

Beer and Tea: Harmony and Contradiction Among Two Unlikely Counterparts

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This essay begins by examining the representations and interpretations of women and men in two sets of images: the Women's Institute Alternative Calendar and a television commercial for Guinness beer. Both of these compositions are exceptional in their own right, and have captured the imaginations of wide audiences. Taken together, the counterpointing of culture and nature, serenity and intensity, and feminine charm and virility creates a montage of images that both reflect and represent traditional forms of femininity and masculinity. This essay draws on a variety of sociological and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches, with an emphasis on the storied nature of lives, sexuality, and life change. C. Wright Mills declares that the sociological imagination is necessary in order "to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (Mills, 1959, p. 6). The author's aim in this essay, following through on Mills's idea, is to provide insight into the lives of earlier cohorts of women and a glimpse into how personal and social change comes about.

KEY WORDS: sexuality; gender studies; biography; life stories; life cycle development.

Naked but for the pearls around their necks, the women from the Women's Institute pose for the camera while engaging in the everyday tasks and homestyle hobbies of traditional family and community life. In complete contrast to the femininity that exudes from these frames, surfers in Hawaii first wait in silent concentration for the big wave, then ride out to meet it, risking all to experience the power of the forces of nature and their own sense of masculinity as they ride in the wave.

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Fig. 1. Guinness's *horses and surfers* ad.

The first of these images comes from the Rylstone & District Women's Institute (WI) Alternative Calendar for 2000,³ and the second is from the 1999 Guinness⁴ television advertisement, voted the favourite of the top one-hundred TV commercials of all time by readers and viewers of *The Sunday Times* and the BBC (Wright, 2000, p. 4). Taken together, these scenarios reflect the stark opposites and complementary positions of men and women in our world where the forces of culture and nature clash and come together in the cycle of life (Figs. 1 and 2).

With only their pearls reflecting their status in society and the appropriate civilized demureness, the women represent traditional femininity. While following such pursuits as baking, flower arranging, knitting, piano playing, and serving tea, the ladies smile charmingly out of good humour and pleasure, gaze serenely, and with serious composure concentrate on the tasks at hand. Even the mode of portrayal—still photos, in sepia tones—conveys a sense of domestic tranquillity.

In contrast, the images of the surfers in the sixty-second beer commercial, with the challenging of nature and the harnessing of its force, reflect a sense of masculinity characterized by dominance, stamina, and prowess. The tone is set by the “tick followed tock followed tick followed tock followed tick” of the voice-over as the surfers wait on the beach for the big wave. The tension mounts as the surfers,

³Rylstone & District (UK) WI Alternative Calendar 2000: <http://www.daelnet.net/rylstonewi/28/06/2000>

⁴Guinness Great Britain: <http://www.guinness.ie> 28/06/2000

now in the water, muster all their strength and, taking advantage of the momentum of the wave, take their positions and surge with the thundering waves towards the beach, accompanied by the raw brute strength and grace of Lippizaner stallions, galloping and leaping over the waves. Exhausted and exhilarated, the men stagger out of the water and collapse on the beach.

My interest in the WI Alternative Calendar was sparked originally by the fact that these were older women—aged between forty-five and sixty-six—who were posing nude, rather than young women. At the time of this writing, it seems



Fig. 2. “One lump or two?” is the saucy caption for September in *The Alternative WI Calendar for 2000*.

immensely popular to pose naked for public viewing. Plans for a full-length documentary on the making of the WI calendar have resulted in its comparison to *The Full Monty*, the film in which unemployed steelworkers decided to perform a strip act and which has been suggested as a possible inspiration for the WI calendar (Weale, 2000). But there is something special about this group of women. The baring of all *for a charitable cause* sets these women apart from those who strip for personal gain. In this case, their aim was to benefit leukaemia research, a motive that has influenced other groups who are now using similar ways of raising money or promoting their cause. The WI calendar, however, is different in style and effect than the efforts of other groups, such as the promotion for breast cancer by two women posing topless, covered only by two fried eggs and some bacon, or naked firemen posing with their hose pipes. The age of the WI women also sets them apart from other groups who pose in the nude. In S. Stowell's (2000) BBC television documentary on the making of the calendar, one of the women explained that many older women have contacted them saying that the calendar had changed their lives, and that they were more confident about themselves now as older women. But even *age* is not what this is mainly about. The photo in *The Observer* (Greer, 2000) of feminist academic and author Germaine Greer, posing naked on a bed, which like Greer is also stripped bare, is in a very different style than the photos of the women engaged in WI activities. Age, nudity, and worthy causes are distractions from the real significance of the WI calendar, and that becomes clearer when it is examined alongside the television ad for Guinness beer.

