

Lesbian Ethics



Volume 1 No. 2

Lesbian Ethics

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Editor's Introduction

The response to *Lesbian Ethics* has been enthusiastic. Lesbians have written us, "If I had my way, *Lesbian Ethics* would be published weekly. I crave it." "*Lesbian Ethics* is absolutely wonderful! She has produced great changes in me and my life, in other wimmin I know." "What a relief to find that. . . there are others who mourn the concept of a lesbian community. . . I hadn't even realized I was in mourning." "I think it's exciting, needed – I am grateful because it is such an encouragement to me to think," ". . . chock full of the hottest theory I've seen in a long time." "My radical feminism has been sparked over again." "I love giving lesbians your journal as a gift." "As a Separatist it's a joy to read – Right On." "Thank you for beginning something which really needed to be done!" "I was tremendously impressed. . ." "It is a delight indeed. . . I am so damned sick of all the mealy mouthing compromises and backsliding that go on in the name of – what? Enlightened feminism?" ". . . anxiously awaiting installment #2 [of *The Mystery of Lesbians*]." "It's about time I read something that was as supportive. . . of Lesbians as [Julia Penelope's] article is."

LE has also gotten several letters and subscriptions from Europe. The wimmin of Onlywomen Press in London have been holding a *Lesbian Ethics* discussion series (not related to *LE*) and are planning to start a magazine similar to *LE* this year.

Certainly *Lesbian Ethics* is doing for me what I had wanted: she is bringing alive for me the network of radical feminist lesbians that I had hoped existed. My life and my consciousness are wondrously different now than they were six months ago. In fact, this issue is a little late because I was so happy basking in the response to *LE 1* that I forgot I had to do it all again!

Although *LE* is doing well, she is still not self-supporting. Our goal is another 200 subscriptions before the appearance of *LE 3*, and we need to increase the number of bookstores that carry *LE* (she has been selling out at most stores that carry her). So think of *Lesbian Ethics* when you have a gift to give, inquire for her at your local feminist, lesbian, and gay bookstores, and suggest that your college (or perhaps your local?) library subscribe.

You haven't responded to the idea of a Dear Lez column. We do plan, however, to continue the readers' forums on a regular basis. The forum topic for *LE 3* is "Lesbian-Feminist Therapy." *LE 3* will also include Julia Penelope's summary conclusion to "The Mystery of Lesbians." I would like to encourage readers to submit comments on any of the issues Julia has raised in her paper. We begin with a comment by Sarah Hoagland in this issue. For more information on the therapy forum and submissions to *LE*, see the Announcements page.

Jeanette Silveira

Lesbian Origins*

Susan Cavin

In this work I posit that female society is the eternal constant base of all societies, even patriarchies. *Female homosocial relations* are critical to the formation and maintenance of the family, community and society. By female homosocial relations, I mean social ties between females. These ties include the following familial relations: mother-daughter, aunt-niece, sisters, female cousins, grandmother-granddaughter. Outside the family, female homosocial relations take the form of female friendships and female loverelationships. In patriarchy, male society is always hierarchically superimposed on top of the productive and reproductive labor networks of female society. Quite simply, without female society, society does not exist at all. Due to both sexism and heterosexism, patriscientists generally miss this point and falsely assume that society is sex neutral, when at base it is a female network.

Sex Theory of Social Origin

I begin with the theory that the origin of human society is characterized by a predominantly female adult population, a high degree of horizontal sex segregation, chronic incest, and a year-round prevalence of female asex, bisex, and homosex compared to the relative infrequency of exclusive heterosex.

Female adults greatly outnumber male adults at the origin of human society. Social relations between adult females form the original and continuing base of society. Homosocial relations between biological female kin of all ages form

* Excerpted from "An Hystorical and Cross-Cultural Analysis of Sex Ratios, Female Sexuality, and Homo-Sexual Segregation versus Hetero-Sexual Integration Patterns in Relation to the Liberation of Women" (Rutgers University, Political Sociology, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1978). Cavin's dissertation is being published this year under the title *Lesbian Origins* by ISM Press, PO Box 12447, San Francisco, CA 94112.

the original and continuing core of the human family.

Beginning at adolescence, the majority of males born into original society are horizontally segregated outside the perimeters of the female community, whereas the majority of females born live inside their community of origin. I assume that the high female-low male adult population of early society is the result of extreme social and physical separation of the sexes beginning at adolescence, rather than being the result of a high female-low male live birth rate.

Extreme separation of the sexes characterizes human social origin. Asexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality are freely permitted year round. Heterosexuality is practiced for reproductive purposes only, and thus may be rarer than other sexualities at origin.

The prevalence of homosexuality occurs in two separate spaces in relation to the sexually segregated community of origin. Lesbianism occurs *within* the perimeters of the female community, while male homosexuality is a prevalent feature of male life *outside* female society.

Theory on the Origin of Women's Oppression

Women's oppression begins in the late historical transition from gynosociety to patriarchy. The patriarchal transition, the beginning of women's oppression, is characterized by: 1) A mass societal shift from the original high female-low male sex ratios to the historic high male-low female sex ratios of patriarchal transition and early patriarchy, and then later to the near equal sex ratios of established and late patriarchy. 2) Gynocide and female infanticide. 3) Decreasing female and increasing male social space due to the mass heterosex integration of all adolescent and adult males into female society. 4) Chronic rape, i.e., forced female heterosex. 5) The male "energy capture" of female sexuality and thus of reproduction. 6) The persecution of non-heterosexual women, i.e., lesbians, spinsters, celibates, of non-monogamous heterosexual women such as prostitutes, and of so called "frigid" heterosexual women. The oppression/liberation of women is tied to the oppression/liberation of lesbians.

The oppression of women is marked by male societal attempts to limit female sexuality to exclusive heterosexuality for the mass production of fathers and sons. Another critical method of oppressing women is the assimilation of adult males into female society, first by invasion, then by the establishment of male dominance hierarchies superimposed on female society.

The establishment of paternity, the male exploitation of female products, and the separation of daughters from their mothers (patrilocality) are requisite conditions for the establishment of patriarchy. Matrilineality and matrilocality have to be destroyed for patriarchy to exist at all.¹ Matrilineality and matrilocality are the first gynosocial variables to go at patriarchal transition. The last gynosocial variable to go is the high female productivity contributed to the maintenance of society. There is a reason for the endurance of female productivity throughout

patriarchy. Once men develop patrilineality and ownership, females can then perform the bulk of social labor without controlling the products of their labor.

The patriscientific focus, in an effort to disprove gynosocial origin, has been on the *minority* of matrilineal societies today compared to the majority of patrilineal societies. This approach borders on stupidity because matrilineality and matrilocality modally had to be destroyed at patriarchal transition in order for patriarchy to be established.

Incest Theory

The development of the patriarchal family and heterosexual monogamian marriage may be traced back to rape, "marriage by capture," and heterosexual incest. I suggest that the first enduring heterosexual relation is the mother-son relation. My theory is that the first father is the son. Patriarchal biologic maintains that the husband creates the father who then creates the son. My sociologic reverses this sequence. I suggest that the son is the first male to reside with mother as lover. The son becomes the first residential and social father who creates the role of the residential husband. Morgan (1963) and Engels (1972) noted that probably the first heterosexual marriages are incestuous.

The first father is the son. When the first incest taboo banning mother-son incest obtains, the brother-sister incest relations replaces it. The father becomes the brother. When the next incest taboo bans brother-sister heterosex, the brother is no longer the biological father.

In matrilineal societies extant in the 19th and 20th centuries, the brother remains the social father. Patriscientists have puzzled as to why the mother's brother would have so much sexual and political power in matrilineal societies, instead of the mothers themselves. I posit that the reason why the mother's brother is regarded as the social father of his sister's children in matrilineal systems surviving into patriarchy is due to the brother's prior biological paternity of his sister's children in earlier forms of matrilineal systems.

Using the language of Mary Daly (1978), the ultimate "patriarchal reversal" is that the son creates the father of patriarchy. Engels (1972) thought that the primal patriarchal urge comes from the desire of fathers to pass property onto their biological children. Since I think that the first residential fathers are sons of their mothers, or in the language of the street "motherfuckers," the primal patriarchal urge is more likely to be located in the son's desire for his mother's power.

Incest is a complicated area which needs deeper research by women. This much is clear to me: The effect of the incest taboo on mother-son and sister-brother relations is critical to an understanding of how patriarchal transition and the mass heterosex integration of non-kin adult males into female society may have occurred. Feminist scientists would learn more about the study of women's oppression by studying the effect of heterosexual incest on the family than by focusing on matrilineality as patriarchists do.

The incest taboo may have effected patriarchal transition in that the bans on mother-son and then later sister-brother heterosex alter original social organization in at least two ways: 1) These two earliest heterosex incest taboos may cause the entrance of non-kin adult males into a predominantly female society, which had previously only allowed select adult male kin in positions of close physical proximity to females. 2) If previously sons and brothers were first fathers, and then are replaced by non-kin male strangers, both the biological and social power of the mother's sons and brothers are usurped. If this is true, oedipal jealousy may have a historical, reproductive base rather than being just the psychological drama depicted by Freudian analysis.

I delineate between two major forms of incest, homosex and heterosex incest. Homosex incest describes the emotional and/or sexual relation between biological kin of the same sex. Heterosex incest describes the emotional and/or sexual relations between biological kin of opposite sex. The social bonds derived from same-sex incest and opposite-sex incest are illustrated in Table 1.

Table I
Incest Relations by Sexuality and Dominant Parental Gender

SEXUALITY	PARENTAL GENDER	
	Matri-	Patri-
Homosex	1.	2.
	Mother-daughter	Father-son
	Sisters	Brothers
	Aunt-niece	Uncle-nephew
	Female cousins	Male cousins
	Grandmother-granddaughter	Grandfather-grandson
Heterosex	2.	4.
	Mother-son	Father-daughter
	Sister-brother	Brother-sister
	Mother's brother- sister's children	Father's sister- brother's children
	Grandmother-grandson	Grandfather-granddaughter

Theoretically, I argue that, although probably all sexualities are present in all societies, not all family relationships were developed at once into stable social structures. The family develops its various relationships at different historical periods in this theoretical order: 1) The original female homosex relations, which subsequently form the base of all families and societies. 2) Matri-heterosex incest relations, particularly mother-son and sister-brother, which normally characterize the beginning of the end of gynossociety and signal the

coming transition to patriarchy. 3) Patri-homosex relations of patriarchal transition and early patriarchy. 4) Patri-heterosex incest relations, particularly father-daughter, of established and late patriarchy.

I regard the mother-son and sister-brother incest relations as the portals, the windows through which adolescent and adult males bring patriarchal transition into female society. The non-kin husband-wife relation is not strong enough to destroy the female homosex bonds of gynosociety. Even patri-anthropologists generally consider the non-kin husband-wife unit to be the weakest biological link in the human family. It is the mother-son relationship which is the strongest heterosex link in the family, followed by sister-brother. The mother-son and sister-brother relations are critical to an understanding of how patriarchal heterosex integration occurs in original female society.

Sex Ratio Theory

I first began to think of the societal sex ratio as an important women's oppression-liberation variable after reading Georg Simmel's (1950) theories on numerical social relations. Theoretically, I am working from the same base that Simmel formulated.

This quantitative determination of the group, as it may be called, has a twofold function. Negatively speaking, certain developments, which are necessary or at least possible as far as the contents or conditions of life are concerned, can be realized only below or above a particular number of elements. Positively, certain other developments are imposed upon the group by certain purely quantitative modifications. Yet not even those developments emerge automatically, for they also depend on other than numerical characteristics. The decisive point, however, is that they are not the result of those characteristics alone, for they emerge only under certain numerical conditions (p. 87).

As I began to apply Simmel's quantitative analysis to the social relations of the sexes, it became clearer and clearer to me that societal sex ratios are a critical sociological variable which had not been analyzed in relation to the origin debate or the women's oppression-liberation debate.² Following Simmel, I theorize generally that certain sex ratios are historically attached to certain social forms, and that certain social forms have a numerical affinity with certain sex ratios. Although I expect to find a range of sex ratios within any historical epoch, I suggest that at origin the modal, i.e., the most frequent, sex ratio is high female-low male. Further, high female-low male sex ratios correlate with gynosociety.

I operationally define a high female sex ratio as one in which 54% or more of the societal population is female (thus 46% or less of the population is male). High female sex ratios characterize prehistory until patriarchal transition, which

gynarchists begin at 10,000 B.C. This means that nearly the entire time span of human existence on earth has been characterized by high female sex ratios. I theorize that high male sex ratios characterize patriarchal transition, 10,000 to 1,000 B.C. I operationally define a high male sex ratio as one in which 54% or more of the societal population is male (thus 46% or less of the population is female). This massive shift in societal sex ratios from the original high female to high male at patriarchal transition is accomplished by gynocide, particularly female infanticide. The patriarchal takeover, reconstructed by gynarchists, is a bloody affair.³

Near equal sex ratios characterize established, stable, and late patriarchy. I operationally define a near equal societal sex ratio as one in which both sexes number over 46% and under 54% of the population. Near equal societal sex ratios are a relatively late historical achievement, although patriarchal ideology falsely teaches that near equal sex ratios are the human norm. Near equal sex ratios are simply a normal condition of patriarchy.

Rape Culture

I theorize that rape conditions are created and maintained in human society by the patriarchal high male and near equal sex ratios. I think that the reason rape does not occur among primates in the wild is due to the high female sex ratio which predominates, as described below.

As yet there is no conclusive evidence on prehistoric sex ratios. Social scientists have not even systematically recorded all extant societies in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, ignorance of prehistoric sex ratios is accompanied by a gross ignorance of many historic societal sex ratios as well. Proof or disproof of my sex ratio theories cannot be established until further empirical research of prehistoric skeletal remains yields more comprehensive data on early human sex ratios. However, I do present relevant empirical data on world sex ratios below.

I theorize that equal sex ratios are dysfunctional for females and functional for males. High female sex ratios are functional for both sexes living in society, while high male sex ratios are dysfunctional for both sexes. Societies with no adult males, the hypothetical and actual lesbian societies, are functional for females and dysfunctional for males.

The overthrow of mother-right by father-right and the mass development of monogamy cannot occur until the original social organization based on high female sex ratios is altered to high male and equal sex ratios. I regard this massive shift in sex ratios as a prerequisite for the institutionalization of heterosexual monogamian marriage and the patriarchal family.

The empirical question then is: Are prehistoric sex ratios the same as or different from historic sex ratios? Are gynosocietal sex ratios different from or the same as patriarchal sex ratios? When the evidence is all in, I expect that prehistoric human sex ratios will correspond to the high female sex ratios

widely reported in the literature on living non-human primates in the wild.

As to non-human living primate sex ratios, it was Evelyn Reed's (1975) account of the "London Zoo Catastrophe" which convinced me of the importance of the sex ratio as a major sociological variable. Reed describes the "Catastrophe" in this way:

An experiment was conducted by the London Zoological Society upon a colony of about a hundred *Hamadryas* baboons in a rockwork enclosure called "Monkey Hill." Originally, the colony was all male, but it was decided to introduce females to the Hill to cohabit with the males, thus furnishing an opportunity to study their behavior. The experiment conducted over a five-year period beginning in 1925, was reported by Solly Zuckerman in *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*. Despite what seemed to be optimum conditions, a "natural" environment with food and care provided, the results were disastrous. There were continuous fights among the males for possession of the females to the point of virtual extermination of the females and young. The greatest number of deaths occurred in 1925 and 1927 when the main consignments of females were introduced. In the latter year fifteen of the thirty females were killed within a month. In 1928 fifteen more females were killed in one month. In the fights over females, males were also killed. By 1930 there were thirty-nine males and nine females left, and only one young baboon surviving of all those bred on the Hill. The injuries were of all degrees of severity. Limb bones, ribs, and skulls were fractured; wounds penetrated chest or abdomen, and many animals showed extensive lacerations in the ano-genital region. At least four of the females killed were immature; two adult females died after miscarriages precipitated by the fighting. In one case four males fought over a single female. Fourteen of the fifteen baboons born on Monkey Hill perished. In most cases death occurred within six months of birth. One nursing mother dropped her baby in a fight; it was seized by a male who made off with it, and it died. Another death was caused by a male who transferred his attentions from the female to her baby, injuring it severely in the loins. The sexual fights often went on for days, with a female mounted by every male that could gain access to her. During these periods she suffered continuous physical torment and was unable to get food. After death the fights often continued over her dead body with males still treating her as a sexual object. So protracted and repellent was the last fight that by 1930, when the experiment was declared a failure, the five remaining females were removed and Monkey Hill once again became an all-male colony (pp. 63-64).

This sadistic experiment typifies patriscientific "objectivity" toward female and animal life. Reed's account cracked the case in my mind regarding the importance of the sex ratio in relation to women's historic oppression. Reed understood that the worst mistake made "was to introduce a small number of females into an overwhelmingly male enclosure. In the wild this ratio is just the reverse, giving females the advantage of numbers" (p. 65). Reed alone pinpoints the cause of the catastrophe as sex ratio reversal of the natural order. The male

scientists involved in the case wrote the "freak" occurrence off to captivity, depravity of those particular apes, and no exit in the enclosure when in danger. They missed the sex ratio point.

Sex Ratios of Non-Human Primates in the Wild

According to Gough (1975, p. 57) among the mountain gorillas of Uganda, South Indian Langurs, and hamadryas baboons of Ethiopia, "a single, fully mature male mates with several females." Among East and South African baboons, rhesus macaques, and South American woolly monkeys, the troop usually numbers up to two hundred. Gough writes that these troops contain "a number of adult males and a much larger number of females." Some macaques expel from the troop a proportion of the young males, who then form "bachelor troops." The males that travel on the border of the group have little access to females. Leibowitz (1975) describes the social organization of orangutans in this way:

An orang female and her young occupy a stable range which may overlap that of another female and her young. Where mothers and daughters with young live in adjacent areas, they sometimes join together to make a multi-female group. Adult males travel alone, moving back and forth across a wider area that cuts across the ranges of several female groups (pp. 25-26).

Leibowitz notes that among gorillas, one of our very close relatives, adult females always live in female groups with one or two silver backed males. Male adolescents are found outside the group. Finally, Gough (1975) writes of our closest relative, the chimpanzee:

Chimpanzees, and also South American howler monkeys, live in loosely structured groups, again (as in most monkey and ape societies) with a preponderance of females. The mother-child unit is the only stable group (p.57).

Across all species it is deadly for the female to live continuously outnumbered by males. Females know this instinctively, although male scientists regard polyandry as the *sine qua non* of female power and prestige. This male interpretation of polyandry is, of course, ideological.

Sex Ratio Data

My interest in sex ratios is based on the major hypothesis that high female sex ratios are the sex ratios of women's liberation, while equal and high male sex ratios characterize women's oppression. To test this hypothesis, and to disprove the patriscientific assumption that societal sex ratios are always approximately equal, I drew a world sample of 100 societal sex ratios from the *Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)*.⁴

Further, since I hypothesized that original and early society is characterized

by high female sex ratios, I needed an empirical link to prehistoric society. The methodological approach to prehistoric social life through studying hunting and gathering societies is an accepted social science methodology. To be sure there are problems with this approach. For one, no hunters and gatherers studied in modern times go back as far as our human ancestors of original society. Still, hunters and gatherers are the best living human link to prehistory that social scientists have found to date.

The test is simply this: If hunters and gatherers are found to have high female sex ratios in either the adult or total population, then I will regard this evidence as support for my theory that high female sex ratios characterize early society. If, however, the societal sex ratios of hunters and gatherers are equal or high male, then I will conclude that there is no empirical support for my sex ratio theory. Since I have also posited that equal sex ratios and high male sex ratios characterize patriarchy, if I find that these ratios obtain in patrilocal or patrilineal societies, and that high female sex ratios obtain in matrilocal or matrilineal societies, then I will regard this as empirical support for my theory.

Sample Description

I was only able to locate sufficient information on 18 hunting and gathering societal sex ratios out of 91 such societies listed in Murdock 1957. Since few conclusions could be drawn from such a small sample, I decided to enlarge the sample by finding sex ratio data from 15 to 20 societies from each of Murdock's six world regions. Since there is no coded summary of world sex ratio data in the *HRAF*, I had to draw my sample by going to the files themselves and searching the records of each society for observers' reports of sex ratios. After randomly examining 182 societies in the *HRAF* I found 100 (including the original 18) with enough information available to test my hypothesis. The 100 societies selected for hypothesis testing range in mean societal size from one Trumai village of 43 persons in the Mato Grosso of South America to the entire 1926 Soviet Union society of 147,027,915 persons.

I took the average sex ratio of all accounts I could find in the *HRAF*. I rarely used only one account of a society's sex ratio that could not be cross-checked or averaged out by other accounts. (Societies with conflicting sex ratio reports, e.g., high female and equal, high female and high male, were excluded from the sample of 100.) Total population sex ratio data was available for 92 societies, and adult (age 15 and above) population sex ratio data was available for 60 societies.

The earliest societal sex ratio I found among the 100 societies examined was the extinct Callinago of the Caribbean in 1647, where "a multitude of women" was reported by the Spanish. The Callinago displayed a high female sex ratio. The only other societal sex ratio I could trace back to the 17th century was the equal sex ratio of the Lapps of Northwest Europe in 1694 and 1772. The only sex ratio I found in the 19th century was the high female Abipon of the Gran

Chaco in South America (1784). The earliest high male sex ratio in the sample is Miao of East Asia in the 1850's, 39% female and 61% male. Most of my 100 society sample is historically set in the 19th and 20th centuries.

I looked for earlier sex ratios in the *HRAF*, but no information was available on the Babylonians, the Hebrews, the classical Greeks, or the imperial Romans regarding their sex ratios. Scholars still fight over whether Rome housed a population of one or four million persons; they are not in a position to know the sex ratio with exactitude when the total population is unknown. I would have liked to have had an earlier historical sample, but the information is simply unavailable.

Table 2
Sample Societies with High Female (Total Population) Sex Ratios

SOCIETY	LOCATION	DATES OBSERVED	AVERAGE % FEMALE
Lozi	Central Bantu, AFRICA	1958	57%
Chagga	NE Bantu, AFRICA	1891	63
Fang	Equatorial Bantu, AFRICA	1936-50	55
Mende	Guinea Coast, AFRICA	1921-31	56
Luo	Upper Nile, AFRICA	1900	"female sex predominates"
Tiwi	Australia, INS. PACIFIC	1928-29	60
Muragin	Australia, INS. PACIFIC	1946	F > M
Ifaluk	Micronesia, INS. PACIFIC	1905, 1947-48	57
Marshallese (Bikini)	Micronesia, INS. PACIFIC	1878-1901	54
Aleut	Arctic America, N. AMERICA	1831	54
Klamath	Great Basin, N. AMERICA	1865	63
Blackfoot	Plains, N. AMERICA	1896	"preponderance of women over men"
Gros Ventra	Plains, N. AMERICA	1847	"preponderance of women"
Mandan	Plains, N. AMERICA	1870-72	62
Crow	Plains, N. AMERICA	1862	55
Pawnee	Prairie, N. AMERICA	1840	56
Hopi	Southwest, N. AMERICA	1933	55
Haiti	Caribbean, S. AMERICA	1805	60
Callinago	Caribbean, S. AMERICA	1647	"multitude of women"
Jivaro	Inter. Amazonia, S. AMERICA	1949	65
Siriono	Inter. Amazonia, S. AMERICA	1950	54
Abipon	Gran Chaco, S. AMERICA	1784	"abound more in women"

In Table 2 is a list of sample societies with high female total population sex ratios, showing dates of sex ratio observation, location and percent of females reported. The average percent of females reported is 58%, the average year these high female sex ratios were observed is 1879.

Sample Sex Ratios

The reader should be aware that differential availability of data could affect the conclusions to be drawn from the data which follow. First, there is no guarantee that the societies in the *HRAF* are representative of world societies as a whole. A particular kind of society, e.g., from a particular geographical area, with a particular economy, with a particular sex ratio, may occur more or less frequently in the *HRAF* than in the world, because anthropologists have observed that type of society more or less frequently than other types of societies. Second, there is no guarantee that the societies drawn from the *HRAF* because the societies had useful sex ratio data are representative of societies in the *HRAF* or the world. Reports on sex ratios might be more common from one type of society than another. Particular sex ratios (perhaps those "unusual" to the observer, i.e., the high female and high male sex ratios) may also be reported more frequently than others.

In other words, the results from the sex ratio sample of societies can be only tentatively generalized to the world of societies outside the sample. The fact, for example, that 24% of the sample societies have high female sex ratios (see Table 3) can only be suggestive of the percent of all societies which have high female sex ratios.

The total population and adult sex ratios of the sample are shown in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. In Table 3 we see that predominantly female populations do not exist in the 19th and 20th century Circum-Mediterranean or East Eurasian societies sampled. However, between 1647 and 1971 predominantly female populations existed in almost half of the North American Indian societies sampled, in a third of the South American, in a third of the African, and in a quarter of the Insular Pacific. These findings are significant in view of the fact

Table 3
Number of Sample Societies by
World Region and Total Population Sex Ratio

WORLD REGION	TOTAL POP. SEX RATIO			
	High Female	Equal	High Male	Total
Africa	5	8	2	15
Circum-Mediterranean	0	12	2	14
East Eurasia	0	14	2	16
Insular Pacific	4	9	3	16
North America	8	8	1	17
South America	5	6	3	14
TOTAL	22	57	13	92
PERCENT (%)	24	62	14	100

Table 4
Number and Percent of Sample Societies by
Adult Sex Ratio

	ADULT SEX RATIO			Total
	High Female	Equal	High Male	
Number	21	32	7	60
Percent (%)	35	53	12	100

that patristicists generally function under the inaccurate assumption that equal sex ratios have always characterized world society except in time of war or crisis. It is particularly significant that societies with unequal sex ratios are more likely to have high female than high male sex ratios. In 24% of world societies sampled, females outnumber males in the total population, while males outnumber females in only 13% (Table 3). Among adult populations, 35% of the sample contains more adult females than males, while only 12% contains more adult males than females (Table 4).⁵

Hunters and Gatherers Have High Female Sex Ratios

I am going to turn now to the relationship between societal sex ratio, on the one hand, and other important societal variables such as subsistence type and marital residence type. Since data on these other variables is not available on all the societies in the sample, the total number of societies will vary from table to table and will be less than 100.

Table 5 shows that high female populations characterize hunting and gathering societies, but not societies with other dominant methods of

Table 5
Number of Sample Societies by
Dominant Means of Subsistence and Total Population Sex Ratio

SUBSISTENCE	TOTAL POP. SEX RATIO			Total
	High Female	Equal	High Male	
Hunting and Gathering	7	4	1	12
Other (fishing, animal husbandry, agriculture)	14	46	11	71
TOTAL	21	50	12	83

subsistence (animal husbandry, fishing, and agriculture). Fifty-eight percent (7/12) of the hunting and gathering societies I studied have high female sex ratios, while only 20% (14/71) of other societies do. Looking at the data from another angle, 33% (7/21) of the high female populations I studied are hunting and gathering societies, while only 8% (4/50, 1/12) of societies with equal or high male sex ratios are hunters and gatherers.⁶ Furthermore, though not shown in Table 5, hunting and gathering is present as a subsistence activity, even if not an important one, in 91% of high female societies, but only in 67% of high male and 56% of equal sex societies in the sample. These findings are significant because they support my theory that high female sex ratios characterize original society.

Matrilocal Societies Have High Female Sex Ratios

Table 6 reveals a strong correlation between high female total population sex ratios and matrilocality. Matrilocality occurs in 63% (12/19) of societies with high female sex ratios, but patrilocality is the residence form in 75% (33/44) of societies with equal sex ratios and also in 70% (7/10) of societies with high male sex ratios.⁷ This finding supports my theory that equal sex ratios and high male sex ratios correspond to patriarchal social forms whereas high female sex ratios characterize gynο-social forms.⁸

Table 6
Number of Sample Societies by
Marital Residence and Total Population Sex Ratio

MARITAL RESIDENCE	TOTAL POP. SEX RATIO			Total
	High Female	Equal	High Male	
Matrilocal	12	11	3	26
Patrilocal	7	33	7	47
TOTAL	19	44	10	73

Other Sex Ratio Findings

The hypothesis which was not supported by the data was my prediction that high female sex ratios would be correlated with matrilineal reckoning of descent. Matrilineal descent was infrequent in the sample (17%, 15/86 societies), and there was no correlation between a society's sex ratio and its method of reckoning descent.

Additional findings, which will not be detailed here, were as follows. In high female societies the most frequent household form was mother-child, while it was nuclear in equal sex and lineal in high male societies.⁹ The extended family was the most frequent family form in high female societies while independent

and lineal families were most frequent in the equal sex and high male societies respectively. As for marriage forms, high female societies were overwhelmingly polygynous (85%), with sororal polygyny most frequent (40%), while monogamy or only limited polygyny characterized equal sex (79%) and high male (82%) societies.¹⁰ Both high female and high male societies had relatively simple class systems as compared to equal sex societies, and larger communities of 1000 or more persons were found only among the equal sex ratio societies.

In summary, with the exception of the findings on matrilineality, the data supports my theory of high female sex ratios at origin and equal and high male sex ratios in patriarchy.

Women's Liberations

Consider now the final analysis of the sources of women's liberations, patriarchal transition, women's oppressions, and then to theoretical women's liberations. I conceive the takeover as the theoretical pivot in the devolution from gynosomal women's liberations to patriarchal women's oppressions. Theoretical women's liberations begin the historical end of patriarchy.

While some feminists and Lesbian Feminists think that the liberations of women depend upon a knowledge of history and the *history* of women's oppressions, others do not think it matters whether women were ever liberated, free, or powerful in the past. The point is that liberations for women are the present necessities, and at the same time, future female visions.

