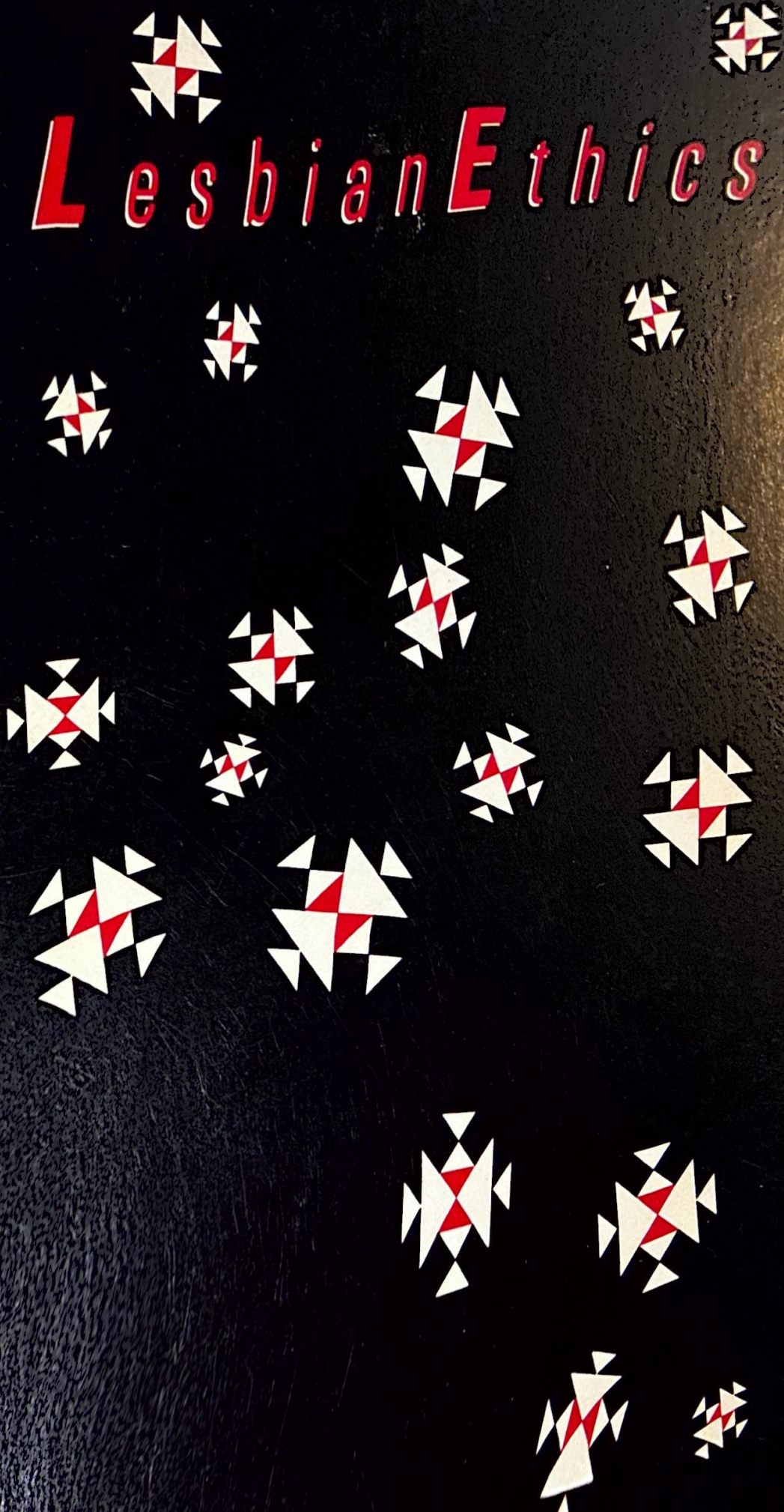


Lesbian Ethics



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Editor's Introduction

This issue completes Vol. 1 of *Lesbian Ethics*. The next issue begins Vol. 2. I think *LE* is a real journal, that's here to stay. This also means that, for many of you, IT IS TIME TO RENEW.

It is marvelous to experience the cycle of an issue taking shape and becoming a physical reality. Each issue takes on a life of its own. And so far they seem to be taking 5 months, instead of the planned 4 months, to be born. Perhaps production time will get shorter as production becomes more routine.

I am particularly fond of this issue. (For one thing, I think I deserve special recognition for having produced three covers which are totally color uncoordinated with each other. I do not know if this has been done before.) *LE* #3 is, I think, a particularly meaty and even controversial issue. *Lesbian Ethics* is a radical lesbian and a radical feminist journal, but that still leaves plenty of room for disagreement. Again I want to encourage readers to submit responses and reactions to material that has appeared in this and previous issues.

The Readers' Forum topic for *Lesbian Ethics* #1 (2) is "What Works." The purpose of this forum, a suggestion of Julia Penelope's and Sarah Valenine's, is to refuel our sense of radical community and to strengthen our collective power by sharing information about what does work: Write us your favorite retorts to sexist remarks, tell us about successful lesbian actions — ones that didn't make the papers, ones that did, ones you didn't want to make the papers. (*LE* will print your contributions anonymously if you wish, but you do need to identify yourself to us.) Your contribution can be very brief ("He said '—'; I said '—'") or longer. I'd like to make this a regular *LE* feature, another way for us to learn from each other and enjoy each other.

A few items of business: 1) We are glad to forward mail to *LE* authors, if you enclose a stamped envelope we can do it in. 2) If you change your address you must let us know. THE POST OFFICE WILL NOT FORWARD YOUR COPY OF *LE*, since it is mailed bulk rate. 3) Please put your address on your letters, not just on your envelope. 4) If you send a check or a letter and do not get a response in a reasonable time, please write again. I am sometimes very busy, but lesbian mail also does get lost.

So, now, sink your teeth into *LE* #3.

Jeanette Silveira

The Mystery of Lesbians: III

Julia Penelope

The Context of Choice

Liberal feminists have made the word *choice* so attractive, as though all wimmin were capable of acting as autonomous, self-determining beings. "We must respect all women's choices," they say, as though our choices are made in a vacuum, as though every single woman knew what her choices are or might be. Humanism ignores the fact that our choices, such as they are, are made in the context of heteropatriarchy. How many of our "choices" are REAL choices? If there is a "politics of liberal feminism," it's nothing more than a way of rationalizing the fact that women continue to choose men.

Many Lesbians have expressed surprise and pain about the phenomenon of wimmin who "go back to men." Each of us knows at least two or three "lesbians" who've "gone back" to heterosexuality. Gloria Greenfield, for example, once a Separatist, later a co-owner of the now-defunct Persephone Press, describes her own shift in identity from Jewish Lesbian to Lesbian Jew in *Nice Jewish Girls*.¹ Now, she's married (but she didn't change her name). Because "choices" can only be made in the heteropatriarchal context, they're **no choices** at all. A Lesbian who prioritizes her heterosexual community doesn't live full-time in a Lesbian community, and her dual allegiances will lead, inevitably, to betrayals.

The message sent to Lesbian Separatists by such Lesbians is: We don't need you. Maybe not. But *I* need you: I need Lesbians. Many Lesbians cannot "go back" to men because we didn't start there. One can "go back" only to something she's previously "left." The metaphor of "returning" to men or heterosexuality reveals the heterosexism of liberal feminism, because it assumes that ALL women are or have been heterosexuals, first. Heterosexuality becomes the touchstone of their identity.

I have no heterosexual community to return to. It's just not that simple. Maybe, as Beverly Smith has suggested, white Lesbians become Separatists

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because we have to reject white men and all they stand for.² But we could certainly choose to identify with gay men; we do, after all, share an oppression. There may be some truth in what Beverly said, but it ignores every Asian, Native American, Black, or Chicana Lesbian who has chosen herself and other Lesbians as her priority. Separatists didn't invent racism or classism or sexism. We may not be any better than anybody else, but we're also *no worse*, and anti-Separatist Lesbians of Color, like Barbara Smith, have allowed themselves to be used by anti-Separatist caucasian feminists, who wield more power than they do, because of skin privilege.³ These attempts to discredit Separatist political analysis have caused Separatists of Color a lot of pain because the statements have been used by caucasian anti-Separatists to justify ignoring and isolating Separatists of Color, thereby denying them support and making them *more* invisible.⁴

When we talk about "choices," let's at least try to be honest with each other. We have enough pain and sufficient obstacles in our lives not to compound it all by lying to each other. Those Lesbians who believe they must make a "choice" in prioritizing their oppressions, who feel they must choose between the racism, classism, or anti-Semitism of caucasian Lesbians and the Lesbophobia of their genetic communities will, I hope, make their choices well. We don't choose the ethnic, racial, religious, or economic communities into which we're born. We *can* choose a commitment to other Lesbians. We can also reject the idea of Lesbian community, and many Lesbians have done just that, by returning to the "safety" of their genetic communities and rejecting me. They say, and I believe it's true, that they feel "safer" choosing labels and communities that include men. But I believe that "safety" is illusory and dangerous to Lesbians. Is the hatred and violation of Lesbians in male groups easier to tolerate than whatever racism or classism still infects the minds of white Lesbians? If so, let's say so and have the realities of the choices we make or don't make out in the open between us. Choose men, reject Separatists, but don't try to justify your choice by trashing us.

I've singled out racial and ethnic conflicts here because Lesbians like Barbara Smith have used them as a pretext for diverting our attention from wimmin's issues. But the return to men and their communities is going on under a variety of other guises as well. I could expect, and get, praise for dropping my political commitment to Lesbians and turning my energies to combatting racism, or classism, or fighting for animal rights. Because I'm an obvious Lesbian, I have no credibility in the heteropatriarchy. Any cause I chose would be discredited by my voice unless I also chose **INVISIBILITY**. I'd have to *choose* to abandon the priority I give to Lesbian existence.

In contrast, writers like Rita Mae Brown and musicians like Holly Near can use their ability to pass in order to make money from liberal heterosexuals. Such wimmin may excuse their choice by claiming, as Rita Mae has, that they're "artists" first and Lesbians second, but that's a convenient lie. The fact of the

matter is that it's not only more rewarding to label oneself an "artist" rather than a Lesbian, it's also safer, because "artist" is a category validated in the heteropatriarchy.

Similarly, I have no sons to bind me to the heteropatriarchy. I cannot see myself as having any political investment in "human beingism" as some Lesbians with sons do. I was a humanist before I became a feminist, and I know that the neo-humanism now popular among feminists is a way of ignoring choices; I understand that none of our choices in these days is easy. But, really, is it also necessary to discredit and trivialize Separatists in the process? Is there something inherent in the nature of *your* choices that requires you to claim that *my* choice is **invalid**? Do those choices necessitate *my* dismissal?

As Sid Spinster pointed out in her excellent rebuttal of Adrienne Rich's confused "Notes for a Magazine: What Does Separatism Mean?":⁵

It's time for non-Separatist Lesbians to start explaining yourselves. What does it mean to not be a Separatist in "our" movement? What is your strategy for the defeat of patriarchy over the long haul? Can you honor the choice of Separatist wimmin of color not to work with men? Is it racist *not* to be a Separatist; not to withdraw your support from patriarchy, not to fight for an anti-racist Lesbian-identified culture?

I have **yet** to hear even *attempted* answers to Sid's questions, which indicates two things to me: First, the neo-humanists among us didn't (and don't) take her questions seriously; second, they can't *afford* to take them seriously because they don't have answers to them. To date, neo-humanists have substituted Separatist-baiting and name-calling for outlining a viable, plausible political analysis of their own, thereby avoiding the unpleasant prospect of asking themselves questions they're afraid to answer.

My politics aren't something I can put on and take off like designer jeans (even if I could find them in my size). My politics are me. I believe that the same is true for other Lesbians who call themselves Separatists, Lesbians who refuse to put aside their priorities for the illusory benefits of neo-humanism. There are too many Jewish Lesbian Separatists who have chosen the potential of Lesbians together, in spite of anti-Semitism among us. There are too many Black Lesbian Separatists who choose other Lesbians, in spite of racism, for the vision of a community where we can be together. So many Separatists are working-class or poor that charges of "elitism" and "privilege" would be laughable if they didn't come from other Lesbians who should know better.

Let's be honest with each other. Let's stop hiding behind the rhetoric of the left of the 1960's: Separatism isn't racist, classist, or elitist. Those are fashionable labels used to discredit Separatist analysis, they're substituted to hide the void in other "analyses." Ironically, in spite of efforts to keep Separatists invisible in the WLM media, we have a quasi-mythical grass-roots reputation because the visible "stars" of WLM can't resist taking potshots at us. So a lot of newcomers to

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WLM are told that "Separatists are bad," but the few who might take the time to check things out for themselves don't know where to go to get the information that would enable them to make their own judgments.

For years now, Separatists (and Separatism) have been cast as the "villains" in episode after episode of the WLM soap opera. We turn up in some of the most unlikely places: Friedan's *It Changed My Life*, Morgan's *Going Too Far* (as the dreaded "killer dykes"), insulted in the last segment of Joanna Russ's *Extra (Ordinary) People*.⁶ And the spectre of "separatism" is frequently raised by their "gay brothers" whenever individual gay wimmin finally tell them that they're tired of "struggling" with gay male misogyny.

We've been made into the ogres lurking under bridges in the WLM fairy tale. A rap group for young Lesbians in Washington, DC was told, a couple of years ago, simply that "Separatism was a bad thing, unrealistic, man-hating, etc." When the facilitator of this group was asked where one might go to read about Separatism, she didn't know. At a workshop on racism in Lincoln last year, one Lesbian asserted that "the Separatist bent" in the Lincoln wimmin's community was responsible for the racism there. Fortunately, a Separatist was present who pointed out that racism had a significantly longer history in Lincoln (and elsewhere) than Lesbian Separatism, and it wasn't likely that one could account for racism among Lincoln wimmin because of the six (or eight, depending on how one counts) Separatists who live there.

But we must ask, and seriously, what kind of stupidity exists among us that such assertions are accepted, believed, and repeated as though *they make sense*. Why do the lesbians who utter such nonsense gather followings around them as though their garbage was astute political analysis? Such assertions are common in Lesbian and feminist communities all over the U.S., and this scape-goating has given us enough notoriety that many Lesbians find their way to reliable sources of information on their own eventually. What worries me are the larger numbers who don't bother to find anything out for themselves, accepting instead whatever they're told about Separatism and Separatists regardless of the credibility of the source. This docility is evidenced on an even larger scale in our preference for negative information about other Lesbians, information which we rarely bother to check out and simply accept as "true" without considering the source or the probability of distortion. In contrast, we hardly ever pass along positive information about each other. Where does this come from?

As they were about the ancient Amazons, stories are told, events are elaborated according to the taste of whoever's telling the story, and no one knows for sure what's fact and what's fiction. But Lesbians go on becoming Separatists. No, we're not the media "stars" so doted upon by heterosexuals, but the hostility and rage directed at us have worked in our favor. We're not engaged in a dialogue with heterosexuals. Most of us, however reluctantly, have decided that our energies must go to other Lesbians; attempts to talk to

heterosexual feminists are usually frustrating and depressing. Lesbians are the focus of our lives. In contrast to all the wimmin's voices telling us we should be working with "progressive" men and their issues. For this "narrowness" we'll never be "forgiven." But no one is attacking us because we aren't "struggling" with fat men, for example, to eradicate sizeism and looksism in our society, even though a lot of Separatists are fat and have these issues in common with fat men. Why aren't heterosexual and Lesbian feminists calling us names for excluding fat men from our lives?

Partly because they have no interest in fat issues; partly because they've bought the Virginia Slims theory of "liberation." But the crux of the matter remains that Separatists have steadfastly maintained, even those (like myself) who have, on occasion, worked in coalitions, that **MEN ARE THE ENEMY**. We've insisted that our primary commitment is to Lesbians (or, for some, to wimmin in general). Liberal feminists are embarrassed and threatened by our refusal to let go of wimmin and our issues as **priorities**, and, lacking a coherent political analysis of their own, they've resorted instead to calling us "man-haters," "elitist," "privileged," "racist," and, yes, "fascist," every name that'll set liberal knees ajerking. Judy Grahn once observed, when we were discussing this phenomenon, that she'd never heard a heterosexual woman called "fascist," only Lesbians. (Recently, a group of Separatists in the Bay Area told participants at the Jewish Feminist Conference that Jewish Lesbian Separatists didn't appreciate being called "fascists." Why isn't the anti-Semitism of this name-calling obvious?) Why do wimmin/Lesbians feel comfortable comparing *any woman* to powerful, evil, violent men like Hoover, McCarthy, and Hitler? Why do they immediately, reflexively, grab for the most odious male name they can think of and wield it as a weapon against us? What is the source of this deep-felt need to discredit and hurt Separatists? The viciousness itself is a cowardly, feeble act of deception, a dangerous masquerade in which Separatists are portrayed as the **male enemy** so that other wimmin can feel powerful by attacking us, instead of confronting their very real powerlessness in this culture. What comfort can there be in this?

Separatists have been saying this for years, but it bears repeating again (and again and again): We choose wimmin or we choose men. Let's drop the deception and the rhetoric. Let those feminists who prefer men, who need to work with men in order to feel good about themselves, who require the company of men, who feel safer with men, simply say so and claim their choice out front. I won't like that choice, and I won't approve of it, but I'll respect the honesty of the assertion.

What angers me are the elaborate justifications and abstract theorizing about choosing the causes and movements which are validated by segments of the heteropatriarchy. What angers me is the hostility directed at me, as though hurting me will somehow discredit my decisions to work with Lesbians and make choosing men seem a courageous and necessary act. But this is nothing

more than the old trick of heteropatriarchal reversal, a tactic also being used successfully by the S & M "feminists" who're martyring themselves for the "cause" of PORNOGRAPHY. Choosing wimmin over men is scary; choosing Lesbians over the safer category, wimmin, is even scarier. I know; I'm scared a lot. When I get really terrified and think I can't go on choosing Lesbians for one more day, I recall the image of Robin Morgan weeping pitifully in "Not a Love Story" because her decision to stay with "her man" and struggle with his sexism was so hard and painful for her, casting herself as the helpless heterosexual "victim" of Lesbian "oppression." That image has stayed with me because I was so angered and sickened by the hypocrisy and self-delusion of her plea for pity. What does it mean to say that one "loves a man" and, at the same time, to acknowledge the male violence experienced every day by millions of women? What does it mean to "love our oppressors"? Women have been loving men for millenia, and I can't see that it's done anything but worsen our situation. What does it mean, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, to believe that men, now, today, can be "rehabilitated," and to commit one's life to that belief? Why is that choice seen as "nobler" than choosing each other? Why is it so easy to be male-sympathizers and cast Lesbian Separatists as the "oppressors"? Who's living in the "real world"?

Choosing men is simply not the same act as choosing wimmin or Lesbians, and its consequences are very different. I'm not talking here about lipstick, or pantyhose, or a hamburger. I'm not debating a matter of "taste" or "preference." I'm talking about the conscious, aware decision to choose the safety of male approval instead of the risks and dangers and joys of a Lesbian community. Don't think for a moment I'm glorifying or romanticizing the day-to-day exhaustion and tiresomeness of living among Lesbians, I'm not ignoring the pain I've experienced when other Lesbians have attacked and rejected me. I'm saying that, **in spite of** the pain and frustration I've experienced among Lesbians, we need each other.

Accepting the priorities of men as their own, liberal feminists hastened to rewrite the entire WLM agenda hoping, thereby, to get the male approval they knew would be withheld otherwise. This revisionism has had a foreseeable and subversive effect: There is no longer an identifiable, autonomous WLM in the U.S. That the word *feminist* and the derogatory *women's libber* continue to identify us as "man-haters" in the popular mind is beside the point. It feels very different for many of us who were once active and "inside" the Movement. (I know for a fact that I do speak here on behalf of wimmin other than myself.) What many now call the WLM is indistinguishable from socialism, environmentalism, and a diluted, ineffectual brand of liberalism that occasionally affirms a "concern" about racism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism. If I'd wanted to concentrate my energies on issues that affect non-women, I'd've signed up long before the second wave crashed onto the shores of my consciousness; I didn't need feminism to alert me to the dangers of anti-Semitism, nuclear war, or

racial bigotry then, and I don't look to feminism to do that for me now. I grew up as a Lesbian among Jewish Lesbians; I know how anti-Semitism continues to flourish. I grew up trying to squeeze myself under my desk during the obligatory "bomb drills" of the late Forties and the Fifties; I've been afraid of nuclear war since I watched mushroom cloud after mushroom cloud blossom into fire and ash on the movie screens of my childhood. I grew up in the racially-segregated South; I've fought racism since I was old enough to ask my mother, "Why"?

The WLM, once so hopeful and energetic, and even irreverent, has been successfully subverted from within as well as without. We cannot continue to put other issues and causes ahead of our own. Surely there are men capable of doing *something* worthwhile who don't require constant monitoring!

I want wimmin who choose men to take responsibility for that decision, because it's a choice that everything in our society encourages, urges, mandates, requires. **I live in a society that tells me every day to choose men.** When I turn on the radio or television, no one screams at me to choose Lesbians. No one tells me to buy Diet Pepsi because then I'll meet "the Dyke of my dreams." I'm not told to buy Hanes pantyhose because Dykes "prefer" them! (Which is probably just as well for me!) In such a society, try to imagine the insult to my intelligence, my sensibilities, when Starhawk, who calls herself a "feminist," asserting that "we need images of both genders to enable us to come into all of our powers" and that "the part of us that feels free and autonomous, out of the realm of mother's control, comes to be identified with maleness," LEAPS to the conclusion that, "This might change, of course, if our childcare arrangements changed so that men as well as women become associated with the fears and pleasures of infancy. . ."

What kind of "political" analysis is this? It's pure heterosexuality.⁸ When Starhawk asserts that "we" need both sexes for role models, she blithely ignores those of us who were brought up by our mothers, liked it that way, and believe that our lives are better and stronger *because* we didn't have a male parent during our formative years. Some of us *have* managed to do well for ourselves, and, even though I agree with her claim that we associate freedom and independence with men, I can't conclude, with her, that allowing men access to babies and children will help to break that association. If anything, as an incest survivor, I believe that allowing men unlimited and unsupervised access to children is a stupid, dangerous idea, made to appear plausible in the context of a humanist framework that asks us to ignore real and provable differences between the behaviors and actions of women and men. If men get their way, and women let them participate in raising children, we'll very quickly notice a substantial increase in the numbers of incest victims. And I know too well the damaging extent and power of my past experiences as an incest victim, and how, without my being aware of it, those experiences controlled and poisoned my responses in intimate relationships.⁹

Where Do I Go from Here?

It's time now to return to two of the central questions in this essay. First, why do wimmin who call themselves "feminists" refuse to name the enemy? Earlier, in Part II of this essay (*Lesbian Ethics* No. 2) I listed so many sources and varieties of FEAR that I don't think I need to do more than say, again, their fear of the consequences, male retaliation, is stronger than their need for freedom. We see such behavior in battered wimmin, who return, time after time, to the batterer, and they call their fear of change "love," or "financial dependence," or "the children's sakes." The willingness of wimmin to remain in battering relationships brings me to the fact that we are, all of us, the "broken" wimmin of whom Mary Daly writes so eloquently:¹⁰

From the earliest times of patriarchy countless mothers have been broken, and the resulting broken daughters have carried on the chain of fragmentation Women in the Misbegotten State have been assigned to break/divide the daughters, to break in their daughters, to break down their defenses, to cut off their possibilities for Original communication. They are indeed unfettered in carrying out this male-ordered mission.

The fact of the matter is that every single one of us is "broken"; not a one of us can claim that her self is whole. When we strike out at each other in anger or pain, we're often acting out of our broken state, retaliating against each other for the damage done to us in the heteropatriarchy. In spite of our best intentions, we persist in hurting each other. But we must break "the chain of fragmentation" somehow. Are there some ways we can acknowledge the old pain we carry within us, stay in touch with its origins enough so that we can realize our violent reactions to each other have their sources in the things men have done to us in the past? Can we make it possible to begin to heal ourselves by allowing for mistakes, disagreements, and angry moments, by stepping outside the immediate situation, examining our own intentions and motivations, and saying to each other, "Yes, I made a mistake. Can we go on from here?" Must we continue the cycle of oppression among ourselves by expecting a level of perfection, even nobility, in each other, while, at the same time, excusing the mistakes of men? Why are we kinder to men than we are to each other?

Which brings me to the second question of this essay: If some of us are willing to name our enemy, men, why is it possible for us and apparently impossible for a majority of wimmin? What is it in us that acknowledges our fear but feels compelled, in spite of it, to say, **Men are the enemy?**

Almost everyone I know has a simple theory about the perceivable differences between ourselves and "the others." Most of these theories start with "There are just two kinds of people in the world, the _____ and the _____." The blanks are easily filled in with the theorizer's then-

current favorite opposites: the Good and the Bad, the Saved and the Lost, the Suckers and the Con-artists, the Sadists and the Masochists, the Hawks and the Doves, the Haves and the Have-nots, the Anal and Oral retentives, the Dreamers and the Doers. Other theories about our differences get pretty sophisticated and allow for three classes: the good, the bad, and the ugly; ectomorphs, endomorphs, and mesomorphs; the lower, middle, and upper classes; the stupid, the average, and the bright.

Well, as a good friend once observed, theories are like assholes; everyone has one. I have an asshole, and I have a theory. Mine is also simple. It goes like this: There are two kinds of people, those who crave reality at any cost, and those who have to escape from reality, also at any cost. There are those who go crazy if they're told to ignore what they see around them, and those who go just as crazy if reality is the only thing they can get. Of course, only a minority seems to need to stare long and hard at what they can see, and the business of providing illusions is the multi-million dollar industry of politicians, amusement parks, television, movies, and Madison Avenue, all of whom manufacture neat deceptions for the majority of people who don't want to know what's going on around them.

Pretty simple, huh? But complicated, too. Who's to say what's "real" after all? Reality is a slippery item, and, as the quantum physicists assure us, we create the reality we perceive, we see only what we expect to see, and the cultural filters imposed on our minds guarantee limited and conventional vision. So maybe the people I say are escapees from reality are the ones who "really" know what's going on and I'm the one who "can't face the truth." (I'll grant that that's possible, but I'm dubious. This is my theory, after all, so I get to put myself in the "good" category, those who need reality to feel safe.) Indeed. What we believe we know exists depends utterly on where we're standing in the world at a specific moment. Here's what I believe I know: Men rule the world. Men rape women. Men rape all females, their daughters, wives, mothers, sisters, granddaughters and any other female unlucky enough to be accessible to them when "the urge" strikes. Men beat women up, cripple them, maim them, starve them, kill them. Men make money and war. Heterosexuality insures that men will always have a ready and willing supply of females for their uses.

That's what I see around me every day I live, and some days are worse than others. I would welcome anyone who can demonstrate to me that I'm wrong, that my perceptions are distorted by where I stand in the world. But don't trot out your "exceptional man" to show me; everyone has one or claims to have one, including me. But I'm not willing to base my entire political analysis on his existence. I wish I had a dollar for every heterosexual feminist who's challenged my Separatism by claiming that "her man" is "different," and, then, after she'd become a Lesbian, confided to me that he was a rapist, a batterer, a violent misogynist. I remember my mother telling me, when she still hoped that I'd turn out heterosexual, that "a good man is one in a million" and holding up my dead

father to me as evidence. Heterosexual women know men for the untrustworthy, base individuals that they are. Why, then, do they persist in defending them, lying for them, and protecting them? Is this, perhaps, proof of the "mothering instinct," since the facts so clearly contradict the assertions? Is it possible that they can't "help themselves"?

In a conversation (November 9, 1984), Jennifer Lynne suggested that the difference seems to stem from how individual wimmin deal with their knowledge of oppression. Some seem to take the information inside, turn it over, look at it from every angle they can think of, and, on the basis of that examination, set about the processes of changing themselves; their commitment moves from the inside out, from their experiences of oppression and their construction of hopes to those of other wimmin. Others in contrast, seem to acquire the information about their oppressed situation, learn the appropriate rhetorical noises to make, yet don't seem to change themselves. They can talk about "wimmin's oppression," or the need to eradicate pornography, or the importance of dealing with racism, but there's a barrier of some kind between the words their lips are forming and the inside of their minds, because the shape of their lives doesn't seem to change over the years. They go on hurting other wimmin and seem oblivious to the damage they do in our communities. Some have called this the process of intellectualizing our oppression.

Take, for example, the night I ended up defending Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party," something I'd never imagined I'd find myself doing. A local wimmin's collective had shown the movie about the making of "The Dinner Party" to raise money. At a bar later, I found myself in a heated argument with another lesbian who had nothing but criticisms about the art itself, the movie about it, the processes involved, etc. etc. I've criticized "The Dinner Party" myself; I think I know its flaws as well as anyone. Yet, something about the criticisms of this Lesbian grated; something about her intensity, her persistence in refusing to say that there might be *anything* positive about Judy Chicago's art, made me doubt the reasons underlying her totally negative, critical approach to Chicago's efforts. Finding words for what I felt is hard, but I think it was the way she dismissed *everything* about "The Dinner Party," denied it any value *at all*, insisted upon its "wrongness."

That, and the fact that this particular Lesbian had never taken any risks herself in the community, had never tried to do anything, become active in one of the many groups, contributed anything of her own to our efforts on behalf of wimmin. Instead, she remained aloof from all the groups, and had set herself up as "critic," made herself responsible for telling those of us who were trying to do something everything she thought we were doing wrong. And she may have been right. But, after a while, I stopped listening, and then I stopped caring. Because she never had a good word for anything; she didn't take the time to say, "I think you did a good job here, I think you made a mistake there." The negativity wasn't ever balanced by even a token acknowledgement that, in spite

of mistakes, we might also have accomplished some positive things. Had she been working *alongside* any of the wimmin she criticized so freely, had she herself contributed to the community, I think my reaction would've been significantly different. As it was, I found myself trying to get her to say that something, **anything**, about "The Dinner Party" was deserving of her approval. To no avail. Yet, she has now aligned herself with the politics of the male left and, from that position, harangues other wimmin about their alleged misdeeds and misbehaviors.

