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Women's Perceptions of their Health,
Family and Personal Needs in a Rural Area:
Some Implications for Social Work Practice.

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for
the requirements of the degree of Master of
Philosophy in Social Work.

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Abstract:

A democratic - socialist, feminist perspective was adopted to undertake an in-depth investigation of the social requirements and support needs of a group of 50 women living in the rural Far North. Critical health, family and community support service needs were identified using qualitative research techniques. An analysis of the information so derived highlighted a range of difficulties experienced by women living in the rural area. These difficulties included isolation, access, inequality, poverty, unemployment and pervasive sexist attitudes among key service providers.

Certain conclusions were made, particularly with respect to the practice of social work in rural areas and the training of future social workers. It is also clear that further research into the consequences of inadequate social services in rural areas should be undertaken.

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INTRODUCTION.

Writing this thesis has been a long, lonely and difficult task. After months of reading and more months of research I was still at a loss about how to begin writing up a piece of qualitative research. On one of my trips to Massey University Ian Shirley told me that I must begin writing - anything - so there was a basis for discussion. So home I went to make another dozen attempts to begin Chapter 1. All of them ended in the rubbish tin. In desperation I thought of the advice I had often given students in my teaching days; to write about what they knew best from their own personal experience. It made sense in the situation I was in, where no one was available to help resolve my mental blockage. So when I next sat down I began to write about myself and the influences that I considered had helped to make me the person I am, with the opinions I hold. In this way I was able to begin and continue writing the rest of the thesis. This was one reason for adopting a personal approach in beginning the thesis.

The second justification for the approach I have taken is both more complex and academically more acceptable. It has to do with perceptions of truth and leads to the question of whether there can ever be value-free research within the social sciences.

Several of the books that I read on research methods dealt with this problem. Bogdan and Taylor, (1975), struck a responsive chord within me with their comment about truth being an evasive concept. As they wrote, "People interpret things differently and focus on different things so that if more than one person listened to, truth emerges as a composite picture" (Ibid. p10).

Sjoberg and Nett, (1968), stated in their introduction to Methodology for Social Research that the researcher is a variable to be considered in any research venture. Later on, in Chapter 4, they commented that as a researcher is influenced in choosing methods by his theoretical commitment as well as his role and status in society, he cannot be treated as a non-person.

Feminist writers on feminist research were quite explicit about the influence the sex of the researcher had on research. The point made by several of them, including Helen Roberts, (1981), was that men often consider that their research is value-free because "Sociology itself has traditionally operated within a patriarchal paradigm" (Ibid. pp14-15).

Because this patriarchal bias has been the norm, it has been accepted as being value-free. Thus any deviation from the patriarchal paradigm was seen as biased. Roberts quoted Howard Becker as saying that value-freedom or objectivity was not possible and that "We cannot avoid taking sides for reasons firmly based on social structure." (Becker, 1971, p.213).

Because I agreed with the writers I have quoted, that social research is never entirely value-free, it appeared to me that the most honest course of action was for the researcher to openly declare his or her values so that the reader could take that information into account when assessing the work.

The researcher's background may also be relevant, as it can play an important part in the development of values. Others agreed with me. In writing about women's roles in community development, Bev. James quoted from Elizabeth Wilson to say that "Traditionally, development has adhered to a 'rigid, sterile division between the individual and society or politics.' (Wilson, 1977, pp.1-11.) Such a perspective obscures social inequalities and prevents the development of an individual's awareness of the conditions of their existence. It reflects the split between personal and private life... but everyday life is political. Personal lives are shaped by structural conditions, and in turn are the basis for organising social change." (James, 1982 pp.245-6).

As both community development and social work deal with people in society, it seemed to me that comments applied to women within the community would be relevant to both social work and community development.

I know that as a social worker and researcher, sorting

out the formative aspects of my background and the influences that these have had upon me has been important. Making this process clear may also help clarify my approach for the reader.

I was aware, too, that although I am a New Zealand born country woman, like many of the women I interviewed, my personal philosophy was quite different to many of theirs. We had shared many similar experiences but we had interpreted them in different ways. There had to be logical reasons for different interpretations of similar experiences. Possibly, differences in background accounted in some degree for differences in outlook.