Since I do not think there is only one oppression of women, there is not only one liberation path for women. I refer to the plural oppressions of women which demand plural liberations.

Liberations of women may derive from history or female consciousness or both. The various solutions to the problems of women's oppressions can be learned from a reconstruction of the following variables in the past female forms of society: Female family, sex socialization, sex ratios, marital residence, inheritance, marriage, marriage resistance,¹¹ homosex segregation, sexuality channels, female space, female art, goddess religions, female social organization, all-female armies, female languages and literature, feminist political struggles, hysteconomy,¹² reproduction, sexual selection, and other socio-historical variables.

Or the liberations of women can be built upon an emerging female consciousness such as Lesbian Feminism or Lesbian Separatism. What is beyond all doubt is the historicity of women's oppressions. Women's oppressions obtain whether or not all women are conscious of their sources, but women's liberations do not obtain when all women are unconscious of the sources of their oppression.

Theory of Women's Oppressions

The historical preconditions for the universal subjugation of women are: 1) Near equal or high male sex ratios; 2) A high degree of horizontal heterosexual integration of the mass of adolescent and adult males into female society; 3) Vertical segregation of females economically and politically down to the bottom of male dominance hierarchies; and 4) Male confiscation and "energy capture" of female sexuality by forcing or paying females to practice exclusive heterosexuality for male reproductive purposes.

All four of these are simultaneously the preconditions for what Engels (1972) perceived as the sources of women's oppression, viz., the mass societal establishment of patrilineality, the heterosexual monogamian family, private property, and the male state. These economic sources of women's oppression are preceded by their sexual sources, just cited.

I do not think there is only one patriarchal takeover buried in the remote, forever lost prehistoric past. The sexual power of women is overthrown daily so long as patriarchy exists. Although evidence of the first patriarchal takeover may remain empirically inaccessible, the functional requisites of this male-overthrow-of-female-sex process are reenacted daily in patriarchy.

Bachofen (1967) and Engels (1972) knew that monogamy invents paternity. Engels knew that monogamy and paternity are associated with the rise of private property. Father right is, by definition, the male expropriation of someone else's (the mother's) labor. Father right is the classic and original form of private property. The development of private property is inseparable from the development of heterosexual monogamy. They not only develop at the same time; their relationship is closer than that.

Engels blames the oppression of women, in the end, on private property instead of father right itself. Since Engels was after all a man, he could not bring himself to blame father right for the oppression of women. He mistakes the institutionalized result of father right, i.e., private property, for the source of women's oppression. Because socialists and communists accept Engels' analysis of private property as the source of women's oppression, their subsequent practical attempts to abolish this suffering by abolishing private property have failed because father right, the original source of women's oppression, has not been abolished at the same time.

Can patriarchy exist without father right, the male knowledge of paternity? I think not. How is father right determined? It can only be determined by the strict *female* observance of heterosexual monogamy. What the "father" does is irrelevant; recognition of the precarious existence of "fathers" depends solely upon the mother's decision to be heterosexually monogamous.

It is not enough that all women be straight for straight men. If women are promiscuous and straight, as Bachofen and Engels thought women were originally, paternity cannot be determined. It must always be remembered, from a sociology of knowledge viewpoint, that the hystorical or legendary period when

women are thought to have been unoppressed or liberated is the time period Bachofen termed "hetaerism," a time of promiscuity. What this means, translated into female terms, is that women slept with whomever they wanted. I disagree with Engels that Bachofen picked a poor term, *hetaerism*, to describe the original anarchy.

Scholars have missed a critical point about original promiscuity. Promiscuity is not limited to heterosexual relations. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines promiscuous as "characterized by a lack of discrimination; specifically, engaging in sexual intercourse indiscriminately or with many persons." Thus, original promiscuity can include homosexual relations. To say that a woman will sleep with anybody does not exclude the possibility that she will sleep with a member of her own sex. I have wondered throughout this research if the promiscuity posited at origins by male matriarchists connotes a sexual period where anything goes — homosex, asex, bisex, and heterosex.

The transition to patriarchy is made possible by the male heterosexualization of women. The sexuality mode of patriarchy is the required heterosexual monogamy of the female. In order that the mass of women can be straightened out, lesbians, celibate women, spinsters, manhaters (Amazons), prostitutes, mother heads of households, and "illegitimate" children (gynosociety's children) must be targeted by straight men as examples of female sin, their acts the acts of sick women, abnormal women, diseased women, insane women, dangerous women, and must be set up as outcasts, criminals, deviants, marginal examples of what fate befalls women who do not become heterosexually monogamous. The women who are not heterosexually monogamous women must be punished as examples to the rest of the female population.

Even then, the heterosexualization of the mass of women in patriarchy could not be achieved so easily. The early history of heterosexual marriage teaches that even straight women did not desire this relation, since early heterosexual monogamies were accomplished by abduction of females, then payment. Men had to either physically force or buy women to be their wives. Obviously if even straight women had to be captured, enslaved, or bought and sold into heterosexual monogamy, they did not freely choose to become wives. Not only are non-heterosexual women isolated and degraded by the forced heterosexualization of the mass of women, heterosexual women are isolated and degraded too, but in a different way. The non-heterosexual women are locked out of society, exiled to the margins; the heterosexual females are locked into a heterosexist male society, isolated from core female society. These two types of isolation serve the same purpose, the male disorganization of female society for the purpose of creating heterosexually monogamous females who enable men to become "fathers."

Patriarchal social organization is based on the disorganization of female society. More precisely, the isolation and separation of females from each other and female society makes possible the heterosexist integration of males into society.

The male overthrow of female society is, unfortunately, not just a prehistoric question, far removed from the exigencies of the female present. I suspect that some of the same psychology or egonomics that brought fatherhood into existence originally is still at work everyday in patriarchy.

Women do not need to search tirelessly through all of prehistory to find the first rape, dissect it, and reconstruct it before we can understand rape. The same occurrences happen every hour in patriarchy. We can take our pick of present day rapes and analyze the phenomenon still. The reasons behind rape today are not entirely different from the reasons behind the first rape. It is the same dynamic repeating itself between males and females. In the same vein, we do not need to search back into the primeval past for the first father in order to understand the dynamics of fatherhood. The same process of reinventing fathers is reenacted everyday in the life of patriarchy.

For example, one of the most telling tales of artificial fatherhood is found in the 1970's reincarnation of natural childbirth, the LaMaze method. The father, or non-womon¹³ is given a simulated "equal" part to play in natural childbirth, which makes him feel included in a process that does not ordinarily involve his presence. The non-womon goes to classes with the expectant mother; he is given the artificial role of "coach" with a stopwatch! He tells the woman what to do at birth, a subject about which he is experientially ignorant. The non-womon "coach" (boss) directs the labor of the woman worker, then claims her product (child) as his own. This male egonomic process is probably not that different from the original male invention of the artificial father right.

My point is that the sources of women's oppressions are all very much still with us today. Women are still surrounded by the sources of their oppressions. In this sense, the sources are accessible for the analysis of liberation. The great difference is that the basics of male overthrow of female society are ritualized and institutionalized in established patriarchy, rather than being a premier performance.

The mother-daughter bonds are severed daily by patrilocal residence; the imaginary father is recreated daily; the separation of females from female society is achieved daily by the male occupation or heterosex integration of males into female space; the mass of women are still terrorized by rape; there is no public space where females can move freely without male interruption; the punishment of non-heterosexual women and non-monogamous heterosexual women still obtains; women's sexual, reproductive, and productive services are either taken or bought; female infanticide continues; female childbirth is stifled and female growth stunted.

Another egonomic factor at play in the patriarchal transition, as it is today, is male jealousy of female reproductive power, or womb envy. This contributes enormously to the problem of women's oppressions. Male jealousy of female reproductive power is also responsible for the "patriarchal reversal" (Daly, 1978) of the natural, material relations of the sexes, where the male is dependent

upon woman for his existence, his every act being a response to his unequal material position. At patriarchal transition and since, the male has been able to artificially reverse his natural dependence upon woman through the mechanism of male dominance hierarchies juxtaposed on top of female society. These male dominance hierarchies now make women economically and politically dependent upon their male relatives and other heterosexual relations who have a position in the local, state, and national or international male dominance hierarchies which rule society.

Female Power

Why high female sex ratios imply power for females must be explained here. First, it must be understood that power for women is not the same as power for men. The first requisites for female power are: Female control of the female body ("our bodies, our selves"); female control of female reproductive and productive products; and the establishment of female space for the physical safety of females and offspring from rape, child molestation, and other forms of male violence.

While power for men may be cynically defined as the ability to coerce or threaten others into obedience or to do their will, power for women is freedom from male exploitation and coercion. Practically speaking, power for men is offensive, while power for women is defensive. These two opposite forms of sex power are related; historically, male power is based on both an individual and collective male offense against the female sex for the purpose of "energy capture" of female reproductive and productive capacities, while historically female power is based on both the individual and collective female defense against the male sex for the purpose of female energy release and female freedom. In other words, historical male power is based on slavery, -archy, and exploitation of women, nature, animals, and children. Historical female power is based on freedom, anarchy, and defense of women, nature, animals, and children. Thus high female sex ratios defensively operate to create power for women. Practically, the liberation of women is closely bound to the defense of individual females and the collective female community. The rhetoric of the women's movement is apt: All women will not be free until every woman is free from the threat of rape.

High female sex ratios provide defense for women against rape and other male terrorization. Women will grasp this point immediately; the likelihood of a woman being raped is greatly reduced when females outnumber males. Consider this comparison of sex ratios in regard to rape: What are the possibilities of a woman being raped when she is in the company of ten other women and one man? What are the possibilities of a woman being raped when she is alone in the company of ten men? In the former case, rape chances are low; in the latter, chances are high.

High male sex ratios are intolerable for women, as well as generally dysfunc-

tional for society. High female sex ratios imply defense and safety from male violence and exploitation. Near equal sex ratios in social organization on a microcosmic level enable the individual male to isolate an individual female from the rest of the female community. The isolation of a single female from the female community, which is simultaneously the condition for the development of monogamy, is the quintessential rape condition.

Rape does not generally occur in front of the female community; on the contrary, it occurs when a female or females are isolated away from their network of female connections. The Mundurucus, according to Yolanda Murphy (1974) and Robert Murphy (1955), make this point quite clear. Any woman who leaves the female community to walk alone on the outskirts of the village is, by custom, openly considered fair game for any man or boy to rape by tribal right. Most patriarchies are not this honest, but the same custom covertly obtains. The separation of females from female society is the point of danger.

The problem is how to define and measure female power. Feminists in the social sciences have criticized male models of power on the grounds that they do not apply to women nor to other band and tribal peoples.

Rohrlich-Leavitt, Sykes and Weatherford (1975) find the male model of political power, i.e., ruling elites, inapplicable to band and tribal cultures since it is a "projection of Euro-American society" (p. 111). In her article, "Matriarchy: A Vision of Power," Paula Webster (1975) summarizes the difficulty in this way:

The first thing that becomes apparent after reading the literature on the position of women in society (past and present) is the need for sharper, explicit, and cross-culturally applicable definitions of power, authority, influence and status. Our own male-biased socialization as women and as anthropologists has allowed us to accept and use conceptually limited descriptions of social reality. We need to develop new concepts to identify clearly the areas of women's power and the factors that facilitate or obstruct its exercise (p. 154).

I think Lesbian Feminists and feminists agree to reject the typical male model of power as the ability to control others, especially through political institutions, force, threat of force, or legal authority. Neither Lesbian Feminists nor feminists want this as a model for female power.

I also reject any ideal type of power for women that is ahistorical. A social science scale of female power must be empirically, historically, and cross-culturally based on the action and traditions of living or dead women.

I therefore offer an elementary Lesbian Feminist power gauge based on historical and cross-cultural examples of COLLECTIVE FEMALE (not exceptional individual) power lines or life rights exerted in female social organization. Essentially I present, from the anthropological literature, female practices used to defend female society. This female power gauge can be used by Lesbian Feminists to assess the bases of female power in our own societies. The list can, also facilitate the comparison of the *relative* power of women cross-culturally,

rather than the usual dead-end street of comparing the virtual non-power of women to the power of men in the same patriarchal society. Consider now 13 dimensions of a Lesbian Feminist Power Gauge.

1. *Traditional female community recourse against individual or collective male abuse of women, or rape.* For example, the existence of a female collective grievance system, where a woman can make a complaint against a man and receive some form of help or support from the female community. Female resistance to male abuse can be either realistic or ritualistic. Rituals of resistance include worship of female deities which protect women from the danger of men, witchcraft spells, etc.

2. *Evidence of a history of female revolts.* For example, the Aba "War of the Women" where over two million women rioted over taxes men put on their trade in the 1920's, also known as the "Aba riots."¹⁴

3. *Collective female veto power of male decisions which women perceive to be wrong.* For example, among the Iroquois the women could and did stop men from going to war by voting against it and withholding food for the warriors to take to battle. The warriors could not go to war without a food supply, and the war was called off. See Brown (1975).

4. *Evidence of women's economic organizations which look after collective female interests in community affairs.*

5. *Evidence of women speaking a female language which men cannot understand.*

6. *Female solidarity associations.* Feminist leagues, marriage resistance sororities (see Topley, 1975), lesbian organizations, covens, etc.

7. *Female self- and gyno-defense organizations.*

8. *Female control of the female body.* Women secretly practice abortion against men's authority; other women conspire together to support each other's birth control methods.

9. *Women practice herbal medicine, make medicines and narcotics for other women.*

10. *Feminist consciousness and female consciousness.* Women have some form of feminist consciousness about male supremacy and female sex oppression and do not consider themselves inferior to men. Women have a strong sense of female achievements and of the values found in their female cultural traditions and history.

11. *Women holding political power.* Tradition of women founders of tribe, country, nation, town, district; female governesses; women holding political office.

12. *Women's control of production.* Women perform half or more of subsistence labor for societal maintenance; women control the distribution of the food supply or the products of their labors; women have access to/some control over the major technology of society.

13. *Female-centered household and descent.* Matrilocal residence, the

mother-headed household, matrilineality, women living in homosex separated communal houses.

Strategies for Women's Liberations

To contemplate our lesbian origins is to see many avenues to the liberations of women. The possibilities to be outlined here are not the only routes out of patriarchy, but they are each capable of empirical test. The real empirical test of any liberation solution to the oppressions of women will be conducted by grass roots women themselves, not in an academic paper or social science laboratory.

I would like to conclude with 13 theoretical solutions to women's oppressions, as suggested to me by my research into lesbian origins.

1. *Increase in Illegitimacy and Abolition of Father-Right.* Collective refusal of women to tell men who is the "father" of their children. This could be accomplished by the simple method of hetero-females never sleeping with only one man for any length of time, but always having two or more male lovers. This method is based on the assumption that mass high rates of "illegitimacy" will destroy the patrilineal family, especially its monogamian form. Female abolition of fatherhood.
2. *Reproductive Strikes.* Collective female reproductive strikes, shutdowns, the refusal of women to bear patriarchy any more sons until female demands are met.
3. *High Female Sex Ratios.* Development of high female societal sex ratios at all levels of community size through the assertion of the female prerogative to retreat when in danger of rape or violence caused by too many males. The female community must assert itself by closing ranks and selecting only those men who respect women's liberation to live inside the female community. Sororal polygyny may be more liberating for straight women than exclusive monogamy.
4. *Lesbianism and Anti-Heterosexuality.* Increased rates of lesbianism, and female celibacy and heterosexual frigidity as well.
5. *Economic Sabotage.* Using the male supremacist sexual division of labor against itself. That is, across sexist divisions of labor women are economically segregated into food preparation and production, health care, education, child care (production of socialization), clerical work, and housework. These are critical areas of societal maintenance, the disruption of which would prove problematic for the continuance of patriarchy.
6. *Buildup of the Women's Community and the Women's Economy.* Strengthening female social-political-economic organization, "networking" to disrupt the patriarchal process of isolating women from the female community. Economic networking could culminate in a pullout of female reproduction and production to form new hysteonomies.¹⁵
7. *Marxist Solutions.* The Marxist abolition of the patriarchal family, private property, and male religions.

8. *Women's Internationalism*. Collective female secession from established, nationalistic male political states to join an international collectivity of women committed to creating new gynosocieties.

9. *Redistribution of Earth Space*. Female struggle for the creation of a proportional female-space, under the principle that females have the right to preserve at least 52% of earth space from male exploitation, destruction, and pollution.

10. *Feminist Consciousness Raising*. Development of mass high female consciousness regarding male supremacy and patriarchy, which should lead to a feminist reexamination of mother-son relations and the development of non-patriarchal socialization of sons by mothers.

11. *Lesbian Separatism*. Female sexual separation from patriarchy and individual men. Individual women leave men sexually, emotionally, socially, politically, and ideologically, refusing to perform wageless services for men. This is the lesbian sub-culture's method of surviving the hostile environment of patriarchy, by being marginal to it.

12. *Amazons*. A form of Lesbian Separatism, a mass exodus of females from the high heterosexually integrated areas of patriarchy to remote regions to form all-female colonies.

13. *Overthrow of Patriarchy*. Open, direct sexual warfare; all-female armies fighting for the military overthrow of patriarchy and for female self- and gyno-defense.

These are only some possibilities of the female fight back for liberation. There are other ways out, other exits from patriarchy yet to be discovered and empirically tested in the female future.

Notes

¹ In a *matrilocal* society, wife and husband live with or near the woman's kin, in a *patrilocal* society near the man's. A *matrilineal* society traces inheritance and descent from the mother line, a *patrilineal* society from the father line.

² At the time of my research only Marvin Harris (1977a, 1977b) had discussed sex ratios in the context of women's oppression. Harris' (1977b) major argument is:

Far from being arbitrary or conspiratorial, male chauvinism arose during pre-history to counter a basic threat to human survival – the threat of overpopulation and the depletion of resources. . . . My theory holds that male supremacy and prehistoric warfare together constituted the core of a primordial system for avoiding the misery and annihilation latent in the reproductive power of the human female (p. 116).

This is a new twist to the mass psychosis of male supremacy. Harris tells us that male supremacy is really a humanitarian effort to save the world from womb power. His argument that man kills woman to save the world is reminiscent of those laughable, but insane, contradictory arguments that "man fights this war for peace."

A recently published work, Guttentag & Secord (1983), should prove to be more useful.

³ Sarah Pomeroy (1975) presents evidence on the sex ratios of Classical Greece, which according to gynologists was a society at the transition to Western patriarchy.

J. Lawrence Angel's studies of skeletal remains indicate that the average adult longevity in Classical Greece was 45.0 years for males and 36.2 for females. Other sorts of studies. . . all agree that females predeceased males by an average of five to ten years. . . . What proportion of the citizenry was male, what proportion female? . . . Homosexuality, anal intercourse, recourse to prostitutes and slaves or dislike of women, and the preference for a sexually inactive wife continued to be adaptations for population control. . . . It must be recognized that ancient literary sources may merely take note of the children who mattered most: that is, the boys. But a casual survey definitely gives the impression of a preponderance of male children among well-known Athenians. . . . Johannes Kirchner's classical work. . . *Prosopographica Attica*, shows that, of 346 families, 271 had more sons than daughters and that the ratio of boys to girls is roughly five to one. . . . [During Greece's Dark Age, c. 1000-600 B.C.] the male-female population ratio. . . is startling: the Agora burial plot by the Tholos shows almost twice as many male burials as female, and the study of *prothesis* and *ekphora* vases also shows more male burials than female. . . . Homer, who is probably relating a Bronze Age tradition, although he may be reflecting the Dark Age, states that Priam had fifty sons but only twelve daughters; Nausicaa is an only daughter with a number of brothers; Andromache mentions her seven brothers. We have also seen that some Greek colonies were founded by men alone. . . . [T]he most likely reason for sexual imbalance in a population is female infanticide. While it cannot be proven beyond doubt that newborn females were selectively eliminated, the evidence seems to point that way (pp. 68-70.)

About the Romans Pomeroy says:

In 18 B.C. according to the historian Cassius Dio there were more upper-class men than women. Such is my perception of the ratio of males to females not only in the Roman upper class in the days of Augustus, but, with few exceptions, in all social strata throughout classical antiquity. A selection from the crude and haphazard data of various periods and places in antiquity shows that males outnumbered females by at least two to one (pp. 227-28).

If Marvin Harris' (1977b) figures can be trusted on the numerical relations between the sexes, they are quite interesting regarding the incidence of female infanticide in patriarchy:

Recent studies by William Divale of City University of New York have revealed that war-making band and village societies often killed their infant daughters and that they did so far more frequently than they killed infant sons. The more intense the warfare, the greater the difference between the number of boys and girls reared to adulthood. Among those band and village societies whose population was known prior to the suppression of warfare, there is an average discrepancy of 128 boys under 14 to 100 girls. . . . some groups have as many as 200 boys for each 100 girls. . . . In India and China, as has long been known,

female infanticide was common. . . . During the last 100 years the British were horrified to discover that the ratio of male children to female children in parts of northern India was as high as 233 to 100. Anthropologist Mildred Dickman contends that some castes destroyed all their female babies. In China, in regions such as Amoy and Fukien, 30 percent of female babies were killed, and in some villages it went as high as 80 percent. In England between 1250 and 1358 and then again between 1430 to 1545, the sex ratio of male children to female children was 133 to 100. In Italy it stood at 125 to 100 among the wealthy families of Florence during the 15th century (p.118-9).

⁴ *The Human Relations Area Files* contain all western anthropological accounts from 800 B.C. to 1967 of societies around the world. The files contain information on over 1000 societies. George Murdock has compiled much cross-cultural data from these files, see Murdock (1951, 1957, 1963 1967), and Murdock et al. (1967).

⁵ *Editor's Note:* For those readers interested in statistics we can test the null hypothesis that this sample of societies (if it is a random or representative sample of world societies, an unanswered question) was drawn from a population of societies in which high female and high male societies are equally likely against Cavin's hypothesis that high female societies are more likely than high male societies. If we assign a 1 to societies with a high female sex ratio, a 0 to societies with an equal sex ratio, and a -1 to societies with a high male sex ratio, then under Cavin's hypothesis the mean of the population of sex ratios is greater than zero. The mean of Cavin's sample of adult sex ratios is .23, which is significantly greater than zero, $p < .003$. The mean of Cavin's sample of total population sex ratios is .10, which approaches significance, $.05 < p < .10$. — J.S.

⁶ Sex ratio and subsistence are significantly related to each other, *Chi Square* (2) = 11.21, $p < .01$. — J.S.

⁷ Sex ratio and marital residence are significantly related to each other, *Chi Square* (2) = 8.41, $p < .02$. — J.S.

⁸ Kathleen Gough (1975) discusses the relation between matrilocality, means of subsistence, and women's liberation:

Removal of the wife to the husband's home or band may have been a relatively late development in societies where male cooperation in hunting assumed overwhelming importance. Conversely, after the development of horticulture (which was probably invented and is mainly carried out by women), those tribes in which horticulture predominated over stock raising were most likely to be or to remain matrilocal and to develop matrilineal descent groups with a relatively high status of women. But where extensive hunting of large animals, or later, the herding of large domesticates, predominated, patrilocal residence flourished and women were used to form alliances between male-centered groups (p. 73).

lineal household or family is a rare form of nonnuclear household or family comprised of blood relations who are not from the same generation.

ororal polygyny occurs when sisters take the same man as a husband. Kathleen

Gough (1962) discusses the empirical relation between sororal polygyny, matrilineal systems and matrilocal residence. Her work in this area is quite valuable, since the intersection of matrilineality, matrilocality and sororal polygyny is a triple feature of gynosociety. Sororal polygyny is the modal form of marriage among societies with high female sex ratios in either the total or adult population. This finding leads me to believe that further study of sororal polygyny is important in a reconstruction of historical gynosociety, as well as for the liberation of women.

I hypothesize that sororal polygyny is an ancient institution characteristic of gynosociety. One reason I first studied the sex ratio question was my fury over the patriscientific misinterpretation of one female with many males as an example of female profit due to scarcity of female resources, and over the harem interpretation of one male with many females as a male controlled group.

¹¹ See Topley (1975). She writes:

For approximately one hundred years, from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century, numbers of women in a rural area of the Canton delta either refused to marry or, having married, refused to live with their husbands. Their resistance to marriage took regular forms. Typically they organized themselves into sisterhoods. The women remaining spinsters took vows before a deity, in front of witnesses, never to wed. Their vows were preceded by a hairdressing ritual resembling the one traditionally performed before marriage to signal a girl's arrival at social maturity. This earned them the title "women who dress their own hair, *tzu-shunii*."

¹² Hysteconomy is the history of women's labor, and also the basal structure of all economies.

¹³ I learned this term from Irene Mascolo.

¹⁴ Van Allen (1976) writes:

The term "Women's War" in contrast to "Aba riots," retains both the presence and the significance of the women, for the word "war" in this context derives from the pidgin English expression "making war," an institutionalized form of punishment employed by Igbo women and also known as "sitting on a man." To "sit on" or "make war on" a man involved gathering at his compound at a previously agreed upon time, dancing, singing scurilous songs detailing the women's grievances against him (and often insulting him along the way by calling his manhood into question), banging his hut with pestles used for pounding yams, and, in extreme cases, tearing up his hut (which usually meant pulling the roof off). This might be done to a man who particularly mistreated his wife, who violated the women's market rules, or who persistently let his cows eat the women's crops. The women would stay at his hut all night and day, if necessary, until he repented and promised to mend his ways.

¹⁵ See C.L.I.T. Statement #5, "The Female Counter Economy," *Big Apple Dyke News* 2, Spring 1982.

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The Mystery of Lesbians: II*

Julia Penelope

what i am thinking
will never be forgiven
men
are destroying
the world

Caryatis Cardea
"separatist"¹

"See Jane Blow It"

So much of what I say here has already been said in Andrea Dworkin's article, "Look, Dick, Look. See Jane Blow It."² that I wonder why I feel that I need to say similar things now, nearly six years later. Then I recall the fact that I've never seen her article cited anywhere else; no one else took her words to heart as the warning that they were:

I have seen too much of female self-delusion not to fear it more than anything. I have been under its sway too often not to fear it more than anything. Those who take the priorities of men as their own priorities are colonized: we must name it to stay free of it.

When did we forget, or fail to remember, that men have thoroughly colonized our minds, that there is no idea, no feeling, no impulse, no moment we can take for granted as **OUR OWN**? I say "take for granted" here to acknowledge a contradiction I see no way for us to resolve. On the one hand, each of us has an identifiable system of perceptions, beliefs, principles, and ideas, a

*The coherence and clarity of this portion of my essay owe much to the time, energy, and patience of Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Emily Levine, Jennifer Lynne, Kate Moran, Jeanette Silveira (a fine editor!), Linda Strega, and Sarah Valentine; their close, critical readings helped me maintain my overall perspective and, at the same time, held me accountable for the accuracy of details and interpretations. While their questions and the sharing of their perceptions strengthened my writing, their encouragement strengthened me.

more or less cohesive framework that enables us to make choices, distinguish likes and dislikes, and make value judgments. On the other hand, we know that many items in this framework were adopted by brainwashing when we were children, or borrowed later by choice from the society we grew up in. Because "socialization" is nothing more than brainwashing an entire population, and it starts (probably) while we're in the womb, we don't know what we'd think or believe if we hadn't been brainwashed. Consequently, we can only decide which beliefs and values we wish to neutralize (I don't think we can "erase" them) by a self-conscious process of identification, evaluation, and self-criticism.

This process of going back and forth between the creation of new values and ideas for ourselves and the neutralization of heteropatriarchal ideas (like racism) must be continual. (An excellent example of this sorting out process is Joyce Trebilcot's essay in the first issue of *Lesbian Ethics*, where she talks about her conflict between what she calls the "experience" and "achievement" ethics, and how she identified, experienced, and, eventually, abandoned them.) We don't simply wake up one morning "all radicalized" and rid of our socialization. The result of this for me has been an almost daily weighing and questioning of my own perceptions and motivations as I make decisions and choices in the course of my life, a self-critical process that I've often felt to be frustrating, tedious, and (sometimes) a dead-end. But my negative feelings about this process are short-term complaints, outweighed by the long-term effects, changes I can identify in specific ways I think and act.

To be sure, there are still many aspects of my life that other Lesbians can point to and say, with justification, "You haven't yet changed *that* for the better" or "You're still doing the same old shit." I'd be stupid to offer myself as some "ideal" of what a Lesbian can be, and I can't claim that I've succeeded in eradicating from my mind the structures incorporated during my heteropatriarchal socialization. But I have managed to change some things during the past 10 or so years: to value myself and other wimmin, not men; to listen to what other wimmin have to say to me, not men; most importantly, to stay in touch with the fact that I have "nothing to lose," no "investment" in the heteropatriarchal culture — not its values, its ideas, its privileges, its rewards, and especially, not its institutions.

I learned how to monitor myself, to maintain a self-consciously critical stance about my perceptions and beliefs from the radical feminism of the early 1970's. In CR groups I learned that NOTHING could be assumed; no idea could be accepted or adopted without a critical examination of its origins and implications. The reasons for this *critical* stance remain as compelling today as they were then, even though self-examination has become anathema within the ranks of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). In the interests of presenting a "united front" to anti-feminists and the facade of "sisterhood" to new recruits, reform feminists told radical feminists to be quiet about "our" issues. We were told explicitly that "making value judgments" about the actions, behaviors, or language of another woman was "unsisterly." "Making value

judgments" became synonymous with negatively-charged words, like *criticize*, *attack*, and *trash*.

