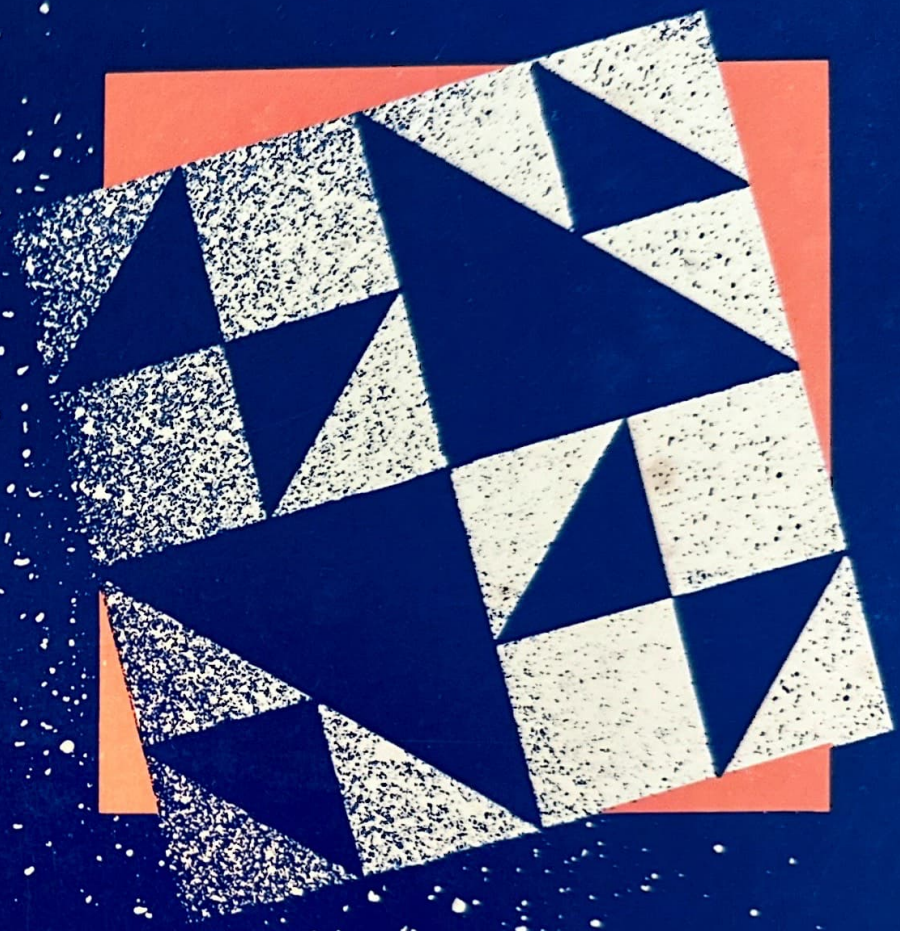
LesbianEthics



Volume 1 No. 1



Lesbian Ethics

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Lesbian Ethics

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Editor's Introduction

I am thrilled to be sending the first issue of *Lesbian Ethics* finally off to the printer and soon to you. *LE* has been in the works for two years, at a leisurely pace until three months ago, when she decided to rush madly downhill, dragging me after her. And so here she is.

Lesbian Ethics aims to be at once visionary and intensely practical. That is, *LE* aims to nourish the Lesbian spirit by envisioning the world we were all meant to live in, and to envision by looking at how we are now creating that world in our day to day interactions and in our larger projects and aspirations.

The idea for *LE* grew out of my own growing realization that Lesbians are creating a society, an economic and social and cultural network, intersticed with patriarchy, but nonetheless real. And out of the realization that this society is the first one in which ethics have been possible. While the oppression inherent in heterosexual relationships has prevented ethics from developing in the heterosexual world, Lesbians do not divide the people in our community into those one has sex with and exploits or is exploited by, on the one hand, and those one has meaningful work and social relations with, on the other hand. Almost any type of relationship is possible between any two or more of us. Lesbians are in our daily lives building the first true ethics, and I want *Lesbian Ethics* to contribute to and to name this pioneering work.

It is not always popular among Lesbians to say that ethics matter. (Is it politically correct to hold that political correctness is politically incorrect?) Perhaps some Lesbians are critical of "political correctness" because they object to trivial or rigid rules and to harsh judgments, but ethics do not have to be trivial, rigid or harsh. And ethics are essential to politics, since politics is building the society one believes nurtures the spirit. I see ethics in two ways: as learning from experience, and as saying what we want.

Ethics is about learning what is good for us, that is, learning both what we value and how to get it. Ethics in this sense is always growing, is never rigid or lifeless. Suppose we form an ethical statement: Lying is wrong, because when I lie to another woman I make it impossible for her to choose to act in her own best interests (or whatever other reason we might have). Living is now a little simpler: The same decision does not have to be made over and over again, and new areas for ethical decisions can be contemplated. Since for us ethics is learning, however, we never forget why we have this rule. The rule is a hypothesis which needs to be tested against experience and undoubtedly modified. Sometimes lying is essential to accomplish other valuable goals. It is, in fact, the willingness to examine our lives, the process of hypothesis building and hypothesis testing, which is ethics.

Ethics is about saying what we want. In creating ethics we must be willing to say, I want this, I don't want that, I like this, I don't like that. Only when we can openly and fully say what we want do we possess ourselves. It is hard to say what we want, even from other Lesbians and other women, because we don't have it. When a situation is making us feel bad and the situation is hard to change, there is always a tension, a pull towards manipulating our feelings into feeling good about the crumby situation. This is why being revolutionary is so difficult. We have to keep hold of what we want and of how little of it we are going to get in our lifetime. And yet, for me at least, there is no joy to match that of returning once again to the knowledge of what I really want and thus of who I really am. In this first issue of *LE* two papers in particular, those by Julia Penelope and by Karen Fite and Nikola Trumbo, are about the importance of saying what we want.

What kinds of articles is *Lesbian Ethics* going to publish? *LE* intends to be a forum for working out the important ethical issues in the lesbian-feminist community. As a forum, *LE* will often publish papers with which the editor, editorial consultants, and support group do not agree. Or rather, different ones of us will agree and disagree with different parts of different articles. Since the final decision will be mine, the contents of *LE*, although they will not necessarily reflect my position on issues, will reflect what issues I believe are important in our community.

LE particularly wants to encourage Lesbians to write about our personal experiences, in our social and political interactions and also in our sexual and emotional interactions. What you said and did, what she said and did, what they said and did. The personal is political. *LE* also encourages responses, in the form of letters or articles, to pieces which have appeared in *LE*.

At the suggestion of Cynthia Rich, and if you the reader do your part, *LE* will initiate with Issue #2 our "Dear Lez" column. What are you fighting with your lover about? What is going wrong in your collective? If we print your letter, we will print one or more responses, depending on whether our consultants agree or disagree with each other. And you too can write back your own responses to the problems published in the last issue.

Two final items. First, the design on the cover, journeying through space, is the patchwork quilt block known as "Old Maid's Puzzle," and is the *LE* logo. Second, I am committed to recycling Lesbian money. Although it was not possible to produce this first issue completely with Lesbian labor, I hope to do so in subsequent issues.

So here she is now, the first issue of *Lesbian Ethics*. Read her, enjoy her, write to her, and help her to be the wonderful, controversial journal we need her to be.

Jeanette Silveira

The Mystery of Lesbians: I*

Julia Penelope

Retrospective

Sometimes, it seems as though it's almost **too** easy for us to forget who we are. I had, until one night in August, 1983, when I remembered. I was standing in a bar in Montréal called The Bilitis. I didn't like the name, because Bilitis was the name a French pornographer, Pierre Louys, gave to the fictional daughter of Sappho he created for his own purposes. But the name also reminded me of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first Lesbian organization in the U.S., founded in 1957 by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in San Francisco, a continent away from where I stood in 1983. It reminded me of being a Lesbian in another time. I remembered my excitement at 19 when I found out there was a magazine, *The Ladder*, published by the Daughters of Bilitis and available on newsstands in large cities. I remembered how long I've been a Lesbian, the several ways I've named myself, and how long I've fought to defend and maintain the integrity of my life and the feelings that make my life what it is. I remembered publishing my first articles in *One* magazine in 1962 and *The Ladder* in 1963. In that bar in a strange city, knowing only the two Lesbians who'd brought me there, I was home. There, I touched once more my own origins in the Lesbian and gay bars of Miami and Miami Beach in the 1950's and '60's. My first community. My first sense of belonging somewhere.

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*I want to thank my good Separatist friends who questioned and challenged me to clarity and encouraged me to say what I wanted to say: Alix Dobkin, Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Bobby Lacy, Anne Leighton, and Sarah Valentine. Jeanette Silveira of *Lesbian Ethics* has been an astute editor, and I appreciate both her helpful observations and her patience while I revised this article. My gratitude doesn't imply that these Lesbians agree with my descriptions or interpretations of events; what appears here is my story alone, and its presentation, which owes so much to their criticisms, remains my responsibility alone.

In Montréal, I remembered who I am. I liked the bar. It was full of Lesbians, all kinds of Lesbians. I couldn't move without touching or being touched, and the air was humid with the moist smell of Lesbians, thick and sexual, busy with the sounds of Lesbians being Lesbians, shouted, exclaimed, whispered, angry, defiant, aloud. I was among my kind, my people. Overcome with joy, and myself, I danced. (Actually, the dance floor was so small and crowded that I could only stand in one place and weave and wiggle and snap my fingers to what I managed to hear of the music, but I was dancing in every cell of my body. It was all I could do.) I was dancing with Ariane Brunet of the Amazones d'Hier, Lesbiennes d'Aujourd'hui Collective, while Louise Turcotte, also a member of the Lesbians-only Collective, stood by our table because there wasn't any place to sit down. In the company of these fine Lesbians, I danced for the joy of being a Lesbian among Lesbians, for having the strength of my will, for hours.

I was wonderstruck. Why? I've been in Lesbian bars ever since the night I snuck, terrified and illegally, into Googie's on 17th Avenue in Miami in 1956, because I had to be with my own kind so desperately. Since that first frightened excursion, I've been in the dyke/lesbian/gay bars of New York, New Orleans, Atlanta, Danbury, Conn., Houston, Tampa, San Antonio, Austin, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, Chicago, Minneapolis, Madison, Wisc., Boston, Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Wichita, and Mexico City (where we had to sneak into the bar because the Lesbians who'd offered to take me there were afraid of being seen going into the place)[1] as well as those in Miami and Miami Beach. I've felt a lot of emotions besides terror and joy in these places: disgust, despair, loneliness, desperation, self-pity, thrilled, lustful, sinful, evil, daring, sophisticated, naive, worldly, hopeful, degraded and degrading, exploited and exploiting, put down, assaulted, ignored, ugly, beautiful, wanted, unwanted, lost, you name it. (I felt and named what I was feeling according to how I understood my experiences at the time.) I knew, from one end to the other, the range of what being a Lesbian means, from intense joy to extreme pain.

There could have been no surprises for me at the Bilitis in Montréal in 1983; I could have been in any one of many dyke bars on the North American continent. The names and locations of our bars may change like the weather in Nebraska, and the decor may range from J.C. Penney's Frontier Rustic to Neo-Plastic Interstate Motel Contemporary, but the atmosphere of Lesbian space remains remarkably predictable and, therefore, comfortable.[2] Therein lies the [illegible] mystery hinted at in my title. I was a Lesbian among Lesbians, even [illegible] some of the customers in the Bilitis might never claim that label for [illegible] would've been insulted if I had called them "dykes." So what if [illegible] preferred the safety of calling themselves "bisexual" or [illegible] the dubious protection of identifying as members of a [illegible] each of us was proclaiming, in her own way, that she [illegible] imperative and taking the risk of acting on her

feelings and convictions. Some of us had declared our Lesbianism over and over, out of desperation and a will to survive; some had become Lesbians, changed their minds, wavered, and returned. Others were probably still in the process of coming to understand that they were Lesbians, not yet entirely aware of what their identity might come to mean to them, might cost them. Some were there for "kicks," others were there because they were lonely. But we were there, in all our phases, the "for real" and the phony, together.

Remember the excitement of discovering that a friend, co-worker, old high school acquaintance, or sister is a Lesbian? Remember the sense of *confirmation* that discovery brought both of you, and how that established a connection between you? Do any of us get that excited when we find out that another womon is heterosexual? Is it POSSIBLE to even talk about "discovering" that a friend is "heterosexual"? Is it a unique event when heterosexual women finally find each other and connect? Do they tell their friends "the story" about the meeting for weeks after?

In that bar in Montréal, I remembered who I am and why I do the things I do. I remembered the time when I believed that I was "the only one." I remembered fears and pain, but, most of all, I remembered the integrity of my self-knowledge, how the threads of my experiences are woven into the patterns I call my Self, and I reclaimed for myself my commitment to change what it means to be a Lesbian in this world. It is so easy to forget what we've refused, what we've survived, and to take each other for granted. I had forgotten, or chosen not to remember, until that August night in Montréal put me in touch with my joy *and* my pain all at once, and called to consciousness my abandoned dream of a Lesbian community.

So profound had my estrangement become that I had forgotten who I am. I am a Lesbian, yes. I can be independent, strong, defiant, stubborn, arrogant; I can survive, alone, but only in a very narrow sense of the word. The quality of my survival requires—is defined in terms of—the existence of a community of Lesbians. Even though it isn't my purpose here to describe explicitly what I mean by my use of "community," I need other Lesbians to affirm me, support me, challenge me, encourage me, argue with me, tell me I'm full of shit, and tell me I'm wonderful; I need to know as well that there are safe places for me in this world, places where I can be stupid, wise, silly, profound, trite, or original, make mistakes, undo my mistakes, make bad jokes and a few good ones, without constant fear of being cast out. I discovered in Montréal that I no longer believe there is such a place for me. Whatever potential for safety with other Lesbians I'd once envisioned now seemed impossible and far-fetched.

In a strange city, in the unique aura of safety provided by anonymity in a crowded bar, I realized I'd ceased to believe in the Lesbian community I'd thought I was helping to build. Instead, I'd become an outcast from outcasts with no place to go. Having touched that pain, withdrawn from it, and touched it yet again, I knew I had to find out why I'd let go of my vision. More hopefully, I

needed to discover, if possible, a way back to it, or, failing that, to fashion new frameworks for ordering and interpreting my life.

The Mystery of Lesbians

I'll repeat here, briefly, some things I've said before (in other articles) because certain aspects of my experience are integral to what I want to say here. I cannot omit them, because, like everyone else, my interpretations and descriptions and responses to events and situations are framed by my past experiences. That is, although what I say here is based on my experiences and perceptions of events and I cannot, for that reason, expect every Lesbian to agree with my interpretations, I believe that other Lesbians will understand what I'm talking about and be able to substitute similar experiences of their own that had the same effect on them. I've always been a Lesbian. I've never thought of myself as anything *but* a Lesbian, even though, at earlier stages in my life, I called myself "homosexual," "queer," and "gay." I accepted from the people around me the words I used to describe who I was. At 9, 12, and 15, I didn't know or care that the words I used to name myself were insulting or damaging to my self-concept; I took the labels offered to me for my identity in much the same way that I chose cereals at the supermarket—without consciousness. It didn't bother me in 1954 that "homosexual" and "gay" referred primarily to males; I took those labels as I found them, without meditating on their sense or the possible cost to my sensibilities. What I knew, with certainty, was that I loved other wimmin and wanted to spend my life loving them.

Never having entertained the idea that I might be a heterosexual (even though everyone around me kept insisting that I was if only I'd admit it), my Lesbianism was never a choice in the way that many speak of it now. My Lesbian identity has never been merely a "preference" for me; it's not an identity I casually selected from a Baskin-Robbins sexuality counter. Heterosexuality wasn't an "option" for me. Heterosexuality was forced on me from all sides and at every moment of my life until I managed to escape the adults who were so set on coercing me into a mold that suited them, not me. Heterosexuality wasn't a "choice," it was an attempted imposition, a way of being I found repulsive and demeaning.

I was attracted to, sexually excited by, and comfortable only in the company of women. I found men stupid and arrogant (a combination of traits I don't like in anyone), egotistical, presumptuous, and mean. I didn't like men when I was growing up, and I've found no reason in the intervening years to change my opinion of them. (The very few exceptions I've met simply aren't quantitatively significant enough to warrant revising my generalization.) I don't regard myself as somehow "more" of a Lesbian than others who did go through a heterosexual phase in their lives. Each of us has come by her own path to embrace what being

a Lesbian means, and our experiential differences can be, should be, a primary source of our strength. I want you to understand that my Lesbianism is who I am, and it's always been that way for me. I could not have been other than I am and continued to live. If there was an "alternative lifestyle" for me, it was death, not heterosexuality. I would have killed myself, and did try, before I would have tried to live as a heterosexual.

There is something else you must know in order to understand my perspective and its origins in my experience: I've never been able to "pass" for heterosexual. Not that I haven't tried. I understand the desire, the temptation, the need to at least LOOK like everyone else. I understand the benefits to be gained by "passing" for something one isn't. I've missed the privileges of heterosexuality, including the rewards for successful mimicry, and felt that lack painfully. I wanted the goodies, and have many times wished fervently to be able to "pass" for a heterosexual. Living on the outside of the heterosexual system made me acutely aware of the validation and support that wasn't, and wouldn't be, forthcoming. But I've always looked like what I am, a dyke.[4] When I've tried to look like a heterosexual, I was a failure, and I always felt ridiculous and laughable and, therefore, humiliated. My choice, in my circumstances, was to brazen it out.

It would be easy for some to say, "Oh, you're just as bad about stereotyping Lesbians as society is," but that statement ignores the fact that I've lived my life AS society's stereotype. As a result, I didn't have many girlfriends while I was growing up; mothers made it clear that their daughters weren't allowed to associate with the neighborhood queer. My isolation began when I was a child, but it was only the beginning. As I became aware of my difference and discovered that I wasn't the "only one," I learned simultaneously that lesbians who could pass, thereby escaping more overt methods of social punishment, didn't want to be associated with me, either. I was too "obvious" when "discretion" was the code word for "passing." Only outrageous faggots and bardykes weren't afraid to be my friends, because they, too, had nothing to lose by being seen with me. From our isolation and defiance we created families and "homes" within which we were assured that we were loved for ourselves. In the bars, we lived in constant danger from both the nastiness and violence of het tourists and the vice raids that accompanied every political election. Not one of us was safe anywhere else. On good days, we were called names, jeered at, mocked, and ridiculed; on bad days, we were assaulted, raped, beaten up, and killed.

Isolation is nothing new in my life; I've spent my life being lonely, and trying to "fit in" some place (this isolation, which isn't self-chosen, shouldn't be confused with "being alone," which is chosen), in order to end my isolation. You need to understand these things about me to comprehend my intense hopefulness in 1971 when I heard that the contemporary Women's Liberation Movement

(WLM), at that year's NOW convention, had announced that Lesbianism was to be recognized as a valid and acceptable lifestyle for women. It's hard to admit that I felt relief, hope, even gratitude, as groveling as that seems to me today. But I was tired. Isolation is an exhausting, painful way to live that makes simple survival seem a hopeless aspiration, and the radical politics of the then-lusty WLM appeared to be a chance to end my involuntary isolation, a way to find a community within which I would be accepted as a valuable, contributing member. If radical feminism[5] could change the quality of my life as a Lesbian, I was more than willing, in exchange, to work to improve the lives of other women, all women. If these women were going to fight to make my being a Lesbian easier, I was equally committed to the seriousness of their issues.

I believed, when I first became active in the WLM in 1972, that radical feminist analysis offered me a coherent way of interpreting and understanding my experiences as a Lesbian. Indeed, early feminist radicalism did give me a consistent and coherent basis for making sense of my experiences and acting to change both the way I perceived myself and related to other wimmin. So thorough-going and logical were the insights and explanations I learned from that feminism that I found myself gradually withdrawing from gay male organizations (GLM) and friends in order to remove myself from the omnipresence of their concerns and behaviors and, thereby, to focus my energies on wimmin's and Lesbian issues in a more concentrated, less fragmented way. The more I identified with radical feminism and, as a consequence, understood my experience as female, the less able I was to see my destiny as linked to that of GLM.

First to go was my support for drag shows, which I'd once enjoyed; now the misogyny repelled me. Then, I began to realize how much of the gay lifestyle I knew so well simply wasn't mine. I didn't hang out in bathrooms seeking quick, anonymous sex; I didn't go to Interstate rest areas for a "night out." "Cruising" for sexual partners in public places, with the exception of bars, had never been a part of my life. (And any dyke will tell you that even "cruising" among us is significantly different from the way that gay men cruise.) More tellingly for my own analysis, pederasty, sadism and masochism, water sports, and a variety of "kinky" sex behaviors were, and remain, nonexistent in my life as a Lesbian. (That other females who prefer such sexual activities also call themselves "gay" and identify their interests with those of GLM supports my early conclusion.)[6] Although I numbered among my close friends several gay men, and although I'd come to my feminism through my involvement in GLM, the latter simply didn't address the problems and issues of my life as a Lesbian or as a womon. I ceased to call myself "gay" because I finally understood that the "gay life" I'd thought I was living since the age of 15 wasn't *my* life at all, and the "gay slang" I'd been using for 15 years was primarily a vocabulary for talking about male sexuality, not mine. In 1972, I finally used the word *Lesbian* to name myself. The first time

was scary, but I managed to get the word out. I wasn't "gay" from that time forward, although I did participate in "gay" events and collaborate politically with gay men when I thought we shared compatible goals.

Now, it might seem that some of the preceding realizations should have been obvious to me long before 1972, but that's how it was for me. Yes, there'd been times when I felt uncomfortable among gay men, and times when gay male friends humiliated or angered me, or both. But I was an outcast, and, as an outcast, I'd sought companionship in the only place I'd been able to find it. Imagine, then, my excitement and euphoria when I discovered strong, energetic, out dykes active in WLM. At first, like many Lesbians, I divided my energies between WLM and GLM, but, ultimately, I made a choice. Caught between the sexism of gay men and the heterosexism and Lesbophobia of heterosexual feminists, I chose to commit myself to that movement whose ideas and analysis had first excited me and then given me a foundation for changing myself in ways that felt good, feminism.

Of course, **AS A LESBIAN** I have many issues in common with hererosexual and celibate women: rape, battering, incest, sex-role stereotyping, and sex discrimination, to name only a few. But I want to emphasize here that, for me, I needed validation and support for my Lesbianism, *positive* responses that I couldn't get anywhere else in this society. Not unpredictably, involvement in the WLM was a trade-off for me. In exchange for having *MY* issues and concerns dealt with seriously, I was willing to listen attentively and offer reactions when heterosexual wimmin talked about their struggles for equality in relationships with men, even though I had no similar experience of my own and I couldn't understand why they were so determined to make heterosexuality "work" for them. But they were, and I accepted their issues with the seriousness I expected in return. It was that early promise of acceptance that won my allegiance to radical feminist ideology in 1972.

And, indeed, I *did* find heterosexual feminists who were seriously committed to Lesbian issues and problems during the early years of my involvement with the WLM. Some of those wimmin are still around, but, as the years have passed, I've found myself more and more seeking the company of wimmin who call themselves Lesbian-Feminists or Separatists. Why? Because the trade-off I'd believed would occur failed to become a political reality; I did not find a serious commitment to Lesbian issues in groups controlled by heterosexual feminists, and I felt continually patronized and degraded in my attempts at dialogue with them. Remember when *Ms.* (May 1980, p. 20) reprinted (from *New Women's Times*) a message placed in an 1879 time capsule by a Lesbian, but *DELETED* her statement that she loved other wimmin? Instead of listening to me and other Lesbians when we tried to explain why visibility and acknowledgement were so important to us, heterosexual wimmin tried to convince us that all women were "the same" regardless of their "sexual preference," reducing Lesbianism to a

carbon copy of their lives with men. Not only is it simply false to suppose that the life of a Lesbian is identical to that of a heterosexual woman, but that reductionism enables heterosexual feminists to ignore both the constant and tangible rewards they derive by living as heterosexuals and the brutal reality of socially condoned persecution of Lesbians. As a result, I came to feel less and less comfortable among the heterosexual wimmin who called themselves "feminists" but urged me to "keep a low profile" because my obvious Lesbianism would discredit or harm the WLM or who asked, when I protested being made invisible as a Lesbian, "Well, what do *YOU* people want?" (No kidding. I'm not making this up. I was asked just that question by a "feminist" in 1977.)

