, which had the support of the labour movement through local trades councils. The International Socialists (Socialist Workers Party from 1976) established local Women's Voice groups in the late 1970s, which tried hard to engage with issues such as women's low pay, inequality at work and abortion, but this initiative did not last.⁸⁹ Some local WLM initiatives never got off the ground. Bolton launched a campaign against Christmas, presumably on the grounds that it was such hard work for women, which flopped.⁹⁰

A notable feature of the 1980s was the move towards 'municipal feminism' in local authorities as many WLM activists moved into the Labour Party. Labour-controlled Leeds was a good example of this trend which aimed to 'feminise' the local state. Leeds began serious work on equal opportunities

in 1982.⁹¹ Eventually four equal opportunities officers were in post and leader of the council George Mudie was keen to advance work with disadvantaged groups. Lots of grants were given for equal opportunities projects in the community, some of which proved controversial, most notably the black lesbian group.⁹² Following on from Ripper murders it was clear that police attitudes towards women and violence had to change as the standard approach was not to take domestic violence seriously. A police women's unit was set up and with the aim of developing training programmes to challenge traditional attitudes. This was largely the work of feminist sociologists Sheila Allen and Jalna Hamner, who also encouraged inter agency work between the police, housing and social services on domestic violence.⁹³ These gains came at a cost. As Ruth Ingrams put it 'I remember...at '1 in 4' standing up in my dungarees trying to talk to councillors and not getting anywhere, learning to put a suit on before I did it.'⁹⁴

Culture and Personal Life

Women's liberation was about more than meetings, conferences, formal demands and campaigning. Any historical account would be incomplete without mentioning cultural forms such as feminist art, literature and performance. Feminist cultural production celebrated femininity, but was also important for expressing feminist ideas and creativity. As Eve Setch has written, creative work is not a peripheral part of the WLM but 'needs to be understood as an integral part of the movement'.⁹⁵ This is evident in the towns and cities examined here. There were women's theatre groups, women's bands and discos, comedy, cinema screenings, performance poetry and many other feminist cultural activities. Sadly, WLM historiography has neglected this important area of women's liberation. In contrast to WLM conferences and theoretical position papers there are few sources relating to many performance and artistic aspects of WLM cultural forms. Bristol, which had a large number of feminist artists and writers, has addressed this issue with its HLF booklet on *Feminism in Bristol 1973-5* which focuses particularly on *Sistershow*. This was a feminist cabaret which was active in Bristol and elsewhere 1973-4.⁹⁶ Combining poetry, sketches, dance, song and mayhem *Sistershow* was 'unruly and anarchic, disorganised and confrontational'.⁹⁷ *Sistershow* was performed surrounded by feminist art works. Among the works on show was that of Swedish born Monica Sjöö whose most famous work is 'God giving birth'.⁹⁸ This work was thought to be so shocking at the time that many art galleries refused to show it.⁹⁹

Finally this article turns to personal life and changes in life styles. This comes over very clearly in the oral testimony relating to the movement. As Marilyn Porter said, she looks back to this period as 'tremendously exciting, lots of new ideas around the place and above all, fun fun, I can't believe we had so much fun'.¹⁰⁰ The archive relating to Bolton WLM can make the Bolton women appear rather straight-laced and earnest, but this was far from the case. In a Bolton celebration of International Women's Day, women did the 'conga' all linked together in a long line dancing and

singing to 'We are family' by Sister Sledge.¹⁰¹ WLM conferences were also a great time for social events. At the end of the Bristol National WLM conference in Bristol in 1973 women took off their clothes and danced together in a giant circle 'ecstatic and naked'.¹⁰² No written record of this 'spontaneous gesture of trust and solidarity' was recorded at the time.¹⁰³ It exists only in the memory of the women who took part, but it is just as important to the social and cultural history of the movement as the conference resolutions which were debated. Women's liberation actively promoted communal life styles. In Brighton there were many women's collective houses, sometimes leading to accusation of cliques.¹⁰⁴ Revolutionary feminists established separatist collective households. Sadly, as yet little is documented about this aspect of the movement. In Women's Aid refuges it was standard practice for the women to cook and eat communally. In Bolton, six of the women jointly rented a set of adjoining terraced houses and enjoyed communal meals, shared childcare, cars, washing machines, social events and loaned each other money etc.¹⁰⁵