Broken? Yes, she's a broken woman. So am I. And I've done the same thing or been perceived as doing the same thing. I, too, have forgotten or neglected to say, "Good job, but don't you think such-and-such could've been handled better?" But I've also been taking my own risks along the way; I've also been "putting myself on the line," open to the judgments of other wimmin myself. My own commitment to change was visible and explicit, and I think I've been consistent enough in my willingness to take risks that I've earned some measure of latitude for my mistakes, some credibility, at least, for the quality of my commitment. It's too easy to sit back and ridicule or trivialize another woman's efforts, to deflect our ancient anger against men and target other wimmin for its expression. It's called "horizontal hostility" and is the behavior that most surely marks an oppressed group. We will, every time, turn our anger in on ourselves rather than direct it against the perpetrators of our oppression. I'm not advocating the kind of liberalism that urges uncritical support or validation for every impulse or idea of any woman. We need to be critical of each other, and it's easier to see the errors and misconceptions of someone else than it is to see them in ourselves. We need to remain aware of heteropatriarchal traps, to monitor ourselves as well as other wimmin, to question, question, question.

But we cannot go on as we are. We may have to consider the possibility that being Lesbians simply isn't "enough" to enable us to create communities for ourselves. Perhaps because of my own experience, my necessary reliance on other Lesbians for community, and my lack of investment in any heterosexual group, I've believed that we, Lesbians, do need each other. The strongest, surest part of me cries out for a Lesbian community. Part of me says I'll take a scruffy, loud-mouthed, pushy dyke any day, **every day**, because I'm a "scruffy dyke." A part of me is invested in the survival of every Lesbian, whether I like her or not. Maybe she's a vegetarian, an alcoholic, batterer or battered, sado-masochist, or hermit, but she's created herself, and every day she lives she's backed up against the same wall I am, the heteropatriarchy.

There's no retreat from that simple fact. I can't "go back" to anywhere from here. Once I became conscious of my oppression and all that my life would never be because of it, I closed that door. Now, I must continue, somehow, to live the conceptual impossibility of being a Lesbian, of trying to make myself whole. That is my reality, my life. Now I re-member.

Can we call each other to being other than we are, for the sake of a vision we

can live toward, at the same time remembering that we will continue to make mistakes, continue to hurt each other, continue to forget how serious our differences are? Can we be critical and remain kind, learn perhaps to disagree honestly without disowning each other? Can we value and respect each other's strengths, skills, and talents without devaluing ourselves? Can we learn to thank each other for time and effort? Can we stop taking each other for granted, and stay in touch with the miracle of self-realization that each of us is? Can we focus more on the good things we do without forgetting that we must continue the process of critical self-examination? Can we end the destructive effects of our victimization in the heteropatriarchy, distinguish the pain we bring with us into our communities, identify when our feelings arise out of past experiences and gradually learn to respond to our *present* context? Can we break the control that our past exercises over us in order to create a present context for survival? Can we unlearn the behaviors of victims and come to value ourselves as survivors? So far, our anger and frustrations, directed at each other rather than our real enemies, have worked to destroy us internally far more successfully than any retaliatory actions undertaken by men. Can any one of us afford to do their work *for* them?

Can we go on together?

There are three possible answers to that question: yes, no, and maybe. I can't assume a positive answer, as much as I'd like to. We can no longer assume that "being Lesbians" is "enough" of a bond to enable us to put ourselves first. Maybe we can't go on together, and we need to look at this negative possibility now, acknowledge it, and talk about it. Perhaps only a few of us are, first and last, identified as Lesbians. If so, we need to find each other and work out ways of supporting our vision of a community where we can heal ourselves, or find satisfactory ways of reconciling ourselves to our isolation.

We're at "maybe" now, and we must be honest with ourselves. If the answer is "no," then we can all "go back" to whatever we were doing before the dream of a Lesbian movement called forth our best energies and commitment. I will not base my life on deluded expectations and false hopes. Easy affirmations won't do either. If the answer is "yes," then we have a lot of hard work to do as we renew our focus on creating a Lesbian **community**, and we'll have to begin by discovering values we share, values that will identify us to each other.

I suggest we begin with honesty, of the variety that originates in critical self-examination, each of us asking herself exactly what we want and expect from other Lesbians, and results in clarity. Whatever we do, we deserve honesty and clarity from each other. If we cannot go on together, as Lesbians, we need to say it now.

Endnotes

- ¹ Gloria Greenfield, "Shedding," *Nice Jewish Girls*, Evelyn Torton Beck, ed. (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1982), pp. 5-27.
- ² Beverly Smith & Barbara Smith, "Kitchen Table Dialogue," *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldua, eds. (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1982), p. 121.
- ³ See in "Mystery of Lesbians: II," for example, my discussion of *Yours in Struggle*, Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, & Barbara Smith, eds. (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1984).
- ⁴ My thanks to Linda Strega for this observation.
- ⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Notes for a Magazine: What Does Separatism Mean?" *Sinister Wisdom* 18, Fall 1981, pp. 83-91. Sid Spinster, Letter to the Editors, *Sinister Wisdom* 20, Spring 1982, pp. 104-5.
- ⁶ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life* (New York: Norton, 1985); Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 185; Joanna Russ, *Extra (Ordinary) People* (New York: St. Martins, 1984), p. 160.
- ⁷ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark* (Boston: Beacon, 1982), p. 86.
- ⁸ The word *heterosexualism*, as I use it here, was coined by Sarah Lucia Hoagland in her book, *Lesbian Ethics*, now in manuscript.
- ⁹ I describe the effects of incest with respect to my sexuality and emotional capabilities in, "Whose Past Are We Reclaiming?," *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* 13, Autumn 1984, pp. 16-35.
- ¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), pp. 365-66.

Lesbian Therapy

A Reader's Forum

An Open Letter to an Abusive Therapist

Abusive client/therapist relationships happen all too frequently. Is it because therapists are incompetent or just bad people? Or is it just the nature of therapy? In any case, how does the presence of lesbian/feminist therapists in our communities affect our relationships with them, with the lesbians in our lives, and with ourselves? This is an open letter to a lesbian/feminist therapist who acted unethically and unprofessionally with me, her client. I have heard of other l/f therapists who have acted similarly. So I'm writing this for all of us saying, "Sisters, surely we can do much better. . ."

"Before we get started, there's something I need to tell you. Two months ago, I terminated therapy with Claudia because I found myself attracted to her. I said that she could contact me if she wanted to pursue being lovers with me. She called last week and we had lunch together. I'm not sure what will happen but I told Claudia that I would have to tell you. We can talk about it one more time before our next session together. I think we can still continue therapy together."

Then you stopped. Your rehearsed speech over, you quietly sat expectant for my response. I had stopped breathing moments earlier when your words came crashing into my understanding. My mind raced to sort out what I thought I had just heard. Claudia had been my lover (more accurately, sexual partner) for about a month. That was a year ago. Indeed, *not* a very long time – hardly anything. But the quickness, intensity, and joy of our "relationship" had so affected me that I hadn't been able to let go of it. I had attached great importance to it. And now you, my lesbian/feminist therapist, were informing me that you were desiring to have a lover relationship with Claudia who, up until recently, had also been one of your clients!!

There are two dimensions to this situation: Claudia's and mine. I can only

offer an observer's view on Claudia's situation based on what little she's told me. Claudia went to therapy to work on a specific issue, basically relationship/non-monogamy/jealousy (it stemmed from the experience of her last long term relationship). She went to you partially because she perceived you as someone who had an outlook on and experience with what Claudia was seeking. You exploited her "process." Sure, it's possible for a therapist to be attracted to a client. There are ways of dealing with that. Discuss it with a colleague or with your own therapist. If that doesn't work, terminate therapy – but don't pursue a relationship! Oh, but isn't that unenlightened of me? Doesn't my narrowness short circuit the possibilities for women relating with each other? Isn't it possible you can work it out? Did you subconsciously think that you could help in practice (through relationship) what Claudia was struggling to do in theory (through therapy)? If so, I think you were wrong – because of the power and emotional imbalance inherent in a therapist/client relationship. For Claudia's sake, I hope I'm wrong.

But really it's up to Claudia to decide her situation. I can only reflect on my end of the experience. When you first told me about how you wanted to be lovers with Claudia, I felt betrayed and vulnerable. (How could you smugly claim for yourself a joy that I knew could no longer be mine?) I became overwhelmingly aware of the power imbalance between us. (You knew a lot about me, I really knew little about you. Anything I said could masterfully be twisted by the logic of psychobabble.) I couldn't help but feel the exploitation of my insecurities and self-consciousness. (What did you tell Claudia about me? Of course she'd want you, I'm not really attractive and I'm really possessive! Also, you knew I was attracted to you, why didn't you choose me?) Immediately I perceived myself as "the loser," "the victim," and finally, as "the one who just has to accept it because that's the way it is."

And while I cried my pain, kicked and screamed my hurt, and vented what little anger I could muster, you sat there calm, rational, and quiet. You crossed the line in pursuing your personal desires and then retreated into the role as therapist while I "dealt with it." We had stayed in the boundaries of our client/therapist relationship – until this incident, when you touched one of my rawest emotional nerves. (And later I was to feel further embarrassed and frustrated by my explosion, because once again, I let you know how I felt while from you I got stony silence.) I asked you why you were so quiet, didn't you have anything to say, how did you feel about me and the way I acted, didn't you have any reflections? And what did you say? No, you had said all you wanted to say, you had said how you felt, you had no reason to judge me. By your silence, how could I believe differently.

I think this situation opens up some important issues about the use of therapy in our lesbian communities. I'm sure there are many reasons why women go to therapy (crisis, particular issue, depression, whatever). But regardless of the issue, the purpose is to establish some sort of relationship in which a woman

has a friend, a confidant, an objective challenger, a miracle worker. For as long as I have been in therapy, I have always resented paying for someone I can trust and someone who listens. And, because she was being paid, I always doubted that the therapist liked me (though many of therapists claim to take a woman as a client only if they feel they can work with her).

Though I knew you weren't "my friend," it was those qualities I was searching for. But it is not friendship when one woman does all the emoting and the other is the objective listener. Though at times you may have shared your perspectives and feelings, the power equation was unbalanced (and therefore not mutual) because I was paying and you were the "professional," the one with the insight and knowledge.

Lesbian/feminist therapists see many women in the community as clients. Therefore, they have a lot of information about many women (including women who may not want to be known)! Do we really want so few women having that much information? (I don't, now that I know what you have done with the information that I gave you about myself.) Can any therapist be so objective about all that she encounters both professionally and socially? Where are the boundaries? I have run into you in some social settings. How am I supposed to act? Will you talk to me in any meaningful way? You once told me that whatever I said about myself in therapy you do not associate with me in the social setting. And I, on the other hand, don't know how to make small talk because I have shared the important intimacies of my life with you. I do not like this patriarchal fragmentation and partitioning. It doesn't allow us to encounter each other woman to woman.

I respected you and trusted you. I valued your insight and your self-confidence. Why did you feel it was so important to inform me about your actions with Claudia? Did you figure I'd find out somehow and that it would be better that I knew from you? Was it out of some sense of fairness? Did it have to do with your sense of integrity — your way of showing some openness and honesty? Or did you perceive somehow that I had not let go of my feelings about Claudia? Did you realize that it would spark some jealousy and worse yet some deep pain in me? And why didn't you help me sooner in therapy to let it go? Or did you have to satisfy your guilt by showing you were a caring feminist and therapist?

It doesn't matter. Though you may have felt yourself as honest and open, I perceived that you were being smug and self-righteous. You were the master. You were beyond judgment. I knew I could not argue with your righteousness. Nothing I could say would make you feel bad or guilty or wrong. There was nothing I could do to change the situation. I was powerless. And you still wanted to be my therapist. You honestly thought you still could be. When I decided to terminate, effective immediately, you wanted to continue in your role and meet with me to discuss closure. We had come so far and accomplished so much but, according to you, there were still things that I needed to

work on. I should still continue therapy. Well, thank-you for the condescension.

It has taken me a long time to begin to articulate the hurt, the anger, and the betrayal that I felt in this situation. And I have worked hard to maintain my self-esteem through this. I've wanted for so long to have you know what you've done. But as I said before, I could not approach your righteousness. I did not want to subject myself to your anger as you would try to justify yourself. You wouldn't take me seriously, as I now feel you never did. But most importantly, I did not want to give you anything more of myself. I did not want to become more vulnerable. You knew how I felt about Claudia. I, of course, would have felt bad regardless of whoever was to be her new sexual partner. But because of what passed between Claudia and me, and from my understanding of our conversations, I still, unfortunately, held on to the hope that we might get together again. But because her new lover turned out to be you, I felt mocked and betrayed. Not only because of my past with Claudia but also because you knew my insecurities around being an attractive sexual woman. You knew my self-confidence vulnerabilities. In some ways, this reopened my feelings of being crazy, stupid, and out of control. How could I have given you so much power in my life?

One of my perceptions of this experience comes as a question about women in therapy. Why did I undermine my own judgment? Why did I doubt my instincts? Your reputation, both positive and negative, preceded you. You were known to some as an excellent therapist. On the other hand, you were known as "sexually promiscuous," as emotionally cruel to your lovers, as a wedge between lovers in a relationship. I perceived you as sexually self-confident and aware. I was wary of going to a therapist whose sexuality and sensuality were so frightening to me. This uncomfortableness, however, was something I wanted to "overcome." I hoped to learn from you.

By investing my trust and confidence in a therapist, I handed my own authority over to someone else. Also, I didn't need to use my friends as confidants, thereby, of course, giving a certain superficiality to our relationships. How many other lesbians does this happen to? How does it affect the way lesbians in our communities treat and respond to each other? Fortunately, the friends to whom I spoke about this experience were very supportive. Also, the handing over of one's self-authority to the perceptions of a therapist continues the woman-as-victim cycle. I felt victimized in this situation. And though many l/f therapists think that therapy helps women to discover and claim their own power, this does not address the real power differential that exists between therapist and client.

Since this happened, I have seen you at some of the women's events in town. You are very solicitous to me. I am furious with you. And you have said that if there's anything I want to talk to you about you're willing to listen. Listen to this: Go to hell.

Recently, because of a conversation you had with a mutual friend, you

apologized to me. You called to say that you hadn't realized how betrayed I felt. You acknowledged that you made a mistake. But at this point, I'm not ready to accept your apology. It doesn't feel real or honest to me. I don't trust you. The bottom line is that you fucked up. An apology doesn't easily fix how I feel. Since you've broken a contract with me, I should demand the return of the fees I paid you. (Claudia should do the same.) This is not the first time you've said, "It'll never happen again." Maybe you should just stop, because saying you're sorry and not adjusting your behavior isn't acceptable. I'm not expecting you to be perfect. But I do have high expectations for the ethical behavior of women, especially lesbians, because we have so much creativity and life to offer to each other. We can't afford to abuse each other, we get enough of that from the patriarchy. Healing is essential.

I have learned, yet another time, that my strength lies in me. I am continuing to appreciate that fact. I don't easily trust people. Trust is something women have so little of in each other. Therapy is something that is billed as a relationship of trust and confidence. I trusted you. I like you. I respected you. You were a model of strength for me. Women have need to recognize other women as models. But I must ask one final question. In a relationship in which the power differential is clear, was I really being trusting? Or was I merely finely tuning the art of manipulation as a means for survival? In this world of patriarchy, women need to come together as allies in mutuality. I think I will now spend more intimate time with my friends.

Mev Miller

Malpractice

I am currently suing a lesbian feminist psychiatrist for medical malpractice. The ethical issue is abuse of power. Although I would like to give a detailed account of what happened in therapy prior to my decision to take legal action, I cannot do so until the lawsuit closes. I think, however, that it is my moral duty to publish a letter warning lesbians that it is possible to be severely abused by a woman who advertises herself as a lesbian feminist therapist.

This "healer" seduced, betrayed and abandoned me. She shattered my ability to trust. She broke my beliefs. She wrecked a long-term relationship, injuring my lesbian lover too. Years have passed and I remain shocked, distraught, and fragmented by the experience. Meanwhile this therapist continues to treat lesbian patients. So I would advise women to be painstakingly cautious about choosing a therapist. Investigate her background. Be thorough and skeptical. Ask how she views therapist/client sex; do not enter therapy with someone who approves of it or who considers the therapy relationship a "real" relationship. If you have the slightest flicker of doubt about the therapist, trust *your own* perceptions.

For myself, after my former therapist's psychic/sexual abuse of me, I don't trust therapists anymore. Why? Because the imbalance of power endemic to that "relationship" makes the patient/client vulnerable in ways that she would never otherwise allow herself to be, even in an intimate relationship with a lover. The very definition of therapy requires one to open up more deeply than she would in any normal relationship. In this abnormal state of childlike dependency (transference), the patient/client, no matter how mature and/or sensible she usually is, can no longer be responsible for her behavior within the therapeutic situation in the way she can and should be for her choices in a real relationship between equals. Again, the therapeutic relationship is not *real*, no matter how much we may wish it to be. One woman unveils her dearest secrets, bares her soul, while the other observes in unshared safety, risking relatively little. This one-sided exchange fosters a false sense of security, a sense of absoluteness and certainty that one cannot get from authentic relationships. Therein, of course, lies both the appeal and the danger of therapy. As Mary Daly wrote in her unsurpassed analysis of feminist therapy in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*:

The same incongruities that are inherent in the role of females who would be christian priests and ministers are ingrained in the functions of the newly ordained female priests of therapy. . . . My criticism concerns therapy as a way of life, as an institutionalized system of creating and perpetuating false needs, of making and maintaining depression, of focusing/draining women's energy through fixation upon periodic psychological "fixes." My criticism concerns the emotional, economic, and intellectual hooking of women into a perpetual procession of cyclic re-turning, which provides false security and prevents independent risking/questing. . . . I suggest that the god of therapy is therapy itself For this reason, any criticism of therapy threatens/terrorizes the therapeutized. . . . Like religion, therapy tends to replace transcendence, assuming/consuming all process, draining creative energy, eliminating Originality, mislabeling leaps of imagination, shielding the Self against Self-strengthening Aloneness. The Self becomes a spectator of her own frozen, caricatured history. (pp. 280-83)

When I first selected this psychiatrist, I considered myself superbly discerning and exceptionally insightful about human character. What I failed to see was the tragic extent to which a woman can misuse power. Wearing a mask of kindness and compassion, appearing to be wise and altruistic, this "advanced" thinker used her professional skills and personal charisma to persuade me to give my Self over completely to her care. Although I still agonize over why, she ultimately proved not merely indifferent to my welfare, but hostile towards me and even destructive to my survival. As humiliating as it feels, in part, to say this, the fact is that she almost destroyed me. In spite of months and months of unremitting anguish, terrifying alienation along with the blankness of being that

makes despair seem lighthearted in comparison, I am alive. But after devastation of this magnitude occurs, one can perhaps never entirely recover; if a lost limb can never be regrown, the same is true for psychic mutilation.

I am aware that by naming what happened to me – by pointing a finger at a therapist – I risk condemnation. Several close friends, themselves in therapy, have found it necessary to say to me that what happened to me could never happen to them. In other words, they perceive themselves as different from and therefore safer than the woman abused by another woman. They need to make it clear to themselves and to me that I am "other." And in this way they unintentionally objectify me, perpetuating the humiliation begun by my ex-therapist. Isn't this kind of disassociation similar to what takes place when we assert, "I could never be raped. Rape happens to her, not to me. I'm different. I know something she doesn't.?"

Besides, what woman would think it necessary to protect herself from another woman, especially from a woman who calls herself a lesbian feminist healer? The man on the suicide prevention line, upon hearing that I had been abused by a psychiatrist, urged me to rush to another therapist. "But this time choose a woman," he advised. It would seem that safety is nowhere to be found in patriarchy. Except, maybe. . . (and I am still only falteringly believing this) safety within oneself as a dignified, solitary Self, distinct from social relationships, rooted in nature, and without profound answers, but still somehow afloat, and reaching out through words for some thread of kinship with others.

Anonymous

Lesbian Feminist Therapy: A Report and Some Thoughts

The origins of this issue on lesbian feminist therapy go back several years, when I went to a "lesbian feminist" therapist with my lover, for couples counseling. I had avoided therapy for many years, but thought of couples counseling as not-quite therapy. At our first meeting, after hearing both of our initial stories, this therapist turned to my lover and said, "I'm in a similar position to yours now in my relationship." I felt very unsafe very fast. Since, not surprisingly, my lover liked this therapist better than I did, she asked the therapist a couple of sessions later if she'd consider doing individual counseling with either one of us at the same time as we were doing couples counseling. The therapist said, yes, she could be objective and separate the two kinds of sessions in her mind. I said that I didn't believe that kind of objectivity was possible. She got angry at me that I was doubting her word, and took up a good portion of our time trying to fight with me. There were several similar incidents, and I terminated the counseling after about two months. Recently I read an article in *Women & Therapy* by two "feminist therapists," who reported on a "technique" with a heterosexual

couple of siding with the male in initial sessions. This is to keep him from bolting. These therapists viewed themselves as treating the relationship rather than individuals (it's called "systems theory"); thus, they did not have to confront their dishonesty to their clients. Very convenient, no actual persons to be responsible to. Perhaps, I thought on reading this article, our l/f therapist had been using this technique on my lover and I. This did not make me feel better, I do not like being lied to and manipulated by lesbians.

A friend of mine had a very similar experience in couples counseling with a lesbian therapist, at about the same time I did. We were both very angry, and were frustrated that there was no way to call these therapists to account. We wanted to write down our stories and get someone to publish them, but the possibility seemed too remote to pursue. Moving forward a few years to the present, recently a friend (not a therapist but in their professional network) reported a feminist therapist saying to her, "What are we going to do about all these lesbian therapists sleeping with their clients?" What indeed, I said, and decided to do this issue of *Lesbian Ethics*.

Since that decision, I have learned a lot. For one thing, every lesbian to whom I mentioned the topic had a story. Here are some of them, from around the country:

A prominent lesbian therapist was counseling a lesbian couple. She counseled Lesbian1 to leave Lesbian2, moved Lesbian1 into her house, and the two became lovers.

A prominent lesbian feminist therapist was counseling a lesbian couple. Without the knowledge of Lesbian1 she had an affair with Lesbian2 while couple counseling was continuing.

A prominent lesbian feminist therapist, who wrote a column for the local lesbian paper, formed a therapy cult like those described in Laura Brown's paper in this issue. She became lovers with one client and made her a co-therapist. She insisted that her clients engage in marathon counseling sessions with her, moved out of town, and would call them at all hours on the phone to do "counseling." Several of her clients filed complaints which resulted in her losing her license.

Two therapists doing weight-loss counseling advertised in the lesbian community by using a picture of a fat woman with a circle and bar symbol over her, meaning "No Fat Women" (you know, like the bumper sticker, "No Fat Chicks").

A lesbian said to me, "Most of my friends who go to therapy have a story about sleeping with a therapist. My drug dealer [the speaker is now clean and sober] had sex with her therapist and they used to take drugs together."

A lesbian therapist is known for socializing extensively with groups of her clients.

A prominent lesbian therapist, after gaining her lesbian client's trust and learning about the incest in her past, became lover's with her and then began behaving like the client's mother had behaved during her childhood.

A prominent lesbian therapist has had several affairs with clients and made one her co-therapist; they now advertize together in the local lesbian paper.

A prominent lesbian therapist, recently elected an officer in a statewide professional organization finds a new lover among her clients frequently and has a serious alcohol and drug problem.

A lesbian feminist therapist expressed concern over the frequency with which therapists in her lesbian community break the confidentiality of their clients. One prominent therapist, after giving a lesbian psychological tests, revealed the test results to the lesbian's friends, asking them to convince the lesbian to enter therapy.

According to Laura Brown, currently head of the Women's Division of the American Psychological Association, 14 of the 18 complaints against therapists now being adjudicated by the APA are complaints against women therapists.

I could go on, but I hope this gives the flavor of the data. The first thing that impressed me, after I had gotten over my shock at the extent of the problem, was that, although I was hearing a lot of second-hand stories about abusive therapists, only two lesbians had sent personal accounts to *Lesbian Ethics*. The two pieces are eloquent and instructive, but they are only two. I think that the intimacy of therapy, and the powerlessness and humiliation one feels when therapy goes wrong are so intense that it is difficult for a lesbian to reveal these experiences to others in print.

The second thing that I noticed was that lesbian therapists have known about these abuses for years. For example, feminist therapists did manage to bring an end to the Colorado therapy cult described by Laura Brown in this issue, but the rest of us did not read about it in our local feminist newspaper. We may talk about individual cases in our communities, but the victims remain isolated victims. To my knowledge, Laura Brown's paper is the first time that a lesbian feminist therapist (or any therapist) has taken the issue of therapy abuses to the lesbian press.

The sorry truth is that too many lesbian therapists are behaving much like male therapists: Abusing their clients, forming therapy cults, or protecting therapists that do. The demand characteristics of the profession seem stronger than whatever ethics are innate to lesbianism. I doubt this problem is limited to therapy; I would expect to find a similar problem in other professions and in other places in the lesbian community. I do think the facts confirm the need for *Lesbian Ethics*. Our community is not going to grow itself, we are going to have to build it consciously.

A practical solution to part of the therapist problem would be for lesbians who are deeply concerned with these issues to start a lesbian feminist therapy

referral service. Therapists who agreed to practice according to written ethical principles, such as Laura Brown suggests in this issue, would be listed with the service. Then lesbians seeking a lesbian feminist therapist would know where to go to find one, and lesbians who felt a therapist had violated those principles in therapy would have somewhere to go with their complaints.

As for therapy itself, for or against, the argument that stays most strongly with me is Caryatis Cardea's, in this issue: Who are these lesbian therapists, what are their politics, and HOW MUCH DO THEY KNOW? I could certainly use a good lesbian therapist. Everyone I know could use a good lesbian therapist. I don't see anything wrong with learning from others, whether they be parents, teachers, or therapists. But I need a therapist who doesn't exist yet, a therapist who not only takes it for granted that being revolutionary is essential to health (there are a few of those), but who also knows HOW to live in this world AS A REVOLUTIONARY and be as happy and well-balanced as possible while doing it. I think we may be building this body of knowledge slowly, together, but no one yet knows the answers.

When I think about it, it is clearly absurd to expect these large numbers of perfectly average, often young lesbians to be wise enough to either understand or be able to help with many of the problems in lesbians' lives. And it is worse than absurd to make ourselves so vulnerable, by revealing the intimate details of our lives to someone we know almost nothing about.

I do think that often the impulse to become a therapist is a genuine one. Particularly if a lesbian has had a more than usually traumatic childhood, it can be healing for both her and others if, as her work, she helps others to survive as she herself has survived. Such lesbians often have a great deal to give. And it is in the area of childhood damage that I think therapy can be of some use, helping us to discover and learn how to use those resources that we have now but did not learn to use when we were children. Unfortunately, however, healthy motives and even talent do not always mean a therapist will avoid abusive behavior. According to Laura Brown, "Usually the ethics offenders are 'magicians,' wonderful therapists until they cross over the line; that's part of how they can do it, they're hypnotized by their own splendor" (personal communication, August 29, 1985).

The impulse to seek therapy is also a pro-life impulse at its core. We want control over our lives, we want to be happy and loving and creative. But when revolution or social change does not seem possible, then we are the only thing in our lives that we can work on. The price we pay, though, is very high. We blame the victim, we blame ourselves. That is, having a clear political perspective means accepting that we are victims. That acceptance is not too difficult to maintain when the lesbian movement is at its height, since we believe we have the power to change, and in fact are changing, the system that is victimizing us. In a time of political conservatism, however, our own victimhood is a very painful truth to hold on to. Better, perhaps, to blame ourselves, not men, and thus continue to try to fix our lives, by fixing ourselves.

If therapy is often not the answer and yet the impulse to relieve the pain is healthy and insistent, we need to find some better ways. Could we return to consciousness-raising, groups do you think? We left them because we were impatient to change the world. Now we know patience is required. I have been in a support group for over 3 years; not a consciousness-raising group but very helpful and healing. Ruth Mountaingrove's contribution to this forum, next, shows us another way. We will need many such.

Jeanette Silveira

Touch: The Ethics of Nourishment*

What brought me into therapy years ago when there were no lesbian therapists, that I knew of at least, was touch. My inability to touch a friend of mine who was strapped to a hospital bed in traction. A woman friend I loved and desperately wanted to reach out to, to hold. There might as well have been a wall of glass between us in that hospital room. I was paralyzed by a *thou shalt not* I only felt but didn't know the origin of or even understand, until this year when a friend said, yes, women in the nuclear family are allowed to touch their husbands and their children, but no one else: they are owned.

And I was a woman in a nuclear family. I had made a substitution for touch by touching with my voice, putting feeling into my voice, but here it did not work with my hospitalized friend who needed to be held in my arms.

I was very upset, recognizing that I was less of a human being for being so tied up. Not recognizing I was literally tied up internally in my gut (which I have learned will tell me a lot if I will listen) and in my tongue. Tongue tied. Unable to tell her I cared for her. Unable to talk about why I couldn't touch her.

I began therapy with a woman therapist who was also a long time friend. Analysis with a friend was not considered the good way to go but she solved that by cutting off all other communications with me as long as we were in this arrangement. When before we would have had lunch together downtown, or gone to a symphony concert or to the art museum, or talked to each other at parties, or shared our writing, no exchange of that nature was allowed.

Instead I was kept very busy working on my dreams, or current situations and past childhood. And gradually I was brought into contact with my feelings which in the beginning were overwhelming to me, since they had been buried through my childhood and half my adult life. And gradually this work with her began to release the *shalt nots* that bound me.