By 1980, again exhausted, this time by trying to persuade heterosexual feminists to take seriously the realities of Lesbian oppression, the economic and social benefits they received because of their relationships with men, and the stark contrast created by sexuality, I stopped participating in "feminist" groups with heterosexual wimmin. I withdrew unhappily from a movement that was determined to make the Lesbians within its ranks invisible in order to "reach out to **ALL** women," when the phrase "all women" clearly excluded Lesbians as members and potential beneficiaries of political action. A movement that was committed to creating the facade of a coerced "unity" that ignored Lesbians and was anxious to avoid "frightening away potential converts" who, assumed to be heterosexual to a woman, "would be scared off by 'radical extremists'." A movement that was timidly requesting male validation of its retrenched politics, instead of demanding the social reconstruction necessary to make the U.S. a safe place to be a female. At the same time, I want to point out that I wouldn't need to focus attention on the second wave of feminism if it weren't also true that, without it, I wouldn't be talking about the existence or non-existence of a "Lesbian community" or a "Lesbian Movement," and we wouldn't have a journal called *Lesbian Ethics*. It was the WLM, with its weaknesses and strengths, its contradictions and insights, and its tensions and breakthroughs that called forth in many of us the vision of Lesbians living and working together. I don't think it's coincidental that so many Radical Feminists were also Lesbians. We had nothing to "lose" from telling our truths.

The radical feminism that had demanded an immediate end to the centuries of patriarchal subjugation of women was eroded until all that was sought was a paper reform, the ERA, which would acknowledge (nothing more, mind you) that women are "human beings, too." How that acknowledgement of "equality" with men would establish our right to live without male interference and control has yet to be explained.

It wasn't only heterosexual feminists who abandoned the dream of a "feminist revolution"; Lesbians, too, accepted without much protest an appeasement program which had, as its explicit goal, the task of making something called "feminism" less threatening to men and their women. Feminists loudly proc-

laimed that the "women's liberation movement" would "liberate" men as well as women, thereby transforming Feminism into a banal "humanism." Remember the *Plexus* (March, 1979) interview in which Charlotte Bunch equated "the birth of new ideas, the continual moving into new territory" with "humanism"?

> We need to expand our base of support and to expand the number of women who see themselves as having a stake in humanism.... Radical feminism has been the place where new ideas came into being, ideas which later spread to the other, more organized parts of the Women's Movement and then began to be taken up by society.... We need growth and enrichment which comes from interaction with people who aren't like us....

What is now being called "feminism" is indistinguishable from the "human growth potential" movement, and women who call themselves "feminists" speak psychobabble fluently, a dialect that enables them to avoid talking about real pains and real issues. Of course, Charlotte Bunch, who'd been a member of The Furies Collective, isn't solely responsible for the devolution of WLM into neo-humanism; she was telling her 1979 audience what they wanted to hear. She helped them to rationalize the redefinition of feminism in the U.S.

What happened on our way to the "feminist revolution?" The threat of angry male reprisals (a real fear, by the way) intimidated wimmin into redefining our principles. The focus of our politics became, not what we could do to improve the lives of women, but how we could live more comfortably with men. Cohabitation with **men** was substituted for a thorough-going social revolution.

What happened to our vision of a "Lesbian community"? No one talks about such things anymore unless it's in a derisive, sarcastic, or apologetic tone. Why do I have trouble believing that our present disarray, apathy, and internal conflict is "just another phase" on our way to something "better"? Was it, as some would say, merely a PERSONAL dream, a private, non-collective desperation that deluded me into imagining that Lesbians might create spaces where we would be valued and taken seriously? Yet, I know that there were other Lesbians who shared that dream; we talked about it so often. I know that there are Lesbians who still hold that vision, who still talk about it, who silently cherish it in a time when its mention has become an embarassment. Where are we? Without caucusing, without convention, we've withdrawn into our private and isolated lives. Faced with the heterosexual betrayal of a movement from which we'd hoped for so much, we silently shelved our dreams of freedom and accepted the lesser goal of individual survival, a sort of spiritual "scraping by" that's as bleak as it is exhausting.

In Montréal, when I touched once more the mystery of being a Lesbian, the miracle of Lesbian survival against all odds and in spite of the tremendous social pressures to deny our feelings, I also recognized the loss of my own hope, a loss whose recognition demanded grieving.

Having relinquished my dreams, I grieve. But I also keep trying to understand what happened and what didn't happen. I keep hearing all those "feminist" voices urging me to reembrace invisibility, cajoling me to patience ("It's not your time yet"), demanding my acquiescence to the substitution of humanism for feminism. Instead of "abortion on demand" for all women, I'm supposed to say "pro-choice"; instead of "Lesbian," I must refer to my "alternative lifestyle"; instead of "battered women" I'm supposed to say "battered spouses"; suddenly, I'm supposed to agree that being a housewife is an "honorable vocation," rather than an enslavement. Those voices—placating, angry, insulting, declaring the politics of appeasement as the new face of "feminism"—convince me that I, and I believe WE (radical feminists, Separatists) have been sold out; worse, we've collaborated in selling ourselves out, betrayed by our own willingness to believe in the voices of wimmin, our own hopes for a better future.

To what promise have we been sold out? And by whom have we been sold out? The WLM that earned my energies and commitment no longer exists as a nation-wide Movement; isolated, small enclaves here and there in the U.S. continue to make the demands of radical feminism, but they are few and scattered. Now we are called "extremists" who want to "ruin it" for everyone else, relegated to invisibility by the new "feminist mainstreamers." We are urged to "fall into line," run bake sales for the Women's Political Caucus, subscribe to *Ms.*, vote for Mondale/Ferraro. Mostly, we're told **NOT** to say the word *LESBIAN* in public. Radical feminism, the angry, outrageous, exuberant, powerful feminism, is, to all intents and purposes, dead in the U.S. Dead, and unmourned except by the few who re-member the early dreams and visions, and the analysis that informed and shaped those dreams and visions. Euphemism and distortion have replaced the radical act of naming our experiences. We're supposed to believe that rapists are "sick men," deviant and exceptional males for whom we should feel compassion. We're expected to forget that the nuclear family is the basic unit of the heteropatriarchy and to accept the premise that eradicating incestuous acts can be accomplished by "family therapy." Such a proposition would be ludicrous if it weren't so monstrous.

What sort of "feminist," I ask you, could agree to the premise that INCEST, *the rape of female children and adolescents by male members of their family,* should be regarded as a "family" issue? The patriarchal family holds females in bondage to men; females are the property and, therefore, the LEGITIMATE PREY of all men. The family defines WHICH females are the exclusive property of ONE MAN. Once we're property, we can be DISPOSED OF in any way. I simply cannot feel sorry for men who rape children, nor will I accept the idea that they're "deviants." So-called "family therapy," which treats incest as though the men responsible for the atrocities are "victims," is a poorly-disguised attempt to

save the heteropatriarchal family from a much-deserved extinction. WHO benefits when we accept the mainstream analysis of incest? WHO benefits when we reject the radical feminist analysis that ALL MEN ARE RAPISTS?

It's *NOT* us!

On Selling Out

How could a politics so hopeful, so strong, so sure of itself have been undermined, sold out, deflected from its first insurgency? The evidence is all around us in the journals, newspapers, articles, and books that claim a "feminist" point of view: Women (wimmin) will, at every turn, choose men over themselves, over other wimmin. Lesbians are no different. Remember "Lesbian-only space," which was euphemized to "wimmin-only space," and then we suddenly found ourselves embroiled in arguments about allowing male children into what had been FEMALE SPACE? And then we started arguing over the exact age at which male children become dangerous to females? Remember the lesbians claiming that, by excluding their male children, we were excluding THEM? The argument itself is subtle: Lesbian mothers with male children would be excluded from "wimmin-only" events if they couldn't afford childcare; therefore, we started admitting male children (up to some arbitrary age) to wimmin-only meetings and concerts in an effort to be "fair." As "wimmin-only" space disappeared, so did "lesbian-only" space. Environments invaded by male presences are no longer female-only spaces, regardless of the motivation or intent, and calling them "wimmin-only" is worse than a lie. It's a SELF-DELUSION!

We chose to accommodate the claims of females with male children rather than ask them to choose being with us over their male children. We knew, although we didn't admit it, even during our most heated debates, that those women would choose their male children, not us. Framing these confrontations was the tacit acknowledgement that, because these women would NOT choose us, it was our "responsibility" to choose them. Childcare is a *false issue*. Whether or not a Lesbian mother leaves her male son at home isn't "the issue." The real issue is the fact that these wimmin are choosing to raise males, choosing to nurture them, choosing them instead of choosing themselves and other wimmin.[7] That my interpretation is accurate is evidenced when the mothers of sons are STILL angry and outraged when childcare for their sons is provided away from the event. They demand that we worry about the "damage" exclusion would do to the frail egos of their sons, thereby making their sons *more important* than the wimmin who don't want ANY MALES in wimmin's space! Furthermore, such demands to accommodate male children in our space are ageist, because they assume a relationship between age and the will and capacity for violence, and

ignore as well the realities of girl children's lives: the fact that girls are tormented, assaulted, and raped by boys. Asking us to allow male children into wimmin-only spaces is asking us to be accomplices in male violence against wimmin.

Time after time we've allowed wimmin who put the men in their lives first guilt-trip us into "respecting" their priorities; we've accepted their claim that prioritizing wimmin is *LESS IMPORTANT* than nurturing men, and we cannot continue to let them force their priorities on us at the expense of our own. This tactic has been successfully used against Lesbian groups and communities over and over again—another group of Lesbians saying, "If you want, expect, need the pleasure of my presence, it'll be on my/our terms, *not yours.*" And we knew, without saying it, that we were on dangerous ground. Choosing the presence of other wimmin, excluding males without exception, is dangerous. Accommodation was much easier because the rationalizations and justifications for choosing men over wimmin are so numerous, so attractive, and so rewarding that even I must pause and wonder why I'm surprised, why I stubbornly continue to reject that safety as an option for myself.

Surprised, I realize that I'm angry at being caught off-guard. Angered, I admit that I'm hurting because I failed to protect myself. Hurt, I'm surprised once more because I believed I wouldn't need the defenses against men and other women acquired during a lifetime in a lesbophobic society; worse, I believed, and acted in accordance with that belief, that my own best interest lay with the "best" interests of other wimmin as they conceive them. *But that naive belief assumes that other wimmin believe that their "best interests" lie with all other wimmin, further, belief isn't enough—they must also consistently choose to act in terms of that belief.* Talking about one's commitment to wimmin's issues simply isn't *enough;* each of us must be willing to live that commitment on a daily basis, and that commitment must determine our choices and how we make them. But I know how few wimmin believe that their own lives will be significantly improved by acting in concert with other wimmin, how few dare to entrust their aspirations to the success or failure of women's political action. Of those who say that their self-interests lie with feminist politics, not many will opt for the possibility of failure with other wimmin when backed up against the wall. *I* certainly no longer believe it, for belief, and the commitment that substantiates belief, require some evidence that the belief isn't mere fancy or delusion, and such evidence will be a long time coming if current trends continue without significant change.

What the evidence points to, and reinforces over and over again, is the fact that wimmin as well as women persist in seeing their "best interests" as inextricably bound up with those of men. Wimmin/women will, time after time, ignore betrayals and hypocrisies they wouldn't think of tolerating in each other in order to link their own destinies and aspirations to those identified by men.

I'm told that I'm "racist" unless I put aside my own oppression and accept as a priority eliminating the oppression of Black, Chicano, and Native American men. I'm told that I'm "classist" unless I put the goals of working-class and poor men before my own. If I refuse to identify my goals with those of male-dominated groups, I'm told that I can't be trusted.[8] Politically charged labels like "racist," "classist," and "anti-Semitic" have been used repeatedly to discredit Separatists, especially by feminists who identify themselves as "leftist" or "socialist."

Barbara Ehrenreich, for example, talking about what did or didn't happen "on the way to socialist feminism" (*Heresies* 1980, 9:5–6), identifies what she calls "partial feminisms," feminist politics that fail to express "the totality of our experience as women." For Ehrenreich, that "totality" includes her "community" of men—"fathers, brothers, sons, neighbors, co-workers"; and a feminism that asks her to leave behind "The love and dependencies[9] which tie us [sic] to this community" does "violence to some part of ourselves [sic]." She elaborates:

> Radical feminism is one of these "partial feminisms"—a feminist politics that recognizes (not without some qualifications) only our allegiance to other women. But paradoxically, the more it insists on an allegiance to women and women only, the more it turns against those women (the great majority of us) who are tied in to the community of women and men. In the most Jacobin, separatist versions of radical feminism, "sisterhood" comes to embrace only a tiny minority of wholly "women-identified women." All others are complicit with the enemy—and suspect.

Radical feminism has not ignored or trivialized the "ties" and "dependencies" on male communities that Ehrenreich wants to retain. (I think her use of language here reveals the nature of those connections to men.) On the contrary, radical feminism asks us to question just those "dependencies," their sources, and the ways they define and necessarily limit the connections we establish with other wimmin. By labeling radical feminism, particularly Separatism, as a "partial feminism," Ehrenreich trivializes our efforts to construct a wimmin first political agenda, and, by trivializing them, justifies her refusal to ask herself WHY men are so important to her. Typically, we are expected to justify our insistence on putting wimmin first.

Similarly, in "The Combahee River Collective Statement on Lesbian Separatism,"[10] a group of Black Socialists tried to negate Separatist analysis by claiming the superiority of their own analysis:

> ...Although we are feminist and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand...we reject the stance of lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children....We must also question

> whether lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race...

Again, men are prioritized as political allies. In order, however, to accomplish this, the Collective had to simultaneously assert, falsely, that Separatism "fractionalizes," "leaves out...far too many people," and "denies...the facts of race and class." If by the word "fractionalizes," they mean that Separatists insist upon wimmin putting ourselves FIRST, they're correct; but their use of that word, rather than others (such as "woman-identified"), loads their argument with unstated assumptions: if Separatism is called "fractional," then other analyses, especially socialism, are to be seen as "whole," and therefore, "better." By implicitly claiming that Separatists are white wimmin, they purposely ignore the fact that Separatists, like any group of wimmin, are racially and culturally diverse, and attribute to skin privilege the decision to work for and with wimmin only. In order to somehow validate their refusal to give first priority to their oppression *as wimmin*, they had to resort to distortion and omission.

But that wasn't enough either to make their decision convincing. Having said that Separatism isn't "a viable political analysis or strategy" for them, they felt perfectly justified in further asserting that Separatism probably isn't "an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it,..." They might at least have left it up to us to decide whether or not Separatism is "adequate" for us; their presumption here is arrogance of the worst kind, since they betray their own ignorance about Separatism and Separatists by asserting falsely that Separatist analysis ignores "the facts of race and class..." Because so many of the early Separatists, those who first articulated a Separatist analysis, came directly from leftist and socialist organizations, they were among the first feminists to state repeatedly that radical feminism couldn't ignore racism, classism, ageism, or any other issue that affects wimmin's lives.

Finally, the Collective conspicuously used that old buzzword, "progressive," both to characterize the Black men they sought to ally themselves with and to deny the viability of Separatism as a political analysis. "Progressive" implies, of course, that anything in disagreement with the assertion is necessarily "backward" and, therefore, politically suspect. Such assertions are typical of the rhetoric favored by socialists of all varieties, and the Collective's repetition of the word *progressive* says more about their need to identify with the "good guys" than it does about Separatism.

Their language isn't simply name-calling by implication, however. It's also representative of the sort of conceptual reversal that surfaces when Separatists

are called "fascists" and "Nazis" (which, by the way, is ignorance of the worst kind since some Jewish Lesbians continue to be among the most vocal advocates of Separatism). By reversal, such wimmin seek to wrap about themselves the cloak of political respectability by using the vicious device of name-calling; that which is politically dubious can be justified by lies and slander, techniques developed and polished within heteropatriarchal politics. This conceptual reversal enabled Gayle Rubin to assert that Kathleen Barry, Sally Gearhart and I are in the "tradition" of J. Edgar Hoover (as quoted in *oob* June, 1982: 21). More recently, a "bisexual feminist witch" felt comfortable calling a Separatist a "lesbian Jerry Falwell" because the Separatist made a distinction among the kinds of energy characteristic of Lesbians, heterosexual wimmin, and men.

Apparently, when a Separatist explicitly asserts a preference for Lesbian energy or asserts that we cannot blithely allow our sexual desires to go unquestioned, the most expedient rebuttal is to damn us by linking us with despicable men. Such devices aren't simply transparent and feeble, they're vicious, because they refuse to take seriously what Separatists say. The wimmin who must resort to name-calling and lies avoid arguing with us, deny us the most basic dignity and respect, and expose inadvertently the inadequacy of their own political analysis. Worse, name-calling isn't merely defensive and superficial. By striking out at Separatists and radical feminists in this way, they reveal that they want to hurt us.

And, unfortunately for us, they frequently succeed. As much as I'd like to pretend otherwise, I am hurt when other wimmin compare me to J. Edgar Hoover or Jerry Falwell, because I know that they're denying **ME**. Suddenly, I am the one "on trial." Why would wimmin, especially Lesbians, ignore their own experiences with men (rape, battering, incest) in order to attempt to coerce me into associating with men? How did it happen that, having committed myself to wimmin's issues, I'm informed that my commitment is dubious if I'm not working to "liberate" men as well? Why is refusing to give my energies to men, all men, racist or classist? Why would wimmin/Lesbians demand that I work with men in order to prove that I'm "trustworthy"? What on earth could have persuaded so many Lesbians that the men with whom they share one or more oppressions are more reliable and more likely to protect them than I am? Such assertions "make sense" only if one assumes that what will benefit men will also and certainly benefit women, and I have yet to hear of ANY male group that plans to make *ANY WOMON'S* life any better. There are NO MALE GROUPS that make feminist issues priorities. How would working with men of any kind promote my well-being?

I'm not advocating "downward mobility" here, or suggesting that I'm capable of surviving without SOME contact with men. The issue here is the extent and kind of control over our lives that we *choose* to exercise. As a Lesbian, my

survival strategies are limited in a society that wants to erase me. That is, in or to survive, I must interact with men; if I don't I won't survive. My control in t situation is limited by the fact of male domination. In my personal sphere, however, I have considerably more control over who I'll choose to interact wi and that includes political activism. I will not accept the premise that my "political credibility" depends upon my working with men. I shouldn't have say this, but I am opposed to the oppression of anyone, including men, but tha doesn't mean I have to like them, keep company with them when I can avoid or condone another womon's choice to prioritize her connection with them cannot accept the assertion that my life is inextricably bound up with that of a man. I'm utterly committed to issues that affect relationships among wimmin, such as classism, fat, racism, incest; I will not commit myself to "improving" men's lives, nor will I accept the premise that heterosexuality is a "choice" mad in the same way I became a Lesbian. I certainly will not tolerate heterosexis

That programs and actions prioritized by men might be diversions or even hoaxes is easily ignored by wimmin/women who simply cannot imagine their lives as distinct and, yes, SEPARATE from those of men. Realizing how difficult, perhaps impossible, it is for women/wimmin to imagine themselves as having unique and identifiable interests APART FROM those of men, I must abandon commitment that has informed and given meaning to my life. Then the hurt and anger return, for a part of me prefers to believe that wimmin *are* capable of **PUTTING OURSELVES FIRST**, and another part of me resents the decision to put aside illusions in favor of a reality I cannot deny or ignore. (Obviously, there are many ways in which my involvement with WLM significantly enriched and improved my life. I now have friends [and enemies] that I wouldn't have had I'd never been involved.) I must cut my own losses, for continued identification of my self-interest as necessarily connected with the self-interest of other women/wimmin is self-destructive and counter-productive as long as they prefer to identify themselves with men, and so, reluctantly, I decide that I must return to my pre-WLM lifestyle, picking and choosing with greater care those to whom I entrust my dreams.

I Must've Dozed Off

I think there are many reasons why feminism and its current practitioners now repel me, and I see no way that the gulf between contemporary feminism and Separatism can be bridged. Separatism is a politics of insight as well as vision; it names the horror that is heteropatriarchy and imagines a safer world for Lesbians. At the core of my Separatism is my commitment to loving myself and other Lesbians to the best of my ability. In order to do that, however, I've also had to commit myself to actively UNLEARNING the self-hatred I was taught from the time I was a child, and that self-hatred takes many forms, not all of them immediately apparent. Being a Separatist is also an energetic, dynamic politics

that requires constant alertness and evaluation. NOTHING in my life or in specific situations can be taken for granted; every decision, every impulse, every idea must be weighed, questioned, poked at. I must continue to reconstruct myself, emotionally as well as intellectually, or I risk stagnation and hypocrisy. Worse, I risk self-betrayal. If I fail to believe, each day, that I can be other than I am, if I cease to believe that I'm capable of redefining myself, then my commitment is without substance.

In contrast, the WLM has lost its early enthusiasm and the force of conviction has been drained from its rhetoric, which now echoes the bland, sluggish liberalism of the Democratic Party in the U.S. Certainly, one might have expected that the WLM would lose some of its early energy and enthusiasm with the passage of time, but that occurrence alone won't explain the simultaneous exhaustion of the mental resources of the movement's thinkers or the continued disintegration of its logic and coherence. Of course, one can point to notable exceptions, like *Pure Lust* by Mary Daly (Beacon, 1984) or *Right-Wing Women* by Andrea Dworkin (Putnams, 1983), but they've survived in spite of the WLM, not because of it, their analysis and perceptions undimmed by dreams of "a slice of the pie." Or, one could object to my observation by asserting that "times have changed and WLM has changed with the times," but that won't account for the continued decline of feminist businesses, the disappearance of wimmin-only spaces, the utter lack of interest in issues that don't include men as part of the agenda. In short, the once enthusiastic support for the spaces available only to wimmin and Lesbians and the politics that made **OUR** issues the central focus of our lives have dissolved, only sporadically revived by one group or another. (And even at such events there is an almost tangible aura of nostalgia.)

Is it possible that the world has changed so drastically in 15 years or that men have altered their attitudes and behaviors so radically that the analysis of radical feminism simply no longer applies, is no longer viable or meaningful in wimmin's lives? Did the "feminist revolution" come and go one night while I slept and I missed it? I doubt it. I cannot accept any of these possibilities as adequate explanations for the demise of radical feminism.

The erosion of radical feminism in the U.S. has been gradual, and time may prove that it was inevitable as well. Individual experiences may differ from mine, but each of us can, I think, supply examples of her own that illustrate equally well the processes of internal destruction. I'll describe my perception of what has happened as starkly as I can: During 1977, International Women's Year, the organizations and "leaders" of the U.S. WLM saw an opportunity to build a large political constituency, a movement of NUMBERS of women. The urge to count bodies, the belief that numbers is a more significant index of political strength than political consistency, required that feminism be made more palatable to women in general, but especially to the conventional, particularly housewives and others to whom the Eagle Forum had more appeal. Note that, when feminist

recruitment strategies were being formulated, it was never suggested that LESBIANS should be the focus of active recruitment. No. The concern has always been "attracting" heterosexual women into WLM. (In a sense, recruiting heterosexual women into the movement has served to recruit Lesbians, because so many wimmin shed the facade of heterosexuality once they're given permission to love themselves and other wimmin. Hence the felt "need" to continually find and bring in more heterosexuals as their numbers dwindle.)