Because of the period in which I was born, (1933 - at the height of the Great Depression), my early childhood in the Nelson backcountry was spent in a period of political ferment. Among my earliest memories are the political discussions around the open fire or the kitchen table. Looking back I realise that I learned to think in political terms before I ever faced^{the} reality of the effects that biology was to have on my life.

Increasingly the discussions about Mickey Savage, Bob Semple and the changes brought about by the first Labour Government gave way to talk about Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and the 'isms' that went with their names. My father, already permanently disabled from the First World War, hugged our battery powered radio set as the world slid into another war. By the time I was 6 or 7 the most carefree days of my childhood were already over.

My father's whole-hearted involvement in Home Guard activities threw more strain on my mother and I. Eventually her mental and physical health broke under the strain of poverty, hard work, loneliness and too many children. As the oldest of their ten living children I bore the brunt of his absences and her deteriorating health.

My Correspondence School lessons were a welcome break from the daily drudgery. Yet, despite our poverty and isolation from other children, these were happy days for me.

My first harsh experience of the realities of class structure in New Zealand came at 13, when I became a temporary

state ward. This was done so that I could attend a good secondary school, but it was done on the cheap in that I was boarded in private homes as a foster child. In those homes I learned that there are separate worlds for the 'haves' and 'have nots' and that I was one of the 'have nots.' I learned how it feels when the way that you speak, look and act is not acceptable to many of the people around you. The lesson is doubly hard when you must live in their homes rather than your own.

Memories of how it felt can still make me angry when I hear professionals talk about 'them', the poor, with their hopeless, feckless ways. For I know that I am still one of 'them', the outsiders. It is, of course, worse than that, for you also become an outsider to the family and the class from which you came unless you consciously reject either the old or the new class backgrounds.

I am sure that it was this experience that left me with a fierce belief in egalitarianism, coupled with a concern for the poor and the powerless. Because of this determination to be one with my brothers and sisters in the ordinary working class world, I have found it very difficult in some situations to adopt a detached, 'scholarly' pose. This problem, (if problem it is), has been with me throughout my student-teaching and social work years. It was one of the factors that made writing this thesis in an acceptable form a problem. My identification always tends to be with my clients or, in this case, with the women that I studied, rather than with the academic establishment.

My early experiences of class differences were reinforced in adult life when my husband and I bought a small farm in Mid-Canterbury. There the distinction between landowners and railway employees was so rigidly enforced by some farmers that it was impossible to take the children of both to Saturday sports fixtures in the same vehicle.

Some of these landowners also locked gates to bar public access to riverbeds and reserves. These experiences forced me to realise how strongly I believed that landowners are merely guardians of the land and its resources for the public and for future generations. The conviction grew that I was

indeed that dangerous creature, a socialist, and that I was, to some degree at least, opposed to the capitalist economic system.

These personal experiences have been recounted to make it clear to the reader that I realise that my socialism has an emotional as well as an intellectual base. Experience probably taught me more of my basic philosophy than universities ever did.

CHAPTER 1.REFLECTING ON THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS
RESEARCH.

In the introduction to this thesis I acknowledged that my early experiences have left me with the conviction that all people should be treated as being of equal worth, no matter how unequally they have been created or endowed with earthly goods.

From these experiences I have come to see that much is wrong with the structure of our society. Present structures bear very heavily on certain groups of people, usually those who have no power or who cannot mobilise their potential power. One may choose to carry the analysis no further; to say that "the structures are wrong so let's change them". In practice change is now so simple because behind the structures are people with different ideas, some of them openly declared, and some seldom expressed but never-the-less very powerful. The people who form the establishment are usually dedicated to maintaining it.

A common method of denigrating a critic of social structure is to find that any fault there is lies within the individuals who in any way challenge the way things are. So in New Zealand young men with brown skins who attempt to flout the rules of what they no doubt see as an unjust system are locked up in our jails. Some women maintain that those of us who cannot cope emotionally or physically with the conflicting demands imposed on women in our society are "cured" by a spell in a psychiatric hospital. We are told that in Communist Russia similar treatment is given to dissidents who challenge the system there.