I suggest that the study of representations and interpretations of masculinities and femininities—and sexualities—of any group of individuals requires a biographical approach, with an understanding of the storied nature of lives, their development over the life cycle, and their place within history. Although my main research interest is on sexuality and the lives of older women, men's sexuality is significant in relation to women's life cycles, and examining the calendar and the advertisement together will further understandings of sexualities and complex relations among men and women. In what follows, I explore the images of the women and men in the calendar and the advertisement, and the significance of the WI calendar for society.

TWO UNLIKELY COUNTERPARTS

The Rylstone & District Women's Institute sold eighty-eight thousand calendars by the beginning of the year 2000 rather than the one thousand they had expected (Hussey, 2000). The "surfers and horses" advertisement was voted the peoples' favourite of one hundred most popular TV ads of all time, from ten thousand responses sent to the BBC and *The Sunday Times* (Armstrong, 2000).

But why did these achievements earn such renown? Was it due to the artistic technique of the photographers, camerapersons, and directors? Was it emotional involvement that the presentations drew from their audiences, and/or the identification of the audiences with the actors, fantasizing about their own capabilities and desires? Could this be an historical phenomenon?

The creativity and technical expertise of those responsible for these two compositions most certainly contributed to the magnitude of their acceptance. These artistic expressions did not come together by chance, but were carefully composed. For narrative theorists, using particular themes repeatedly and juxtaposing events and actions to make a point are a means of ensuring narrative coherence (Riessman, 1993). Although the women posed naked for the calendar, the settings were designed to ensure that the scenes were tasteful and discreet. The women revealed no more than they were comfortable with, using teapots, flowering plants, and kitchen bowls, etc. to conceal private parts. The sunflower, the only part of the photos in the calendar to be shown in colour, rather than in sepia tones, and meant as a symbol of hope, added to the sensitive style of the calendar. In order to project an image of intensity and vitality, the creators of the “surfers and horses” television advertisement focused the first nine seconds of the total sixty seconds on the face of one surfer, and packed forty-five different shots into the next fifty-one seconds (Wright, 2000). The filmed sequence of stallions, juxtaposed with the surfers as they ride the waves, helped to create a wild and vibrant atmosphere. Overall coherence refers to justification for the telling of the story and to impression management. In these two pieces, attention to detail and to the style of presentation created overall impressions that made sense, were pleasing to look at, and which contributed to their success.

The effects that these might have on the public cannot be understood in a straightforward manner, as individuals’ subjective interpretations vary. On first seeing the calendar, I was struck by the sensuousness of the composition, the composed naturalness and discreet photography. In a similar vein, there was a magnetism about the Guinness TV ad, although sex was not overtly part of the sequence of images.

Together, the two compositions depict polarizations of femininity and masculinity. The images of the women reflect the historically traditional passive role of the home-centred housewife, whose sexuality was not usually acknowledged and sometimes assumed to be non-existent. In the images of the youthfully mature men and of the entire scenario, from the watchful gaze of the surfer waiting for the right moment to its culmination with the sense of elation that accompanies a peak experience, the charismatic machismo exhibited is at its ultimate.

While sex and sexuality were not referred to in these compositions, it seemed to me that they were sensuous, if not sexual in some way. Sensuousness refers to being aesthetically pleasing and, although there is no one definition of sexuality, Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter (1998) describe sexuality as being gendered,

social and biological, and involving both behaviour and desire, that is, what people do and what turns them on.

The images, as depicted in these scenarios, draw people in ways they might not always recognise. Theoretical approaches to sexuality and gender, including sociological, feminist, and psychoanalytic, provide explanations that challenge everyday assumptions about social phenomena such as these images, which might not be seen by all as having a sexual component. Representing traditional stereotypes of earlier times, of femininity and masculinity, the men and women in the calendar and the ad occupy opposite but complementary positions. According to Wendy Holloway (1996), the gendered positions men and women take, with the man as subject in the discourse of the male sexual drive and as object in the have/hold discourse, and the woman in the complementary position, tend to reinforce one another, reproducing the discourse. Within this discourse, the knowledge produced by the male sexual drive discourse confers power on men, who are recurrently motivated to take up that position, and women take the complementary position, having recourse to no other. Thus the discourse is historically reproduced.