As the angry accusations increased, wimmin could no longer distinguish between horizontal hostility³ and processes necessary to personal/political change. Any criticism or disagreement was perceived as "trashing," and trashing itself accelerated as we refused to acknowledge the very real differences in values that divided us. The pain and confusion were so acute that any difference became intolerable, and dishonesty, silence, and withdrawal were among the tactics chosen for self-protection. Personal change and the commitment and energy required for profound changes in one's life, have been devalued and abandoned for the "equality" illusion, making void the possibility of the emotional rewards that come from successful struggle, trivializing the pride that one feels when she has achieved a new concept of herself and acted in terms of it.

Male values have devalued us: we cannot expect to be valued by honoring male values. This is a contradiction without resolution except in our obliteration.

Dworkin

These days, one can call herself a "feminist" and a xtian, an orthodox jew, a marxist, a housewife, a freudian, a jungian, or a sado-masochist. I'm not suggesting that ideological differences are intolerable or that uniformity of thought is desirable. I'm pointing to the philosophical dishonesty that enables women to label themselves "feminists" without batting a false eyelash or tripping in their spike heels. As a political ideology, early second-wave feminism had a system of values. Because it did have clearly defined values, it was bound to conflict with those ideologies and conceptual frameworks which serve the heteropatriarchy. That it did convinced me that it was a political activism I could embrace gladly.

. . .we have women who want to be good in male terms at any cost to themselves and to other women; we have women willing to forget everything substantive we have learned over the past decade so that they can begin again, arm in arm, with men who have slightly improved their manners and not much more.

Dworkin

All well-intentioned denials to the contrary, as feminists shed the very values that had previously identified the WLM as a political movement, they did not become value-LESS. That is, the refusal to defend feminist values didn't mean that we didn't have any values at all. Instead, we donned the protective covering of "old" values, those values deemed "safe" within the heteropatriarchy, its own. At the risk of being called "narrow-minded," I cannot understand how a woman can say she's both a xtian and a feminist, or a freudian and a feminist,

nor do I grasp the conceptual machinations that enable her to reconcile the basic contradictions that dual allegiances require. Maybe some women can change conceptual frameworks as easily as they change dresses, but I can't. **FEMINISM CHANGED THE WAY I PERCEIVE THE WORLD AND MYSELF AS AN AGENT IN THE WORLD. Feminism may have changed Betty Friedan's life but IT CHANGED THE WAY I THINK. I changed my life!**

and i say to my sisters
men are destroying
the world

Cardea

Freudianism, marxism, judaism, xtianity, all these and any other conceptual frameworks of the heteropatriarchy, are in direct ideological conflict with the Feminism I learned in the early '70s. Rather than subject the framework of values within which they were raised, (e.g., xtianity, judaism, socialism, capitalism) or educated, (e.g., jungian or freudian psychology) to critical examination latter-day feminists have attempted to infuse such ideological structures with "feminist values." Instead of letting go of heteropatriarchal ways of describing the world, people, and events, they have tried to revise such conceptual frameworks so they could feel more comfortable within them. In order to avoid the complicated task of changing their own ways of thinking and behaving, reform feminists set out instead to introduce a few minor revisions in the heteropatriarchal agenda, leaving themselves and social institutions largely unquestioned and unchanged. If we think of ideological frameworks as though each was a house, with a foundation, an internal structure, and several different rooms, so that marxism is a house, freudianism is a house, xtianity is a house, etc., what is now called "feminism" is nothing more than one, tiny room in each masculinist ideology. Feminism has no house of its own. Feminists have torn it down, because they didn't have any confidence in the way it was built. Was our construction so shoddy that we were afraid to try and live in it? Instead of having a "home" of our own, we now have cramped rooms rented to us by xtians, freudians, marxists, socialists, etc. (Is this why so many Lesbian spaces like our coffeehouses, are in the rented basements of xtian churches?)

"Women's athletics" is a good example of how reform feminists have moved into a little room in a heteropatriarchal framework instead of building their own house. (Note that it's not called "feminist athletics.") In universities, the money has usually been provided by the (still) all-male football team (and not without considerable resistance). Given the social stereotype that women must be feminine, the associated assumption that athletic women are, somehow, "less than women," i.e., Lesbians, and the fact that any financial support for female athletes would have to be sought from men, wimmin committed to female athletics simply continued the pro-feminine, anti-Lesbian propaganda that has characterized women's sports in the U.S. for as long as I can remember.⁴ Now,

however, with the prospect of financial rewards in the foreseeable future, the anti-Lesbian campaign has become more vicious. The existence of Lesbians in athletics continues to be vigorously denied or, when the evidence is unarguable, dismissed as quantitatively insignificant; Lesbians are coerced, threatened, and intimidated into staying in their closets, denying themselves and their lovers, and adopting those behaviors and modes of dress that will enable them to pass for heterosexual.

Because so many female athletes are Lesbians, the consequences were predictable. Consider, for example, the now-dead women's pro-basketball league. In order to sell the athletes as sex objects to their male fans (no one cared what their Lesbian fans thought), the athletes were *forbidden* to go to women's bars. The immediate cost of becoming a professional athlete for every woman was the curtailment of her personal life, limitations imposed on her freedom of movement. One player, for example, who'd been seen going into a women's bar, was immediately traded to another team. Ironically, her male fans, for whom she was a sex symbol, were so outraged by the trade that the owners of the team had to back down and reinstate her. Lesbians in athletics are a *fact*. There's no way to make "compromises" like this one (compromise is a polite word, this was a *sell-out*) and expect anything but personal destruction of the women so man-handled. A Lesbian who chooses her identity first and refuses to deny it cannot be an athlete. Wimmin who should've known better accepted without question the heteropatriarchal framework of athletics.

The basic premises of athletics in the U.S. remain what they've always been, essentially competitive and identifiably militaristic in their structures: winners/losers, offense/defense, domination/submission. These are essential, institutionalized dichotomies in our society, and we cannot ignore the fact that they justify violence as a way of life, "explain" the systematic destruction of women's minds and lives, and promote war as a "necessary evil" in the world. These dichotomies aren't "harmless" or inevitable ways of conceptualizing ourselves and others. As a result, we act out of and perpetuate a violent dualism when we refuse to challenge women who accept them.⁵ **WHOSE INTERESTS ARE WE SERVING?**

Don't get me wrong. I'm as thrilled as any other woman when I watch women's athletics and see women striving for a goal, succeeding, and being rewarded for their perseverance. I watched avidly as female athletes won medal after medal in the 1984 Olympics. But we cannot ignore the **COST** of such accomplishments, the **PRICE** that every single one of us must pay for such individual achievements, and we cannot stop asking if such gains are **WORTH** the utter betrayal of feminist values. We cannot, for example, pretend not to notice the **USES** to which such women are put as evidenced in the decidedly patriotic, imperialistic, militaristic descriptions typical of ABC's coverage of the 1984 Olympics. While the sportscasters were, on the one hand, patronizing in their treatment of the female athletes, they were, on the other hand, utterly glib

when they talked about how the U.S. women "dominated" the basketball court or compared the coach of the U.S. women's volleyball team to General Patton!⁶ Some women have made some gains in the world of athletics, but they must, in exchange, allow men to make whatever use of them will immediately benefit heteropatriarchal society and perpetuate its underlying assumptions.

Most importantly, for me, I cannot pretend that any of these compromises have made it any easier to be a Lesbian. If anything, it's become more difficult as a result, rather than less. I'm unwilling to concede that much has been accomplished if the quality of a Lesbian's life is improved materialistically at the expense of its psychological quality. It's harrowing and demeaning to live with the constant fear of discovery; the more one believes she has to lose economically, the more terrified she becomes. A few women have made perceptible gains for themselves, but what about the invisible, the unknown, the uncounted Lesbians? Are we so inept, so unresourceful, that we must be grateful for so little? Are we so desperate that we'll abandon all our principles in order to accept any crumb tossed to us by the patriarchy?

Emily Levine⁷ has suggested an analogy from carpentry that illuminates how the process of compromise has functioned to erode radical values in WLM. In carpentry, when one has several boards that she has to cut down to the same size, each succeeding board must be measured, not by matching it with the board just cut, but with the *FIRST* board cut. By measuring the length of each board against the first one, the carpenter insures that every board ends up the same length. If she makes the mistake of measuring each successive board against the one cut just before it, she'll discover, when she finishes, that none of the boards are the same length. As the number of boards cut between the first one and the last one increases, so, too, does the extent of the error in measurement.

Similarly the individual compromises we've made in WLM haven't seemed "dangerous" or "unreasonable" taken one by one. Cumulatively, however, they've gradually added up until WLM no longer has a political viewpoint distinguishable from humanism. Weighing compromises against the one we made only the day before has made each particular concession seem negligible. Measuring the politics of the contemporary WLM against the radicalism of early second-wave Feminism, though, reveals how far short we've fallen of fulfilling those goals. Each compromise has moved us imperceptibly away from radicalism on our own behalf, until the gap between what we said we wanted and what we have (or are likely to achieve) has destroyed the framework we set out to build.

As our right-wing enemies have gained in strength and arrogance, women have become more and more afraid . . .

Dworkin

In an effort to enlarge the "appeal" of WLM and "attract" more women into its burned-out ranks, every issue that might "turn off" a prospective "feminist" was

euphemized into extinction or abandoned altogether. Our failure to examine critically the *means* of realizing the radical goals of early feminism led, inevitably, to the eradication of the goals themselves. What is unspeakable too easily becomes the unthinkable.

Eu-fem-ism

Because *what* we say reflects our consciousness, language should have been a central political issue for WLM. Instead, the demand for an end to sexist uses of English, such as *he* and *man* as "generics," and sexist descriptions of females like *cunt*, *girl*, and *chick* was simply dropped, because, we were told, "We have more important issues to deal with." That sexist uses of English are important, that language issues are crucial, was an idea too difficult for those eyeing elective positions at various governmental levels. The fact of the matter is that the reform feminists didn't want men to laugh at them, and men laugh at us when we object to sexist language. No one likes to be trivialized and humiliated for taking a political stance, but the tactic of trivialization worked very well for men, so it's not surprising that they've continued to use it against us. Only a few saw the tactic for what it was and pointed out that, of course, men would trivialize issues of language use. As long as they kept women convinced that language was a trivial issue, they could continue to terrorize heterosexual feminists by calling them "dykes" and "lezzies" and to distort the issues by calling anti-abortionists "pro-lifers."

When wimmin stopped paying attention to and criticizing the sexist language of men, they also stopped monitoring their own uses of language. This refusal to examine the language we used meant that we'd also ceased to question the origins and meanings of the ideas that the words symbolized. Deceived by our adoption of euphemism as a protective cover, we chose to ignore the power of language as a primary instrument of masculist social control. The power to name is also the power to **CREATE REALITY**. Naively, wimmin perpetuate heteropatriarchal ideology by refusing to examine the **substance** of the words and names in which they put so much trust! Neglecting to think about the connection between one's language use and the conceptual framework that language reflects, feminists simply refused to take the time to experiment with new ways of describing the world. It's still common, for example, to hear wimmin/Lesbians say, "I'm an incurable *romantic*," as though the word *romantic* was a positive way of describing their emotions, in spite of the fact that both *romance* and *romantic* are important terms within the medieval chivalric code (remember "knights in shining armor"?), and in spite of the fact that Ti-Grace Atkinson, in *Amazon Odyssey*⁸ discussed at length **all** the reasons why "romance" is one of the central terms of the heteropatriarchal conceptual framework!

Likewise, Lesbians and feminists continue to use words like *monogamy* and *nonmonogamy* as though they **made sense** within a "feminist" conceptual framework, when, in fact, they make **no sense**, especially when they're being used to

describe Lesbian relationships! *Monogamy* means, literally, 'marriage to one [woman]'; and its contrastive term is *polygamy*, which means 'marriage to more than one [woman]'. I've added the word *woman*, in brackets, here because **only men** ever have the option of being married to more than one [woman]. These terms **assume** that women are the property of the men who marry them. Both *monogamy* and *nonmonogamy* name heteropatriarchal institutions within which the only important information is: *how many women can a man legitimately own?* Since the question of "ownership" is supposed to be a non-question in feminist and Lesbian-feminist relationships, I want to know **why** so many wimmin who claim to have a "raised consciousness" persist in using such words when they're supposed to know better? Marychild, in her article, "Calling All Dykes,"⁹ provided an excellent analysis of why (non)monogamy isn't a dyke issue. We keep going back, over and over, to the same, tired, old *pseudo*-questions. Why?

Romantic and *monogamy* are only two among the heteropatriarchal words still used frequently by so-called feminists to describe central aspects of their lives, feelings, and relationships. Other suspect words still heard frequently include both *pornography* and *erotica*, used as though such things were to be positively valued, and the entire vocabulary of sado-masochism, which is racist, heterosexist, and anti-Jewish as well. As long as such terms remain our only way of describing our emotions and lives, we're still thinking and acting and believing in ways that serve the social structures created by men. This failure to work at language change has contributed to the erosion of radical feminist values and programs. So thorough was the deception that we lost the faculty of distinguishing friend from foe, feminist from non- or anti-feminist. As long as we willingly validate heteropatriarchal language by continuing to use it, there's no distinction between "feminist" values and "non-feminist" values. The language we use **describes** the values we live by.

It should've been obvious that diluting feminist values in an effort to make them SEEM less threatening to the heteropatriarchy was a futile and self-destructive tactic. How any feminist could've seriously believed, even for a moment, that cosmetizing the WLM's ideology in order to appeal to masses of women was a politically viable strategy is beyond me. **THE VALUES HELD TO BE PRIMARY WITHIN A POLITICAL MOVEMENT DEFINE THE IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK. A POLITICAL MOVEMENT THAT TRIES TO DIVEST ITSELF OF VALUES CANNIBALIZES ITSELF.** But the fact is that Feminism "put on a new face," smiled profusely upon its male converts, and died.

The truth of the matter is that all those faceless women out there that the WLM's leaders hoped to attract aren't stupid, and our "media spokeswimmin" grossly underestimated them. First, most women know, very intimately, the economic and physical power that men hold over them, and they won't ally themselves with a movement that threatens their dependence on male benevolence or requires them to abandon manipulation and cajoling as ways of

"getting what they want." A submissive posture has served them too well for too long. They know, even if the WLM spokeswimmin don't, that the conflict between feminism and patriarchy is one of VALUES. As a consequence, and secondly, *no* woman with a shred of self-respect is going to ally herself with a movement that has systematically and purposely set out to LIE to her in order to recruit her into its ranks. Diluting one's politics, denying one's principles, gutting one's ideology to seem more "appealing" are all ways of LYING. No euphemism will do here. It's the oldest "feminine wile" in the book, and mainstream American women *saw through it!* I wish I could list here for posterity the names of wimmin who've said to me, "I'd've become a feminist much quicker if what was presented to me as 'feminism' hadn't been so watered down and namby-pamby." Any woman who really wants a different life for herself doesn't want essentially the same life with a few superficial frills here and there. She wants something other than what she has, or she isn't going to bother.

Marrying into the "Family"¹⁰

There are women calling themselves 'feminists' though they have no particular commitment to women as a group and no credible interest in sexual politics as such. They are in the service of male 'isms,' and both they and the 'ism' are being manipulated to dissuade women from political, sexual, and social confrontation with men.

Dworkin

The neo-humanist feminists have rushed to establish their political credibility with various male movements and masculist ideologies by accepting the burden of responsibility for curing all of the world's ills. Thirsty for male validation, they have accepted as valid the premise that feminism, if it is to be a viable political ideology, must have, as *priorities*, the struggles to end racism classism imperialism hunger, poverty, nuclear proliferation, pollution, anti-Semitism, and cruelty to animals. Simultaneously, other issues that arise from male subjugation of females, most significantly SEXISM and HETEROSEXISM, have been shelved as central feminist concerns.

Having committed themselves, at least rhetorically, to the premise that WLM must become an "umbrella" movement for advancing the political agendas of every contemporary political cause, the energies of "committed feminists" are no longer available to make the kinds of demands a "wimmin's movement" should be making on its own behalf. Exactly, I'd like to know, HOW MANY FRONTS can any ONE woman fight on? Accepting the assertion that one's political "credibility" requires a simultaneous (and equal?) commitment to every *significant political issue* of our times isn't feasible or realistic. Once we grant that

there isn't a single issue around that **doesn't** affect Lesbians/Separatists/Radical Feminists, we must also confront the fact that we don't have enough time or energy to join every group, go to every meeting or demonstration, and still see to our own welfare and needs. Is it any wonder that WLM has had the highest burn-out rate of any political movement?

The effect of attempts to prioritize other kinds of oppression as goals of "feminism" has been to increase the gaps between wimmin and harden the divisions that keep us apart. Barbara Smith has been one of the most vocal proponents of the idea that fighting racism in U.S. society must *come before* sexism or Lesbian oppression can be political priorities for WLM. In "Across the Kitchen Table, A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue" (with Beverly Smith),¹¹ Smith responds to the questions about Separatism in a peculiarly lop-sided fashion:

... I think we have real questions because separatism seems like such a narrow kind of politics and also because it seems to be only viably practiced by women who have certain kinds of privilege: white-skinned privilege, class privilege. Women who don't have those kinds of privilege have to deal with this society and with the institutions of this society. . . (p. 120).

Barbara's use of language here betrays her purpose. She's not interested in convincing white Lesbians that our racism must be exposed, confronted, and honestly dealt with. She's trashing Separatists. Barbara Smith uses specific words and phrases to trivialize and distort Separatist politics, and she won't take the time to define them because she's using them as a substitute for serious analysis. Why, for example, is Separatism "a narrow kind of politics"? Well, "narrow," of course, because we refuse to put our energies into nurturing men regardless of their race, class, or ethnic origin. But why on earth would any woman believe that it's "narrow" to concentrate one's energies on wimmin's issues? Why is Barbara Smith so adamant about her concern for her "whole race" and so reluctant to put herself first as a *Lesbian*?

What does the phrase "viably practiced" mean to Barbara Smith? To the best of my knowledge, there's **NO** Separatist, regardless of her race or class, who *doesn't* have "to deal with this society" and its institutions. Even those wimmin who've moved to rural communities still have to deal with men in nearby towns, and live in constant danger of male reprisals. Furthermore, to maintain that skin and class privilege make Separatism "seem" a viable politics ignores all the Separatists who've consciously rejected whatever "privileges" they might've gotten had they maintained their bonds with men. Barbara persists, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, in pretending that there are *no* Lesbian Separatists of color, *no* working-class Separatists. What does she accomplish by denying that there are Black Lesbian Separatists? (Some of whom, by the way, are separatists from white Lesbians as well as all men.) Most Lesbians living on wimmin's land are working-class. What about Juana Maria Paz, who continues (as far as I know) to struggle to survive on wimmin's land in Arkansas? What

about flying thunder cloud, RDOC (Radical Dyke of Color), who struggles to survive with her lover in South Carolina? What about Elana Dykewomon, who left rural Oregon because of the anti-Semitism there? Is there any kind of "privilege" that would make their lives easier? Yes – **HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE!!** But they've rejected it because they're **LESBIANS**.

I understand that racism, wherever it's manifested and whoever does it, oppresses Barbara Smith, and that eradicating racism will make her life more tolerable. Even, however, when racism has disappeared, Barbara will still be a Lesbian and a Black woman. I don't understand why Lesbian issues are irrelevant to Barbara nor why she has singled out other Lesbians for attack. She has yet to make an argument for choosing Black men instead of Lesbians. She has used the accusation of "racist" to discredit Separatism and those Lesbians who call ourselves Separatists, as though that label sufficed as a political argument. I'm not being "racist" when I say that using such labels to discredit or trivialize Lesbians and, specifically, Lesbian Separatists, **MUST STOP**. It's name-calling, it's destructive, and it's horizontal hostility, because it directs anger at wimmin instead of men. **BEING ANGRY WITH EACH OTHER IS SO MUCH SAFER THAN OPENLY RESISTING MALE COLONIZATION.**

White wimmin, furthermore, have been the most vicious and merciless in their use of issues like racism to play oneupmanship with oppressions and to divert attention from their refusal to examine their own lives closely. I've seen more than one all-white wimmin's workshop degenerate into angry accusations and denials, finally disrupted by the tearful departures of the participants. By failing to acknowledge "white guilt" and deal openly with it, white wimmin have used it to terrorize each other without really trying to change. White feminists substituted self-righteousness for supportive criticism, and issues like racism were used to discredit and alienate Separatists. Scape-goating and name-calling are nothing more than defenses to protect oneself from "reality leaks."

The colonized mind will use ideology [sic] to defend itself from both pain and knowledge.

Dworkin

Well, of course, it's obvious that reform and socialist feminists stood to gain substantially as individuals by shelving both sexism and lesbophobia. Neither oppression includes men as potential beneficiaries (in the event that one or the other was actually eradicated from the social consciousness); instead, the recognition of both oppressive mentalities requires either the change or elimination of men. Similarly, sexism and lesbophobia aren't parallel phenomena. While heterosexual feminists would demonstrably benefit from the erasure of sexist forms of oppression, only the lives of Lesbians would improve if lesbophobia were, first, recognized and then treated as a *serious* problem that must be eradicated.

Feminists are now threatened in every area of activity because men are trying to recolonize our minds – minds that have been trying to be free of male control. Everywhere, women are confronted by the urgency of male demands, all of which are supposed to supercede in importance the demands which women must make toward our own integrity.

Dworkin

In contrast, issues like racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, and all the rest, clearly affect the lives of specific groups of men. Unlike sexism and lesbophobia, which cannot reasonably appeal to male self-interest (unless one posits the existence of an inherent altruism in the male sex), every other issue or oppression I can think of can be shown to be relevant to one group of men or another. For this reason, issues and oppressions *other than* sexism and lesbophobia have attached to them the seductive aura of MALE APPROVAL. Men welcome women who put aside their own issues and divert their energies to male priorities. What an ego trip for men that is! More significantly, perhaps, issues like sexism and lesbophobia, which obviously threaten the heteropatriarchal *status quo*, attract overt and often violent opposition from men, which makes it even scarier to broach them and, therefore, easier to dump them when the going gets rough.

and my sisters say
no
there are institutions
beliefs and prejudices
we must struggle to erase
we can stop their institutions

but we need not confront
the ones who built them
and want them
and profit from them
and love them
and rebuild them
and rebuild them
and rebuild them
on our bodies

Cardea

The development of the second wave of feminism shows that racism and the dangers of nuclear energy are "safe" issues for wimmin to work on. They've been validated because men have prioritized them as "REAL ISSUES." Other issues, like equal pay for equal work or abortion on demand, issues which potentially threaten male power, are relatively safe and will gain limited male

support, up to a point. Dangerous issues, however, those which call into question the assumptions and privileges of heteropatriarchal society, such as Lesbianism and using guerilla tactics against our oppressors (like actions against pornographers), inevitably elicit active opposition from men.

Women are especially given to giving up what we know and feel to be right and true for the sake of others or for the sake of something more important than ourselves. This is because the condition in which women live is a colonized condition. Women are colonized by men, in body, in mind. Defined everywhere as evil when we act in our own self-interest, we strive to be good by renouncing self-interest altogether.

Dworkin

I'm tired of "movement women" who play only to men and worry about what "they" think. I'm tired of women denying my existence because I'm a "political liability." I'm tired of being ignored and trivialized because I'm a Lesbian; I'm tired of being hushed up, quieted, and made invisible so other folks can get on with "their business." There is no struggle for human dignity (call it "rights" if you will) that is "trivial". There is no instance of the abuse and exploitation of the powerless by the powerful that is justifiable. I am not attempting to ignore or dismiss other people's existence by claiming the significance of my own; I am, once more, trying to make a space for my existence, my dignity, my importance.

war and the weapons of war
prison and the tools of torture
these things I will not forgive
languages obliterated with their cultures
and sometimes their people
radiation and chemical dumps
land laid waste
minds laid waste
the hunger of millions
 a prerequisite of society
the domination of children
 a necessity of power
the slavery of womyn
 a deep and primal desire

Cardea

I'm objecting to the way other issues have been used to diffuse and disperse feminist energies, to turn the WLM into Motherhoodism, to make us responsible for *solving* problems in the world that we didn't create, to force us

into nurturing men, again, and cleaning up after them, again, when they've made yet another mess. The radiation leaking from nuclear sites, is, after all, piss on the toilet seat on a grand and lethal scale. Men either don't care enough about anything to clean up after themselves or, used to their own power and the habit of wielding it, they've become accustomed to having someone else, usually women, clean up their messes for them. Like the guilt-ridden wife blamed for her husband's "ring around the collar," politically-conscious wimmin choose to ignore or dismiss male causation, because acknowledging it would then require developing an adequate means of neutralizing it. If men washed their necks, ring-around-the-collar wouldn't exist; there would be no "problem" to solve. If men didn't like war, and the toys of war, the thrill of killing, and the promise of death, the world wouldn't be like it is. War, like dirty necks, is a by-product of male manufacture.

The fact of the matter is that exactly the same women who urge me to trust men and work with them in "mutually-beneficial" coalitions **DON'T TRUST MEN ANY MORE THAN I DO.** "Who," these women say, "will do it if we don't?" They know that men can't be trusted, and they certainly can't trust men to clean up the political and ecological messes they persist in making on this planet. If they really trusted male politics, they'd feel secure focusing on their own issues and leave it to men to undo the damage they do every day. Whether it's ring around the collar or acid rain, women seem more than willing to roll up their sleeves and try to salvage whatever they can.

Up the Mainstream with a Mop, Hi Ho!

and my sisters say
 coalition androgyny
 unity
 we must all work together
 because
 men
 some men
 may be destructive
 but they can be healed
 they are only the later form
 of little boys
 poorly trained

Cardea

When the neo-humanists and socialists among us urge "unity" with sympathetic men, they're really saying they want to feel safe. When they talk about "healing men," they're really trying to protect the institution of Motherhood. To

some extent, their *desire* to retain the importance of Motherhood is comprehensible. In the heteropatriarchy, Motherhood is the only activity that gives heterosexual women the **illusion** of exercising power, of existing autonomously, of being independently significant. They reason: Men can't give birth; only women can produce offspring; therefore, the "power" of women resides in our reproductive function. They ignore the fact that this particular heteropatriarchal lie is the **foundation** of male superiority, male dominance, male control. They ignore the fact that Motherhood is the **justification** for female inferiority, weakness, and subjugation to men. Such "feminists" have traded the difficulty of radical struggle for the illusion of safety, and the consequences for WLM have been destructive. In spite of every warning to the contrary, liberal feminists have bought the myth of "Supermom," the hideous idea that, given enough Spic 'n' Span and elbow grease, they can "make everything all better." This is a dangerous self-delusion, because, if it had even a tiny grain of truth in it, we'd be living in a very different world right now. By pretending that "mommy" will be able to heal every wound and nurture all the world back to health, they can ignore the fact that they don't want to face: "mommy" doesn't have any power. Period. Mothers in this world can't protect themselves from battering, can't protect their children from male predation, can't save the boys from the fathers or the daughters from any man.¹²

Motherhood is "in" again, this time with a vengeance. Anyone, even a Lesbian, can satisfy her "natural instincts" by either the turkey baster method or, if she can afford the price, visiting a sperm bank. (That 85% of the children born through these methods are boys seems not to bother the wimmin stuck with raising them for the next 18 years.) What really grates about the rebirth of Motherhoodism, especially among white Lesbians, is that it's the exercise of economic privilege to further one's own vanity and egotism. Even in those cases where Lesbians have used the cheapest method available for insemination, a turkey baster and a willing male accomplice, raising a child requires a financial and emotional commitment that a lot of women simply can't afford; forced by circumstances, poor women may go ahead and raise a child, but they do so at great cost to themselves and with inadequate and grudging social support.

We also live on a planet that's dangerously overpopulated; we don't need more children to feed, and feed poorly. It won't do to assert that overpopulation is an imperialist tactic to justify sterilizing Third World women. While overpopulation has been used to do just that, the heteropatriarchy doesn't need any "justification," however flimsy, to do whatever it wants to do. Was the point of radical Feminism nothing more than a quest for the "right" to motherhood? Was the goal of radical Feminist politics the reassertion of motherhood, a biological trait, as the very ground of the category *woman*?

Has anyone else noticed how the words *woman* and *female* have replaced *feminist* in phrases like "female consciousness." Someone like Gertrude Stein is sometimes derided for not being a "feminist" or not having a "female conscious-

ness"; the two aren't the same. I can imagine that Stein, like me, easily rejected femininity as a way of being; her contradiction lies not in her refusal to behave like conventional women, but in her elevation of those female traits in her lover, Alice B. Toklas, that she would've despised in herself. That same contradiction underlies the contemporary efforts of some Lesbian-feminists to validate butch/femme roles in their own lives. How can one successfully confer empowerment as inhering in the "femme role" when the behaviors and actions expected of it exhibit the feminine traits defined as appropriate to ALL women in the heteropatriarchy? How can Lesbians praise other Lesbians for adopting the "female consciousness" they rejected for themselves? Why are docility and submissiveness OK in some Lesbians but not others?

Substituting "female" for "feminist consciousness" has resulted in similar contradictions in the lives of other Lesbians. Rita Mae Brown, for example, once a Radical Lesbian, was quoted in *The Body Politic* (July-August 1983) as a defender of femininity in Lesbians:

Brown says she prefers her women to look and act like women – real women . . . 'I think that what I'm saying is what attracts me to women is femininity – whether it's culturally defined or not, I don't care. I don't want them to wear combat boots – it'll just send a shiver up my spine. I'm utterly besotted by women who look like women . . . Someone who's real masculine-looking might have a heart of gold and I'll never notice her. That's me, it doesn't have to be you. It's lust, pure lust' (p. 36).