Thus anyone hoping to bring about change needs to have another set of ideas and rationalisations for what they want to do. These ideas can be both a battering ram against the establishment and a shield to withstand establishment attacks on those who dare to challenge the

status quo. Socialism and feminism are two sets of ideas which perform these functions for me.

Another use for theories such as socialism and feminism is as the social glue that can bind groups of people sharing similar ideas together. Thus they are strengthened in their challenge of the status quo.

SOCIALISM.

Although I accept the socialist label, I baulk at being called a Marxist. This is because I disagree with two classical Marxist beliefs.

Despite their acceptance of the dialectic; "The uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away," as Engels expressed it in "Ludwig Feuerbach" (Eng. ed. 1934); both Marx and Engels were products of their age in that they held rationalist beliefs about the inevitability of human progress. Engels completed the above quotation with the words, "of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher," thus holding out the promise of better things to come. (Hawton, 1956:p121) ¹.

Marx's interpretation of the inevitable rules of the dialectic as applied to economic and social organization was that feudalism was replaced by capitalism, which was in turn to be destroyed by violent revolution when class exploitation became too oppressive. Revolution would be followed by the "dictatorship of the proletariat", which in turn would create the classless society. This scenario holds the promise of a perfect society to come and an end to human suffering caused by the class system. World events over the last hundred years have shattered beliefs in the inevitability of human progress for many people, including me. Mao Tse-tung seemed more realistic when he wrote, "Nobody will ever be perfect, even when a communist society is established." (Schram, 1969:p304) ².

It follows that if it is impossible to attain the perfect society permanently, even under socialism, there is little point in forcing the sacrifices of bloody revolution upon people to achieve a socialist government. Unfortunately, after all the misery and blood-letting that

accompanies a violent revolution is over, there is a strong tendency for the revolutionary state to sink back into conditions very similar to those that prevailed before the revolution. Therefore the revolutionary process is pointless if it fails to destroy the old, pre-revolutionary society. It is better to take the path of peaceful, democratic reform where possible, even if "perfect socialism" is never attained by peaceful means. At least more people will survive the struggle of oppressed against oppressors if the path of peaceful change is followed.

In order to clarify where I stood in the socialist spectrum of beliefs, I set off on a trail of half-remembered ideas when I began to write this thesis. Fortunately, before I became completely bogged in political science and philosophy, I stumbled upon R.M. Berki's book entitled "Socialism" (1975)³. His interpretation of socialist trends was so straightforward and logical that I decided he had already done the work for me. I intend to use his analysis here.

Berki saw four basic tendencies within socialism: rationalism, libertarianism, egalitarianism and moralism. Each of these he linked two ways in his analysis - backwards to an historical past and forwards to the development of modern types of socialism.

Historically egalitarianism had its roots in the classical Greek city states. It stressed the achievement of common goals through the dominance of community values and self sacrifice. After jumping forward 2000 years, we find that equality was one of the catch-words of the French Revolutionaries. In our own times this tendency has been linked, often with nationalism, with the rise of socialism in Third World countries such as China and Cuba. Here and in the French Revolution, egalitarianism has often taken a militantly revolutionary stand, emphasizing the difference between rich and poor within the capitalist state. This revolutionary stand makes it impossible for me to adopt a pure egalitarian socialist stance.

Berki saw rationalism as representing the principle of Enlightenment within socialism. If this view is held,

the reins of government can be entrusted to experts devoted to the promotion of general happiness. Achieving desirable ends through democratic means is not all-important. The chief values of rationalist-socialism are individual happiness, reason, knowledge, efficiency in production and the rational, purposeful organisation of human society in the interests of progress. Rationalist-socialist ideas were also dominant in one phase of the French Revolution. In modern times this approach has been the road taken by the European Marxist Establishment. My egalitarian beliefs would sit uncomfortably with an acceptance of meritocracy and a desire to entrust 'experts' to promote general happiness, so rationalist-socialism is not the type I espouse.