Within heterosexual relationships the idea of monogamy was being challenged. Dorothy Sheridan lived for several years in a 'threesome' in Brighton with two men, living communally, sharing income and care of a child.¹⁰⁶ Among the bohemian feminist circles of Brighton in the 1970s and 1980s there was a belief in 'open relationships' and the idea that sexual partners should strive to overcome feelings of jealousy and possessiveness.¹⁰⁷ The shift away from heterosexual relationships has already been mentioned. In this period lesbians were able to 'come out' and openly celebrate lesbian sexuality, although discrimination was still rife. In the early 1970s Bolton WLM appears to be very much based on heterosexual women, but this had changed by the late 1970s and in the Bolton oral history project four women from the seventeen interviewed stated that they were lesbians. Lesbian feminists who were mothers offered different ways of being a family. This was fraught with difficulty however as the Family Courts tended to grant custody to fathers on the grounds that being a lesbian was incompatible with being a mother.¹⁰⁸ We have also noted that there were problems between revolutionary feminists and heterosexual women. A woman told Sarah Braun in the Bristol women's centre in the mid 1980s that she was a 'traitor and had no right to be in the centre' after she revealed that she was married with two sons.¹⁰⁹ There were also issues with boy children in women's centres and attending WLM events. Although in some cases attitudes were extreme, this was generally not the case as there was much overlap and fluidity between socialist feminists and radical/revolutionary feminist circles and thinking. Kate Page defined herself as 'a socialist and feminist' but spoke of the influence of radical feminist ideas on how she has lived her life; in a long term relationship with a man but living apart, not allowing him to have power over her and not seeing herself as part of a couple,

' I think that for me the crucial thing was always about not wanting to be... about not believing the romantic model where you fall in love with one person and they fulfil your every need, and as a woman that's all you need, is to be satisfied through that one

person'.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the importance of local studies for the history of the English women's liberation movement. It was very much a national movement, but there was no central organisation and few national structures except for some individual campaigns. As we have seen, local WLM groups had an informal communication network, mainly through WIRES, but local groups very much 'did their own thing'. Even national WLM conferences were organised locally on a volunteer basis by different local WLM groups and they ceased after 1978. It is unwise to take a 'top down' approach and see this as the beginning of the decline of the WLM. This is far too simplistic. We need to build the analysis from the bottom up. Only with detailed local histories can we appreciate the rich diversity of the movement and overcome the bias in the historiography towards London based socialist feminist intellectuals. We have hinted here at some of the regional variations in WLM activity. Bristol had a strong interest in peace and the arts. Brighton WLM also had a strong cultural dimension and it also developed a lasting interest in women's health care. West Yorkshire developed work around violence towards women which set off a surge of activity around the country. We need to be very wary of applying any kind of national chronology as local groups often had very individual trajectories. Women in Norwich, for example, appear to be pursuing direct action on violence in the late 1980s whereas previously it appeared that this aspect of the movement petered out by the mid 1980s. This case also illustrates the diversity of the movement even within cities as, at the same time as the WITCH group in Norwich was engaged in high profile direct action, the Women's Centre management was attempting to appear 'respectable' in order to qualify for local authority funding.

We have seen women's liberation as a collective activity which firmly rejected any concept of leaders. The movement had very many unifying characteristics, but how they played out across the country differed according to local contexts. The WLM has been seen as a widespread movement which embedded itself into the fabric of communities and brought about important social change.¹¹¹ There has been a tendency to over-intellectualise and over-categorise the movement rather than seeing it as 'lived experience'. Ideological differences were often not very significant to women who simply wanted to challenge 'traditional' sexist attitudes, behaviours and structures in their own communities and thereby improve the lives of women. Where significant differences did occur they were not exclusive as women usually accommodated difference and often friendships traversed ideological divides.