The conceptual confusion here stems from the simile, "women who look like women." What is a "woman" who doesn't "look like a woman"? A man? A woman who "looks like a man"? A non-woman? That is, is there a specific bundle of features that identifies a woman *qua* woman and another set, e.g., combat boots, that identifies a "non-woman"? Well, yes, if we agree with Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "a woman is made not born." If WOMAN is a category created by men for their own purposes, then some features and not others will define that category exclusively, and WOMAN is a cultural class, nothing more. For Rita Mae to say she doesn't care if femininity is culturally defined amounts to asserting that she likes the world as it is. Which is OK, as long as she doesn't call herself a Feminist. In this regard, I prefer the relative honesty of Phyllis Schlafly, who also claims to like femininity.

Similarly, when Radicalesbians, in their position paper of 1970,¹³ coined the phrase "woman-identified woman," they suggested its use as a substitute for Lesbian in its radical sense and asserted an identity relation between the class woman, as culturally constructed, and the ideology of feminism, an identity that is possible but not necessary. Now, one can go around calling herself "woman-identified," meaning she 'identifies with women as a category', but the ambiguity of what that assertion might mean from one woman to the next cannot be easily resolved. If I say that I'm "woman-identified," does it mean that I accept

the category woman **AS IT IS** or does it mean that I love the female sex and abhor the oppressions of the cultural category? In any case, it obviously isn't the same as being either "feminist-identified" or Lesbian, although some such equation motivated the Radicalesbians' essay. Here, too, the attempt to attach political import to a heteropatriarchal term has led to the sort of ambiguity that divides us in spite of our best intentions. Among the worst results deriving from this muddle has been the denial of significance to Lesbian sexuality, creating a gap now monopolized by the sado-masochists, who've claimed "sexuality" as their territory,¹⁴ and the now-proliferating numbers of wimmin who call themselves "Lesbians," demand energy and space in Lesbian communities, all the while secretly having sex with men on a regular basis.¹⁵

I rejected femininity because I couldn't respect it; merely "feminine" was something I never wanted to be. Femininity constructs females within the heteropatriarchy so that they aren't worthy of respect. Asking a Lesbian to respect femininity in other wimmin is asking her to accept the terms of the men who created the category WOMAN. The two cannot be reconciled. It's not enough either to say that it's "society" or even "patriarchy" that makes femininity so attractive and compelling for heterosexual women; too many heterosexual wimmin have seen through the masquerade and abandoned feminine behaviors as the restricting frame that they are. But femininity *does* serve heterosexuality in the patriarchy; it binds women to relationships with individual men, and those men, who have names, who have faces, who aren't abstract, benefit directly from the limited behaviors and activities permitted by that adjective. Women have no privileges beyond those they receive directly from men. For this reason, they cling to heterosexual privilege. They have so little besides the men they're obsessed with, and femininity enables them to get something from the men who control their lives. Most importantly, femininity insures that such women won't acknowledge their anger, won't act on it, won't take revenge. Anger isn't feminine. High heels are.

...the colonized mind cannot remember. The colonized mind does not have the pride or militancy of memory. The colonized mind refuses to politicize anger or bitterness. The colonized mind must meet the demands of the colonizer: devotion and good behavior, clean thoughts and no ugly wrath.

Dworkin

The colonized mind, Lesbian or heterosexual, cannot afford anger, must avoid at all costs the painful recognitions inherent in the words *sexism* and *lesbophobia*, must deny the reality of heterosexual privilege, must refuse to name men as the enemy. We are so frightened of the political significance of sexism and lesbophobia that we'll go to any lengths to claim that they name only "partial" or "limited" truths. In a seemingly enlightened rationale, we stop seeing

ourselves as politically significant and rush off with wetmops and bleach to make the world clean for men.

Time after time, I've been told by Lesbians who're racially and ethnically oppressed¹⁶ that they can't trust white Lesbians to stand beside them when "the shit flies," and that they have to maintain their connections with male groups because that's who'll "protect" them. The reasoning usually starts out by, first, asserting that they share one oppression with a group of men. Having accepted the premise that sharing the oppression entails an undeniable and unbreakable bond with such men, they assert that only those men can "understand" the specific oppression. Discussing her identities as a Lesbian and a Jew, for example, Evelyn Torton Beck, in her introductory essay to *Nice Jewish Girls*¹⁷ explains that, "In order to feel fully safe I need to feel known," and asks, "How so? Is visibility safety?" (p. xiv, her emphasis).

As she acknowledged, these are complex questions; but I don't think she answered them because she kept on equating anti-Semitism with "homophobia." No equations or assertions of similarity will bring the two experiences into balance, although some aspects of both may illumine specific experiences, such as the invisibility and denial perpetrated by passing. Lesbianism is surely as ancient as Judaism, but anti-Semitism has been named and opposed far longer than anti-Lesbianism. Jewish communities have a history of survival and struggle for their identities against the perpetual threat of individual death and eradication of their communities. Lesbians have no such shared history. We have only shreds of information about Lesbians who lived before us, no oral tradition among us to celebrate the brave, nor community rituals to mourn our losses.

Can we be "fully safe" even when we are "known"? Is any degree of "safety" possible for any Lesbian? I don't think so. I do believe that my Lesbianism, which I share with Evelyn Beck, means that I have a vested interest in knowing her Jewishness and its significance in her life; I don't believe that Jewish communities have the same investment in knowing her (or my) Lesbianism. The investments are too different, the social power available to heterosexuals too entrenched, for Jewish culture to need or want to KNOW what being a Lesbian means.

I believe, with a lot of my friends, that we're headed for yet another era of genocide, violent persecution, and purges. But I don't believe, as much as I'd like to, that I really can protect my friends or myself from the consequences. We might be able to run an underground "railroad" and save a few of whatever group is rounded up first. But we have neither the resources nor the cohesion that effective protection requires. Good will and good intentions are important and consoling, but they're not enough against the forces ranged against us. Safety is a delusion and protection is a pseudo-issue. Where would Lesbians get the idea that ANY group of men will "protect" them? That's NOT going to happen! What will happen is what has always happened and will continue to happen unless, and until, Lesbians stand together and say, "No more," and say it

LOUD and CLEAR. The goal cannot be "safety." It must be to improve the quality and integrity of our lives as Lesbians. We'll be made invisible, our existence as Asian, Jewish, Black, Chicana, caucasian, or Native American will be **denied** by heterosexual communities, and, ultimately, they'll find ways to "get rid" of us.

The alternative, one already being chosen by increasing numbers of once out-front Lesbians, is to allow heterosexuals to force us back into our closets. And, let's be clear about this, such Lesbians believe that there's going to be a pay-off for them when they deny their Lesbianism. This movement back into the closet has been especially noticeable in "wimmin's" music (whatever that is!), and the apologists for it have justified the invisibility of Lesbians on the basis of "economic survival."

The justification goes like this:

- (1) Lesbians don't buy enough records to support Lesbian artists;
- (2) In order to survive, Lesbian musicians must be "commercially attractive," marketable, to a "broader," i.e., heterosexual, audience;
- (3) In order to "reach out" to this "wider" audience, Lesbian musicians must be in the closet.

Putting the argument as though it were purely an economic decision, however, utterly ignores the questionable politics of record companies like Olivia and Redwood. Many radical feminists and Lesbians stopped buying records made by those companies in the mid-70's, because we didn't approve of their political decisions. Remember the Lesbian outrage when Olivia hired Sandy Stone, a male transsexual who claimed to be a Lesbian, as a sound mixer? The formulation of the "economic" question by-passes the essential circularity of the situation. That is, once Lesbian musicians decide they want/need a "larger audience" for their work, they go "slick," trying to make their records more "professionally" acceptable, hiring male musicians for back-up (because, they say, there aren't enough "good" female musicians), singing songs written by men on albums they call "wimmin's music," growing their hair long, and, in some cases, femming up their images. Remember Teresa Trull's album cover, where she was clearly wearing make-up?

All arguments to the contrary, all this is, of course, simply self-delusion on a large scale. Because it isn't going to work! They've put themselves in a double-bind. Lesbians and radical feminists won't buy their records anymore because it's not "wimmin's music," much less Lesbian music; the "wider audience" they hope to "appeal to" doesn't exist. So who do they imagine is going to buy their records? They've compromised whatever politics they once claimed to have for the sake of financial survival, but they aren't surviving.

It is time, I think, to examine critically how we think and talk about political work, community identities and the resulting conflicts, and our "personal" priorities. In the heteropatriarchy, TIME IS MONEY is an essential cultural equation. We talk about "wasting (or not wasting) time," "spending time on this or

that, "investing time in a project," "putting a lot of time into something," and we automatically assign positive value to events and relationships that "last a long time" at the same time that we devalue whatever occupies a relatively "short" span of time.

Feminists and Lesbians, substituting "energy" for "time" in the metaphorical equation, say ENERGY IS MONEY. I remember hearing a woman ask, at a workshop on Separatism, what the panel members felt they'd "lost" when they became Separatists. In order to feel like her question "made sense," enough so to ask it, that woman also had to accept the ENERGY IS MONEY metaphor and related assumptions about reality: (1) That wimmin get something from paying attention to men and taking care of them; (2) That we have something "to lose" by withdrawing our energy from men and opposing heteropatriarchy.

One of my reasons for becoming a Separatist was my own realization that whatever "investment" I believed I had in the cultural *status quo* was **illusory**. I realized that this culture promises me nothing, offers me nothing, and will give me nothing. Because I was born female, the social contract requires specific behaviors and concessions from me; because I am Lesbian, and refuse to "honor" the terms of the heteropatriarchal social contract, this society gives me damned little for my "skin privilege." To believe otherwise would be ridiculous.

My skin privilege does act as a buffer. That is, men, given their choice of me, a fat, white, upfront Lesbian, or a fat, Black, upfront Lesbian, will choose me. We can, and do, hierarchize oppressions, and I don't think we need to apologize for doing so. The more we deviate from the WHITE, MALE, HETEROSEXUAL "norm," the less access we have to the resources we need to survive. It's common knowledge, for example, that census figures continue to show the following income hierarchy:

WHITE MEN
BLACK MEN
WHITE WOMEN
BLACK WOMEN

Men are still "on top," and women are still "on the bottom." This isn't a coincidence! If we start to add other features, to subclassify Black and white women, we can see how the hierarchy of oppressions functions to push Lesbians toward the bottom of any classification.

WHITE HETEROSEXUAL WOMEN
BLACK HETEROSEXUAL WOMEN AND WHITE LESBIANS
BLACK LESBIANS

PASSING WHITE LESBIANS
PASSING BLACK LESBIANS AND OUT WHITE LESBIANS
OUT BLACK LESBIANS

Any way we subclassify, the Black Lesbian is more oppressed, that is, has less access to resources, than the Black heterosexual or the white Lesbian, and I think similar results emerge for other Lesbians who're racially and ethnically oppressed.

Yet, in spite of the reality we experience and struggle against all of our lives, the fact of the matter is that a majority of Lesbians do believe that they have an "investment" in the heteropatriarchal social structure and continue to live and act in terms of that belief. Separatists, in contrast, understand quite well that our "vested interests" lie with other wimmin, other Lesbians, and in our hope for a new social order. By becoming Separatists, we announce to each other that we choose to "invest" in each other, we acknowledge that whatever our "gains" in this life might be, they'll come from working together and defying the heteropatriarchy, and we lose **NOTHING** because we have **NOTHING**.

What leaves me in a painful quandary is the fact that it looks as though my "best interests" no longer lie with either the WLM or the Lesbian community. I wish I had somewhere else to go. But I don't, so I must either accept the fact of my isolation and rely on the few wimmin I know I can trust or hope that, by talking openly about my own pain and disillusionment, I can turn the situation around, reverse the tide, and, thereby, enlarge once more my "community." But I want it on **my terms**: NO MORE TALK ABOUT WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO FOR MEN!!!

None of the feminists I knew ever bothered to point out that the insistence on making male concerns feminist priorities was an infringement on the rights of Separatists. It didn't seem to occur to anyone that we have the right **NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH MEN. WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY TO OTHER WIMMIN, "NO YOU MAY NOT IMPOSE UPON ME THE PRESENCE OF 'YOUR MEN' "**! Yet, many heterosexual feminists said, over and over again, that they would not work with Lesbians (most heterosexual feminists continue to assume that **ALL** Lesbians are Separatists!) **UNLESS** we accepted "their men" along with them.

When we protested against the renewed focus on men, we were called racist, divisive, elitist, fascist, and subjected to the basest kinds of name-calling and trashing. What the name-calling hid, however, perhaps even from those feminists, was the fact that the real issues, the issues no one wanted to confront head-on, were heterosexism and heterosexual privilege. It was heterosexism — the **ASSUMPTION** of heterosexual prerogatives, the presumption of heterosexual priorities — that made non-Separatist feminists so self-righteous and indignant when we'd insist on wimmin-only space, or seek support for specifically Lesbian issues. It's the arrogance of heterosexual privilege that has created an atmosphere in WLM that makes credible the use of a mutant word like *heterophobia*.

Has it been used against you yet? What, you may wonder, could "heterophobia" be? It is, obviously, modeled on the term *homophobia*, 'fear of sameness', used to denote 'fear of homosexuals'. "Heterophobia," then, although it literally means 'fear of difference', is being used by heterosexual feminists against

Lesbians, who, they claim, "discriminate against heterosexuals." I'd throw up my hands in disgust if they weren't so utterly serious about this abomination they've created, an obnoxious false comparison created in order to protect themselves from having to own up to the privileges they've acquired by relating sexually and socially to men: money, credibility, and the dangerous illusion of safety. Only the deluded would have any investment in pretending that Lesbianism and female heterosexuality are **comparable, equivalent choices!!** Again, feminists have substituted name-calling and falsehoods for honest contemplation of inherent political differences. Again, feminists have drawn around themselves the shield of male approval, daring Lesbians to challenge their "right" to use it.

In order to protect their heterosexual privilege, in order to avoid examining how they benefit from the heteropatriarchy, heterosexual feminists have denied the fact that oppression functions hierarchically. "For the sake of ALL WOMEN" we're told, "we must take care of men." This is the "safe" way for heterosexuals. For Lesbians, it's dangerous! We must set about envisioning and creating a Lesbian community capable of resisting heterosexual colonialism.

Yes, Let's Talk about Men

The "split" in the WLM has never been defined or examined, because it's not a subject we can talk about without a lot of anger and pain. Attempts to describe the "split" usually deteriorate into name-calling, scape-goating, and then withdrawal by those participating. The issue of *Maenad* (Winter, 1982) that tries to figure out the "split," called "The Lesbian/Heterosexual Split," wavers somewhere between sincere, but simplistic efforts to mend the breach and ferocious anti-Separatism. To label our division as a "Lesbian/heterosexual split" is erroneous, because many Lesbians refuse to choose wimmin and will not give up their masculist values, and some heterosexual feminists show, time and time again, that their commitment to feminist values is reliable and consistent. It would be more accurate to characterize the "split" as one between Separatists and Radical Feminists on the one hand and Assimilationists on the other, with Coalitionists waffling around uneasily somewhere in-between.

Separatists, for example, maintain that the only way to free ourselves from male domination is for all females to withdraw from men, to withhold from them our energy, our nurturing, our care-taking of them; only in this way, we believe, can we erode the foundation of male power and control over us. Male power is based on female complicity in our own powerlessness; to say "no" to male demands on our bodies, our minds, our energies, is to take power for ourselves. The Assimilationists, in contrast, maintain that the only way to liberate ourselves is to "struggle" with men, educate them about their sexism, nurture them through the painful changes necessary to a thorough-going social revolution.

That is the essential ground of the split that divides the WLM: **What do we do with men?** To say that they're "half the population" and can't be ignored begs the question. All of us know they exist. Separatists and Radical Feminists assert that men use women's labor and energies as the basis of their domination. If we are to free ourselves, we must first deny them access to the nurturing on which they depend. Liberal and Reform Feminists, in contrast, claim that we'll liberate ourselves by working with men and convincing them to change. Both Assimilation and Coalition, in order to sound like plausible political goals (or strategies) presuppose Separatism, but the success of Coalitions *requires* Separatism as the power base for political trade-offs, whereas Assimilation entails the necessary denial of Separatism in the formulation of its program.

Lesbians who choose to work with heterosexual wimmin misconstrue the issue of giving energy to men, and reduce it to sex, as though that were the significant distinction. Carole Anne Douglas, defending her "token good heterosexual feminist" quotes Ti-Grace Atkinson to the effect that ". . . it is more important what you're willing to die for than who you sleep with" (*Maenad*, p. 60). And I agree. The "real" issues that we refuse to talk about have to do with our values, the frameworks we use to make our choices and order our priorities. Unfortunately, we frequently choose *what* we're willing to die for on the basis of *who* we sleep with, and that's the "grain of truth" that makes the reduction to "sexual preference" sound plausible. The fact remains that, *generally* speaking it is more likely that I'll be able to rely on a Lesbian than a heterosexual feminist.

That generalization is based on my experience and observations. Because heterosexual feminists choose men as their sexual partners, their allegiance to other feminists and, especially, to Lesbians is divided and ambivalent, at best, or nonexistent, at worst. Because they maintain intimate emotional relationships with men, they see their "best interests" as more likely to be served by Assimilationist politics; that way, they don't have to confront the nature of their investment in men and they can enjoy whatever benefits come their way as a result of their male connections.

Lesbians, though, have made a choice; at some point in our lives, we crossed a line. We put behind us the heterosexual privileges offered to us and acted on our feelings for other wimmin. That single decision is the basis of my Lesbian politics. We said "no" to the social pressures and rewards that demanded our self-denial. In spite of the fact that many Lesbians remain "in the closet" and get whatever they can by pretending to be heterosexual, in spite of the fact that many Lesbians cling to whatever privilege dribbles down to them from working with gay men, I continue to look for my surest support, caring, and understanding among Lesbians. Even when they don't share my Separatist politics, they do share many of the same problems of survival that I experience daily.

In contrast, although the aspects of my experience that I'm likely to share with a heterosexual feminists may seem somehow "broader" or more general, the range of commonality between us is little more than a narrow strip that

must constantly be renegotiated if mutual benefits are to come from our political association. It might seem, for example, that "equal pay for equal work" would be a common issue on which we might profitably work together, and, to a limited extent, that's true. But the reality is that many Lesbians need jobs before "equal pay" becomes an issue to them, especially "out," "open" Lesbians. (I've put the words *out* and *open* in quotation marks to emphasize the lack of connection between a Lesbian and a heterosexual feminist in even the most obvious aspect of our lives, economic well-being.) Most blatant Lesbians, whether for physical or political reasons, or some combination of the two, as in my case, cannot find jobs, and the ones available to us are factory work and other low-paying occupations. Our Lesbianism keeps us at the bottom economically. Many professional jobs are closed to us by law, in some states, or by tacit maneuvers, and the latter is the prevalent method because, quite simply, Lesbians don't have legal rights in the U.S. Since we don't have any "rights" to be violated, our economic lives are both peripheral and extremely fragile. One might or might not get a job, or a raise, or a promotion because she's female; we don't get jobs because we're Lesbians, but we certainly lose them for that reason and that reason *alone*. Even Lesbians who choose to remain "in the closet" live in an illusory security, because disclosure almost always means ruin for the Lesbian whose identity is discovered by employers.

There's no way a heterosexual feminist can understand that kind of persistent, daily fear. She may have other reasons for fear in her life, but they aren't the same and they don't have the same consequences for her. Joy Harjo and I were once discussing the ways our experiences were different (in a conversation, December 1983) and why we have trouble understanding Lesbians whose experiences are different from our own. She pointed out that there's no way a non-Native American woman can understand what it's like to grow up Native American and endure the daily taunts, threats, violence, and subtle expressions of hatred that she had to survive as a child. But Joy, having grown up believing and acting as though she were heterosexual, doesn't know directly what it's like growing up as the school or neighborhood queer, and enduring the constant harassment and violence.

The white, heterosexual feminist doesn't have to *hide* her heterosexuality or fear the consequences if it's revealed; there is no such thing as being a "closet" heterosexual – unless it's the women going around calling themselves "lesbians" and having sex with men. The simple fact of the matter has been, and remains, that heterosexuality in our culture is rewarded emotionally, economically, and socially; Lesbianism is punished. Until heterosexual feminists acknowledge this essential difference and how it affects our lives, until they stop feeling sorry for themselves and asking Lesbians to do the same, dialogue between us will continue to be hard, if not impossible. Heterosexual feminists who've experienced racial and ethnic oppressions are better able to understand Lesbian experience if they take the time to extrapolate from their lives to ours. First, however, they

must get over their own hatred of Lesbians and stop denying the Lesbians suffering in silence within their own communities.

From the time we're born, quite literally, we are told we're heterosexual; our parents take for granted that the primary objects of our emotional and sexual responses will be men. From nursery school on, our teachers, some of them Lesbians themselves, determine what we'll learn and how we learn it by assuming, first, that every female in a class is heterosexual. Sexual harassment by male teachers (and employers) assumes that every female is heterosexual and, hence, their legitimate prey. If such treatment is insulting, degrading, and humiliating for the heterosexual, it's doubly so for the Lesbian.

The media depend upon the heterosexual majority for their credibility and viability. If we destroyed every book, movie, sit-com and piece of music, from opera to new wave, that assumes the heterosexuality of its audience, there'd be no "entertainment." The real theme of *Yentl* was the triumph of heterosexuality; the intense emotional relationship that developed between the two women (but only because *Yentl* was cross-dressing) had to give way to heterosexual conformity. (Ask yourself, for example, why couldn't the two women abandon the charade that brought them together and forget the man altogether? The movie could have developed in that direction, but didn't!) Advertisements, on television, radio, billboards, and in newspapers and magazines, **sell**, along with cars, toothpaste, and diet colas, **heterosexuality**. The Diet Pepsi and Levis ads now showing on TV are good examples.

From the mundane to the tragic, heterosexuality is the subject. How can something touted as "natural" need so much PR? Lesbianism is, as Sally Gearhart said years ago, A MIRACLE!! And a **MYSTERY**. HOW, without guidance, encouragement, accurate information, images and words to nurture us, do we manage, finally, TO CONCEIVE OURSELVES?? HOW, in spite of derision, incarceration, violence, and poverty, do we find the courage TO CREATE OURSELVES?? I don't know, and wish I did. Like cockroaches, we live in the woodwork of society, in its tiny cracks and crevices, finding our way to each other. Like cockroaches and dandelions, all attempts to eradicate us have failed; if anything, overt efforts to thwart us strengthen our resolve and make us more stubborn.

The consequences for Lesbians of heterosexuality among feminists take many forms in our lives. There's the Lesbian who was late to work one morning because she offered childcare for a heterosexual feminist, who decided to spend the night with her boyfriend without checking to be sure the Lesbian was willing to make breakfast for the child and get her ready for school, and then wasn't considerate enough to return home at an hour that'd enable the Lesbian to get to work on time. How many times have heterosexual feminists left Lesbians waiting around for them while they took care of men?

In spite of such behaviors, Lesbians have provided, and continue to provide, much of the energy that has fueled a dwindling and sputtering WLM. In return for our care, our patience, and hard work, heterosexual feminists have claimed

that Lesbians "divide" wimmin when we demand all-wimmin spaces; they've called us "extremists" when we refused to "be nice" to their "exceptional men"; they've accused us of "heterophobia" when we objected to their insistence on male presence in wimmin's groups. This is patriarchal reversal. What continues to scatter and defuse the energies of WLM in this century is the central place in their lives heterosexual feminists continue to give to their "exceptional men."¹⁸

If, as one of Sid Spinster's respondents asserted,¹⁹ all the Seps have gone home to their lovers and jobs, the fact remains that it *does* matter *who* we go home to. Lesbians cannot forget, when we look at our friends and lovers, when we listen to our stories of shame and humiliation, that we live and survive, against all odds, in the midst of the heteropatriarchy. We don't tell ourselves and each other that our lovers or friends are "exceptional," that a one of us has "escaped" the damage, the pain, the violence of living under the rule of men. No, we go *home* to the results of male domination.

Separatists, and some radical feminists, have told the truth that other women don't want to hear: **WE'RE AT WAR**. Men are the enemy, and heterosexuality makes wimmin collaborators in their own betrayal. I'm not using a "metaphor" here; I'm speaking literally. Yes, there is a "battle of the sexes." What is so painful and terrifying about acknowledging that fact is that **we didn't declare this war**. We didn't *choose* to be at war. It may be a war we're going to lose, every day of our lives. It may be a war we can't win. In every aspect of their lives, women have been invaded, conquered, and colonized. But most women either won't admit that they're hostages of enemy forces or they go on believing that "the battle" is a joke! A war is an armed conflict, yet women consciously, willingly, choose to live their lives *dis-armed* and "disarming."

And, because so many women persist in believing that men can change, and delude themselves by thinking men *will* change, insisting that their own fate is inextricably bound up with that of men, a lot of Lesbian energy has gone into maintaining shelters for battered women (NOT spouses!), rape crisis lines, and rape patrols. In spite of the real and needed aid and solace such projects provide, they're nothing more than field hospitals for the wounded, the maimed, and the dead – the fatalities of the "battle between the sexes." And the war goes on. Denials of its existence don't stop it; refusals to name it for what it is don't make it any less real or dangerous.

Men rape women at will, beat up women when it pleases them to do so, murder their wives and daughters, rape their daughters, grand-daughters, nieces, sisters, cousins, use and abuse any and every woman to whom they have access. Rape and murder are the activities of WAR. Looting and destroying the possessions of the conquered are what war is all about. Does it improve our situation to point out that it's our MINDS and BODIES that are daily looted and destroyed? Is it not war because we have nothing of our own but our minds and bodies to protect? Yet, only a few hundred wimmin, at the most, will acknow-

ledge that women are at war, and that we're losing, have lost. Only a few will name the enemy. Why?

The answer to that question is as complex as it is deceptively simple: FEAR. Fear of change, fear of starvation, fear that men will think up more overt and violent forms of repression to control us, fear of declaring ourselves free of them, fear of being alone, fear of losing whatever we're convinced we do have, fear of losing what little we've managed to keep for ourselves, fear of power, fear of ourselves. The list goes on, but fear is fear is fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of not knowing where to go from here. Fear of having no place to go. Fear of failure. The trap is woven of many strands but the mold is sturdy, secured by its repetition and sameness. There's great comfort in the KNOWN, safety in knowing the shape of the walls that limit our movement, a confidence in knowing the number of the bars that guard our vision.

The Sitting Ducks

If any group of wimmin has been hurt by the failure of "sisterhood," it's Separatists. We eagerly embraced the vision of a world of wimmin, free and unfettered by the rule of men. We made that vision the focus of our lives and energies. In return for our commitment, we demanded the same commitment to change and struggle from other wimmin.

When the WLM began to "go bad" as we knew it would, Lesbians, Separatists in particular, became the scapegoats for the anger and frustration of the neo-humanist, reform feminists. How utterly, drearily predictable. Attacking other wimmin is always in season, and it's always safe. We're much easier to get to because we're accessible: we chose wimmin. We're easier to hurt because we love wimmin; we're safer to attack because the only "weapon" we have for our own defense is further withdrawal, retreat from our own commitment to wimmin. But we're not only more accessible for scape-goating than the men who run this world's governments, we have neither their power nor their will to hurt other wimmin. Separatists haven't simply been silenced, although it's true that we have. We've also consciously maintained our silence, refusing to respond every time we were attacked in print by other wimmin and Lesbians, because we didn't want to respond in kind; we didn't want to help perpetuate the horizontal hostility that keeps us from confronting and fighting our real enemies. Lacking the resources and having failed to adequately protect ourselves from the psychic pain inflicted by other wimmin, we have remained the sitting ducks of the WLM.

There's hardly an issue in this world or a type of oppression that Separatists haven't been blamed for, from racism to the sexual objectification of other Lesbians. On this, see, for example, Chapter 14, "The Extremist Fringe," in *Sunday's Women* by Sasha G. Lewis, where Separatism is called "latter-day lesbian fascism," and blamed for the "coldness of instant anonymous sexuality that is more reminiscent of a large subgroup of the gay male culture than of

lesbians" (pp. 174-81). The false attributions and mistaken identities of this chapter are too confused for adequate discussion here. It's so much easier to call Separatists names than it is to fight the power of the heteropatriarchy.

The idea that an autonomous "wimmin's liberation movement" is somehow invalid or insignificant is the fundamental assumption of the essays in *Yours in Struggle (YIS)*.²⁰ Barbara Smith, for example, extolling the usefulness of what she calls "identity politics" (which she doesn't define) in the development of "Third World feminism," asserts that "[i]dentity politics has been much less effective when primary emphasis has been placed upon exploring and celebrating a *suppressed* identity within a women's movement context, rather than upon developing practical political solutions for confronting oppression in the society itself" (p. 84, my emphasis). In order to make this distinction between "effective" and "ineffective" uses of "identity politics," Smith must assume a dichotomy between "political activism" and exploration/celebration "within a women's movement context." Whatever is identified as "personal," or focussed on wimmin's identity, is treated as politically irrelevant.²¹

It [identity politics] has undoubtedly been most clarifying and catalytic when individuals do in fact have a combination of non-mainstream identities as a result of their race, class, ethnicity, sex, and sexuality; when these identities make them direct targets of oppression; and when they use their experiences of oppression as a spur for activist political work (p. 84).

Although she's generously willing to grant that other oppressions do exist, and she implies that being a female and a Lesbian might make one the "direct target" of oppression, she conceptually puts what she regards as valid "political activism" in opposition to "celebration" of a "suppressed identity." This convenient solipsism ignores what oppression is and what it does to each of us as individuals. It ignores the self-hatred not only of Lesbians but of all other oppressed peoples, and it refuses to consider how that ingrained self-hatred divides us and perpetuates horizontal hostility. How, Barbara Smith, are we to engage in what you'd consider "political activism" if we don't confront our self-hatred, if we don't work to eradicate the ways our self-hatred continues to be used against us? How do we get from here to there without first learning to respect and value ourselves?