Libertarianism also has its roots in history. To me it conjures up memories of Rousseau and "The Noble Savage." It is interested in the individual and looks inward for the 'real' natural man or woman. Libertarianism is the romantic principle that demands freedom from constraints, so the libertarian focuses on the oppressive nature of capitalism. At its most extreme it becomes anarchism. Its modern form is the radical socialism of the "New Left" in the Western World. Because libertarianism would be hard to reconcile with my egalitarian belief in the values of community, this is not the form of socialism for me.

The final tendency within socialism listed by Berki is that of moralism. Historically this tendency is linked to Christianity and the moral values of the Christian churches. The moralist tendency within socialism emphasizes social justice, peace, co-operation and brotherhood. Despite Marx's rejection of religions as being another factor helping to maintain the oppression of the proletariat, many sincere people are able to use the values I have listed above to link a belief in both Christianity and socialism. According to Berki the moralist "critique of capitalism concentrates on the latter's inhumanity, its institutionalised exploitation of the people, especially those who have to sweat and toil to gain their livelihood." (Berki, 1975:p95)⁴. This is the way of Western Democ-

ratic Socialism, with its belief in the achievement of socialism through democratic means.

Like many other New Zealanders, I have been taught to base my actions in the values mentioned in the previous paragraph. As a result I recognise that my view of socialism lies within the democratic socialist range, which Berki saw as being a third force in world politics, between capitalism and communism. Berki also stressed the range of views within democratic socialism. He wrote, "Many in social democrat and labour parties are indistinguishable from liberals. At the other extreme social democracy is continuous with egalitarian socialism." (Berki, 1975:p95)⁵.

It is therefore in this left wing of democratic socialism, where a belief in democracy and democratic change merges slightly into egalitarianism, with its belief in community values, that I believe that I belong.

Berki also pointed out that "social democracy is not and does not want to be Marxism." (Berki, 1975:p99)⁶. Nevertheless, its historical pedigree and claim to the name of socialism is beyond dispute. It has its roots in the liberal philosophy of Kant and developed through socialists such as Robert Owen and William Thompson in England, the Saint Simonians in France and Ferdinand Lasalle in Germany. The tremendous work done by Marx in synthesising previous ideas on socialism with Hegelian philosophy, and his influence on all modern political thinking, even that of conservatives, is generally recognised. As Joan Robinson wrote, "It is as difficult nowadays to find a really pure non-Marxist among historians and sociologists as it is to find a flat earth enthusiast among geographers." (Ibid, 1980:p192)⁷.

She also wrote,

"A school of thought flourishes when the followers continually revise and sift through the ideas of its founder, test his hypotheses, correct his errors, reconcile contradictions in his conclusions and adapt his methods to deal with fresh

matters. It takes a great genius to set a new subject going; the disciples must admire, even reverence the master but they should not defer to him. On the contrary they must be his closest critics." (Robinson, 1980:p162)⁸.

In her view, "Marxism did not develop this way but became too soon embalmed." Democratic socialism, on the other hand, has been subjected to constant change and revision within the last century.

Honesty forces me to admit, however, that, appealing though the principles of democratic socialism are to me, there is inherent weakness within it. On one hand democratic socialism slips all too readily into "electoralism" as the political party following the democratic principle seeks to gain the power without which little can be achieved. Once the political party succumbs to electoralism it can easily be diverted into immediate, ad hoc policies which ignore long term socialist objectives. This can lead to a virtual surrender to status quo forces.

On the other hand a doctrinaire socialist approach can mean that the immediate needs of people are sacrificed on the alter of political theory. To my mind all great theories, which is what religions and ideas such as socialism are, have been invented to help people make sense of their surrounding environment and their history. Yet all too often, in the hands of doctrinaire practitioners, these theories are used as excuses for crucifying rather than assisting people.