I would still need the sisterhood of the early women's liberation movement to really reach out to my sisters and they to me. I became a lesbian through this experience and rather shortly after that came out with a woman who would be my friend and partner for thirteen years.

It was at the close of that relationship that I realized that the problem of touch was still with me/us. I wrote in my journal:

Have been mulling over touch. Realizing I do not touch myself much. Wondering why that is. Who told me I couldn't touch myself? Who benefits when I don't?

Well the massage people for one, the hot tub people, the sauna establishments. All those consumer things: candy, sweets, clothes manufacturers, car salesmen. Whole sections of the economy benefit when I give (buy) myself one of these things as a substitute for loving touch – my own or others. Since these substitutes are just that, I am always needing more.

Where am I given permission to touch myself? Washing my face, brushing my teeth, combing my hair, taking a bath or a shower, if, the big IF, these are done in a practical, utilitarian manner. The idea that I might wash my face – touch myself in a sensual way – stroke my body as I clean myself, as a cat uses her tongue to clean and soothe herself, is not an idea that is being championed. Bathing is to be done thoroughly, but without pleasure, and a brisk rubdown with a towel will stimulate circulation. But nowhere have I seen suggestions that a sensual stroking of the towel on the body is as good as a candy bar and more satisfying.

Genital touching is reluctantly permitted. The billboards may proclaim that I will come alive with coke but they do not extoll the joys of cliteration. And even cliteration can be utilitarian. A way of relieving sexual tension, rather than a loving of myself.

I find that with all these codicils that defend me from touching myself I frequently do not benefit from the hugs I am given because I am not there to receive them.

So I stopped writing and began stroking myself. I have a smooth skin with no rough patches and few bumps. At first the touch was utilitarian. Then I told myself to pay attention, to feel this. And I felt the tingling electricity of my own touching. I touched my thighs, my breasts, my belly, and found myself going to sleep. (When I just touched my forehead where I have a slight headache, I yawned.)

Writing of touch is giving me a headache as well as a feeling of embarrassment, as though I am dealing with a taboo subject in my culture. And I am. We can talk about touch, even write about it in an "objective" manner, but bring the idea of snuggling or cuddling with one or more women into the conversation with a group of lesbian women and "objectivity" flies out the window.

The taboo against touching only seems broken when there is sexual bonding. Even then there are women who put parts of their bodies off bounds even to their lovers. *Don't touch me there, or there, or there.* Soon the lover touches nowhere.

And while I haven't tried this yet, I'll bet talking about touching myself, ourselves, will not get much of a response except a backing off. *Thou shalt not touch* is one of our built in *thous* even in lesbian land.

One woman told me after I had talked of cuddling to a group of lesbians, as we were sitting around in a collective livingroom, that for her cuddling was more intimate than sexuality. Another that she had never been able to separate the two. Another woman asked me if I had ever cuddled other women when I was in a couple and when I said yes, said, "then you weren't monogamous." And another said that what I was talking about was very threatening to the couples there. That they were all in a shaky place. And to the singles I might add. And to me continually placing myself at risk of rejection, disappointment, misunderstanding.

And yet, we all want snuggling. Some more. Some less. And it's probably one of the main reasons we stay in couples for that touch, for that tenderness.

We live in a scarcity society where the less there is of something the more expensive it is. Where artificial scarcity is part of the economy. Yet the universe is abundant. Without artificial scarcity there could be plenty of touching, hugging, cuddling for all of us.

I see instead that we give each other sweets. That it is quite permissible to go into the kitchen and make a batch of candy to share with a group of women. Nobody backs off from that. It may not be good for your body, it may not be food, but in lesbian land it is the substitute for touch.

I have been traveling now for four months. Sometimes I meet women who are into cuddling and we do. Sometimes there are women who consider it as a future possibility. Sometimes there are women who want to be lovers. I am not talking of strangers. I am talking of old and new friends. Mostly there is a kind of shocked reaction – as though snuggling, except with a lover, was taboo. The suggestion of non-sexual snuggling with a friend: going to bed to cuddle, talk, and to sleep is surprisingly new, at least on the west coast where I have been talking to women.

What are the ethics of being a snugglebuddy? One is honesty. Looking back in my journal I find:

We are going to sleep in the same bed . . . and snuggle in the morning. It's been six weeks since I've snuggled. My friend says she needs it too.

How do I feel? Enjoying cuddling – not really feeling sexual at all. I told my friend that to find a woman who likes and needs to cuddle as much as I do is like finding an oasis in the desert.

I can be warm and open without being sexual. Little jealousies surface and I tell myself no one owns anyone else. It's the owning that makes for the isolation. Generously spread out warmth can give healing to many women. My friend has that courage to offer and to ask that made my week so good. Also I could accept both my need and the possibility of its being met. I did not deny or turn off the possibilities.

In the case of another cuddler, I said I'd be into cuddling, would she? She would, so we did. Somewhat tense, but over all nice and warm. In the morning we talked a while. The intimacy I like.

So what are the ethics of snuggling? For me, not being sexual. Being open, tender and warm. Not being in or falling into desire. This last did happen once with a snuggler friend of mine some years ago. She said, "I just went up in smoke. So I had to tell the other woman. She was not turned on so I went and slept somewhere else."

For me, sexuality is a different and much deeper dimension. Snuggling is friendly and nourishing. Sexuality is passionate and life changing.

It is not that snuggling can't move into passion but that if it does it should be by mutual consent, I feel, with a conscious decision having been reached by both women (or more?).

Snuggling as nourishment is available with a larger number of women, with much less jealousy.

I met a woman at a recent spirituality festival who came to my workshop on Nourishment and said she snuggled with 5 other women on a regular basis while being sexual only with her lover. And she liked to snuggle without clothes. Felt she needed all that touch.

So far I've worn clothes – pajamas – when snuggling. No clothes says sexuality to me but I'm not sure why. In my culture you are naked to your lover. But then I think of women's festivals and Michigan where, if you wish, you are naked to everyone. So I may try that sometime if it is agreeable to both of us.

Big spooning is nice. Brings back memories of cuddling with mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins. It feels nurturing too. And that's the whole point. This kind of being with is food for both of us. A friendly embrace for me is whatever I and my cuddler feel comfortable with. It is intimate but not sexual.

If you have ever been to a festival where women feed each other, if you have ever fed a friend food and been fed in return, you will know how nurturing that can be. And how much less it takes to be filled. In the same way cuddling, snuggling, touch, can feed us.

One of my friends who read this felt it was simply that my own internal girl was not getting enough strokes, enough cuddling. But I take care of my little girl. I cuddle my four year old, tell her I love her, am loving with her, and if she's having a tantrum I understand that I have not been paying enough attention to her.

I feel rather that the problem of touch is an adult problem and have tried to examine some of its roots and how we might begin to work on it.

Ruth Mountaingrove

**I have been traveling around on the West Coast having discussions with many women concerning cuddling. I found, when my partner of 13 years closed the door on this intimacy at the same time as she took a lover, that deprivation of touch was the hardest thing I experienced. This particle is part of my "research."*

Many thanks to Mary Forst, Karen Anna, Dianna Seagiver, Marianna, Billie Jo and Germane for giving me insights and raising questions. And to all the women in the Southern Oregon Writers Group for "hearing me into speech." (The phrase is Nelle Morton's.)

Power, Responsibility, Boundaries: Ethical Concerns for the Lesbian Feminist Therapist*

Laura Brown

Since lesbian feminist therapists first began to name ourselves such in the early 1970's, we have been developing a perspective on psychotherapy that by and of itself is an ethical stance. It is a philosophy of psychotherapy that arose from a political and ethical critique of the actions and attitudes of traditional, misogynist schools of psychotherapy, and from a sense of outrage at the damage done to women, both lesbian and heterosexual, by traditional psychotherapists. The world of feminist therapy was perhaps the first place in the helping professions where being a lesbian was positively valued, rather than treated as a shameful fact to be hidden. As such, lesbians have been active and visible feminist therapists, and have contributed much to the development of feminist therapy's theory and practice.

Yet it has only been recently that lesbian feminist therapists have begun to discuss the ethical issues that we ourselves face in our work. I see two reasons for the delay. First, I believe that there was the mistaken notion that women who called themselves feminist therapists were ethical *per se*. Unethical, exploitative behavior was what the "bad guys" did. Ergo, we did not have to concern ourselves too much with ethics as long as we were sufficiently politically correct. Second, I think that many of the ethical concerns operative for lesbian feminist therapists derive from a world not envisioned by those who wrote the ethics codes of the helping professions. The social structures of a

*A version of this paper was presented at the Third Advanced Feminist Therapy Institute, held in Oakland, California, in March, 1984. My thinking on ethical concerns for feminist therapists in general and lesbian feminist therapists in particular owes much to the women who participated in that meeting, and in the Fourth Advanced Feminist Therapy Institute, held in Miami, Florida, in April, 1985. Without the work done by these women and others in the Feminist Therapy Institute, this paper would lack much in richness and meaning.

I am very interested in comments and feedback. Please write to me at PO Box 20366, Broadway Station, Seattle, WA 98102.

lesbian community, the concept of egalitarian relationships between therapists and their clients, the impact of operating in an all-woman social and emotional context: None of these possibilities are within the world described by the ethical code in which I was raised, that of psychology. For instance, standard psychological ethics assume a world in which therapists and their clients rarely if ever encounter one another outside the therapy hour, and in which the roles and relationships of clients and therapists are fixed and defined only by the therapy context. This does not allow for lesbian reality, a world in which, because of both the small size of our community and the oppression which we experience, we cross one another's paths constantly. The women who see me for therapy are likely to also see me at women's music events, at parties of mutual friends and acquaintances, in political groups, at the women's bookstore. Our training as therapists in a heterosexual and heterosexist environment leaves lesbian feminist therapists with significant ethical lacunae that our experiences have taken time to fill (Berman, 1985; Brown, 1984, 1985).

There are now several pressing reasons for lesbian feminist therapists to be creating, codifying, and acting on our own codes of ethics. A positive reason is the goal of reducing the influence that models created by and for patriarchal institutions have on this vital part of our thinking. It is odd that while critiquing thoroughly other aspects of traditional psychotherapy, we have left ethical codes alone (except to add to them, as has been the case in psychology, where feminists have been responsible for the adoption of strong language against sexual exploitation and harassment of clients, students, and coworkers). A lesbian feminist code of ethics would incorporate the realities of lesbian lives into a new ethical model. In addition, such a code would embody proactive, rather than reactive ethics; such a proactive stance is a hallmark of feminist ethical thinking, and thus of ethics for lesbian feminist therapists (Rosewater, 1985).

Yet another, and less attractive, reason for developing and implementing our own therapy ethics is the need for ethical, critical feedback among lesbian feminist therapists. Self-described feminist therapists have been known to commit abuses of psychotherapy. On occasion, feminist principles have been invoked in support of these abuses. For example, feminist therapists (I use this description because the therapists in question have done so, not because I personally see such actions as having anything to do with feminist therapy) who have become sexually involved with women clients during and shortly after therapy have rationalized that, since they and their clients were both women, there was no opportunity for an abuse of power or for psychological coercion entering into the sexual relationship. At times, abusive therapists have utilized feminist principles of equality of power to support a position that banning of sex between women therapists and women clients would be anti-feminist, since such a rule ascribes more power to one woman than another!

Although it has seemed intuitively obvious to me why sexual involvement with current and former clients is an ethical violation, that point has not always

been so apparent either to abusers or their potential victims, so I will spell out here the issues as I see them. Therapy as a relationship between two people contains both obvious, real-world relational components, and subtle, symbolic, and often non-conscious components, traditionally referred to by the term "transference." However, since this term has heavy overtones of psychoanalytic theory, from which it derives, I will use the term "symbolic relationship" to refer to these non-obvious and non-conscious components of the therapy relationship (an earlier article, [Brown, 1983], critiques the use of the term "transference" and other psychoanalytic concepts by feminist therapists). One extremely common aspect of a symbolic relationship in therapy is a symbolic replication of a parent-child relationship. This can happen in a number of ways: It can be because of the therapist's role as nurturer, because the client idealizes the therapist and internalizes her values, because the client experiences herself as "little," regressed, or dependent in relationship to the therapist, or for a variety of other reasons. I think that most feminist therapists would see this symbolic component as being an important part of the process of therapy, a level at which intimacy and trust develop, and where the caring, concern, and parent-like feelings of a therapist find their expression.

In consequence, a sexualization of the relationship by the therapist is very much like a parent's sexualization of a relationship with a child. At a symbolic level, the parent-child relationship often exists; and it is usually because of this level that sexualization occurs on the therapist's part. The damage done when a therapist sexualizes the therapy relationship is similar to the damage done by incest. It is not, in my estimation, the case that the client is a consenting adult with equal power. Rather, in most cases where therapists sexually exploit their clients, the client experiences herself as very dependent upon the therapist and as needing that person's love and praise; consequently, she is willing to comply with the therapist's requests for sexual contact. Rather than molesting actual six-year-olds, the sexualizing therapist molests them symbolically (Bouhoutsos, Holroyd, Lerman, Forer, and Greenberg, 1983). (Discussion of this problem with other lesbian feminist therapists, and my experiences as an advocate for sexually exploited clients of other therapists, suggests, although not conclusively, that many of the clients offended against sexually by their therapists are incest survivors. In the woman-woman cases of which I am aware, many of the offenders were also incest survivors.)

In an extensive review of the clinical and research literature on sex between clients and therapists, conducted by Hannah Lerman, a feminist therapist, one theme emerges. Sexual contact, including all behaviors along the sexual continuum from verbal sexual harassment to genital contact, is hurtful to clients. It can, in some instances, be the catalyst for suicide attempts, and is thus potentially fatal to women (Lerman, 1985). Since women are far and away the majority of victims of this exploitative behavior, this issue is of particular concern for lesbian feminist therapists, and of even greater concern when the abuse is by a

therapist who calls herself a lesbian feminist. Although it is true that in feminist therapy power is shared and that therapist and client should grow into a relationship of both greater symbolic and greater real-world equality, it is my belief that the destructive potential of sexual involvement remains even after therapy has ended. We can and do grow up to become our parents' equals and perhaps their friends. We do not, however, grow into their actual or potential lovers. The same should be true where lesbian feminist therapists and our former clients are concerned.

Some abusive therapists have condoned the creation of what are essentially therapy cults (see Temerlin and Temerlin, 1982, for an in-depth description of therapy cults), in which all clients are friends and/or lovers of each other and the therapist, and all "do therapy" with each other in all settings. Although Temerlin and Temerlin describe only male-headed cults in their article, I have seen, as have other lesbian-feminist therapists, that lesbian therapists can and do create cult structures around them. Indeed, it seems as though almost every major city has had or currently has at least one such lesbian therapy cult. Rationales stated for this cult-creating behavior by lesbian therapists have included: It is necessary in a misogynist world to create a support system for women; there should not be lines drawn between what is "therapy" and what is "friendship"; and, the most frequently offered rationale in the experience of this author, women and/or feminism are intuitively therapeutic (at this point the conversation is usually heavily sprinkled with quotes from Mander and Rush's *Feminism as Therapy* to support this particular belief, since that early document of feminist therapy does naively suggest that good woman energy is all you need to heal from oppression).

Each lesbian therapist is likely to know of at least one self-described feminist therapist in her own community who has engaged in abusive behaviors and used such arguments to support her stand. Each of us has, likely, known the sense of perplexity and confusion regarding the appropriate actions to take in such cases of abuse of therapy by feminists. Some of us have not wanted to air the dirty linen of feminist therapy on the laundry lines of the patriarchal system, and often even the ethical structures of our professions have not offered the means for dealing with abuses of therapy by so-called lesbian-feminist therapists. For instance, often the offending therapist belongs to no organization that would expel her, or is outside of the licensing system, and has nothing to lose. Even supporting clients in bringing civil suits against offending lesbian feminist therapists has been difficult. For one thing, rarely do such therapists have either malpractice insurance or sufficient personal assets to generate damage monies for the exploited former client. For another, exploited clients are often among the most vulnerable in the lesbian community; in the closet, at risk of loss of livelihood or children should their lesbianism be revealed, which would invariably occur if a lawsuit were to be brought. The very abusive and patriarchal nature of the legal system also presents a barrier to action for lesbians who have

been offended against sexually by their therapists.

Some of us have also found ourselves challenged personally by abusive therapists regarding our right to confront their behaviors. We have often heard that since there is no agreed-upon code of ethical behavior for feminist therapy, we are only stating our own opinion, no more valid than the opinion of the therapist that we believe to be abusive. We have been, on occasion, accused of gossiping, bad-mouthing "sisters," and slander. One well-known author on feminist therapy issues, who conducted an abusive therapy cult in Colorado for a number of years, accused me of being slanderous, and implied that she might take legal action against me if I continued to inform people that she had been sexual with clients, and abused and exploited others non-sexually. Although I continue to share that information in person, my not doing so in print here indicates my unwillingness to undertake the lawsuit that I am sure would follow upon my sharing of her name in print. The complexity of the problem can, I believe, be inferred from my own difficulties in finding an effective mode of action against therapists who violate ethical norms in ways that are particularly harmful to clients.

An additional ethical concern that moves me in the direction of the creation of our own ethical code is that of the ethics of theories that lesbian-feminist therapists use as conceptual frameworks for the conduct of psychotherapy. Fifteen years ago, a lesbian-feminist therapist calling herself "psychodynamic-feminist," "Jungian-feminist," or "Reichian-feminist" would have found herself called into question by other feminists for her willingness to utilize theories that were by and of themselves sexist and misogynist. In 1985, such "hyphenated-feminist" therapists are common. Since the misogyny and sexism of the traditional theories have not changed, how can lesbian feminist therapists ethically incorporate those theories into our work? If psychoanalytic theory was misogynist and harmful to women fifteen years ago, what makes it any less so now? The very paradigms by which lesbian-feminist therapists understand women's growth, development, and healing processes create ethical questions of a kind undreamed of by the men who framed the traditional ethical codes of the helping professions.

In short, we need to act responsibly as an integral part of the exercise of our power as feminist therapists, and we need to create structures that will serve to increasingly empower each of us to consider ethical concerns in our own lives and work. The guidelines suggested in this paper are more an expression of the need for feminist therapy to begin claiming that which is its own and to be consciously responsible during that growth process than they are a proposal to control abuses. However, these guidelines will make clear the kinds of power held by lesbian therapists in relationship to our clients and our women's communities, and they will clearly define and give examples of abuses of that power. As a professional group, we have been unfortunately true to our socialization as women regarding power. We have had difficulty knowing ourselves

capable of overt power (Smith & Siegal, 1983); we certainly did not envision ourselves capable of the sorts of power abuse that we have observed in men. We are, and I know that I am, still frightened on occasion by the need for acknowledging our power, and so we move slowly toward the codification of structures that will make our power visible and tangible. A code of ethics for feminist therapy is just such a frightening step, and it is also a validation of our knowledge that we are, in feminist and womanly ways, capable of power. It is an acceptance of our responsibilities as therapists in lesbian communities, and it is a confrontation with self that we must engage in or be disabled as effective change agents for others.

The responsible use of power is thus a theme that must inform our ethical standards. One of the truly revolutionary actions of feminist therapy has been our insistence on comprehending and demystifying the power dynamics that flow in the relationships between clients and therapists (Sturdivant, 1980; Greenspan, 1983; Brown & Liss-Levinson, 1981). "Responsible" can be defined in Daly-an terms: capable of response, listening to, aware of the needs of, aware of our impact upon. Power here will be conceptualized as the capacity for impact; following Smith & Siegal's model (1983), both covert and overt methods of having impact will be defined and described as "power."

Proposed Ethical Principles

I. *Lesbian feminist therapists empower clients regarding issues of privilege by giving support and space to speak regarding these concerns, and by sharing in the responsibility for the mutually satisfactory resolution of these issues.*

Lesbian feminist therapists recognize that there are many ways in which privilege can create an inequality and imbalance of power in any relationship between two people, be they therapist and client, parent and child, friends, or lovers. Factors to be taken into account include, but are not limited to: Racial, i.e., white-skin, privilege, heterosexual privilege, educational privilege, class privilege, privilege stemming from youth, able-bodiedness, thinness, "attractiveness," and financial resources. Feminist therapists are aware of how they and their clients are similar and different in degree of privilege. They maintain an awareness of their own feelings regarding privileges held by their clients that they do not share, and do not abuse power covertly by experiencing themselves as potential victims of their more privileged clients. They are aware of feelings their clients may have regarding privileges held by the therapist and not shared by the client, and demonstrate that awareness by initiating analysis and discussion of these issues in the therapy context, rather than requiring clients to educate them regarding issues of privilege. Feminist therapists do not assume that shared gender with women clients in any way obviates the importance of examining the effect of differences in privilege on power balance in the therapy relationship.

Many non-feminist therapists have said that this principle simply describes the norms of "good therapy practice" for any therapist, and that these are issues of quality of practice, not of ethics. This precisely illustrates my point about the proactive stance of a lesbian-feminist therapist's ethical code. For the very practice of therapy to have any ethical justification in a world of immense and on-going external oppression of lesbians, the ethical principle of sharing of power must be a cornerstone of therapy. Therapy where clients are not empowered to move into positions of equality with therapists is not feminist therapy. Our standard of practice, as lesbian therapists, must express feminist therapy ethics. For feminist therapists, I do not think it merely advisable to practice in this way; I see this as an issue that helps define feminist therapy ethics as broader than the ethics of traditional approaches to psychotherapy. Ethically, a lesbian-feminist therapist must always take issues of race, class, culture, etc., into account in formulating assessment and interventions, and must do so from a position of respect for differences, and awareness of the power imbalances inherent in those differences. In doing so she obeys an ethical imperative for the practice of good therapy.

II. To avoid harm from overlapping roles, feminist therapists attend to the zone of overlap and develop strategies for the prevention of abuses of personal power.

Lesbian feminist therapists acknowledge that some overlap of roles between life outside of therapy and the therapy session may be unavoidable. Overlap occurs because we operate within the context of a community of women, in which we must participate in order to maintain our connections to our communities and to avoid the risks of isolation and elitism. Consequently, lesbian-feminist therapists must be cognizant of the potentials for abuse of power that can occur when roles overlap. Temerlin & Temerlin (1982) point out that the blurring of boundaries and roles between clients and therapists is a trait of therapy cults, and feminist therapists must thus acknowledge that the norm of overlap creates a situation where cultic attitudes and behaviors are a risk.

A. When clients and therapist operate in the same social and/or political settings, the therapist is ethically obligated to initiate the development, with the client's participation, of strategies for the protection of the client's confidentiality; as well as for the recognition by the client of the therapist's rights and responsibilities away from the actual therapy session. There should be agreements regarding the initiation of contact in social settings, and regarding that information about the client that she considers to be in the public domain, and thus discussable in a public context when the two meet. Such strategy development precedes, when possible, the social contact. Such strategies take into account issues of women's ego boundaries as developed in patriarchal culture. Thus, lesbian-feminist therapists must hold and act upon an awareness that behaviors and

roles between women tend to operate on a continuum, rather than in an either/or fashion. When we encounter our client at a concert, she is both client and sister concert-goer, we are both therapist and sister-audience. The roles blur and blend; it is our ethical responsibility as therapists to attend to where the tangles can develop, and to work them out in the process of therapy. The many layers of our relationships with our clients are most evident in this way. I have no more power than my client when I'm in an audience at a concert and she's the producer. In fact, she has more there, in a very real-world way. If I do not, in a conscious fashion, acknowledge that shift from setting to setting, I am violating the most basic precept of lesbian-feminist therapy ethics. If I do not offer support and protection in therapy for coping with these changes, I am doing bad therapy, ethics aside.

B. A lesbian feminist therapist is ethically obligated not to become sexually involved with a client. Lesbian feminist therapists know that sexual attraction can develop between client and therapist, and that this is not always an expression of symbolic feelings. When a feminist therapist develops a sexual attraction to her client, she is ethically obligated to not bring up her feelings to her client. This last would be an abuse of power similar to incest, as the client might be put in the position of feeling obliged to please the therapist by reciprocating the feelings. When clients bring up feelings of sexual attraction to therapists, the therapist is ethically obligated to create a safe emotional setting for the client to experience and process these feelings while in no way jeopardizing the client's process of therapy. Therapists should act with extreme caution when considering sexual involvements with former clients, and should consider these potentially as risky to the client's well-being as involvements during therapy. Factors to take into account include: Were the sexual feelings present during the course of therapy, and could therapy have been prematurely ended so that the feelings could be acted out? Does the former client have other therapists available to her as therapy resources, since, were she to become lovers with her previous therapist, she would no longer have that person as a resource? How long has the period been since therapy was ended; is there any likelihood that the power dynamics of the therapy situation are still operating? In all such instances, the therapist's consultation with a peer is ethically essential.

It is also important to be aware that sexuality between women is not simply genital sexuality. Thus, lesbian feminist therapists need to be aware of sexual dynamics present in nurturing holding and hugs goodbye. We need to attend to how dancing with clients, attending intimate social gatherings with clients, going to the hot-tub with clients, and so on, are potential violations of our clients' boundaries. Our ethical obligation to attend to sexual boundaries becomes heightened when we work with survivors of incest, who are at risk, because of incestuous assault, for "consenting" to have their boundaries violated in adult life in both subtle and overt ways.

C. In all potential barter situations, the therapist should consider the nature of the task being bartered for. Barter agreements between clients and therapists constitute a particular form of role overlap in which issues of economic power and privilege can operate to create an imbalance of power. Bartering for certain types of personal services, such as massage, should be undertaken with extreme caution, due to the risks of blurring of boundaries between nurture and sex. Barter exchanges should only be undertaken when the client feels positive and self-affirmed by performing the tasks and the therapist wants and seeks the product or service being bartered. Rates for barter should be paid at fair market prices (or higher, when such prices reflect gender discrimination in payments for services and products such as housecleaning or clerical work).

D. In all cases involving role overlap, power is equalized by putting the needs of the client in a primary position. This is because the therapist has privilege and greater power by virtue of her position as a therapist.

E. Feminist therapists avoid having long-standing resentments against clients build up, for several reasons. First, by being chronically resentful, the therapist puts herself in a victim position, where she is likely to engage in destructive power plays without being aware of doing so. Second, some evidence exists (Smith, 1984) that therapists who abuse clients do so from a position of resenting the nurturance and care that they have given to their clients, and are rationalizing the abuse as a means of equalizing power. Thus, resentment can create conditions conducive to abuse of therapy. An additional factor for lesbian feminist therapists is that long-standing resentments against a client can lead to destructive dynamics being introjected into our interactions with those parts of the lesbian community to which both therapist and client belong. Unlike traditional therapists who can and do live separate from their clients, we are intertwined with them. To hold resentments can damage the fabric of our communities.

The following example is meant to illustrate several of the issues outlined above. It particularly describes what can occur in a therapy cult, and draws both upon my experience working with lesbian survivors of lesbian-run therapy cults and on accounts shared with me by other lesbians who have survived lesbian-run therapy cults.

EXAMPLE. A therapist in private practice tells her clients that she works from a perspective that requires the friends, lovers, and roommates of the client to also enter therapy with this therapist. Her rationale to clients is that in order to make changes, they must be part of a system that totally supports their changes. She encourages her clients to end relationships with those significant others who will not enter therapy with her. The therapist holds frequent workshops and

retreats where all clients interact; several become lovers with one another, with the guidance and approval of the therapist, who lets the clients know that, since she knows them well, she can best know who is right for any of her clients as a lover. This therapist's social life consists primarily of clients and former clients. Several former clients become her co-therapists. Her lovers are often women who have also been in, or continue to be in therapy with her. Clients who call her practices into question are "excommunicated" from the therapy community. Other therapists who confront her, or attempt to publicize her abuses, are accused of "professional jealousy," "not being feminist," or simply, of libel and slander.

While this example may seem extreme, it is not. In addition, variations on these ethical concerns can also occur in less intense ways. The feminist therapist who finds that large numbers of the people in her social group are former clients, even when this is not a stated goal of her work, needs to examine how she might be misusing the reality of role overlap in the lesbian community between therapy and life outside of therapy. Unmothered as women are (Chesler, 1972), we are thus vulnerable to having our integrity violated by intrusive nurturing in the guise of the creation of total support. The ethical violations in the example above are clear because of their obviousness; the more subtle forms of enmeshment that occur between clients and therapist are not always as apparent, and yet, in feminist ethical terms, are similarly capable of damaging women by an abuse of therapist power.

III. Lesbian feminist therapists work from a feminist conceptual model of development.

We challenge ourselves to develop this model in a way that is pro-woman and respectful of the variety of women's experiences. We observe our analysis to be sure that we are neither solely adapting to nor solely reacting against patriarchal models of development and change (Lerman, in press).

A. Feminist therapists are cautious in their use of standard diagnostic terminology. This principle, however, does not imply an avoidance of diagnostic thinking, e.g., having a coherent system of understanding the problems that our clients bring into therapy. This system needs to reflect a feminist political understanding of the impact of oppression on mental health and functioning, and thus must take into account such normative events in women's lives as sexual abuse and physical and psychological violence against women. To have a cognitive framework for therapeutic intervention is a feminist ethical imperative for the responsible use of power. Without such a framework for making our work comprehensible to our clients, we engage in a mystification of the therapy process. When therapy is mystified to clients, therapists run the risk of creating dependency relationships in which only the therapist understands the nature of

change, and in which clients are not free to exercise choice regarding the approach with which to intervene in their problems. When therapists are cognitively clear about why we do what we do, we can explain it clearly to our clients. I, for instance, routinely share with clients the books and other sources of information that I have found helpful in developing my theoretical framework. When using tests or applying diagnostic labels, as may be necessary when a third party pays for therapy, or in a legal case where a woman is suing for redress, I share information about the tools that I am using, and about the implications of the diagnosis that I am applying.