The role of women's centres has been examined, which has hitherto been overlooked in WLM historiography. Tension between putting energy into providing a safe physical space for women and taking campaigns into the community has been revealed. Ultimately the women of Bristol

chose to keep their commitment to a women's centre contained and to focus instead on the wider aspects of the movement. Others, such as Norwich and Brighton, tried to build the movement around the women's centre. Feminists of the 1970s had an enormous amount of energy and utopian idealism. By the 1980s most WLM activists had learned that if they wanted to bring practical benefits to women they had to engage with local and national state agencies for funding and this entailed compromise. Perhaps surprisingly, revolutionary feminists were involved in this process by helping to change attitudes, policies and training in the police and social services regarding violence towards women. The WLM helped to bring about a profound change in society towards women in the late twentieth century, not least being the lives of lesbians which were transformed in this period. More research needs to be undertaken on the WLM in other English regions to build on this initial sketch. Hopefully more archive material and oral testimony will become available to fill the gaps. By writing accessible history we can bring these important changes to light and thus make women's liberation an essential part of our cultural memory of late twentieth century Britain.

Notes

¹ Natalie Thomlinson (2012) The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement, *History*, vol 97, pp. 454-5.

² Sheila Rowbotham (2001) *Promise of a Dream, Remembering the Sixties* (London: Verso); Lynne Segal (2007) *Making Trouble, Life and Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail); Michèle Roberts (2007) *Paper Houses, A Memoir of the '70s and Beyond* (London: Virago).

³ The BBC Radio 4 programme 'The Reunion', broadcast September 5, 2010 on the disruption of the Miss World competition in 1970 is a good example.

⁴ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their detailed and constructive feedback.

⁵ Arthur McIvor (2013) *Working Lives in Britain Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan), p. 5.

⁶ Kalwant Bohopal (2010) Gender, identity and experience: Researching marginalised groups, *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 33, pp. 188-195.

⁷ Margaretta Jolly & Sasha Roseniel (2012) Researching women's movements: An introduction to FEMCIT and Sisterhood and After, *Women's Studies International Forum (WSIF)*, no 35, p. 128.

⁸ Margaretta Jolly (2012) Recognising Place, Space and Nation in Researching Women's Movements: Sisterhood and After, *WSIF*, Vol 35, p. 145.

⁹ Segal, *Making Trouble*, p 367. See also Margaretta Jolly (2011) Consenting voices? Activist Life Stories and Complex Dissent, *Life Writing*, vol. 8 no 4, pp. 363-374.

¹⁰ See *Sisterhood and After* website <http://www.bl.uk/learning/news/sisterhood.html>, accessed 4.1.15.

¹¹ See, for example: David Bouchier (1983) *The Feminist Challenge, The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London: MacMillan), p. 147; Anna Coote & Beatrix Campbell (1982) *Sweet Freedom, The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Pan: London), 1982, p. 225.

¹² Eve Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1979, Organisation, Creativity and Debate*, (PhD Thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway), p. 8. See also Jeska Rees (2010) who argues that the enormous practical problems for local groups in hosting these large national conferences also contributed to their decline: 'Look Back at Anger: the Women's Liberation Movement in 1978.' *Women's History Review*, vol. 19 no 3, pp. 337-356.

¹³ Jean Radford (1994) History of Women's Liberation Movements in Britain: A Reflective Personal History, in Gabriele Griffin et al (Eds) *Stirring it, Challenges for Feminism* (London: Taylor and Francis), pp. 43-4.

¹⁴ Jolly, Recognising Place, pp 144-146. See also Sarah Browne (2014) *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); Jeska Rees (2007) *Revolutionary Feminism in England 1977-83* (PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia). Similar work is being done in the USA. See Stephanie Gilmore (2013) *Groundswell: Grass roots feminist activism in post war America* (London: Routledge). This exciting book examines the US WLM in the very different local contexts of Memphis, Tennessee, Columbus,

Ohio and San Francisco, California and argues that ‘the local story is much more complex than the dominant narratives suggest’, p. 19.

¹⁵ Basic factual information on these towns can be gained from the local authority websites.

¹⁶ Jill Liddington & Jill Norris (1978) *One Hand Tied Behind Us, The Rise of the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (London, Virago); Sue Bruley (1993) Gender, Class and Party: The Communist Party and the crisis in the cotton industry in England between the two world wars, *Women’s History Review*, Vol.2, no 1, pp. 81-106.

¹⁷ *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Leeds and Bradford, 1969-1979*, Oral History Project Feminist Archive North, University of Leeds, see particularly the interviews with Yvonne Stringfellow and Julia Moore.

