

SEX AND GENDER PAGE

DISHY

by Fran Mosley

We were talking about therapists during the workshop lunch break. "Mine's younger than me. She's a dish" he said. I gnashed my teeth and told him that made me angry, but he clearly didn't see why.

Later we did an exercise on breaking out. 'I want to be in the middle please' I said. 'I want to break out of all the labels that are stuck on to me as a woman - or that don't get stuck on me, so I feel inadequate.' So I went round the circle naming them all. 'You are "dishy"' I said, pointing to him. 'You are "dolly bird", you are a wolf whistle, you are "a bit of all right", you are "a bit of crumpet"'. I named them all, then they joined hands and arms, and I had to fight my way out. It was hard, and I only got out because someone's spectacles got knocked off in the fray, and I made the most of the opportunity to dive at the weak spot and force my way out. I felt good once I was out. I'd shown myself that I needn't ever let those labels constrain me again.

Then last week we spoke again about therapists. Obviously forgetting the previous conversation he said to me 'Mine is younger than me. She's s...' and I finished for him 'She's a dish.' He looked a bit surprised that I knew she was, but didn't appear uncomfortable about the label. So here is an explanation.

From childhood up I and other women have been told either that we are pretty, or that we aren't. We have also been told very clearly that our value as human beings is greatly enhanced if we ARE pretty. Indeed one of our main purposes (i.e, why we were created) is to be attractive to men. Now it is not for ME to decide that I am pretty, nor is it for other women to decide this. Only men have the power to define who is pretty and who isn't. And some of them don't half use it. They condescend to tell us we are 'dishy', or dismiss us as 'old bags'.

When I am told that I am an 'old bag' two things are happening. First, the idea is being reinforced that my only value lies in sexual attractiveness, and bad luck, I don't have any. Secondly, my ability to own and define my own sexuality and my own worth is denied. Similarly, if I am told that I'm a dish, again the implication is that my value lies in that dishiness, a qualification bestowed on me by one of the privileged ones. I am one of the saved. And still my ability to own and define my own sexuality and my own worth is denied. Only a man can do that. So please, don't pin the dishy label on us. Tell me you are attracted to your therapist - fine. Then you would be telling me something about you. But don't perpetuate the myth that there are qualities such as dishiness which some of us have, and some don't. Take responsibility for your own feelings.