Some examples of this principle have to do with the current popularity of sexist diagnostic terminology to serve as a shorthand means of conceptualizing the problems presented by clients. Kaplan (1983) has critiqued, from a feminist perspective, a document called the *DSM-III*. This book is the "bible" of diagnosis; it describes certain syndromes as observed clinically, and supplies the clinician with diagnostic labels. Any therapist working in a mental-health agency, or dealing with insurance companies, must assign a *DSM-III* diagnosis in order to deliver services, or obtain reimbursement. Additionally, many therapists, lesbian-feminist or otherwise, will talk about "my borderline client" when referring to a set of behaviors. This makes life easy for the therapist; she does not have to explain to another therapist what she is talking about, as certain meanings are assumed between therapists. However, Kaplan points out how easy it is for women, because of female socialization, to be accurately described by some of the more pejorative diagnoses, including Borderline Personality Disorder, Histrionic Personality Disorder, and Passive Personality Disorder. When a therapist does not use a feminist conceptual framework in understanding a client's problems, such mis-labelling and mis-diagnosing can easily occur. Rosewater (1985) in particular discusses how women survivors of battering may be diagnosed in this way by clinicians who lack a feminist perspective on assessment and diagnosis.

On the other hand, a few of the *DSM-III* terms are of use to lesbian-feminist therapists. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (*DSM-III* 309.81) is an accurate and useful term for describing the psychological impact of oppression and violence against women. In my work with women bringing lawsuits against men, this diagnosis has been one of the weapons in our arsenal against offenders. In addition, it has been used successfully in support of women who have killed their batterers. The theories of personality that underlie the concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are less shaming than those underlying the personality disorders, and can and do take into account the violence done by oppressions.

B. Lesbian feminist therapists carefully examine other systems of personality and psychotherapy for sexist assumptions and biases prior to incorporating these systems into their work. It is simultaneously valuable to be able to use the tools of patriarchy to the benefit of women (Rosewater, 1982, 1983, 1985) and impor-

tant that we de-bug those tools so that women are not damaged in the course of our use of them. Moss (1985) has, for instance, pointed out how certain body therapies may contain both theoretical assumptions and techniques that have misogynist underpinnings. It is an ethical imperative of feminist therapy to not cooperate with sexist approaches to psychotherapy by including them in our work unexamined. It is both seductive and dangerous for lesbian feminist therapists to continue to look for the good in Freud and Jung and Perls and Kohut and the rest. As much as we strain and stretch to fit ourselves into the molds created by these theorists, they will always fail what should be a basic test for lesbian feminists. They either have the potential to be of harm to women, or they fail to explicate reality in a way that reflects the actual phenomenology of women's lives (Lerman, 1983). For instance, while finding Chodorow's (1978) work conceptually fascinating, I continue to be horrified by her apparent blanket acceptance of the psychoanalytic notion that incestuous assault against girls is not a reality, but rather a fantasy inherent in female development. This is not a feminist reanalysis; it is a feminist being so entranced by the explicatory usefulness of object relations theory that she swallows it whole, misogynist poison and all. Lesbian feminist therapists have an ethical obligation not to do this, or we will be running the risk of doing harm to women in ways that mimic the errors of traditional psychotherapy.

IV. Lesbian feminist therapists have a deep and ethically obligated commitment to the education of psychotherapy consumers regarding their rights, and the means available for redress of wrongs.

This education occurs at all points in the therapy process. Initial sessions should include verbal and written or taped information regarding how we practice; our clients should be informed often during therapy regarding their options where intervention techniques are concerned; therapists should encourage questions regarding our work and our interpretations. Lesbian feminist therapists engage in community education efforts regarding the rights of psychotherapy consumers. When necessary, we participate as advocates in the support of exploited clients seeking redress, by serving in legal and other settings as expert witnesses and educators regarding harm done, without fear of disloyalty to our professions. We participate actively in the creation of systems of redress for clients who have been abused by other lesbian therapists, e.g., client's rights groups, laws that give abused clients genuine and effective grievance procedures that contain powerful consequences for therapists who are abusive, training programs for lesbian attorneys regarding the bringing of civil injury suits against abusive therapists, education of the public regarding the nature and impact of the abuse of clients. We also, when possible, engage in these efforts in the world beyond the lesbian community, knowing that many lesbians and heterosexual women continue to seek therapy, and to be abused and exploited, by non-lesbian and non-feminist therapists. However, we are ethically obligated to our community and its welfare first and foremost.

A. When a lesbian therapist appears to be acting in an unethical or questionable manner, her feminist colleagues are ethically bound to lovingly and persistently confront her behavior, and to work to develop systems within their community for feedback to her. Communities of feminist therapists should strive to develop systems by which concerns over ethical issues can be mediated in such a way that abuses of power do not occur, e.g., peer review and mediation panels.

B. Feminist therapists must begin to develop a system of sanctions against therapists who continue to abuse power in their work in the face of persistent confrontation. Examples of such continuing abuse of power include sexual involvement with clients, the use of therapy time for the therapist to deal with her own personal problems, i.e., role reversal between nurturer and person being nurtured, or therapist impairment during the therapy hour due to the use of drugs or alcohol. Ethical sanctions against abusive therapists include, but are not limited to, refusals to refer and active public client education efforts toward the development of community norms that challenge an abusive therapist. This last is a particularly feminist action, as it empowers current and potential clients of an abusive therapist to know what they can expect and demand ethically from a therapist.

It is in the area of sanctions against abusive feminist therapists that I find myself least creative and most fearful of exercising power. I find myself engaging in many disempowering arguments with myself: Shouldn't I get out of the business of protecting clients, and isn't that perspective one that implies that I know more and know better what a client should want and receive in therapy than she does? When I take this argument to its conclusions, however, I find that I am saying that I have less than equal right to call "foul" on another therapist than a client does. I do know that I am uncertain regarding what other steps feminist therapists can ethically take. I have come to the conclusion that the practice of benign neglect where the abuses of a self-described feminist therapist are concerned is not an act of respect for the equality and adulthood of her clients. It is, rather, a collusion with the myth that the therapist does not possess power and privilege in the therapy context, does not possess the potential to do harm beyond that possessed by any non-therapist in relationship to her clients, and in fact is just another woman, who enters into the transaction of therapy only equal to the women who are her clients. While feminist therapy, and lesbian feminist therapists, are ethically obligated to develop systems that move us toward that equality of power, and while feminist therapy is structured to encourage that equality of power, the equality does not exist initially, nor does it tend to develop until well toward the end of the therapy process, when the therapist moves into a more consultative rather than therapeutic role. But in the

beginning, we are more powerful, more privileged, more the creators of reality. I would be a co-conspirator with abusive and exploitative therapists were I not to acknowledge this fact.

At the current time, feminist therapists, both lesbian and heterosexual, have begun to build systems for implementing ethical codes, and confronting abusers in our midst. The Feminist Therapy Institute, a national organization of advanced feminist therapists, has begun the process of writing a code of ethics for feminist therapists, and has also begun to consider the ways in which this code can be enforced.¹ The Committee on Women of the American Psychological Association is authoring a pamphlet on what to do if your therapist sexualizes the relationship; it should be available by the Spring of 1986 from the Women's Programs Office of the APA, 1200 17th N.W., Washington, DC 20036. That office also publishes a small book, written by feminist therapists within APA who are members of the Division of Psychology of Women, entitled "A Consumer Guide to Psychotherapy." This is available to anyone for \$4.00 to cover costs. It is my belief that an ethical imperative for lesbian-feminist therapists is to make these and other similar material available to clients at the beginning of therapy. As with child sexual abuse prevention, the prevention of abuses of psychotherapy begins with the informed and empowered therapy consumer. Hall's recent book, *The Lavendar Couch* (1984), is also a good guide for lesbian consumers of psychotherapy. Because there is currently no system by which feminist therapists are registered or certificated, the most powerful contingency controlling lesbian feminist therapists is a financial one. Well-informed lesbians are not likely to get into or stay in therapy with a therapist who abuses; such a therapist is likely not to stay in business for very long.

* * * * *

These principles are a beginning. They reflect my thinking, my experiences with the potentials for abuse of power in feminist therapy, and my acknowledgement of the degree of power that accrues to any therapist. I hope and assume that this paper will provoke discussion and debate, and that it will be a spur to all of us to engage in the on-going process of professional self-examination and self-criticism that is necessary for the presence of an ethical core within a therapy system. Writers on the topic of ethical standards in traditional systems of psychotherapy have often made the point that such standards are little more than window dressing for the general public, put in place to assure the wary that a particular profession is concerned with its potential for abuse, but rarely used and difficult to implement for clients already suffering from an abuse in a therapy setting (Zemlick, 1980). The ethics of feminist therapy must go beyond window dressing. Because feminist therapy is a system built around the ethical stances of feminism, the ethics of feminist therapy need to be woven into the fabric of our work.

In this paper, I have commented on how issues of technique become ethical issues for a feminist therapist; our ethical stances can and ought to be reflected in every aspect of therapy. We can empower ourselves further by a conscious expression of our ethics as feminist therapists; now we must also begin to empower ourselves to make those ethics a standard, with expectations aimed at other feminist therapists for adherence to that standard. We can act responsibly with the power that comes from our position as therapists, and we can give ourselves the message that our school of personality and psychotherapy is truly an entity separate from patriarchal systems.

Notes

¹ During their annual meeting in April 1985, members of the Feminist Therapy Institute engaged in hours of collective soul-searching and discussion, hammering out a code of ethics for feminist therapists. Readers interested in finding out what FTI is doing to further develop this code should write to the Co-Chairs of the FTI Ethics and Accountability Committee. They are: Liz Rave, 1725 19th Ave., Greeley, CO 80631 and Carolyn Larsen, University Counseling Services, U. of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4 Canada.

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The Lesbian Revolution and the 50 Minute Hour: A Working-Class Look at Therapy and the Movement

Caryatis Cardea

... liberty loses its meaning when women are not in fact free to change their situation or when they participate in limiting others' freedom

Kathleen Barry¹

In the early Spring of 1980, I sat down to my typewriter to compose an essay about the classism I felt subject to within the lesbian movement. As I developed the examples which came to mind, I found it all boiling down to three main categories: The rigid rules of feminist process in politics, the humanist dilution of radical feminism, and the distortion of personal relationships between lesbians. When the paper was completed in draft form, I discovered that each of my analyses of classism reveals the power of therapy in lesbian life.

Feminist process, with its emphasis on courtesy, and on a firm separation of thought and feeling, exists for the comfort, benefit and continued power of middle-class lesbians. And it is to therapy that they go to acquire and maintain this mind-spirit divorce.

The me-first attitude of humanism coupled with its obsessive inclusion of everyone and everything under the formerly womyn's banner of feminism (See, there's really no one to be angry with!) is reinforced by, and had its origins in, therapy's insistence that we each move beyond our anger and create our own reality. And we were to create this reality in our own space, one of individual prosperity and individual happiness.

Lesbian relationships have been newly defined as the place to get one's needs met, and to enter on a never-ending struggle to process honest political and personal differences. Here therapy has provided perhaps its most popular

justification for the imposition of middle-class manners and values under which lesbians like myself, from working-class backgrounds, have been suffocating.

In the intervening years, I've tried several times to finish this paper. Each time I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue, by the destruction already wrought in the movement, and most of all, by the inescapable fact that no matter when I pulled the article out, my premises still applied. Clearly, the situation was getting no better; in fact, it seemed to degenerate daily.

Everywhere I looked, lesbians were going to therapists, becoming therapists, changing therapists, discussing their therapists, being abused by their therapists. If any other topic of conversation was introduced, it was phrased in the language of therapy. The heart of fire which our movement once contained was gone, replaced by what Mary Daly has termed "plastic passions." Womyn no longer had opinions, they had "energy around some issues"; they didn't even get mad any more, they only "experienced some anger." I have no doubt, as a matter of fact, that I will receive several suggestions when this article is published that I enter therapy to deal with my excessive hostility.

It seems only yesterday that we were yelling in the face of the world which had mislabeled our feelings for centuries, "We're not crazy, we're angry." But anger is passe nowadays. The status quo of misogyny and oppression simply doesn't exist: we each create our own reality.

Well, in the hope that some semblance of sisterhood still survives, this article is a plea. Let's try to reverse the tide of "valueless individualism"² which stems from therapy. Therapy is not politics; it is not feminism. It is dangerous.

The attitudes and actions which I will describe as middle-class are exhibited in greater or lesser degrees within all strata of the economically privileged in this society. I plan to *attack* the values, and *challenge* the lesbians who hold to them.

The Drift from Radical Feminism

In the early years of my feminist activism — 1972 and 1973 — the world seemed to be expanding out in front of me as a woman. By early 1975, I had come out as a lesbian and a separatist, and I thought it awesome and beautiful that our horizons, already incredibly broad from the boundaries we had pushed out, moved apace with us, at lightning speed. Radicalism was present even in what would now be seen as the least likely places. Concepts of world feminism, separatism, visions of lesbian nation, and a firm grasp of sexual politics could be found everywhere. We were full steam ahead, no end in sight.

After some time, we realized that the results of our efforts were not to be seen in our lifetimes. Across the country, in the coffeehouses, buildings and centers we had braved everything to establish, the movement sat back to take a breath. Besides the needed rest, challenges were coming from within and without the movement: race, class and other issues were being raised to challenge what we had finally acknowledged to be the white, middle-class domination of the movement.

This breather may be the biggest mistake ever made by a revolutionary movement. For, while some lesbians wanted to rest and move forward again, and others wanted to make the movement inclusive of and responsive to all lesbians and move forward again, many were resting for good. They had sought only reform, and this being achieved, they were through. Like the rest of us, though, they drew energy from lesbians together. So although they retired from the battle, they did not leave our ranks. They remained where their dominance was already established, their influence powerful. The lesbian/feminist movement had, often unawares, taken its lead in tone and style from white middle-class womyn. Now their inactivity prevailed, as had most of their other choices, and the Movement became a Community.

The opportunity to challenge our movement's goals and methods was soon perverted. Few real challenges, and fewer changes, occurred. Political self-examination of ourselves as a group was readily abandoned because it would have required movement, and those dominating the community wished to remain where they were. They met the challenge in a way palatable to them: self-examination on a private level. Therapy. Thus was one of the most dangerous elements of the patriarchy introduced into our midst.

We acknowledge, as feminists, that we live in a patriarchy, but we have failed to recognize that the patriarchy lives in each of us. Had we faced this, we might have taken each political challenge as an opportunity to add more lesbians to our ranks and stretch our horizons further yet. Instead, everything being done by lesbian/feminists was explained, denied, responded to in the terms of therapy, an element of white middle-class life.

Those of us not involved in – or even familiar with – therapy felt as though the earth were shifting beneath our feet. Most of us were working-class and poor. The change was not exactly overnight, it only seemed to be. Attending meetings became an ordeal, conducted according to alien rules. Lesbians who had been by our sides for years grew scornful at our lack of familiarity with the territory into which they were dragging us. Language and vocabulary skidded away from us; words skirted around the edges of clear meaning. Womyn's centers (and bookstores and restaurants and buildings) were effectively closed to separatist and other radical lesbians by their switch from revolutionary forums to social reform, and later still to a focus on personal growth. Relationships between lesbians were similarly undermined as privileged womyn, bolstered by their therapists, sought not love and mutual respect, but a place to have their needs met. The key word was process; its concepts, goals and vocabulary were drawn from therapy.

Feminist Process

It is claimed by those who employ it that feminist process was devised to correct inequities in our political meetings. Domination by a minority of the lesbians present (those most verbal and assertive), infighting, a lack of structure, certain womyn not being heard. Each of us knew who we believed responsible

for these problems; each of us thought all the others meant the same ones.

Throughout the decade of feminist process's hold on the lesbian movement, I have watched the growing perplexity of working-class dykes as the proffered solution to our problems – feminist process – has proved not only to exclude us further, but to oppress us. [I have shared the ideas contained in this paper with many lesbians who feel excluded and oppressed by these same things, but on the basis of their race or ethnicity. I am aware that process is more than classist, but it *is* classist. And as a white working-class woman, I will approach it from my personal perspective in this paper.] Process was so highly lauded and so loudly touted, and in terms so foreign to us, that we were, quite literally, powerless to oppose it. The reason is that feminist process is based on middle-class values and experience, and justified by the middle-class phenomenon of therapy.

First, there is the issue of who gets to talk at meetings. I was among those who complained loud and long about some lesbians controlling all meetings. Like other outsiders (non-WASP, non-middle-class), I meant the middle-class WASPs, whose long-winded, abstract discourses bored and irritated me, in addition to taking up entire evenings, often on personal topics. It took me years to truly understand that while I wished to stop the discourses, they wished to stop my loud complaints.

What are the elements of feminist process which so differed from the lives of nonprivileged women that we could not understand their enormous attractiveness to other lesbians? One was the practice, ostensibly to put everyone at ease, of going around in a circle at the beginning of each meeting. This may not have been offensive in ongoing groups where the members wished to keep up with one another's lives between meetings. But I am referring to the request (read: demand), at the opening of a one-time group (forum, support group, work group, etc.), that we go around in the circle and have each lesbian relate her feelings, memories, fears and so forth on the topic of discussion. [The voice of the therapist is saying, So, how have you been this week?] This practice, which may seem very simple and straightforward to some of you, can be very disturbing to working-class lesbians. Opening ourselves to this sort of vulnerability and emotional exposure is a strange experience to be asked of us: encounter groups, after all, are not a working-class phenomenon.

How the classes differ in this respect is really rather simple. Working-class people tend to **express our ideas with feeling, but we do not necessarily express our feelings**. This would be considered poor taste in our cultures. Middle-class people maintain a level of coolness about ideas which baffles us (and is designed to make us feel vulgar), while displaying a willingness to reveal personal feelings which seems positively uncouth to many of us. It is a difference in style. But since the middle-class rules, working-class lesbians are continually reprimanded for our "excitability" in meetings, while also being reproached for our failure to "open up" personally. This we generally prefer to

do privately, or with good friends, or in meetings designed to handle personal reactions.

Furthermore, in my world, trust (which is what is being asked in these check-ins) was to be earned, not granted at first sight. Even within the confines of feminism, all we have in common is our existence as womyn and lesbians. Trust on a personal, emotional level, that which implies a shared understanding of these experiences as lesbians in the patriarchy, is something I do not accept as a given. The womyn comfortable with these circumstances therefore do most of the talking, setting the stage for their continued starring role in the meeting as it progresses. If you think this is all a voluntary procedure, try passing your turn some time, and watch the fur fly. You get suspicious glances, everyone feels affronted; you are presumed to be aloof, snobbish, superior. If our meetings are such safe, supportive environments, why is it so threatening for anyone to decline to "share feelings"?

Lesbians have, in fact, countless experiences which are not shared. I once tried to relate a story about one of my little sisters which included, on the way to the point of the story, the fact that there had not been enough food for dinner that night. This was important to the story, but it was *not* the story, and *not important* by itself. Yet, a middle-class woman who was listening began to weep at the very thought of such a state of affairs and became so distraught with pity for me that I never could get to the end of the anecdote. We just don't always speak the same language.

The next practice instituted at political meetings was that of having — always — a facilitator. This snowballed from the initial custom of designating one woman to generally oversee, stepping in only when the group threatened to drift irretrievably from the agenda, or when any one or more lesbians took too much attention or became abusive of any other, to a rigid observance wherein one or two lesbians control all aspects of the meeting. They keep time, limiting how long each individual may speak; as each issue is raised, they take names of those who have raised their hands and call them in order — the order in which they saw them, or perhaps in clockwise order around the inevitable circle in which we sit — but with no weight given to the import of what any particular woman has to say. [The voice of the therapist is saying, I think we've dwelled on this enough. I'm sorry, our time is up.]

This is true even if one woman was just directly accused of something by the previous speaker, or has a direct response to her, while the others have new topics to introduce. If, by luck, the next speaker is the one with the most direct response to make, what is now considered a good facilitator would rescind the responder's right to speak: such personal dialogues are nearly always deemed best left until after the meeting. [The voice of the therapist is saying, It seems you have some unresolved feelings with this person.]

Throughout feminist meetings the language has changed also. Slowly the concepts and jargon of therapy have replaced political language. Everything I

had watched middle-class lesbians struggling to learn about assertiveness vanished as they settled into the more comfortable – to them – stance of apparent chronic uncertainty, self-effacement. Assertiveness taught middle-class womyn to leave behind ladylike manners (and who else, I ask you, ever had them?) which interfered with the possibility of tackling head-on the multi-faceted monster of patriarchy. Assertiveness teaches that if your roommate borrows your clothes and leaves them in a heap, you should tell her to knock it off. Middle-class womyn never really got comfortable with this approach. Therapy worked much better for them. Therapy teaches that if your roommate repeatedly borrows your clothes and leaves them in a heap, you should tell her that this feels like a violation of trust to you, that you are flattered that she enjoys your taste in clothes enough to want to be seen in them, you are more than happy to allow her to share in the use of them, but she really must show more respect, so that your feelings for her can remain clean and uncluttered by your resentment.

I can recall attending a meeting of a newly-formed group at which volunteers were asked to facilitate. There was a short silence; then, a lesbian I knew slightly said (I am paraphrasing), 'Well, although I don't consider myself any more qualified than anyone else, if no one has any objection, I will volunteer to facilitate. If I offend anyone by my choice of methods, please let me know. I could be wrong about how I think this should be done. When the meeting is over, I will offer my criticism of myself as a facilitator, and I will welcome criticism from the rest of you.' She went on in this vein for some time, wielding the power which therapy bestows: for several minutes she kept all attention focused on herself, yet she used words which sounded a note of humility, self-disparagement. She was, in fact, rather authoritarian in her manner of facilitation. I later found out she was a therapist.

This lesbian also inadvertently made evident to me what makes this distinctly courteous-sounding mode of behavior so desirable to some womyn. She was the first in my experience to forbid direct confrontation between any two lesbians at a meeting. At first, I thought it was only more of the fear often evinced by middle-class womyn at any sign of anger. (They sometimes act as though we're all about to pull knives.) When I saw that she also stopped all humor, I realized that it was simply emotion of all kinds that made her uncomfortable, out of control of the meeting. She wished to conduct a calm, objective meeting.

Therapy, of course, is the training ground for the separation of intellect and emotion. I will not belabor the differences in kinds of therapy. The basic premise, stated or unstated, is that emotions need to be examined with the intellect. Instead of seeing our emotions as expressive of our thoughts, therapy teaches that they actually obscure our thoughts and our thought processes. Therapy is the definitive manifestation of middle-class alienation. Therapy institutionalized one of the essential dichotomies of the patriarchy, one to

which womyn are very susceptible: the split between intellect and emotion. Mary Daly notes the dangers of therapy to revolutionary dykes in a very few, very pertinent, pages in *Gyn/Ecology*.³ Her observations helped me to begin seeing the link between therapy and lesbian/feminist classism, for her complaints about the former were ultimately the same as mine about the latter. She notes, among other things, that therapy "...fixes women's attention in the wrong direction, fragmenting and privatizing perception of problems. . ."⁴

The advantage for lesbians who find open emotion distasteful is that they can declare emotion off limits when working-class dykes express themselves with feeling, and still give vent to their own more circumspect sentiments by saying they are just putting out their personal needs, to which, of course, no one dares object. The personal has superseded the political. Whereas womyn like myself, not being possessed of objectified emotions, try to obey the rules and speak objectively. Ironically, we are then accused by middle-class dykes of being "too much in our heads."

What is the distinction between intellect and emotion? *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* gives us some clues:

Intellect: The power of knowing, as distinguished from the power to feel and to will.

Emotion: A psychic or physical reaction (as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling and physiologically involving changes that prepare the body for immediate vigorous action.

Hadn't we better question our movement's seeming preference for thought divorced from "the power to feel and to will?" When I began this paper long ago, a working-class friend of mine remarked that what I describe here is what she had long been terming "the difference between feeling and talking about feeling." The political result is the difference between change and talking about change. A movement aimed at subverting a system (of government, society, religion and personal relationships) many tens of centuries old should welcome "strong feelings" leading to preparation for "immediate, vigorous action."

But some of our sisters – notably those from middle-class and/or WASP backgrounds – were raised to believe that expressions of emotion signify lack of control. Some years ago, a friend from an upper-middle-class background explained to me the way she had been taught to dissociate herself from the immediacy of her anger by, for example, focusing her attention on the process of being angry rather than on the source of the anger. She was encouraged to doubt her own reactions to the world, and led to believe that intellect was not compatible with emotion. It was all right for her to "have anger," if she kept control of it. One can't help one's feelings, after all, one can only conquer them. She further explained that, without the release of yelling, physically expressing herself, she learned to reach for a reaction from her parent, or

whoever had wounded her, by stating – calmly, of course – some essentially cruel thing. Other middle-class womyn have described this kind of training, received either in their families or through therapy. Hence, we now have thousands of lesbians who will sit down, in all earnestness, and say, "I am very angry," in a perfectly serene tone of voice. (As the years go by, they grow more and more distant in their phrasing, as, "I feel some anger around this," or even, "I have some anger here.") The same womyn, while righteously defending the necessity of putting out their feelings, will level charges of aggression, divisiveness, and male-identification at lesbians who don't need to announce that they are angry, because it is clear, from their every word and gesture.

Alienation, a term widely used in therapy, and chosen by many middle-class lesbians to describe their own state of consciousness, renders understandable their fear of what they see as our emotional outbursts. Assertiveness training, very popular in the 1970s, was a must for active feminists. I never quite got it, having survived working-class poverty, the streets of Buffalo, and eight brothers and sisters. But middle-class feminists, trained as ladies, perhaps afforded an excessively abstract education, and almost certainly exposed to one of the many therapeutic fads of the baby-boomer generation, needed to be taught to speak directly, to make their anger known, to not shrink in fear from their own or others' emotions, to accept most of all that emotions are not an outside force to abhor and attempt to control.

Therapists thrive on the belief held by these lesbians that feelings are a threatening fog veiling the world, but that with the counselors' help, the lens of the intellect can be applied so that these womyn, divided against themselves, can see through.

Emotions are not uncontrollable, primitive forces forming a screen between womyn and our world; it is not necessary or advisable to think of them as such, for to do so leaves one open to those who wish to be our interpreters to ourselves.

And so we have the basic set-up of feminist process: a desire to bring into submission those lesbians whose forcefulness was being used to challenge middle-class WASP dominance. A method was devised which included a retreat from the honesty encouraged by assertiveness (and, for that matter, by feminism), and its replacement by a therapeutic substitute which can only function to deeply entrench the power of the middle-class lesbians in the movement. Therapists teach their clients/patients that they have a right to "put out their needs" as whatever they define them to be. But therapists routinely exorcise the demon of open emotion. [The voice of the therapist is saying, Now, let's calm down and see if we can't work to get to the true source of this pain.] Open emotion has at least a better chance at being honest, and is much easier to challenge.

Middle-class womyn have had to go through very few changes to adapt to process, to "sharing" feelings, to sublimating anger and emotion and laying a

coating of sophistication over their pain. They operate on the tacit assumption that everyone in a feminist political gathering will understand the importance of using the (male-identified) concepts of therapy.

Their explanation usually presents lesbians with an either/or proposition: either feminist process or patriarchal power games. I maintain that the one is the other. Feminist process, we are often told, has been developed so that the business of certain vocal persons dominating the group can be avoided. Through process, we can prevent the yelling bouts, the interruptions, the shouting over each other, the emotional expression of ideas, *the mixture of intellect and emotion* that have characterized other political movements.

The usual scenario, when the rules are stated for us, is that everyone nods silently, accepting what is really middle-class manners newly defined as feminist process. Many working-class womyn are actually shamed into this silent compliance. And why not? By the equation which has developed, feminist equals middle-class and working-class equals patriarchal. The way we of the working-class have related all of our lives is now labeled "male-identified," "politically incorrect."

I have had several personal experiences with middle-class folks who were threatened by my readiness to express my anger (or even my sarcasm). They never feared I would strike them or attach bombs to the ignition switches of their cars, but they said repeatedly that my anger frightened them. In the course of their various therapies, they would mention this problem to their counselors.

An incident of mine from about six years ago should serve to explain what happens next. I attended a lesbian concert in a local bar with two friends. At intermission they began a rather esoteric discussion of the talents of the musicians in the band, progress they had noted over the years of observing them, and an assessment of that night's performance so far. I felt no desire to join the conversation, as I found the academic tone of evaluation inappropriate to the occasion. They asked for my opinion repeatedly and I just said I thought the band was fun. No, they said, they wanted to know what I thought of them musically. Eventually, I said that I had nothing to add, that I had not been listening as critically as they had. Furthermore, their insistence that I contribute to the general running down of the group felt like a test: say something educated, give a critique. I closed with the comment that I thought they were acting rather elitist and campus-y and I didn't want to play.

What followed immediately is another story. But a few days later, I ran into one of the womyn, who was upper-middle-class. She had, by now, seen her therapist and they had discussed how my "attack" had hurt her. She resented my having accused her of classist behavior in the other evening's discussion. To "take back her own power," she told me that I had had no right to make any "judgments" about her musical opinions because everyone (including some mutual friends whom she had no better grace than to name) knew how rigid I was about music. Her elaboration of this had to do with the fact that some of

us got together at her house once a month to play music. Though extremely shy about it (which she knew), I usually played the piano.

In short, I said she was classist. She was angry about this. Unable to say so, she stated something cruel, something which she knew would make me self-conscious about ever playing in public again. I was, in fact, momentarily humiliated. But I had time to see the look of triumph on her face. She had cut me down to size and no longer had to deal at all with the truth or falsity of what I said in the bar.

She still hadn't "expressed her anger," if you will; but she felt better and could duly report in her next therapy session that she had "dealt with" the situation.

I have eaten it more times than I can count, thanks to lesbian therapists; since the middle-class friends of mine who went to them were never explicit that what made them uncomfortable with me was not what I said but that I *could* say it, what I got in return was abuse. Just as my long-ago class-privileged friend had explained to me, when people are forbidden a right to honest anger and the apology that could be demanded from one who has injured them, all that is left to express is cruelty; all that is left to reach for from the other person is a reaction — any reaction — but preferably one that hurts as much as the wounded party now feels hurt.