What, then, are the basic democratic socialist principles I can apply to analysing the results of my research? The first is the repudiation of much in the capitalist system, with it's "anarchy of unplanned growth", where "big money leads to big science and to big industry, to technological meglomania, rather than to meeting human needs." (Robinson, 1980:p41.)⁹. This is linked to a desire for progressive democratic change aimed at achieving the maximum social justice possible. However, I would prefer to see change come from within communities rather than

have it always imposed by the state and its experts. I see the proper role of the state as being to arbitrate and to provide the opportunities for all people to achieve happiness and well-being. In order to do that, state servants must listen to the voices of the comparatively uneducated, poor and powerless, who are also funders and consumers of state services, as well as to those of the experts, be they ever so well meaning. When it is in the interests of social justice, the state should make provision for these community groups to develop co-operatively, in their own ways. There is strength rather than weakness in a certain amount of happy diversity, especially in a society which claims to be multi-cultural.

The socialist social worker in our society chooses to walk on an endless tightrope, apt at any time to fall into doctrinaire socialism on one side or submission to the status quo on the other. The path for a democratic socialist social worker can be particularly difficult in conservative rural districts such as one in which I live.

FEMINISM.

"It is a huge emotional leap for an individual when a psychological situation in which he or she suffers a sense of failure to meet a social norm, changes to a condition in which there is dignity as a fellow combatant." (McWilliams, 1974:p160)¹⁰.

This quotation was selected to head my discussion on feminist theory because it expresses succinctly the way my feelings have changed toward myself as a woman over the last 30-odd years.

When I matured into young adulthood in the 1950s', Western society was going through a conservative phase as nations who had fought in the Second World War strove to repair the damages of that war. One of the more important aspects of this repair job was to rebuild populations depleted by the recent carnage. Women, who had been encouraged to throw themselves into the war

effort, were now expected to return to their homes, adopt traditional female roles and rear lots of babies. It was a period of considerable pressure on young women to conform to fairly narrow patterns of dress, thinking and behaviour. Because I did not fit readily into the prevailing pattern I was left with the feeling of being a social misfit, or with "a sense of failure to meet a social norm" - a continuation of the way that I had felt in my secondary school years.

By the 1960's, when feminist material began to be published in New Zealand, I had made many adjustments to life as it was rather than as I wished it to be. In the process of adjustment I had experienced a broken marriage and a nervous breakdown, but I had survived.

The 1960's were spent mainly in rearing my three children and earning a living as a teacher or as a farmer. Because of my pre-occupation, the early years of feminism made little immediate impact on me. My only reaction was a sense of recognition as other women expressed some of the thoughts I had been thinking and the pain that I had suffered in the 1950's. I was given the dignity of being a fellow combatant in the female struggle to survive in our male-dominated society.

While I was pleased to recognise that I was not so strange or so alone as I had sometimes felt, I have never immersed myself in feminist theory. Rather parts of it have been grafted onto an already existing personal philosophy. It is possible that this approach has not made for a totally integrated view of feminism.

The Main Branches of Feminist Theory.

While there are not as many shades of feminists as there are of socialists, there is still enough variation in feminist theory to be confusing.

Ann Oakly defined feminism in the following ways:-

"Ultimately any feminism is about putting women first; it is about judging women's interests, (however defined), to be important and to be insufficiently represented and accommodated within mainstream politics/

academia. However, this position allows for a very wide range of stances, theories, practices and recommendations to be selected. (Oakley, 1981;p335)¹¹.

She then outlined ten different feminist positions within the Women's Liberation Movement. Each of these positions differed in some way on stances such as the cause of female oppression, the course of action to be taken to rectify women's inequality and what the attitude of women should be towards men. However, the main division that she drew was between socialist and radical feminists. The biggest difference that Oakley found between these two basic types of feminist was that the socialist feminist saw the system as the main problem while the radical feminist placed the blame for the female oppression squarely upon men.

All the discussions of feminism I have read seem to emphasize two main points: a sense of oppression and a desire to change the perceived situation of women. James, a New Zealand sociologist, outlined four main feminist perspectives; liberal feminism, lesbian feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism. (James, 1982;pp245-6)¹².

