

# Correspondence to the ongoing project on Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas

*co-ordinated by*  
Shona Russell, Maggie Carey & Cheryl White

The paper, 'Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas – Exploring some not so commonly asked questions', compiled by Shona Russell and Maggie Carey, was published in an earlier edition of the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* (2003 #2) and heralded the beginning of an ongoing project on this theme. Subsequent articles by Judy Wright (2003): 'Considering issues of domestic violence and abuse in palliative care and bereavement settings'; and 'The Mother-Daughter Project: co-creating pro-girl, pro-mother culture through adolescence and beyond' by SuEllen Hamkins, Renee Schultz et al. (2003), represent ongoing explorations of these issues.

If you were not a subscriber to the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* in 2003 it is possible to receive back issues (just contact your local distributor). A number of these feminist-informed papers are also available on the Dulwich Centre website: [www.dulwichcentre.com.au](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au)

If you would like to contribute to this project, in any way, we'd love to hear from you! Please write to us [c/o dulwich@senet.com.au](mailto:c/o_dulwich@senet.com.au)

Here we are pleased to publish a letter by a therapist from Belgium, Arthemis Rodhanthy (not her real name), in response to this project so far.

## References:

- Hamkins, S., Schultz, R., Hamkins-Indik, T., Hamkins-Indik, F. & Schultz-Baer, M. 2003: 'The Mother-Daughter Project: co-creating pro-girl, pro-mother culture through adolescence and beyond ... the construction and deconstruction of mother-daughter discourses.' *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work No.4.*
- Russell, S. & Carey, M. 2003: 'Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas – Exploring some not so commonly asked questions.' *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work No.2.*
- Wright, J. 2003: 'Considering issues of domestic violence and abuse in palliative care and bereavement settings.' *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work No.3.*

## A letter from Artemis Rodhanthy

Dear Shona, Maggie and Cheryl,

Here are a few words in connection with your invitation to write to you in relation to your project on 'feminism, therapy and narrative ideas'.

As a woman of transsexual/transgendered experience and a therapist of a systemic-narrative or poststructuralist tradition, my relationship with feminism is not straightforward. I've lived a life in between the sexes, and my identity was never solely feminine or masculine, male or female. In different periods of my life, people have thought I was a girl, a girlish boy, a womanly young man, a male-to-female transperson, and now with the influence of hormones and some small cosmetic interventions, people accept me as a woman. I have joined several women-only gatherings and when I have expressed at a later phase the transsexual aspect of my life - I have often encountered surprise by the other women, they would have never guessed. For me, being a woman has involved a negotiation with culture and is the end-result of a long gender-quest. **Being a woman feels like home to me and the only option for me to exist at all. There's no choice here.**

In this process of body- and gender-questing, I have felt drawn to join women's gatherings and to engage with feminism. My desire to explore with other women a feminine way of being in the world is still very much alive and is possible for me when I go 'woodworking' (that's the term when someone doesn't mention anything about one's transsexuality). In these situations, when I am simply accepted as another woman, it feels like a **medicine for me to feel a sense of community and togetherness with other women.** However, **when I do express that there's a transsexual component in my life, this exploration becomes impossible. Then it seems I suddenly become in their eyes 'a man who wanted to become a woman', and all aspects of my identity and experience shrink into that definition of me.**

What is particularly striking for me is the attitude of hostility displayed by certain feminists towards 'differently sexed' women like inter-sexual and transsexual women. In the

US and in the UK, based on the writings of cultural feminists who claim that transsexual women are **pawns of the colonisation of women's bodies by men,** there were **witch-hunts** in the 1980s and 1990s by feminist groups to 'out' transsexual women who lived peaceful lives without the public knowing their transsexual background. Other prominent feminist writers have called us **'monsters of modern popculture'**. Terms such as **'biofemales'** have **pumped up especially in the US to distinguish 'real' women from those who're merely 'failed males'**. Then there are the smaller situations, when women's groups need to discuss whether they can accept women of transsexual experience or not – forgetting to realise that the very terms of discussion result in women of transsexual experience being the object of discussion and decision-making rather than equal members of the group.

So you see, my relationship with feminism is rather complex. How is it possible for me to draw upon feminist ideas when some circles have caused damage to my kindreds and when feminism seems to have forgotten that transsexual women also get paid less, are also forced into extreme female stereotypes and also get raped. In fact, when transgendered women who decide not to have 'the' operation or who are 'pre-op' because of financial reasons are raped, they are often killed. When the rapist finds out that the woman has or used to have 'male' genitals, he becomes more aggressive and the consequences are often deadly.

It is a sad reality that those who I thought would be allies in a patriarchal world have caused harm to the subgroup of women to whom I belong. **It's a sad reflection of our situation that, unless we keep quiet, we have both the patriarchy and feminism against us.**

This brings me to the question of whether it is possible to connect feminist ideas with poststructuralism. I don't believe that there are two sexes or two genders. I think there can be many. Is it possible to connect the projects of feminism to notions of a multiplicity of genders; to gender-diversity; to multiple ways to become gendered or sexed; to freedom of gender-expression; to genderrights? My hope is that it is.

Friendly greetings,  
Artemis Rodhanthy.