The answer is that, in Smith's framework, we don't. Being female or a Lesbian, according to her description, doesn't mean that we're oppressed. It's only when "these identities make them [i.e., us] *direct targets of oppression*" that sex and sexuality are valid to her. How many combinations of oppression does it take before one can see herself as legitimately oppressed? How DIRECT does the oppression have to be before it qualifies as significant in Smith's framework? Clitoridectomy, infibulation, coerced sterilization, daughter rape, and the bride slaughter going on in India are *wimmin's* issues. Once we've said that women do two-thirds of the world's work, get 10% of the wages paid for work, and own

only 1% of the world's property, we have acknowledged that we are the largest, most exploited, most impoverished class in the world.

And it is LEGITIMACY that's in question, for Smith goes on to say this about Jewish "identity politics"?

When Jewish feminism has subscribed to or been influenced by cultural feminism, separatism, or a narrow version of identity politics, it has been limited in both analysis and strategy, since, for example, anti-Semitism does not manifest itself solely as attacks upon individuals' identities, nor does it only affect Jewish women (p. 84).

"Limited," "narrow," "solely," and "only." These words betray the real intention of Smith's "analysis." If we aren't working with men, if our attention is turned to women, it isn't "politics." Why has Smith persisted in attacking Separatist politics for the past decade? If we're so wrong-headed and irrelevant, why not ignore us and hope we'll go away? Perhaps she thinks that Separatists are simply "perverse" or "quirky" for refusing to allow men to have access to our energies, because she persists in saying that Separatists deny that some men are oppressed. We do not, and the statement that we do utterly devalues our decision to concentrate on fighting oppressions that make wimmin's lives miserable. That decision entails a commitment to eradicating *all* kinds of racism and classism, as they affect us as wimmin. It doesn't entail giving energy to men.

Smith's failure to grasp this point and her insistence on valuing men can only be understood by referring to her avowed Socialism. Socialists believe that all oppressions have the same cause, but this cannot be the case. If it were, surely all of the oppressed people would unite together and overthrow tyranny! But it's not true, and we haven't, and we won't. The hatred of wimmin, the more virulent hatred of Lesbians aren't grounded in the material causes which Socialists define. We must make a choice, one *forced* on us by male domination. WE MUST CHOOSE WIMMIN.

The utter devaluation of women, of Lesbians in particular, and the insistence on prioritizing men, has destroyed the very idea of a WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT. Smith, for example, cites as a "major misunderstanding within feminism as a whole. . . that it is politically viable to work on anti-Semitism, racism, or any other system of oppression solely within a women's movement context" (p. 84). If this assertion isn't hierarchizing oppression, then I don't know what is. In this case, "women's issues" are shoved to the bottom of "the list" assumed by Smith. I don't understand now why Barbara Smith calls herself a "feminist," since the "women's movement context" is apparently insignificant to her.

No matter how oppressed a man is, he always has a woman somewhere who bears the brunt of his anger and frustrations. I cannot ignore the fact that men rape women, ALL MEN. Yet, Barbara Smith and Elly Bulkin would have me

somehow "forget" this. They would have me regard my oppression as a Lesbian as insignificant in order to concentrate my energies on what they consider "real politics." I'm asked to ignore sexism, heterosexism, and Lesbophobia. I'm asked to somehow be more noble or generous than my oppressors, MEN. I'm asked to tolerate their intolerance for me; in other words, Bulkin and Smith, like so many other segments of heteropatriarchal society, want me to devalue myself.

I'm tired of being told that I'm a "bad person" because I'm a Separatist. I'm tired of being attacked because I choose to concentrate my energies on Lesbian oppression. Men of any and all groups not only don't believe that Lesbians are oppressed, which would be *something*; they regard us as sub-human, as bourgeois degenerates, as a "dirty joke." I'm sorry, I will not ignore the way I'm treated by men in order to qualify for Smith's validation. I won't work with men and endure their sexism and heterosexism in order to "measure up" to Smith's definition of "political activism." I will not tolerate being ignored and demeaned, and that's exactly what Smith has done. I will not work side by side with anyone unless and until I believe that they are as committed to dealing with my issues as I am to dealing with theirs.

At the same time that she's busy telling me what's "legitimate" and what isn't, Smith goes on, in the very next paragraph, to inform "some Jewish feminists" that it's "offensive" to "Black and other women of color" to say that to be or to have been at any time a Christian "is to be by definition anti-Semitic" (p. 77). In order to cover herself, in order to place Black xtians beyond political criticism, she distinguishes between what she calls "institutionalized Christianity" and "the mere practice of Christianity" (p. 77). What is xtianity if not anti-Semitic? How can one "practice" xtianity without also being anti-Semitic? She doesn't attempt to answer these questions but, instead, asserts that Blacks have "reshaped" xtianity "into an entirely unique expression of Black spirituality and faith, . . . a major source of sustenance and survival for our people" (p. 78).²²

That my questions indicate a contradiction in Smith's assertions becomes obvious when women and (invisibly) Lesbians are accused of "limited" and "narrow" "cultural feminism for emphasizing the development of a distinct women's culture through such vehicles as music, art, and spirituality" (p. 84). Why does Smith place challenges to xtianity "off limits" because Blacks practice it, but persist in demeaning the political significance of wimmin's/Lesbian's attempts to identify/create our own culture? Why is the xtian religious impulse among Blacks a "survival" strategy, but the desire for a wimmin's culture and spirituality not? What is the difference we're being asked to acknowledge? Exactly **what** is being prioritized by this differential treatment?

Not surprisingly as a result of the socialists' insistence that anything woman-centered is unimportant, *misogyny* is a word that has disappeared from the "feminist" vocabulary, along with *sexism* and *heterosexism*. Reading *Yours in Struggle*, I could believe, if I wasn't aware of the continued rise in rape, battering and incest, that misogyny had ceased to be a problem. Whatever happened

to sexism as a fundamental issue for feminists? It's virtually impossible now to mention sexism without a shuffling sort of embarrassment, and, when I do happen to hear it, it's usually a heterosexual woman accusing Lesbians of "oppressing" some man. Feminists can see their way clear these days to saving anyone from "sexism" if he's also, coincidentally, MALE.

Once feminists extended the range of "sexist" oppression to include men, the word lost its meaning, and, although that extension required one of the most mind-boggling semantic tricks in recent history (Ronald Reagan and George Bush still have us beat, though), only Separatists objected. In order to believe that a male can be sexually oppressed, one must also posit that, at the same time that he's benefitting from oppressing women, it's his benefits that "oppress" him!!! If I hear one more woman say, as an afterthought, that men and boys are "raped, too," I may turn in my "feminist secret decoder ring" that so many Lesbians have demanded I relinquish. Gladly. Perhaps then I could watch the internal intrigues and hostilities and betrayals with some serenity; perhaps then I could turn my attention to more satisfying contemplations.

Ending sexism and its devastating effects in the lives of women has yielded to a dogmatic insistence on "human beingism." We wouldn't, after all, want to assert the unforgivable idea that we should, first and foremost, be committed to healing ourselves from the violence and battering and rape and incest perpetrated by men, and to making whatever lives we can for each other amidst the emotional devastation caused by male violence! Oh no! Feminists have tripped all over themselves, trampling many of us in the process, to reassure the timid and the reactionary that they're worried about everyone, and it's now taboo to suggest that we might be our own PRIORITY. How many other oppressed groups have been so willing and eager to make their oppressors' welfare their primary concern?

The authors of *YIS*, between their persistent refusal to identify Lesbian oppression as central in their political analysis and their perpetual demeaning of a wimmin-only politics, tacitly assume that heterosexual dominance is, has been, and will always be. Underneath that, I believe, is a fear of casting their lot with Lesbians. This fear isn't explicit, of course. It's to be found in what isn't said, in the silences and omissions. In her final chapter, "Openings," Bulkin, for example, says:

I believe, for instance, that our choices both of political priorities and of strategies are influenced by our definitions of our community and our home, by the people we can trust are beside us and those we see only across the room or down the block (p. 191).

I agree. Choosing one's "political priorities" entails hierarchizing oppressions. But how does Bulkin define her community? She doesn't say, but she doesn't name Lesbians as her political priority either. Being a Lesbian isn't Bulkin's priority, and I want to know why. Why do Lesbians have to wait until all the

oppressed men are taken care of?

Two possible answers to my question can be found in Bulkin's article: (1) the "scarcity" theory of political struggle, whose identification she attributes to Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (p. 139); and (2) the obvious warmth and safety she associates with the word *home* in the above quotation. I agree that feeling as though one must choose between one or more forms of oppression is disturbing, but we **do choose** those with whom we "cast our lot," and we make that choice on the basis of who we look to for "community." The way Bulkin uses the word *home* indicates that her model of community is based on the heteropatriarchal nuclear family, a mother and a father who make a "home" in which their children are "safe." In contrast, for me the word *home* conjures violent nightmares, memories of the years I spent locked in my bedroom so my step-father couldn't get to me. And I know I'm not alone in rejecting the nuclear family as a metaphor for community or "haven." For too many of us, the "family" was an arena of on-going torment, torture, and pain. It was within the heteropatriarchal family that we experienced, first-hand, the reality of male power and female powerlessness. While our "fathers" raped us, our mothers stood by, silent and tearful. Socialists and reformists refuse to question their reliance on the nuclear family as a model of "community." (Recall the Ehrenreich passage I quoted in "Mystery of Lesbians: I," *Lesbian Ethics* #1.)

Both Bulkin and Smith look to constituencies other than Lesbians/wimmin for their support and validation, while, simultaneously claiming the label "feminist" for themselves. Why do they persist in redefining "feminism" to suit their own purposes? Why are they ignoring HETEROSEXUAL DOMINANCE? At what cost are they ignoring the political significance of their Lesbianism? Why have they gone to such lengths to rationalize their choices, over and over and over? Why don't they go off and be socialists and stop trying to discredit Separatism? What is their investment in casting Separatists as the "enemy"? Why do they believe so strongly that Separatists are more "dangerous" to them than either men or heterosexuals?

The fact of the matter is, as Mary Daly has said over and over again, **we aren't supposed to question the BACKGROUND.** We're expected to limit our analytical attention to the FOREGROUND of heteropatriarchy, thereby limiting the potential of our insights and discoveries. By and large "feminists" like Smith and Bulkin have dutifully stuck to the heteropatriarchal agenda, asking safe questions and intoning the predictably safe answers. For these reasons, although some Lesbians continue to call themselves "radical" or "Lesbian feminist," trying, thereby, to keep alive the radical promise of WLM, many of us have ceased to call ourselves "feminists." Some now refuse any label for their politics, so tainted are the available options; others of us continue to wield the name "Separatist," as a reminder to "feminists" that they might have made other choices than the ones they did.

Finding My Way Back

As I sit here today, trying to trace the outlines of my pain and isolation, I see that I had to go back and touch the old pains I'd thought were "behind" me, for the old and the new are the same knowledge: I don't "belong" anywhere. But the new pain, now identified, hurts more because I believed, for a while, that I'd found a community among Lesbians, that I did belong somewhere. As painful as it is to realize that I don't belong in the WLM anymore, having been defined out of it, it's harder to admit that I have no place to go among Lesbians, either. Harder, because if I don't belong among Lesbians I have no other place to go. Because I'm a Lesbian, I've never had the "option" of joining heterosexual society. They won't have me, and I won't have them. I can't delude myself with the possibility of assimilation, nor accept the humiliation of tolerance, as "gay wimmin" can. Because I'm a Lesbian, and so obviously a Lesbian, many (but not all) of the privileges attached to my white skin aren't going to come my way. And so, I also say, any Lesbian who believes that skin privilege, class privilege, or any other privilege *over-rides* or *cancel*s the social sanctions against Lesbians should look again. (Lesbians who pass as heterosexuals do, however, retain such privileges. That's why they consent to passing.)

Do I appear to now have some of the benefits usually associated with class or skin privilege? Then Lesbians who're fond of dismissing other Lesbians because of one -ism or another should admit that they're looking at us as "products" and ignoring the processes and experiences in our lives that brought us where we are, and that isn't fair to us. You deny the reality of our lives. Class privilege? I had some, yes, for about six years, while I lived under the roof of my step-father, but that brief respite from economic poverty was purchased at the cost of my sexual victimization. The "exchange" was explicit: In return for a roof over my head and food in my belly, I was expected to tolerate his sexual abuse.

You say I have college degrees? Indeed, I do. But I didn't get them because of class or skin privilege. I was kicked out of TWO universities *because I was a Lesbian* and denied entrance to two others *because I was a Lesbian* and that fact was on my transcripts. Finally, I lied to get into City College in New York City. Why CCNY? Because the tuition was only \$12 a semester, something I could afford while I worked full-time as a file clerk for \$45 a week. I went through college on the "beg, borrow, and steal" program, supplementing my income with the five-fingered discount. I won't allow anyone, Lesbian or otherwise, to dismiss the violence done to me because I am a Lesbian.

I'm tired of simple-minded assumptions about the life of one Lesbian being "easier" than that of another. We have to stop using those assumptions, and the ways of talking to and about each other that follow from them in order to justify the hurt we're inflicting on each other. Even Barbara Smith admits to the pain she's experienced when other "feminists" have attacked her (*YIS*, p. 76), yet she dismisses the ways we deal with each other as simply not worth our time (p. 85). If Lesbians/wimmin cannot find better and less hurtful ways of talking to

each other, I, for one, cannot imagine what I'm supposed to expect from the men Smith and Bulkin insist I "struggle with."

Yes, so far I've "survived." Because of people who were in the right place at the right time and willing and able to protect me when my survival was threatened, and my own stubbornness and hard work. Yes, I've made choices, but if you want to talk about those choices then I want you to also know what my options were. At 18, I could've worked in a factory or driven a lunch truck in Hialeah, Florida; I could've gone into the military; or I could somehow get a college degree and try to survive in academia. Those are the traditional options available to Lesbians unwilling or unable to "pass." The military was "out" for me because I was also fat and, therefore, more "obvious" as a Lesbian. (Also, I understood, more likely to be kicked out, too, during one of the frequent purges.) Why did I choose academia over factory work? Because three Lesbians sat me down one night in a bar and told me I should go back to college if I could. They told me I could use my "brains" to help other Lesbians like them. They believed our lives could be better and I believed them. Ridiculing the naive "upward mobility" of working-class dykes in order to dismiss them and me is both cruel and unnecessary.

They had dreams, those Lesbians, and they passed them on to me. Now, though, the dreams are endangered. Many Lesbians, oppressed because of race and ethnic background as well as their Lesbianism, have chosen their heterosexual communities over the possibility of a Lesbian community. (See, for example, essays in *Nice Jewish Girls* and *This Bridge Called My Back*. And I feel abandoned, and believe I deserve better from other Lesbians. Is this pain all I get for my work and energy? Is it impossible for Lesbians to make a community for ourselves? Do you think that Separatism is the "threat"? It's not. Heterosexuality and the pull of heterosexual bonds is the danger. Those ties are pulling us away from each other, daily.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Endnotes

¹ *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* #13 (Autumn 1984), pp. 90-94. Caryatis Cardea's kind permission to quote so extensively from her poem does not in any way indicate that she agrees with what I say in this essay.

² *New Women's Times*, March 30, 1979, pp. 6-7.

³ I'm not sure about the origins or source of the phrase "horizontal hostility," but I learned it as soon as I became involved in WLM in 1972. Jeanette Silveira has suggested that the phrase was first defined by Florynce Kennedy ("Institutionalized Oppression vs. the Female," in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful* [New York: Vintage, 1970], pp. 438-446-JS). Horizontal hostility occurs when the oppressed, largely unconscious of

their oppression, angry about the conditions of their lives, and frustrated because they're powerless to change their lives, vent their rage on each other. Men haven't had to work very hard to undermine radical feminism because other women have been more than willing and quite capable of doing the job for them. The first step toward ending the effectiveness of horizontal hostility is recognizing and naming it for what it is and who it serves. The second is to stop doing it when we know that's what we're doing, and the third step is to use that anger to change our lives, to direct it toward those who oppress us.

* I've enjoyed sports ever since I can remember, and actively indulged myself in them whenever the opportunity appeared. When I was 9, 10, and 11 I believed I could grow up to play first base with the Brooklyn Dodgers or become a forward on a pro basketball team. (All of this was, of course, before I'd realized what "The Difference" would mean in terms of my career options.) But, in high school, something strange began to happen. In spite of my athletic ability, my "letters," and my membership in the Girl's Athletic Association (GAA), I found myself ostracized in subtle, yet painful, ways.

And I tried to "fit in" because I wanted to so badly. I had what my coaches still called "baby fat," but several of the other women were "large" so it wasn't my size *per se* that governed the way they treated me. I wore the conventional female jock uniform for "passing," a straight skirt (black or dark blue), a white Ship 'n' Shore blouse, low-heeled flats, and I carried the (also black or dark blue) small, rectangular purse that was supposed to signal my desire to be "discreet."

I must've stuck out in every crowd, in spite of my efforts to look, walk, talk, and act like the other women. I was, alas, "too masculine," as one after another of my P.E. acquaintances informed me. It wasn't "safe" to be "seen" with me. I had no female friends; I wasn't invited to "slumber parties," lest, I suppose, I lose control of myself and attack someone. Yet, several of those women were Lesbians as surely as I was then. Instead of that shared identity becoming a source of bonding among us, their fear of discovery and its consequences for them drove a wedge between us that it still hurts me to think about.

From high school, almost all of us entered Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida; it'd been an all-woman school until recently at that time, and still retained some of the former attractions that would draw young Lesbians to it. Again, I went out for sports, intramural as well as intercollegiate, and tried to become active in the women's sports club. This time, my ostracism was complete and final. Not only was I told that I was barred from majoring in women's sports, but also that I wasn't to be anywhere around the women's gymnasium (except, of course, for my required four hours of P.E. classes).

Around campus, the other Lesbians I'd known as members of teams in and around Miami simply stopped speaking to me. My greetings went unacknowledged, and when "seeing" me was unavoidable on the sidewalk those women looked through me. I became invisible and nonexistent as far as they were concerned. My "indiscretion" meant that I was dangerous to them. I spent a lot of time crying in my room that first year.

Yes, that was all 28 years ago. Has women's athletics changed in its attitudes toward the Lesbians in its ranks? No. When Billie Jean King's ex-lover sued her, Billie Jean admitted that she'd had an affair with the woman, but I got tired very quickly of seeing pictures of her with her "loving husband" in the popular magazines. When word got out about

Martina Navratilova's relationship with Rita Mae Brown, Martina hastily retreated into what she called her "bisexuality," swearing that Nancy Lieberman was helping her to become heterosexual.

I know stories more devastating and cruel than those that've gotten media attention, but, to "protect" the parties involved, I can't tell them here. I know enough stories about the persecution and maltreatment of Lesbians in women's P.E. in only the past five years to assert that women's athletics is NOT a safe place for Lesbians to be, in spite of the large numbers of Lesbians still active in athletics. Only those who can pass need apply. The cult of femininity remains unchallenged within women's P.E. departments, and it oppresses Lesbians.

⁵ In our society, we're taught the metaphorical concept ARGUMENT IS WAR. Consequently, when we talk about arguments, we say things like, "I tried to defend my position, but she outflanked me," "I really shot down her objections," "her arguments were right on target." No wonder we feel so good when we win arguments and so bad when we lose them. Our thought patterns mold our behaviors so that our arguments are "dangerous," "threatening," and "risky" for us. Suppose, instead, that we came up with new ways of thinking about arguments, ways that helped us learn less painful and destructive ways of behaving during arguments. How about ARGUING IS A SCAVENGER HUNT, ARGUMENT IS QUILTING, ARGUING IS WORKING A PUZZLE, ARGUMENT IS DANCING, or ARGUMENT IS SURFING? If we don't teach ourselves new ways to argue with each other, the alternative is to learn to agree with whatever another woman says, regardless of what we really think. That's lying, and I think, still, that we deserve better from each other.

⁶ I'm grateful to Sarah Lucia Hoagland for passing on her observations about the frequent use of militaristic metaphors in the descriptions of events during the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

⁷ During a conversation about this article on November 11, 1984.

⁸ Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Link, 1974).

⁹ C.L.I.T. Statement #2, *off our backs*, July 1974, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰ I feel strongly that something must be said about Lesbians, particularly "politically-aware" Lesbians, who persist in trying to use the concept FAMILY as a base for constructing a "feminist" political framework. A recent example was the interview with Cherrie Moraga published in *off our backs* (January 1985: 12-13), in which she's quoted as saying that she learned "an unconditional form of loving" from her genetic family. Several things about this interview and her talk of "familial love" bother me. First, I don't believe there is such a thing as "unconditional love" and I think it's dangerous for Lesbians to believe in it. Sometimes our het families may love us or tolerate us in spite of our Lesbianism, but that's not "unconditional love," its **condescension**. In most cases, the love we're given in a nuclear family assumes, and is dependent upon, our being **heterosexual**. Perhaps Cherrie's genetic family was a haven from the racism of white society, providing a "buffer" for her against the dangers of racism. However, I'm extremely suspicious of

generalizations urging Lesbians to look to the nuclear family, Chicana or otherwise, as a "model" for love. Some Black het families do provide a haven from white racism for their children, and others don't. Some families do love their Lesbian daughters, others don't, and it's often one parent or the other who's more supportive.

Second, Cherrie very carefully specifies that the "best form of love [she's] known" came from her family, but, in particular, from "[her] mother and her side of the family"; the male members of her family (dad, uncles, etc.) get only mention, nothing more. If the family unit was so great, how come she concentrates her comments on the female members of her family? The conventional nuclear family, Chicano or otherwise, has **men** in it. Why does she ignore them? Does she slight her father's contribution to her growth because he's white or because he didn't help to raise her? It sounds to me as though Moraga's talking about caring love among wimmin, not "family love." Why, then, rely on the heteropatriarchal family for a model of love among wimmin?

Which brings me to my third problem with the interview: She's advocating that Lesbians, "queers in general," use the Latino home as a model to "recreate" a family life! This is conventional, nostalgic, sentimental thinking. It blatantly ignores the fact that at least 50% of the girl children in this country are raped by **men in their families**. To hold up **any** patriarchal family structure as an acceptable model for Lesbians isn't just unthinking, it's cruel. Cherrie is asking us to ignore our own violent and humiliating experiences in families, to forget the years it's taken us to break the cycle created within our families, to validate her memories by invalidating our own. Who does she think she is?

Cherrie may be trying to show that Chicano families are somehow "better" than white families, and, to the extent that they can shelter their children from the racism they experience outside the family, they may appear to be a model of "unconditional love." But that protection was provided, not because it had a male breadwinner and a female nurturer (and Moraga's hedges about the male members of her family support this), but **because it was a group who were aware of separatist consciousness**. Both the Spanish *familia* and the English *family* are derived from the Latin *famulus*, which means 'servant, member of a household'. If we've anything beneficial to learn from the concept of **FAMILY**, it's the importance of destroying the nuclear family.

¹¹ Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*, (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981).

¹² I'm indebted to Kate Moran for this observation, which she urged me to incorporate (December 6, 1984).

¹³ This paper was published in K. Jay and A. Young, ed., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: Douglas Books, 1972), pp. 172-77.

¹⁴ To the best of my knowledge, only Sid Spinster has made an attempt to open a dialogue about our sexuality outside the boundaries set by sado-masochists. Although I have problems with some of her opinions and assertions, Sid has risked a lot of herself to get the rest of us talking about sex, orgasms, and how we deal with issues of sexuality. Her article on orgasms appeared in the *Lesbian Insider/Insighter/Inciter* #12 (July 1984).

¹⁵ It's not only women who have sex with men who drag het values into Lesbian communities, however. As Bev Jo Separatistdyke has pointed out to me in a letter, the "new. . . Lesbian-'feminists' who are mostly femme set up their behavior as normal, and meanwhile they're inundating our Lesbian communities with het culture. They also often act like older Lesbians are oppressing them like their parents have. They include Old Gay culture as part of their rebellion against who they consider having power over them. That's where I believe some of the crap about fighting the 'politically correct' line comes from. It's a 'rebellion' that is actually a very reactionary stance" (Letter, November 29, 1984).

¹⁶ Throughout this essay I've purposely avoided using the phrase "wimmin of color" because several friends have objected to the fact that it treats all racially and ethnically oppressed wimmin as though their experiences and cultures could be lumped together. Caryatis Cardea, for example, noted that I don't mention Asian wimmin explicitly and felt that I should. I don't see any way out of my dilemma right now: I don't want to lump all of us together and I don't want to list every kind of oppression I can think of either. I've opted for the phrase "racially and ethnically oppressed" as an unsatisfactory way of acknowledging that these oppressions require separate treatment.

¹⁷ Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1982).

¹⁸ For the dubious, those readers who don't believe that such ideas are the very essence of mainstream thinking, consider the TV series, "V," which features, among its regular characters, the "exceptional lizard," the "good lizard." In spite of the fact that his people, reptilian extraterrestrials, have invaded and conquered our planet, the "exceptional lizard" belongs to a group of human resisters. In the latest (Feb. 15, 1985) episode, he told a human woman that he could never be "family" to her in the way that her gang was, but she said, "You're family to me in my heart!" and threw her arms around him. I have nothing against lizards, especially "exceptional lizards," but I wonder if it's merely coincidence that the "exceptional lizard" is male, while two of the nastiest, cruellest lizards are females.

¹⁹ "The evolution of Lesbian Separatist consciousness," *Lesbian Insider/Insighter/Inciter* #7 (April 1982).

²⁰ Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle* (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1984). I am purposely ignoring Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay in *YIS* because she's made herself so vulnerable and abject that her essay won't stand a critical reading.

²¹ Ironically enough, Kim Painter came to the opposite conclusion in her recent review of *Yours in Struggle* (*Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* #14 [Winter 1984], p. 106), in which she lauds the authors for "delineating [their] concerns in both personal and political terms."

I think that Lesbians, myself among them, have been misguided when we recommend books like *Yours in Struggle* without mentioning their flaws, questioning dubious assertions, and pointing out errors in fact or internal contradictions in the development of arguments. I was, as I recall, reluctant to review Lesbian work critically because I

believed strongly that we could resolve our differences without verbally hurting each other. Having been hurt once too often by things alleged about me in print, I've changed my mind.

²² The situation in which an oppressed group uses the oppressors' religion or religious precepts is much more complicated than I've indicated in the main text of this essay, and I'd like to be more explicit here. Religion, of any kind, is often the only "survival mechanism" available to oppressed people, and I include here both Lesbians and wimmin generally. Black slaves, for example, used xtian hymns as a code to signal that a clandestine meeting was about to occur. For centuries, xtian nunneries provided women with their only alternative to living in a father's house or to heterosexuality and marriage, and they continue to offer that kind of sanctuary, at a price. That women willingly surrender other freedoms (speech, self-chosen movement) for such sanctuary indicates their desperation more than it does the benevolence of the religious institution.

But these facts don't justify continuation of heteropatriarchal religious practices within oppressed groups. I don't understand how a socialist can reconcile her politics with becoming an apologist for xtianity, a religion that has systematically opposed social change for hundreds of years, persecuted Jews, Blacks, women, Lesbians, practiced ideological imperialism in every non-xtian culture by sending out "missionaries" to "convert" its people and subvert its mores, and supports, with its considerable wealth, white, male, heterosexual domination. For a Lesbian, I don't understand how there can be any "compromise" with xtianity.



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Dear Julia,*

I, like several other seps I know, am reading your "Mystery of Lesbians" with sighs of relief, pain, and acknowledged anger. I couldn't agree with you more. We must keep our attention focused on lesbian concerns and needs. No one else will. Ever.

However, in trying to articulate and clarify the implications of such a commitment, I think some distinctions are worth making.

I think we should make a distinction between concerning ourselves with racism as lesbian separatists (which you do in your work), and deciding that the only way to *really* work on racism (as we are often told) is to stop being separatists and join with men. It is the latter claim that is thrown in our faces. And it is the latter claim that is damaging. In the first place it is false, for it presupposes that lesbians are incapable of accomplishing meaningful work without men. Secondly, it is used dishonestly and manipulatively. For through it, coalition socialists are able to disagree with separatist politics merely by hurling the label, "racist," at separatists and so can avoid real argument and debate over political differences. (This happens to white lesbian separatists, but considerable scapegoating and coercion are leveled at lesbian separatists of color as well.) And I think this is what angers you and me most. I think there are legitimate political differences and significantly different perspectives. And I want lesbians again to engage in real debate and analysis. But by hurling the label "racist" at separatists as separatists, others have stopped significant discussion over political strategies, goals, and analyses; and they have ducked, without addressing, separatist objections that coalitionism (as a way of life), human beingism, and assimilation all sell out lesbians. Actually, they don't stop such discussions alone or by themselves. Such discussions would not be stopped if lesbian buttons weren't pushed by such claims. And this brings up, among other things, the issue of white liberal guilt which I will come back to.

Thirdly, when coalitionists imply that what we're doing is lesbian nonsense

* Originally this was part of a longer, private commentary which I sent to Julia Penelope about an earlier version of Part II of MOL. Julia thought these points should be laid out in a separate piece and I agreed to write them up for Lesbian Ethics. However, you should not consider this a complete nor encompassing work. It is merely a few very general distinctions which I think important to add to the claims Julia makes in Part II of MOL. I have had help in clarifying these points from Anne Leighton and Bette Tallen though they, of course, are not responsible for the views I express here.

and not fighting the *real* struggle, they offer clear proof of their own lesbophobia, or worse, their inability to conceive of lesbians as a political group or lesbianism as a political concept. It has been argued that lesbians have not produced an adequate analysis of racism. This is true. But since the discussions of early separatists and radical feminists, we have produced no analysis of heterosexism.