According to James the aim of liberal feminists is to gain for women equal opportunities with men. They see reform of the attitude society displays towards women as being adequate to achieve equality. Liberal feminists ignore, (or so it seems to me), the influence of other factors such as race, class and poverty in denying equal opportunity to both men and women. Because liberal feminists are prepared to work for reform within the system, their members face similar dangers to those faced by democratic socialists, in that activist workers may be co-opted into existing systems without any basic changes having been achieved.

Lesbian feminists see a need for separation rather than compromise. To them the oppression of women is based on heterosexuality. They believe that women must organize themselves to become emotionally, economically, politically and sexually independent from men, male values and male

control, in order to counter this oppression. I see this desire for separation as being based on a deep-seated fear of men. Unfortunately some women do fear men and they often have valid reasons for this fear. The idea of separation - of a state within a state - presupposes that women are incapable of either competition or co-operation with men. Possibly separation is a stage some women have to go through, as have other oppressed groups, but I cannot see it being a satisfactory ultimate solution.

There is, I find, a certain attractive logic about the radical feminist perspective of seeing men as both the main cause and the main beneficiaries of women's oppression. To define 'the enemy' in this way totally absolves women themselves of any complicity in bringing about the situation they are in. It does not lock women into a battle against the capitalist system, as women's oppression quite obviously predates the rise of capitalism. Those women who feel confined by marriage and family are happy to see both as part of the institutionalisation of oppression by men, rather than relationships that women assumed by choice. Because socialization into gender roles is one of the influences directing women into many female traps, radical feminists want to completely abolish the social institution of gender. The radical slogan that "the personal is political", which encourages women to use personal experiences to analyse the position and roles of women in society, is firmly based on inductive reasoning techniques.

It is when radical feminists such as Firestone, (Firestone, 1972;p12)¹³, carry the logic of their position a step further and see nature, which imposes physical sex differences on humans, along with most other living creatures, as the main enemy, that the radical feminists and I must part company. For I see nothing wrong with the fact that some different biological functions are imposed on men and women. What I would challenge is the need for sex differences being extended out to cover nearly every aspect of our lives.

Another argument against adopting the radical feminist perspective on its own is that it also ignores other

fundamental issues that can cause oppression for women, men and children. Some of these other issues such as racialism, social class and poverty have already been mentioned. By ignoring such issues radical feminists limit interest in their ideas to a comparatively few privileged women. Working class women may face more urgent needs which will ensure survival for themselves and their children, so they may have no time or energy to spare for comparatively esoteric causes such as equal opportunity or consciousness raising.

Some of the Implications of Socialism for the Feminist.

Before beginning a discussion of socialist feminism I want to recapitulate briefly some of the points I made when I was writing about my view of socialism.

Firstly, my belief in constant struggle means that I do not see an easy, permanent victory for any type of feminism as being possible. Neither do I believe that the gains that are made will be achieved by women working in isolation. Rather they will come slowly as the attitudes of both men and women change. To illustrate this point I refer to the Matrimonial Property Act of 1976, a piece of legislation which has changed ideas about the worth of different roles within marriage as well as about the ownership of joint property upon the dissolution of a marriage. This Act introduced the concept of the equal sharing of property based on the contribution each spouse had made to the marriage. Contributions such as rearing children and running the home, usually the responsibility of the wife, were to be considered as having comparable value to monetary contributions often made by the husband. It has brought to the surface many attitudes, both good and bad, about women and marriage. The fact that this Act was passed by a supposedly conservative, male-dominated political party shows that it is unwise to make assumptions about possible progress along either sexual or political party lines.

The qualities of justice, peace, co-operation, and brother-sisterhood apply as much to women as they do to men. Ideas of equality and the achievement of common goals

through communal effort do not have gender. The application of these values would benefit women and men equally.

The socialist emphasis on criticising the operation of systems such as capitalism and the class society, which capitalism perpetuates, apply as much to women as to men. While Marx did not fully analyse how these systems apply to women, more recent socialist and feminist theorists are grappling with these problems. Sometimes women do not fit into systems such as class structure or the work place in exactly the same way as men do, because of different sex roles. An understanding of the economic and social pressures which impinge upon women can make clear many situations which might otherwise be seen as personal failures.