Biology cannot be ignored, however, and it is important to acknowledge the interconnections between Holloway's (1996) "complementary discourse" and physiological differences between males and females. While there is often no direct link between biology and the roles that females have ended up doing within their families and communities, in other ways, the biological differences between men and women are often central elements in heterosexual attraction and an essential part of heterosexual pleasure. Using an integrative approach to sexuality, Schwartz and Rutter (1998) take into consideration biological differences and social contexts of gendered sexualities. In their approach, sexuality is both physical and contextual, involving differences in bodies and their capabilities, and environments, relationships, families, and governments (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998). Overall, historically reproduced discourses, social values, and biology are intertwined in complex ways, and the WI women and the surfers, with their different biological characteristics, socially constructed lives, and personal values, can be seen as representing opposites in traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity, and of female and male heterosexuality.

Feminists have sought to gain equality for women alongside men, and have made tremendous achievements, but as Moira Gatens (1992) explains,

the (traditionally male) public sphere of liberal society can be understood as one which defines itself in opposition to the (traditionally female) private sphere. . . . Equality in this context can involve only the abstract opportunity to become equal to men. It is the male body, and its historically and culturally determined powers and capacities, that is taken as the norm of the standard of the liberal "individual" (p. 124).

Men and women have internalized the notion that the male body is superior. But must the capabilities of the male body—as determined historically, culturally, and

biologically—continue to be seen as the norm and as superior? Because the two spheres are opposites in dualistic Western societies, does this mean that they must be in opposition to one another?

As individuals, we interpret our lives according to meanings gained from the interaction between our selves and our environments. We learn, in part, from families and friends, from medical discourses, from cultural and literary resources such as books and films, and from academic theories, although the *meanings* of stories to us as individuals often are not inscribed anywhere. Rather, meaning comes to us from making sense of the relationship between fragments of “stories.” Richard Ochberg (1994) explains that “Lives, like stories, are the way we fashion ourselves (p. 142).” A combination of life experience, learned knowledge, personal agency, and bodily and social limitations/advantages all influence our life course and the meaning we ascribe to it and, as biographical/narrative/life story researchers suggest, drawing these together in a coherent manner is essential in making sense of our lives (Ochberg, 1994; Plummer, 1995; Skultans, 1998). History, “stories,” and embodied lives are the source of our ideas and knowledge, and also are reflections of our lives.

The calendar and the ad depict both fantasy and real worlds, any with which men and women of today might identify. These are not professional actors but ordinary men and women whose real lives, in part, became integrated into the ad and the calendar. The surfer, a local “beach bum” discovered on location—not a prime example of physical fitness but somewhat out of condition, with a “strange, wary face”—seemed like the kind of person who would “genuinely wait for this extraordinary wave” (Wright, 2000). In the photos of the WI ladies, wrinkles were left untouched rather than being airbrushed out. The emphasis in both is on showing the women and men as ordinary people in their everyday lives, but with an imaginative departure from reality. There is no reference to work in the scenarios. Rather, they depict domesticity and nature, both thought of traditionally as escapes from the world of work—one as refuge, the other as adventure. These vignettes, taken from the lives of the men and women, are significant and must have been found attractive by the multitudes that bought the calendar and voted for the ad. They represent the lives of ordinary people, or some aspect of them, or perhaps how people would like their lives to be.

Even though reflecting traditional stereotypes, the images indicate movement in other directions. The Women’s Institute is a traditional organisation, for the benefit of family and community, and has been in existence in the UK for almost a hundred years and for over a century in Canada. That these “traditional” women decided to bare themselves in such a public manner, month by month, is an indication that, though not completely casting off traditional expectations of feminine behaviour, they are exploring their potential and moving into the public world in a way not thought possible several years ago. Meant as a tongue-in-cheek approach to the WI, the photos of the women present a contradiction between traditionally

modest feminine subordination and non-traditional sensuousness and sexuality, unpretentious yet at the same time displaying their feminine attributes with a certain knowingness and boldness. And what of the men—are they behaving in a traditional masculine manner? The role of men traditionally was to go out and conquer the world, while the women stayed at home. But if masculinity is characterised by domination, the images in the ad do not suggest a masculinity of this type. Rather than the men attempting to bend the course of nature to their will, there is a combining of strengths of man and nature in order that each fulfil what they are driven to complete. Is it idealistic to think that these demure women are now branching out in ways that will lead them to fulfilment and aid them in achieving their potential? Are the men refraining from traditional hierarchical attitudes and behaviours, and moving instead towards using their power in ways that engage with the Other, if not as the same, at least as counterparts, working towards the same goals?

SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Could the appeal of these two collections of images be an historical phenomenon? Ways of perceiving sexuality, as indicated by queer theory and postmodernism, go beyond understanding it in terms of identity, life choices, or behaviour. Steven Seidman (1997) suggests that,

Queer theory wishes to challenge the regime of sexuality itself, that is, the knowledges and social practices that construct the self as sexual and that assumes heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories marking the truth of selves (p. 93).

Although the women from the Women's Institute are heterosexual, their sexuality can be understood in broader terms than mere heterosexuality. In the same way, the sexuality of the surfers can be seen as going beyond "heterosexuality." While self-identity in terms of gender and sexuality is often an important part of an individual's overall identity, queer theory can enable us to see sexuality in more fluid terms than fixed sexual identities and rigid gender categories.

The men and women who posed for the TV ad and the calendar are represented in ways that are erotic, imaginative, and aesthetic, and perhaps in ways that could be considered sexual, but without relating them directly to a specific lifestyle or behaviour. There may have been specific intentions on how the TV advertisement and the calendar ought to be perceived by the public, but subjective interpretations of them by audiences could take other forms. The director of the beer ad, Jonathan Glazer, decided to use four men to give the impression of a "good-time group," arguing that "If there is one person drinking, they are alone. If you have two people, they are gay. If you have three people, they are going to beat someone up" (Wright, 2000, p. 5). Glazer's aim was to depict the men as heterosexual without referring directly to their sexuality. Likewise, the sexuality of the eleven WI women, in terms of lifestyle or behaviour, is not addressed explicitly through the photos. In the television documentary on the WI women, however,

husbands, children, and grandchildren were included, affirming non-verbally the heterosexuality of the women (Stowell, 2000). Publicity on the lives of the surfers was limited, and marriage was not mentioned. We learn only that the main surfer in the advertisement lives on the beach and “surfs for the female tourists” (Wright, 2000).

The images of the men and women in the calendar and the ad appear natural, although also obviously contrived and illusory, a phenomenon explained by Judith Butler’s (1999) theory of performativity. She suggests that,

As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an “act,” as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of “the natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status (p. 187).

Her claim is not that gender performance is intentional, although it can be, but that any exaggeration of gender acts draws attention to its illusory nature. Throwing into question traditional femininity, the WI women might be seen as engaging in “subversive bodily acts,” although not to the extent of disavowing their gender identity. The women in the calendar have taken activities that would be considered ordinary activities for WI women, and have drawn attention to them by performing them nude. And they have normalized their nudity by displaying it in a harmonious manner, integrated with their tasks and their surroundings. Whether the displays are seen as sexual or not—in the calendar or the ad—is left to the audience’s imagination.

Rather than see sexuality only as a specific area of life, as an activity, or associated with a particular identity, it can be seen as both reflecting and influencing the totality of a person’s life. The place of the sexual within its wider context can be summed up by William Simon’s (1996) proposal that we might be encouraged

to broaden our concerns for the sexual, to deny it its traditional position of privileged isolation, and to try to understand how the sexual helps to shape the totality of experience and how the larger context of social life may shape the sexual experience at its most fundamental level (p. 19).

For women whose identity was formed at least partly in relation to marriage and motherhood, their understanding of sexuality and of themselves as sexual persons would likely be influenced by these experiences. On one level, their sexuality comprises hormonal and physiological experiences, which may include menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, as well as a range of sexual pleasures (and pitfalls) and possibly periods of celibacy.

Although WI values and ways of life might seem old-fashioned and deserving of gentle mockery to those who have never lived them or who, in some way are moving beyond them, they are a real part of the lives of many women. For many of these women, now growing older, changes in perceptions and experiences of sexuality are not only age-related but are also related to the experiencing of social and historical change, such as the increased participation of women in the

work force and wider availability of “the pill,” granting many women financial independence and greater freedom to express their sexuality.