Once the QUANTITY of bodies took precedence over the QUALITY of one's commitment, feminists wholly adopted the male definition of "politics," thereby committing the U.S. WLM to issues formulated within the context of heteropatriarchal political games. "Feminist politics" became identified with issues sanctioned by the male political framework, and, by focussing on the passage of the ERA to the exclusion of all other issues, feminists tied the fate of the WLM to the whim of male politicians and their female cohorts. Once bound to the limitations imposed by heteropatriarchal definitions of the "political," feminism as a politics independent of male concerns, could only evaporate.

Steadily, in bits and pieces, radicalism, and its proponents, have been silenced within the WLM as the media personalities (most visibly) set about to redefine and, thereby, dilute the very ideology on which the movement itself was founded and through which it has grown. The emphasis on female autonomy and independence from men is simply discounted; Lesbianism is trivialized and heterosexuality reaffirmed as equivalent "preferences," or Lesbianism is made invisible as one among many "alternate lifestyles"; being a feminist no longer means that one is pro-abortion. In short, any women can call herself a "feminist" if she wants to without having to change any of the assumptions she's grown up with and without seriously altering the structure of her life. (I realize that in many contexts, it's quite "daring" and "brave" to label oneself a "feminist," as nondescript and unthreatening as that word has become, but that fact indicates HOW MUCH we've lost.)

Feminists, in what is one of the grandest follies and delusions of our times (with the exception, perhaps, of heterosexuality itself), have undertaken to make feminist ideology "respectable," and set about the rather easy task of disavowing the radical analysis that has been the backbone of the WLM. Many non- and anti-feminists have been, of course, more than willing to help in this process, and the erasure of radical feminism as a presence, however marginal, in U.S. society has been accomplished with a minimum of noise. And, yes, radical feminists allowed this gutting of WLM to occur, but, in our defense, I must also point out that we have neither the numbers to outvote the reformers in floor battles nor the national media visibility that would enable us to present our protests to larger numbers of wimmin. Against the strength of their numbers, we have only the strength of our convictions. Against the range of their media appeal, we have only our irregular periodicals and (necessarily) limited and

confidential mailing lists. Against the funds available to liberal feminists, we have only what monies we can raise from our own pockets.

The results have been predictable. Some of us, at first, protested, but we were collectively and individually silenced. Feminism has become, very quickly, the new humanism of the twentieth century, indistinguishable in its political program from garden-variety liberalism. It is a movement that purposely and consciously betrayed its ideology, abandoned its principles, forgot its aims. Anyone can join; misogynists like Alan Alda and John Irving are celebrated as "feminists," and support, however tainted, is gleefully sought and accepted, from Mobil Oil, Virginia Slims, and the Playboy Foundation. Those of us impolite enough to challenge such "progressive" actions find ourselves isolated as "extremists." The values first articulated and accepted by early feminists are set aside as "idealistic," "unrealistic," or, insidiously, "anti-feminist." We have, indeed, sold out and been sold out. The values first articulated and acted upon by early feminists have been put aside; most importantly discarded were those aspects of feminist analysis which put wimmin and our issues **first**, the analysis which validates our experiences of oppression, enjoins us to act on our own behalf, an ideology which can teach us to value ourselves and other wimmin, **first**.

But along the way, "oppression" has been abstracted from its immediate social expression so that the agents of wimmin's oppression, men, can be pitied as the "victims" of their own power and dominance. The radical assertion that "The personal is the political" is twisted into the notion that anything and everything a woman does must be supported and validated regardless of its sources or ramifications. (This distortion has been criticized by other radical feminists, in particular by contributors to *Feminist Revolution* [Redstockings, 1975], but they attribute its proliferation, erroneously I believe, to "cultural feminists" [as opposed to "socialist feminists"]. They consider "dyke separatists" a sub-class of the "politically-misguided" cultural feminists.) To challenge a woman about her choices and decisions is said to be "unsisterly," and we are enjoined to accept without question the doctrine that no woman can be wrong. This distortion of "the personal is political" makes it impossible to challenge heteropatriarchal institutions like the family, marriage, and the heterosexual framework such institutions protect and perpetuate. If individual men aren't the oppressors of women, then heterosexual women can blithely continue their lives without having to think about WHY being heterosexual is so "preferable."

Once oppression is removed from its locus in common female experiences of violence at the hands of specific and identifiable males, the only logical agent for oppressing women is that vague entity "society." If "society" is responsible for oppressing women, one cay say, quite logically, that it also oppresses men. Somewhere in that "logical" sequence, the fact that men benefit from oppressing women in personal and economic ways disappears. By converting "the personal is the political" into the assertion that every woman's experience and perceptions

what? Or, more realistically, are we to interpret the assertion from the lips of such women as a claim that they feel as though men have given permission to become "persons"? I'm certain that many Radical Feminists, though the word *liberated* was adequately defined by the values of the ideology itself, but this cannot have been the case. If we'd been more careful with language and made explicit the suppressed agent of specific verbs, e.g. *oppressed, liberated*, in phrases like "All women are *oppressed* (BY WHOM), "I'm a *liberated* woman (BY WHOM? FROM WHAT? HOW?)," had we done so, say what we meant ALL the time, such misinterpretations and distortions of Feminist principles wouldn't have been so easy.

As soon as we were told that "men are oppressed too," "men are the victims of their oppressiveness," "feminism will liberate men as well as women," we should've known the consequences. Those who did, and said so, were heard like children talking out of turn, and then ignored. WHO, for example, "oppresses" men? Why, certainly, OTHER MEN (although book after book written by men asserts that women oppress men, as mothers, as wives, and claims that male misogyny originates in the mother/son relationship). Failure to specify the agents of oppression, to name those who benefit directly and personally from their oppression of women has made our political assertions so abstract and ambiguous that even the well-intentioned can, and do, misinterpret essential Feminist ideology. With men now among the ranks of the "oppressed" to be served by the "feminist" agenda, the reformers have successfully substituted neo-humanism for feminism. The patriarchy audibly sighs with relief, rushes one or two token women into politically visible positions, and calls it a day. The radical emphasis on the valuing of our experience, and the corollary commitment to seeing to it that OUR issues are dealt with first have been transformed into an acceptance of the worst of the patriarchal stereotypes: Woman as Mother, Woman as Nurturer, Woman as Spiritually Superior to Man. We played right into their hands and located our essential Selves in our wombs, making Feminism a political travesty.

TO BE CONTINUED: In Part II of "The Mystery of Lesbians," I discuss several confusions and distortions that have, I believe, helped to defuse feminist radicalism. I'm most excited about how sorting through specific ideological confusions has clarified for me my own commitment. Among the confusions I examine are: Motherhoodism, the substitution of "female" for "feminist" consciousness, liberal feminist demands for support without acknowledging the necessity to be responsible to the wimmin from whom they expect support, trusting men, and the investment metaphor, ENERGY IS MONEY, as a cover for political analysis. Along the way, I answer the non-question, "Can *heterophobia* be cured?"

Endnotes

[1] Lesbophobia in Mexico and South America is so severe and so overt that discovery of one's Lesbianism often has dire social consequences and can, too frequently, be fatal. I say this because the Lesbians who took me to the bar were being courageous in their gesture of sisterhood.

[2] Lesbian bars (and gathering places) do vary according to the economic class of the clientele the owners seek. A middle-to-upperclass bar, for example, the old Sahara in NYC, had carpeting, potted palms and other greenery, and couches and easy chairs for customers to sit in. Googie's, in contrast, was much like other working-class bars: wooden stools, tables, and chairs, and a bare floor, covered with a thin spattering of sawdust. I'm also ignoring here the fact that most "Lesbian" bars are owned by the Mafia, and it's the Mafia that profits from alcoholism among Lesbians. "Comfortable," then, is a relative term, and I use it here, without regard to what members of one class or another may find most "comfortable" for themselves, to mean that *I* feel comfortable as long as I'm within a space occupied by Lesbians and permeated with the animation of Lesbian energies, period.

[3] For my purposes here, I'll use a variety of spellings and terms for the female sex in an effort to signal the distinctions I wish to make among conflicting social/political categories as clearly and consistently as I can. Please bear with whatever discomfort you may experience as a result of such shuttling back and forth; the nature of this article requires some generalizing and, in an effort to avoid both overgeneralization and oversimplification, I decided to resort to these distinctions by using different terms and, in the case of wimmin/women, spellings to try and name, as specifically as I could, the groups to which I refer. I realize that it's difficult to go back and forth with these words and different spellings for them, and hope that the following explanations will make that process somewhat easier.

SEPARATIST: A Lesbian (virtually always) who believes that men, individually and collectively, oppress women, that every man benefits directly and indirectly, from birth, from the oppression of women, that the rule of men, patriarchy, is a social structure designed to perpetuate the subjugation of women and the dominance of men, and that all females must withdraw their energies from men and cease to nurture and take care of them if women's oppression is to cease.

LESBIAN: A womon whose primary sexual and emotional intimacies are shared, in any of many ways, in relationships with wimmin. Alix Dobkin quotes the definition proposed by Mary E. Hunt, "A Lesbian is a woman who is radically serious about loving women." (Thank you, Alix, for taking the time between concert tours to sit down and send me Mary's name and the accurate version of her definition!) What is significant to me is a womon's decision to act on her deepest and best feelings for wimmin, whatever the rewards may be for denying those feelings.

FEMINIST: A womon, Lesbian or non-Lesbian, who calls herself such; frequently modified here by *heterosexual* to acknowledge that some Lesbians call themselves *lesbian-feminist*, as I have in the past, and to indicate in the context that I'm talking about non-Lesbians specifically.

WOMON/WIMMIN. Used here somewhat optimistically to talk about females who [illegible] and to refute to those so named the *potential* for an unqualified political commit[illegible] destroying the heteropatriarchy, a Lesbian spelling convention in the U.S.

FEMALE. In spite of the fact that this term is derived from the French *femelle*, it was [illegible] manufactured in the 14th century by the Anglo-patriarchs so that it'd *look* as though it were derived from the base word *male*. I use it here as a generic term to refer to our biological sex and to distinguish between our biological sex, *female*, and the heteropatriarchal [illegible] *woman*. For this essential insight, I'm indebted to the writings of Monique Wittig and to arguments I've had with Ariane Brunet and Louise Turcotte, who maintain that going back to the early spellings of *woman* doesn't change its etymology *(wif + man)*.

WOMAN/WOMEN. I use the heteropatriarchal spelling here, following Monique Wittig and other Radical Lesbians, to designate females whose primary (and secondary and tertiary) allegiances, sexual, emotional, intellectual, political, and social, are to men and to heteropatriarchal values. See, for example, Wittig's article, "One is Not Born a Woman," (*Feminist Issues*, vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 1981) in which she pursues the implications of de Beauvoir's observation that women are made, not born. I realize that in the course of reading this article, you may feel my choices are sometimes inconsistent and that my usage of one term or spelling rather than another may appear whimsical at some. I assure you, however, that every choice has been weighed and debated in my own mind.

[4] The word dyke remains an insulting term to a majority of Lesbians in the U.S. because of the ways it has been used against us by men and women, but I've been called a "dyke," "bulldyke," and "diesel dyke" since I first started frequenting bars in Miami. Because I've never been able to "pass," *dyke* remains, for me, a primary term to name my strength and to congratulate myself for having lived so long. Rita Mae Brown, in *Sudden Death*, (Bantam, 1984, p. 189) makes the following snide (and false) distinction between dykes and Lesbians: "In this world there are Lesbians and dykes. The two have nothing in common. Lesbians are women who love women. Dykes are women who imitate men." Is comment or analysis necessary?

[5] Throughout this article, I use the label "Radical Feminist" to describe those feminists who were unwilling to settle for mere political reforms, who demanded a thorough restructuring of society, not just a handful of token women occupying positions in the male superstructure and acting like men, who identified the nuclear family as the essential cell in the heteropatriarchal body, and who sought, not just a piece of the pie for women, but an entirely different pie. The distinction I wish to suggest between "radical feminists" and "reform feminists" is similar to the detectable difference between meals cooked from scratch, in which only fresh ingredients are used, and those put together from frozen, or otherwise pre-packaged foodstuffs. Both methods of cooking will result in a meal, but the former requires time, care, watchfulness, and the expenditure of considerable energy, while the latter requires more money but less time, care, and energy. Which method produces the better meal? The answer depends on what we're willing to eat.

[6] I'd like to point out here that sexual behaviors involving sado-masochistic rituals, scat orgies, and golden showers have been around for a long time, and, although Lesbians

didn't invent them, have been the common preference of a few Lesbians for as long as I know of. S&M among Lesbians isn't new, and would hardly deserve comment if its practitioners hadn't insisted upon also calling themselves "feminists." Sado-masochism provides another example of the ways feminist values have been eroded and diluted until it's embarrassing to try and talk about feminist "values" in any context.

With only a few exceptions (to the best of my knowledge), those Lesbians who persist in identifying themselves as "gay" do so for a good reason. Pat Califia, for example, prefers to call herself "gay," thereby making a political statement about the system of values she chooses to live by. Gayle Rubin, who also identifies as "gay," does so because she advocates pederasty as an expression of "children's rights." Lesbians who refuse to abandon xtianity and involve themselves in groups like MCC, Dignity, and the like appropriately prefer to call themselves "gay." The label "gay" designates a Lesbian's decision to identify herself with male issues, male institutions, and male descriptions of the world. As long as we label ourselves honestly, in ways that accurately describe the values we choose to live by, we'll avoid a lot of misunderstanding and unnecessary pain.

[7] Much of what I say here about the exclusion of male children from wimmin's space as a pseudo-issue is based on a more thorough analysis by Anna Lee. For example, something she discusses that I don't mention is the assumption of superiority inherent in the claims of wimmin who insist on raising sons. Such wimmin assert that they're raising sons with the purpose of teaching them to be "nonsexist and nonoppressive to women"; their justification for nurturing boys is, "If I don't do it, who will?" This assertion, however, as Anna Lee points out, assumes that the mothers of sons who've preceded contemporary mothers either DIDN'T try to raise sons who wouldn't rape or otherwise abuse women or DID TRY and failed. Whatever the assumptions of such claims, these women presume to be capable of accomplishing a feat that generations of other mothers have failed at. Unfortunately, her article on the subject, "The Tired Old Question of Male Children," isn't easy to get, although it's accepted for the still-unpublished anthology on Lesbian Separatism co-edited by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and me.

[8] The ways the words *trust* and *trustworthy* are used in the WLM could occupy an article of their own. Here, I'd like to point out how the contexts of their use reveal the kinds of semantic distortion we associate with doubletalk. Dictionaries frequently offer *faith*, *confidence*, *reliance*, and *dependence* as synonyms of the noun *trust*, but converting such nouns into verb phrases demonstrates how very different these "synonyms" are. We can say, for example, that we "have faith *in* someone," "are confident *of* something or someone's ability," or we can talk about how "we rely on someone" or "depend upon them." What such expressions have in common is the concept that the person or thing spoken of won't fail in *performance* (from *American Heritage Dictionary*). The editors of the *AHD* go on to comment: "When acceptance of someone or something is unquestioning and emotionally charged, *faith* is the . . . appropriate term. *Confidence* suggests less intensity of feeling but, frequently, good evidence for being sure. *Reliance* implies a decision to commit oneself to another and to accept the consequences in case of failure; with *dependence* the commitment *is not a free choice*." (My emphasis.) *Trust*, in contrast, "implies depth and assurance" of someone else's strength or ability to perform, without

implying that the assurance can always be supported by proof. Underlying our use of these words is some relative degree of "provability," and they can be ranked in descending order on the basis of the necessity of proof, i.e. *confidence, trust, reliance,* with *faith* and dependence at the bottom. Thus, although we frequently hear of ourselves or another womon/lesbian that "you/she can't be trusted," which means, I think, that we've been judged and found "wanting," even though proof of reliability isn't a prerequisite for trust. In such cases, it would be more appropriate to say that one doesn't "have confidence in so-and-so," which points more explicitly to our behaviors and actions in our dealings with each other as well as implying that evidence for the judgment is available.

Talking about the trustworthiness of other Lesbians or wimmin really constitutes a thinly-disguised personal attack on the character and intentions of an individual without requiring, on the part of the speaker, any justification for the assertion. Furthermore, if our judgments are said to be based on "trust," we obscure the very sources for our judgments. As Kate Moran (personal conversation, Oct. 12, 1984, Lincoln, Nebraska) has pointed out to me, many "liberal feminists," speaking of another womon as "untrustworthy," are really saying that she isn't "reliable," i.e. that they aren't willing to take the chance that she might "fail" to meet their expectations. Reliability includes an element of predictability; if we want to rely on someone for something, we also want to be able to predict what they'll do in specific situations. In the WLM, the element of predictability came down to knowing the politics of other wimmin, knowing "where they were coming from." This kind of predictability required only consistency between the politics a womon claimed to believe and her actions; that is, we accepted her political characterization of herself. As long as she behaved consistently in terms of her politics, she could be trusted; we knew where she'd stand on a given issue. Judgments about the "trustworthiness" of a womon were, then, made on the basis of the *internal consistency* of what she defined for herself. One might not agree with, or like, or approve of another womon's politics, but predictibility meant that she could be "trusted." We knew what to expect in specific situations.

But predictability and consistency have now been equated with conformity of behavior and political belief by those talking about the relative "trustworthiness" of other wimmin: in order to be judged as "trustworthy," one must now conform to the politics espoused by whatever group one wishes to be trusted by. Judgments about "trust" are made on the basis of *external consistency,* adherence to the political "line" deemed most expedient or fashionable at the time. Among reform feminists, for example, Lesbians can be trusted as long as we agree to remain invisible, as long as we don't insist that heterosexuals deal with their heterosexism. Among socialist feminists, we can be trustsed as long as we "support their "choice" to make their allegiances to male communities more important than whatever commitment they might be willing to make to us. In both cases, the wimmin insisting upon conformity to their demands want us to assume that they're "trustworthy" enough for us to ignore what we want and accept their priorities as our own. Having substituted external consistency, conformity, for internal consistency, reliability, contemporary "feminist" groups spend more time trying to coerce agreement in their ranks and dealing with the resulting pain and anger than they do fighting against the patriarchy. Again, psychobabble, the rhetoric of "trust," helps to thicken the ideological muck we throw around.

[9] See endnote 8 on the word *dependent;* in her article, Ehrenreich asks us to support her in her "choice" to remain "dependent" on male communities. In order to do this, we must ignore the fact that "dependency" isn't a *free choice.*

[10] The Combahee River Statement appears in *This Bridge Called My Back,* eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Persephone Press, 1981) and in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men but Some of Us are Brave,* eds. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Feminist Press and Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982) as well as in other publications.

Many of the observations in this article aren't my own, and I'm indebted to many Separatists, especially the contributors to the anthology on Separatism co-edited by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and me, for their insight and clarity. Doreen Worden and Isabel Andrews, for example, have responded much more adequately to the Statement of the Combahee River Collective in their article, "In Defense of Lesbian Separatism: A Response to the Combahee River Collective Statement on Lesbian Separatism," first published in *Voices: A Survival Manual for Wimmin* (December, 1981).

That more Lesbians aren't aware of their article, (and many others), can, I think, be attributed to the fact that articles by Separatists are systematically rejected by mainstream "feminist" magazines and newspapers because those editors believe that the less said about Separatism the better. Which, from their point of view, is probably true. Because articles by Separatists are routinely rejected by journals and newsletters that have large readerships, a womon would have to have access to countless small, local newsletters and irregular periodicals in order to find out that Separatism exists. The rejection slip has been a powerful weapon in efforts to silence Separatists and our sympathizers, because it's hard to get mainstream editors to take responsibility for their actions in an outfront manner. We have no way of knowing how many pro-Separatist articles and letters are unpublished every year, although we hear, through the grapevine, that such-and-such a journal turned down so-and-so's article on Separatism or some aspect of Separatist analysis.

Why Men Oppress Women*

Jeanette Silveira

This paper presents a comprehensive theory of why men oppress women, why they do so in the present, why they have in the past, and under what conditions they will do so in the future. The analysis is materialist in spirit (!) and even Marxist in method, but the conclusions are quite opposed to those of current Marxists. The basic argument is that reproduction, women's ability to bear and nurse children, because of its central importance to the economy, places women and men in an inescapable class conflict with each other. "Class conflict" is here intended in the strict Marxist sense of the term. After discussing briefly the role of reproduction in pre-industrial economies, I turn to a more detailed analysis of the evolution of the relations of reproduction in the industrial economy. The key to making sense out of what can seem a contradictory set of economic relations between women and men is understanding the interlocking relationships between reproduction, housework, and women's wage labor. The final section of the paper weaves together two themes: The possible futures predicted by the analysis, and the place of lesbians in the economy—present and future. The theory attempts to provide lesbians with a solid theoretical base for understanding who we are in space and time. Lesbians are, I believe, the future of women, we are what women are becoming.

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*This is the latest version of a paper which has been evolving over the last 12 years. (Each version seems to resolve the questions of the prior version and then to create a new set of questions, a new beginning.) The major contribution to the paper has been the intellectual vigor of feminism in the early 70s, when our ideas were bouncing off each other so fast no one woman's name could be attached to them. Just recently the group discussion during the October *Lesbian Ethics* salon focussed the current revision, Meda Rebecca buoyed my confidence with hers in the paper, Lise Weil's comments helped tighten the paper, and Julia Penelope's paper in this issue reminded me to change the title from "Why Women Are Oppressed" to the active voice of the current title.

I
Reproduction

The cause of women's oppression is reproduction, surely. The specialization of women's bodies to bear and nurse children is the only biological sex difference significant to the economy and to society more generally.

Feminist theory has not, in my view, kept its focus sufficiently on reproduction. The wavering is understandable, feminists have avoided biological explanations of sexism for at least two good reasons. For one thing, reference to biology suggests that something intrinsic to women's nature is inferior to men's; if we are not intellectually and spiritually inferior, we are at least physically impaired. What's worse, this inferior aspect, being biological, seems immutable, and women appear doomed to oppression forever. With no one to blame but our bodies. And, of course, men are always pushing biology, because it lets them off the hook. "It's not my fault, dear. It's your biology. Sorry."

Second, an emphasis on biology can appear to strengthen the conventional view that women and men are different castes rather than different economic classes. Castes are social groups which are defined by a hereditary or biological difference and between which social stratification and prejudice have developed. If one believes in the primacy of economic forces, caste oppressions look like a relatively ineffective place to put one's political energy. Prejudice appears as an aberration, a sickness engendered by a destructive and exploitive economic system. Only after basic features of the economy are changed, say those on the left, can other divisions between people be eradicated. Women are exhorted to put sexism on the back burner and work on "the primary problem." Feminists are women who cannot do this, thank goddess.

The theory presented here removes both these causes for feminist reluctance to focus on reproduction. I argue that, in the case of women and men, because of the important role reproduction plays in the economy, the biological difference is not a caste but an economic class difference. I argue, further, that childbearing is not an impediment but a source of great economic and social power, and that women's history is in large measure the history of the struggle with men for the control of this power.

Previous Feminist Theories

While they have spent most of their discussions on issues other than childbearing, at least three feminist theorists have identified childbearing as the cause of sexism. Childbearing conceived, however, as a negative biological factor, as a weakness. Shulamith Firestone (1970) argues that originally pregnancy and nursing were so physically debilitating that they inherently deprived women of sources of social power. Such an argument, however, presupposes a sexist system which devalues what women do. Also,

anthropological and primate studies indicate that pregnant and nursing women can and do take active roles in economic and social life. As I've said I am going to argue the reverse of Firestone, that pregnancy and nursing were sources of great social power.