¹⁸ Bridget Lockyer provides an insight into the Bradford WLM scene in ‘An Irregular Period? Participation in the Bradford Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 24 no 4, pp. 643-657, p. 647.

¹⁹ June Corner (1971) Women in Search of LIBERATION, *Bolton Evening News* (4th February), press cutting in scrap book, Bolton Women’s Liberation Group archive, Feminist Archive North (FAN), University of Leeds.

²⁰ Barbara Gray, report of an interview, in *Norwich Women’s Education and Resources Centre Newsletter*, nd, c1983, Norwich Women’s Centre Archive, Box 21, Feminist Archive North, University of Leeds, p. 5.

²¹ Caroline New, *Personal Histories of Second Wave Feminism* Vol. 1&2, Summarised from interviews by Viv Honeybourne and Iona Singer, Feminist Archive South, Bristol University Special Collections, available on <http://feministarchivesouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Personal-Histories-of-the-Second-Wave-of-Feminism.pdf>, 30.

²² Doreen Massey (1994) *Space, Place and Gender* (Oxford: Polity), p. 4. Historians have also drawn attention to the importance of gender in defining urban space, see Fiona Williamson (2014) The Spatial turn of Social and Cultural History: A Review of the Current Field, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 44 (4), pp. 703-717, p. 713.

²³ Al Garthwaite, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Leeds and Bradford*, interview with Louise Lavender and Lee Comer. The fact that there was a joint oral history project covering both Leeds and Bradford underlines the close connection between the two cities.

²⁴ There is no space here to develop the relationship between the left and the WLM, see Sue Bruley (2014) Jam tomorrow? Socialist women and Women’s Liberation 1968-1982: An oral history approach, in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (Eds) *Against the Grain, The British Far Left Since 1956* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

²⁵ Pen Dalton, *Personal Histories*, p. 76.

²⁶ Sue Bruley (2013) Consciousness-raising in Clapham, Women’s Liberation in South London in the 1970s, *Women’s History Review*, Vol 22 no 5, pp. 717-738.

²⁷ Elizabeth Shorrocks *WLM in Leeds and Bradford*, Interview no 3.

²⁸ Gray, *Norwich Women’s*, p. 7.

²⁹ Helen Taylor, *Personal Histories*, p. 42.

³⁰ Bristol WEA Lecturer Miriam David was frustrated by the lack of material for women’s studies classes. She organised a collective which produced Bristol Women’s Studies Group (1979) *Half the Sky, An Introduction to Women’s Studies* (London: Virago).

³¹ Brighton and Hove Women’s Liberation Newsletter, November 1978, Women’s Library, LSE (henceforth Brighton WL newsletter), 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17.

³² *Sweetie Pie, A Play about Women in Society*, introduced by Eileen Murphy, copy in BWLG, FAN, Box 2 A/3A.

³³ Gray, *Norwich Women’s*, p. 7

³⁴ Nicola Harwin, *Personal Histories*, 99.

³⁵ WIRES, monthly national WLM newsletter, September 1977, available at Feminist Archive North, University of Leeds, and other archives.

³⁶ Report back from four delegates from Brighton, Brighton WL Newsletter, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, November 1978.

³⁷ Gray, *Norwich Women’s*, pp. 10-11.

³⁸ Miriam (AKA Miki) David, *Personal Histories*, p. 87.

³⁹ Sheridan Homer, Bolton Oral History Project, Box 6, Bolton WLG, handwritten response to questionnaire, was not interviewed. Other women in this project, some of whom preferred to remain anonymous, also refer to it as a predominantly middle class group.

⁴⁰ *Brighton WL Newsletter* 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, July 1984.

⁴¹ Lockyer, Irregular Period, pp. 649-650.

⁴² Jalna Hanmer, Interview no 9, Julia Moore, Interview no 17, Karen Griffiths, Interview no 20, *WLM in Leeds and Bradford*.

⁴³ Karen Griffiths, Interview no 20, *WLM in Leeds and Bradford*.

⁴⁴ Karen Griffiths, Women’s Liberation in Leeds and Bradford, Interview no 20; Lockyer, Irregular period, p. 650.