I think much of the duplicity of statements about how lesbians should address racism comes from the fact that many neo-humanist and liberal and socialist lesbians are *presupposing* lesbian community, taking for granted that they are lesbians, and not working on their identities as lesbians. I've noticed a significant number of lesbians presuming that because they are lesbian they must automatically understand homophobia and hence don't have to work on their own homophobia (not to mention their own heterosexism), or that because they are lesbian they have no use for, or need of, analyses of sexism or heterosexism and hence anyone offering such analyses must not be talking to them. In general I notice lesbians of all colors presupposing their lesbianism; addressing racism, classism, or anti-Semitism because these are problems they are willing to acknowledge; then turning back to patriarchy as if they were solid and secure as lesbians — had a lesbian community — and then promptly forgetting it so they can deal with what they consider to be important, without radical analyses of sexism (not to mention heterosexism) getting in their way. It is lesbianism, not heterosexualism, which makes their work possible.**

I think we might make another distinction between (a) feminism being nothing but the fight to end racism with an occasional token mention of women, which is what many coalitionists want to argue such that Jesse Jackson could thereby be called a feminist; and (b) feminism being an ideology which functions to undermine the oppression of women and which thereby includes among its priorities undermining racism. What you're talking about is (a). In my opinion it is coalitionists, not separatists, who would drop battles — they drop the fight to end sexism and heterosexism as your paper so aptly shows. But don't let them make you say you're dropping battles; if you do so, you are accepting the liberal and socialist feminist framework which holds that some battles must be dropped for expediency. You know as well as I do that heterosexism won't cease if anti-Semitism, racism or classism are still around. Again, what some claim is prioritizing racism mostly means dropping feminist and lesbian concerns. And I think separatists of all colors have got to point out more clearly that not only is that selling out women and lesbians, it is not really fighting racism.

** I want to acknowledge here that separatists can also take lesbianism for granted in certain ways. Further, you and I have talked about how at times we have contributed to the invisibility of lesbians.

To put this another way, the problem is that assimilationists and coalitionists are trying to tell us just what fighting racism really means – dropping separatism. If you don't distinguish between prioritizing racism on their terms (dropping separatism) and fighting racism on your own terms as a lesbian separatist, then by implication it would follow from your argument that prioritizing racism means selling out women or lesbians. However, if you distinguish between addressing or even prioritizing racism as a separatist on the one hand, and prioritizing racism as a coalitionist or assimilationist on the other, then what you are saying is that coalitionists and assimilationists way of prioritizing racism is selling out women – ALL women, not just white lesbian separatists – for they have allowed feminist and lesbian values to be shoved back into the closet.

You talk about assimilationists and coalitionists who push for expediency and for greater numbers. And I think it is important to examine further the feminist desire to include greater numbers and the belief that we must work to include all women. In the first place, feminism is not for all women. Feminism is for all women who choose to embrace feminist values. Those concerned with making feminism popularly palatable tend to forget this.

Secondly, the move to include all women typically begins with a move to exclude specific women, namely separatists and later, out lesbians. So all women are not included even though we supposedly are. Those women who act to make an organization's focus "more inclusive" are actually making a choice about which women they want to be responsive to. Separatists have been pointing this out for years. And certainly it is easier to respond to women who need to be "saved" and persuaded that possibly they might think in terms of their own interests (as if they weren't already) than it is to deal with obnoxious, pushy, and tacky dykes, especially when the former do not require that assimilationists or coalitionists re-examine their own values as exhibited by the choices they make.

Thirdly, as Anna Lee has pointed out,^{***} many attempts on the part of white feminists to widen a group, collective, or project to include "greater diversity" have resulted in an increase of white men and a correlative decrease of black women.

The problem, again, is that insofar as the WLM dropped its radical stance so that those who were fighting other issues would say feminists were good girls, feminism ceased being the feminism of the WLM. This is why Ariane Brunet and other Radical Lesbians from Quebec argue that (what is practiced as) feminism is the last stronghold of the patriarchy and challenged you and I, asking how in good faith we could call ourselves separatists and feminists in the same breath. From the inside, feminism was undermined not because feminists addressed other issues, but because those feminists who were granted media

^{***}This statement is from an unpublished revision of a paper entitled "A Black Separatist." The original version appeared in *Innerviews*.

exposure (feminist, even lesbian feminist, as well as patriarchal media exposure) dropped radical values so they could be heard by those who were dealing with other issues and would not acknowledge or address feminist and lesbian analysis and values, or worse, who offered a token or tolerant nod toward feminism and lesbianism and expected praise and attention for it. The problem, again, was not in addressing racism – we do not have to drop our commitment to Lesbians in order to combat racism – it was in dropping feminist radicalism. Fighting racism, indeed prioritizing it, is consistent with being a radical lesbian killer dyke separatist.

As for the distinction between "identity politics" and "political activism," I think you are again allowing others to characterize, erroneously, what separatists are on about. For these labels and this dichotomy obliterate the unique politics of the WLM. The phrase, "the personal is the political" was, among other things, a redefinition of social change. What radical feminists and lesbian separatists argued and still hold is that big political movements and legal reform don't bring the kind of change we're after. Yes, women can vote now, and that is a necessary step; and yes, segregation *per se* is no longer openly legal; and yes, the nazis were stopped, temporarily; and yes, in Russia and China Mammon does not reign supreme. . . yet; and yes, the war in Vietnam is over, temporarily; and on and on. But no, these have not brought the kind of changes you and I and other separatists and radical feminists and radical lesbians are working toward.

At most, large political movements and legal reforms stop crises, and at times we may decide that now is a time to work to stop some crisis or other. But such movements and reforms do nothing to change the fabric of our society, they do not undermine the structure and foundation which feed oppression and which will make it credible again and again in countless different arenas. Further, insofar as these crises force us to play by dominant rules, they reinforce dominant structure and ideology. Others forget or have not figured out that men create crises when all else fails to force us to play by their rules and game plan.

The WLM began to weave, and radical lesbians and lesbian separatists have persisted in continuing to weave, a different fabric and a different pattern for social change. What others who talk of "identity politics" and "cultural" or "spiritual feminism" in effect do is work with the patriarchy to keep us believing that the patriarchy is the only reality, that what men call revolution is the only revolution, and that what men call change is the only change. Some lesbians say they don't live in the WLM but on U.S. streets. Well, I and you and radical lesbians and lesbian separatists live in both.

What we are working on is our own internalized oppression, the pig in the head – how we are complicit in the dominant ideology, and our values and goals about how society can be restructured. What we are on about is creating something different. Of course our work hasn't made any earth-shattering changes – we've only just begun it and it will take generations. But without it

you and I know that there never has been and never will be any other change. Socialists and liberals alike may belittle our work, but don't let them name it for us. In my opinion it is they, not us, who fail to understand the real struggles. I will add that at times I think there are legitimate reasons for socialists' and liberals' choices and that some of the work they do is valuable. The main problem, as you point out, arises when socialists and liberals turn on us, trying to silence our voices in the community, and are the first to undermine wimmin and lesbian space for what they try to claim is a "larger" cause. Again in my opinion, it is separatists and radical lesbians, not socialists and liberals, who are fighting the larger cause.

I want to return now to something I mentioned earlier which is one of the problems of racism in the lesbian community — white liberal guilt. Too many white lesbians simply shun something or someone called racist in the community without really examining the charge and evaluating the situation for themselves. As long as the label, "racist," is allowed to be a tool for silencing political differences, the community is not dealing with racism.

There is a related problem here that I have not yet found addressed. Some lesbians say, "I am black (or Jewish, or working class), and I find such and such offensive," and then argue that that should be enough. The argument goes something like this: "To ask me to explain to you why something is offensive is to oppress me and to rest on your white (or gentile or class) privilege which has included your being able to grow up not understanding how such and such is racist (or anti-Jewish or classist). If I find something offensive, you should just take my word that it is oppressive, to insist I explain it to you is itself oppressive."

I think to a large degree this is an accurate argument. For example, if I continue to play up to men by explaining why male strutting is offensive — no, dangerous — then I am left dependent on their ability as well as their willingness to understand. Further, to continue arguing with them about their sexism or heterosexism is to validate their agendas and framework. That is, to the extent that I must argue that women should have equal rights, for example, I am validating a framework in which the question of whether women should have equal rights is reasonable. Thus to engage in such debates with men is to validate my own oppression.

Nevertheless, I want us to realize that if in the community we take the stand of never explaining what is oppressive and offends us — for example, I make a sexist remark and you simply say it offends you without explaining it to me under any conditions — then several problems arise. First, we are our primary teachers. Certainly we learn by attending elsewhere. But it is through radical analysis which we develop in conceptual frameworks separate from the conceptual framework of the rule of the fathers that we gain a unique handle on that knowledge. Thus we are our ultimate teachers, and we will never learn in the community without helping each other. I can try to understand something, but some things may not be clear without help. Someone else may choose with

perfect legitimacy to withdraw from me and refuse to explain something I profess not to understand because she thinks I am not taking responsibility for my own ignorance. But I think it a serious mistake if we accept as a general community policy never offering each other explanations and analyses of oppressive remarks which we make to each other or policies or survival skills which we use with each other.

Secondly, a primary reason for engaging in explanations is to unravel the mess in our thinking that growing up in patriarchy has caused. When I first started teaching, a very bright, politically active student secretly confided in me her fear, "What if we really are inferior?" Ever since then I have insisted that students be able to analyze and explain how something is oppressive.

Thirdly, if we back off from a remark or policy just because it offends someone else when we don't understand what is offensive, then we are not learning or unlearning anything. Rather than divesting ourselves of our privileged ignorance, we are embracing it.

Fourthly, a given remark might not really be oppressive – sizeist or classist for example. If I just rest on others' reactions, I am not allowing for that, and I am not allowing that they may be mistaken. This attitude has encouraged the scapegoating of separatists and has promoted very shallow understandings of racism and classism and sizeism and ablebodyism in particular. So I think in the lesbian community that we need to re-examine the question of explaining and giving reasons for our reactions and ideas.

Finally, I'd like to add a distinction concerning your criticisms of Cherrie Moraga's claims about the family and Barbara Smith's claim about the Black church. I take it Cherrie is making a point about la familia Chicana to the effect that it is significantly different from the white family. Certainly some Black, Hispanic, Arab, Asian, and Native American families have provided their children with a significant haven from white racism. And in some respects such a haven includes something which one might be tempted to call unconditional love (though I agree with you that there is actually no such thing – its like light under no conditions of perception). Further, certainly the Black Church has provided a celebratory place of Black Culture and a haven from white racism. But to Cherrie's point I would add that when such a unit is a haven, it is a haven not because the unit is a *family*, i.e., not specifically because it has a certain structure called a family (no matter how varied that structure can be). Nor is the Black Church a haven because it is a church, i.e., xtian – rather, despite it. If such institutions are havens, it is because they are groups made up of people who are, to some degree, separatist and not assimilationist in their consciousness.

Sarah Lucia Hoagland

MISSING - LINK CARTOONS

"TAKING IT LYING DOWN"

INSIDE PAUL'S PORN PARLOR
OUR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER,
NANCY, FINDS A DISCOVERY:

NEW DEFINITION
DICTIONARY
= NEWSPEAK =
EDITOR: EROTICALLY
MERRY WIMPY PAD.

PRO-SEKS
[NEWSPEAK SLANG]
1. SEX IS BORING
2. PASSION MUST BE PLANNED
3. SLAVERY CAN BE YOUR CHOICE

FREEDOM
OF
MY
STEECH

TRACK UP
AND READY

HOT MOMMS
NURSING

16
CHERRY

JOY
of
ANCEST

CHILD CARE
TOTS
KIDS
TEENS

SLASHED

CRIPS
LIGHT MY FIRE
ACCESSIBLE

KKK
TIES
KNOTS

BLACK
BEAUTY
IN
BONDAGE

HOT
DEATH
DEATH

RAPED
SLIT

OLD AGE
HOME:
A DRS.
FANTASY

CUNTS
WORKING

TEACHER
AND
THE
PUPILS

WHIPPED
PUSSY

STOMP
IT

SUMMER CAMP:
S.S. GUARD'S
WORK IS NEVER
DONE.

AIDS
PLEASURE
AND
THE
DANGER

CHICKEN
HAWKS
AND
OTHER
BIRDS
PUCK A DUCK

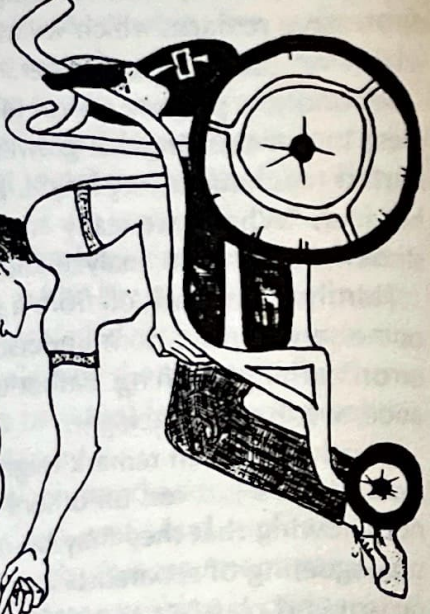
PLAYBOY
MRE
PURE
PURE

MUSTER
SEIT
SEIT
SHIT

ON OUR BACKS
FOR THE ADVENTURE
PRONE LESBIAN

VIDEOS

THE
MISSIONARY
POSITION ?!



HOW TO PARTY
FROM PORN

EIGHT BILLION

ACLU
SIN
SUPREME COURT
OBSCENITY
F.A.C.T. ♀

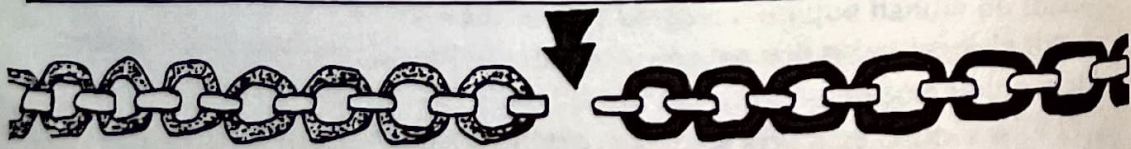
PAIN FOR FUN
HONEY VANILLA
IS A CONSPIRACY
BY NAUGHT DICKS

From M. London
April 1985 ©

UNDER THE TABLE:

RECEIPT?

I.R.S.?



F.A.C.T. or F.I.C.T.I.O.N.?

Last Fall, F.I.C.T.I.O.N., Feminist-Inspired Conspiracy To Improve Our Nonchalance, announced our annual Fibbi (Fiction Is Better – Believe It!) awards. Winning third place was F.A.C.T., the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce, a group formed to oppose human-rights legislation that would allow victims of pornography to sue the makers, distributors and users of pornography. "We like F.A.C.T.'s refreshing attitude," said a F.I.C.T.I.O.N. media starlet. "The less we know about these imaginary victims, the better. In a funny way the Factoids remind us of Phyllis Schlafly, who once said, 'A virtuous woman is never harassed' – in the case of the Factoid, it's more like 'A real woman is never sexually subordinated.' That makes us feel better. That helps us ignore other women's tacky situations. That makes us feel freer, more feminine and ineffectual, and extremely nonchalant."

In our intermittent efforts to educate you, the potentially nonchalant, about the work of groups like F.A.C.T., F.I.C.T.I.O.N. invites you to test your knowledge of Culture and Politics. Who made the following statements?

1. **IDEOLOGY:** The eroticization of rape in fantasy is sex. Rape in reality is violence, not sex. Sex is nevernevernever violence. . .

"There is no connection between thought and action."

- A. B.F. Skinner
- B. Carole Vance, FACT founder
- C. Son of Sam (the dog made me do it)
- D. President's Commission on Obscenity (1970)

2. RELIGION:

"More sex offenders have read the Bible than have read pornography."

- A. Jerry Falwell
- B. Carole Vance
- C. Phyllis Schlafly
- D. Larry Flynt

3. JUSTICE:

"When acts of violence are involved the laws already existing against rape and battery should be enforced."

- A. Resolution signed 60% by adult women.
- B. Resolution signed 50% by battered wives.
- C. Resolution signed 92% by acquitted rapists.
- D. FACT flyer

4. COERCION:

What public figure expressed concern over the impact on Vanessa Williams of the pornography fraudulently made of her?

- A. Phyllis Schlafly
- B. Betty Brooks, member of FACT Los Angeles
- C. Karen DeCrow, NOW liberal lawyer
- D. Al Goldstein, publisher of Screw magazine

5. PORNOGRAPHY:

"Pornography really should be defined as the degradation of women. Nearly all pornography involves the use of women in subordinate, degrading poses for the sexual, exploitive, and even sadistic and violent pleasures of men. Sex-role stereotyping is essential to the production and profiteering of pornography."

- A. Kate Millett
- B. Betty Friedan
- C. Phyllis Schlafly
- D. Nan Hunter, FACT member

6. **SEXUALITY:**

"Women need the freedom and the socially recognized space to appropriate for themselves the robustness of what traditionally has been male language."

- A. Norman Mailer
- B. Helen Gurley Brown
- C. FACT Brief
- D. Hugh Hefner

7. **FORCE:** Experiments showing that pornography increases aggression are irrelevant to real life.

"Moreover, most of the reported willingness to aggress occurs only in the subjects who are previously angered."

- A. Defense counsel for the reasonable rapist.
- B. Manufacturers of Lithium, Valium, and Darvon
- C. FACT Brief
- D. Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman*

8. **HARM:**

"People working for the anti-pornography laws always want to talk about the body count, how many women have been raped, murdered, brutalized, sodomized. Incest."

- A. John Money, sexologist
- B. Henry Lee Lucas, serial murderer
- C. Casper Weinberger
- D. Barbara Kerr, FACT member

9. **SEXUAL LIBERATION:** Hey, more sexuality for women, more openness, more freedom . . .

"I want to be able to walk down the street and grab someone's ass."

- A. Bob Barker, Miss America Pageant host
- B. Calvin Klein
- C. Betty Brooks, member, FACT Los Angeles,
- D. Bob Guccione

10. CULTURE:

Identify the logic of these two statements from the FACT Brief:

"Additionally, aggressive behavior occurs only when the experimenter gives subjects disinhibitory cues" (p. 24).

"Rich fantasy imagery allows us to experience in imagination ways of being that we may not wish to [or be able to with impunity for the time being – F.I.C.T.I.O.N.] experience in real life" (p. 29).

- A. Pornography is cathartic.
- B. Pornography is disinhibiting.
- C. Pornography liberates women's repressed sexuality.
- D. Pornography liberates men's repressed sexuality.

Answers Below

1. B. Carol Vance, FACT founder in talk, "Why Feminists Should Oppose the Anti-Pornography Ordinances," at ACLU Feminist Forum, Los Angeles 3/18/85.
2. B. Yep, Vance again. *Ibid.*
3. D. FACT New York flyer, "Why Feminists Oppose an Anti-Pornography Ordinance," 1985, p. 2.
4. A. Phyllis Schlafly, as reported in Newsweek, 1984.
5. C. Phyllis Schlafly, published in her regular column, 1984.
6. C. Brief of Amicus Curiae of Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce et al., in *Hudnut v. American Booksellers*, on appeal 7th Circuit, p. 31.
7. C. Fact Brief, *Ibid.* at p. 24.
8. D. Barbara Kerr, FACT member, "Just the Facts," *New York Native*, January 14, 1985, p. 17.
9. C. Betty Brooks, speech before Stonewall Democratic Club of Los Angeles, April 15, 1985.
10. We don't care. We're nonchalant. Any of the above.

Non? Monogamy?

A Readers' Forum

Monogamy/non-monogamy My mind tells me that this is not really an issue, or that it shouldn't be. The issue is how we love each other and that we love each other well and honestly. That is what my mind says. My gut tells me I'm terrified.

I am in a relationship now where we have made no promises, no guarantees, except that we will love each other and continue to love each other. That we will be honest. That each of us will talk with the other before she does something that will affect the relationship. We have not stated limits on our ways of being with each other or being with other womyn.

Most of the time, this is acceptable to me. But when we first got together, I was terrified at the prospect of becoming intimately involved with a woman again after nearly a year of celibacy. For me to begin the process of opening myself to her, I needed to feel safe, I needed to be able to trust her, and myself, too. At that time, I felt that I needed a promise of sexual exclusivity in order to feel safe. But I also knew that the woman I was becoming involved with would not make such a promise, so I didn't ask. A friend pointed out to me that I was actually safer if I didn't require a promise of sexual fidelity. I didn't understand her point at the time, but I am beginning to understand now. If there are no promises made, there are no promises to be broken.

Sexual exclusivity, or the promise or assumption of sexual exclusivity as a measure of the significance of a relationship is a legacy from heteropatriarchy. . . . While [exclusivity] might be a very workable arrangement for some lesbians, and I do not pretend to criticize lesbians who freely focus their attentions on one other lesbian for a period of time, how ever long that might be, I believe it is usually a piece of baggage that we bring with us, often unawares. It limits us in our potential to love womyn, which is the basis of lesbianism.

Rather than keeping sexual faithfulness as a parameter of our ways of being with each other, I would suggest that we be CONSTANT, which "stresses con-

tinuing firmness of emotional attachment without necessarily implying strict obedience to promises or vows" (Webster's). This does not mean that we have made no promises whatsoever; we have promised to be honest with each other and to care about one another. The loving between us is freely given, it is constant. . . .

Now I am considering becoming more intimately involved with another womyn, one who has been a friend for several years. I know that I can love two womyn well, and that loving one does not diminish the love I feel for the other. Nonetheless, sometimes I am terrified. When I try to say what it is that I am terrified about, I can rattle off a list of possible reasons: I might make a fool of myself, I might alienate one or the other of these two womyn, one (or both) of them might decide that she doesn't love me anymore, I might discover that I really don't deserve to be loved or to love, blah, blah, blah. But those are superficial and spurious reasons. They aren't real, at least not to me in this particular situation.

What frightens me is change, knowing that my friend and I are going to have to change the patterns we have developed around our being together, patterns that are essentially comfortable for both of us. They are patterns that have allowed me to grow immeasurably in the last two years, to learn a lot about love and trust and ways of being with a womyn. But now it is time for me to try out what I have learned, and that means learning even more about being with myself and being lovingly with other womyn. That means being willing to take risks, being willing to jump into something without knowing what is there, without guarantees. That is frightening. It can also be exhilarating, and joyful.

The issue is not how we choose to limit or not limit our relationships; the issue is how we challenge each other and ourselves to grow, to be all that we can, to love womyn honestly and well.

Morgan Grey
2/26/85

. . . . I am now with my fourth lover and know only two lesbians (one 78 and the other 83) who did mate for life. Yet, each of them had several lovers before settling down for the long haul.

When other lesbians and I have heatedly argued the topic, monogamy has meant sexual exclusiveness with or fidelity to one lover at a time; nonmonogamy has meant an openness to sexual intimacy with more than one partner, or actually being sexual with more than one woman. . . . I have observed in myself and other lesbians a tendency to be serial monogamists. Most often we are sexually involved with one woman at a time for a variety of reasons — socialization as women in a culture based on monogamy for women only; constraints of time and energy; the emotional pain caused by feelings of jealousy. I begin to advocate nonmonogamy when my old relationship is strained or when sexual

problems are developing in order to justify looking for someone else. I am then a practicing nonmonogamist until I move on to a happier, more compatible sexual relationship, at which point I become sexually focused on one woman again. At least that is what I did in the past. From now on I won't label myself nonmonogamous during those transition periods but rather as a serial monogamist who is between partners.

. . . . I know that my nonmonogamous days are over, mostly because of a recognition of my pattern of relating and a desire to spend time on creative work. Because of an illness I suffer known as workoholism, my lover accuses me of being a semi-ogamist—one who is satisfied with half a relationship. If she is right, all I can say is "Semi-ogamists of the world unite!"

Mary Lee Sargent

SO YOU DON'T WANT ANOTHER MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP. . .

Monogamy is less an ethical issue than a housing issue. Skipping over analysis of why monogamy is the mating pattern *de rigueur* here, let's go to possibilities for exception.

This isn't just a theoretical consideration. Six months ago I mutually ended an eight-year monogamous relationship. A biggie I accomplished while in that relationship was establishing a home for myself, complete with pleasantries and warmth, that was truly mine. It definitely took two incomes to make it happen and if I wanted to repeat it I would find a new monogamous partner.

But I'd like to try something different. Why? Putting together my home was a task I set for myself to prove I could do it. It was important to me at the time but I do not feel driven to repeat it. I see it as a piece of my "improve on childhood" agenda that has been satisfied.

I still want friendship, companionship and an active sex life . . . but without taking them all to one woman with whom I'll be expected to come to deep emotional intensity. I'd like to distribute my gynergy more into other worthwhile areas such as starting a business, doing feminist research, and harassing men.

So what can I envision? Living alone in a studio and sleeping around? No, thanks. How about a suite in a lodge housing three to nine Lesbians? OK, in the middle is a commons area with two fully equipped kitchens off to the side. Adjoining the commons, or down the hall, whatever, are private suites. My suite, like the rest, has a door to the commons, a private outside entryway, and well-insulated walls. I have a bedroom, sitting room, kitchenette, and a full bath. When I want companionship I don't have to take a trip across town. When I want private time I close my door.

And during those trying national and christian holidays when the pressures to fake out het lifestyles are overwhelming & crazifying I won't have to check into a motel and draw the curtains to stay sane. (Some single women do this.) So now I am full circle. No ethical exploration of alternatives to monogamy is

possible until we create the alternatives. Likely we will have to build/remodel these buildings ourselves, turning our backs on father-family structures (no master bedrooms, please!).

And so mote it be!

V.E.R.D.

Virginia Ethel Rachel Diannah

I regard this as a matter of personal need and/or style which should be removed from the political arena. . . .

My present views on the issue of monogamy can be summed up in this paraphrase of Judith Martin: "Monogamy was created to give people a rest. We must celebrate a species of grownup who is sufficiently evolved to derive pleasure from knowing she can rely on another's love instead of seeking the cheap excitement of uncertainty" (*Miss Manners' Guide to Rearing Perfect Children*).

I am a creative writer. My work requires that I embark every day onto a sea of emotional turmoil in order to create characters and plots. It also involves a great deal of uncertainty about publication, sales, critical success, etc. At forty, I do not have the physical, mental, or emotional stamina to sustain turmoil in my work and turmoil in my personal life too. I need a stable relationship that I can return to every night like a safe harbor, someone I am sure will always be there to nurture and sustain me. In return, I am willing to be equally steadfast and dependable.

If you have a humdrum job and crave excitement after hours, if games of relationship roulette excite you, and if you have the social skills necessary to pull them off, by all means engage in romantic escapades. BUT be sure to choose partners who share your views on the acceptability of transitory alliances; stay away from other women's lovers; and be sure to wear armor around all vulnerable parts, especially your heart—if you have one.

Cheryl Alexander

To me non-monogamy is about loving more than one person at the same time. It's not about who you sleep with, which is a comparatively easy question, and one that for me is mostly inseparable from the question of who I love.

Sometimes I think my internal wiring must be different from my friends'. They seem to understand completely when I tell of falling in love: They say they know how great it feels; they say I am touching, with my fumbling, smiling-too-much attempts at describing it. They celebrate with me. That is, if I've been single up til then. If I happen to "have a lover already," the majority of my friends, not to mention society at large, don't understand at all: They'd never do something like that; how could I treat her (my first lover) that way; don't I feel ashamed; what's come over me. The word "villain" comes through clearly though unspoken.

How can this be? How can such a sweet development in one's life be seen as

a nefarious betrayal? It seems to me one of the world's cruelist tricks, to label as ennobling and touching the same thing that, given a different immediate personal history, makes you an enemy of caring and fair play. I say an emotion so fine can know no constraint of context. Something so fine should not be limited to a unique dyad in a lifetime, or failing that, to as long a series of monogamous relationships as one can string together in the time one has. Such feelings are at their best when they are free of external management.

Look, I don't know what love is. So that I could define it, I mean. Who does? But I do know what it feels like to fall in love, and I can't understand anyone who would willingly disconnect the circuits through which love is growing inside them. Doesn't a little bit of you die when you do that?

"Sometimes I think my internal wiring must be different from my friends'."

I want to give and get all the love I can; it's all too rare. But I also will do almost anything to avoid hurting someone I love. The resulting clashes have torn me apart in the past, and torn apart some of my relationships. I think the only honorable way to proceed is to give notice from the start: I am true and loyal to everyone I love (and expect the same); but I will promise monogamy to no one (and expect the same). I can't make a contract with one person about how I will feel about another person I haven't met yet (or one I have met). And I won't feel one way and act another. If you, potential lover, can't handle this, then you are not totally serious about me; so I can't be totally serious about our relationship, or invest in it totally.

This may sound uncompromising, and it does limit my field of potential lovers; but I don't see it as a great loss. I consider my point of view on non/monogamy to be one of the most important ethical issues in my life, and frankly there is a limit to the pleasure I can get from someone who cannot accept what's important to me. There are long "dry" periods sometimes, since I value my principle of nonmonogamy more highly than the pleasure of frequent sex at any cost (which some people equate with nonmonogamy). But my approach has opened doors to pleasure that I could otherwise never experience: I can share falling-in-love stories not only with a platonic best friend, but with a lover-best-friend; I can have two or more lover-best-friends; I have heard my lover tell another, "This is what she likes." The categories of "lover" and "friend" have blended in my life.