Simone DeBeauvoir (1953) says that pregnancy is inherently nontranscendent, it sacrifices the individual to the life of the species. In the past, women were biologically alienated from our human individuality, biologically deprived of the decision to risk, the decision through which men created their own humanity in the hunt, in war, etc. For this reason women lost the initial battle of the sexes, we were forced to accept men's view of us as the Other, because we could not create ourselves as fully human. While I would agree that pregnancy is inherently alienating, so is the necessity to spend so much time producing material necessities. Death is the ultimate human contradiction, and both kinds of labor are lesser forms. Pregnancy is indeed nontranscendent when women are deprived of the decision to risk; but I submit that the deprivation has always been social rather than biological.

Ti-Grace Atkinson's (1970) argument includes elements found in both Firestone and DeBeauvoir. In seeking relief from the insecurity and frustration inherent in human existence, men have appropriated women's existence, they have succeeded in defining us as extensions and functions of themselves. This absorption, which Atkinson calls "metaphysical cannibalism," was possible because women were weakened by the physical burden of pregnancy.

Firestone sees test-tube babies as the only solution to the impediment of pregnancy. DeBeauvoir, on the other hand, believes that in industrialized countries at least, health care, birth control, and the need to limit population have eliminated the negative aspects of pregnancy. On this issue I agree with DeBeauvoir. Even if pregnancy was once an impediment, which I doubt, it no longer is. In all three theories, then, sexism is an outmoded prejudice, a frustratingly resistant holdover that must be fought everywhere and can be cornered nowhere. Later I do propose that test-tube babies are part of the solution, but I do so for different reasons than Firestone.

Suppose Women Controlled Our Bodies...

To see reproduction clearly, we need to see that reproduction is a socio-economic activity and that there are choices about how to do it. What would an egalitarian control of reproduction be like? Both women and men would have complete control of our bodies. Women would decide whether or not we wished to conceive, carry the baby to term, or breast feed. Men whether or not they wished to impregnate. Neither sex would be coerced physically, economically or socially into reproduction. Such a situation would give women considerable power, from at least two sources. The first source is the emotional and religious allegiance to the creative force embodied in women as childbearers. The second

source is the control of the birth rate and population size. The first has been with people since we were capable of allegiance, emotion, and awe. The second came into play when population growth became significant to the economy, that is, with the advent of war and agriculture.

Looking at the first source, there are several reasons to believe that the tie between women and children would be stronger than the tie between men and children, and women would thus have the power which comes from the allegiance of the next generation. Breast-feeding, necessary in most times and places, would build the tie between nurse and child, particularly if it were accompanied by other forms of child-care. There is also the social and psychological power women would derive from the salience of biological motherhood relative to biological fatherhood. The limit case here is those earlier societies in which the roles of intercourse and sperm in conception were not understood. The existence of the individual and the species is created and nurtured in the bodies of women. The awe in which motherhood was formerly held and the male struggles to build a counteracting ritual and ideology have been documented in many places, e.g., Davis, 1971; Diner, 1973; Hays, 1964; Stannard, 1970. When Marge Piercy in her future society in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1980) used non-womb reproduction, gave children three parents, and had men nurse babies, she was reducing the power advantage which childbearing gives mothers and thereby reducing the possibility of male backlash.

As for the second source of power, since women would not only share control of conception with men but would also have sole control over abortion and breast-feeding, women would have more control than men over the birth rate and thus more of the power that comes from that control. The birth rate affects the size of the labor force, the size of the army, the standard of living, and the relative power of classes within the system and of the system with its neighbors. In a labor intensive economy, the probability of conflict between women and men would be high. Since pregnancy is a risk to life and health, women would have a stronger motive to limit reproduction and to reproduce only after careful weighing of the benefits to ourselves.

What I am saying is that egalitarian control of reproduction would give women power so extensive that a society continuing on this course would become woman-dominated rather than egalitarian. Men, subordinated or threatened with subordination, would then be motivated to seize control of the means of reproduction, who are women. In fact matriarchy or patriarchy have been the only choices, equality has not been possible. Women and men are natural enemies. Obviously, thoughts such as these lead me to take seriously the evidence for matriarchies and amazons. Even if matriarchies and amazons are myths, they are still evidence of the dynamic which creates sexism. Evidence of women's and men's awareness that reproduction gives women potential power and that women's inferiority is itself a myth.

The issues I'm raising here are seldom discussed in sufficient depth, because of the assumption, fostered by male propaganda and widely held in heterosexual society despite the evidence to the contrary, that there is a high, biologically given rate of heterosexual intercourse leading to conception. This assumption has prevented full consideration of the sexes' struggle for the control of reproduction. Even Elizabeth Gould Davis (1971) and Helen Diner (1973), strong matriarchists, assume that women naturally seek frequent intercourse. From most people the question, "Why do women have babies?" produces snickers, not analysis. Discussions are of "society's" "technical" struggle with biology. If "society" needs to increase its population, the problem is to improve health care and food supplies. If "society" needs to reduce its population, the problem is to find the technology which will "separate sex from reproduction" or to impose social restrictions on the biological given of intercourse.

As lesbians know, sex has always been separate from reproduction. Even when we have not had the means of separating intercourse from reproduction, means such as the diaphragm and abortion, we have had the means of separating sex from intercourse. There are several kinds of satisfying sex besides intercourse and several kinds of people to do them with. Some of these alternatives are more satisfying to most women than intercourse, nor is it clear that they are less satisfying to most men than intercourse. As Ti-Grace Atkinson (1968) argued, intercourse and conception are social, and I would specify economic, institutions. It is not just variations in social structures surrounding intercourse and conception, variations in structures such as the family, it is the existence of intercourse and conception as economic and political institutions that must be explained.

Gatherers and Farmers

The argument thus far is supported by what we know of pre-industrial economies. My discussion of these economies relies greatly on Elizabeth Fisher (1979), and is in particular aided by her argument that the advent of agriculture was a major and disastrous event in women's history.

The earliest people were gatherer hunters. They lived off the land, either as nomads or settled in caves and small villages. Archeological evidence as well as observations of present gatherer hunters tell us that their lives were good. Gathering and hunting provided an excellent diet with a low investment of labor even in apparently sparse environments. Population size was relatively steady. A woman had 4 to 5 children in her life, spaced about 4 years apart, the first child coming not until 4 or so years after menarche and the start of sexual activity. Nursing of each child for 4 or more years functioned as a form of birth control. (Nursing reduces the probability of ovulation; also among some gatherer hunters there is a taboo against intercourse while a woman is nursing.) Abortion and infanticide were also used, and the decision was the mother's. Among recent

gatherer hunters studied by women anthropologists (Goodale, 1971; Kaberry, 1939) the primary reason the women gave for attempted abortion was avoiding the pain of childbirth. Infanticide was common, ranging from 15 to as high as 50% of births; reasons, in addition to the healthiness of the infant, were the burdens of carrying and caring for the child. To what extent early peoples had effective means of birth control and abortion is not known. Fisher believes that the causal connection between intercourse and pregnancy was not understood; if she is correct, then sperm blocking methods of birth control would not have been developed.

There is a wide variety of relations between the sexes among recent gatherer hunters. Bamberger (1974) describes tribes widely distributed over South America in which the men are intensely misogynist and paranoid. Men oppress and control women with a combination of strategies including physical terrorism, gang rape, murder, mythology, male ceremony and secret ritual, men's lodges and male solidarity. Among other tribes in which men have secret societies and ritual, the Australian Aborigines, for example, the mythology seems more defensive and imitative of women. The famous subincision rites of the Aborigines clearly attempt to transform the penis into the vagina and the vulva, those mysterious organs which bleed but do not die. In still other gatherer hunters, such as the Tasaday of the Philippines and the !Kung and Pygmies of Africa, relations between the sexes are egalitarian and cordial, without such compensating male rituals.

In other words, in societies where a high birth rate and population growth are not desirable, a variety of adaptations to the biological difference between the sexes can and do occur. At some particular point in time, presumably, specific conditions set each tribe on its unique path, which has then been nurtured and adapted by the descendents. Male backlash, male resentment of women's awe-inspiring powers, always has the potential to create a society in some degree misogynist. Indeed it is worth noting that there have been no known matriarchal societies in which men have been seriously oppressed by women. The reason, I think, is that women did not need to develop exaggerated monopolies of power, because we began with the authority which accrued to us through childbearing.

Farming was the first major change from the gathering and hunting economy. The development of farming required the coming together of several factors: 1) An understanding of the role of intercourse and the testicles in reproduction. We are not sure when and how this understanding arose, but it is necessary for animal breeding; the knowledge also makes effective birth control possible. 2) The development of farming methods, including plowing, irrigation and draught animals. 3) Sharp increases in population to provide the needed farm labor.

Fisher has several important and surprising things to say about farming. Agriculture is not the cause of population growth; rather, growth is essential to farming, which is labor intensive. Farming was not developed in lush areas but

rather in more barren regions where cultivation could provide needed food not otherwise available. Fisher's hypothesis is that when some nomads settled down in small villages, the sedentary life resulted in a population increase, small but sharp enough to provide the labor for some farming. Farming itself, however, changed the ecology in such a way that gathering and hunting were less productive. Farming and population growth would then have leapfrogged with each other. As people became more dependent on farming, higher pregnancy and birth rates become necessary. What's more, each development in farming was more labor intensive than the last. In addition the diet was declining in variety and nutritional value. Essentially, more people were eating less well (semi-starving in fact), living for shorter periods (thus increasing the demand for a higher birth rate), and working much harder than their ancestors.

Fisher describes how farming in turn led to the development of cities, usually said to begin with Sumer 5000 years ago, and to a rigidly hierarchical society. In a system dependent on farming, private property becomes not only possible but important; stored grains are hedges against natural disasters and famines, farm animals (and women) are essential productive property. Society evolved in several stages from a collective and communal structure to a hierarchical, bureaucratic, male state, in which warring and raids on neighbors were major occupations and in which the few acquired private property from the overworked and starving bottom classes.

For women the development of farming was devastating. As the very knowledge necessary to develop birth control was being acquired, the farming and war economies were developing strong needs for sharp increases in population. When given real choices women simply do not become frequently pregnant. Men's solution to this conflict was to suppress women in order to control reproduction. Once the male state and bureaucracy had developed, it instituted the patriarchal family as an efficient way to control women's childbearing. At the beginning of Sumer, both women and men could have several spouses and could divorce freely. At the end of the Sumerian period, some 1700 years later, a man could divorce a wife freely without any further financial responsibility, while a woman was to be stoned to death for taking a second husband. A woman who attempted abortion was to be impaled on a stake and left unburied, and a husband could split his wife's ears for going out with her head uncovered.[1]

II
Industrialization

In order to present my analysis of industrialization, I need first to take you on a short trip through Marxism, though Marxism as perhaps you have not seen it before.

Suppose Marx Had Been a Lesbian...

I like to think that if Marx had been a woman and a feminist and a lesbian, she would have been enthusiastic about this paper. The core ideas emerged originally in the conclusion to an extensive critique of Marxist analyses of women's condition (Silveira, 1975). (I thought if I could put the obvious down on paper, those socialist feminists would understand it!) The basic inadequacy of Marxism is that it analyzes only a small part of the economy, that occupied by white European males. The analytical tools themselves are powerful and beg to be applied to those parts of the economy where all the rest of us are. This paper does part of that job. Though few if any Marxists would claim my conclusions, I do want to outline here the Marxist influences on this paper.

For one thing I do accept the primacy of economic forces. That is, I concentrate on economic analysis because I believe that economic factors have a stronger determining effect on politics, law, religion, education, science, art and psychology than all these do on economics. An important part of the mystifying screen the patriarchy weaves around sexism is that "women's problems" are personal, psychological, emotional, private, and non-economic. Even those of us who know better can fall into the trap and find ourselves arguing that non-economic factors are important as way of arguing that women's issues are important. We can even sometimes fall into the trap of agreeing that women's issues are not important. For example, in the April 1984 *WomaNews* we find the headline, "Salvadoran Women Battle Dire Poverty, Sexism a Secondary Concern." When we said *the personal is political*, we meant that what the patriarchy calls personal is in fact a political system. The personal is political. The personal is also economic. Women are outside an analysis of the economy, but we are inside the economy. On the bottom.

I am particularly fond of the logic of Marx's version of class analysis. It cuts through the verbiage to ask, simply, what exchange relations do you enter into in order to get the means of subsistence? All the people who take the same part in the same exchange relation belong to the same class. If the exchange is unequal, there is exploitation. That is, if you give out more than you get back you are exploited. If you are exploited, you can also expect to be oppressed in a whole range of non-economic areas such as law, politics, education, religion, science and the arts. Exploitive exchange relations cause class conflict and eventually revolution. This Marxist concept of "class" is different from and a lot more precise than our everyday use of the term to convey differences in income, education, and occupation. The definition is a structural one: A description of the classes is also a description of the structure of the economic system. Different economic systems, through history or around the world, are distinguished by their different class structures.

Let's look now at an example, the exchange relation between the industrial worker and the capitalist. Actually, we have no choice, this is the only relation

Marx analyzed in depth. A few people, the capitalist class, own the raw materials, the factories, and the goods produced in the factories. The great majority of people own only their own labor power. Many of these workers, the proletariat, rent their labor power to the capitalist in return for wages. With these wages they buy the means of subsistence, products of their own labor, from the capitalist. These commodities are used to reproduce their labor power and to raise the next generation of workers. (Do you think we're skipping over something there?) The capitalist combines the rented labor power with the raw materials and machinery to produce commodities. With money from the sale of these commodities they buy their own means of existence, more materials and machines, and more labor power. The relationship between the proletariat and the capitalist is an exploitive one. The capitalist insures that the worker adds more value to the product than they receive back in wages. It is exploited labor, materialized as profits, which maintains the capitalist's high standard of living and which is invested into expanded means of production. The worker is forced into the most vicious and destructive of positions, depleting themself to strengthen their enemy. This self-regeneration of exploitive exchange relations is one of their most essential and important features.

Finally, and most important, I am indebted to two feminist Marxists, Margaret Benston and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, for sparking two of the core ideas in this paper. Benston (1969) was one of the first during the current phase of the women's movement to call attention to the fact that the Marxist-defined classes do not contain many women and one of the first to turn our attention to housework as the place where many women are. Benston emphasizes that women do essential and important labor, and that we do it without pay. She goes even further, she says "... women as a group do have a definite relation to the means of production and ... this is different from that of men." I was excited when I read that sentence, because it is only a teeny step from there to the statement that *women and men are classes in the Marxist sense*. Benston, however, does not take this step and, thus, does not see two major flaws in her argument. First, although she asserts that housewives are exploited, she does not define their exchange relations and thus cannot demonstrate that they are exploited. The best she can offer is that housewives are devalued because they are not paid for their work, but housewives suffer more concrete oppressions than what others think of them. Second, as are most definitions of economic classes, her description of the housewife is sex-neutral. That is, there is nothing in her description of housework, cooking and cleaning, etc., that requires the worker to be a woman. As there is nothing in the definition of the proletariat or the capitalist that requires the members to be male. Housework illustrates the difficulty economic theories get into when they try to explain the oppression of biologically defined groups, such as women, people of color, the young or the old. Why *are* housewives women, anyway?

Dalla Costa (1973), in a wonderfully fiery paper, shows us the direction of the answer, although she too refuses to go all the way. Dalla Costa draws our attention to the parts of the capitalist production cycle that we sensed were skipped over in the above description. To persist, any production cycle must reproduce itself, from day to day and from generation to generation, and it is women who are the reproducers. Women reproduce the labor force, from day to day through housework, and from generation to generation through childbearing and childcare. There is a glaring gap in Marxism where the analysis of reproduction should be. Men may find themselves in industrialized production, but as theorists they must be able to see beyond factory walls and to follow their analysis to its logical conclusions. That requires that they see into their own homes, where their own dinner does not materialize itself upon the table.

Dalla Costa, then, has solved part of the sex-neutral problem. Only women can be in a class of childbearers. We have now only to understand why the childbearers also do housework. Dalla Costa, however, does not see that she is defining a new class; she insists that housewives really work for the capitalist and are part of the proletariat. It just won't wash: The housewife does not work for the capitalist, who pays her nothing, but for the husband and children, who own the product of her labor, their own labor power. And if the housewife were a member of the proletariat, Dalla Costa would not be able to explain why women (as housewives) were more exploited than men (as factory workers). Why *do* men oppress women, anyway?

The step that Benston and Dalla Costa do not take, and indeed the step that would surely cause their expulsion from the society of Marxists, is to state that women and men are in a class conflict with each other. I do not see how we can avoid this step, even if we would want to. Once we see that childbearing is an economic activity, we have the economic base of sexism. Women's bodies are means of production. Labor is labor. One way to state what I am trying to prove to you in this paper, and particularly in the remainder of this section on industrialization, is this: *Women are a class in the Marxist sense and are exploited in exchange relations with men, who are also a class in the Marxist sense.*

The "working class woman" and the "working class man" do not exist; that is, the people referenced do not belong to the same class. "*The* working class" does not exist. Neither does "*the* middle class. We should not use these terms; their use continually reinforces the assumption, which most of us would recognize as an error if we thought about it, that women and men can have the same economic position. A related error is the phrase "working woman," which implies that women who do not earn wages do not work. To rid our language of these terms is essential and requires courage and intellectual rigor. How delighted I am to read Dworkin (1983) referring to "the sex-class system." *Sexism is classism.*

By saying that women are a class in relation to men, I do not mean to say that all women are in the same class in relation to each other. There are class differences among women as there are among men. The economic class system is multi-dimensional. It is way past time to surrender the simplistic "working, middle, upper" litany. A major area which this paper marks out for future theoretical work is the development of this long overdue multi-dimensional class analysis.

Women are always poorer, always earn less, always work harder, eat less, starve sooner than men. These are qualitative not quantitative differences, these are class differences. At the base of all this, I am saying, is pregnancy, is childbearing, nursing, and childcare. At the bottom are women's bodies, manufacturing labor power.

The Evolution of Housework under Industrialization

To see how reproduction has ensnared women in our present complex economic situation, it works best to look first at how women's work—wage labor and housework, has evolved under industrialization.

Industrialization developed in England from the 1400's through the 1700's. The first textile factories appeared in the early 1800's. Over the preceding seven centuries (700 to 1400) England had gone through a process not unlike that described earlier for Sumer. A tribal society had been replaced by a male authoritarian state, which had in turn instituted the patriarchal family (Hartmann, 1976). Male farmers or artisans, as heads of families, possessed their wives and children and all the products of their labor, including any wages they earned. Among the more well-to-do, things could be even worse for women. The nursing of infants was farmed out to women of lower strata, and the wives of the elite became more purely breeders.

> In England, Ann Fanshawe bore twenty-one children in the twenty-three years and twenty-nine days during which her marriage lasted. Her childbearing career was brought to a close only by the death of her husband in 1666.... The composer Pleyel...was one of forty-some children of his father...Enrico Caruso was the fifteenth child of his mother, the first to survive. (Fisher, 1979, 389).

Industrialization required overturning the older agricultural socioeconomic order. The first workers in the factories, in the U.S. as well as in England, were women and children. Men, who had more powerful and central positions in the old order, were able to maintain themselves outside the factories for a longer time.

There is a general principle here which deserves attention. Any rebellion against the established order mobilizes the people with the least investment in that order. If the old order is patriarchal, then the rebellion will mobilize women and children. Thus we see women and children fighting in leftist revolutions past

and present; but if the revolution is successful, women's gains are gradually dismantled. Women are also used by rebellions from the right, e.g., Phyllis Schlafly, the women who beat their pots and pans in the streets during the overthrow of Allende in Chile, or the women who fought with Khomeini's forces. New religions are often started by women or quickly find women adherents. Christianity, for example, was sexually egalitarian for the first few hundred years.

Eventually, as small farms were taken over and accumulated into large land holdings and as industry took over the manufacture of commodities, capitalism eroded men's power base outside the factories so extensively that men had to enter the industrial labor force in large numbers. The union movement was the male struggle to push women and children and, in the U.S., men of color out of industrial jobs. The male protectionist nature of the union movement has been well documented by Hartmann (1976) and Falk (1973). Exclusion of women from unions, and from the wage labor force if possible, was often an explicit goal of male unions. "Protective" labor legislation limiting women's and children's working hours was part of this strategy, and the feminists who opposed it (only a few did) were essentially correct. The truly progressive thing to do, of course, would have been to legislate decent working hours and conditions for all adults and to include all adult workers in the unions. As it was, women's alleged protection became another pretense for not hiring women and for paying women lower wages than men. And union membership became a far better protection for wage earning men than protective laws could ever have been. The sanctimonious "working people's struggle" mantle around the union movement is a lie, and feminists should pull the covers at every opportunity.

What the male worker won through the union movement, by the early 1900s, was the family wage. That is, he won from the capitalists a wage sufficient to support not only himself but a wife and children. A Marxist would say that men own labor power, rented to the capitalist for its value, which is the value of all the commodities and labor necessary to reproduce it. A man is paid enough to marry a housewife, or to eat out and send his clothes to the cleaners. Men do not have to do the labor of reproducing themselves so they can go back to work the next day. In these terms, *women do not own labor power.* We earn 64 cents for every dollar a man earns. Women's jobs, such as secretary, pay less than do men's jobs, such as groundskeeper or garage attendant, which require far less education and skill. Women, with few exceptions, do not make enough to hire maids or eat out. As housewives and/or as wage laborers, women do the labor involved in the daily replenishing of ourselves.

The least advantage a man gets out of the family wage is more free time than women. If he has a housewife, however, he can extract even more surplus. A housewife's labor can substitute for commodities; and the more housework she does, the more of his wage the man keeps. The man can use his surplus time and money for leisure and hobbies. He also can and does use the surplus in the

variety of ways which maintain men's control of the money economy. He uses it to increase the value of his labor power through education and training (called putting hubby through school), he "capitalizes" it by starting his own business, he uses it to do the union and political work which protects men's interests. During the last century, while men were meeting in bars to form unions, women (excluded from bars, interestingly enough) were working 12–14 hours in the factory and then going home to do the cooking and sewing.

What I am saying is that the well known sex differences in the economy are structural. They are due to a classic exploitive exchange relation between women and men. Men and not women own labor power. To own labor power is to be paid enough to obtain a housewife whom one can then exploit. With the surplus from this exploitation, men control women's access to money and thus force us to continue doing housework. When women's wages are only enough for the material necessities, we do not have the time and money men have to invest in labor power. When there are fewer jobs for women than men, women have even less time, because many of us, wage earners or not, are coerced into the "security" of marriage and are doing men's housework as well as our own. With that housework, women reproduce men's control over the money economy.

Bringing It All Together: Reproduction under Industrialization

The above description of the housework system is fine as far as it goes. There are, however, two very interesting questions left. The first one is, why did the capitalists accede to the family wage? Marxists are fond of saying that sexism and housework are in the interests of capitalism. Since capitalism is known to be the main source of evil, of course the other evils must be caused by it, and the theorist's task is only to construct the argument that leads to the known conclusion. A more objective look reveals ways in which the family wage, housework, and sexism are not in the capitalists' interests at all. If women had an equal position with men in the wage labor force and if far fewer women were doing housework for men, competition for jobs would be greater, wages would be lower and more "rationally" related to the skills required, male workers would have fewer resources with which to extract higher wages from industry, and great new business opportunities would be opening in the area of industrialized housework services. Why have the capitalists given all this up?[2]

The second question is, how does childbearing fit into the picture? I've said that housewives are women because housework includes childbearing, yet my description of the current exchange relations between women and men has said nothing about children. The answer to these two questions is going to tie everything together. Perhaps you can already see the end of the argument.

First, however, it is time to stop talking as though our analysis applied only to capitalist countries. Although industrialization first developed in a capitalist

setting, I can see no theoretically significant differences between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. or China in the areas of housework and reproduction. The three groups we have been discussing are women, the more privileged male wage laborers, and the ruling elite of the male authoritarian industrialized state. However much the countries may differ on other major issues, the reproductive issues confronting women, the more privileged male wage laborers, and the male ruling elite are essentially the same in each of the major powers and their industrialized satellites.