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- ⁴⁵ *Minute Book 1*, February 23 1972, Box 1, BWLG, FAN.
- ⁴⁶ Elaine Glover, Bolton Oral History Project, Box 6, BWLG, FAN
- ⁴⁷ Anon, interviewed 23 January 2009, Bolton Oral History Project, no 12, BWLG, Box 6. She says the campaign 'just fizzled out eventually'.
- ⁴⁸ Jackie Barron, *Personal Histories*, p. 61.
- ⁴⁹ Angela Rodaway, *Personal Histories*, p. 32.
- ⁵⁰ WIRES, 20 July 1979.
- ⁵¹ *The Future of the Norwich Women's Centre, A briefing document*, December 1990. This document was a defence of the women's centre, in the light of council proposals to cut funding. Box 21, Norwich Archive, FAN p. 3.
- ⁵² *Future of the Norwich Women's Centre*, p. 4.
- ⁵³ The Norwich Women's Centre Day Book for 1977-81 is available, Box 9, Norwich Archive.
- ⁵⁴ City Treasurer, Evaluation, *Norwich Women's Education and Resource Centre*, 1990 Norwich Archive, Box 3. There are also various leaflets for the centre.
- ⁵⁵ Various authors (1999) *A Woman's Place 1974-1999, A celebration of women's lives in Brighton over the last 25 years* (Women's Words: Brighton), Jen Murray, p. 52, also p. 109.
- ⁵⁶ Jen Murray, *A Woman's Place*, p. 52.
- ⁵⁷ Alison Hammer (1978) writing in *Brighton WL Newsletter*, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, August 1978.
- ⁵⁸ Rosemary Lovatt, *A Woman's Place*, p. 95.
- ⁵⁹ Both Leeds and Bradford had women's centres but as yet there is little archival material or oral testimony which relates to this, which has limited the analysis which can be made here.
- ⁶⁰ Norwich Women's Centre AGM, 8 March 1989, Box 21, Norwich Archive.
- ⁶¹ Alison Hammer (1978) writing in Brighton WL newsletter, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, August 1978.
- ⁶² Betty Underwood, *Personal Histories*, p. 44.
- ⁶³ *A Woman's Place*, p. 9.
- ⁶⁴ Personal memory of author.
- ⁶⁵ Both Kate Page and Dorothy Sheridan were involved in NAC and went on to promote women's health facilities in Brighton, Kate Page, interview, Dorothy Sheridan interviewed by Sue Bruley in Brighton, 2 August 2011 and 18 September 2011, transcript (TS).
- ⁶⁶ *A Woman's Place*, p. 110.
- ⁶⁷ *Personal Histories* Sara Braun, p. 8, Janet Brewer, pp. 66/7.
- ⁶⁸ Hilary Eastham refers to her role in helping to set up Fortalice, Bolton Oral History Project, Box 6, BWLG, FAN. Limited information on Radclyffe Hall is in Boxes 2A/3A, BWLG, FAN.
- ⁶⁹ Anon, no 5, Bolton Oral History Project, Box 6, BWLG, FAN
- ⁷⁰ Jenn Bravo, The UK Women's Liberation Movement, Violence Against Women, History Workshop, British Library, Leeds, 31 January 2009, TS p. 7.
- ⁷¹ Ruth Ingram Violence Against Women Workshop, TS pp. 53-54.
- ⁷² Jeska Rees (2007) *All the rage: revolutionary feminism in England, 1977-1983* (PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia).
- ⁷³ Leeds Revolutionary Feminists (1981) Political Lesbianism: the case against heterosexuality, in *Love your enemy?*, *The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism*, (London: Onlywomen Press). Originally from a WLM conference paper, 1978.
- ⁷⁴ Leeds Revolutionary Feminists, *Political Lesbianism*, p. 7.
- ⁷⁵ Sandra McNeill, Violence Against Women workshop. TS pp. 58-67. See also Jeska Rees, *Revolutionary Feminism*.
- ⁷⁶ Following the violence at the national Reclaim the Night March in London in 1978, warnings were given of the likelihood of hostility from both porn shops and police, Brighton WL newsletter, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, 20 March 1979.
- ⁷⁷ S. McNeill, Violence Against Women workshop, p. 60. The idea for Reclaim the Night marches came from a similar event in Germany, but was originally thought to come from the USA, see Introduction.
- ⁷⁸ *Brighton WL newsletter*, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, January 1979.
- ⁷⁹ June 1978 and 1 March 1982, Minute Book 3, Box 1, BWLG, FAN.
- ⁸⁰ Reproduced in the *Norwich Women's Centre Newsletter*, nd, c1989, Norwich archive, Box 4. The newsletter refers specifically to an Australian branch of WITCH. The use of the name WITCH also crops up among radical feminists in North America, e.g. Jill Vickers (1992) *The Intellectual Origins of the Women's Movements in Canada*, in Constance Backhouse & David H. Flaherty (Eds) *Challenging Times, The Women's Movement in Canada and the US* (Montreal: McGill University Press), p. 46.
- ⁸¹ *The Future of the Women's Centre*. This was a briefing document produced in 1990 in response to council plans to cut the grant. Norwich Archive, Box 21.