In a newspaper article entitled “Love in an Older Climate,” author Clare Boylan (2000) writes about sex in the lives of older women. The odd one out in this article, which consists mainly of anecdotes on women’s lives, is Germaine Greer, who is quoted as saying that “she now gets as much pleasure from her solitary bed as she once got from sharing it when young” (Boylan, 2000). The remaining quotes are from other older women, famous and not, seeking the sexual experience they never had, sex for the pure enjoyment of it, power over younger men, and sexual freedom outside the bonds of a relationship. In Boylan’s model, it is older women who have power and sexual authority, and she sums up their new attitude towards sex, saying “Having used the vagina as a path to the womb, they want to see how it operates as a solo performer” (Boylan, 2000). Male domination and women’s lack of freedom of choice have been key concerns for feminists and the women’s movement, but if women have viewed male domination as problematic, the question now is how women will deal with new-found power in their own lives.

Seidman (1997) suggests a “communicative sexual ethic” that, while not addressing the issue of power directly, calls for an ethical approach to sexual practices and arrangements. Rather than a morality of sex, through which specific sexual practices and identities might be judged more worthy or unacceptable by others within society, he claims that “Such a ‘communicative sexual ethic’ holds that social agents make sex meaningful, and ethical judgement is to be determined by the moral qualities of the social exchange or communication” (p. 214). Bearing children, and raising them, are considered to be of a high “moral order,” that of raising a new generation and ensuring the continuation of the human species. Increasingly, older women are choosing to be mothers as a means to fulfilment, but motherhood is not the only way, or the main way, that older women find meaning for themselves.

For Boylan (2000), discovering the joys of sex and power is what it is all about. In her article, the women’s approach to sex seems to be the same—although the reverse—of the gendered positions of the “complementary discourse” described by Holloway (1996), in which the man is the subject and the woman is the object. Within Boylan’s model of heterosexuality, and the complementary model described by Holloway, dominance is a key theme, women being dominant in one, men in the other. For women who learn about sexual arrangements from being in male-dominated relationships, this dominant/subordinate pattern would be a familiar one. But reversing the pattern so that women are the decision-makers does not change the basic pattern. I would argue that both these models could be considered egalitarian where informed consent to the basis of dominance is mutual, each partner stands to benefit in some way, and each has freedom to end the arrangement. But these need not be the only models for heterosexual arrangements.

The “communicative sexual ethic” upholds the notion of substantive value commitments, whereby individualism, autonomy, and choice are tempered by

consent, responsibility, and reciprocity (Seidman, 1997, p. 235). I suggest that putting these values into practice, and creating new models for sexual arrangements, requires making allowance for the different needs and desires of the participants and their limitations and strengths, including material, physiological, cultural, and psychosocial differences. While freedom of choice is emphasized in both this model and the dominant/subordinate model, the essential element, if these are to be effective in dealing with difference and inequality, is the willingness of both to compromise. Dominance, *per se*, is not a problem unless the dominant partner uses his/her power without regard for the other.

A further issue, and seemingly an exception to the notion of “social” sexual arrangements as described by Seidman (1997), is raised by Greer’s comment on the pleasure of her “solitary bed,” as reported by Boylan (2000). Celibacy and/or abstinence can often be neglected in theories of sexuality. The genuineness of celibacy and/or sexual abstinence in the lives of heterosexual men and women is not always acknowledged, and those who are not sexually active are sometimes viewed with disparagement. But even though abstaining from heterosexual activity, these men and women may find other ways of expressing their sexuality.

Seidman’s (1997) “communicative sexual ethic” goes beyond understanding sexuality in terms of procreation, pleasure, and love, with the intention of taking into account multiple meanings that emerge in social exchanges. In applying Seidman’s theory to heterosexual, gendered practices of sexuality, my aim has been to explore ways this theory can be used to shape heterosexual practices and relations. Theories of choice and ethics do provide insight into the rational considerations associated with sexual practices and arrangements, although the powerful emotional character of sexual relations (and not only what we call “love”) has not been addressed here to any great degree. Sexual practices might have no intrinsic sexual meaning, but for many, it can seem that they do. The different physiological characteristics of men and women and the accompanying influences of traditional gender ideology together suggest that the re-organization of intimate/sexual culture must include a means of renegotiating the essentialized dominant/subordinate “complementary heterosexuality” discourse to include new knowledges and practices. Conflict is inevitable, but the “communicative sexual ethic,” while supporting the ideal of freedom of choice of sexual expression, provides normative guidelines for developing tolerance and affirming difference, for those who endeavour to follow this practice.