So my friends would approach our next confrontation having gained from therapy no knowledge of how to express anger (and certainly no experience). They would fall back on what skill they had acquired through their class experience and in therapy, for therapy and the middle class are the two places where expression of anger is presumed to mask some other emotion. They would do the familiar: state something cruel, actually make a deliberate attempt at meanness, thereby depleting my power in their eyes, so that I needn't be taken seriously. They would feel less pain because now *I* was the one hurt. Because they feel bad when I yell, and I feel bad when they are cruel, they delude themselves that we are doing the same thing. But, of course, they remain therapeutically calm and objective, which gives them enormous power: in a classist culture emotional outbursts in response to such coolness would be so tacky. For both parties would be judged by the standards of "America," those of the white, Protestant middle class.

As meetings progress, and decisions must be made, the only mode now acceptable to feminists is consensus. (Groups such as Abalone Alliance have published statements detailing the consensus process. A pamphlet called "Blocking Progress" is a statement by an Abalone member who finds consensus rife with abuse, especially classism.)

Consensus is said to do away with majority rule, giving everyone an opportunity to speak and to object to group decisions, even if the majority approves them. Being outvoted consistently is decidedly frustrating, but you still get to cast your vote firmly on the side you wish. In consensus, any member of a group may block consensus; for the decisions to go through, then, requires

the block to be withdrawn or the person to be persuaded that voting for the decision is best.

In ten years, I have never seen anyone but the most privileged members of any group successfully block a consensus decision. (The important exception is the instance in which womyn attend meetings solely to block decisions. Consensus is dangerous in this way, too. A group of womyn attended the opening sessions of an anti-nuke group I was in some years ago only to make sure that neither the word "lesbian" nor the word "feminist" appeared in the title of the group. They blocked consensus, the group was named as they wanted, and we never saw any of them again.) Since consensus requires that every person be satisfied (the American Dream), that no one be declared the loser of the vote (a horror to privileged folks), the pressure brought to bear on the dissenter is formidable. In the past, if the middle-class lesbians dominated all decision-making, winning simply by outnumbering, we could protest or leave. Now, any objection to losing a vote is childish, because everyone theoretically had the chance to stop any vote from going through. The fact that dissenters must carry the onus of having selfishly stopped the entire group's progress is not officially acknowledged.

Instead, the only authorized dissent is one in which the lesbian who wishes to block the consensus announces, inevitably, that she doesn't agree with the decision but won't block. Not many can stand up to the condescension directed at those who don't seem to understand that consensus is not supposed to be blocked. The dominant group patiently and disdainfully wears the unfortunate down.

To close the meetings, we are offered criticism/self-criticism, perhaps the most jarring item of feminist process for those of us from working-class backgrounds. This allotment of time at the end of meetings for the expression of feeling means implicitly that feelings are taboo during the meeting. Explicitly, it means only that emotionally expressed thoughts are forbidden. Intellectually (read: therapeutically) expressed emotions, the domain of the middle-class, are very much indulged. Crit/self-crit is the first element of process to which working-class lesbians objected. When first introduced, it was no secret that it was a therapeutic concept. When we began objecting, they came up with the argument that since it had *really* originated in China, with the Communist party, it was both racist and anti-revolutionary to resist.

Hand in hand with the disapproval of direct interactions between lesbians at meetings, crit/self-crit serves to allow abusive or manipulative lesbians to say anything they wish in the course of meetings, knowing that it will not be tolerated for them to be directly confronted. The same womyn reign during the crit sessions. Another working-class dyke friend has recounted to me her abuse during these sessions, as her audacity in offering real criticism of middle-class lesbians' exercise of privilege was consistently punished by a responding criticism of her offensive style. She was castigated in vague therapy terminology

about how attacking or unconstructive she had been. This was supposed to silence her protests against oppression. If she couldn't learn to do it right, she simply had no credibility. Yet, what middle-class dykes said about her never had to do with realities like privilege and oppression (or even with the content of her criticism); only that some delicate spirit experienced her honesty as being hurtful.

Furthermore, lesbians whose low-income backgrounds have placed us in the position of struggling against scorn all our lives sometimes just fail to see the benefit of chastising oneself in the presence of others whose respect one might like to have. We tend to take the brunt of the criticism (which should tell, once again, what and who is being silenced by feminist process) because we do not use the jargon of feminist process. We are not taught in working-class homes to preface everything we say with the phrases: *I think, I feel that, in my opinion, I could be wrong but*. Our stereotypical bluntness, which precluded the need for assertiveness training in many respects, brings our statements out in a forthright manner. During crit/self-crit, we are often attacked for opinions we expressed, because we neglected to provide ourselves and our listeners, in the fashion of feminist process, with those verbal escape clauses. For the emphasis in middle-class language is not on the "I," but on the doubt-filled words "think," "feel," "opinion." (As I pointed out in an earlier example, a woman skilled in this manner of speech can *still* hold the floor a long, long time by using this verbal trick: talk about yourself but sound modest.)

When such phrases are not used by middle-class lesbians, then the "opinions" come out with no "agent" at all. Mary Daly has referred in lectures to the diluted emotions of what she calls "therapized" lesbians as "plastic passions." Saying, "There seems to be some energy around this," removes the fire from the feeling. You don't, in fact, "feel" anything at all: you "have" some remote "blob" of ersatz emotion to be "dealt with."

Therapy teaches self-doubt by its basic premise that womyn (who are the patients of all forms of therapy) need interpreters to understand their own spirits. The willingness of working-class lesbians to simply say what we want to say and take the consequences is an affront to the devotees of therapy. With such responses as "Speak for yourself!" when no one had claimed to be doing otherwise, middle-class lesbians make clear their discomfort with, and need to discredit, the fact that working-class dykes do not negate our own statements. It is claimed that we are less open to criticism because of this. In fact, we are more open, because we take the risk of making statements that can't be as easily withdrawn as those beginning with, *I'm not sure, but it seems to me that . . .*

Humanism

...there has been resurrected an individualism which, flowing directly from the human potential movement, emphasizes taking one's own space, defining one's own reality, taking care of one's own needs. For many, concern over the quality of life is personal, individual, and focused on one's well-being.

*Kathleen Barry*⁵

These attitudes Barry describes cannot help but be familiar to active feminist lesbians; they have become part and parcel of what is now accepted as feminism. Chapter 10 of Barry's *Female Sexual Slavery* contains a section on womyn's values that is, itself, invaluable. It has given me strength and words when I needed them over the years, and I honor that by using several quotes in this paper, including the opening quote.

Contradicting the middle-class acclaim of criticism/self-criticism as a necessity to growth, the middle-class hold their own growth to be dependent upon their maintaining a right to self-centeredness and freedom from challenge. Although feminism as a movement probably no longer exists, feminists certainly do; and the majority of them have succumbed to the "therapeutically polluted environment,"⁶ needing above all else to feel good about themselves.

This is a handy focus to have for oneself in a time when lesbians are trying to challenge each other about privilege and oppression. For example, I tried once to approach a lesbian who had been driving me up the wall with her class-oppressive notions and attitudes. She suggested we discuss it over dinner. (I see now that that should have been a dead giveaway: she, being supported by her family, could afford restaurants, while I, employed and underpaid, found it difficult. This never occurred to her. Challenging it never occurred to me.) We settled in the restaurant and I had to begin the talking.

She initiated no part of the conversation, took no risks and no responsibility. After I did all the work, tracing the various things she had done or said in our encounters (we were not friends, but had mutual friends who brought us together frequently) she answered. Looking utterly unmoved by the pain I had just told her she had inflicted on me, she said that, yes, she could see why I felt this way and she would like to promise to do better. However, she had never felt really good about herself and was trying — with the help, of course, of a feminist therapist — to acquire a better self-image. Therefore, much as she was sorry for my feelings, she would simply be unable to do anything about her classism. To acknowledge her privileged oppression of me would make her feel like a bad person. And her prime motivation at this time of her life was to feel good about herself.

This is not the only instance of a middle-class lesbian telling me it was just too painful for her to confront her own oppressive behavior; other working-class womyn have related to me similar experiences, also. The pursuit of a

contentment with oneself as one is, without wishing to grow and change – wishing in fact to avoid growth and change – is the symptom of a self-centeredness which is overtly threatening to a revolutionary feminism. With so much emphasis on self, how much concern could there possibly be for the rest of the world? Even for the rest of one's immediate environment? What kind of revolution waits until its warriors are happy and fulfilled before confronting the enemy?

The answer is: one which has abandoned revolution for "therapy as a way of life."⁷ The larger context which must be grasped here is that feminism is no longer respected, even by most feminists, as a valid movement to which a lesbian could dedicate her life's energies. It is seen now as a step on the way to humanism: patriarchy in drag. All the values and attitudes radical feminists started out battling are contained within the humanist approach, disguised by "psychobabble," which, the author who coined that term says, "must be seen as the expression not of a victory over dehumanization but as its latest and very subtle victory over us."⁸

Lesbian Relationships

Processing, or dealing, is also required now in lesbian relationships. Dykes no longer seek partners with whom they can relax, with whom they have much in common, with whom they feel deep happiness or even love. (Love, in fact, is seldom mentioned, although falling in love is. It is really the only uncontrolled emotion accepted by lesbians. It should have been the last one we even considered countenancing, for it is fraught with possibilities for abuse.) Lesbians have been seeking "fixes" of various kinds: Alcohol and drugs, to be sure, but more and more frequently "psychological 'fixes'" in the form of therapy sessions and the drama-filled relationships which serve to provide the symptoms for which they seek therapeutic "cures."⁹

The most virulent mode in which I see class oppression affecting personal relationships between middle-class and working-class lesbians is in the therapeutic concept of "getting one's needs met." Therapy, in trying to teach womyn what they need and how to get it, has been instrumental in redefining lover-relationships as a place of struggle, instead of as a refuge from the outside struggle of our lives. (This makes eminent sense when we realize that therapists have also been instrumental in closing off lesbians' awareness of these outside struggles: sexism, racism, and classism, etc., are too painful to deal with.)

Needs are now, in feminist/lesbian circles, anything a woman wants or to which she feels entitled. (I am exploring this more fully in a paper on lesbian battery, a depressing sign of how far things have gone.) This is more than a semantic distortion. A woman *needs* food, clothing shelter; secondarily, she needs, in order to have a full life, satisfying work, productivity and usefulness, to love and be loved, the achievement of inner peace and spiritual growth. What each of us *wants*, however, is a matter of individual taste and the choices we have made in our lives.

Seeking to get their needs met in whatever relationship they find themselves, lesbians with enormous differences and with vastly varying visions of a good relationship can remain together indefinitely. Manipulative behavior by one or both of them and the "adjustment" skills of a "good" lesbian therapist can keep the lovers struggling to process their differences, instead of separating because of them. Therapy greatly aids in this circumstance because it doesn't deal in facts, e.g., that the relationship is no good for you, but in personal feelings about facts, e.g., that you are unhappy about elements of the relationship (but therapy can help you change it and get your needs met).

If a therapist's patient was expected — or even *allowed* — to say, "I am in a relationship which limits my freedom of movement, inhibits my expression of ideas, threatens my peace of mind, and invades my privacy," chances are an intelligent and caring friend, or even counselor, would say, "Get out of it!" But the report is — as it is expected to be — phrased as, "I feel she doesn't trust me, or respect my opinions. I have a lot of anxiety and because of her insecurity, I have less free time than I need." Now there is something a therapist can work with: Fears, anxieties, insecurities. The relationship could go on for years with the therapist encouraging better communication, more efforts to deal with these differences, perhaps even mediation. Moreover, successful relationships (by therapeutic standards: ones where you struggle and make it last) are the hallmark of health to therapists, who are in the business of recommending and facilitating adjustment to existing circumstances.

It has been so easy, therefore, for privileged womyn to take advantage of working-class dykes in relationships. We do not expect others to do for us. Middle-class people hire therapists and any number of others to provide service for them. The interdependency and innate pride of the working-class contribute to a culture where you don't say to your parents, "I wish I had the money to go to camp," when you already know they can't afford it. You don't come to the dinner table complaining of the unfashionable nature of your wardrobe, when there is no means of replacing it. Therapists tell us we should do this, we should put out our needs: To go where our friends go and to have a sense of belonging, to dress like the more affluent kids and to achieve some kind of popularity. Therapy says, even if it cannot be accomplished, putting out your needs means you have done everything you could about the situation, you feel better, and now, if anything can be done by the listeners, it will be done. You have taken power by putting out your needs.

Working-class etiquette says you don't expect everything in life. Outright demands to parents would likely be met with scorn and a reminder that the world, after all, did not owe you a living! Besides, what therapy recommends is known, in the feminist vernacular, as "dumping." Why should I burden my parents with the knowledge of the specifics of what I lacked? Do you suppose they didn't know we were poorly dressed? Rubbing their noses in their — and therefore our — poverty wouldn't make me feel better. Recommending that we

"take power" in a situation like this means recommending "taking power" over those whose obligation you think it is to provide for you. Power-over is not desirable. We all knew that everything was given which could be given. Living in close quarters with many people brings an awareness of the others' needs. The natural empathy of working-class culture brings a willingness to help when *and if possible*, though we were probably not conscious that we followed an etiquette. What one wanted/needed, thus, was never named, opening no one to public disappointment; the responsibility of fulfilling needs was given (by putting them out to others) to no one, opening no one to feelings of guilt and failure. It is a matter of pride, mutual respect, and consideration.

Contact with mixed-class society is a culture shock for working-class dykes on many levels. We are accustomed to keeping our private desires to ourselves, unless we have certain knowledge that someone with whom we are intimate can help. Then it is asked, respectfully, as a favor, to be reciprocated when possible. A refusal to help meant an inability to help, which also was treated with respect. This is how things would function between people of my background. Pointing up the absence of something material (even to the point of asking for sugar or coffee in someone's home) might be exposing temporary or permanent poverty. We all knew that we gave whatever we had; if you didn't see it, you didn't ask for it. Trust was built in widening circles, within which things could be taken for granted.

For working-class womyn, there is more at heart than the absence of a personal therapy experience. There is the basic contempt in which therapy is held in working-class environments. For instance, I not only never experienced therapy myself, I was acquainted with no one who had until I was about twenty-one. People at survival level have a justifiable disdain for the privileged, whose leisure time and money can be squandered on having a total stranger solve their problems for them.

I have found that middle-class lesbians go through their lives with the expectation, to varying degrees, that their needs/desires can and will and *should* be met. There is a selfishness, a shortsightedness, in this attitude that is shocking to me. And what they label "needs" is everything they want, like, prefer in life.

Trained in proper etiquette involving the suppression of emotion, middle-class lesbians seek therapists to teach them about emotion. They spend their childhoods being repressed when trying to express emotion; being told that their feelings are invalid and in need of re-examination with the help of professionals. They are taught to doubt their ability to perceive the world through their own eyes. Therapists then lead them into a web of exploring feelings, denying feelings, examining feelings, analyzing feelings, trying to experience feelings, dealing with feelings, dealing with how others deal with their feelings, and how that affects their own ability to deal with these others. In short, they enter on an absorption with self, acquiring an ability to talk about feeling, but not to trust simply feeling.

A key factor in community life is missing because, not trusting her feelings – never in fact *feeling* them – the middle-class lesbian is unable to comprehend those of us who do, and empathy is beyond her. If it were not, the practices of the privileged over the oppressed would have to become obsolete; standing in the other woman's shoes makes one more considerate.

Meanwhile, a working-class dyke relating intimately to middle-class dykes is unprepared for the outright demands, the assertion that needs be met; more importantly, she is often shocked by the accusation of failure if she doesn't meet them. What we consider true needs are those things the lack of which mark one as inferior in the U.S. I repeat, we express ourselves with emotion, and pride is an emotion. Our 'druthers we do not refer to as "needs." And, since working-class lesbians expect empathy in other womyn (I have found this to be true even in those from the coldest, most non-nurturing homes imaginable), and because of the class dynamics I laid out above, nonprivileged dykes are sometimes unable, and usually unwilling, to state their needs, as needs are defined by the middle class. We are therefore (conveniently, I can't resist noting) thought to have none. So, those accustomed to asking for things, do so; those who are unaccustomed to asking for things, don't. And the class system marches on.

I categorically refuse the assertion of the middle class that we all learn to put our needs out. When it becomes valid to say, *I need not to have meetings scheduled on Thursdays, I need you not to use that expression because it reminds me of an ex-lover, I need you not to raise your voice because my mother used to yell and then hit me* it occurs to me that silence may truly be golden. I grew up around too many alcoholics, constantly putting out their needs, and co-dependents, indulging them and fulfilling the needs, not to comprehend the danger in this. I, for one, have no desire to live in, let alone help create, a world of self-centered therapy addicts. Many lesbian relationships, as well as the current "model" for lesbian relationships, are, in fact, based on the dependency of someone seeking the fulfillment of her needs by another (as opposed to an inner fulfillment enhanced by a joy in the existence of the relationship) and someone feeling worthwhile because she succeeds in meeting her lover's needs. This is a dependency model, much like alcoholic families. Similarly "falling in love" brings together two womyn, each feeling incomplete, looking for a relationship and the person in it to bring wholeness. A mature love/friendship would be the meeting of two womyn, each complete in herself, or at least seeking to be, coming together for further happiness.

The Therapists

Therapists are, very simply, lesbians who believe the tenets they learned as students or patients themselves and think they are helping by offering these services. There is, really though, no earthly reason why lesbians should have turned so much authority and power over to any specific group of womyn. If it

is true that none of us has escaped indoctrination in the distortions of the patriarchy (and it is true), it is especially true that lesbians who have taken specialized training in one of the power structures of the mainstream society should not be given such absolute trust.

I have heard stories of abuse of patients by therapists. I have been told of therapists who, in some strange move toward equality with their clients, spend entire sessions discussing their own problems; still, of course, accepting payment from the patient. Therapists are not the objective listeners or wise counselors they are widely accepted to be. They bring all of their own biases and personal experiences to each session with them. Some have admitted to encouraging or discouraging some behavior, such as ending a relationship, depending on how well that aspect of their own lives is going at the moment. Lesbians approaching a therapist for help in escaping an abusive or destructive relationship should not be subjected to the prejudice of a therapist who suggests preserving the relationship because the therapist is content with her lover right now.

Moreover, we must question what they, as womyn who so deeply believe in getting needs met, are getting out of these sessions themselves, besides their often outrageous fees. The power to change the course of other lesbians' lives, the ego-strokes of clients' dependence on them, the addiction many womyn develop to the therapy sessions: All these things are distasteful at best, and dangerous at worst.

The dependence especially is usually mutual. Many therapists are panicked at the thought of their patients' leaving them. Even general criticism of the existence of therapy threatens them greatly. With this sort of dependency in action, therapists cannot be teaching their patients skills for handling problems in their lives. Lesbians do not, as a rule, go to therapy to figure out something general which they can then apply to future situations. They go to therapy to learn from therapists what to do. When the next crisis arises, they will be right back in session. Independence, particularly from the therapist, is not fostered.

The power of therapy, residing in both the practitioners and the patients, has conferred on a relatively small group of middle-class-oriented lesbians the power to define virtually every aspect of life in our community. Because therapy patients can be so religiously firm in their belief in the power of counseling, therapy ends up interpreting reality for the whole community: The therapists, the clients, and the rest of us who have to live and work with both.

"Those who argue in favor of 'feminist therapy' maintain that it departs entirely from the old freudian presuppositions."¹⁰ Even if this argument could hold water, therapy is a part of the mental health establishment, which labels womyn's behavior aberrant and seeks to alter it. How do we dare ignore the pitfalls of embracing, as central to our community life, even this lesser form of an institution which tortures and imprisons lesbians?

Conclusion

By the equation the feminist movement has accepted, all too eagerly, middle-class = feminist, while working-class = patriarchal. Yet, there are many qualities from poor and working-class lives which others would be wise to emulate. Honesty, straightforwardness, a natural blending of intellect and emotion, a notion of female competency, empathy, self-reliance, a sense of the interwoven nature of life, and not least of all, survival.

It is important to understand that therapy is one of many abuses which have combined to destroy the womyn's movement. But while racism, classism, reformism and other oppressive elements serve each a single purpose, therapy has the double effect of *being* oppressive in and of itself, *and* of reinforcing, making possible, all of the others by the use of language and concepts which shield oppression. Middle-class manners and values reign in the lesbian community, disguised by therapy and masquerading as feminism.

What We Have Lost

The physical space we fought so very hard for, in which we had hoped to discover ourselves and each other, our commonality as womyn and lesbians, our shared oppression in the patriarchy and our shared strengths as those who had, so far, survived that patriarchy, no longer exists. In the place of the precious few square feet which was solely ours we have establishments in which everyone is welcomed, except those of us who remember when the space was ours. Exclusion (of, for instance, men) would violate the tenets of humanism, which was peddled to lesbians by therapy as the step beyond feminism. Instead of the invaluable womyn-only or lesbian-only space where we reveled in our freedom to learn and grow together, we now have the ubiquitous "safe, supportive environments," formerly known as womyn's centers. Now they exist for therapeutic personal growth where lesbians learn not from each other as peers, but in therapist-led or -facilitated groups. They offer not revolution, not even assertiveness, but adjustment. (Twelve Step groups, patterned on Alcoholics Anonymous, are blossoming everywhere as the means of coping with every imaginable aspect of life. Despite the successes of AA — in lives saved — we should be more than a little alarmed at the popularity of a program whose First Step is for each person to admit her complete powerlessness over some area of her life. Self-sufficiency, in the form of hands-on workshops and concrete lessons in survival are gone; in their stead we have not even self-defense, but self-improvement.

And what sort of improvement is being taught? Defeating racism or classism? Not really; just "unlearning" them. The former is political and involves group movement; the latter is a personal realignment of ideas, having nothing to do with community.

• The feminist maxim, "The personal is political," was distorted like so many

other things. It has been made to mean that anything a lesbian does, whether or not she involves herself in the furtherance of womyn's or lesbian' liberation, is political activism. It is not, although every aspect of womyn's lives does have political implications. That, and the fact that the oppression we suffer in our lives is not a personal issue but a political one was the original meaning. The present-day lesbian has acquired the right to live an utterly personal, self-centered life, because, after all, the personal is political. She may seek completely private solutions, through therapy or its related themes, to what we had once defined as universal female problems. Various workshops and seminars, not specifically under the auspices of any therapeutic discipline, are nevertheless dedicated to the same self-improvement. It breaks my heart, as a lesbian witch, to acknowledge that one of the themes related to therapy, of late, is certain forms of feminist spirituality. With a personal/therapeutic slant and humanist origins, "spirituality" is making its contribution to the individualization of lesbian feminism.

The truism that each of us must start the revolution with herself was not meant, by its originators, to mean that everyone could retreat into prosperity workshops, parental-paid educations, professions and the professionalizing of every aspect of womyn's liberation (licensed psychics, certified relationship mediators, professional organizers, Ph.D. witches) and the religion of once-a-week therapy. Start with yourself, yes; start and end with yourself, no.

Therapy, with its endless list of diseases to cure in oneself, keeps us standing still and isolated. While dealing with alienation, fear of intimacy, and poverty consciousness, while learning dynamic listening and havingness, we are trapped, as Mary Daly points out, into arrested thinking, "neatly labeling/limiting every impulse,"¹¹ finding no end to the process, spending our lives peeling off layer after layer after layer of seemingly bottomless personal sickness. It cannot be a stage in preparing ourselves for activism, because "therapy, including the institutions of 'feminist therapy', resists being relegated to the role of a 'step.'"¹² It is the religion of middle-class-oriented feminist lesbians, and those who oppose it are indeed heretics. There is an element of coercion here that we are not facing.

What We Could Have

Understanding the feminist classism made possible by lesbian therapy does not mean that from now on our groups can have no structure or form. It means that any group's structure must be arrived at as at least a synthesis of working-class and middle-class experience and values. Whoever is facilitating a meeting must question whether she makes certain decisions and suggestions for the true benefit of the whole group and all of its members, or for the comfort of the group's middle-class members, who don't like raised voices and sudden interruptions.

It doesn't mean that anyone should be allowed to pitch a fit in the middle of

meetings or indulge in any sort of temper tantrum. It means recognizing, when a middle-class lesbian uses subtle manipulations of a group's rules or structure, invoking the principles of therapy which give her the right to demand that others deal with her feelings, that she is on a power trip. It means that when middle-class lesbians, skilled at speaking interminably while sounding humble and altruistic, calmly demand attention to their opinions, taking far more than their share of time, they are interrupting at least as much as a working-class lesbian who yells about the oppressiveness of the rules. We have come to view the middle-class mode as objectively right because we live in a classist society that has taught us all to respect and aspire to middle-class values, even if we don't understand any way in which they are workable in our own lives — even if they mean denying our traditional class and race and ethnic backgrounds.

It does not mean that there can be no politeness, no respectful treatment of one another in meetings. It means realizing that feminist process, while it may prevent yelling bouts (not always evil, you know), also prevents simply the excited expression of ideas, the interruptions of each other, *the mixture of intellect and emotion* that have characterized other groups. Feminist process is not automatically egalitarian. The lesbian community ignores the facts that assuming the necessity of "sharing feelings" in a specified time slot means that those feelings must be hidden (essentially forbidden) until the appropriate time; that many people talking at once does *not* necessarily mean that no one gets heard (only that it might be a challenge for someone to hold the floor solely to herself for very long, a fact which I am sure upsets those accustomed to undivided attention); that silence while one lesbian speaks does not necessarily imply attention in the listeners; that calm, objective political discussions sometimes indicate (and often create) boredom in many working-class lesbians.

It does not mean that any group should be permitted to dominate group dynamics. It means realizing that feminist process *may* have put an end to one kind of hierarchical domination of group interactions but has instituted another kind. Both forms of control exclude working-class lesbians. In both formats, the middle-class rules; therapy gave them the right to rename much of what they were already doing to maintain control, such that therapy becomes synonymous with feminism. Under feminist process, only objectified feelings, which one has analyzed and dealt with, are acceptable. Our liberation movement was not created to provide a solitary stage for each lesbian/woman who felt entitled to one. The system we know as feminist process has become static, a fixed and rigid presence in our community, which we can ill afford if we are ever to become a movement again.

It does not mean that middle-class lesbians have no rights. It means acknowledging that working-class lesbians have had to learn to relate in the forms acceptable to middle-class womyn for years now — and I do mean *had* to. The complete denial of our way of life has been a means of coercing us into conformity with a way foreign to us. A middle-class woman relating with a working-

class woman should no longer feel completely free to find the solutions to her own problems within the relationship without considering the methods and results of her solutions. Is she making demands which are acceptable according to middle-class standards, but which are painful for a working-class woman? Has she ever considered the vast differences in those standards and whence they arise?

At this point, it is incumbent upon middle-class lesbians to stand aside from the privilege they have assumed for themselves and really listen to their sisters who see things differently. This means an ongoing assessment of choices.

Working-class lesbians who seek therapy or become therapists are advised to think twice. Solid friendships are a better place to talk about problems; politics is a better weapon against our oppression, within and without the movement. Therapy does not truly help any of us, individually or collectively; that many oppressed lesbians (subject to classism, racism, anti-Semitism, etc.) end up in this "helping" profession is not a surprise. We all too often serve the upper classes, and act as a buffer for them.

Politically, the anger of working-class lesbians is an expression of raw pain, the unsophisticated anger to which middle-class feminists once felt attached and to which they are now hostile. The acknowledgment of that pain would be many-faceted. It would involve a recognition of the psychic suffering of the affluent housewife (your mother, perhaps); the loneliness of the inner-city widow; the terror of the institutionalized woman, abandoned by everyone (including most of us); the hopelessness of the enslaved prostitute; the entrapment of the incest victim; the struggle of the unemployed teenage mother; the bureaucratic nightmare of lesbians and poor women and Third World women whose children are "adopted" right out of their homes by social welfare agencies; the isolation of the incarcerated woman: The sadly endless list of nonprivileged lesbians/women whose lives our rhetoric has never touched.

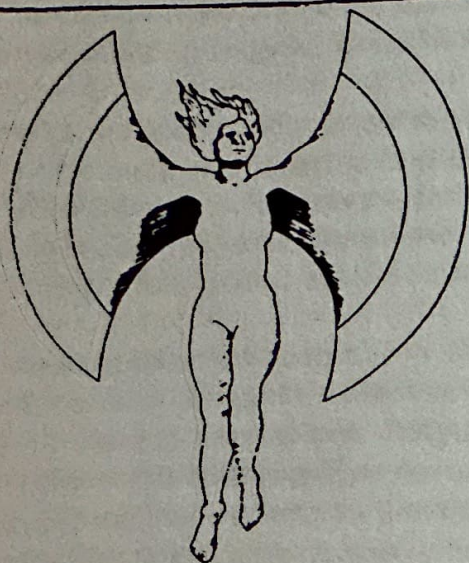
Relief from oppression must come to all of us or none. We cannot settle for academic and employment gains for those who had at least limited access to such privilege – albeit, sometimes, through men – even before feminism. A revolution of lesbians cannot make privilege more comfortably accessible to the already privileged. *"Feminism demands more than private solutions or even private solutions stated in political terms."*¹³

Life, after all – especially lesbian/feminist life – is a progression of relationships in the truest sense: from the momentary to the life-long, the vital touching of one spirit with another. We *should* draw laughter and tears from one another, and we must learn to find them in ourselves. Separation of intellect and emotion, the prime *raison d'être* of therapy and its primary function, is one of the most deadly dichotomies of the patriarchy: one to which women, always stereotyped as controlled by our emotions, are especially susceptible. Above all

things, this dichotomy must be struggled against. Certainly, we must not perpetuate it ourselves. Otherwise, defeat is imminent. A successful battle, however, could give us back ourselves: Whole, integrated, prepared to seek the joy of freedom, individually experienced, but collectively achieved.