To complete our analysis now, we need to look at reproduction, which has been in a conflicted state since the beginning of industrialization. In the pre-industrial system, children, and therefore mothers, were a considerable economic resource for the average man. Both were productive property, owned by him and supported by him when necessary. Upon separation of the parents custody of the children was always given to the father. In the industrial system a wide network of family ties is still an economic resource for the ruling elite and the poor, for different reasons. For the people of moderate means, however, the bearing and raising of children is an economic responsibility without any apparent economic benefits to the man or the woman. Thus, in the U.S. since the middle of the last century, custody has been given in almost all cases to the mother, increasing even further the real income disparity between women and men. Child support is inadequate, rarely paid, and nonpayment rarely prosecuted. The more centralized the economy and the state become, the more the benefits of controlling reproduction pass from individual men to the ruling elite; yet the actual control has passed only partially to the male elite. The family as a unit of reproduction looks like an outmoded institution, out of kilter with the mode of production.

Control of reproduction is important to the rulers of the industrial economy. It is commonplace to hear that one country or another, in order to increase or decrease the size of its labor force, is restricting or easing access to birth control or abortion, is encouraging late or early marriages, is giving financial awards to mothers or tax incentives to single people, and so forth. These male games played with women's bodies are considered acceptable, even enlightened social policy. Here is a recent example from communist Romania (*WomaNews*, June 1984).

> According to . . . *The Observer*, the Romanian government is intending to force women industrial workers to have a monthly blood test to check whether or not they are pregnant. Those women who are shown to be pregnant one month and not the next will have to explain why.
>
> The ruling Communist Party is apparently worried about Romania's shrinking population, and the implication this has for the workforce.
>
> Abortion is illegal in Romania. . . . This indicates the power of the Catholic

> Church... However the Communist Party discovered recently that out of 243,000 registered pregnancies, only 40% resulted in live births.
>
> ...the Government's goal is four healthy children per "healthy female." Women who fail to produce the required number of children will lose their chance for promotion.
>
> *Outwrite*

A similar example comes from Nicaragua. In an interview in the October 19[illegible] *Mother Jones*, Nora Astorga, an official in the Foreign Ministry, explains that abortion is illegal in Nicaragua because the country is underpopulated. In these examples, the state's problem is a too low birthrate. The state's real interest is in controlling the birthrate, up or down depending on its needs. Usually, however, women will experience coercion to have more children, first, because women given free choice have fewer pregnancies rather than more, and second, because industry still needs a large labor force.

The ruling elite's difficulty at present is technological. The system has not developed the organization and technology necessary to a centralized control of reproduction and child-care; the Romanian method above, for example, is crude. The male state is channeling resources into research in reproduction, however, and I believe we are entering a period of rapid development in this area. Advances are being made in male laboratories towards sex determination, genetic engineering and fetal surgery, implanted fetuses, cloning, parthenogenesis, and test-tube babies. To date industrialization has evolved through three stages, extending itself first to capital goods (machines and materials), then to consumer goods, and most recently to services. I suggest that we are now in the early part of the fourth stage, the industrialization of reproduction and, more generally, of biology.

Because the control methods for the present remain primitive, the male state is still forced to rely on the old method, indirect control of childbearing through control of individual women by individual men. *The price men have extracted from the ruling male class in return for controlling reproduction and child-care is precisely the family wage, the ownership of labor power, and the current housework system.* This deal between the two male classes is why industrialists agreed to the family wage, and why housewives are women.

The forces behind the situation of poorer women, who because of racism are disproportionately women of color, now become clearer. Poorer men, those who don't belong to the class of privileged male wage earners, do not have the economic power to individually extort housework from women or to individually control women. Women of color and poor white women are "out of control." That is, they have to be controlled by the male state, the public patriarchy. The state's cruel and floundering attempts are contradictory: Forced sterilization, birth control experiments, welfare cutbacks on the one hand; the elimination of

funding for abortion, birth control, and health services on the other. The demands are crazy-making: Stop breeding "like cattle" on the one hand, stop using abortion and birth control on the other. Men in power fear the production of "marauding hordes," they also fear the existence of a large set of independent women who control and limit their own reproduction.

The motives and methods which more privileged men have for oppressing lesbians, poorer men and gay men are also complex and contradictory. Lesbians, too, are women who are out of control, in fact we are out of reach of all reproduction control methods except rape. At the same time, we are, as Marilyn Frye (1981) has described, invisible. Women are objects, means of production, and objects cannot relate to each other; that is, the patriarchy does not provide the constructs which would enable people to see lesbians. The oppression experienced by poorer men comes from several sources. Men distrust any man who does not for whatever reason do his fair share of controlling women, such men are potential traitors. At the same time the more privileged wage earning men oppose poorer men's attempts to gain control of women, because such control would give the poorer men the resources with which to compete for higher paying jobs. Also, I believe that more privileged men, who have to suppress their feelings and needs for intimacy in order to oppress the women with whom they live, are deeply angry about the freer access which poorer men, and gay men as well, can have to their own feelings. Gay men, like poorer men, are hated by other men because, not individually controlling individual women, gay men are traitors to their class. The hate can be particularly intense because gay men, unlike poorer men, often have the economic resources to oppress individual women but choose not to. What males on the left mean, I believe, when they say that gay men are elitist and privileged, is that gay men are men who have enough resources not to *have* to get married.

Because poorer men, often men of color, have less economic power with which to oppress women, women can feel more in common with these men than with more privileged men; the more politically radical among us can also experience a sense of identification with revolutionary struggles led by such men. These sympathies are a dangerous mistake. Despite the sympathetic and even enlightened qualities some may have as individuals, these men are as much constrained by the logic of reproductive biology as are all other men. Inevitably their struggle for power, when successful, includes the seizure of the means of reproduction (that's us) as well as of the means of production.

There is considerable movement in our society these days on reproductive issues. Most salient are the right's virulent anti-abortion, anti-ERA, anti-feminist, and anti-gay campaigns. Among other important trends is the fact that the number of mother-child families is increasing much faster than the number of two-parent families (Sawhill, 1976) and that women and children are becoming a greater and greater percentage of the poor. Parents are struggling with the state

over the control of school systems and over parental control of children. The courts are taking more power over the determination of the conditions under which children live with their parents or are reared by those deemed more acceptable. Women have won paid maternity leaves and are working on child-care benefits. While most fathers are continuing to refuse to pay child support, some fathers are suing for custody of their children. Lesbian mothers are asking for custody of their children, or defending against suits that they are unfit mothers. Women are selecting men as biological fathers and then deserting them; lesbians are practicing artificial insemination. And, what I believe is the most significant portent of the future, lesbians are a far larger and politically organized social force than we have been at any other time in history.

This ferment is evidence of the transitional state of the mode of reproduction and of the conflicting forces acting on all three classes of men. The ruling males want to deprive the privileged working males of the surplus exploited from housewives and to prevent poorer men from acquiring such a surplus, but they want also to keep childbearing controlled. The privileged wage earning men want to be free of the burden of supporting children, but they want also to keep control of childbearing in order to keep the family wage. The poorer men do not want to take on the burden of supporting children; but they want access to the family wage, and they know that being "family men" who control their wives' childbearing is essential to that end. What women must get clear is that all three classes of men are our enemies, none of them are working in our interests. Hopefully we are learning to use them against each other.

III
The Future

The key to understanding what the significance of future events will be for women is to ask, first, how labor intensive the economy will become, and second, what the state of reproductive technology will be. There are many future conditions and events which could have serious direct or indirect impacts on women. For example, war, pollution, space travel, space visitors, industrialization in third world countries, and the continued development of multi-national corporations could all affect the economy in ways that would be significant to women.[3] The approach I've found most useful in thinking about the future is not to think about the details of what might happen, but rather to focus on the logical development of productive and reproductive technology. That is, if left to themselves, where are these two forces going and what are the implications for women? What dreams and images do we have that show us the potential for the future?

The logical development of commodity and services production is towards automation. Now, the advantage of automation for women is that the economy would not be labor intensive. Personally, I love computers. Rather than creating

a robotized, programmed society, their function, as I see it, is to take over all the robotizing things we do now. Most jobs are destroyers of mind and body; we may want the money to pay the rent, but the jobs themselves, as activities, aren't worth having.

Automation's potential disadvantages for women are three. First, the current population would have to be reduced to a size that could live comfortably in an automated society. How do we think this is going to happen, careful planning or wholesale murder? If we suspect murder, then of whom? Women in disproportionate numbers, no doubt, particularly since fewer of us will be needed to have babies. Second, an automated society could make things temporarily better for women and lull us into a false sense of security without altering the basic difficulty—that women are still the means of reproduction. Then, if something happened to move the economy in the labor intensive direction again, men would be remotivated to oppress women and women would have let our defenses down. I'm concerned, for example, about space travel. If men decide they want to colonize the universe, women are in for a long struggle. Third, a particular danger I see for women is the development of a class of women breeders, women whose primary socioeconomic function would be to be pregnant and produce children. We already have surrogate mothers and implanted fetuses. The breeders would almost certainly be women of color and women from other oppressed groups. Even an all women's society, if it relied on pregnancy to produce children, could go in this direction.

My conclusion, after contemplating automation, is that it is not the complete solution we need. The real solution, I believe, must be a change in the method of reproduction itself.

The logical development of reproduction is towards genetic engineering and test-tube babies. These two categories of technology have quite different implications for women. Both techniques attempt to increase control of the nature of the embryo; but genetic engineering can be carried out on an embryo in or outside the womb, while test-tube babies replace the womb environment with one more amenable to control. The portents of genetic engineering for women are ominous. Different gene materials could be combined outside the womb and then implanted in the wombs of the breeder class. Various kinds of fetal surgery and interventions could also be *in utero*. Janet Gallagher (1984) describes how doctors and the courts are already asserting their right to decide what happens inside the uterus. Doctors have asked for and in some cases judges have granted them the right, against a woman's will, to confine her in a hospital or give her a Caesarian, in order to increase the fetus' chances of survival. Ironically, it was the far right and the "right-to-lifers" who began to initiate such suits, with the goal of strengthening the individual patriarch's control of his wife and family; but now it looks like the real benefit of such rulings will go to the male state, which is extending its colonization of women to the physical occupation of the womb itself.

The real issue in the abortion struggle is bodily integrity, not "choice." ("Privacy" is a euphemism but it is on the right track.) The issue is not whether or not the fetus is a person. That is irrelevant. The issue is whether or not the woman is a person. Not even a fully developed adult is given the rights over another person's body that the fetus, fronting for the patriarchy, already has been given over a woman's body. Gallagher cites the case of a man who was dying of cancer and who went to court to compel his cousin to donate some bone marrow to him. The court refused. I recall reading of a similar case in Texas where a boy needed a kidney transplant and the only possible donor was his older, 13-year-old sister. The court assigned her an attorney to insure that she was not coerced into donating the kidney. Both these cases illustrate the strong legal precedent that a person has complete right to control their body, even when another person needs part of that body to stay alive. What these examples make clear is that men and the male state treat women as less than persons, as machines for producing persons. Genetic engineering could greatly increase their ability to "fix" the machine.

Test-tube babies, on the other hand, I believe, have positive implications for women. If the technology could be developed sufficiently, we might not need women's wombs for reproduction at all. (But we had better make sure the technology is simple, so it can be taken along when one is colonizing the universe. Whether the trip is ours or theirs.) Consider the situation we have now, dependent as society is for its continuance on women's wombs. Women's liberation requires ownership of our bodies, as means of reproduction and in every other respect. This ownership would mean that women would have more control than men over reproduction. Freedom for women would also mean equality with men in the control of all other aspects of our lives. Equality in other areas and greater control over reproduction equals women's dominance. In other words, as long as women's bodies are means of reproduction, women's freedom means women's dominance and men's freedom means men's dominance. Women and men could be in conflict forever. If we have to choose rulers, then both history and preference, of course, say women. But I do not want to spend my time dominating men. Test-tube babies are a means of reproducing the species without oppressing one half or the other of it. (Note that the presence of test-tube babies does not mean pregnancy would be forbidden to women who want it.)

I have experienced two objections from lesbians to the mention of test-tube babies. First is the fear that men will massacre us if they don't need us. Or that they will breed only males. These consequences are certainly possible. I am not saying that test-tube babies will solve our problems; I am saying only that it will make them solvable, while to date they have not been. With test-tube babies sexism would become (it is not now) a type of racism. Yes, women may have to fight men, as other oppressed peoples have to fight their oppressors; but we can

fight them as a people, and we can win something worth having: Freedom and full lives.

The second objection is that if men gain complete control over reproduction they will create monsters. Are women then to continue to be martyrs to the species? Are we to consume our lives creating the next generation of mothers and oppressors, simply because it might make things a little better? DeBeauvoir was wrong I think to call pregnancy inherently non-transcendent; but it is non-transcendent to expend the creative energy of your life in creating your own replacement. That is truly meaningless activity. And do we really believe that women are doing such a good job? Are mothers not communicating their anger and their despair to the children they raise? Can a servant, a despised person exert an influence on children, and on the adults they become, strong enough to overcome the persuasive powers of the male classes?

I am in the extraordinary position of having the letters my mother wrote almost daily to my father, when he was overseas during World War II. I was 2½ to 5½, my sister 1½ years younger. These letters describe our daily lives in extensive detail. My mother has always expressed pride in her life centered on being a wife and mother. Yet, day by day in her letters she is tired, burdened, confused, angry, and frustrated. I got my feelings about motherhood directly from her. She communicated her feelings to me, day by day as she was raising me, they are her legacy to me. If we are serious about our feminism and about our respect for women as beings who need to be whole and free, then we must understand that we have been raised by an oppressed and angry being and that we bear her with us.

I am a lesbian who has never wanted to bear or raise a child. I feared the physical pain. I didn't want my body torn apart. I wondered if I was a coward. When I was young and pregnant, I knew immediately that society had no right to the sacrifices it was demanding of me in order to reproduce itself. It had no right to the pain and struggle my ostracism as an "unwed mother" would cause me (this was the late 50's), it had no right to the lost years of creativity and health, it had no right to the years of my drudgery. I have never felt guilty about the abortions. We are not means of production, we are not life support systems for other persons. I have never wanted to raise a child. I hate being interrupted when I am concentrating on something. I hate spending a lot of time around people who don't understand me. We are not servants. We are not food for the growth of others.

I am glad to see other feminists and other lesbians expressing similar ideas (see Allen, 1983; Giminez, 1983; Breeze, 1984). Nor do I think it is an accident that we are coming to a new view of mothering during this time when reproductive technology is developing. It is only possible to really think about a thing on the ground of its alternatives. What I think we need now is a radical lesbian task force on reproductive technology. The task force would research what kinds of

technologies the male laboratories are developing, what kinds of technologies are workable (are test-tube babies feasible?), and what kinds of reproductive technology lesbians could acquire and use. Lesbians should take an assertive not a reactive position on reproductive technology.

What the present-day lesbian and gay male movements represent, I believe, is a society that senses itself moving towards a future in which social relations between women and men will not be necessary for reproduction. In such a system gay men would cease to be traitors to their class. The homosexuality which has always been present underneath male solidarity would be openly expressed. Thus, members of the male ruling class can and do today take stands against the oppression of gay men (two California examples are Ronald Reagan and Ed Davis). The men in this future would not necessarily be less sexist, but they would necessarily be sexist in different ways than now. The lesbian represents the more hopeful future, one in which women, free of the reproductive tie to men, can create our own world as a people.

I have wanted women to be a whole world unto ourselves. I want lesbian universities, restaurants, lesbian cities, countries, lesbian space travel. I want to be free of the necessity to adapt to this reality of childbearing, to this world where childbearing has to be done and where it is done in this brutal way. I do not want to have to fight to change this ugly system. I want to grapple with the problems we, women, will create between us when we do not have to contend with breeding. I want to be fully who I am. I want the future.

And yet, writing this, I have also become aware of my identity as intersticed with pregnancy and motherhood. What will women and men become without reproduction? Mary Daly (1984) refers to women as a race. We are not yet a race, because we cannot yet reproduce ourselves, but potentially, yes, we are. (Some women might intermarry with men, but probably most will not.) I am surprised to find how much I am still to myself not-man and not-heterosexual. It is to not these nots that Monique Wittig says she is not a woman and not a lesbian (talk given at UCLA November 29, 1983, see also Wittig, 1981). If lesbians are the future of women, who then are the future of lesbians? If there is no pregnancy, what is my body to me? What then are breasts, what is a vagina, a clitoris, what is a womb? What is sex between women? What is orgasm? I truly don't know. But I want to find out. I'm bored with this world conditioned by reproduction. Let's go somewhere else now.

Notes

[1] Some readers may note a similarity between this analysis of the role of agriculture in intensifying sexism and Engels (1972) thesis that the oppression of women began when the farming economy produced surplus and private property. However, in Engels analysis sexism is almost an accident. It just happened that the sex-division of labor gave to men

those farming activites which produced a surplus, and so men became the first owners. Since they then wanted to pass property on to their children, they suppressed women and created the monogamous patriarchal family. Nor does Engels explain forced increases in childbearing. In my analysis, on the other hand, men's need to oppress women is inevitable, given reproductive biology and the nature of farming itself.

[2] Heidi Hartmann (1981) discusses well the conflicting interests of capital and patriarchy, but describes these as two separate systems, one having classes and the other apparently having none. Thus women and men are within "the" working class. She also refers to the "partnership" of patriarchy and capital, and in my view underestimates the conflict between them. The entire collection of articles (Sargent, 1981) is a good example of the strength of the false dichotomy between feminist theory and economic theory.

[3] In the present there are two intriguing exammples of what looks like history repeating itself. In the U.S. union membership has declined to seriously low levels, while the demand for women workers in non-unionized areas is increasing. In Asia and other third world countries, the workers in the new industries are women, as they were at the beginnings of industrializtion. Will males organize to take over labor in these new industries, will women fight back?

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A Call for an End to Ageism in Lesbian and Gay Services*

Barbara Macdonald

I am a former social worker and a lesbian who is proud of our lesbian and gay history. That history identifies us as critical of the mainstream, refusing to accept its heterosexual myths, more sensitive to oppression, more willing to examine what has gone unquestioned for generations, more willing to risk breaking old molds and creating new lifestyles. I believe in that history.

Today, the mainstream is coming to terms with a growing population of older citizens. We too, are becoming aware of our own older members of the lesbian and gay community. But as we do so—and as we become gerontologists and social workers in the field of aging—it is urgent that we take stock now and ask ourselves hard questions about the services we are providing.

We have come to a "Y" in the road. The future is not preordained. We have a choice. We can continue on the road we have so bravely travelled, where we have cut a swathe through oppression and discrimination when the going was hard; where, with a sense of our strong difference from a straight world, we have been willing to risk the ways that have never been tried, the outcome unseen, determined only by our own vision. Or we can leave our chosen course and take a hetero-social welfare, institutionalized direction for our own aging. (Two things can be said for this direction—it is *straight* and you can see the end of it.)

It matters to me and to Cynthia and to other lesbian feminists which way we go. The decision will alter our lives and yours. Those of you in your 20's and 30's and 40's will have to live out what is begun now. Consider—that institutions last a long time. You are never rid of them. They only reappear in a new guise.

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*This paper was originally delivered as a talk to the Lesbian and Gay Freedom Democratic Caucus in Santa Cruz, at a May 16, 1984 meeting organized and attended predominantly by social service workers. Macdonald is co-author with Cynthia Rich of *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism*. Spinsters Ink, San Francisco, 1984.

I have been reading the appeals of straight and gay agencies for services to the old, and it pains me that I see no difference. I see only imitation, ageism, and practices that do not reflect the values of our heritage.

Let's look at an ad from United Way. An old woman is sitting in a dark room, staring out of her window. The caption reads, *One day you wake up old and all your friends are gone.* The ad continues: "When you're older you'll know what it's like. The countless hours alone. The phone that never rings. The children who are so busy with their own lives. You'll realize how important the work we do is...[Our agencies] provide visiting nurses. Home health care. Protective services. And maybe most important—companionship."

Nothing tells the woman she can walk across the hall or phone a neighbor who is 20, 40, or 60 and give and take support, find a common ground. The message here is that the only friends an old person should expect to have will be her same age; otherwise, what do they mean, "Someday she'll wake up and all her friends will be gone"? What are they telling me about the phone that never rings? The message is about power—who calls who. I should not call. I should sit and wait—other people are busy.

This woman's problem is not her age, it is ageism. She is not defining herself, she is being defined by a social agency. They are not only telling her who she is and what she should expect; they are telling younger women who the old woman is and what she expects. Such stereotyping by social agencies, whether United Way or SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment), affects not only the recipient of the services but the attitude of every person in our society toward aging. Our own services, without ever examining their own ageism, explain old lesbians and gay men to the community at large, to mainstream social agencies and to hospitals and nursing homes. Their approach also influences, as I want to show, the way our gay publications view us and the way younger lesbians view us and portray us.

The following is from a letter addressed to the producers of *Gay Seniors: The Silent Pioneers*, a documentary film prepared with the consultation of SAGE.

May 27, 1983

Dear Pat Snyder:

This is in response to an article in *Gay Community News* about your appeal for financial support and for input from old lesbians for the film *Gay Seniors: The Silent Pioneers*.

As a 69-year-old lesbian, I am concerned about how your film will portray old lesbians. I am especially concerned about how your own ageism is apparently shaping the film and how it will reinforce attitudes which the lesbian and feminist communities are trying to change. Because your film will be seen by millions of people nationwide and their singular impression of who I am will probably be a lasting one, what you are about to do affects my life and that of many other lesbians. I am all the more

concerned when you say your film will "...attempt to make some generalizations about the lives of the estimated two million lesbians and gay men 65-or-more years old."

...work [is] being done by the lesbian community to put a halt to the social work, welfare, philanthropic approach to old lesbians, perpetuated by some younger lesbians and specifically by SAGE, who is advising you in producing your film. That approach is painfully clear in the way your film is described, and I have no assurance that its content will be any different:

> *The Silent Pioneers* will examine many legal, socio-psychological and political problems that straight society creates for older lesbians and gay men, such as denial of hospital visitation rights to non-related couples and battles over the wills of lesbians or gay men who bequeath possessions to their lovers. Many have also had to cope in silence with loneliness and bereavement after the loss of a life-long companion.

The article continues with a quote from the co-chair of the board of SAGE:

> We are very excited about the potential of this film to raise public awareness about the unique problems and concerns of older gays.

Surely you know that these "unique problems" are the problems of every gay in this country. If you ask a 30-year-old lesbian whether she's concerned, when she enters a hospital, that her lover can be denied visitation rights, she'll say, "Damn right, I am." She might even tell you an experience in which she or her lover had been refused such rights. The problem for the young lesbian may be compounded by the fact that she has parents who have never accepted who she is and who are hostile to her lover, who can move in and affirm their "rights" to visitation, consultation with doctors, determination of a course of treatment if she's unable to speak for herself. As for wills—SAGE itself mentions in a flyer that people of all ages need wills. And do you believe that, across the country, in rural areas and in many cities, young lesbians are not today facing the loss of a lover with nobody to tell about it? *It is dishonest, ageist and exploitative to have these battles and forms of oppression projected as unique to old lesbians—to have the battles fought on the turf of the old.*

It is expecially exploitative because old women are already stereotyped as powerless and pathetic. We are already seen, *ad nauseum*, as the embodiment of younger people's fear and shame around sickness, need, physical weakness, death, and loss of loved ones—as if these were our principal attributes, and as if they were unique to us. Must we continue to be portrayed as powerless and pathetic because that is how younger lesbians choose to see us? Or because it serves the purposes of younger lesbians?

Instead of selecting out old lesbians and gay men to ask how we feel about our "unique problems" around hospitals, wills, loss of loved ones, how about asking us, "How do you feel about being patronized by younger people, gay or straight?" If SAGE is to be used as a model for services across the country, if they are to advise film-makers about the lives of old lesbians, they need to start asking such questions. Or better yet, asking themselves, "How would I feel?"