I've struggled with issues of monogamy and nonmonogamy for many years, and through several relationships. I've experienced the joy of watching a lover explore her feelings for another woman, and the confusion if I didn't like her taste. Jealousy? Yes, sometimes. In practice, I have lived mostly rather monogamously. (I said it: Love is rare enough!). But I have treasured the freedom and richness of experience of never feeling constrained to turn off love in any of its manifestations. I have only one regret – the loss of one particular lover who

could not accept my relationship with another woman, but who I could never let go of in my heart, even after many years. I often wonder how many women she's loving now, and how many love her, besides me.

Alice Anderton

I do not hold a position on monogamy/non-monogamy. The words stop my thought, they pull me under, and the sinking sensation tells me that the words conceal a perverse question. Some questions are horses and I can ride them to a new place; perverse questions are quagmires and my instinct is to circle them and head for firm ground, what I know is real and can therefore think about.

Ambivalence I know is real because I feel it: I feel conflicting impulses, am moved in opposing directions, when I am with another lesbian. And the more truly it could be said that I love her, the more I feel also what she feels, the play of unreconciled desires in her. The more naked we are with each other, the more intense is the ambivalence I feel and feel her feeling. And if we are literally naked, skin to skin, the ambivalence between us becomes intensely poignant, for we are coming together and separating along a cusp between living and dying, between waking and dreaming, we are enacting primal scenes, and our present resonates with the past—most especially with that originating ambivalent relation, the going back and forth between mother and daughter. I want to hold her head between my breasts like this forever; I want to run from

**“...and our present resonates with the past —
most especially with that originating ambivalent
relation, the going back and forth between
mother and daughter.”**

her. I need her aliveness as I needed my mother's milk; I need to be alone. She incites me to invent adventures; she tempts me to long for impossible comforts. I am afraid how I am with her will tear me apart.

But what if I begin by accepting the facts of my history—that I am always going back and forth, back and forth? What if I begin by realizing that the tension inside us, and the tension between us, gives our story its plot, makes it possible for us to have a story? What if I remember the balance of attraction and repulsion between the particles of an atom, the conflicting tendencies that give form to matter? What if I remember that polar contraries give form to thought, that I cannot think of anything without thinking of what it is not?

Perhaps if I understood that ambivalence is necessary and natural, then I could think clearly. Perhaps then I could begin to develop an artfulness in loving her. Perhaps then I could concentrate on what is spontaneous between us, what is specific to us, and what it might mean to be *fidele*, faithful, to myself and to her, what it might mean to nourish the circumstances in which transforming encounters between us could recur, through time, over time.

I can think about lesbian relationships if I begin with the reality of my emotions and actions and use what I see of the world around me to make sense of that personal reality. If I try to begin, instead, by taking a position, holding a position, defending a position, I cannot think at all.

Harriet Ellenberger
2/20/85

I believe in monogamy, and I believe that it is a more important issue for the lesbian community than for society at large, for the following reason: as lesbians, we expend enough of our energy fighting the world "outside," in our careers, in our families, in our day-to-day lives. We need relationships that can close off the world and give us peace, quiet, health, and caring. Monogamy generates this kind of relationship because it allows its practitioners to transcend the anxious second-guessing that seems always to accompany non-monogamous relationships.

But monogamy is not a prescription that I'd offer to anyone. It only makes sense for couples with a clear sense of commitment to each other, a commitment that supercedes all other ties. To those who are committed to long-term relationships, monogamy means assurance that each partner's needs will always come first to the other, that each partner's secrets will always be safe with the other. It eliminates much needless worry, and allows the partners to concentrate on the risky and difficult business of getting on with life, each counting on the other as a particular support. It means a dedication to working out problems as they arise, rather than looking around to continue the problems elsewhere with a new set of names and faces. And monogamy has a particular benefit to couples who plan to spend their lives together: the benefit of a complex and trying puzzle finally solved without help from outside. As those rewards for which we work the hardest taste the sweetest, the creation from two lives of a working, problem-solving unit, bound in spite of whatever difficulties threaten its equilibrium, is a lifelong and all-involving effort to maintain, but offers a depth of pleasure unimaginable to those who have shied away from its pains.

I don't believe that monogamy should be strained after. It comes naturally to me because the woman whom I cherish is the loveliest creature in the world, beside whose charms the fascination generated by other women quickly pales. But I believe that is worth working for, and for my part, intend to work on it all my life.

Meredith Jackson

HORTENSE AND GLADYS ON DREAMS

Hortense: Being in a couple repeats the relationship an infant has with her mother, or wants to have with her mother: intimate, loving, predictable.

Gladys: How wonderful. To fulfill the dream.

H: Nonsense. The dream, the desire, gets created because women take care of infants in one-on-one relationships, a set-up designed to keep women powerless.

G: No matter. Once the desire, the longing for a warm, intimate, reliable relationship exists, how WONDERFUL to fulfill it.

H: No, no, no. To fulfill the dream from infancy—or, rather, to treat it as fulfillable—

G: Wait. As long as daughters are born of mothers, couple-love will have deep, deep roots, roots in the relationship of each woman to the body/spirit of her mother—

H: You speak as if it were something sacred. . .

G: Well?

H: It keeps women down. Cherishing that relationship keeps women being mothers, in the form that focuses on the one infant.

G: So?

H: So in patriarchy one-on-one mothering is incompatible with resistance, and in liberation it's tedious.

G: So children should be cared for by two adults, "shared parenting"?

H: No, of course not. Quite the opposite. Rather than having two or more adults nurturing a single child, we should have largish groups of children cared for, raised, by several adults, perhaps something on the order of the early kibbutzim. In this situation, the children love one another, and their several nurturers. Not just one other. No couples. They don't start life by learning couples.

G: But they still relate in couples, it's just that they have non-monogamy instead of monogamy. They have lots of couple relationships at the same time, or one after the other.

H: No, why do you imagine that they relate in couples? Why not in groups of three or four, say, rather than two? Our minds tend to keep going back into the groove of two. One more example of the tyranny of dualism. Copulation requires two, but that's irrelevant outside of patriarchy—

G: But still—

H: Couples are important to us because we learn couples as infants, the pattern gets burned in—

G: But still, if we dream now of deep coupledness, why not have it? Being in a woman-woman couple is not harmful to us, quite the opposite — and it does not promote woman-infant couplehood. So we can be committed to radical changes in the settings in which infants are cared for and still enjoy our own lives. In fact, we ought to. Goddess knows, most of our dreams do not come true that can. Let's have fun. . . .
 . . . couples now, hoping always for support
 . . . deep connections

from one other, the babies will hear us, they will want to be in couples too.

G: But there aren't any babies here.

H: Of course there are. They're everywhere.

G: Little cherubs in the sky?

H: Just so.

Joyce Trebilcot

i don't use the words monogamy or non-monogamy because they are patriarchal words having to do with men possessing wimmin. lesbians do not have words for our relationships. so to describe how i feel . . . i use as many words as i need to in order to express myself.

i believe that lesbians are the hope of this planet. our connections with eachother are precious threads that we cannot aford to sever. the ties we sever the most often are with those lesbians with whom we've been the closest. i question this patern that so clearly divides us from eachother. . . .

our sexuality is a world we have barely begun to understand. as wimmin, knowlege of our bodies has been with-held, our sexuality has been taken from us by men. some of us spend huge portions of our lives trying to heal the devastation men have done to our sexual selves. . . .

i'm 24 and have been a lesbian for nine years. for me so far, the myth of one lover, forever, has remained just that. . . a myth.

in each of my long lasting lover* relationships, myself and the lesbian i was involved with have sincerely tried to do something different. it has taken nine years and several painful "break-ups" to bring me to this moment when i can say i'm feeling hopeful about how i'm doing my lover relationships.

truthtelling is what i finally caught on to.

its the bottom line.

telling the truth, unfiltered and raw was what was missing in my less than happy attempts to share a particular level of intimacy with more than one lesbian at a time, and, to share the lesbians with whom i was enjoying that intimacy.

telling the truth as a daily life thing is not easy. it means saying no, being said no to. the patriarchy has given us the word "reject" as if that is what i am doing by saying my truth. that my desire to be alone is a reflection on how i feel about you. then you feel bad about yourself, i feel guilty, niether feels good about the other, resentment builds. . . etc.

to remain empowered when a painful truth has been said or has to be said takes experiance and practice. for me it is getting easier. . . .

the hardest truths to speak are the ones that cause pain, the wholest way to love another lesbian, to love myself, is to tell the truth, even when the truth hurts a lot.

i am being sexual with one lesbian right now. . . judy.

judy's being sexual with two. . . me and beth.

beth lives in another state so about every six weeks they meet somewhere for a few days or a week.

when judy and beth's relationship began, i was shocked at how threatened i was. i didn't expect to be neutral about it, but i had no idea how much work i would have to do during the next long weeks.

i knew i wanted both judy and myself to be free to have other lovers. i knew judy and my relationship felt far from "over". our commitment to truth-telling had been there from the start. our bond was strong and clear. our lovemaking exciting, satisfying. we were *into* each other. judy wanted to be lovers with beth and was also very scared it would end what we were doing together.

my friendship with judy had empowered me. it was my choice whether to stay empowered or to use the power of our closeness, of her deep caring for me and turn it on her so it limited her freedom to love someone else.

i could feel her loving me. but she loves someone else. how could that be possible? my head believed it was possible. my cells would not accept it. my body went into an altered state. i acted very strange.

there were several components to my strange behavior: one was withdrawal, in which i interpreted everything judy did as an act of aggression. i took everything personally. . . what clothes she put on, how often she laughed, when she took alone time. . . everything. then there was a day or two of "love overkill" in which i moved out of angry withdrawal to being the most loving, energetic, all-pleasing, perfect, smiling pixie that any lesbian would be out of her mind to risk losing. judy seemed the most concerned about this phase. the "in waiting" phase was when i stopped saying any of my needs in order to avoid rejection. i commenced to waiting for judy to ask me to sleep with her, go for a ride, make love, make a date, etc. within a few hours in this phase i was so angry at her for not divining my needs and asking me on this marathon of activities that i finally told her what i'd been doing and we both got a good laugh out of it.

i eventually realized that it had been a while since i'd focused on me. . . so, i refocused. here's some of what i did:

-me and judy talked, sobbed, laughed together and with lyndalou and bekie, who we live with. processing with lyndalou and bekie was a lifeline. i could write pages about the importance of taking our struggles out of the isolation of a couple.

-went away alone for hours or days at a time; to the woods, to the prairie, to the ocean, where i learned how to cry loud and deane taught me how to scream.

-embraced my pain, let it happen, resigned myself to live with it for a while.

-reminded myself to *breathe*.

-wrote.

-drank lots of water.

-wrote, said, screamed all the shameful thoughts i was having.

- meditated, lit candles drummed, laughed . . . a lot.
- learned more every day that the truth has power to unblock walls and untighten tention just as surely as it makes those walls and tention.
- told truths that made the room spin around me.
- talked with other lesbians about what was happening.
- then came out at the other end of my pain. stronger. happier. real into me. a real good friend to judy. i am able to talk about judy and beth's relationship without pain ripping through me or petty comments spilling out of me. i definately have spells of pain and they're not as intense, long lasting or frequent right now.

before closing there are a few issues i would like to touch on: one is that i am jewish, white, middleclass, ablebodied. i am sure that there are incredibly complex class and race issues that are woven into all i have said in these pages. for example, the security i have felt in the world that lesbians of color, disabled lesbians, poor lesbians, lesbians healing from rape, incest and countless other abuses do not have in their experiance. i acknowlege this as privilege. i believe my class and race help make up my need to do relationships this way and that my privilege assists me in carrying it out.

the other issue has to do with judgement: do i think lesbians are wrong to choose to have one lover at a time?

one of the things i have learned is that i respect lesbians' desiding not to do it this way. the amount of emotional stamina i called upon to go through the experiances described in this piece may have been unfathomable during times in my life in which i was recovering from addictions, or any number of situations which are incredibly draining and stressful in their own right.

loving this way has been a growth process that is ongoing and unpredictable. i wonder with nervous anticipation what will happen next. what will it feel like when i have an intense relationship that is sexual with another lesbian? that side of the issue has its own painful growth and responsibility and can be scary as anything. no telling what'll happen tomorrow.

Ruth Ann Segal

* i question my use of the word "lover" and am so far unable to invent a comfortable alternative. any suggestions?

I am breaking up with my lover. She wants to be non-monogamous after almost two years of being together, monogamously. I have always wanted sexual exclusivity, to feel the most special, to feel secure, because sex has always been sacred for me with someone i loved. Because more than one lover was too complicated, too hurtful, and lesbian lives are difficult enough. My needs for monogamy have to do with my spirituality and my cultural

upbringing. I am a product of my environment, have not grown up in a culture where nonmonogamy is the norm, or even supported. While I never agreed with the idea of possession, I did understand a need for safety, day to day dependability, and the trust, time and attention that made sexual love an incredibly special experience, not one to be shared lightly, not with just anyone. Sexual love tapped my core and I did not want to go to that place with many people.

My lover says she cannot put her sexuality in a bell jar, had never wanted monogamy, had agreed to it with me only because I said I could not handle the affair she started two months after we had been involved. Agreed because she wanted me. I say, I cannot put my sexuality in a bell jar either. I feel erotically attracted to other people, but choose to only feel the attraction, not to act on it. I appreciated the difference between fantasy and action, liked being devoted sexually to her and wanted that in return. Monogamy doesn't preclude erotic attraction to other women. That would be unrealistic and destructive. Desire cannot be legislated. What can be agreed on is the appropriateness of acting on those attractions. I can even make a case for one night stands, on the adventure-seeking side of things. But ongoing multiple relationships take up too

**"The amputation of her physical presence
in my life sends me into the void."**

much time, cause too much pain, demand too much juggling of emotions. I also understand erotic attractions as a source of creative material. I fear the tendency to act on sexual attractions with new or prospective friends as a way of solidifying the friendship or bonding the person to me. It is a dangerous method. I would like to see our lesbian communities create deeper and more nourishing/nurturing/inspiring/enspiring forms of friendship. I would like to see women delve deeper inside ourselves with one another's help before we seek satisfaction in or a vehicle through the bodies of others. I would like to see sexual exploration occur in contexts of clarity, not out of boredom or fear or desperation. To be sexually active with many women in order to feel good about myself has not worked for me. . . .

We decide to talk. We go back and forth. I say almost immediately, I cannot do this, cannot be lovers with you while you are wanting or with another. . . . I rethink my stand. What does she really want? Will that change? She claims confusion, uncertainty about what can be saved with us. . . . The amputation of her physical presence in my life sends me into the void. . . . Shall I give her up and try to find someone who would be more "suitable" to my monogamous needs? Would my agreeing to nonmonogamy in order to keep her be an honest move for me? . . .

I think of how I have changed in my life. I once thought I was completely

heterosexual; I became a lesbian. I once thought I could live a life without being political; I know now that politics is central. I once thought I was not intellectually capable. I was accepted into any ivy league university. I once thought monogamy the way to love, security and growth in myself and relationships. Now I wonder. In grief anything is possible. Like Demeter, maybe my grief can stop the world, make it hold its breath until something new is born.

L.L.A.

Monogamy? . . . Nonmonogamy? . . . I think it's dangerous and complacent for us to uncritically pattern our relationships after heterosexual stereotypes. Their false dichotomies are based more on power and ownership than genuine love.

Just as the sexual drive of womankind spans a continuum from complete disinterest to obsession, our sexual relationship ethics also probably need to span a continuum from monogamy to nonmonogamy. I think it's dishonest and unloving to expect one's lover to go against her individual sexual nature. A past lover of mine continues to be self-righteous about the immorality of nonmonogamy while she flatly admits that she rarely feels attracted sexually to others. So, its no big deal to be monogamous when your need for commitment in emotional passion parallels a need for commitment in sexual passion.

However, for those of us who do find ourselves struggling with more separated sexual and emotional drives, monogamy isn't so natural. Perhaps the best matches are between/among wimmin who share similar levels of need. I don't know the global solution, but I know I belong to the group of us who can deeply, wholeheartedly commit ourselves emotionally to one ("primary") lover while on occasion sharing sexual affection with a friend or acquaintance just to be sexual, no strings attached.

Barbara Olen

If I am laying on my bed (really a futon mattress), and look towards the left, I see a picture – of blue moon, silver stars, orange-red sun, water, a ship, a tree – all in brilliant cartoon-like color. There are also three hearts in the upper left hand corner. They are the key to this picture. They speak of the picture's origin. When I look at it, I am both sad and happy.

The three hearts represent three women – Gail, Laura, and me (not real names). The picture was given to me by Gail and Laura on Valentine's Day, 1982, over three years ago. I am still sifting through what happened then, and it is only now, perhaps, that I can tolerate looking at that time period in my life more directly. . . .

Before I knew about Laura, I pursued Gail. We worked together and took our lunch hours and breaks at the same time. At that point, neither of us was certain that the other was a lesbian. But I did know that I was falling deeply in love and Gail seemed to feel the same way. When I was finally given the

opportunity, I confessed my feelings. That's when I found out about Laura.

I decided to keep open about the whole thing because I already wanted Gail very badly. I did not pursue her, but I did respond to her overtures of friendship which she continued to make. I knew that Laura knew about Gail's interest in me and did not oppose our friendship. Laura was interested in a strong relationship with Gail which, to her, involved as much freedom as possible on both of their parts. So, at the beginning, she even arranged her life so that Gail and I could be together. Everything seemed easy.

After a few weeks the curiosity was too much for Laura and I, and we arranged to meet. I was not prepared to like Laura as much as I did. She was utterly charming and very attractive. We decided that we liked each other. So, as a logical progression, all three of us began to spend time together.

It was a very short honeymoon period, but as I look back it was definitely one of the happiest experiences I've had. I had not *one*, but *two* lovers. Each was different, each had gifts to offer, and each was incredibly and wonderfully complex.

"I envisioned many happy years of love and work. I pictured us as three old women in a house by the sea."

I was amazed to find that, for the most part, I was not jealous. We arranged our schedules for time together—separately (two at a time), and all three of us together. It wasn't easy—in fact, it became quite stressful. We were juggling jobs and each other. And we spent a great deal of time going from *their* house to *my* apartment. What soon complicated everything and blew it all apart was that:

*Laura and Gail were in the middle of working out problems that happen when you are with someone for awhile and I felt left out and in the middle.

*Laura didn't believe that I cared for her as much as I cared for Gail. We disagreed on this—for I felt that although it was a different kind of energy between us—I loved her more as time went by.

The break-up was the most intensely painful experience of my life. I truly thought I would die from it. It was made worse by the fact that I still worked with Gail and it took me another whole year to leave my job.

As far as I know, Gail and Laura are still together. I have not heard from either for almost a year. I have attempted, through letters and phone calls (I have moved to a different city), to keep in touch. But the effort hasn't been reciprocated, so I've stopped.

...in every way it seemed a good way to spend my life. I loved Gail and Laura and our values and goals were pretty much the same. We all believed (in varying degrees) in love, truth, art, beauty, justice. I envisioned many happy years of love and work. I pictured us as three old women in a house by the sea. I guess that I am a true romantic...

During the break-up I was shocked, sometimes, at the cold behavior of both Gail and Laura towards me. After all, I told myself, they still have each other and I am alone. Couldn't they be more kind?...

I have no answers. I do not regret my experience except that it pushed Carol (my first lover) and I further apart and the fact that I would like a friendship with Gail and Laura. That is the hard thing about all this. I loved them both as people, and I am no longer sure of their affection for me. Why does that have to change when we decide not to be lovers anymore? (The age-old question). I regret losing them totally. But I did try, and as I have lost them (for now), they, too, have lost me by their neglect.

Barbara O'Hara

MONOGAMY: ONE FORM OF NONMONOGAMY

...I know that cutting off my sexual feelings for other wimmin is not the proof of my love for my present lover. So often I see we lesbians using the heteropatriarchy's assumptions that there are two kinds of love – the love we have for our friends and the sexual love we feel for our lover(s). Heterosexism is the core of this dualism. Heterosexists believe there's the love you have for same-sex "friends" and then the "real" or sexual love you feel for other-sex people, i.e., men. This "real" love is seen as more important and much more valuable than the love you feel for friends. I often hear my lesbian friends express a version of this when they say, "Yes, I love X, and I do love Y, but I'm 'in-love' with Z," as if there are two kinds of love! Are there? I don't think so. I name that second feeling "infatuation" and have learned that it may or may not become "love."

I believe that I use my feelings of sexual attraction and my willingness to act on those feelings rather easily as a way to get to know another dyke. The infatuation period (up to 3 months) is generally a satisfying period for both of us; it is fun revealing our lives to each other and generally acting out our infatuation. But at some point one or both of us wants a change in that intense one-on-one focus. How each reacts to this change can bring us closer or it might eliminate being close. Many different variations of this reaction have been part of my experience, but reaching that point is always a given. In my eyes the crucial factors in remaining on good terms and loving each other seem to be self-love and self-confidence, trustworthiness on both wimmin's parts and the ability and willingness of each to trust the other. In my experience if my lover is involved with someone else and is able to let me know she cares for me and

feels we have a strong *vital* connection* I can usually handle the situation. At times it seems to be a search to balance my "freedom" needs and my "security" needs. The situation I just described encourages me to meet my "freedom" needs. If what I'm needing and wanting at that point in my life is more "security" with a lover, it may not be a situation I choose to stay in.

. . . . I find myself very wary of (serial) monogamy (which is what I'm committed to now with Jeanne) in part because the heteropatriarchy says it's the real way to express your "true" love for another. In fact, I find it much easier to be "out" to my co-workers when involved with one woman than when I'm involved with more than one woman. . . .

My dream is for each of us to be lovers with our friends and friends with our lovers. . . .

Paula E. Mariedaughter

* Personal conversation with Jeanne Neath, Dec. 84.

Once I was in a monogamous relationship and having a whole lot of painful relationship difficulties. Suddenly one week my lover believed in and was nonmonogamous. We did not discuss why she no longer wanted to be in a monogamous relationship with me. We instead discussed how monogamy was possession and could not be politically acceptable to her any longer. This we discussed at length over many painful teary conversations that were devastating to me. . . . We continued being lovers in a nonmonogamous and not exactly primary way for over a year. Suddenly she had a new lover and pretty suddenly she and I weren't lovers any longer and also pretty suddenly she was in a monogamous relationship with her new lover. Eventually (after 7 or 8 months) she and I were able to talk about some of what had transpired between us and it turned out that those "painful relationship difficulties" we'd been experiencing early in our relationship, in its monogamous phase, had been so difficult for her that she could no longer deal with having the kind of exclusive relationship we'd been having. It was too hard for her to be so intimate with me.*. . .

Now the fact that political rhetoric advocating nonmonogamy can and has been used by dykes to escape acknowledging a relationship issue does not mean that nonmonogamy is wrong or bad; it simply means that nonmonogamy and the politics of nonmonogamy can be misused. . . . Personally at this point in my own personal and political evolution I don't feel like either monogamy or nonmonogamy are across the board the politically perfect choice. . . . I think sometimes dykes need the security of monogamous commitment from our girlfriends and sometimes we need the freedom afforded by nonmonogamy.** I think that dykes who are acting monogamously will do well to not lose sight of a dyke community larger than two, to remember that relationships change, and in general to be aware of the various political implications of our choice. I think that dykes who are attempting nonmonogamous relationships will do well to remember that we do not live in a matriarchal world where it is easy to all be

sisters and trust one another. . . .Under patriarchy, we live with a scarcity of resources that makes it hard or impossible to satisfy our needs. I think that living nonmonogamously would be much easier if we all had easy access to the resources we need, both material resources and non-material ones like love and nurturance. As it is, the idea of having my girlfriend spend a lot of time with another feels like it would be a real loss to me — I have no guarantee or even likelihood of finding another separatist dyke I'd want to spend time with as lovers in this small city I live in. I find the vision of nonmonogamy lovely but the reality of it always difficult.

Jeanne F. Neath
Lawrence, Kansas

* I do not mean to imply that my lover developed her political beliefs simply to escape our relationship. I believe that her political beliefs were important to her and that she believed them. It's just that the beliefs also served a personal need and that neither she nor I consciously or openly recognized that the beliefs were serving a personal purpose.

** Thanks to Paula Mariedaughter for this thought.

WHEN THEY PICK SIDES, NO ONE ASKS ME TO PLAY *

When I consider the amount of time Lesbians put into discussions of monogamy/non-monogamy, I wonder why it keeps coming up? Everyone I talk to has an opinion. Whatever relationship they are in at the time is the best form for a relationship to have, and whichever relationship they just got out of was the worst possible mistake. These conversations may be safe growing places for thin women, but as a fat woman they feel less and less safe to me. I get the same sick feeling I had in high school when my friend the drum majorette used to take me with her to pick out prom dresses. I feel too frequently as though I'm expected to sit outside the world of thin, attractive women and listen to their dilemmas: whether to choose taffeta or lace; whether to have one lover or two; whether they should be in a different city or the same one?

As a fat lesbian I am so seldom seen as a possible sexual partner that I long ago stopped obsessing on how many women I would like to be involved with. It's not a relevant question for me. I don't care how many times thin, cute, small amazons sleep with each other trying to prove they are thin, cute, small amazons, or, if they meet at a softball game, buy matching running shorts, and are only seen when they run out of tofu. I'm not interested in judging other Lesbians on the basis of how they choose to structure (or not structure) their intimate relationships. What I do care about is how other Lesbians perceive me and deal with me. . . .

. . . Thin women, when they talk about one-night stands or sexual relationships that would have been better left friendships, I hear them talk about their impulses and lust. As a fat dyke, I don't jump into bad scenes

because of my impulses or lust, but because I feel I can't afford to say no to what may be one of my few opportunities to be "in" a relationship, however long it lasts, to call another woman "lover." Only once, at a music festival of 5,000 lesbians, did I get the opportunity to have more than one sexual relationship at once, and then I found that I wasn't feeling "attracted" to anyone. I could have had two days of "non-monogamy." When I told another fat dyke that several dykes had told me they were sexually interested in me, she advised me, though to "go for it," whether I was attracted to any of the dykes or not. "After all, how many of us get the chance to be promiscuous?"

But the fact of the matter is that no matter how many lovers we have fat dykes' sexuality is ignored and erased by many thin lesbians. . . . I saw. . . disbelief recently when a woman asked a group of dykes if any of us had ever been involved in a non-monogamous relationship. She was shocked when I said yes, until I explained that my lover was the one who'd had more than one, not me. I'm not going to offer that kind of information again until I'm sure that no one is keeping score. Proving worth through sexual conquest belongs in the stag parties of the heteropatriarchy. It certainly tells us nothing about a dyke to know how many wimmin she sleeps with or how exclusively committed she is. Looking at numbers is a game. What's important to me is talking honestly about how we deal with each other and starting to take seriously the anti-fat prejudice of many Lesbians. Quantity simply isn't an "issue" for me or for the Fat Dykes I know, but quality, and the lack of it in our relationships, certainly is.

Kate Moran

* Although I use suspicious words like *attractive*, *promiscuous*, and *monogamy* in this discussion, I do so purposely because they accurately reflect the framework that makes such pseudo-issues seem worth talking about.

I came out for a better world. When I said I was a lesbian, I said I was against patriarchy and all his evil pestilences, monogamy being foremost of his domestic scourges. When I moved into a house with six to twelve other women, depending on when you counted (it was a large house), monogamy was out of the question. It oppressed women. Coupling was for sex, for warm smoochies, but it was the collective to whom I owed fidelity. Monogamy was a way for the patriarchy to mark its offspring, to keep the ownership of land flowing smoothly from the father's hands to the son's. It had nothing to do with us. We were spinning a new culture, a women's world. We wanted our threads to be pure. We were the vanguard.

When one couple in our household became too obviously a couple – I think it was domestic quarreling that gave them away – they were called into a one-sided criticism/self-criticism session and confronted for their exclusivity. Why any of us wanted to be closer to two quarreling women I will never know. They were too monogamous, we said. Their monogamy oppressed others in the

house. It was elitist. They failed to share their resources. They were not collectively behaved.

Later when I fell in love, monogamy had achieved a sort of comeback. I declared my independence from the collective and lived instead with my Significant Other. Monogamy was a sign of maturity. Nonmonogamy was a tool of the sons of the oppressors, who just wanted access to the women. Our monogamous relationship was womon-identified and healthy. We were two separate women come together, not merely halves of a sickly whole. Our fidelity was creative and we accomplished great things together. Our relationship was a haven for others.

At some point being a haven for others got so important that my lover moved out in order to give personal haven to one particular woman. Monogamy had become monotony for her. If sex with others was the only thing that wasn't allowed in our relationship, then sex with others was the only way out. But she didn't really want out, she just wanted some changes. I wanted some changes, too. A contract specifying nonmonogamy was not one of the changes I wanted. But it was one of the changes I agreed to so that she would be my Significant Other once again.

Little did I know that I would be the first to explore this new clause in our contract. Just for one night, I asked, just for one chance to "sleep" with her. One night was not enough, of course. Being the good little socialized women that we are, we couldn't just have casual sex – that was for our brothers, the homosexuals. We had to multiply whole relationships. For a year I carried out two, Significant and Pretty Damn Significant. During that time, my lover of the first part embarked on her own mission of sex and love. Our lovers also had their other significant others. Everyone had two chickens in the pot and it was cosy. Was it nonmonogamous? Only our hairdresser knows for sure. It was very avant-garde and it was time-consuming.

Eventually my first lover went off to settle in another town with her lover. My new lover and I did what lesbians in the '80s do to tie the knot (or express our commitment) – we bought a house. Are we monogamous? When we are having sex with each other, yes. A couple of times we haven't been. Mostly we are. Mostly, though, now that we have reached our thirties and have a Mortgage and a lot of other little bills running around under foot, we consider it a coup when we manage to have sex with *each other*. So far, so good. And that's all I know so far.