This is a time of historical significance, when the baby boomers, born in the years following World War II when the men returned home from the war, begin to pass through middle-age, and the population of older people increases in proportion to the young. It may also be a time of historical importance that the WI women are taking their private lives into the public sphere, and bringing with them the time-honoured family values of the Women’s Institute, their own particular backgrounds, and their own way of expressing their femininity and sexuality.

The private lives of ordinary women have for the most part been invisible to the public, remaining in the margins, and although they might seem quite ordinary and tame in comparison to more starkly presented or more explicit forms of sexuality, or to more unconventional sexual lifestyles, the popularity of the calendar is an indication that it is time to take notice. I suggested earlier in this essay that the age of the WI women was not the main reason for the importance of the calendar. Rather, it is the intersection between ageing and cohort membership that makes the difference.

Doris Lessing (1996) writes:

Somewhere about middle age, it occurs to most people that a century is only their own lifetime twice. On that thought, all of history rushes together, and now they live inside the story of time, instead of looking at it from outside, as observers (p. 123).

Women in the age group of these WI members were raised during a time in history when sexuality and issues around the body were considered a taboo subject, and much of the value of women was considered to be their child-bearing potential. One of Butler's (1999) aims is to have bodies that have been regarded as "false, unreal, and unintelligible" seen as legitimate (p. xxiii), and older women of earlier cohorts have been at risk of being regarded as among these. As the WI women move into the public sphere, possibilities exist for shifts in power relations between men and women, and between young and old, and for the displacement of norms of gender and ageing. Acting from within their cultural situation, the women are already engaged in "doing" gender, and the effects this will have on the lives of the women, and on future generations, remain to be seen.

Researchers interpret social phenomena, as I have done in this essay, with the realization that they are limited by their own knowledge and biases, although their specific location in society and within history may give them a unique perspective. Having been born nine months after WW II ended, when my father returned home to England after several years overseas, I might be considered one of the first of the baby-boomers. Like many others of my generation, much of my life, spent living in Canada, has been quite traditional, with marriage and motherhood being a large part of it. When I became single again, at midlife, I set about discovering the "real me," beginning a new life, and returning to university. More recently, leaving my family in Canada, I returned to England to further my studies, to take up residence, and to discover how my British background might have influenced my life. What I am discovering, more than the British influence, are the ways that living in Canada, and my life experience there, have affected my life.

Part of understanding our own place in this world is to question how we came to be who we are, but since individuals' life experience and knowledge (and their ways of interpreting these) differ from one another, achieving a universal mutual understanding is impossible. J. M. Bernstein (1990) claims that,

Not only do social agents often fail to grasp the interconnection between the various aspects of the meaning complexes they inhabit, that is, fail to recognise the nature of the

determinations operating on the different parts of their symbolic totalities (hence failing to see them as totalities), but equally they are made blind by their understanding of given meaning complexes to the non-normative causes and conditions for those very same complexes (p. 52).

“Traditional” lives are not all the same, but because they have elements of old-fashioned values and norms about them, the study of these lives as they change can provide valuable knowledge for “sexuality and gender” studies. The story of the men in the ad ends abruptly. We hear no more from them. But for the WI women, the calendar was the beginning of change in their lives. Joanna Bornat et al. (2000) state that,

Awareness of the ways in which the language of narratives combine personal moralities and public discourses highlights the active integration of broader social change with more private and personal preferences and moralities. The disruption of family change may challenge an individual’s concept of self and the meanings attributed to core relationships (p. 256).

Changes in values and in self-knowledge are part of experiencing and contributing to social and historical change. The idea of the WI alternative calendar was inspired by the illness and untimely death through leukaemia of the husband of one of the members. Had it not been for their concern for him, and his involvement in the process, growing sunflowers from seeds for their friends, as a symbol of hope, and providing motivation, the idea of the calendar might not have been carried through to completion. These women, married still or having been married in the past, who were not celebrities, but ordinary women, are among the first older women to express themselves and the social values of their community—the Women’s Institute—in such a unique manner. At the time of this writing, the women from the Rylstone & District Women’s Institute are planning to make a full-length documentary, and are taking steps to distribute the calendar throughout Canada and the United States. Re-integrating their personal, social, and public lives in ways that do justice to themselves and their families, to tradition, and to a changing society will be the challenge.

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