SAGE circulates a reprint of a newspaper description of their services from the *Daily News*, April 6, 1982, regarding their young volunteers:

> One such volunteer is Liza, a young lesbian in her 20s who visits an infirm 80-year old lesbian who has been confined to a hospital. "She is an important part of my life," Liza said of her older friend. "She has so much knowledge, experience, and wisdom—she's like a treasure. She's like my own collected history—it's like seeing pictures from the 1920's."

This kind of sentimentalizing and fossilizing of old women is so offensive that when I think of this woman being subjected to it I am appalled. I am compelled to try to get the entire lesbian community to wake up to our own ageism and stop this exploitation of old women. Stop it and stop it now.

I am confirmed in my fears about the film by your title, *The Silent Pioneers*. We are all pioneers; why are old lesbians the "silent" ones? Why project closetedness onto us as if—again—it were our unique problem? There are still, today—and with good reason—more "silent" young lesbians than out lesbians. To imply otherwise is classist and racist, since being out is far more difficult when you already have other strikes against you. Even the young lesbian who works on a lesbian publication or makes a lesbian film may well be closeted, "silent," on her straight job, or with her neighbors, or with her family, or when she is in a court of law or a hospital. The number of younger lesbians who are out to everybody, everywhere is still miniscule. "Silent" is not the adjective that sums up my life to me or the lives of the lesbians I have known.

The world has not seen many images of old lesbians, and I insist that your film portray us as the real, strong women we are. I felt good about seeing *The Word is Out*. That film was not touted as "examining many legal, socio-psychological and political problems that straight society creates for lesbians and gay men." It wasn't a film made by a social service agency about their clients. It didn't define lesbians as victims or define our problems for us. It resounded with powerful statements like Sally Gearhart's, "Women are leaving men in droves." With the framework you've publicized for *The Silent Pioneers*, how will you set up interviews that elicit power rather than victimization? Will old lesbians in your film

be able to say, "I chose not to marry, I chose not to raise children for the male state, and I am sick and tired of being thought of as a grandmother, by straight and lesbian young people alike!"? If not, I'd rather see the strong straight old women from OWL, the Older Women's League, saying, "We're fed up with how we are treated," than be objectified by my lesbian sisters of SAGE.

I am not an enemy of SAGE. They should be proud of having established the first service in our community to face ageism. I don't want them to quit. I want them to get going. Since their beginning in 1978, knowledge of the politics of growing old has exploded before us, and I recognize that it is harder for an institution to change than for individuals. But it is imperative that they reevaluate their program in the process of making this film or they will turn back the clock for the feminist community and will, sooner or later, suffer the consequences themselves.

I do not want to be critical of you when you are putting out good energy without offering some positive suggestions. I am sure SAGE is deeply committed to this task and will remain so. My proposal is not that they lessen their contribution but that you broaden the base of your consultation . . . [I then suggested women to contact and closed the letter].

Following the writing of this letter to the film-makers of *The Silent Pioneers*, Cynthia and I went to the Second National Conference on Lesbian and Gay Aging in June of 1983. We found not one workshop on ageism, and ageism was not even discussed as a problem. We found career people looking for and talking about "them." We found a division into the able and the needy, into the gerontological community and those they view as the isolated and lonely. We found a few old lesbians and gay men caught again into serving the young. Like Liza, the SAGE volunteer who saw the old woman's life "like pictures from the 1920's," again old lesbians and gay men were asked to "tell us how it was," objectified, fossilized for the benefit of the young. We found a duplicate of the traditional heterosexual social welfare, philanthropic approach, administered by gays and lesbians to be practiced on old gays.

As a final example, this March I received a second, revised questionnaire, a survey of lesbians over 60, from CERES (Center for Research and Education on Sexuality). The ageism in the original questionnaire had prompted my *Open Letter to the Women's Movement* (*Gay Community News*, November 1982; reprinted in feminist papers and in *Look Me in the Eye*). The revision made changes in the most glaringly ageist language: They no longer described old lesbians as living in "self-imposed isolation" or as "lonely and depressed," and they no longer described those receiving their services as "having their problems solved and their accomplishments recognized by an appropriate service organization." But the thrust is identical in the two questionnaires. This is not a

questionnaire to find out who old lesbians really are. It is geared to establishing a population for service agencies. Its results will go to social service agencies, lesbian and straight, nationwide.

It should be obvious that unless this questionnaire is sent to lesbians of all ages, the results will tell us nothing about old lesbians as having any particular need that younger lesbians do not have. But the ageist presumptions and the social service bias result in questions the responses to which are guaranteed to indicate special needs. Let me give you just one example (Question 15):

> How do you feel about participating in each of the following?
> Social Organization for Older Lesbians Only
> Social Organization for Older Lesbians/Gays
> Social Organization for Older Women
> Social Organization for Older Women/Men

No one asks you how you feel about social segregation by age. There is no category for Other. The question itself clearly informs me where I might belong and where I do not belong. I do not belong in an age-mixed group unless the younger people are paid to be there.

Throughout our lives, lesbians and gay men have developed enormously creative ways of living our lives, refusing the mainstream values. And now, at the end of our lives, gerontologists and others of the established helping professions want to push us into conventional, patch-up, disempowering social services, while they use us to accomplish what they can't accomplish for themselves. As if somehow, around 60, we had lost that lifelong capacity for creativity and now want nothing more than to rejoin the heterosexual family model—what SAGE proudly calls its "family setting"—and play "grandma" and "grandpa" to our gay, salaried grandchildren. This is not only ageism, this is homophobia. This is not equality.

Those of us who are lesbian or gay and in the helping professions have inherited two histories—our proud gay heritage on the one hand, but also a history of psychiatry, psychology and social work practiced on women and gay men that is an embarassment to us today and leaves us with much to be accountable for. I see no way we can develop lesbian and gay services unless we root out the ageism, sexism and homophobia built into our training.

It is time, not just for SAGE or Operation Concern to raise their consciousness about ageism, but for all of us to work on this together. Not the able helper and the needy recipient, but together in a relationship of equality. Equality demands that we empower each other, and you do not empower if you do not look at the source of the oppression. To empower is to politicize. Equality demands that we who are old have the power to name ourselves. I do not want United Way or the geriatric community, gay or straight, to name me.

I have been critical. You may well ask, "What then do you envision?" I leave

you with one example that can stand for many others: your hospital services. Let representatives of the entire lesbian and gay community, old and young, go as a committee to confront the medical community and root out the homophobia in our hospitals. Don't tell them *my* story because I am old—let every one of us in our 20's and 40's and 80's tell our own experiences in hospitals. A 30-year old lesbian's story is no different from mine. Don't hide behind the false "respectability" of "our elders," or the false pity, either—that is, don't hide behind ageism to get the job done.

When that job has been done, every admissions room in every hospital will have, in plain view, the telephone number that any one of us of any age can call to reach the Lesbian and Gay Hospital Task Force. And in learning to work together, as equals, we will have begun the long, hard job of ending ageism.

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Rule Making

Jane Rule

I once taught at a boarding school where at the end of each year all rules, except those to do with physical safety, were crossed out so that in the fall students returned free to use their own judgment until such time as it seemed necessary to make a rule because too many students were staying up and out too late, because there were too many injured animals left in the biology lab, because too many of the day students' dogs were attending classes.

We are as much rule as tool making creatures because few of our behavior patterns are handed to us in our genes, and we need not only to shape our environment but get along with each other to survive. I suppose, because I moved around the continent a lot when I was a child, I learned early that, though all communities have rules, they are not the same ones in, say, suburban California and rural Kentucky. So I grew up with some respect for the necessity of rules but also with some critical distance from any particular rule's usefulness or moral justification.

I was delighted to find that, though a few rules at the boarding school cropped up early and regularly, a fair number did not recur. Since my father as a student made a practice of breaking rules not yet written, I always had special admiration for those students with the creative imagination to set the rule makers to work on such things as not turning off the water mains into the teachers' quarters or taking the school tractor to church. I was also amused at the Head Mistress's rule every year that no student be allowed to get up at 4:30 a.m. on Patriot's Day to witness the reinactment of Paul Revere's ride. It was the only way she could be sure that students would think it worthwhile to lose sleep for a historic event.

Though some people and some communities thrive on absolutes, most of us

under rigid regulation chafe and pine, and the chafers are more apt to resort to destructive than creative rebellion, the piners to waste away. Unless there is some compelling and overriding reason, therefore, people's behavior should be codified as little as possible.

As lesbians who have until very recently had no community, whose relationships have been themselves considered immoral if not criminal, we are for the first time in a position of declared responsibility, able to join together, able to describe for ourselves what the nature and value of our relationships are. We should not be surprised at how raggedly we have begun that process.

Many of us have internalized the larger community's prejudice and take any failure as an indication that we are, after all, sick and depraved. I have had letters from exlesbian nuns begging me to repent. Many of us feel very much on the defensive and want to justify our relationships by mimicking monogamous marriage and making strong statements against such things as promiscuity and seduction of the young. I've been having some correspondence with exnun lesbians who want to label the seduction of a nun by a sixteen-year-old student child abuse. Those with a more secular grounding often muddle through, as most other people do, in serial monogamy until over the years at any large party most women, at one time or another, have been lovers with most other women and call their community, either affectionately or sourly "incestuous." There are also those who think coupling is reactionary, the image of bondage that women, and particularly lesbians, should reject, who live alone or in groups, taking their pleasure where they find it. Recently one of the most vocal groups celebrates bondage as the most intense sexual fantasy to be fulfilled, the real declaration of freedom from puritanical hypocrisy. With them we come full circle, for they share with those in religious orders the strictest and most specific rules in search of ecstatic experience.

It must be clear to any lesbian who has been around a while that consensus is impossible. Our sexual preference gives us no more in moral common than it does our heterosexual sisters. Our chief reason for wanting to reach consensus is to defend ourselves against judgments from both without and within our community. The exnuns trying to make their sister exnun confess to child abuse say to her, "Isn't it better to be confronted by loving lesbians than by Christian homophobes?" to which her answer is, of course, "No, it's much, much worse."

Rules made to defend ourselves against those who disapprove of us are suicide weapons, for they serve to distort and then silence what we learn from our own experience, whether we are embracing those rules for ourselves or imposing them on other people. And they are also useless for our defense, for nobody who thinks a lesbian is sick and depraved will be persuaded of our health and virtue even if we set age limits, time limits, and correct postures.

As in that boarding school, I wish we could begin without rules, except those to do with physical safety, make rules only when they seem necessary and start afresh every year or so.

When I refer to "our community," it is a metaphor. We don't live under one roof, in one city, or even in one country. We, as lesbians, don't have to get along as we do with people who share a geography, property, and all the mundane chores of citizenship. The only rule I'd like to propose for "our community" is tolerance because we certainly have been getting into bad squabbles on the public platform and on paper. Oh, we can disagree all we like, but none of us needs to convert the whole world to separatism, monogamy, sadomasochism, or celibacy for the freedom to choose for ourselves, and each of us has more to learn about other choices without feeling personally threatened by them.

The problem is much more complex when we confront differences between people attempting to be friends and lovers.

One rule which is gaining support, particularly among younger lesbians, is the eliminating of power in relationships between women in an attempt to get away from the inequality of heterosexual models. Not only must concepts of butch and femme be banished, but women should seek out other women as much like themselves as they can. Look-alike, feel-alike, and think-alike couples are becoming so common that they may be the forerunners of the arranged marriages of the past with the same drawbacks because they infect any community with the snobberies of race, class, education, money, health and good looks. Further, power is not in this way eliminated, for power trips are not sourced in differences but in the simple desire of a person to dominate or be dominated.

It is not power but its abuse which should concern people. If one member of a couple is much stronger than the other, it doesn't necessarily follow that the weaker one will be physically abused. It may mean instead that nobody has to be hired to move heavy objects around. If one member of a couple is much brighter about figures, it doesn't necessarily follow that one will control the money. She may simply be stuck with doing the income tax returns. For strength and gifts are there to be of service in any loving circumstance.

The line in the marriage service, "for better or worse, for richer or poorer," which has trapped far too many people in destructive relationships does have the virtue of reminding us that both circumstances and people change. Even if two people start out in a relatively equal relationship, one may eventually make much more money than the other, be faced with a disabling disease, become famous, have to assume responsibility for an aging relative. Any of those changes would certainly break up a relationship based on canceling balance of power.

People in love do have enormous power over each other, and it is often unequal simply in the quality of caring. Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote of her life-long lover, Valentine Ackland, "...yonder sits the other one, who had all the cards in her hand—except one. That I was the better at loving and being loved." It was a relationship that survived sexual infidelity, separation, financial hardship, impossible mothers, war, Valentine's conversion to Catholicism, not without periods of strife and pain but with a great deal of productive work (both

women were writers) and happiness. Sylvia Townsend Warner knew how to u
rather than abuse her power to love and be loved.

People who want to be sure that they are always free to be and do as the
please might be better off living alone, and increasing numbers do, in love with
their work or their leisure, setting up a network of friends dependable in
emergencies like illness or Christmas.

Only people unafraid of power, willing to risk being vulnerable to it and to
take responsibility for it are real candidates for serious relationship, and some
of the most unlikely ones from the point of view of those who look for equality
are the most successful. To acknowledge difference, otherness is the beginning
of real love in which each can be depending and dependable according to her
own gifts and needs.

If a relationship lasts richly, the rules do have to change whether they have to
do with who takes out the garbage, who pays the rent, what goes on or doesn't
go on in bed. I watch the earnest sweetness of one old woman learning to cook
for the first time because her mate is recovering from an operation. (I wrote
"lover," crossed it out, and wrote "mate" because I don't know whether they do
make love or ever have, but I do know they have lived together and loved each
other for probably forty years.) I watch myself learning sight reading against long
failures at that skill because Helen Sonthoff, the woman with whom I have lived
for nearly thirty years, is having increasing trouble with her eyes. Now that she's
retired, she's learning to tend the household machines so long my domain in
order to give me more time to write. But it is not simply old age which changes
patterns, makes new demands. Every period of living presents changes and
problems no one could foresee, just as each lively one of us breaks rules which
have not yet been written. I have now been forbidden to buy raffle tickets and
put Helen's name on them. I have done it out of embarrassment at junk and craft
sales when I find nothing else to buy, but the result has been prizes of
unspeakable taste and uselessness. Cooking, reading, and raffle tickets may seem
frivolous examples, but love is based in daily living which can be made up of
petty disagreements and silly power trips or co-operation and laughter. In any
couple both people can be comically overqualified for a job at hand or jointly
defeated by changing a washer. Initial differences may minimize those puzzles.
Willingness to change, to learn something new overcomes most of them.

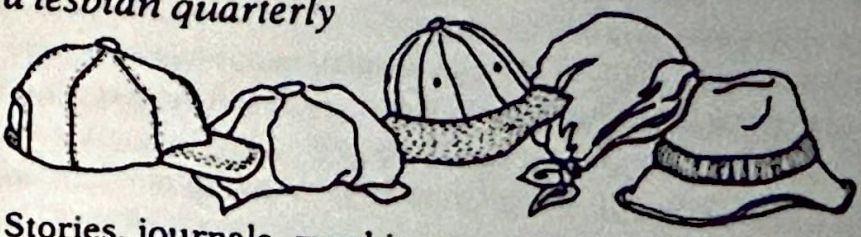
The defeating issues, fidelity, politics, money, responsibility for others, may
call up our rulemaking instincts, and they may be necessary from time to time
for a time. I read the other day that Frida Kohla agreed to remarrry Diego Rivera,
accepting his infidelities as long as he gave up his conjugal rights and paid no
more than his share of the housekeeping, an odd bargain many of us would
think, but it redefined their relationhship enough for them to stay together to
nourish each other in their work as no one else could.

Fairmindedness is not a simple talent, for each person's needs and desires are

not only different but changing. There is no point in a second car when only one person knows how to drive. There is no point in the same number of lovers if only one wants them. Equal time in an argument is useless for a person who doesn't like to argue and is no good at it. Balance is probably more a matter of keeping one's own to help insure the balance of the other in the sometimes rocking boat.

I am very leery of any rule that is made after asking, "What would happen if...?" I am on surer ground with "This has happened. Now what?" It is both realistic and affectionate to know that most rules really are made to be broken. A father left his son a series of notes about a box of cookies I had baked for them. The first said, "Jimmy, don't touch this box." Then inside the box, another note said, "Jimmy, don't eat these cookies." Finally on the bottom of the box, a note said, "Jimmy, leave me at least four cookies." When I next saw the box, four cookies remained. Fair enough.

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Betrayals Among Women: Barriers to a Common Language

Karen Fite and Nikola Trumbo

This work began when we had the courage to articulate to each other that we felt betrayed by our mothers and had felt betrayed by other women. We then began to act on our need to make sense of these experiences. This involved checking with other women to see if we were the only two who had had these feelings. And we found that the experiences we were trying to describe and to understand were indeed widely shared.

The "we" of this paper are two lesbian women, in our forties, of upper-middle class backgrounds, white, who live together in a committed relationship. Nikola is a Child Development Specialist, who works as a consultant to schools and Head Start programs, and in private practice with young children and their families. She is also a college teacher and advisor to a training program for Child Development Specialists. Karen is the academic dean of a college, a college teacher, and a lawyer. Karen has never been married and has no children, and has lived most of her life as a lesbian, though only in the last five years, with the support of Nikola, as a public lesbian. Nikola has been married, is the mother of one adult son, and lived most of her life as a heterosexual. More details of our lives will emerge for the reader through this paper. We have deliberately chosen to write about ourselves, to use our own lives as one of the bases of our theory-building.

In writing this paper we also talked with other women ranging in age from their mid-twenties to mid-sixties. We talked with about 25 women, most of them white and most of them middle class. We talked with two Latina women and two black women. We talked with more women who identify as heterosexuals than with women who identify as lesbians (10 lesbians; 15 heterosexuals in our original group), though all of the women we talked with were deeply concerned about relationships among women. Since the first writing of our paper, we have presented it at one conference and received additional feedback from about 75

women there, and have used it in a class we teach—Social and Political Contexts of Human Development—and received reactions and additional stories from another 150 women, including an additional 20 women of color. We have found that the many stories and examples which women have shared with us reiterate and reinforce the themes of betrayal described here.

We are both middle-class white women and our thoughts largely reflect our social and political context. In our original interviews our sample of women of color was limited to 4 out of 25 women and thus cannot be representative of the experiences of women of color as a whole. Race and class barriers present complex problems to us as white researchers, and it is our hope that women of color will want to expand upon our ideas about betrayal among women as it relates to their experience. Our reading of the works of feminist and lesbian women of color has been useful to us in examining the socio-political aspects of betrayals among women.[1] We both desire and feel an obligation to pursue this research with women of color since class and race betrayals must be examined honestly if women are ever to find our common and different voices.

This paper is intended as a dialogue with ourselves, the women who have shared their stories with us, and with you the readers. We asked ourselves and others: "Have you ever felt betrayed by another woman?" "Will you tell us your story?" "What sense do you now make of this experience?" "Why do you think it happened?" This paper is based on the answers we got, and on our reading, most especially on our reading of the works of Adrienne Rich, without whom we could not have thought our way this far.[2] We can't prove what we say is so. We have simply done our best to say what we feel and think to be true. And we would ask of you who read it: "What here speaks to your experience? What does not? What here troubles you and what delights you?"

We knew from our own hesitation in naming the experience, and rediscovered in our conversations with other women, that there is a deep resistance in us to naming these experiences "betrayals." We believe that there are two strands to this resistance. First of all, women resist naming betrayals because we do not want to blame other women and we do not want to blame ourselves. We don't want to attach blame to other women for fear of rupturing the very tenuous bonds which do exist between us; we don't want to attach blame because as feminists we see that women have been blamed far too long for far too much, and because we are committed to enhancing the self-worth of women, not detracting from it.

If we say someone betrayed us, does that not carry with it blame? The answer to this in the context of our whole paper is: No, not when the experience of women is seen in its actual context—a patriarchal society. To blame women would be to blame the victim. To blame means to hold responsible for some negative situation. The situation of women, the betrayals among women, are the responsibility of patriarchy, of an entire social structure and world view, not the responsibility of individual women nor of all women. Power is in the hands of

the patriarchy; responsibility belongs to the patriarchy. But the answer is also, yes. We, as women, are not innocent of the betrayals we commit, but our ignorance of what's going on and why does rob us of the power to act otherwise. No, we must not blame the victim. Yes, we must accept responsibility for learning to act otherwise. One of our greatest hopes in naming, investigating, and writing about the experience of betrayal among women is that we all will gain the power to act otherwise.

Second, women resist naming betrayals because to do so violates the taboo against bonding between women. On what basis can we make any claims that there can be an expectation of loyalty between women? Women are enculturated to bond with men and children, not with other women, and so all relationships among women are supposedly secondary to the bonds of women with men. And yet we, as women, do feel betrayed when women choose men first. We feel betrayed when our mothers choose our fathers and our brothers over us. We feel betrayed when women pay more attention to men's opinions than to ours. We feel betrayed when our lover will not tell her family about our relationship. Yet we know we are supposed to understand, we are not supposed to feel betrayed.

To acknowledge that we feel betrayed when another woman does not choose us first is to acknowledge a very deep and frightening longing for connectedness with other women. We longed for, and continue to long for, more from our mothers than we ever got. And so we continue to long for gentleness, caring, devotion—all those things which women are trained to give but not to expect to receive. And beyond the taboo of expecting to receive rather than to give lurks the taboo against sexuality between women. And beyond even the taboo against sexuality between women lies the taboo against lesbianism, that is, against a complete bonding with other women emotionally, intellectually, and socially as well as sexually.

We are brought up to believe we come second, that we have no right to expect to come first. We believe our womanly identity depends upon giving. And that our identity depends upon bonding with men. There are strong taboos against asserting that we come first, that we are entitled to be given to, and against bonding with other women. To say to another woman, "You betrayed me," is to say, "I deserved to come first," and to say, "I wanted to come first," and to say, "I wanted you to love me best." All of these statements are taboo violations, and to make them is to risk loss of social acceptance and to risk our very identities as women.

And yet, in spite of all this, we do long for connectedness with other women and we do feel betrayed by women. We are going to concentrate in this article on what women told us about their experience of betrayal in their relationships with their mothers, because for many of us this relationship is the first long and intense physical and emotional relationship we have with another woman. We will then comment more briefly on betrayals which spread out from this core relationship.

Of Politics and Psyches

Our informants' stories must be seen as embedded in the complex cultural, political, and psychological contexts which create betrayals among women. The patriarchal nuclear family is both the keystone of western culture and the seedbe of western personality. The family holds our culture together structurally and creates persons who will reproduce families and perpetuate our culture.

Politics

We would like to emphasize three aspects of the western nuclear family as a cultural and political structure: its roles in implementing patriarchy, isolating women, and programming for heterosexuality.

First, the patriarchal nature of the western nuclear family produces a structure of scarcity, creating personalities which operate based on the experience of scarcity. Mother is supposed to provide for all emotional needs, with no help from the larger society, and Mother's task is impossible. All children growing up in this structure must experience not enough mothering and become programmed for competition not cooperation, for neediness rather than generosity. People who have felt not-enoughness in their childhood families are eager to believe that a family of their own will provide the security and need-gratification they seek. Thus, an emotional structure founded in scarcity of emotional resources leads to the perpetuation of nuclear families.

What quickly exhausts the emotional resources within a nuclear family is the organizational goal of pleasing the patriarch. In all male-headed families in our society, with variations depending on class and culture, the woman is supposed to give first consideration to meeting the emotional needs of the patriarch, at least when he is at home, and then the needs the other males in the family. Mothers relinquish their own needs and those of their daughters and of the other women in the family. Women allow themselves to be physically abused out of this conditioning to the primacy of male needs. Women may tell each other, "He's just a little boy," and believe at some level in the superiority of women. But viewing him as a little boy is a rationale for gratifying his needs and relinquishing their own. Here, as with other patterns of betrayal in the heterosexual world, we see a counterpart in the lesbian world. Lesbians sometimes treat as silly and inferior male behavior which is really violent and dangerous, as when one of us might refer to the threat of nuclear war as "the boys playing with their toys."