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- ⁸² Cristel, *Personal Histories*, p. 74.
- ⁸³ June Butt, *WLM in Leeds and Bradford*, Interview no 19.
- ⁸⁴ Ruth Ingram, Violence Against Women workshop, TS p. 52.
- ⁸⁵ *Anti-Racist Policy 2.10. 86*, Norwich Women's Centre, Norwich Archive, Box 3.
- ⁸⁶ *Personal Histories*, Harriet Wordsworth, p. 55, Pat Roberts, p. 134.
- ⁸⁷ Hilary Land, *Personal Histories*, p. 120.
- ⁸⁸ Juley Howard, *Personal Histories*, p. 115.
- ⁸⁹ S.Bruley, 'Jam Today', see also article by Laurel Forster in this volume.
- ⁹⁰ Hilary Eastham, Bolton, Oral History Project.
- ⁹¹ Frances Bernstein, Violence Against Women workshop, TS p. 103.
- ⁹² Frances Bernstein, Violence Against Women workshop, TS p. 105.
- ⁹³ Frances Bernstein, TS pp. 106-112; Jane McGill, Violence Against Women workshop, TS pp. 114-5.
- ⁹⁴ Ruth Ingram, Violence Against Women workshop, TS p. 126
- ⁹⁵ Setch, PhD, p. 103.
- ⁹⁶ (2011) *Sistershow Revisited, Feminism in Bristol 1973-5*, collected by Deborah M. Withers (Bristol: HammerOn Press), p. 18.
- ⁹⁷ *Sistershow*, p. 17.
- ⁹⁸ For more details see Monica Sjöö, *Through Space and Time, The Ancient Sisterhoods Spoke To Me*, <http://monicasioo.com/index.php/god-giving-birth>, accessed 22. July 2015.
- ⁹⁹ M.Sjöö *Through Space and Time*, M.Sjöö, *Personal Histories*, p36
- ¹⁰⁰ Marilyn Porter, *Personal Histories*, pp. 132-3.
- ¹⁰¹ Anon, interviewed 19 June 2009, Bolton Oral History Project, no 13.
- ¹⁰² M.Sjöö, *Personal Histories*, p. 35. This testimony can be confirmed by other women at the conference.
- ¹⁰³ P.Dalton, *Personal Histories*, p. 78.
- ¹⁰⁴ Brighton WL newsletter, 5BW/survey/B/31 Box 16-17, 25 January 1978.
- ¹⁰⁵ Dorothy Nelson, Bolton Oral History Project, no 9, Box 6, BWLG, FAN.
- ¹⁰⁶ Dorothy Sheridan interviews, TS, pp. 16-17
- ¹⁰⁷ Dorothy Sheridan interviews, TS p. 8.
- ¹⁰⁸ Coote & Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, p. 227.
- ¹⁰⁹ S.Braun, *Personal Histories*, p. 9.
- ¹¹⁰ Interview with Kate Page by Sue Bruley, 3rd January, 2013, Brighton, TS pp. 29-36.
- ¹¹¹ Joyce Outshorn (2012) has noted that establishing causality in relation to women's liberation and historical change is difficult, 'Assessing the impact of women's movements', *WSIF*, vol 35, pp. 147-149. Certainly there are strong indications of both attitudinal and structural change which there is not sufficient space to develop here. For a European perspective see Beatrice et al. (Eds) (2012) *Remaking Citizenship in Multicultural Europe, Women's Movements, Gender and Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).