Endnotes

- ¹ Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 237. [My emphasis.]
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- ³ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 275-283.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- ⁵ Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery*, p. 223.
- ⁶ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 276.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- ⁸ R.D. Rosen, *Psychobabble* (New York: Atheneum, 1978), p. 13.
- ⁹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 280.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- ¹³ Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery*, p. 237. [My emphasis.]



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**LIVING OUR VISIONS:
Building Feminist Community**

An Invitation

Sarah Lucia Hoagland

I

(Part I was inspired by the showing of a slide in a slideshow on matriarchy by Carol Moorfield and Kathleen Valentine. The slide appeared at first to be of a drawing of a female Aztec warrior, for the figure had breasts. Upon closer examination, however, one could see it was the figure of a man inside a woman's skin, the skin of a priestess he had just slaughtered. You could see where her skin ended at his neck and at his wrists, at his wrists where her hands dangled down, like idiot mittens.)

He wore the bag of a priestess, her breasts shrunken and empty. He emptied her then tried to fill himself. Clinging, controlling, coring, he thought he would become her. He thought he gained her power.

His hands reached out where hers had been, greedy, grabbing, grotesque. Methodically he emptied her skin, believing he was absorbing her power, then destroying what he could not have. Like a boy.

He had resolved to introduce his own meaning to life. Determinedly he destroyed Eve. ALL WITCHCRAFT COMES FROM CARNAL LUST WHICH IN WOMEN IS INSATIABLE. Delightedly he created evil. He believed he created purpose. Purposefully, now, he struts.

Carnal lust. Witchcraft. Craft of the wicca, of the wild, of the wooly. Fires burning, flames blazing, heat searing. . . Interruption.

Victorious he stood there, grinning. Look, Ma, no hands. Look what I've done. Look at ME. His victory prevailed, the power of terror, of disruption, of interruption, demanding attention. Attending, we rivet on him. For days. The predator-cum-protector.

He wore the bag of a priestess, he claimed to have her power. Demanding our attention, he would have us believe he is her; believe, indeed, she never

existed. Startled, I look. Shocked, I focus. Stunned, I stop.

Hypnotically he struts: back and forth, back and forth. Horrified I stare in fascination. He can divert us. For days. He can interrupt, terrorize, demand attention. But he has not killed the spirit.

He has not killed the spirit, the spark of the memory of who we were. He cannot claim that power, the fires of the heath, the fires of the hearth, the fire of the heart. Gold and warm, orange and russet, stirring crackling, searing cauterizing.

He stole the bag of a priestess; but he can never kill the spirit. Only we can.

I want to hold you and kiss you and taste you and move with you and fill up with you and find the part of you within the part of me that steps beyond the part they hurt.

II

Several male faculty are notorious on campus for their harassment of female students.

She comes crying to my office.

The female faculty become outraged. Why do they become outraged? Why have they not been outraged? They live on the same campus as I. In a meeting they become outraged and after go home, outraged, to their husbands or their closets.

She comes to my office and names names, is willing to sign hers, wants to reclaim her dignity, wants to gain knowledge without harassment.

In a meeting they write a position paper telling the president all about IT, not naming names. Outraged, the president encourages them to define IT and promises to issue a warning stating that IT is not permitted on this campus, will not be tolerated (by someone).

I say why talk to big daddy, why not develop guerilla training sessions for female students, help them organize so they can ban together, take one class together, circulate an underground list of harassers.

They look at me, say that's a good idea. They talk about the merits of wearing a wedding ring on campus. Then work for a year defining, trying to figure out how to separate harassment from male sexual advances, normal sexual intercourse. It can't be done, say I, any sexual advance from male faculty to female student is harassment. What can you expect from a lesbian, say they.

A year later the president issues his report. He says IT is a no-no. The faculty are delighted. The women have gotten big daddy to speak. The men now have new locker-room material.

She comes crying to my office. She is willing to name names, willing to start a process.

A woman, reputed to be in the closet, tells her he can and will sue for

defamation of character. She warns, like a father warns his daughter.

To avoid threatening men, women comply with the masculine edict that eradicates female resistance, keep the protector as buffer from the predator, convince themselves that men should masculate. The women have chosen whom they will focus on, whom they will attend to. And it is not her or me.

I want to hold you and kiss you and taste you and move with you and fill up with you and find the part of you within the part of me that steps beyond the part they hurt.

She comes shaking to my office. She has been warned, don't use That-word. She has been told she might be labeled, that things can happen to her records. She was warned in good faith, like a daughter is warned. She was warned by a woman, assistant to a woman reputed to be in the closet.

The women are surprised, outraged. But soon they question what they can prove. They have only a student's word. The woman high up is offended, angry at the innuendos behind her back about her office. Why are you causing trouble, they ask me. They expect me to apologize to her. I go to her. I do not apologize but I acknowledge her, I ease the situation. And this is enough. I am surprised. But then I realize that semblance of smoothness, of things being alright, is all that is required; no disruptions.

My separate perception keeps me from losing bearings in my academy. I know what I want. And I know why I'm tolerated. I no longer understand women there who don't know such things. It is from there that I first saw the evolution of wimmin's liberation to ladies' auxiliary. That they live in fear is no longer an explanation.

She comes shaking to my office. But she makes her choice. She never fit in closets. Her focus is Lesbian. And she stands nearly alone.

I want to hold you and kiss you and taste you and move with you and fill up with you and find the part of you within the part of me that steps beyond the part they hurt.

III

She bursts through, she looks around. Arrogantly she moves her weight. From within her a force rumbles venturing out under heavy eyelids, telling of a passion still burning, whispering of a need still groping.

I said come walk with me, here in this space. It is special for me. For you. Sharply her eyes meet mine, her tension encircles me.

I said you can walk proud here.
I said there can be bonding here.
I said you can take risks here.
I said you can find sisters here.

She said my back hurts.
She said I see nothing new.
She said I'm shut out.
She said I'm alone.

I want to hold you and kiss you and taste you and move with you and fill up with you and find the part of me within the part of you that steps beyond the part they hurt.

I said we could create a place of belonging, a place of growing. A place where our Selves emerge through music, through videos, through books and magazines, through healing, the crafts, the energy, the stories, the lectures and readings, the rituals, the photographs, the gossip. . . through our focus. Here among the many and varied dreams of Lesbians.

The spark in her eye flickers. Sensuous rhythms reach out, electricity crackles.

She said I need you here.

I looked at her.

She said I have no power to speak here.

I said what are you doing now.

She said I'm being attacked.

I said I will not be always here.

She said then you betray me.

I said let me walk here with you now. Take this mirror and find the fires. Gold and warm, orange and russet, stirring crackling, sparking burning.

I said this can be our center. We fight here and love and plot and weave and risk and hurt and get it wrong and laugh. Here, among Lesbians. We need not abide by all that develops. But it is to this space we can refer. Here we can focus. As Lesbians.

She said it isn't real.

I said no, this is not what I come from either.

She said I have been hurt.

I said yes, I know.

She said how do you go on.

I said this is what I choose.

She said I'm scared.

I said yes. . . so am I.

I want to touch you in the crease where arm meets shoulder, teasing you open, gently probing, rocking cradling, falling centering.

I center here, my Self settles here. I do not choose this in order to survive or from obligation to you. I do not find Self here; nor do I find community. Rather, I walk here, focus my attention here, grow here. And I find that in choosing this my source opens, my power develops, a reality emerges.

Because I find you here, walking too.

I want to fall laughing into your arms and hold you. I want to watch your eyes sparkle with delight at some exchange between us. I want to nibble and whisper and dream and suck and laugh and center and lick and talk and focus and nudge and argue and listen and bunt and joke and conspire and kiss and kiss and kiss and kiss. . . in the joy that we are Lesbian.

The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity*

Linda Strega

It is the 1980's, the decade of reactionary politics, and femininity is becoming an accepted value among many U.S. Lesbians. Even many politically radical Lesbians, who I would most expect to support Lesbian self-love and self-respect, who usually call prick bullshit for what it is, are beginning to openly admire and defend feminine ways of dressing and acting. Femininity! A patriarchal super-hype if there ever was one; a phoney ideal created by men, not by Lesbians; an ideal that heterosexual women embody to please men.

Femininity is in no way an inborn aspect of femaleness: our most innate, essential qualities as females can never be developed through the restraining, artificial posing, game-playing, and mirror-gazing that is femininity.¹ Men have taught women what they want women to be – they call it "feminine" or "womanly"; as Lesbians we need to be awake enough to realize that a male invention, a male fantasy trip is *masculine* to the core, no matter what it is named, no matter how many women go along with the lie. Femininity is not truly female; the similarity in the words is a lying male trick.

I think Lesbians' acceptance of anything "feminine" is part of the weakening of Lesbian politics – a Lesbian parallel to the right-wing swing of het politics. The same is true of the popularity of Sado-Masochism among many Lesbians, and S & M is contributing a lot toward the re-acceptance of femininity as a "positive" and "erotic" style among otherwise radical Lesbians. Some reason that if some Lesbians "enjoy it" and "can't stop wanting it," then it is better to go ahead and accept it: that is the kind of irresponsible, reactionary politics too often supported by psychotherapy. It is the kind of liberalness that also supports Lesbians going het, being bisexual, having babies, etc. It is the kind of self-

*This article is part of a book that a group of us is working on entitled *Heterosexism among Lesbians: The Politics of Self-Betrayal*. Donations would be very welcome. For a list of other available articles (all are For Lesbians Only) send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: BATTLEAXE, PO Box 9806, Oakland, CA 94613 U.S.A.

destructiveness that allows Lesbians to enforce thinness as a standard, that calls the slow suicide of dieting "eating healthy" and the self-punishment of over-exercising "staying fit," and that encourages Lesbians to worry about the effects of ageing on their appearance. Those are all male, het values – feminine values – they all revolve around what men want women to act and look like, and they all derive from male desires to control female behavior.

Those Lesbians who are acting out the feminine model and claiming it to be a contribution to Lesbian culture, a flowering forth of their "real selves," are of course femmes, and very often femmes who were once heterosexual. I believe they have not gotten rid of old het values, which are now resurfacing in this reactionary decade.

The het media is full of stories, articles, and images of the het feminist who "realizes that she doesn't have to give up being a woman to be a success in life," who "regrets having tried to be like a man," and is now "rediscovering the excitement of feminine seductiveness, the fun of dressing up in high heels, make-up and swishy clothes, and her deep need for the joys of motherhood." Sound familiar? Doesn't sound too different from lots of Lesbian media, does it?

Femme Privilege – Who Pays for It?

During the past few years, I have read several articles and stories written by femme Lesbians that glorify and celebrate blatant femme role-playing as positive, fun, and erotic. It's not just the writings that alarm me, but the fact that from what I've encountered at Lesbian social and political events, these writings do reflect a fast-growing trend among otherwise radical Lesbians. By contrast, articles I've read about being butch show conflict, self-questioning, self-criticism and pain. The same contrast occurs in most discussions I've had with other Dykes about femme and butch identity and is, I believe, one of the many indications that butches are in an oppressed position relative to femmes. Butches are treated as more Queer, and therefore less acceptable, not only by hets but by femme Lesbians.

We Dykes need to acknowledge that every one of us is either butch or femme, no matter what our politics are, and we need to analyze the inequalities existing among us in regard to those roles. There is so much for us to explore: If we can get beyond bad jokes, denial, romanticizing, and if femmes will deal with their privilege, we can make our friendships, political alliances, and lover relationships more equal, more genuine, more passionate, more joyful, more powerful.

I have been identifying myself openly as a femme for about six years, and have been gradually developing a political analysis about butch and femme roles with a few close Dyke Separatist friends. I define myself as a femme, not because I admire and enjoy femininity or want to accept and develop my

femme qualities, but because I recognize that I accepted feminine training as a girl (why I did not resist, when butch girls did is now unknown to me). Being accepted as a "real girl" by the het world – and therefore by my own self – has given me the bearing, the manner, the lack of doubt about being a "real woman" that femme privilege bestows although I do not now identify as a "woman" but as a Lesbian or Dyke.¹ I try to avoid oppressive femme behavior, but I know that because of my history I will still always be femme. If I ever claimed to have become butch because of rejecting femme clothing and behavior, that would be as untrue and offensive as a class-privileged Lesbian saying she's working-class or poor now because she doesn't have much money and rejects classist values.

I also don't believe it is possible to be neither butch nor femme. There is no way for any girl to escape the unrelenting pressure to feminize herself, and thus become a "woman"; this pressure exists in every patriarchal culture – and I don't know of any culture in the world today which is not patriarchal. (If there are any Lesbian cultures on this planet now, they would have to be very secret and vulnerable: we in the U.S. are not able to benefit from knowledge of them.) The styles of femininity vary in quality and degree from culture to culture, but in every patriarchal culture "woman" is defined by her allegiance and orientation towards male values and desires. Because the pressure is universal and unrelenting, every girl is faced with the choice of either submitting to feminization or resisting it.

I believe that butch and femme roles are already chosen at such an early age (they can be observed in four-year-old girls) that they have a profound effect on how we feel within ourselves and how we interact with each other and with the het world for the rest of our lives. A small girl is surrounded by only two models of role behavior: she lives in a world that says, and believes, "Women dress and act like *this*, and men dress and act like *that*, and anyone who's not a woman is a man." If something in her cannot and will not accept the artificiality of femininity, the trappings and mannerisms of the feminine role, everyone around her will begin telling her she's not really a girl. As she gets older and still resists femininity, the accusations that she's not really a girl and cannot become a woman intensify. When she continues to resist, and as her Lesbian identity becomes obvious, she is labelled a deviant, a freak of nature, a man-in-a-woman's-body. She is not supposed to exist: She is a serious, dangerous threat to the Big Lie of "feminine woman," and so men and their women collaborators will make up any ridiculous hateful fiction to explain away her existence. The pressure is meant to humiliate and bully her into accepting femininity, and it must indeed put her through soul-shaking self-doubt, even if she knows other butches. Too often she does not meet other butches for many years but faces the onslaught alone, during the most vulnerable years of her life – her girlhood.

Meanwhile, girls who accept femininity (the vast majority, unfortunately) are

accepted as "real girls" and are encouraged to take pride in their feminine ways. There are degrees of femininity: some femme girls accept the complete emascinated drag queen sex-object ideal while others take on just enough feminine identity to still be accepted as real women. But, because of hets' fanaticism about "real womanhood," hets do set a rigid line: any girl who refuses to make some concession to feminine requirements is pushed over the line – that is, she is denied the right to be called normal. Not only is she "not really a woman," she is considered a freak; she is pushed outside the bounds of normal society, which therefore judges that it owes her nothing and has the right to destroy her. She has become a danger to patriarchy instead of a saleable item in the het marketplace. Femme privilege is based on a remaining claim to that "normal" standing that butches are completely denied. Even though femme Lesbians are oppressed as Lesbians – a very real and serious oppression – we are still treated by hets as if we are more like women than butches are. When young butch and femme lovers are found out by very angry het guardians, who gets the most blame and punishment? You can bet your booties it's not the femme. The usual interpretation, as we all know, is, "That disgusting bulldagger shouldn't be allowed around decent innocent girls."

Knowing from experience how few femmes are willing to acknowledge their privilege in relation to butches, I'm becoming more and more anxious about the damage caused by the flaunting of femme privilege – damage to all of us as Lesbians, and especially damage to butches, who bear more of the brunt of Lesbian oppression because they are treated as more Queer. (Not to mention the other aspects of butch oppression such as inequality in lovemaking.)

Because femmes – in varying degrees – fit more closely the *male-created* ideal of "real woman," we are more privileged than butches, both in the het world and in Lesbian communities. Because butches have rejected feminine conditioning more completely, they are treated as being more Queer, more suspect, more "unnatural." (Never-het femmes get more Queer oppression than ex-het femmes, and ex-married femmes and mothers get even more "normal" privilege. An ex-het butch and a never-het femme are in a position to oppress each other, but when they are both never-het or both ex-het, the butch will be more oppressed than the femme.) Hets do not relate to femme Lesbians with the same degree of vicious Queer-hating (even though we do get it, especially if we're trying to dress and act less femme, it is never as bad as what a butch gets). As is always the case with oppression, we've internalized these privileges and oppressions, so that butches and femmes alike tend to treat femmes as if we were more "real women," more deserving of care and attention. Meanwhile, butches are viewed as being male-identified; what could be more insulting, untrue and oppressive? Butches receive a more extreme version of hets' insistence on seeing Lesbians as male.

Patriarchal het society defines only two "genders" – man and woman. "Woman" is actually not a biological definition, as men claim: it is an artificial,

social definition invented by men. It defines what men want females to be – a submissive being who bonds emotionally, mentally and physically only with men and who tries to live down to men's definition of her. According to this scheme, if you're not a woman (namely, a male-identified female), then you're some kind of man, or trying to be a man; you are "unnatural." So, Lesbians, by choosing to bond with other females instead of with men, are defined by hets as being "like men." (Notice that *only* Lesbians really give primary allegiance to other females; het women and all men give primary allegiance to men. So the comparison of Lesbians to men is inaccurate even in respect to the choice of who we bond with.) Butches, who in addition refused from a very early age to take on the mannerisms, clothing, style, and values and behavior of woman-as-defined-by-men, are viewed as being even more "like men." In reality, they are being more truly female, more self-affirming, more true to themselves as female beings who live by their own female (Lesbian) values, and not by male lies. (This is not to deny the effects of internalized oppression, including self-doubt, that puts a very high price on Lesbian self-love.)

Butch Stereotypes – Who Benefits from Them?

Many, many femmes, especially if they were once het, also act as if butches enjoy the same privileges as men do – an outrageous Lesbophobic lie. Butches live under female oppression as well as under the worst of Queer oppression. From the upside-down, het-created lie that butches are like men come all the rest of the stereotypes about butches – that they are aloof, cool, unable or unwilling to deal with shows of emotion or with the complexities of personal relationships, tough, etc., etc. And that stereotype is partly supported by the public *image* that many a butch is forced to develop for survival in a het world that is extremely hostile and dangerous to her, especially if she is further oppressed by race, class, size, physical ability, or any other oppression. Like many other stereotypes, the ones about butches are often projections by those on the privileged end – femmes, in this case. The butch stereotypes enable the femmes to *feel* less Queer, more normal, once they've defined the butch as the most Queer, as the one who's "acting like a man." The projection also often comes from ex-het femmes who were married, came out, and pressured their butch lovers to conform to their lingering desires for men. I have found as much or more willingness to deal honestly with feelings, and as much or more genuine warmth and sensitivity, among butches as among femmes. What passes for "dealing with feelings" in the name of "honesty" among what I call queeny femmes is often more like theatrical power-plays or cruel outbursts that show no consideration for other Lesbians feelings. These femmes often use tears to manipulate other Lesbians, but ignore or ridicule a butch who cries. That to me is more male.

Extreme damage is caused to butches by femmes acting on stereotypes, and that damage is not diminished by those femmes superficial romanticizing of butches "erotic power" or by the untrue assumption that Lesbians value the butch role more highly than the femme role; those claims are just another form of objectification. There is a similarity here to a class-privileged Lesbian being downwardly mobile, claiming to be poor or working class, romanticizing poor and working class Lesbians, and feeling sorry for herself because she is "the wrong class." If you pay attention to how Lesbians actually treat each other, it becomes very obvious that femmes are treated more like "real people," "real women," while butches are treated as more Queer, more in need of feminism.

Feminism has remained extremely heterosexist and Lesbophobic, and so it supports the male ideals of feminine values. That is why most ex-het feminist Lesbians think that butches are in a role, but that femmes are not. Like with other privileges, femme-ness is considered the norm. And of course it's those with the privilege who have the power to define what the norm is. Butches are often seen as unfeminist by ex-het Women's Liberation femmes and are accused of not being "woman-identified" – a trendy, indirect way of saying not "womanly." The fact is, Lesbian butches are more truly female-identified than the femmes who criticize them: it is butches' rejection of femininity – that very male invention – that offends these femmes. Never does it occur to such femmes that they themselves are the ones who need to become more female-identified, that is, more Lesbian-identified. The feminine "womanliness" they value so much is not basic to female nature at all: butches' insistence on Lesbian strength, directness and independence from male definitions is more truly female. Women's Liberation feminism is concerned with making heterosexuality more comfortable for women; why should any Lesbian want to support such anti-Lesbian, anti-female reformism? Most ex-het Women's Liberation femmes have been too arrogant, because of their het and femme privilege and Lesbophobia, to realize that it is they who have something to learn from always-Dyke butches.

Also, lots of confusion is caused because many femmes are mistakenly assumed to be butches: many femmes believe themselves to be butches. Some femmes who are also privileged in other ways, like looks, thinness, class, etc., can get some power among other Lesbians by playing at being butch: they may be admired for managing to act "butchy" without "going too far," yet they certainly do not experience butch oppression because they are not butches. On the other hand, there are more oppressed femmes who get pressured into a butch-like role by more privileged and more femmy femmes. When two femmes are lovers or friends, if one is more oppressed because of being darker, fatter, or older, having less looks privilege, less class privilege, or less or no het experience, being more Dyke Separatist, etc., she is likely to be considered the less feminine of the two, and therefore "the butch." This just adds to her existing oppression, and she is more likely to understand the nature of butch oppression

as a result of being treated like a butch at times.

Hets often assume that feminine-appearing Lesbians are really bisexual or het. I don't think that assumption is 100% het ignorance: I think that feminine clothing, hair styles, behavior, obsessions with dieting and with male-approved appearance are all a form of social communication that says "I'm willing to please men," or at the very least, "I accept the het dress and behavior code. I'm not as Queer as a butch. I'm really rather normal." Generally, femmes can pass as het more easily than butches, no matter how hard they may try to be out. But there are differences among femmes also, and some are treated as much more Queer than others, especially those who try to be visibly out and who reject feminine values. These femmes are in a position to be oppressed by other femmes who are selling out, and they are more natural allies for butches.

Some femmes *enjoy* the fact that men and/or het women like their femmess. Some ex-het femmes are still caught up with male approval, even if it takes the form of thinking, "You men like what you see, but you can't have me any more." I'm not making this up: I've actually read that written by a femme in a Lesbian publication and I've heard Lesbians talk that way. Lesbians who play those sexual games with men are making the games, and the men, more important to them than Lesbian identity and solidarity. Other Lesbians use feminine clothes and behavior mostly to make themselves safer from Queer oppression by trying to blend in more with het ways. Whatever the reasons, it's all at the expense of butches, who by being the most blatant and public resistance fighters against heterosexist values, by not catering to het approval at all, become the targets for the most intense punishment from the het world. After all, if even other Lesbians (femmes) are willing to play that part of the het game – are willing to dress and change their bodies (dieting, shaving, altering their hair) as men dictate – that supports the het pressure on butches to do the same (not to mention the racism, ageism, looksism and fat oppression involved in doing those things). Butches then become an even smaller minority among Lesbians, and more vulnerable to scapegoating. And again, they are scapegoated not only by hets, but by those many femme Lesbians who accept het values enough to enjoy femmess. Because femininity and all its symbols are male-created, any Lesbian who falls for the lie is extremely likely to regard butches as pseudo-men in some form or another; that is *the* message of femininity: "These symbols and actions show that I am a real woman, anyone who doesn't look and act this way is *not* a real woman." It is a built-in part of feminine behavior and values to treat butches, and even less feminine femmes, as pseudo-men. This is especially true of feminine Lesbians who used to be het and have not spent the considerable amount of time, energy and thought it takes to analyze and understand het privilege and Lesbian and butch oppression.

Some of my understanding about the butch role – limited though that understanding is because of my being femme – comes from how I have been treated

by het women, by more feminine femmes, and by anti-Dyke-Separatist femmes who think of Separatists as being like men. At those times, I am being treated a little bit as if I were butch, as if I was very Queer and not quite female. Not a nice feeling, and it gets worse as time goes on. While it's happening it has made me feel, in weaker moments, as if there might really be something monstrous about me. The effects of being viewed as a freak or a male go very deep, no matter how much I *know* they are wrong, no matter how strong I am — and I am very strong and very politically aware. It's so ass-backwards, so insulting and objectifying to be seen as being like your worst enemy — men. That's the kind of thing that's done continuously to butches. Sometimes it's done by femme Lesbians in the convoluted way of romanticizing butches as lovers: wanting to be pursued and swept off their feet; wanting to be the one who is made love to and not caring to focus the same attention on her lover; wanting to experience the butch lover as other, as some kind of opposite, as being somehow mysteriously more powerful, stronger, braver. The honest admiration and respect that a butch could arouse in another Lesbian, femme or butch, gets distorted in a het-like power game — an addiction to inequality, with the femme in the power position and pretending not to be. It's not honest, it's not respectful, and it sure isn't love.

Why romanticize butches' courage and risk-taking, letting them take the worst of the punishment from the het world, do most of the work of maintaining Lesbian visibility, and be used by femmes to celebrate the femmes' "power to attract"? What about femmes trying to develop some of those butch qualities they claim to admire so much? (Many femmes have done that, but the current trend toward femininity is eroding support for de-feminization and replacing it with strong pressure to feminize instead.) What about femmes recognizing their privileged and oppressive position? What about trying to stop the sexualizing of power imbalances? What about acknowledging that acting out of privilege is, of course, going to feel more comfortable, but that that doesn't make it all right. That's why femmes, especially lately, are so likely to say "I enjoy being a femme," while butches express more conflict about their role, soul-searching, discomfort, self-criticism, *pain*. Being butch is obviously not a comfortable, enjoyable role! Because it's an oppressed position. Because it's the more Queer role.

The extent to which degrading anti-butch attitudes are accepted unchallenged among Lesbians shows in the following description of a sex video advertised prominently in the May, 1985, issue of the local "gay" newspaper: "For the lesbian s/m connoisseur — butch is taught a few manners in femme worship." Anyone having a hard time recognizing the hatred in this ad only needs to substitute the name of any other oppressed group for "butch" and the corresponding privileged group for "femme" and feel what your gut reaction is. (The depth of Lesbian oppression is such that it is often easier for us to react emotionally to an issue which is not particularly and solely about Lesbians.)

Lesbians' work in Women's Liberation Movements of the late '60s and the '70s made it easier and safer for many women to become Lesbians even after having been het for many years. These "new Lesbians," now a majority in many Lesbian communities, brought their heterosexist assumptions with them and exert a lot of influence because of their het privilege; their het influence has no doubt increased Lesbophobia toward butches in our communities. (Many of the Lesbians would not have come out without the encouragement, safety, and support of Women's and Gay Liberation Movements, and now that being out is becoming more difficult again, many are going back to heterosexuality.)

I have met many ex-het femmes who, because of their Lesbophobic assumptions about roles, think femmes are oppressed by butches! When I asked one ex-het, ex-married Lesbian mother what she meant by saying she, as a femme, felt oppressed by butches, she answered that it was "an extension of how I was oppressed as a heterosexual woman." This Lesbian is unfortunately far from unique in thinking of a butch as another sort of man, and she had been a radical Lesbian for many years already when she said that. Het attitudes and het privilege don't vanish upon coming out, even after years of being a political Lesbian: they have to be recognized and analyzed and consciously resisted just like any other oppressive beliefs and behaviors. How many times I've heard ex-het Women's Liberation Lesbians say things like, "She's an old bar Dyke, a butch, but she's learning a lot from feminists." Sound familiar? So far I haven't heard anyone say, "She's an ex-het Women's Liberation femme, but she's learning a lot from always-Dyke butches." Have you? (If you have, please let me know — I'd love to meet your friends.) I do have a good friend, Rose Ruston, who is an ex-het Women's Liberation femme who talks a lot about how much she's learned from always-Dyke butches; she is from Aotearoa (the Maori name for New Zealand), where some of the politics of Lesbian identity seem to be a lot stronger than here in the U.S. Rose is working on a more comprehensive article about butch and femme roles, from a Lesbian Separatist perspective, which analyzes in depth the issues of butch oppression and femme privilege.

The Het Woman's Uniform vs. Lesbian Identity

I have been verbally assaulted (that's exactly how it feels) at meetings, at friends' parties, and even in my own home, by femme Lesbians who wear some form of femme drag and want to know why I don't "dress up," why I "want to wear a uniform" (talk about Lesbophobic, when they are the ones wearing the male-approved feminine uniform), and complain about how terribly pressured they feel to wear Dykey clothes. In every case these femmes aggressively initiated talking about clothes — I do not go around personally confronting Lesbians who dress feminine, nor does anyone else I know who feels the same as I do about this issue: we are usually too busy defending ourselves against attacks

on our lack of femininity. (Meanwhile, I've often been treated to the outrageous injustice of hearing feminine Lesbians praised for their "courage" in displaying their femininity. Where is the "courage" in perpetuating male het values, at the expense of Dykes who are fighting them, and with the rewards from the het world for being less of a threatening Queer? It is the Dykes who reject femininity who are truly courageous.) One femme, another ex-het, ex-married mother, even gave me a long lecture at my own kitchen table about how the "Dyke look" (butch) is really a European-descent middle-class style; she claimed that racially oppressed Lesbians and working-class and poor Lesbians like to "dress up" femme. (She, like me, is working class, christian-raised, of European-descent.) For her, apparently, racially oppressed butches and working-class and poor butches either don't exist or don't count. Not to mention myself, sitting in front of her, a working-class femme who hates feminine clothes and rejects the idea that femme drag is "dressing up" in any positive sense: I also did not count.