In a structure of scarcity, divide and conquer is indeed the prime strategy for preserving power and privilege in the hands of the few, in the hands of the upper- and middle-class white male. Women who have access to power only because they are white, connected to a male, and upper- or middle-class may see affiliation with women of color or with lesbians or with working class women as a terrifying threat to that status, power, and security they believe they do have.

Racism and classism, then, provide continuing bases for women's betrayals of other women, and further obscure the possibilities for bonds between women.

Second, the Euro-American patriarchal family structure has women living in the houses of men. Men tell women that we are not safe alone and confirm the lesson with rape and poverty. In fact, women have little access to money or power except through men. The result is that women have little space in society apart from men and thus little space in which to create a women's culture. Culture is embedded in history, and, since men write history from which women are erased, women have no base in history with which to create a culture. Therefore the culture women do have is fragmentary. Thus, the history that Euro-American mothers have available to pass on to their daughters as well as their sons is men's history and men's culture.

Third, women's value to men depends upon our being mothers, and our value as mothers depends upon how successfully we enculturate our children—our daughters to marriage and motherhood and our sons to careers and material success. For women everywhere the norm—that which is perceived as right, appropriate, valued female behavior—is and has long been connectedness with a man; and so daughters are raised to connect with men. Heterosexuality is the norm, and, in the U.S. at least, heterosexuality is viewed as biologically programmed. As Adrienne Rich so clearly shows, the programming for heterosexuality is in fact cultural, not biological.[3] And it is an intense, repressive, and often violent programming.

When women have no space or culture apart, and when programming for heterosexuality combines with a patriarchal culture in which men maintain power over women and ascribe greater value to themselves, what bonds can exist between women? What basis is there for believing that such bonds could, much less should, exist? What must a daughter be taught about her worth, her abilities, her destiny? Who must be her teacher? And where can she look for connections which support her worth, her own individual abilities, and which suggest a choice of destinies?

The Psyche

Recent feminist critiques of psychoanalytic theory, brilliantly summarized and expanded upon by Nancy Chodorow,[4] posit that the mother-daughter tie is different from the mother-son tie and that the daughter's experience of her mother differs from the son's experience of his mother. The following developmental summary emanates both from this alternative psychoanalytic perspective and from our own speculations about betrayals among women.

Because mothers identify more intensely with daughters, a daughter's striving to individuate from her mother is both more intense and more prolonged than a son's. Her primary love for and dependence upon her mother and her growing need to separate from her mother and to experience her personhood in an extended environment create feelings of intense ambivalence.

As the daughter develops, the mother's expectations for her daughter's behavior as a future woman intrude themselves into the mother-daughter relationship. These expectations may include encouragement of nurturing attitudes, insistence on delaying gratification and on tolerating frustration, discouragement of aggression in its more overt and self defining forms such as tantrums and defiance, instruction in the assumption of responsibility for others, and encouragement of pleasing behaviors. It is with intensely ambivalent feelings toward the mother and toward the beginnings of socialized feminine behaviors that the girl turns toward her father as a significant figure in her life.

The father offers the possibility of freedom from the intense identification with the mother. This separation is precipitated not only by the availability of the father but also by the daughter's growing discovery of her mother's preference for her father. The love the daughter believed belonged to her exclusively actually belongs to her father. This revelation is the daughter's first and most devastating experience of betrayal. She turns toward her father because she wants to be freed from the entanglement with her mother and because she hopes to entice her mother back to her by gaining her father's love. The flirtatious and seductive behaviors of the daughter toward her father always occur with an eye toward her mother, in the hope that she can win her mother through gaining the love of her father, this person whom her mother prefers. At the same time, by attaching to her father under her mother's very eyes, she can vent her fury with her mother for rejecting her. The girl never completely resolves the intense primary tie to the first love object. The daughter's attempts to cope with her mother's betrayal of their love for each other cannot free her from her ambivalence because her father does not supply maternal nurturing. And within the nuclear family there are only two choices. The daughter's ambivalence is consolidated during childhood into feelings of both hostility and love for her mother and for other women.

Alongside this crisis in development lies the father's encouragement of his daughter's feminine characteristics. Indeed it is fathers who most often are the ones that consider feminine behavior important in their daughters and who encourage their daughters' seductive flirtations. Mothers tend not to encourage these behaviors in daughters, but have little choice about not discouraging them. This failure by mothers to support the independent strivings of daughters constitutes a second and on-going betrayal.

The mother, also the daughter of a mother, is similarly ambivalent in relation to her mother. She too longs for caretaking, and she too feels betrayed by her mother. Through her daughter she plays out her anger and her wish for love. A mother's ambivalence, alongside the demands of patriarchy, cause her to collude with the father's active socializing of the daughter toward desired femininity, or even to carry out the process herself. At the same time she needs and fosters her love tie to her daughter. Because of their shared gender and identification she hopes to win from her daughter the love and nurturing her own mother was unable to supply.

We have attempted to describe, from a socio-political perspective and from a psychological perspective what we believe to be the inhibitors to women's bonding and how these influences set the stage for women's betrayals of women. In the remainder of this paper, we will tie these perspectives to actual stories women have told us.

Mother-Daughter Betrayals

Ruth Simpson points out that while for a child of color, a working class child, or a handicapped child, the family is usually a refuge from the oppression in the larger society, a source of support and understanding, for the lesbian or homosexual child the family is generally a source of oppression.[5] This is also true for women. The family is the instrument of patriarchy which teaches us we are second class citizens, and mothers are given the responsibility for passing on these teachings. All of the women we talked with experienced betrayals by their mothers in one way or another. We experience our mothers as betraying us by omission and commission.

A surprising number of the women we talked with told us of mothers who withdrew into sickness—alcoholism, depression, drugs, psychosis, and various non-diagnosible physical ailments, either chronic or intermittent. Daughters felt not only abandoned by these mothers but also betrayed by them because they failed to cope with the world, failed to be strong, and failed to provide their daughters with positive models of how to be a woman. Daughters also felt betrayed by their mothers' creation of a role reversal situation in which the daughter was expected to mother her mother, when the daughter still felt in need of mothering herself. One woman told us of the betrayal she felt when her mother would say to her, "Now you be the mother," and when her mother allowed her older sister to assume responsibility for her. She wanted her mother to be the mother. Daughters also felt at fault in some sense for their mothers' illnesses and so felt guilty when trying to act on their own interests. These daughters wanted mothers who modeled courage and strength and felt betrayed because their mothers were not such models, even though the daughters often had a sense of the difficulties and stresses of their mothers' lives.

Women in many ways suggested that they experienced their mothers' weaknesses as a betrayal of them. One German woman told us that during World War II, when the Reich glorified female strength—in its proper place—and when women had to fill in for men, she experienced her mother as a strong woman who took care of the home and also held public office in the town. She then felt betrayed when upon the return of her father her mother resumed a secondary, subservient role.

Other women who had mothers they perceived as strong and active in the world wished for mother mothering than they got but did not experience their

mothers' absences as a betrayal. Rather they felt betrayed when, usually in adolescence, their mothers stopped supporting their daughters' strength and assertive behavior and started giving or withholding approval based on their daughters becoming appropriately female, dressing properly, and dating. One daughter of such a mother told us of the anger and betrayal she felt in adolescence when her mother tried to get her to change from jeans and sweatshirts to a taffeta skirt, and then, upon her marriage, when her mother started supporting her wifely qualities but never her independent work.

Another common theme when we asked women about their experiences of betrayal was being lied to by their mothers. Some felt that their mothers were engaged in perpetuating the myth of the happy family and the happy marriage, which the daughters knew was false. The daughters experienced their mothers' unhappiness, frustration, unrealized ambitions, and unmet needs. Yet their mothers would not acknowledge to their daughters that they were unhappy or dissatisfied. Mothers would justify the abusive behavior of fathers, or try to hide it, try to hide their own anger, and try not to fight in front of the children.

Many daughters described lying in bed at night listening to their parents fight, only to be told that "Nothing is wrong." My (K's) earliest remembered betrayal is just such a scene. I was lying in bed at night—I must have been four or five—listening to my parents fighting. My mother told my father she would like to leave him, if it weren't for me. I got up and went downstairs, crying and begging my mother not to leave. She put me back to bed, told me she wouldn't leave, and said "Now I have to go downstairs and take care of your father." I felt abandoned by her for my father, and I felt from that time on that I was in some way responsible for her unhappiness. Another woman described overhearing a fight between her parents while she and her sister were in the bathtub. Her mother told her father that she would like to kill the kids. The daughter felt terrified that her mother could be in such a state as to not to be able to take care of her.

Maternal amnesia was also a common and a related theme. Daughters talked of having, as adults, sought honest answers from their mothers to questions about their childhoods. They asked their mothers to remember and to tell them the truth about what had really gone on. To tell them how things had been for their mothers. And, rather than risking the pain of remembering, their mothers had just said that they couldn't remember and that they didn't want to talk about it. I (N) wanted to know about my mother's life before her marriage, seeking, I think, a model of how I could be and what I might become. My mother was often silent about the painful and unhappy period of her childhood, which I also wanted to know about, and her silences led me to feel I needed to protect her from pain. Because of these silences about her early years and about the early years of her marriage, I felt robbed of the chance to know who she was and to define myself within the context of who my mother was.

Many women experienced in their mothers a strange kind of jealousy with regard not to their male but to their female friends. Most of us who spoke about this phenomenon remain somewhat confused about why our mothers behaved as they did, in ways that seemed designed to separate us from our girl friends. Sometimes they belittled us in front of our friends, sometimes they belittled or criticized our friends, sometimes they attempted to intrude into these relationships. One woman told us that she experienced her mother's reaction to her first lover not only as disgust and outrage but also as a kind of jealousy that her daughter had chosen another woman, as though this was a rejection of her.

Women also told us that they experienced maternal discouragement of close friendships with other girls beginning in adolescence. Some experienced their mothers as supporting their father's homophobia and carrying out the programming to separate them from their girlfriends, and others experienced their mothers as failing to support the legitimacy of their ties to other girls in the face of the fathers' disapproval. In either case they felt betrayed.

Women frequently spoke of feeling that their mothers had handed them over to their fathers. One woman felt that her mother had handed her over to her father in order to enable the daughter to be stronger, more a person in the world than the mother had succeeded in being, and so the daughter did not experience this as a betrayal by her mother. Other women, however, felt that their mother then failed to support them in the face of paternal injustice and abuse. One child of an alcoholic father described her mother as colluding with the oppressor: "She stood by while he abused me, or even helped him. She left me alone with him when she knew I wasn't safe." Another young woman whose mother had kicked out her alcoholic father experienced betrayal when her mother took him back. She remembered pleading with her mother, "We are fine without him." She felt further betrayed when her mother then got pregnant again, which she perceived as her mother's attempt to hold on to her husband.

Both of us (K and N) became strongly father-identified at four or five. We both believe that this was in part an identification with "where the power lay." Identification with our fathers also in some way enabled us to identify with active rather than passive stances. For me (K) the identification with my father was an escape from the option my mother seemed to offer, growing up to be alcoholic and miserable, yet I also felt always that I had betrayed my mother by this identification, and she frequently spoke of feeling left out or abandoned by me. I (N) was enchanted by my father, who behaved seductively toward me. My mother didn't intervene or offer herself as an alternative, so my identification with him was strong. During adolescence I experienced my father's bond with me as a repressed sexual attraction, which he kept under control by verbally attacking me. I always longed for my mother to intervene, to rescue me from him. I didn't at the time experience myself as betraying her by turning to my father, because I felt so betrayed by her.

Many women experienced their mothers' attitudes toward the female body and

toward sexuality as a betrayal. Their mothers left them both ignorant and ashamed of their bodies and their sexuality. Some mothers were totally unable to discuss sex with their daughters, and the mothers who did presented it as variously disgusting, evil, or at best mildly unpleasant, but nevertheless a necessary part of being a woman. One woman who grew up within a religious subculture experienced a particularly profound and devastating betrayal of her sexuality by her mother. Her mother failed to protect her when she was sexually abused as a child, but when it was discovered during her early adolescence that she masturbated, her mother took her to a hospital run by their religious group, and held her while she was tied down, to prevent her from masturbating. She was left there for weeks, supposedly until she acknowledged her own evilness. Because of her mother's role in her oppression the woman always blamed her mother and felt no capacity to trust women, until, years later someone said to her, "Whose rule do you think your mother was carrying out?"

Preference for male members of the family was experienced by women in many different ways. Some women experienced the household as revolving around the father, and experienced their mothers' main goal as not upsetting the father. One woman told us that in her large, extended family the women were strong and competent, and enjoyed being together to cook and care for children. But when the men were home all the women catered to them and deferred to them. She and other girl children were expected to participate in waiting on men, while her brothers were not.

One woman told us that on the day that her second brother went off to college her mother stood at the window and watched until he was out of sight, and then went to bed where she stayed for two years, even though her daughter was still at home and still felt she needed her mother.

I (N) have a brother a year younger than I. When I was nine or ten I was a good rider, while my brother was not and was afraid of horses. My horse was given to me the year before as a Christmas present. I was told to go outside for my gift, and standing in the snow was a beautiful black horse with red ribbons braided into its mane and tail. It was a fairy tale come true. I was eager to ride again after the winter, and had planned to ride on a day when my parents were gone. They had cautioned the ranch foreman not to let my brother ride, but he begged to and so the foreman decided to "let the boy ride." I pleaded with him not to, but he did, and my brother was thrown and injured. After this incident my father decided the horse was dangerous and sold it. My mother said nothing.

Other women told us that their brothers got cars or bicycles while they did not, that this was their fathers' idea of what was appropriate for boys and girls, and that their mothers did not fight for their equal rights.

As girls many of us experienced two more subtle and confusing aspects of differential treatment. We experienced confusion about what kinds of behaviors would be approved of by our mothers and remember that sometimes strength and autonomy were approved of and sometimes they were disapproved of.

Sometimes intelligence and success were rewarded and sometimes frowned upon. We felt we got a kind of random reinforcement from our mothers, the kind of reinforcement that was so unpredictable as to rob us of a sense of power over our world, to leave us forever dependent upon the approval of others, starting with our mothers. Since we didn't know which actions would bring approval, which disapproval, we could not make the choice of consequences for ourselves.

We also experienced an on-going critical, belittling, undermining behavior from our mothers. Nothing we did was quite right, and the way we looked was never good enough. I (K) was in a restaurant about three years ago with my parents, and my then nearly blind mother reached over and stuck her hand into my dress to see if I was wearing a bra. Women who had brothers experienced their mothers as tending to praise their brothers or at least as not criticizing them, while constantly undermining us. Also we felt that we were expected to be stronger, more able to delay gratification and deal with disappointment, and more giving and understanding than our brothers or fathers. The message that in some ways women are stronger and more sensible and better than men served not to affirm our sense of self worth but rather to justify our future roles as caretakers of men.

Daughters who have become successful in the world experienced ambivalence toward this success on the part of their mothers. Their mothers had difficulty just being proud of and happy for their daughters. They seemed to feel some resentment toward or envy of their daughters' successes, and seemed to need to point out flaws in the way their successful daughters performed traditionally feminine roles, rather than congratulating them for their success. Daughters are often left feeling that no matter what they do, they can never gain whole-hearted unequivocal love and approval from their mothers. Somehow, in our mothers' eyes, we are always slightly flawed. I (K) don't remember ever hearing my mother say she was proud of me. At my mother's funeral the woman who had been taking care of her said to me, "You know your mother was very proud of you." And when I passed the bar exam my father said to me, "You know how proud your mother would be." The emotional impact of these statements on me—even now—makes it clear to me how much I longed for those words from my mother.

The experience of being betrayed by one's mother in one or more of the ways described was expressed by most of the women we talked with, but with variations. The four women of color we talked with were both less likely than white women to describe their mothers as betraying them and also more likely to describe their mothers as strong, competent and in charge. Women of color did describe various kinds of preferences for maleness, did describe socialization toward heterosexuality and connectedness with males by their mothers. One black woman said, "Since I grew up accepting that men came first and that relationships with women were secondary, I wouldn't have even felt betrayed by

a woman choosing a man first." Nonetheless, women of color seemed to more frequently experience their mothers as supportive of them and encouraging of their strengths. In particular, women of color felt strong bonds with their mothers arising from a shared sense of racial oppression, with a shared sense that there was a real enemy "out there"—the white racist U.S. These women were articulate about the oppressiveness of the sex role values and behaviors passed on by their mothers, and at the same time described how they felt supported by and united with their mothers in fighting racism's impact on their lives. Also, both black women described their mothers as equal partners in the family, who worked hard to insure that their daughters were treated equally.

With variations, then, daughters feel betrayed by our mothers because our mothers failed to provide a model of strength, because our mothers failed to tell us the truth, because our mothers taught us in many ways to accept women's roles, because our mothers failed to support the bonds between women, because our mothers preferred and deferred to our fathers, and because our mothers failed to support us as separate, active, autonomous selves and failed to give us whole-hearted love and approval.

It is important, if this description of daughters' felt betrayals seems to suggest that mothers are at fault, to remember that all mothers are also daughters. It is also important to remember the position of mothers. Patriarchy teaches mothers that their identity and value depend upon the quality of their mothering, and that that quality is judged by how their children turn out. They are in charge of passing on the values of the culture and of conditioning their children to appropriate social roles. Many have also had to give up their role as actor in the world, relinquish their dreams of being doctors, musicians, executives, dancers in order to become good mothers. Other authors have written about the role of frustrated ambitions and unmet needs, both affective and cognitive, in women's illnesses.[6] Those daughters who were and are our mothers continually strove to give us what their mothers never gave them, strove to free us from the limits their mothers imposed on them. As no doubt so did their mothers before. We all believe that we will not make the same mistakes with our daughters that our mothers did with us. But we all—daughters and mothers—live in a world, still, which ascribes greater worth to maleness and gives greater power and autonomy and scope to men, which tells us that without a man we are no one and that bonds between women are secondary. To be a strong woman is to be a castrating bitch, a man eater. To be a lesbian is to be an object of humor, pity, or contempt. So a woman is still not entitled to be for herself or for other women, and few mothers can believe that they are acting in their daughter's best interests to raise her to become a castrating bitch or a dyke.

It is no wonder we experience maternal ambivalence. Surely every mother must always be torn about how far to encourage her daughter's strength and autonomy, and where to attempt to curb her daughter's self for the daughter's

own good. Many of us heard our mothers say to us, "It's for your own good," and resented it. Yet our mother was trying to act for us. Andrea Dworkin, in *Right-Wing Women* says:

> Mothers had to teach their daughters to like men as a class—be responsive to men as men, warm to men as men—and at the same time to not have sex . . . The girls were told nice things about human sexuality and also told that it would cost them their lives one way or another . . . The cruelty of the ambivalence communicated itself, but the kindness in the intention did not: mothers tried to protect their daughters from many men by directing them toward one; mothers tried to protect their daughters by getting them to do what was necessary inside the male system without ever explaining why . . . And the mothers failed to convince because the only life they offered was a repeat version of their own, and the girls were close enough to feel the inconsolable sadness and the dead tiredness of those lives, even if they did not know how or why mother had gotten the way she was.[7]

Betrayals Beyond the Family

Betrayals among women outside of the family system are also frequent and painful experiences. These experiences begin for us when we first move outside the family circle and continue throughout our lives. They occur between two people and in groups and as part of the social fabric. They occur in the personal arena between friends and acquaintances, in political movements, in the workplace, and in interactions between client and professional. Everywhere. And we want to reiterate again that blame is not the issue. The porno actress and the token woman executive, the right wing "right-to-life" supporter and the closeted lesbian all betray all women, including themselves, and all are equally caught in a system not of their making, trying to survive. We are all "innocent and accountable" as Adrienne Rich has said.[8] We are accountable for our own ignorance, and as we become aware, as we grow to understand the ways in which we betray each other, we gain the power to stop.

Many women had memories of childhood betrayals which revolved around exclusion from a particular group, of a friend declaring, "You aren't my friend anymore." In some circles this may be viewed as "developmentally appropriate" play. Many teachers and child development people we talked with did acknowledge that this type of inclusion/exclusion play was much more common among girls than boys. And here, too, we think lesbians can ask ourselves how much of this inclusion/exclusion dynamic operates in our adult lesbian communities.

When any phenomenon seems more prevalent in one sex than another or one race than another, it is critical to stop and say, "Hey, what is really going on here?" We don't have an answer to why the need to exclude figures more in girls' play than in boys', but we have a few hypotheses. First, girls by the time we

reach school age have been trained by our mothers' preference for our fathers and by the random reinforcement our behavior receives. We feel angry at our mothers' rejection and are love/approval dependent. We may exclude as an expression of our anger at our mothers, as an attempt to put ourselves in the powerful position of rejector. We may exclude in order to feel included, loved, special. Girls may in fact be enculturated to be dyadic rather than group oriented. Girls do not grow up to be team players. If so, it does seem that the female's enculturated need for a dyadic relationship would serve to perpetuate the nuclear family structure, the sexual double standard and ownership of women by men.

All of us who experiencd such exclusions are still somewhat bewildered about the bases for them. I (K) interpreted one exclusion as based on the fact that I was wearing green shoes, since I was teased about them, and everyone else was wearing maryjanes or saddle shoes. (I also felt my mother had betrayed me by sending me to school in those green shoes which could provide a basis for my exclusion.) Generally I interpreted my exclusions in early childhood as based on my being fat. In adolescence I had some clarity that they were also partly based on my being "intellectual" and not interested in boys. I (N) was excluded from "Dottie's Dimpled Darlings," a girls' athletic/cheerleading group (Dottie was the gym teacher) even though I was very athletic and able and even though I knew Dottie liked me. It seems to me in retrospect that all the girls who did belong were girls who adopted "appropriate" feminine sex role behavior and I had not. Another woman we talked with, who was excluded from a special group at camp, also in retrospect suspects that the exclusion was based upon her failure to be appropriately feminine.

I (K) betrayed a long time childhood friend during the transition into high school from junior high. It was the kind of thing that could easily be dismissed as our "growing apart" and "going our separate ways" except for the fact that I felt at the time that I was abandoning her, betraying her, and I knew the baseness of my motives. Partly it was that she wasn't as "smart" as I was and that I was included in special classes and she wasn't. Partly it was that she was just one generation out of an Appalachian farming background. I didn't want to jeopardze my status and social acceptance by including her in activities with my new circle of friends. After all, I was still fat, so I had to be careful.

Class and race oppressions create personal barriers between women, in which white women continue to operate out of oppressive attitudes, and out of our own ignorance of the lives and experiences of women of color or women of other classes. The four women of color we spoke with said that they had had few personal experiences of betrayal by white women, because they didn't let themselves get close enough to a white woman to be betrayed, or never had the expectation that the white woman would operate with regard to their welfare in the first place.