Socialist Feminist Theory.

Socialist feminists have examined the influence of the capitalist system upon matters such as the sexual division of labour within the family and the relationship of domestic labour to the capitalist type of production. Using this analysis they have seen that domestic labour performs two functions that are vital to the performance and continuation of the capitalist system. The first of these is to care for the male and some female labourers currently in the workplace. The second important function of domestic labour is to reproduce the next generation of both wage and domestic workers.

Another characteristic of domestic work is that it is often unpaid, being mainly done by women in their roles as wives and mothers. Because it is usually unpaid it is a personal service linked with economic dependence upon a wage worker. Often women domestic workers also care for other non-wage earning members of the community such as the old, the sick and the handicapped.

The final characteristic of domestic labour is that because it is demanding and time consuming women performing it do not have the time or mobility to take advantage of available wage work opportunities.

Although domestic labour is necessary and productive, being a pre-requisite for the production of surplus value, it is generally not recognised as work in the accounting

systems of the economy because it is unpaid. Ignoring the value of women's unpaid contributions to the economy makes it appear that women only count as productive workers when they have a paid job outside the home; i.e. when they are, in fact, often performing two jobs, one paid and one unpaid.

Although women, and particularly married women, function as a reserve "army of labour", available when extra workers are required and prepared to work flexible hours, they are not truly part of the permanent work force in the way most men are. When their labour is not needed outside the home married women disappear back into the family and into unpaid voluntary community work. They are not officially unemployed; they merely disappear.

So, on the whole, women do not function in the work place in the way that men do. Because of their role as producers of labour replacements "women are not in the labour force but become available for work" (James, 1982: p237)¹⁴. In our society women's roles within the family are generally considered to be more important than their role within the work force.

The separation of women from the workplace is one of the hallmarks of the capitalist system. In peasant societies, for instance, home and the workplace are often one and the same place, making it possible for women to be part of both at the same time. The possibilities for two parents to combine rearing children and working together was what drew me back into farming when my children were small. This is more properly a peasant rather than a capitalist situation. But, in the main, the ambivalent situation of women is that they are out of the workplace, yet their work within the home is essential for the smooth functioning of the workplace.

But to discuss the effect of gender and where women fit into the structure of the capitalist system still does not cover the full measure of women's oppression. Patriarchy or the dominance of men within the family and society must also be discussed. It predates capitalism and is a feature of many types of society. Patriarchy is also

present in most of the other structures of our society. Through the institution of patriarchy a man gains control over a woman's labour, fertility and reproductivity. Although Marx stated that women's oppression arose with private property and monogamous marriage, (James, 1982: p235)¹⁵, he did not follow comments such as this through with a discussion of how the family unit should be organised under socialism. Several experiments of different ways of rearing children have been tried in socialist states, including China, where a fairly extensive system of child care seems to have been set up to allow women to stay in the paid workforce. In spite of these experiments both China and Soviet Russia still seem to retain basically patriarchal institutions. I take this as proof that a socialist government does not necessarily abolish the patriarchal system of control.

Therefore feminists within socialist movements have the added duty of making fellow socialists aware of patriarchy as an instrument of female oppression, if women are to be truly equal under a socialist form of government.

Personal Aspects of Feminism.

In foregoing passages I have examined some of the main aspects of feminist theory. My own view of the female situation owes something to several types of feminism.

Having the same degree of freedom of choice in our lives as males do is probably the most important feminist issue for me. This right to choose will be circumscribed by the same forces that affect men within our society until we achieve a fairer social order for us all.

In order to give women full freedom to choose, gender differences between the sexes need to be minimised. To quote Pauline Hunt, "The fact that gender is a significant distinction in a large number of situations, is a social rather than a biological fact." (Ibid, 1980; p8)¹⁵.

If women gained freedom to choose on the same basis as men may, they would then gain considerably more power than many now have over their own lives. In a final analysis many ideological battles come down to a matter of power. Ultimately gaining a fairer distribution of power is

the central issue in both socialism and feminism.