The clothes I wear are not the kind that men designate for women: they are the cheaper, sturdier, warmer in cold weather, less constricting and more protective clothing that men would like to reserve for themselves. Wearing them is not only more comfortable and functional, it also makes it more obvious to anyone who sees me (including other Dykes) that I am a Dyke. My Dyke clothes also free my movements to be more natural to myself, because they don't create or require the artificial constraints that feminine clothes do: the smaller steps, the legs kept together, the restricted shoulder movements, the fussing with hair, jewelry, and make-up that we're used to seeing in women. (When I refer to restricted body movement, I am not talking about physical ability. Whatever one's physical ability, clothing can either restrict or allow maximum use of one's body.) I call feminine clothes "drag" because they are a male-invented, phoney, game-playing het costume. Het women's lives are based on lies that are repeated so often, and acted out so often, that the truths about themselves as females and potential Lesbians are buried deeper than deep: het women are dead to themselves as true females. There is nothing in their lives, their values, their thoughts and desires as *het women* that can give Lesbians anything but the cold touch of death. They don't know what the needs of a female soul are, or they wouldn't be het; they wouldn't be nurturing their very enemy. So why are so many Lesbians imitating het women? Or in some cases, going back to values they had when they themselves were het?

So many femmes are now wearing dresses to Lesbian parties and dances, talking about how much they love to wear dresses, jewelry, make-up, obsessing themselves with dieting and over-exercising (usually in the name of "health"), writing stories and articles about the erotic pleasure of "dressing up" femme, writing stories about femmes flirting with butches in the same way that het women flirt with "men." That's no harmless diversion or form of self-expression: It's not creative, it's not "freeing," it's not daring or sexy. It's just the same old tired phoney heterosexist crap: Spend plenty of time and energy on your nail

polish, dresses, diets, body-shaping exercises, poses and games; fantasize yourself as the center of sexual attention, make everything into a sexual game, get yourself further and further away from female reality, from real female Lesbian power; identify more and more with het values – shit, you could be that woman in the lipstick commercial, just substitute a butch Lesbian for the prick that's panting after her – if your lover or friend doesn't like that kind of crap, you'll teach her how fun it can be. How much time and interest does this leave you for Lesbian politics, fighting patriarchy, forming real Lesbian cultures? Why be a Lesbian at all if you so admire male and het values?

I don't understand the pleasure some femmes claim to get from feminine drag, but I am positive it is connected to heterosexist privilege – that is, it is het-created, het-approved, het-rewarded, and anti-Lesbian. I don't know why most girls accept feminine training when, clearly, it is possible to resist it as butch girls do, but I do know from experience that femme Lesbians have the choice and the ability to recognize the lie for what it is and to reprogram themselves. Our politics change our feelings about a lot of things: think of certain movies or books you really enjoyed before you became more politically aware – movies and books that disgust you now, because your awareness is so much sharper, and your gut feelings respond to your present knowledge. I feel that way about the feminine clothes I admired as a little girl, and I feel angry about the clownish, yet sexually suggestive crap pushed on unknowing little girls as clothing – miniature versions of what they see adult het women wearing to advertise their fuckability by men. Because that's what it is really about, the reduction of females to men's prey for physical, mental, and spiritual rape; and it's about women's collaboration with men in accepting that role and in accepting clothing and mannerisms that *appear* to invite rape. Girls and women certainly do *not* want to be raped, but men encourage them to dress as if they invite sexual assault, because it gives men another chance to blame women and girls for rape instead of admitting their own responsibility as rapists. No female can afford to be innocent about men's deadly games.

Feminine clothes and games are not something that can just be tacked onto a Lesbian's otherwise-political life without affecting her and other Lesbians in deeply damaging ways. Those "feminine" things are male-invented signals and symbols and results of female submission and degradation; we cannot transcend or reclaim them – they are in no way natural, they are loaded with meaning. They are actually *masculine* to the extreme. Any pleasure that is gotten by wearing feminine get-up is enjoyed at the expense of Lesbians who are oppressed by it – and that means especially butches, who are thereby made to feel more Queer, more freakish, more unnatural. And it oppresses femmes like me who would feel miserable and degraded in feminine drag, and who have experienced the Queer-baiting game-playing of queenly femmes. It also makes it that much harder for Lesbians like me to identify ourselves openly as femme and discuss roles, because it reinforces other Lesbians stereotypes

about what being femme means. NOT ALL FEMMES WANT TO CULTIVATE FEMININITY. Many of us are resisting it wholeheartedly: we are trying to strengthen our Lesbian identities, not weaken them. Lesbians who dress feminine also make life harder and more dangerous for the rest of us in relation to the het world, because blatant Lesbians become a smaller minority who are therefore easier to discriminate against, harass, scapegoat and brutalize. It makes it harder for us to get and hold jobs, welfare or disability income, to be rented apartments, to attend schools, to get medical care, to go anywhere, to even just walk down the street. If all Lesbians were obvious Lesbians, we would all be safer – there's a hell of a lot of us, and we would be a force to be reckoned with.

Butches' choice to resist femininity is the choice of a female who is being true to herself, choosing to be as alive to her female self as possible, regardless of the punishments inflicted on her as a result I find in that resistance a key to Dyke power, Dyke beauty, Dyke love, and Dyke integrity.

Endnote

¹ In this article, I use the term female to describe the beings we are born as – the reality that is not defined by men's lies or by adopted artificialities – and the gender definition that is shared by Lesbians and women, because we were all born female. Like many other Dykes, I do not consider myself a woman, but a *Lesbian* or a *Dyke*. I was a woman when I was heterosexual. To call ourselves women is to accept men's definition of us. Hets don't accept the existence of Lesbianism, so they make us invisible by defining us as *fucked-up women*, *unnatural women*, *women-trying-to-be-men*. If we call ourselves *women* (or the closet terms of *wimmin*, *womyn*, *wombmoon*, etc.), we unknowingly go along with making ourselves invisible, even to each other. We are LESBIANS or DYKES, not women. "Woman" means het female: A female who accepts and participates in men's definition of her place in patriarchy as a help-mate (helper of man), bearer, nurturer and defender of men; who accepts this place and function which require denial and betrayal of her own rights, freedom, and well-being and those of all other females, because those rights conflict with the male will to rape, dominate, possess and destroy. Spelling "woman" differently to take the "man" out is just a cover-up; women, being het, are completely bound up with men. Lesbians are not bound up in the same way. Even Lesbians who like, trust, and support some boys and men have chosen their primary and most intimate alliances with other Lesbians and not with men; they reject heterosexuality. A woman who fucks with men is het or bisexual, and not a Lesbian, no matter what she calls herself. It is a tragic sign of the erosion of Lesbian identity, Lesbian politics, and Lesbian self-respect when Lesbians accept het or bisexual women calling themselves "Lesbians." I've already heard several times statements like, "A Lesbian friend of mine is fucking with men now." Then she's NOT a Lesbian! But then, in Lesbian communities where even men are often accepted as "Lesbians" if they are "transsexuals" or even just claim to be "pre-operative transsexuals," Lesbian self-love is in deep trouble.

The description of this analysis that has most influenced my thinking appeared in a report by Ariane Brunet and Louise Turcotte of the workshop on Radical Lesbians at the Montreal conference "Lesbiennes Visibles l'Une a l'Autre" (Lesbians Visible One to Another), printed in the December 1982 issue of *Amazones d'Hier Lesbiennes d'Aujourd'hui*.

A Letter Ms. Didn't Print

Annie McCombs

Dedication

I dedicate my letter to the memory of Cynthia Engstrom, a 19-year-old Union Square San Francisco prostitute who – on or about June 17, 1985 – was bound, gagged and drowned in a bathtub on-the-job allegedly by a \$72,000 a year Marin County, California banker named L. Arthur Byrd; Byrd also had been charged last year with sexual harassment by two female bank employees. The media reported that Engstrom had been warned “not to allow the client to bind her.” It also reported that this man had been arrested “on suspicion of murdering the prostitute during a bizarre sex fantasy [my emphasis].”^{} Cynthia Engstrom joins Dorothy Stratton in the otherwise faceless and nameless body count of our “disappeared” – although some of us could add those we knew personally who didn't survive male supremacist sexual practices.*

^{*}On fantasy: Andrea Dworkin's AMICUS CURIAE brief filed in support of the law against pornography which she co-authored with Catharine A. MacKinnon, in the 7th Court of Appeals (#84-3147), on Feb. 28, 1985, pp. 3-4: “The vocabulary of sexual fantasy often applied to pornography as a genre, is in fact the language of prostitution where the act that a man wants done and pays to get done is consistently referred to as his ‘fantasy,’ as if it never happens in the real world. He goes to a prostitute and pays her money so that she will do what he tells her to do, and it is this act that is called ‘fantasy.’”

Susie Bright, editor of *On Our Backs*, in a film review in *Coming Up*, August 1985, looks at one entry to the S.F. Lesbian/Gay Film Festival, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. Bright states that “. . .any sentimental attempt to take these fantasies as a prescription for living will only make you realize you're already living it.” Then, she quotes the film's female sadist, Wanda: “The masochist must believe that he is dreaming, even when he isn't.” You could wake up dead.

March 29, 1985

Ms. Magazine
 119 West 40th St.
 New York, NY 10018

Ms. Editors:

I was forced to drop out of high school because I was gay.¹ The story is classic; the viciousness *still* stuns me. John Kennedy was president. As a consequence, but not the only cost, I lost an education I wanted. The loss has been permanent, like much damage is.

A major reason why the loss remained permanent is class-based hierarchy. I understand 'poor' to mean that when my family went on welfare, it was an *improvement*. Unlike women published, quoted and admired, 'working class' has been a goal, both elusive and disabling. I personally understand what poverty and lack of education mean for women.

You don't know how many women who come from my reality have been assassinated because they were women; none of us ever will. I do know that while poverty set them up, being born a woman painted a target on them. And, while money or education can and does help, neither guarantees a woman's life. These sisters were young, usually teenagers, not always. Many were not white. Some already had kids. Some were prostitutes. I was only lucky — I stayed alive. They weren't so lucky. You know?

If any of these dead women had been luckier, she might have read Mary Kay Blakely's article titled, "Is One Woman's Sexuality Another Woman's Pornography?" in April *Ms.* 1985, like I did. Then again, some of us didn't read. Not stupid, not disinterested, just illiterate. Also, what we wanted was something to help us out. She might instead have spent the \$1.75 on a drink at The Study, a 4 a.m. breakfast at Pam Pam East, or an El Faro burrito. None of us were feminists, then. But our lives — and their deaths — are largely why feminism exists for me as a political practice. We're all in a lot of trouble if it doesn't work. Murder and torture are male supremacist sexual practices epidemically forced on women and children. What our dead sisters thought or hoped, we can't know; there is no record. We can guess that they would rather be alive. I do know that for those women hideously tortured to death "for the sex",² there is no freedom of speech. No freedom. No speech. No life. And, *no* credibility even in death. Other victims of political repression are understood politically; it is a death-right. I mean, when a man is tortured to death anywhere, people see political persecution; when the same thing happens to a woman the same people see sex.

As editors, you frame a make-believe question, puffing it up as important by emblazoning the plain red cover of *Ms.* with one-inch-high white letters

focusing the word "sexuality" dead-center. (My alternate title for Blakely's work: "Is One Man's Pornography Another Woman's Life?") You, like the A.C.L.U. and their phony lawsuit in Indianapolis, attempt to erase the harm, the pornography and the pornographers *entirely*. You frame your question as if to structure an internecine feminist fight. You call it a "Philosophical Debate." I say that women's right to our own lives is not debatable.³

You allow the harm to continue unabated while so-called pro-sex feminists pressure other women into accepting male supremacist sexual practices. This includes practices such as: The glorification of the Marquis de Sade; the protection and pursuit of male privilege over other women; the exploitation of women's personal sexual histories complete with details of abuse.⁴ This fight is about women's lives. It is not about your sexuality. If you think otherwise, your first responsibility is to figure out why you think it's OK for you to cost us our sisters (and also our lives, our sexuality).

Those of us who know what pornography looks like up close, know what it took to make it. We know how it's done; how the editors lay it out cover to cover – reel to reel. We know what to look for: *name* a sexual crime against a woman or a child – we will show it back to you in the pornography sold as sexual entertainment. We know how it works and what it does. We know real names of real women in it and what they really say about it. Some of us are those women.

You quote F.A.C.T.⁵ member, Barbara Kerr, who was also quoted in the *N.Y. Native*, Jan. 14-27, 1985, faulting anti-pornography activists because we "always talk about the body count. By that, I gather, dead bodies don't count. Not mutilated or brutalized ones either. Those sisters are the "disappeared" of the women's movement. I *will* call out their names until the day comes when sex means something *else* besides women's dead bodies. I live for that day. On that day, I will be silent. I will remember those sisters who have been permanently silenced. Then, I will thank those who changed the world.

Annie McCombs
San Francisco, CA

Notes

¹ "gay" then; "dyke" now; "lesbian" to you.

² Henry Lee Lucas likes to say that he did it "for the sex" about his 360+ victims, which include his 63-year-old ex-prostitute mother, who is now being blamed for what he did to her and the others (*S.F. Examiner* 10-28-84).

³ Materially, your editorial sidebar policy allowed you to give your side of the pornography question 6½ inches more copy; the parenthetical reference pointers refer to your side 30% more often; the number of sidebar voices run 2-1 your favor in three out of 5 cases. Only Blakely knows what you did to her article.

⁴ This practice became undeniable in a class on Lesbian-Feminism; one student's goal was to destroy serious inquiry while creating a false consciousness raising situation wherein she could consume live pornography, i.e., listening to "sexual histories."

⁵ F.A.C.T. is a small, elite group of leftist-professional-types organized *only* to obstruct other women's attempts to have an anti-pornography civil rights law as written by Dworkin/MacKinnon. (Your editorial gambit turning this tiny group into 1/2 of the women's movement is a fraud.)

A collection of thirty stories of
lesbian community, vision, struggle
and growth-told by the Lesbians
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Breaking Silence, Breaking Faith: The Promotion of *Lesbian Nuns*

Susanna J. Sturgis

Lesbian Nuns, Naiad Press's anthology of autobiographical stories by lesbian nuns and ex-nuns, was a publishing phenomenon before it even appeared on bookstore shelves. When asked to speculate about the reasons for the widespread attention given to *Lesbian Nuns*, both co-editors responded in terms of the book's content. Rosemary Curb attributed the media's interest to "the double marginality of lesbians and nuns."¹ Nancy Manahan echoed this and also elaborated, "I think it touches a deep nerve in our collective consciousness where religion and spirituality intersect with the enormous power of the sexual and erotic."²

But regardless of its contents, no book becomes an "overnight" publishing phenomenon unless it is brought to the attention of the right people. In *Lesbian Nuns*, Naiad Press had a title likely to rouse the interest of TV and radio talk show hosts, of those who write for trade journals and the popular press. It chose to promote the book to this audience, and the rest, as they say, is history: the Phil Donohue Show, a favorable review in *Newsweek*, vehement opposition from the Boston archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church, and much more.

If circumstances had been different, the story might have ended here: "Small press scores stunning success with controversial book." Instead, the methods used to achieve this success have become at least as controversial as the book itself. This is particularly true within the lesbian-feminist community, where lesbian nuns and ex-nuns are by no means as invisible or exotic as they are in the country at large. The promotion of *Lesbian Nuns* deserves widespread discussion among lesbians and feminists, for the issues it raises are by no means peculiar to publishing.

Mixed Messages

As book buyer for a feminist bookstore, I heard about *Lesbian Nuns* long

before it was published. As the publication date approached, the flyers sent out to bookstores and to those on the Naiad mailing list began, "NUNS. Alien in their dramatic garb. Set apart from us in their regimented communities, by their singular dedication. NUNS. Different. . . Fascinating. Their lives intrigue us all." This copy was also used on the back cover of the book. Co-editor Curb objected to it, but publisher Barbara Grier reminded her that the purpose of cover copy – and, she might have added, promotional flyers – is to sell books.³

The most casual television viewer or reader of the periodical press can testify that what sells best in this society is sex. Sex was an obvious undercurrent in Naiad's promotion of *Lesbian Nuns*; often it erupted like a geyser into the open air. In mid-February, over a month before the book's publication, I read a full-page story about the book in the trade journal *Publishers Weekly*. "Everyone wants to know what nuns do in the dark," Barbara Grier was quoted as saying. "I haven't quite figured that out."⁴

The mixed messages in that article reflected the two distinct tones present in Naiad's publicity. On one hand, the book was promoted as an important milestone in lesbian publishing – which it is. On the other, presumably because important milestones don't have guaranteed blockbuster appeal – "There is a great deal of sex in it, but," Grier pauses, "I must emphasize that it's not prurient, because there are people who when they hear about it salivate down their jowls."⁵

When I read the *PW* article, I assumed that it could tell me nothing about *Lesbian Nuns* that I had not heard several times direct from the publisher. Skimming through, I noted only in passing the next-to-last paragraph, which said, "Naiad has sold serial rights to *Forum* magazine and to *Ms*." I had no idea what *Forum* was, or who owned it. It did not occur to me that it might be a good idea to find out.

Forum is owned by Penthouse International, and a copy of the June 1985 issue now rests on my desk. The lead headline reads, in dayglo orange capital letters, "SEX LIVES OF LESBIAN NUNS."

Unlike its parent publication, *Forum* relies on the written word to turn its readers on. Although some gay material and material by women is included, its primary audience is clearly heterosexual men. Feature articles are chosen, written, and edited with this in mind. "The Most Erotic Island," for instance, in the April 1985 issue, describes the lost customs of certain South Pacific islanders in a way that conjures for the heterosexual male reader fantasies of infinitely available women.

Forum's tone is "sexual revolution"; its ideal sex life involves fucking and getting fucked as often and in as many unusual settings as possible. It lends support to women who articulate a similar view within the feminist and lesbian communities; along with "Sex Lives of Lesbian Nuns," the June issue contained an enthusiastic review of the lesbian sex quarterly *On Our Backs*.

Forum also enjoys taking pot-shots at feminists with conflicting views. Listed among the out's and should-be-out's in its April feature, "What's In, What's Out," were Robin Morgan, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the Indianapolis and Minneapolis city councils (both of which passed anti-pornography ordinances), Women Against Pornography, Andrea Dworkin's tailor, feminist erotica, and Gloria Steinem.

No one will be surprised to learn that the *Lesbian Nun* stories bought and published by *Forum* — "They Shall Not Touch, Even in Jest," "Finding My Way," and "South American Lawyer in the Cloister" — all deal with sexual experiences in the convent. *Forum* cut almost all references to platonic friendships, spirituality, convent ethics, and feminist views from these stories. The abridged versions leave the reader with the impression that these three authors have no nonsexual dimensions in their lives. Their stories are thus used to perpetuate *Forum's* line that feminism is incompatible with explicit sexuality.

Barbara Grier told *PW* that *Lesbian Nuns* was not prurient, and to *off our backs* she reiterated her belief that "there is no way that you can take non-prurient material and make it prurient."⁶ Having read both *Lesbian Nuns* and the June issue of *Forum*, I disagree. I believe that this is exactly what Naiad has done, or, more precisely, allowed *Forum* to do. In the pages of *Forum*, the stories of three lesbian ex-nuns become the literary equivalent of the female body parts that appear regularly in mainstream advertising and men's magazines.

Breaking Faith

To make matters worse, Naiad sold these stories to *Forum* without the knowledge or consent of their authors. Two of the three women whose work was published discussed their reactions in the July 1985 *off our backs*. "Margaret," author of "They Shall Not Touch, Even in Jest," was informed of the sale on May 9 — when the June issue of *Forum* was already well on its way to retail outlets. "I have been betrayed and violated," she wrote in an open letter to her sister contributors and the readers of *off our backs*, "My deepest soul has been raped."⁷

Wrote "Mary Brady," whose "Finding My Way" was also excerpted in *Forum*, "I was sickened when I saw the June issue of *Forum* where my most sacred and intimate memories are laid out for the entertainment of men along with the Wheaties fetishes and the 'National Kink Test.' Unfortunately, anything that might have raised the level of the *Forum* version of my story above that of pure sexual titillation has been carefully rewritten or edited out."⁸

How could this have happened? Why did the sexually honest work of three lesbian former nuns end up in a magazine like *Forum*?

Some initial discussion of the *Lesbian Nuns* story has focused on the naivete of the women involved. The contributors signed their rights over to the editors, and the editors signed their rights over to Naiad Press, so how can they now

complain that their work has been used in ways that they did not intend? They should have known better. Grier finds "distressing" "the view expressed by a few women that they felt the book would be read only by a select few women."⁹

But Grier also expresses surprise that *Forum* excerpted the stories it bought and thereby created its own distorted version of the "sex lives of lesbian nuns." "It did not dawn on me that *Forum* would edit or condense them in the way that was done. The contract between *Forum* and Naiad specifies their right to do that (*but so do all contracts and it had never been done before*) [italics mine]."¹⁰ All of us base our future expectations on our previous experience. The farther one ventures from familiar ground, the greater the chance that previous experience will not be an adequate guide.

At the time that contributors and editors were signing contracts for *Lesbian Nuns*, Naiad Press had a solid reputation as a lesbian press that published lesbian books for lesbian readers. Because it marketed its titles through lesbian, feminist, and other progressive channels, its non-lesbian readers were likely to be friendly.¹¹ I don't find it strange or naive that Curb, Manahan, and the book's contributors assumed that their work would be handled in the same way. In retrospect, it is too easy to say that they should have been more suspicious.

As a writer, I have tried to put myself into the place of a woman writing her story for *Lesbian Nuns*. Perhaps I have never written these things down before, not even in a journal. Envisioning an audience of women – feminists, lesbians, nuns, ex-nuns, women's studies students – I can manage to write openly, with fear but also with trust, of experiences previously held secret. I may even sign my real name, and provide "before" and "after" pictures.

AND THEN MY LIFE IS PLACED BEFORE THE READERS OF *FORUM* MAGAZINE, IN THE MASS MARKET RACKS AT THE SUPERMARKET AND THE AIRPORT.

A lesbian is forced to come out in a time and place not of her choosing. For each lesbian woman and gay man, each act of coming out sets in motion unpredictable forces that cannot be turned back. Even if I believe that another woman's decision to stay in the closet is cowardly, or harmful to her well-being, or a liability to the gay rights movement, I DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO COME OUT ON HER BEHALF. She is the one who must manage the consequences. I have no right to impose them upon her.

In trying and mostly failing to imagine how the *Forum* sale could have happened, I have had dozens of conversations with other women, nearly all of them feminists, most of them lesbians. A common assumption among these women has been that money was the overriding, if not the *only*, motive for the *Forum* sale.

A Financial Killing?

My four years in the feminist book trade taught me that within the feminist community there is a tendency to exaggerate the amount of money being made

in feminist businesses. I want to emphasize here that no one is getting rich in feminist publishing or bookselling. Most of us without other sources of income are barely getting by. Some of us aren't even getting paid.

Naiad Press did not make a financial killing from the *Forum* sale. In an undated interview released on Naiad letterhead in mid-June, Barbara Grier said, "We received a total of \$2,400 for serial rights; \$2,000 from *Forum*; \$350 from *Ms.*; and \$50 from *Philadelphia Gay News*." Most of the stories distributed for reprint brought in no money at all; they were given to gay and other alternative publications that could not afford to pay for them.

For a small press like Naiad that does not have the money for extensive advertising, the sale of serial rights can be an important promotional tool. Magazine reprints may bring in little or no money, but they do stimulate interest in a book and thus indirectly help to increase sales. A bookstore's buyer may base her decision to stock a book on its scheduled appearance in a magazine popular with her customers.

Naturally, however, the average periodical does not buy serial rights just to help a small publisher out. By featuring "Sex Lives of Lesbian Nuns" in its June issue, *Forum* expected to encourage its own sales and perhaps expand its audience. What benefits *Forum* also benefits *Forum's* owner, Penthouse International and its chairman/publisher Bob Guccione. Given Penthouse's misogynistic record, any lesbian or feminist who chooses to deal with *Forum* might expect some criticism of her decision.

In an interview with *WomaNews*, though, Barbara Grier said of the *Forum* sale, "I had no idea anyone would object!"¹² Earlier, when *Lesbian Nuns* contributor Joanne Marrow confronted her about the sale, Grier responded, "You have no right to ask this question . . . you don't ask a major publisher these questions . . . it's none of your business."¹³

Hearing these comments made me think that I had wandered through a space warp into a universe like and yet not like my own. What was going on here? A lesbian publisher had no idea that anyone would object to her selling other lesbians' sexual experiences to a Penthouse subsidiary? A lesbian publisher telling a lesbian writer that she has no right even to ask? A lesbian publisher claiming the right to be inaccessible and immune to criticism?

Lesbian and feminist publishers, Naiad among them, have been founded over the last fifteen years or so to offer women writers and readers some alternatives to the "major" publishers. Major publishers are not noted for their accessibility or for their generosity toward writers. Unless a writer can get it into her contract, she has little or no control over cover and book design, marketing, or the sale of subsidiary rights. Sometimes she doesn't even have control over the text of "her" work. Needless to say, major publishers do not ordinarily set a high priority on reaching lesbians.

When I read Joanne Marrow's letter, I was astonished and infuriated by Grier's

blatant arrogance. It made me wonder if all of us in the lesbian and feminist print network are working ridiculous hours for ludicrous wages in order to give a few women the authority to act like "major publishers." Yet I also heard something else in Grier's words: *You wouldn't ask a mainstream publisher these questions, yet you ask me. You do not take me as seriously as you would a mainstream publisher. If I want to be taken seriously, and I do, I must act with all the highhanded assurance expected of a mainstream publisher.*

But the issue of "going mainstream" is a good deal more complicated than this. The world of low-budget promotion and small-press distribution is frustrating for everyone working within it. At least once a week a new customer would come into the bookstore where I used to work and say, "I never knew you existed! Have you been here long?" As I answered, "Yes, almost twelve years," trying to keep the edge out of my voice, I couldn't help wondering how things might have been different had we had the money to advertise in the *Washington Post* or to move to a prime commercial location.

Lesbian Nun Goes to the Drugstore

The lesbian and feminist print network reaches lesbians in our thousands and tens of thousands, but it is impossible to forget that there are hundreds of thousands, millions, of lesbians who are not being reached at all. "One of my goals," wrote Barbara Grier to the editors of *Lesbian Contradiction*, the quarterly "journal of irreverent feminism," "is to make sure that every 15, 16, and 17-year-old who wakes up to discover herself a Lesbian can casually walk across the street into almost any bookstore, any library, any drugstore or grocery store and find herself reflected in the mirrors of print."¹⁴

Reaching every young (and presumably every old and every middle-aged) lesbian who walks into the local grocery store is an inspiring ideal, especially powerful for lesbians who, like Grier herself, have lived in times and places where there was nothing available on the shelves that even hinted at lesbian existence. But is it, at this point in our history, a real possibility? Just what would it take to gain such wide exposure for a lesbian book aimed at a mostly lesbian audience?

Making use of its usual distribution channels — its own extensive mailing list and the network of feminist and small-press distributors and bookstores — *Naiad* has achieved remarkable sales success by almost any standard. A recent article in *Ms.* reported that "*Naiad* has never lost money on a title. . . . *Naiad's* minimum press run is now 10,000, and nine titles have sold more than 25,000 copies."¹⁵

For many reasons, however, these channels cannot get books into "almost any bookstore, any library, any drugstore or grocery store." *Naiad* books are not packaged in the splashy, compact mass-market format that will attract attention and fit into the mass-market racks in grocery stores and train stations.¹⁶ Neither

Naiad nor its small-press distributors can afford to offer the high wholesale discounts necessary to interest the large chain bookstores. Naiad titles are not carried by the big wholesalers that serve those stores.

Yet Naiad before publication committed itself to a 100,000-copy print run for *Lesbian Nuns*.¹⁷ There is no way that Naiad's usual distribution network could absorb 100,000 copies of a book in a relatively short period of time. When a well-capitalized mainstream publisher launches a new title with a print run of 30,000, 40,000 or 50,000 copies, the trade takes notice. For a small, presumably under capitalized alternative publisher, 100,000 is an absolutely staggering thought. Keep in mind that a publisher's printing bills come due many months before money from book sales begins to roll in. An undercapitalized press can't afford to tie up great sums of money in this way, lest it wind up with a cash-flow crisis of mammoth proportions and have no cash on hand to pay salaries, rent, the phone bill, etc. Cash flow problems killed Persephone Press, whose scarce funds were tied up in continually reprinting its very popular titles; there wasn't enough cash available for daily operations.

With *Lesbian Nuns*, Naiad took what may have been the only feasible route. Selling the book as exotica, promising to reveal what really goes on behind convent doors, Naiad aroused a keen interest among mainstream media people and booksellers — enough to overcome the obstacles that generally confront an ambitious small press with a saleable trade paperback title. Of course, this was not seen as an end in itself but as a means to the primary goal: reaching as many lesbians as possible.

Lesbian Nun Goes to the Movies

Ripples continue to spread outward from this mainstream interest. According to *Publishers Weekly*, Italian translation rights for *Lesbian Nuns* brought in \$10,000, U.K. rights a "\$25,000 advance," and Australia-New Zealand rights \$15,000.¹⁸ Movie rights were bought by ABC-TV for an as-yet unpublicized sum, about which Barbara Grier said, "It was a lot of money and we're very happy."¹⁹

The most lucrative of the subsidiary sales is the sale of mass-market paperback rights to Warner Books, a division of Random House, for "a six-figure sum."²⁰ Warner has access to the promotion money and distribution channels that small trade publishers like Naiad do not have. Said Mark Greenberg, president of Warner's in-house ad agency, "A book like this will go into supermarkets and drugstores and terminals all over the country."²¹ It seems as if Barbara Grier's goal is about to be realized.

Without question, the mass-market edition of *Lesbian Nuns* will reach lesbians who would never see the Naiad edition of the book. So will the ABC-TV movie, if and when it is made. So will the editions of the book that appear in other countries. The price of this wide exposure is the removing of control one step further from the women who created the book. The editors and contributors had little or no say in how the Naiad edition of *Lesbian Nuns* was promoted.