Black women's experience of betrayal at the hands of white women is as long

as the history of slavery in this country. Linda Brent, writing of her years as a slave, described her terror of being raped by her white mistress' husband and her mistress' rage at her because of the husband's attraction. She told of her mistress' self-pity and self-preoccupation with her failure as a wife at the expense of helping young black girls avoid rape at the hands of their master.[9] Today white feminists continue to ignore the existing realities of women of color, attempting to dismiss differences among women and denying the culture and history of women of color. Doris Davenport speculates, after years of being excluded from white feminist groups and activities, that white feminists' racism is a function of our own colonization by men from whom we have wrested just enough power to be desperately afraid of rocking the boat. To do so would jeopardize our tenuous gains and so we do not examine our accountability for the relative absence of women of color in feminist history, theory and work.[10]

Latinas have also spoken of betrayals among women. Aurora Levins Morales, a Puerto Riquena, writes about white women who, oblivious to her cultural heritage, complain to her about Latino men, and about her mistrust of Latina women who privately agree with her and who publicly abandon her, who complain to her privately about men and who return to men seeking their approval. She writes, "It's not the men who exile me.... It's the women."[11] Her mother, Rosario Morales, writes of similar experiences with classism and racism, and concludes that all women are guilty of identification with the oppressor, and it is this internalized oppression that enables women to continue to betray each other.[12]

Lesbians of color can find themselves on a triple-edge sword of loyalties and isolation. One description, which is also hopeful for bonds between women, is given by Cheryl Clarke:

> The black woman, having neither maleness nor whiteness, has always had her heterosexuality, which white men and black men have manipulated by force and at will.... [B]lack women [have] minimal access to the crumbs thrown at black men and white women. So, when the black woman and the white woman become lovers, we bring that history and all those questions to the relationship as well as other people's problems with the relationship. The taboo against intimacy between white and black people has been internalized by us and simultaneously defied by us. If we, as lesbian-feminists, defy the taboo, then we begin to transform the history of relationships between black women and white women.[13]

Lesbians have had many painful experiences with women who cannot face their own love of women. Women end relationships not because the relationship is destructive, not because the two of you no longer love each other, but because they are afraid someone might find out—that someone can be anyone at all, a child, often a son rather than a daughter, an employer, a parent. Certainly this fear of the consequences of being known to be a lesbian is not a paranoid

fabrication. There are consequences. Yet each of us who has been through this kind of loss feels it as a betrayal. And there is also the loss and anger you feel seeing someone you love betray herself, ignore and repress her own truth. The flight into marriage of a woman afraid of her love of women is something her ex-lover can only watch with intense rage and pain.

I (N) was in love with my college roommate and she with me. Our love affair lasted until graduation was approaching and then she told me she was going to get married. I felt absolutely betrayed and I felt she was betraying herself. I felt further betrayed when she did not invite me to the wedding. Recently another lesbian told me the same story, except that she was invited to be the maid of honor—which she also experienced as a betrayal and as very painful. Many years later my roommate called me long distance in the middle of the afternoon. She told me she was miserable with her husband—they always slept in separate beds. She had obviously been drinking. Financially they were doing fine—they owned a few apartment buildings and a Dairy Queen. I confess that in addition to feeling sorry for her I also felt avenged and vindicated.

Another woman described to us an intense friendship with her college roommate in which they seemed to be constantly compelled to be cruel to each other. As she told the story to us there was pain on her face, and she added, "I think we had to be so cruel to each other because we didn't have the courage to face what the relationship really meant." Even among lesbians, among women who have broken the sexuality taboo, can our cruelty to each other when it happens be a denial of how much we want that which we are afraid we cannot have?

The accusation of lesbianism frequently results in loss of jobs for women. Recently several lesbian women in academia were fired because of their public lesbian identities, and several were fired by closet lesbians in their own departments. This year the accusation of lesbianism was made against the Women's Studies department at California State University Long Beach by several right-wing office-seeking politicians. A legal battle resulted in the reinstatement of one lesbian teacher who had been fired under the guise of a departmental review of the program to determine its future status, but the Women's Studies program was decimated in spite of the legal victory. In Los Angeles this year a thriving, privately and publicly supported pre-school and child care program was denied expected block grant funds necessary for its survival because the director was accused of lesbianism by a parent in the program with whom she had worked closely over a period of several years, although that wasn't the reason given by the funding agency.

Support for lesbians who are publicly accused quickly fades away out of a misguided hope by employers and colleagues, analogous to the anti-Communist hysteria of the 40's and 50's, that the prevailing system will be appeased if their institutions cleanse themselves of trouble-makers. What is the trouble lesbians

make? Is to choose to be a woman separate from men, to choose to love women, trouble? This mistaken notion of appeasing curtails freedom for all oppressed groups, including women who participate in it. Those who choose to appease in the hope that some vestige of their interests can be salvaged are likely to make the same choice a second and a third time. They come to be haunted by the knowledge of their betrayal of themselves, of their sisters and colleagues, and of their lesbian sisters.

Self Betrayal

Self-betrayals can be more difficult for women to name. We feel so strongly the betrayals of others that, depleted by our own denied needs and longings, we often lack the inner fuel to examine our own complicity. Also, once an event is named it can be examined, and examination means being in a position to make a conscious choice. For women the choice is to resign oneself to continued self-betrayal or to try to alter the circumstances of one's own life. Having virtually no opportunity to practice taking our lives into our own hands and nowhere to look for models who have, we are our own trailbreakers; and the pressures against opening new paths are everywhere we look—both within ourselves and outside ourselves. When we do manage to carve out the semblance of a new way it closes around us again like an equatorial jungle because we don't have the resources or connections to sustain our efforts.

Adolescence is often the turning point for girls, in which we are encouraged in every way to deny those parts of ourselves that are active, curious, and achieving, the time in which our own betrayal of ourselves begins in earnest. Girls who had been athletic or smart or competent or self-assertive or confident begin to drop or modify these attributes in favor of more feminine ones. One woman, for example, dropped team sports which she loved and in which she excelled, and exchanged them for dance. For many girls high school is the beginning of a decline in the area of intellectual competence—"boys don't like a girl who is too smart"—and they recede quietly into silence. One woman's father, a judge, told her often during childhood that she should become a lawyer, only to discourage her later because he couldn't stand "pushy, lady lawyers." She didn't become a lawyer.

College is a time when women often experience a sense of self-betrayal. Several women have memories of specific assignments which put them into a state of conflict, which caused them to doubt themselves and their abilities, and which forced on them the choice between betraying their own insights (writing the paper according to the "appropriate" male-defined interpretations and getting a decent grade) or attempting to be true to their own insights, with nothing to rely on, no "proof," and facing failure and ridicule.

I (K) had the experience on several occasions of writing papers that I knew were compromises. I went as far as I thought I could to be true to my own insights, but stopped short of crossing over the line into the totally unacceptable interpretation. One such paper was on *Middlemarch*. I knew from that book how much the world was against strong women, that there was no escape for Dorothea, and that the issue was not just a choice of men, but that there were no men who could help her, no men who would be good for her as a woman. But I didn't quite say that. *To the Lighthouse* was a book which spoke absolutely to my experience and to my needs. I knew that Lily Briscoe was in love with Mrs. Ramsay. So first I tried to distract myself by deciding to write a paper on the color symbolism in the book. But the color symbolism as I analyzed it served only to reflect Lily's love for Mrs. Ramsay. Finally I did write my paper on the relationship between the two women—I just didn't name it for what it was. In writing that paper I read Woolf's diaries, searching for some evidence of her love for women, only to find years later that the editions I was using had been "expurgated."

As a creative writing major I learned what I already intuitively knew, that to write well one had to write the truth of one's own experience. But the core of my own experience was my love for women. How could I face reading aloud in a seminar with a male professor and many male students a story about love between women? So I wrote stories about other parts of my experience, but always they felt peripheral, almost a lie. Finally, for my senior project I did write a story about a high school student's love for her teacher and the teacher's fear of her own lesbianism. I knew that the senior projects would never have to be read aloud in seminar. I experienced my whole college career as skirting on the edge of self-betrayal. Today I am able to view the papers and stories I did write as acts of courage in the face of an unaccepting world, yet at the time they left me doubting my own integrity. And the outcome of these college years for me was to feel blocked about being a writer. I felt that I didn't have either the models or the courage to write directly from my own feelings and experience as a lesbian, and so I pursued various other careers, when in my soul I knew I wanted to be a writer.

Women are taught to worry about "too-ness"—too smart, too strong, too assertive, too loud, too fat, too old, too ugly. No one talks about the sense of personal loss a woman expriences when she attempts to be other than she is and the sense of self-betrayal she feels when she learns to act, and ultimately to be, less than she is, less than she can be. The limits to what men allow women to be in strength, smartness, and assertion are always reached before the individual woman has reached her own personal limits. She never gets the chance to test herself out to the full, and so always at some level she has betrayed her own potential. Thus to assert strength is to encounter self-doubt, and to fail to assert strength is to encounter self-betrayal.

Conclusion

In the face of all the forces that militate against women's bonding with women, it is astonishing that we do indeed continue to feel allied with each other, continue to love each other, continue to feel a shared commonality of experience and maintain life-long ties with each other. Even our betrayals of ourselves and of each other fail to sever our loyalties. We believe that our bonds, as well as our betrayals, grow out of our common oppression as women and out of our earliest ambivalent experiences with our mothers. Oppressed groups feel an allegiance out of their shared status, which creates a common experience. This is true of women and even more true of lesbians. We also feel connected to all women through our mothers, and feel constant longing and hope toward each other arising out of our early mothering.

Women's loyalties to each other, though strongly felt, carry no legitimacy in the world of men, and therefore our bonds have been supported only by our own feelings and our own courage, slender reeds to hang onto in the midst of our oppression and in the face of all the forces at work to sever our bonds. Nothing beyond our individually felt need for each other has reinforced our expectations of loyalty.

But now we are beginning again to name ourselves and to identify women's culture and lesbian culture, and this naming process gives us power. The power to act more and more in our own behalf, the power to begin a history for women and a history for lesbians, the power to name the legitimacy of our bonds with each other, and the power to stop betraying ourselves and each other.

Women's bonding with each other poses no threat to the patriarchal structures so long as we continue to connect ourselves to men and to honor male primacy. Only when we reject the primacy of men in our lives and attempt to put ourselves first do we come up against the retaliatory strength of the oppressor. Naming our betrayals is one way among many to begin to name ourselves as an independent, self-defined, self-affirming people. Naming our betrayals takes courage and only by acting courageously will we begin to discover our selves. History is a monotonous montage of retaliation against struggles for freedom, and we need to pay attention to the reality that as we seek more and more freedom we will encounter more and more resistance. We need to be as truthful as we can be—relentless in our truthfulness—so no lies can disrupt the bonds we must make if we are to become what we can become. Truth opens the door to a common language. As Adrienne Rich wrote for Audre Lorde,

> Until we find each other we are alone.[14]

Notes

[1] La Frances Rodgers-Rose, ed, *The Black Woman* (Sage Publ, 1980); Anita Cornwell, *Black Lesbian in White America* (Naiad, 1983); Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (Random, 1981); Barbara Smith, ed, *Home Girls—A Black Feminist Anthology* (Kitchen Table, 1983); Alma Gomez, Cherrie Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona, eds, *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (Kitchen Table, 1983); Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis, *Common Differences: Conflict in Black and White Feminist Perspectives* (Anchor, 1981); Martha Cortez, *The Chicana Feminist* (Austin, Texas: Information Systems Development, 1977); Alfredo Mirande and Evangeline Enriquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican American Woman* (Univ. Chicago Press, 1979).

[2] *Of Woman Born* (Norton, 1976); *Dream of a Common Language* (Norton, 1978); *Lies, Secrets and Silence* (Norton, 1979). Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence, *Signs*, 5, no. 4, 631–660.

[3] Adrienne Rich, Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence, *Signs*, 5, no. 4, 631–660.

[4] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Univ. California Press, 1978).

[5] Ruth Simpson, *From the Closet to the Courts* (Penguin, 1976).

[6] See, for example, Robert Seidenberg and Karen DeCrowe, *Women Who Marry Houses* (McGraw Hill, 1983) and Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (Doubleday, 1972).

[7] Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women* (Putnam, 1983), 101–102.

[8] Adrienne Rich, in a lecture at Scripps College, February 15, 1983.

[9] Nancy Cott, ed, *Roots of Bitterness* (Dutton, 1972), 200–205.

[10] In, The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin, *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds, Moraga and Anzaldua (Persephone, 1981), 85–90.

[11] Aurora Levins Morales, ...Even Fidel Can't Change That!, in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds, Moraga and Anzaldua (Persephone, 1981).

[12] Rosario Morales, We're All in the Same Boat, in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds, Moraga and Anzaldua (Persephone, 1981), 91–93.

[13] Cheryl Clarke, Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance, in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds., Moraga and Anzaldua (Persephone, 1981), 128–137.

[14] Adrienne Rich, Hunger, in *Dream of a Common Language* (Norton, 1978).

Notes on the Meaning of Life*

Joyce Trebilcot

Most women live most of the time in environments that are pervasively phallic. That is, analogues of male sexuality—of penises flaccid and erecting, of copulating, of male orgasm—surround and inhabit us. Here are some familiar examples: Skyscrapers, steeples, bell towers. Lipstick ads. Spacecraft. Cars and planes. Weapons—bullets, missiles—invading and exploding. And in language: Scholarly essays, for example, are full of issues arising, points to be made, hard cases, ends to be reached, and upshots.

Like other feminists, I have for a long time known that the images of phallic culture are all around me and inside me, but recently I have learned something that has made me especially conscious of this fact. I have discovered that I have devoted a great deal of my best energy over a period of years to a problem that was a problem for me only because I failed to recognize that its form is phallic, that is, that its form is determined by male sexuality and hence is inauthentic for me. Here I want to set out this problem and the dissolution of it.

The Two Ethics

The dominant culture in contemporary industrial society, and this is the context in which I speak throughout, presents two sorts of value as worthy of primary commitment. The first is to be found in extraordinary *experiences*. The content of these experiences is variously described as contemplation (e.g., of beauty, of Platonic Forms), as communion (e.g., with nature or a diety), as

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creation (e.g., of a work of art). Recommended means to such experiences include various religious and quasi-religious disciplines such as meditation, chanting, and fasting; isolation, including solitary journeys in wilderness; drug-taking; sexual practices designed to heighten sensibility; and so on. What these varied experiences have in common is perhaps best described by the term "ecstasy": in such an experience one stands outside of oneself, outside of one's usual consciousness. Although such standing aside may be terrifying, in patriarchy ecstatic experience is prized; it is often presented as the best that life has to offer. I call the system that thus values ecstasy "the experience ethic."

The second way of life presented as worth following in dominant industrial culture is achievement. Achievement is a matter of producing great works, such as works of art or technology or science (poems or bridges or vaccines), or of performing great deeds (deeds of leadership or heroism or martyrdom). Achievements are taken to be of supreme value in large part because they are thought to be capable of rendering the achiever immortal. To be immortal in this context does not mean that one exists forever as an individual organism, of course, but, rather, that one's works and deeds continue to have significance after one's death. It is thought best to create works or perform deeds that have very far-reaching influence in terms of both the numbers of people affected and the length of time after one's death that the influence continues. Further, one's name should be permanently attached to one's productions: it is better to write a poem that is known years after one's death in connection with one's name than to write one that is known equally long as anonymous (but the anonymous poem is preferred to having nothing at all of one's products remain). I have come to call the system that thus values immortality "the achievement ethic."

When I was quite young I began, like many girls, to study, think about, and experiment with the values offered in the culture in which I lived, the values that I later defined as the experience ethic and the achievement ethic. I had decided very early, before I was a teenager, that the values offered to women of my place and race and class—particularly marriage and motherhood—were second-rate. So, being sufficiently privileged, I turned to the other values the culture offered—the values of experience and achievement that were designed by and for men. My focus on these values was reinforced by my university education and, more strongly, by the life I lived on the streets in Berkeley in the fifties as a member of the intensely masculinist culture others labeled "Beatnik."

As the years went on, I understood the two ethics more and more clearly as separate and competing systems. That is, it became clear to me that one had to give priority to one ethic or the other, to choose between them. So a central and continuing problem for me was whether one should—that is, whether I should—focus on living for the moment, on the transformation of consciousness in the here and now, or, alternatively, on accomplishing some worthwhile work. It seemed clear to me that one had to give priority to one ethic or the

other, to choose between them. I was puzzled that there were men in the patriarchal culture around me who seemed to accept both these values, but not to feel the conflict. Nor was I able to share my feelings about this issue with women at that time.

My concern with the conflict between experience and achievement continued as Beatnikism faded and I returned from six years "on the road" to settle down to graduate school. Later, in 1974, still inclined to puzzle over the two ethics, I published an essay entitled "Aprudentialism" (a word developed from the made-up term "aprudent," that is, "not-prudent," by analogy with "amoral"), in which I argue (against philosophers John Rawls and Thomas Nagel) that it is not irrational to live for the moment; the essay, although not so formulated, is a defense of the experience ethic.[1] But although I defended the rationality of the experience ethic in print, I by no means had settled in favor of it. The question of which of the two ethics should have precedence continued to concern me. For example, in 1978 I went on a long driving trip into Mexico during which I pondered over this problem, which I formulated at that time primarily as a problem about "process versus product." For many years, then, I was unable to find a coherent and satisfactory resolution to what I took to be a conflict between the ethic of experience and the ethic of achievement.

The Sexual Connection

My formulation of the two ethics was based on observation of patriarchy and patriarchal men and especially on the study of literature, art, and philosophy created by men for men. As I have indicated, a major influence was university education: in college I was required to read about and respect men's reports of mystical and creative joy, and in every course from classics to chemistry I was taught to view those men who have produced (relatively) lasting work as the most worthy of humans.

Recently I have come to understand that the form of the two ethics as men understand them is the form of male sexuality, that is, male orgasm and the fathering of offspring. For men, ecstatic experience is associated with orgasm, and immortal achievement is associated with impregnating a woman.

The connection between the first pair, orgasm and ecstatic or mystical experience, has been noted by many patriarchal thinkers. Here I cite just one. Abraham Maslow, in the context of a discussion of what he calls "the peak experience," speaks of subjects who describe their mystical experiences in terms that are also used to describe orgasms:

> There were the same feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely

> important and valuable had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences.[2]

The connection between the second pair, impregnating a woman and immortal achievement, is also demonstrated by the fact that the two phenomena are often described in the same language. Diotima provides the classic example when, in Plato's *Symposium*, she asks:

> Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory?... [A]nd many others there are in many other places,... who have given to the world many notable works, and have been the parents of virtue of every kind; and many temples have been raised in their honor for the sake of children such as theirs...[3]

When I understood that men associate the ethic of experience with male orgasm and the ethic of achievement with impregnation, the conflict I had felt between them began to dissolve. I began to understand that for men, the phenomena of orgasm and insemination are closely linked or, rather, in the male imagination these are but one phenomenon: to have an orgasm in intercourse is ("ideally" or "naturally") to impregnate. That is, in the patriarchal imagination, orgasm and impregnation are the same event. Indeed, some men (for example, Norman Mailer) are so committed to the image of the two as identical that they oppose birth control on the ground that it limits male potency, that it interferes with the expression and so with the power of male sexuality.

Just as orgasm and impregnation are a single process for men, so are the experience and achievement ethics. For men, through ecstatic orgasm one creates babies, and through other ecstatic experiences one creates great works of art and science and heroism. For men, there is no conflict between the two ethics—indeed, for them there is only one ethic, an ethic that requires a spewing forth of sperm into the world, spewing forth that is at once both ecstatic and creative of new reality.

But women's sexual experience is different. Orgasm and pregnancy are not connected for us, not even for heterosexual women, as they are for men. While virtually all pregnancies begin with male orgasm, female orgasm is neither a usual nor necessary prelude to impregnation. Because of the anatomical relationship between the clitoris and the penis in intercourse, most instances of intercourse do not include female orgasm at all. Further, probably most episodes of heterosexual activity do not include female orgasm.[4] So female orgasm is probably not a usual precursor to pregnancy, and, of course, it is not a necessary one. Thus, for men, orgasm and insemination are intimately related, or, rather, are one event; for women, having an orgasm and getting pregnant are quite separate phenomena.

Because I do not share men's image of orgasm and impregnation as a single process, I formulated the two ethics as separate, as each setting forth a distinct ideal for a meaningful life; from this formulation, it follows that the two ethics are in conflict. This conflict, to which I devoted so much of my time, occurred for me, then, because I am a woman, and because I failed to understand that the values I was struggling with are by men, for men.

Once I understood the conflict in these terms, it disappeared. I now find the issue of which is more valuable, experience or achievement, completely uninteresting.

As for how to live, I am currently absorbed in the task of excising phalluses from other rooms of thought.

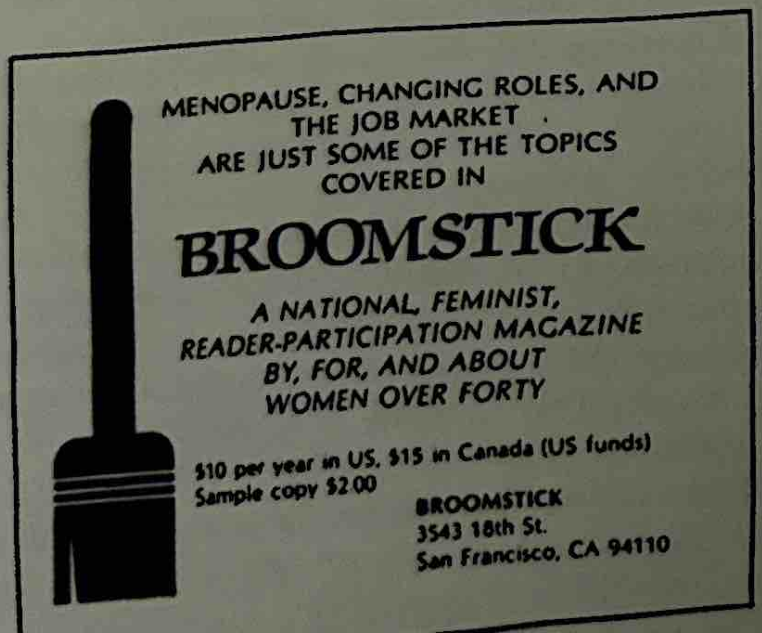
Notes

[1] *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *11*, no. 3 (July 1974).

[2] Abraham M. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 164.

[3] Plato, "Symposium" in *The Dialogue of Plato* translated by B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1892, 1920), 209, p. 333.

[4] See Shere Hite, *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* (New York: Dell, 1976), especially the chapter on intercourse.



Notes on Contributors

Julia Penelope. I've called myself a Separatist since December of 1973 and am still learning what that label means as I make choices and evaluate them. Since I stopped calling myself a "feminist" in 1980 I've hoped that someone else would write an article and say the things I'm saying in "The Mystery of Lesbians." I hope that we can rekindle the embers of radical feminism and blaze more fiercely than before. Writing about my own pain and disillusionment has helped me to put the last 10 years in perspective so I can stop recycling hurt and despair.

Jeanette Silveira. I am privileged to live in the big city by the beach and to work at an all woman agency with lots of lesbians, as the finance and computer person. I've always been an intellectual, I have been a cognitive psychologist, I am a feminist theorist.

Barbara Macdonald is co-author with Cynthia Rich of *Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism* (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1983).

Jane Rule is a novelist, short story writer and essayist living in British Columbia. Her birthdate is March 28, 1931, and she supposes that when it's a matter of ethics, age is an interesting detail.

Nikola Trumbo is a Child Development Specialist who struggles with ambivalence. She works with families and is doubtful about the value of the family; she is a music lover without an instrument, and an animal lover who keeps telling Karen they shouldn't get anymore animals; she is a revolutionary who wants to live quietly with Karen and write whatever pleases them. She is awfully vulnerable for a tough person, or vice versa. She is lucky to have a sense of humor to mediate her conflicts and passions.

Karen Fite has a hard time thinking of herself in the third person. She thinks that perhaps she is defined by what she loves to do: teach, write, eat, read, bird- and cat-watch. Or by who she loves: Nikola, her father, Virginia Woolf, Mother Jones. Or by what she hates: racism, sexism, injustice, exploitation of people, animals, the land. Or by what she would like to be: funny, generous, courageous, wise.

Joyce Trebilcot is a lesbian feminist philosopher and a teacher and coordinator of Women's Studies; a devoted member of SWIP; and a daughter of the golden west currently displaced to the midlands (St. Louis).

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