Moral: Monogamy and its opposite, nonmonogamy, are a dualistic construct born of a bi-sexual species. Any attempt at further definition will only place you in a particular herstorical (or hersterical) period. Ultimately, it doesn't matter whether you say you are or you aren't because you will do whatever you want to do, anyway. And if you don't, your lover will.

First, I will come out as a lesbian who usually wants one sexual+emotional relationship at a time and who wants a lover who wants the same thing. This feels like coming out into a hostile community. Monogamy (for women) may be the value in the straight world, but in my community of lesbians nonmonogamy is. I don't know anyone who argues that monogamy is politically correct.

One reason I decided to do this forum was that I hoped other lesbians who liked having one lover would write in. Another reason was that I hoped women who believed that having several lovers was politically correct would write in and explain why in a way that made sense to me.

My final reason was that I believe that lesbians are in the process of discovering how to relate intimately and sexually with others in a healthy way. Heterosexuals, because of the power imbalance between a woman and a man, cannot do this. We're only just beginning, and perhaps as long as we live in the midst of male pollution, we may be able only to work out partial solutions. But if we're going to get anywhere at all we need to dignify the exercise and we need to share our experiences. There is a male-fostered conspiracy of silence. The most important parts about living, nobody talks about.

On one level, the "(non)monogamy problem" seems simply answered. It doesn't matter how many or how few women you are sexually+emotionally with, as long as you are honest and non-exploitive with all of them. It is simply a choice about how to live.

So if the answer is simple, why go on about the problem? Alas, in order to be ethical in these matters, we have to be honest; and to be honest, we have to know ourselves. And most of us don't. And it is precisely in the areas of sexual intimacy that we are likely to have our strongest denial systems and lapses of self-understanding. We are so prone to saying that we want what we think we should want, and to hoping semi-consciously that if we declare we are not possessive, we will begin to behave so, that if we say that finally we are going to settle down and be serious about a relationship, we will do so. And so I think we do have to talk about it. We do have to talk about what we do with each other *really*, what we want *really*, and what we see others doing *really* that they perhaps do not see. Until we all have enough self-knowledge to be honest with each other. *Then* we can be ethical.

I don't mean to excuse real cases of dishonesty. We often are not honest when we know enough to be. How many times have you heard someone say, "I didn't want to be monogamous, but I said I would because she wanted it so badly." Or, "I didn't want to agree to be nonmonogamous, but I had to for her to stay with me." And then later, of course, the deceit happens and the resentment for denying your own desires happens. These are understandable behaviors, perhaps, love is scarce, but they are dishonest and unethical, and we should call each other on them.

Why do I want what I want? The horror for me is the superficiality and dishonesty of most human relating, including that among lesbians. We all have layers of defenses, masks and games we play, pockets of ignorance and illusions

about ourselves. This is how we live 99% of the time. What I want from an intense relationship with a woman is to break through that and to relate with each other's true selves. And then I want even more, to go on the spiritual journey of transcending ourselves through loving each other. Having a lot of guarded, fenced-in relationships, time controlled, planned, etc., etc., is simply a multiplication of horrors. I don't want even one of them not to mention several. And if I have one of what I want, another is irrelevant.

Most (not all) lesbians like to "fall in love," including me. It is exciting to start working through all the layers of defenses and lies, the masks, the attitudes. But why repeat this exercise over and over, what is the point? This is what seems to happen so often. After the first three months, one lesbian wants to take another lover, or she withdraws in some other way (golf perhaps?). Just when the two get down to what really matters (to me).

All my life a major question for me has been why consciousness is individual. It is an intense puzzlement to me that conscious experience should be centered in my particular body. I would like to be able to switch consciousnesses and bodies with someone. That ultimately is what I seek from a lover.

Perhaps that freaks out some lesbians? I do think there are two kinds of us. Those like me who feel isolated and fear abandonment, and those who feel they can't assert what they want and fear being swallowed up. (There are many other variables, of course, on which there are two types of lesbians!)

If I am going to follow my own prescription of honesty, however, I must abandon the self-image of someone who knows herself fully and admit that I have not yet found the kind of relationship I seek, and that in fact I have a repeating pattern of falling in love with women who, while not having other lovers, are not self-revealing or intimate. I then spend a lot of energy trying to get them to change. As women of that kind often have patterns of falling in love with women like me. My understanding of this is that I (and they) are trying to transform the childhood relationship, an endeavor started by the fact that we could not at that time replace it with another relationship.

I do believe that what I say I want is in fact what I want. I also believe, however, that when I do find myself in a relationship with a woman who wants the same kind of intimacy that I do, that I will have to learn to adjust to having in my life freely expressed feelings other than my own. I'm ready now and finally strong enough at 44, I think, to act on the assumption that there are other women and other chances.

Jeanette Silveira

. . . . Knowing from an early age (nine? eleven?) that what I wanted was an extended family of lovers, and their lovers, and everybody's kids and a room of my own, I still bought the package and bought it when I came out more than I had straight because it was sold to me by lesbians. And while it was obvious to me in my most closeted days that I would never tie myself to any male, I wasn't

sure I needed to be autonomous from wimmin. As a matter of fact, the responsibility I have spent many years trying to avoid is the necessity of being independent at all.

I find something very secure in being dependent — having a lover support me financially, waiting by the phone or calling her at work, cooking and cleaning and not having my work appreciated (fully — who notices everything you do?) and being a little martyred and manipulating because of that. . . nice familiar patterns with clearly defined expectations and modes of communication, and it made everyone so happy.

The short period I was non-monogamous in the lesbian community just after I came out was one of the most horrifying social experiences I have ever had. Wimmin would not talk to me, if my (or their) lover was around, although many of the same wimmin felt free to breathe propositions in my ear if we were alone. They seemed to feel non-monogamy was some sort of Dona Juana routine I used to cheat on "my" womyn and break up marriages. Dyke as Gay Divorcee. But once I became monogamous, I fit into the system, neutered as a tree stump, in the little constellation of couples that formed any lesbian community I found. Singleness was considered a regrettable transitional state, associated with some of the E.S.T. style victim blaming our community often affixes to someone ill, a "correctable disability." With a little positive thinking we can clear this up.

It took almost two years of enforced celibacy in an abusive/addictive monogamous relationship to motivate me to challenge this mentality again. I began to reach out, and one of the first things I discuss with prospective lovers is their position on monogamy. If they are not willing to explore non-jealous ways of relating, to communicate with each other as well as with me, and to forsake any agenda of some day having me all to themselves, I explain that I am a recovering love-junkie and really can't afford to have them in my environment. And I stick with it. This is my survival.

Right now I have three lovers with whom I have committed relationships in various stages of growth and casual sex when I have time. My lovers have other lovers, some of whom are among my closest friends. Some of us work together. I am the only one with the key to the room of my own. There are homes and wimmin in the lesbian community who do not welcome me, but they are fewer now, and friends who knew me when I was monogamous tell me I seem happier. They are right.

Brooke Bovard

WOMAN +: NONMONOGAMOUS LESBIANS

I have a special interest in nonmonogamy for two reasons: I was nonmonogamous for ten years, and have spent the last three years interviewing nonmonogamous lesbians for my doctoral dissertation in clinical psychology.

When I chose my dissertation topic, I had an agenda. I wanted to show that nonmonogamy was a relationship style that was psychologically healthy and worked in practice as well as theory. Not coincidentally, I wanted to describe a lifestyle that I had put many years and a great deal of energy into maintaining.

Three years is a long time, particularly on the timescale of lesbian relationships. I am no longer as invested in advocating nonmonogamy as the most highly evolved of lesbian relationship styles. However, I have learned a lot about how different lesbians view their own experiences of nonmonogamy. In addition to reporting their own interpretations, I have looked at their experiences from the perspective of lesbians' unique psychological world.

For me, and for many of the lesbians I spoke to, the experience of independence is very important. Given the context of our socialization as women, this is not surprising. We are trained to respond to others' needs, to scan our environment for cues, to depend on others for our sense of ourselves. When two women become lovers, it is very common for them to spend a lot of time together. They may think about living together, fantasize about working together or having children, and marvel at how wonderful it feels to be with someone who really understands you. That experience of oneness with another woman is a high point of lesbian identity. At some point, earlier or later in the relationship, it can also become a major problem. If you are one with the one you love, how do you acknowledge and tolerate the differences between you? How do you make space, set boundaries, or simply get a little breathing room? How do you keep sexual excitement alive when all you've done for months is cuddle in front of the television with a bowl of popcorn?

"How do you keep sexual excitement alive when all you've done for months is cuddle in front of the television with a bowl of popcorn?"

For some lesbians, the answer is nonmonogamy. Lesbians, as two women in a love relationship, are prone to merging. What I found, both in my own experience and that of others, is that nonmonogamy is one of many strategies to keep the exciting edge of difference alive in lesbian relationships. The benefits of nonmonogamy that women described were an intense sexuality, the sense of emotional growth, discovery of different sides of yourself through different people, and a feeling of independence. The problems included lack of free time for yourself, friends, or creative projects; spending too much time talking over partner's hurt/rejected/angry feelings; insecurity and impermanence in relationships; and stress. In addition to these problems, a consistent theme was difficulty in defining whether partners were equal, primary, secondary, or other; and what these definitions meant in theory and practice.

The major aspects of nonmonogamy that I and others raised as ethical or political questions were around the issue of non-possessiveness, and the

practice of primary and secondary rankings of partners. Many women felt that jealousy and possessiveness were "male-identified" emotions, stemming from patriarchal notions of men's property rights over women. While this may be true, legislating the end of emotions that are so deeply culturally and psychologically embedded is hardly practical. Many of us discovered that it was impossible not to experience jealousy, but that it was possible to develop strategies to minimize the impact of jealousy on our behavior. One of these was the development of primary and secondary rankings of partners. If you were primary, you could expect certain rights, i.e. Saturday nights, vacations, making plans with your partners first. If you were secondary, you knew to expect Friday instead of Saturday night dates, not to ask for vacations, to wait to make plans with your lover after she'd checked it out with girlfriend number 1, etc. In many ways, this arrangement resembles the age-old pattern of wife and mistress, with several important exceptions: everyone knows what's going on (at least the general picture), everyone technically consents (at least by putting up with it), and each wife can have a mistress, or mistress a wife (at least in theory).

This system works for some and has been adapted by many. The main problems seem to be that primary partners, by definition, are restricting the emotional life of the secondary partner, who often feels one-down. Sometimes the secondary partner will either be in another primary relationship or will develop one. Other times the secondary partner will begin to want and ask for more than secondary status, which eventually results in the end of either their relationship or the end of the primary partnership. In most cases, this type of system doesn't last too long, a few years at most. Two primary partners may run through a series of transitional secondary partners, and focus on the enrichment of the primary relationship. Another pattern is the nonmonogamous woman who maintains two or more relationships with other women, who remain monogamously involved with her. Yet another pattern is the nonmonogamous relationship which services as a transition into, or out of, a primary monogamous commitment.

In any of the patterns I have described, there is a potential for arguing that the participants are behaving ethically or unethically. In one scenario, they are challenging social norms, developing new emotional/sexual frontiers, moving beyond male-defined, heterosexual relationship patterns, and dispelling the myth of monogamous sexual preference. In another scenario, they are oppressing other lesbians through hierarchical ranking, legitimating the ancient practice of the "other woman," cheapening the difficult path of monogamous commitment, and repressing feelings at great emotional cost. To be honest, I think both arguments have some truth in them.

Although I am a great believer in living ethically, I am not sure that relationships are an arena where ethics can be all-or-none. Selflessness, betrayal, love, hate, honesty, and lies all are part of our emotional world, and are acted out with the people with whom we are most intimate. I feel that I learned a great

deal from my experiences with lesbian nonmonogamy, and from talking to lesbians who were struggling with these issues. But nonmonogamy is not for everyone, or for every phase of our personal journey. It has its benefits and problems, insights and shortcomings, like most endeavors. It has a reason, and a season.

Betsy Kassoff

IN RESPONSE TO POPULAR DEMAND

"Send us your articles on lesbian relationships;
Monogamy, non-monogamy, serial-monogamy, celibacy."
I stop writing, "How I Got Out of Marriage,"
To tackle a more explosive subject.

The spilled milk of non-monogamy pours onto the page
Sliding into unreachable places,
Eluding tidiness, eventually smelling sour.

The solid furniture of my life has been moved daily.
When I bump into the newly-placed tables and chairs,
Open relationship enthusiasts don't want to see my bruises;
Skeptics embrace them as proof that non-monogamy doesn't work.

My writers group doesn't understand my poem.
Their scrutiny of its metaphors reveals my unease.
I flee to the safety of my nine-year-old story.

Nine years from now I'll write about open relationships.
What will editors be soliciting then?

Nancy Breeze

When I was first told that there would be a request for papers on this topic, it did not seem relevant to me. When I thought about why it did not, it was because the two lovers I had who wanted to be monogamous weren't. The one who, out of her political convictions, but clearly not out of her real feelings, wanted to be non-monogamous was so upset when I was going to be that I stayed up all night trying to deal with it. Having forgotten to take out my contact lenses I abraded my corneas. I do not question that the women, or indeed women generally, are sincere when they make such statements. It's just that things change.

When I think about the topic I conclude that what decision one makes depends on the situation. It is quite different for a person on disability, an annuity or a part time job to have non-monogamous relationships. It is quite another for a woman who is employed to work 90 hours a week and/or has

young children to care for to be non-monogamous. The latter has almost no discretionary time, unless she needs less than six hours a night sleep, another relevant factor. The former can probably carry it off, or at least is in a situation where it is possible that she may.

I have never minded what was done not on "my time," e.g., when I or the other person were geographically separated, and when I could reach the woman if I needed to talk to her. I have very much minded when there was no time or energy left for me, particularly if the other relationship was such that I was not allowed to call, or, if I did, had to deal with the hostility at the other end of the phone from the "other woman."

There are personality as well as situational factors. There are individual differences among us in terms of areas in which we feel vulnerable. I fear abandonment. But I can well imagine a woman who fears being "swallowed up" wanting nonmonogamous relationships so that she does not feel the intimacy and dependence of monogamy engulfing her. I like intimacy and mutual dependency.

I do believe that the fear of intimacy and dependency, or to put it positively, the existential autonomy and invulnerability which is the hallmark of proper dyke behavior (at least in the Midwest) can often mask selfishness, even psychopathy, insensitivity, and inability to be close without feeling suffocated (at least after the first few hours).

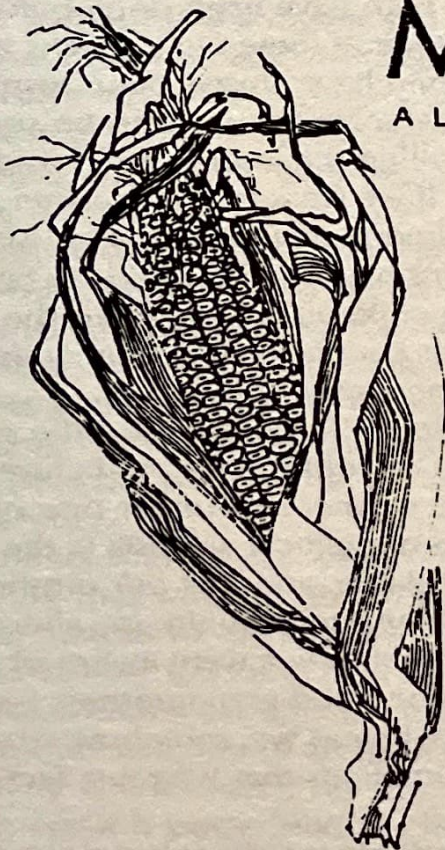
There was an article about the Portland lesbian counter culture community where the norms were to be non-monogamous. When a person's lover left she was supposed to carry on as if nothing serious had happened. Since this all took place within the same social circle, the "community" would try to "fix up" the woman with a replacement. However we ordinarily do not have the sort of situation. What is more likely is that person A leaves person B. Person A, while feeling some sadness, wants to still be friends while she is living with person B's best friend. The community supports person A since she seems so much more reasonable than person B, who spends all her time crying and is a drag. Even if the community does not support person A and is "neutral," person A has a source of comfort in her new lover. Neutrality feels like betrayal to person B. She becomes angry with her "friends" which exacerbates the situation. This scenario is why non-monogamy in geographically separate places is different from the behavior in the same location (to make it worse, probably they all are seeing the same feminist therapist). And person B is pressured to "let go," not blame, and say "she did what she had to do," evidence for which is that she did it.

Since this is a journal that has the term "ethics" in the title I feel free to state that I think it is wrong just to use women instrumentally (I don't feel that way about using men), whether to advance your career or help you deal with a primary relationship from a position of strength, not pain (weakness). Some of my feelings on this subject can be summed up in a poem I wrote after I had left

one woman for the person I had been non-monogamous with, only to find that after a few weeks, she went back to her prior love and could not see me, and I couldn't persuade my former lover to come back. (Lesbian soap opera, violins in background.) The poem is called "Holocaust" and ends:

Fascism starts with treating the first woman as a means to an end
Discarding her like a used kleenex
How you treat every woman is a political act
All the rest is mere elaboration.

Pauline B. Bart



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The Tired Old Question of Male Children*

Anna Lee

As we try to do so many things differently than have been done before, we sometimes lock ourselves into old patterns. One of these old patterns is to concern ourselves with male children. Wimmin have always been responsible for children, especially when the children's behavior turns out to be socially unacceptable. This is the old pattern. Now within the lesbian community we still see ourselves as responsible in that way. If we want to change society and if, as things have gone up to now, male children grow up to be men, then it seems that one of our "chores" is to be responsible for male children by seeing that they become non-sexist. And since male children raised within the lesbian community seem to be about as sexist as their counterparts in the straight, non-feminist world, we wonder what we have done wrong.

We have done nothing wrong. To believe we are responsible for the sexist behavior of male children, to see ourselves as responsible for the failure of male children to adopt non-sexist values, is to labor erroneously under one of two sets of assumptions: Either that our generation of political activists is the first to realize that male behavior is generally unacceptable, and that our mothers and grandmothers felt it was OK for their sons to brutalize wimmin; or, alternatively, insofar as we believe that our mothers and grandmothers were aware of the unacceptability of male behavior, that our mothers and grandmothers were totally incompetent at non-sexist child raising whereas we, somehow, are utterly different in our rearing abilities. These are assumptions that we must face directly.

In addition, the belief that wimmin are responsible for changing male child behavior further assumes that if only mothers would teach their male children

*I want to thank Julia Penelope for her helpfulness in pointing out places in my paper that needed to be clearer and Sarah Lucia Hoagland for taking the time to do extensive rewriting of some of the passages. I of course take full responsibility for the opinion expressed.

to be less aggressive and to respect wimmin, everything would change. This is simply not true. As a black woman, I have seen sons taught passivity to enable them to survive in a world committed to lynching black males. An aggressive black male simply would not survive. So, if teaching male children non-aggression and respect for wimmin is viewed as a means of changing our sexist society, well we already have examples and it hasn't made any difference in how those males treat wimmin. In fact, a black male reveres his mother as a strong woman and claims he would do anything for her. At the same time, he is out on the street pimping, leaving "his" babies for "his" woman to care for, and abusing wimmin. The fact that black male behavior has not improved black wimmin's lives cannot be laid at the door step of black mothers. Unless we fall back on blaming the victim and holding wimmin as the cause of male failure or bad behavior.

As wimmin we have been strong. We've taken care of business. We have been available for our children – whenever they have wanted us. And what have we gained? It is arrogant and sexist for us to believe that our mothers erred, that now we can correct their mistakes and raise male children differently so that male behavior we object to so much won't happen anymore. It is also arrogant and sexist to believe that wimmin as always are the ones responsible for whether male children grow up to be acceptable in a society that gives wimmin no power.

The above assumptions are seen at work during lesbians' discussions about the need for wimmin-only space. Marilyn Frye¹ has discussed separatism in relation to who has access to us and who doesn't. Historically, males have had access to us. If we include them in wimmin space, how is that different than what has gone on before? The argument that boys need to see strong wimmin interacting with each other and caring for each other presumes that today's adult males did not see that as boys. Certainly they saw it in the black community.

The belief that we are responsible for the behavior of male children avoids the reality that wimmin do not hold power in the boys' world. By inviting them into our spaces we perpetuate the historical, sexist pattern of assuming wimmin are responsible for something we have no power over, that thing being the attitudes which male children absorb from a society that discredits and undermines wimmin of all ages. Further, we assume that non-sexism and sensitivity will be perceived by male children as a reasonable trade-off for power. For it is power that any boy is offered upon reaching manhood. Some get more than others but all get to join the old boys club, and in case you didn't notice that is what runs this world. What we as wimmin can offer little boys is not power. If you were a little boy which would you choose – power or sensitivity? Be honest.

A final consequence of the belief that wimmin are responsible for male children is an incredible focusing of attention, once again, on males while

taking females for granted and assuming they can take care of themselves. Girls grow up with the same options we have. When we invite male children into our spaces we devalue our daughters. In the first place we discount them by pretending that since boys appear not to have the power to hurt adult wimmin because they are smaller (a sizeist belief that implies adult males will not side with male children in a dispute over adult female authority), they won't try to hurt wimmin children. Our daughters are the same ages as the male children, perhaps they go to school with them. Even in a womon-only space such as the Michigan Wimmin's Music Festival if male children are included how safe will our daughters feel? If boys see females of all ages walking around without clothes on, what will they say the next week in school to their classmates – that they saw really strong wimmin interacting in a caring way? Surely we all remember how little boys would terrorize us at school and at recess! Is this what we have decided to offer our daughters? Are we not saying that their safety and comfort are not our concern? And in doing so are we not implying that the needs of wimmin are still not important nor as important as the needs of boys, and then beginning that devaluation by devaluing the needs of wimmin children?

Wimmin-only space is limited. It is limited by location and duration of time. It is to be cherished. It is wrested from the powers that be. It is a place for us to heal ourselves, nurture ourselves, grow and change, and relax with each other, a place which would enable us to go out into the boys' world and survive with our sense of self somewhat more intact. Should we not transmit the message to male children that they cannot expect access to wimmin whenever they want? Should we not be concerned about giving support to young females who face the same options we do? Should we not cease to accept total responsibility for what happens in a world where we don't have the power to control what happens in it?

Wimmin-only space is important. Without it the gains we have made would not have been possible. If we hadn't been in a safe environment, the talking and growing would not have happened. I do believe that wimmin who argue for inclusion of males of any age ignore at what cost we have built our communities – fragile though they are. Our communities are still fragile, and especially in light of this reality, who are we going to focus on and value?!

Notes

¹Marilyn Frye, "Some reflections on separatism and power." *Sinister Wisdom* 6, Summer 1978. In, Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press. 1983), pp. 95-109.

Notes on Contributors

Susan Cavin is currently teaching Women's Studies at Rutgers University. She is the editor of *Big Apple Dyke (B.A.D.) News*. Susan is one of the original members of C.L.I.T. (Collective Lesbian International Terrors) and a founding editor of *TRIBAD*, a bi-monthly Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal published from 1977-1979.

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.

Sarah Hoagland is a Separatist and a philosopher living in Chicago and working on a book on lesbian ethics.

Annie McCombs is a cartoonist living in California. Please note that her cartoon is copyrighted. She can be contacted through *Lesbian Ethics*, if you are interested in reprinting it.

Anna Lee. I'm part of a seemingly vanishing breed of lesbian separatists. I wish I knew more black lesbian separatists or misplaced midwesterners. I'm delighted that *Lesbian Ethics* is so open to the separatist voice. It has been a long time since a radical cutting edge has been expressed in feminist quarterly journals.

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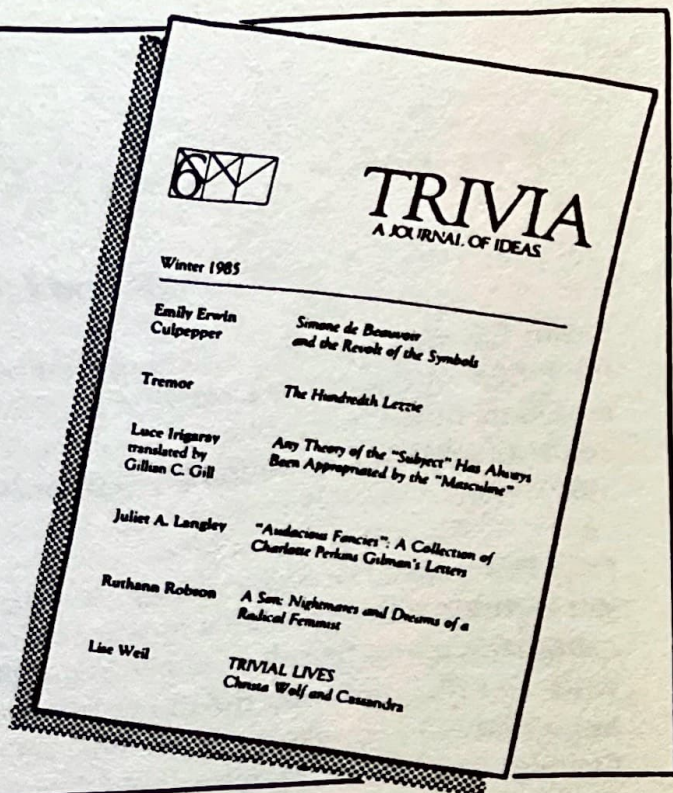
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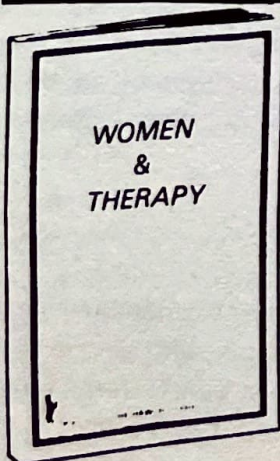
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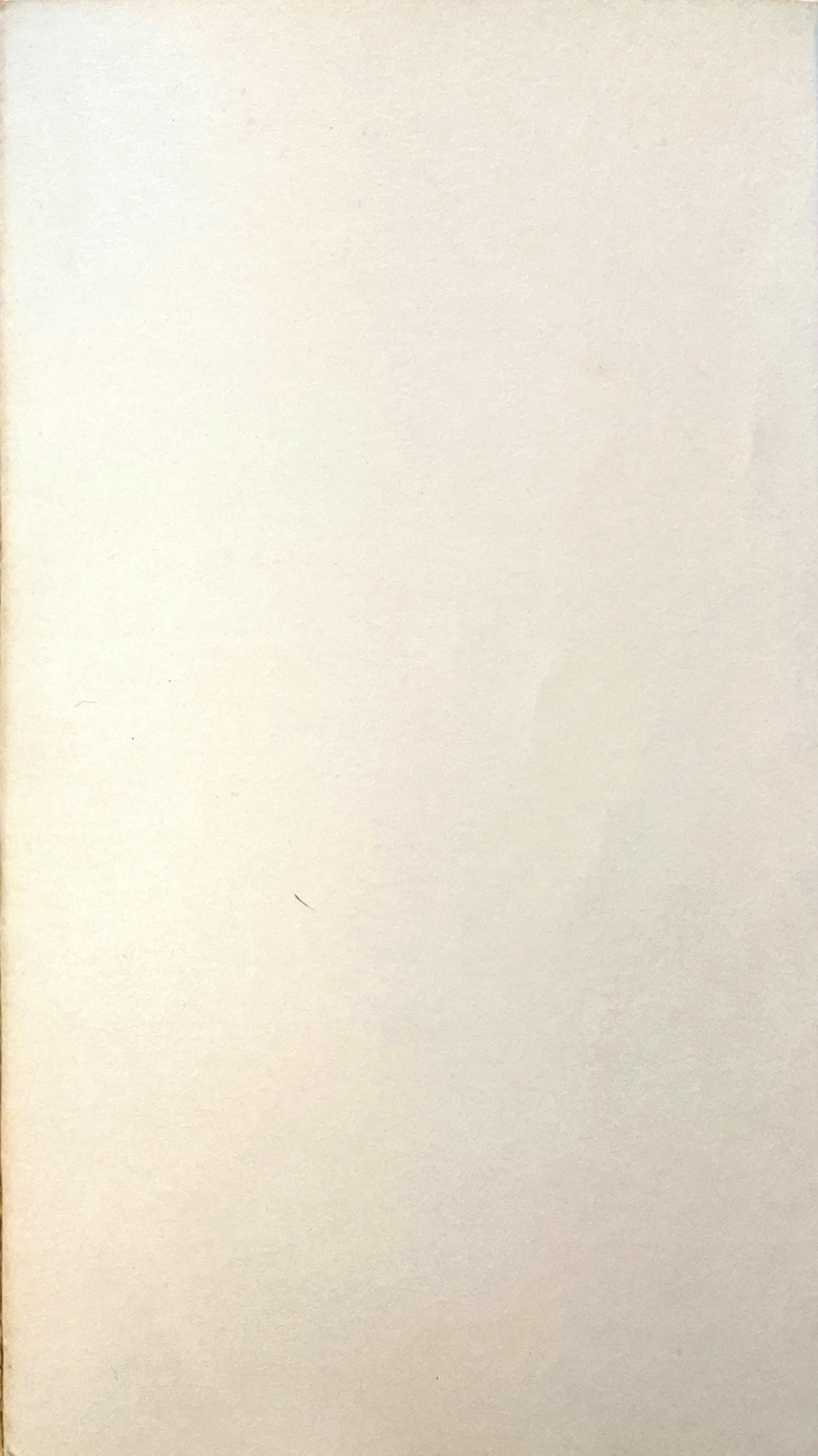
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