Naiad itself will have little or no say in the packaging and promotion of the mass-market edition.²²

Naiad has indicated that reaching the mass audience is important enough to override all objections. If enough women can be reached, it is all right to entrust sensitive, complex material to those whose interest in lesbians and nuns is mainly commercial. Barbara Grier justified the *Forum* sale because, although the overwhelming majority of *Forum's* readership is heterosexual and male, 15% is said to be female — and of that fraction it is likely that some are lesbians.²³

Does the possibility of reaching great numbers of lesbians justify the betrayal of a few, the misleading of others. Do the ends automatically justify the means? Naiad employed a similar argument when it said that money made by the sale of books and subsidiary rights would "go to finance other lesbian books that cannot be expected to be moneymakers."²⁴ In publishing, some books break even, some lose money, and some do very well. The stronger sellers help subsidize the slower. With a financial cushion provided by a few strong sellers, a press can afford to take some risks, to publish books that are not sure things and books that may take a while to find their audiences.

Lesbian Nun Helps Out

Lesbian Nuns has the potential to subsidize lesbian publishing on an impressive scale. Surely all readers will benefit from the availability of books that would not have been published otherwise? Yes, but once again there are other questions to consider. One is whether a somewhat less stupendous success might have served the same purpose. It is also worth mentioning that had Naiad lost the gamble it took in printing 100,000 copies of *Lesbian Nuns*, it might not have been able to publish any more lesbian books, moneymakers or not.

Even if Naiad has never lost money on a book, one may be sure that it is not making much by publishing and keeping in print Renee Vivien's classic works, or the essential bibliographies *Black Lesbians* and *The Lesbian in Literature*. At the same time, it is not always easy to tell which books have the potential to sell well and which do not. Barbara Grier has assumed that nonfiction and "serious" fiction don't sell.²⁵ Other feminist publishers have found otherwise. Sherry Thomas of Spinsters Ink wrote that "Spinsters' sales grew 300% last year [1984] on the strength of *Look Me in the Eye* and *Out from Under*," both of them serious nonfiction books.²⁶ What's the difference?

My guess is that Naiad's current audience is primarily interested in the light lesbian fiction that is the mainstay of the Naiad list. If Naiad wants to continue publishing books like *Black Lesbian in White America* or *A Studio of One's Own*, it needs to either expand the interests of its current audience or expand the audience to include women interested in those titles. Naiad markets a book like *Studio* in the same way it markets Katherine V. Forrest's novels, and it seems to have concluded from the results that nonfiction doesn't sell.

None of this is to deny that some books subsidize others, or that money

brought in by *Lesbian Nuns* will have a beneficial effect on lesbian publishing. But when the abuse of women is justified by the greater good that may result, it seems necessary to raise the possibility that this greater good might have been achieved, at least in part, by less drastic means.

Lesbian and feminist publishers and booksellers function in an economy that does not share our interests. Like any institution, small or large, supportive or hostile, the U.S. economy exerts a profound, sometimes subtle, often unacknowledged effect on those working within it. To remain within, an individual must reconcile her interests to some extent with those of the institution.

The shaping effects of institutions are usually most clearly perceived by those who have been placed, or who have placed themselves, on the outside – those who are, as lesbian-feminist writer Judith McDaniel puts it, “deinstitutionalized.”²⁷ For the rest of us, there is the constant temptation to not-see the compromises we make in order to stay inside, and to not-imagine the alternative choices we might make or create for ourselves. An alternative business functioning within the U.S. economy is pressured to sacrifice bit by bit all the qualities and priorities that make it alternative.

It is a symptom of creeping institutionalization that Naiad has resisted admitting that the public relations success of *Lesbian Nuns* has come at a price, that wrongs have been done and troubling questions raised. In her mid-June press release, Grier did express deep regret for the hurt done to the specific women whose stories were sold to *Forum*. She did not, however, make any real attempt to understand why this hurt was done, or what it might reveal about Naiad’s priorities and ways of doing business.

I do not understand how Naiad Press, committed to lesbians and lesbian publishing as it is, arrived at the point where the three-ring-circus promotion of *Lesbian Nuns* seemed so advisable and necessary that it did not even have to be explained. How could any feminist think it all right to sell the work of other women to *Forum* magazine without their knowledge or consent?

Sour Note from Another Planet

I’ve heard rumors of some women who seem to have no problems with the *Forum* sale, but I haven’t met any of them face to face. All the women I’ve talked with have problems with it, serious problems. Some of them are furious. Many of them are feminist booksellers, writers, book and periodical publishers and/or readers of Naiad books – women who have had some relationship with Naiad Press. Yet Barbara Grier says she had no idea that anyone would object.

If this is true, it suggests a horrifying isolation from a substantial part of Naiad’s audience. How could Grier possibly be so out of touch with women she deals with face to face and over the phone, with some of the women who are Naiad’s reason for existing? Somewhat uneasily, I reviewed some of the more recent frustrations I had encountered as a bookseller in dealing with

Naiad Press. Not once had I communicated my annoyance or anger to Barbara Grier, who had been over the years my most frequent contact at Naiad.

I was on the verge of holding myself, other feminist booksellers, and other women in print at least partly responsible for Naiad's isolation and thus, indirectly, for the gross errors of judgment made by Naiad in the promotion of *Lesbian Nuns*. Then I recalled my experiences as a reviewer of Naiad Books. Some of my reviews were favorable and others were not so favorable. Grier generally responded to the not-so's with a note about how well the books were selling. I soon inferred that she was not interested in criticism, constructive or otherwise. In an essay published in *Lesbian Contradiction* 9, Grier seemed to be suggesting that reviewers should consider ourselves volunteer public relations agents for lesbian and feminist publishers.²⁸

Both before and after the release of *Lesbian Nuns*, Barbara Grier set clear limits to the feedback she was willing to hear. When she told Joanne Marrow that the *Forum* sale was "none of your business," the tone was unusual but the underlying message was not. In the concluding paragraph of her *LesCon* 9 essay, she implies that she considers the discussion of these issues a luxury, to be dealt with only in her spare time – of which she of course has precious little.

"I speak to you out of another eighteen-hour day required to run a lesbian publishing house," she wrote. "I feel inordinately tired at this moment, perhaps because this correspondence has been time-consuming and, apparently, futile. If you'll excuse me, I must return now to the business of publishing lesbian books."²⁹ Time-consuming the correspondence may well have been, but futile? Hardly. Several writers, including myself, were moved to respond, and, if my experience is any indication, many women participated in good, searching discussions of essential issues that would not have taken place without the impetus provided by Grier and others.

I sent a copy of this essay in a previous draft to Grier and co-publisher Donna MacBride, hoping that it might begin to build a middle ground between Naiad and its critics. Grier wrote back, saying that she found herself unable to respond to my "letter essay diatribe." "We live on very different planets," she said. She implied that I had made incorrect factual assumptions but said that she did not have the "time and patience to go through and simply correct" them. She added, "[I] don't feel I have the right to take time to argue with someone when there is real work to do."

I used to be impressed whenever I heard an activist speak, as Barbara Grier not infrequently does, of her 18-hour days and her 80-hour weeks. Sometimes I tried to match that kind of schedule, and to drop hints to let everyone else know just how committed I was. The rest of the time I wondered why I couldn't be that dedicated, why I seemed to need time to sleep, hang out with friends, daydream, bake bread, read trashy science fiction novels, and go for long walks and bike rides.

"More dedicated than thou" is a dangerous game to play. The one playing it

best can discredit the words of any woman who seems to be less committed than herself — while growing more and more angry that no one understands her or is willing to help her out. No one helps her out because she has given the clear impression that any less-than-herculean effort is inconsequential — why bother? Unless one is also willing to put in 18-hour days, 80-hour weeks, one loses the right to speak.³⁰

The eventual outcome is a serious case of "siege mentality." Not only are others insufficiently dedicated, they just don't understand. Potential co-workers fall away, and one's own shifts become longer and longer. One has no *time* to focus on anything else. As one's focus narrows, the peripheries fade from view. One has no time for freewheeling ethical discussions, speculation about the motives a Penthouse-owned magazine might have for buying sexually explicit stories by lesbians, or reflection on what a lesbian ex-nun might think about her work being excerpted by *Forum* magazine without her permission.

This obsessive dedication to duty has its advantages, a major one being that those nagging, answerless questions rarely rise to the surface of the mind, and when they do they don't remain long before they are submerged in a new burst of activity.

Another advantage is that some people are awed by martyrs and saints. Not that they want to be saints themselves, you understand. They do penance for their "selfishness" and lack of dedication by displaying single-minded support for whatever the saints do. One such woman, Stephanie L. Gotlob, wrote to *off our backs* to say that criticizing Barbara Grier for her part in the *Forum* sale "is like criticizing a great symphonic creation because of one sour note." She suggested that we instead "hire a hall and schedule a banquet to honor and acknowledge Barbara Grier for the enormous ongoing contribution she has made to lesbian literature and to us all."³¹

In an open letter to "friends and associates of the Women in Print movement," long-time feminist print activist Helaine Harris makes a similar argument, that Grier's long record of dedication somehow exempts her from criticism.³² Harris makes a number of important points about political correctness, trashing, and the nasty things that have happened when feminists disagree with each other, all of which should inspire widespread discussion. But imbedded in her letter is this telling statement: "I'm not quite sure why Naiad Press is getting all the heat, but I suspect it has something to do with being the most successful sitting duck."

I beg to differ. Naiad is getting all the heat not so much because it is "the most successful sitting duck" as because it did something that no lesbian or feminist press has ever done before: It sold the stories of several lesbian writers to a heterosexual men's sex magazine without first obtaining the permission of the women involved. If this is not enough to provoke some very heated responses, I have grave worries for the future of the feminist movement.

Both Helaine Harris and Stephanie Gotlob write as if the sale were a small thing, an aberration. Gotlob, after all, compares it to the sour note in a

symphony. But in a symphony, sour notes are generally played by accident. The *Forum* sale and the promotion of *Lesbian Nuns* did not happen by accident but as the result of many choices made over time by the women involved in the publication of the book. No one is exempt from criticism, no matter how laudable their motives, how illustrious their records of service. To criticize the *Forum* sale or to raise questions about the promotion of *Lesbian Nuns* does not require any woman to deny or try to tear down what Barbara Grier or Naiad Press has accomplished in the past.

It does not concern me so much that some women think that Grier and Naiad should be exempt from criticism on the basis of past performance. It does bother me that Grier herself seems to think that she should be exempt from even listening to criticism because she puts in 18-hour days as a lesbian publisher. Perhaps in the short run, she can get away with not listening. In the long run – well, we have the *Forum* sale, and all the issues it raises for those of us working in or caring deeply about lesbian and feminist publishing.

All of us, the women of Naiad included, need to get into the habit of asking ourselves some questions before important decisions are made, particularly when those decisions are based on some variation of "the ends justify the means." If a certain goal can only be attained by exploiting other women, how important is that goal? Can the organization survive without it? How will a given decision ultimately affect the group or community it is intended to benefit? Can I live with these possible consequences? Is this decision being made in a way consistent with the group's political and ethical principles and commitments?

I hope that we are not so jaded that we can accept either the *Forum* sale or the indiscriminate promotion of *Lesbian Nuns* as necessary for the survival of a lesbian business. I hope also that we are honest enough, self-knowing enough, to realize that a recurrence of this kind of episode cannot be prevented by excommunicating Naiad Press from the network of feminists and lesbians in print. The necessary ingredients are present in many of our organizations, not just in publishing, and not just at Naiad Press.

Afterword: Sorry Note from the Same Planet

The situation has improved somewhat since Barbara Grier told Joanne Marrow that she had no right to ask about the *Forum* sale. Naiad's acknowledgment of responsibility, however, remains very limited in scope. Speaking for the press, Grier and MacBride have tried to dismiss their critics as unreasonable and/or insignificant in number. Their rebuttals generally hinge on the burgeoning Naiad mailing list, the influx of unsolicited manuscripts, the worldwide interest in *Lesbian Nuns*.

In her June press release Grier referred to a lawyer-mediated negotiation between Naiad and the book's editors. "A number of items were worked out

granting various levels of control over the book to Rosemary and Nancy that had previously been held entirely by The Naiad Press," she said. "In addition to that we were able to make changes in the contract to allot funds that normally would be Naiad Press's income to Rosemary and Nancy for whatever purposes they may feel appropriate in the future." I hope that the editors will find it appropriate to channel some of this income to the book's contributors.

I don't believe that Naiad Press can or should be "drummed out of the movement," but I do believe that we who profess feminism, or who work in the name of all lesbians, can be held accountable for what we do. This doesn't mean that we should strive for the impossible goal of pleasing all of the women all of the time. It does mean that we should hear out our critics and even entertain the notion that they might be making some important points. It is the absence of this listening that disturbs me the most.

In Naiad's actions, and in its refusal to be accountable for those actions, I heard a clear message, directed to me as lesbian, as feminist, as writer, as feminist-bookstore worker, and that message was, *We at Naiad don't need you, we've gone big time, we don't have to listen to your annoying questions.* This message of rejection has made me feel powerless and angry and with only one option: to withdraw my support from the one who has withdrawn support from me.

I learned of the *Forum* sale on April 2; by early July, I had left both my bookstore job and the Washington area. In those three months, I placed no orders with Naiad Press. I ordered Naiad books, including *Lesbian Nuns*, from a small-press distributor, knowing full well that Naiad would be paid less and later for the books I bought. I tended to stock fewer Naiad titles, and those in smaller quantities, than I had before.

As I write, the *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* collective has responded to the *Forum* sale by urging its subscribers to consider a number of measures, all of which would reduce the sales of *Lesbian Nuns*. Do these unconcerted responses constitute a boycott? I feel none of the heady defiance I have felt during boycotts in the past, when the opponent was Nestle or the grape growers or J. P. Stevens. What I feel, what I hear, is grittier: I will not support you as long as you use my support to ridicule or dismiss the ideas and priorities that are important to me.

I am not happy about this, but I do not know what else to do. Naiad does not want to discuss the issue. It appeals instead to a sort of lesbian silent majority, an entity that by definition does not include any of us who are asking questions about what Naiad has done. In her June press release, Barbara Grier says that Naiad would not consider selling to *Forum* again, or to "any magazine that might fall within the same category." Then she says that she hears in her head "the terrifying drum beat of censorship." Does she then equate censorship with exercising a modicum of discretion and responsibility?

I want Naiad to survive and thrive as a lesbian press. I want all of us who

criticize Naiad on these and other issues to remember what Naiad and Barbara Grier have done for lesbians in the past. I don't want us to indulge in holier-than-thou judgments or trashing. I want Naiad to listen, to hear and consider what we say, to acknowledge the possibility that most of us are speaking with all due respect for past accomplishments and current commitment. But as I write these small things seem virtually impossible.

Notes

- ¹ Paula Krebs, "Breaking Silence About *Lesbian Nuns*," *off our backs*, May 1985.
- ² Wendy Patterson, "Breaking Silence Stirs Controversy in the Women's Community," *WomaNews*, June 1985.
- ³ Krebs, *op cit*.
- ⁴ William Goldstein, "Naiad Hopes to Break Out *Lesbian Nuns*," *Publishers Weekly*, February 15, 1985.
- ⁵ *Ibid*.
- ⁶ Krebs, *op cit*.
- ⁷ "Lesbian Nuns: Betrayed and Outraged," *off our backs*, July 1985.
- ⁸ *Ibid*.
- ⁹ Naiad press release, June 1985. It remains unclear to me just what Grier means by "select few."
- ¹⁰ Naiad press release, June 1985.
- ¹¹ Only last year did Pat Califia's lesbian sex guide *Sapphisty*, published by Naiad in 1980, reach the American Booksellers Association's annual list of books that have been banned somewhere in the country. I assume that the lag time was due to the fact that the book banners didn't even know the book existed.
- ¹² Patterson, *op cit*.
- ¹³ Joanne Marrow, letter, *off our backs*, May 1985.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Jane Meyering, "Introduction: The Literary Ball Starts Bouncing," *Lesbian Contradiction* 9, Winter 1984-85.
- ¹⁵ Andrea Fleck Clardy, "Making Change: Best-Sellers from Crone's Own, Light Cleaning, Down There, and Dozens of Other Feminist Presses," *Ms.*, August 1985.
- ¹⁶ My Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books sales rep once told me what a hard time her company (a subsidiary of Gulf & Western!) had getting the trade paperback edition of *The Color Purple* into these markets – after it had been a hardcover best-seller and won prizes, acclaim, and wide attention all over the country.
- ¹⁷ It has been difficult to establish exactly how many print runs, and of how many copies each, there have been of *Lesbian Nuns*. *Publishers Weekly* (February 15, 1985) reported that Naiad "at first planned to print 45,000 copies in paperback and 5,000 hardcovers.

Those figures, Grier says, have been reevaluated and Naiad will print 90,000 copies in paperback and 10,000 in cloth." According to a *New York Times* article published on April 12, 1985, "Naiad Press has printed 125,000 copies, 10,000 of them hardcover" of the book. In a letter to contributors and friends, dated April 12, 1985, Naiad co-publishers Grier and MacBride said that the book was "now in its third printing with 25,000 additional paperbacks expected off press on May 1, 1985." Finally, on July 16, 1985, a *Boston Globe* article reported that, "There are 150,000 copies of the \$9.95 trade paper back edition of 'Lesbian Nuns' in print, and it has gone back to press for a fourth printing of 10,000 copies." Give or take 10,000, there are about 150,000 copies of the book in print as of July 31, 1985. No quibbling over "how many" and "when" can obscure the basic truth that *Lesbian Nuns* has had a phenomenal publishing record.

¹⁸ Paul S. Nathan, "Rights," *Publishers Weekly*, May 31, 1985.

¹⁹ Nancy Pate, "'Lesbian Nuns' a TV movie?", *Boston Globe*, July 16, 1985.

²⁰ Dudley Clendinen, "Book on Lesbian Nuns Upsets Boston and Delights Its Publisher," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1985.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Pate (*op cit.*) reported that editors Curb and Manahan were asked to be consultants on the ABC-TV movie project. Curb was quoted as saying, "But we still wouldn't have any control. They can consult us, but they don't have to listen to us."

²³ Christine Guilfooy, "Nuns' Stories Sold to Penthouse's Forum," *Gay Community News*, April 17, 1985.

²⁴ Krebs, *op cit.*

²⁵ Barbara Grier, "Ignoring the Ninety Percent: A Response," *LesCon 9*, Winter 1984-85.

²⁶ Sherry Thomas, "Seriousness and Sobriety," *LesCon 10*, Spring 1985.

²⁷ Unpublished interview conducted with Judith McDaniel by Susanna J. Sturgis, April 12, 1985, Washington, D.C.

²⁸ Grier, *op cit.* My own response to Grier's article, "One Reviewer's Reflections on Her Work," appears in *LesCon 11*, Summer 1985.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ For a witty and incisive discussion of this feminist phenomenon, read Joanna Russ's "Power and Helplessness in the Women's Movement," in *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans & Perverts*, Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1985.

³¹ Stephanie L. Gotlob, "The Measure of a Woman," *off our backs*, June 1985.

³² Helaine Harris, letter, *Sojourner*, August 1985, and elsewhere.

Lesbian Nuns:

Some Documents in the Case

1985 Women in Print Publishers' Accords

As publishers of feminist and lesbian feminist literature we wish to acknowledge that we will abide by the following statement of our responsibilities:

1) We believe our responsibilities should be first dictated by our individual and collective political commitments and only secondarily by our business requirements. We also acknowledge the differences and diversity of our political commitments and urge readers and writers to acknowledge those differences also.

2) We believe that publishers should view themselves as representatives of the women's works they produce and that this relationship is representational and not adversarial. From this belief, the following statements apply:

A) We should assume a responsibility in relieving the inexperience of our writers in the publishing world.

B) We should not assume that our authors, editors and contributors have monetary or familiar access to lawyers well-versed in publishing or author law (which is not the same as a good feminist lawyer). We should make written information and lawyer consultation available to them before the signing of contracts.

C) Our responsibility is always towards good communication and dialogue and truthful sharing of information as soon as it becomes available. We should above all not see the contract as the end of our responsibility to authors, editors or contributors.

3) As caretakers of the integrity of our authors' and contributors' works we have the following contractual responsibilities:

- A) To incorporate consent clauses on all subsidiary rights (including foreign rights) sales. Such consent or refusal can not be unreasonably delayed or withheld by the writer or artist.
- B) That we agree to set up mediation and arbitration procedures in the event of a breakdown of contracts.
- 4) We also have the following non-contractual responsibilities:
- A) If we have reason to believe that advertising copy, book jacket copy or other promotional material varies greatly from the intent of the editor's or author's work, we shall first discuss and come to agreement with those affected.
- B) If we believe that a subsidiary right sale will allow marketing or a presentation geared differently from the author's or editor's intent, we have a responsibility to inform them at the time of negotiations with them for consent of sale.
- C) In the case of anthologies, we will obtain the contributor's consent (to be granted within a reasonable period of time) for rights to sell her work out of the original context intended, whether that is stated in the editor-contributor contract or not. If consent is refused, that work will not be sold.
- D) In the case of subsidiary rights, publishers will aggressively seek serial outlets for the work that they feel is in keeping with the spirit of the original work.
- E) In the event of windfall profit, all parties will share proportionately in the resulting success.

Signed:

Joan Pinkvoss, Aunt Lute Book Co.

Sherilyn Thomas, Spinsters Ink

Marjory Larney, Acacia Books

Paula Mosley, Acacia Books

**Resolution Presented by the Lesbian Caucus to the
Delegate Assembly of the National Women's Studies Association
(NWSA), June 1985**

- 1) We want editors and publishers of anthologies not to sell or give rights to publish contributors' work without the written consent of the contributors.
- 2) If contributors' work has been so used, we want the contributors to be able to immediately withdraw their contribution from the anthology.
- 3) If contributors' work has been so used, we want the contributors to receive damages in compensation for the harm caused them.
- 4) NWSA shall not provide exhibit space to publishers who violate items 1, 2, 3, 5 or 6 of this recommendation. The exhibit space committee will respond to challenges of specific publishers.
- 5) We want contributors to anthologies to have contracts with the publisher. These contracts are to grant contributors a percentage of the profits.
- 6) We want publishers to advise contributors of all plans to market and sell their work in advance of signing said contract.

Letter from Martha Maas of NWSA to Barbara Grier

national women's studies association

July 3, 1983

Barbara Grier
Naiad Press, Inc.
P.O. Box 10543
Tallahassee, FL 32302

Dear Barbara:

I am writing to express my own esteem and that of the NWSA Coordinating Council, and to provide you with some information about the recent action of the NWSA Delegate Assembly on the resolution about publishing contracts.

The substitute resolution that passed had three sponsors, of whom I was one. Our purpose in offering it was to provide a sensible alternative to the original, which appeared to have been created under emotionally charged circumstances.

We believed that, since feelings appeared to be running rather high on this matter, some form of resolution was apt to be voted by the Assembly. We also thought that the majority of the delegates would prefer a general statement free of hostile language, and we provided a resolution of this sort.

The resolution we offered, and that the Delegate Assembly accepted, is simply an NWSA endorsement of the proposed Publishers' Accords (it describes them as proposed); it has no other clauses or provisions.

We hope you will recognize the spirit of respect and friendship that prompted us to offer this substitute, and we hope that the cooperation between Naiad and NWSA will continue to grow and flourish.

It was good to see you again at the conference. I hope to see you at many more.

With all best wishes,

Martha Maas
NWSA Coordinating Council

university of maryland, college park, maryland 20742

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Notes on Contributors

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

Mev Miller. I am a politically active LFS existing on the lunatic fringe and trying to maintain some sense of humor. I work with an affinity group called Spinsters Opposed to Nuclear Genocide, and, although our name is specific, our focus is much broader. In addition, I am a struggling musician-songwriter hoping to make a record soon. And, in case you're wondering, I am indeed emotionally and psychically healthy.

Ruth Mountaingrove is a photographer, poet, writer, teacher, singer-songwriter, and at 62 is still going strong. She feels lesbian ethics is the foundation to our new ways of relating.

Laura Brown is a clinical psychologist, lesbian, Jewish, a feminist therapist in private practice since 1979. I am passionately interested in the development of our own theories of feminist therapy encompassing all aspects of the process. Pontificating on ethical issues is a piece of my family of origin's pathology that I have kept and reformed as a lesbian feminist.

Caryatis Cardea. I am a lesbian separatist, now living in Berkeley, California. I was born 35 years ago to working-class Irish Catholic and French Canadian parents in Buffalo, New York. I like it better here.

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

Linda Strega. I am a 43-year-old, working-class, Italian-descent U.S. Dyke, femme, raised catholic and now anti-christian, college graduate, with a chronic illness. An ex-het who resisted marriage and motherhood, I came out through the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement in 1972 and have been a Dyke Separatist since 1973.

Annie McCombs. An activist. Remembers when butches got busted in Los Angeles for not wearing at least 3 articles of women's clothing. Active in labor unions, founding member of Tradeswomen, worked against sexual harassment (WOASH). Has done alot of security for events & demos, now disabled from work-related injury. I'd rather grow roses, but I intend to help end pornography. An \$8 billion-a-year industry is a big piece of the action (sexism & racism, etc.) to aim at and stop. If we don't let the threats get us down; or the 38 c slugs through the window get us down; or the loss of jobs – evictions – and every

relationship we have called into question get us down; or the stool pigeons, scabs and company finks get us down . . . we might win.

Susanna J. Sturgis is a former feminist bookstore worker who maintains her connection with the book business by editing the fantasy science fiction column for *Feminist Bookstore News*. Last summer she moved to Massachusetts to work on her first novel and she doesn't plan to leave any time soon.

Errata

In the "Notes on Contributors" for *LE* #2 I neglected to note that "Anna Lee" is a pseudonym (for the author of "The Tired Old Question of Male Children").

—J.S.

In my last-minute efforts to give you revisions over the phone for my piece, "Dear Julia," in *LE* #2, I made a mistake. My point about analyses of heterosexism read that since the discussions of early separatists and radical feminists, we have produced no analyses of heterosexism. It should have read, "But since the discussions of early separatists and radical feminists, we have produced almost no analyses of heterosexism."

Sarah Hoagland

In Part II of "The Mystery of Lesbians," *LE* #2, I paraphrased the gist of a 1983 conversation with Joy Harjo as an example of how her experience of racism as a child and my experience of queer oppression as a child were different, but similar enough to give us a basis for identifying with the pain each of us remembers.

In that paraphrase, I erroneously said that Joy grew up "believing and acting as though she were heterosexual" (p. 52). Joy, by letter and by phone, has corrected my description. At no time did she "believe" she was heterosexual. She had no words to talk about her feelings for other wimmin.

I apologize to Joy for my mistake, and want the readers of *LE* to know about it.

Julia Penelope

Announcements

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WOMYN'S LAND CONFERENCE. We believe a womyn's community can offer a safe, empowering alternative to capitalist patriarchy. If you are interested in attending or helping to plan a conference for Fall 1986, write to: WLC, c/o Heathcote Community, 21300 Heathcote Rd., Freeland, MD 21053.

THE LESBIAN INCITER, published by a Minneapolis collective for more than 5 years, has moved to the west coast. Subscriptions to the *INCITER*, to be published bi-monthly, are suggested at \$1 per \$1000 annual income, MORE IF YOU CAN. Donations are needed to re-vitalize this very important means of communication for Lesbians. We also need articles, graphics, letters, by Lesbians for Lesbians. Include SASE. Write to: Mariel Rae/Kate Anne, *The Lesbian Inciter*, 2215-R Market St., #307, San Francisco, CA 94114.

Guidelines for Authors

Lesbian Ethics is a forum for lesbian feminist ethics and philosophy, with an emphasis on how lesbians behave with each other. We welcome essays, reviews, translations, Letters to the Editor, and responses to material which has appeared in *LE*. *LE* does not publish poetry or fiction. Only original material will be considered.

For *Lesbian Ethics* #1 (2), the readers' forum will be "What Works." Write in those successful retorts that left them sputtering in the aisles! (What To Say When They Say. . . .) Tell us about successful guerilla actions in your community (we can print your contribution anonymously, but you do need to identify yourself to us), and unsuccessful ones, too, so we can do it better next time. Let's regenerate our sense of radical community. We hope to make this column a regular *LE* feature. *LE* also encourages responses to articles that appeared in our first three issues: Why you loved the article, why you hated it, what you want to add to it, why you think she's right, why you think she's wrong.

We invite one page treatments of possible articles and will respond promptly. Material for *LE* #1 (2) should be received by January 15. Type all manuscripts double-spaced. Send an SASE if you want your manuscript returned, and an SASP if you want us to acknowledge receipt of your manuscript.

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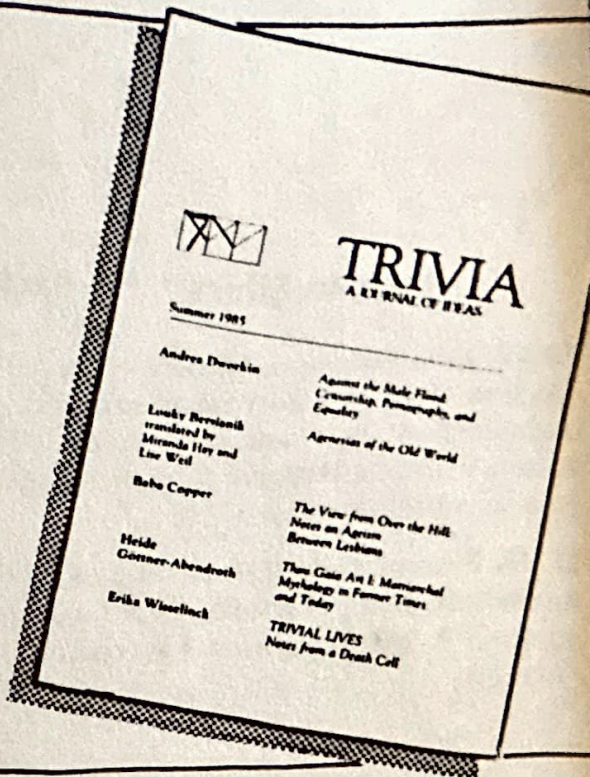
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